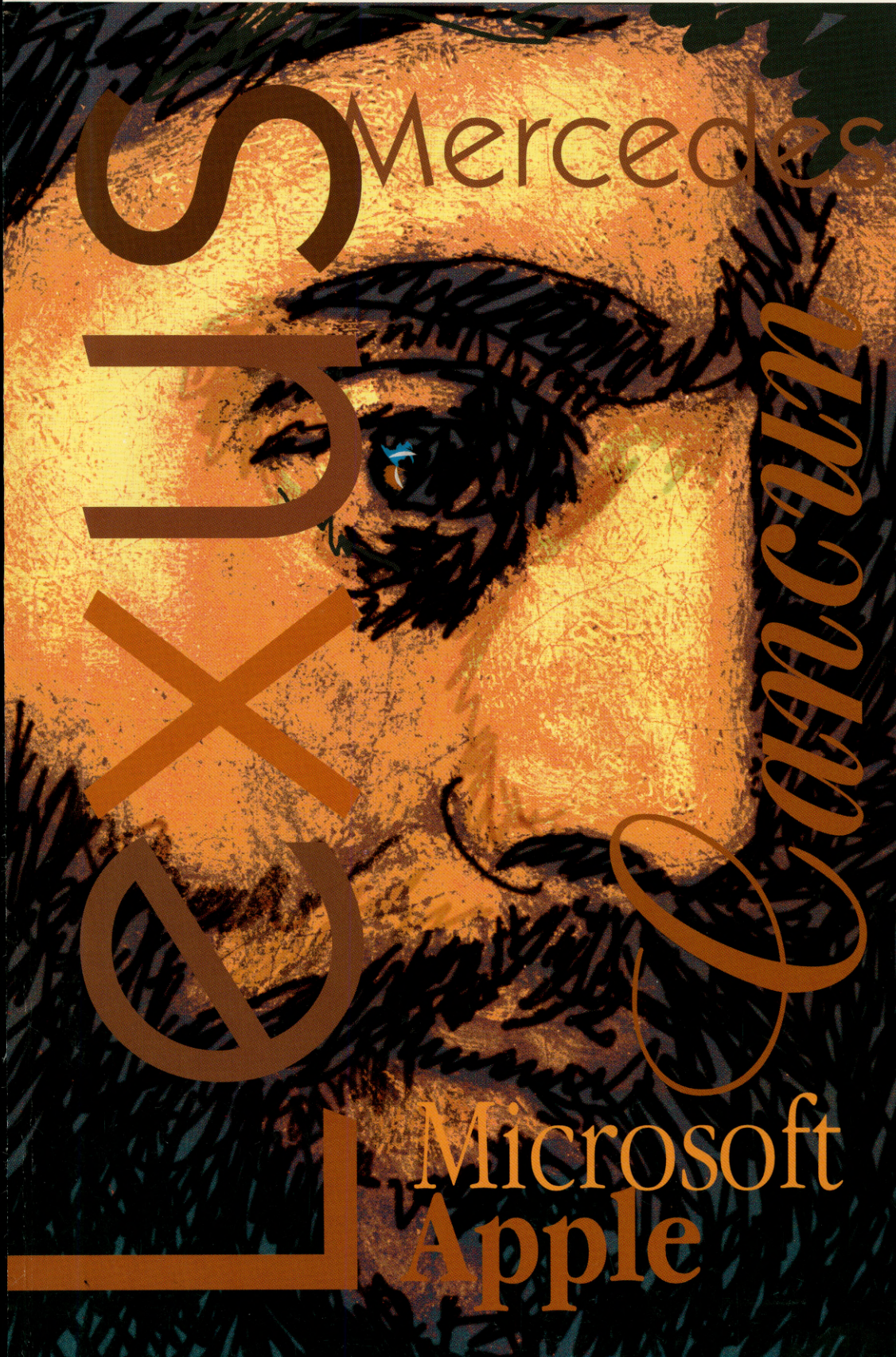


# SPECTRUM

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## A Desert Journey

The Pilate Principle

Changing Relationships with Our Muslim Neighbors

Why Christians and Jews Need Each Other

Sexuality in Biblical Perspective

Living Life in the Closet

# SPECTRUM

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## About the Cover Illustration

From cave walls to chapel ceilings, from leaves of paper to today's video monitor screens, colors, values, textures, and shapes have been utilized to attract attention, provide enjoyment, and enhance communication as they are thoughtfully and sometimes creatively selected and composed.

The colors, values, textures, and shapes arranged on the cover of this issue of *Spectrum* are intended to represent a portrait of a unique man, a Jew, God—a God obscured by word-symbols of consumption, fulfillment, and “happiness”—contemporary distractions. Contemporary gods? The cover's function is to draw your attention to Robert Dunn's homily poem on the inside.

## About the Illustrator

Peter Erhard, the son of Dorothy and John Erhard, grew up, sort of, went to universities and art schools, and now teaches courses in visual communication design, photography, and printmaking in the art department at La Sierra University, Riverside, California.

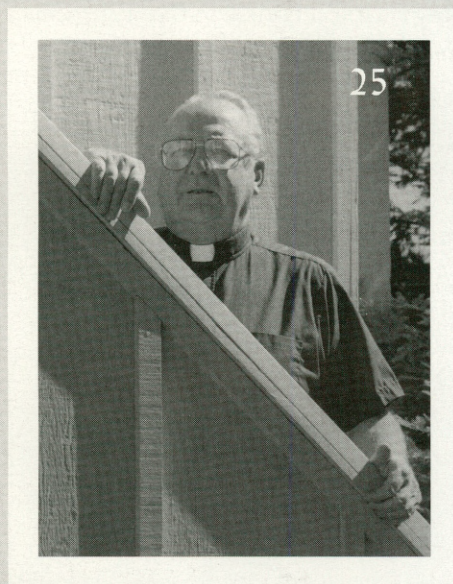
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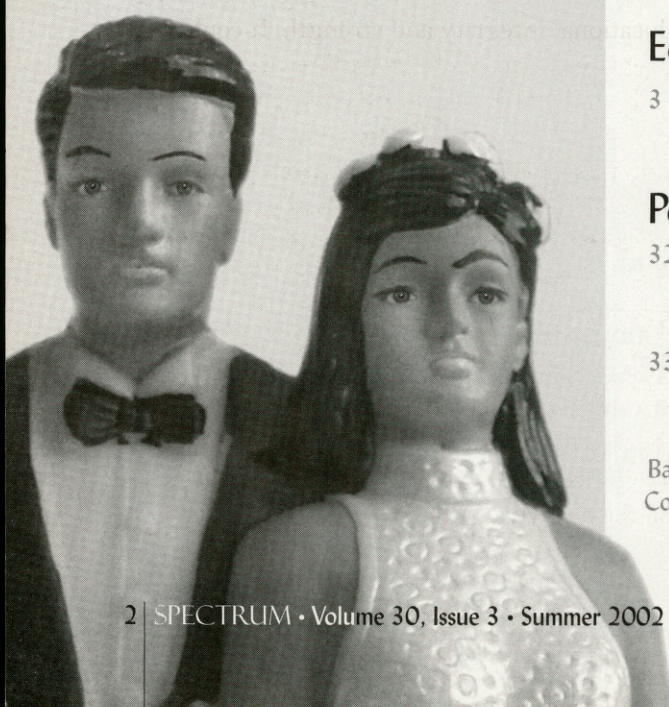
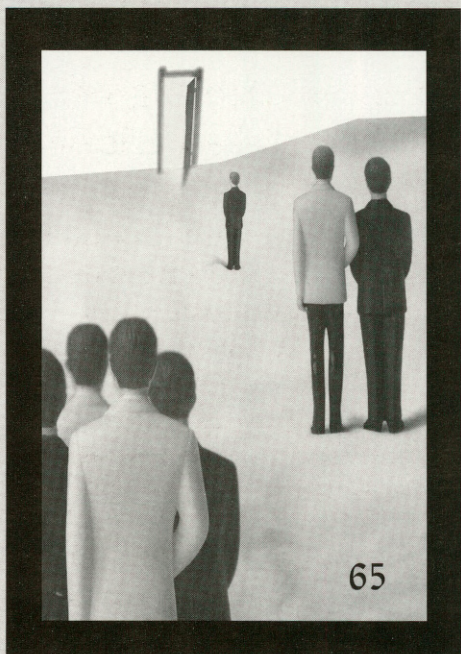
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Editor's Note: *The following guest editorial was written by someone who is not a guest to Spectrum, but a permanent member of its editorial family. His name has appeared in the list of editors in every issue of the magazine from its very first issue, when he served as an associate editor. As a current member of the editorial board, Fritz Guy regularly writes for the journal and helps us find good material. He brought three of the articles in this issue to our attention.*

*When we posted this essay of his on the Spectrum Web site in early June, it immediately generated a great deal of attention. Apparently, the concept of academic freedom is not well understood within the worldwide Adventist Church. In the name of unity, some seem prepared to sacrifice the pursuit of truth. As Louis Menand recently noted in the New Yorker, "you can't have truth unless you are prepared to tolerate error, and even to pay its salary."*

## Is There a Train Wreck in the Adventist Future?

One hundred and one years ago, at the opening meeting of the General Conference session in the Battle Creek Tabernacle on April 2, 1901, Ellen White admonished the 237 delegates, "God has not put any kingly power in our ranks to control this or that branch of the work."<sup>1</sup> Largely as a result of Ellen White's urging, at that session the General Conference reorganized itself to decentralize Adventist ecclesiastical authority through the establishment of union conferences.

Two years later she used the same metaphor in correspondence: "In the work of the Lord for these last days there should be no Jerusalem centers, no kingly power. . . . Brethren are to counsel together, for we are just as much under the control of God in one part of His vineyard as in another. . . . The kingly power formerly revealed in the General Conference at Battle Creek is not to be perpetuated."<sup>2</sup> "God has not set any kingly power in the Seventh-day Adventist Church to control the whole body or to control any branch of the work" (*Testimonies* 8:236).

The announced purpose of the International Board of Ministerial and Theological Education (IBMTE) is to "foster a dynamic theological unity among [the church's] leaders and members around the world" and to "sharpen the focus on Seventh-day Adventist message and mission" (*IBMTE Handbook*, 1). The emphasis on unity is understandable in the face of what William Johnsson has called "the fragmenting of Adventism."<sup>3</sup> Many of the rest of us are just as seriously concerned about the future of our church. But the current endeavor is wrongheaded, confusing spiritual unity with enforced orthodoxy. "Enforced unity" is self-contradictory as an idea and counterproductive as a strategy.

If fully implemented, this attempt by General Conference officials to control all Adventist theological thinking and teaching could mark the beginning of the end of Adventist educational integrity and strength. It could also signal the beginning of a hierarchically defined and dominated Adventism—and, at the same time, the end of an intellectually viable and vital Adventism. Hierarchical domination and intellectual vitality are mutually exclusive.

The present IBMTE project could turn out to be an administrative blunder even more damaging to Adventist faith and life than the decision at Glacier View in 1980. That decision was aimed at one teacher from Avondale College, but it inflicted long-lasting damage on the Adventist Church in Australia, which eventually lost more than a third of its ministers. By contrast, the current thrust toward the ecclesiastical control of teaching and thinking is aimed at all teachers of religion in Adventist colleges and universities around the world. What academic discipline will be the next target? Biology? Literature? Psychology? History?

Of course, we don't know the future. Indefiniteness is, after all, part of the meaning of "future." But we can see possibilities—and danger signals. The present form of the IBMTE project reveals a profound ignorance (or, even worse, a deliberate disregard) of at least four realities:

1. The nature and dynamics of a true community of faith, which is collegial rather than hierarchical, and based, not on official authority, but on mutual trust and a recognition of the diversity of spiritual and intellectual gifts

CONTINUED ON PAGE 79

The Bible

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Apple

# A Desert Journey

By Robert Dunn

*Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. The tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." But he answered, "It is written,*

*'One does not live by bread alone,  
but by every word that  
comes from the mouth  
of God.'"*

*Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written,*

*'He will command his angels  
concerning you,'  
and 'On their hands they  
will bear you up,  
so that you will not dash  
your foot against a stone.'"*

*Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"*

*Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! for it is written,*

*'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'"*

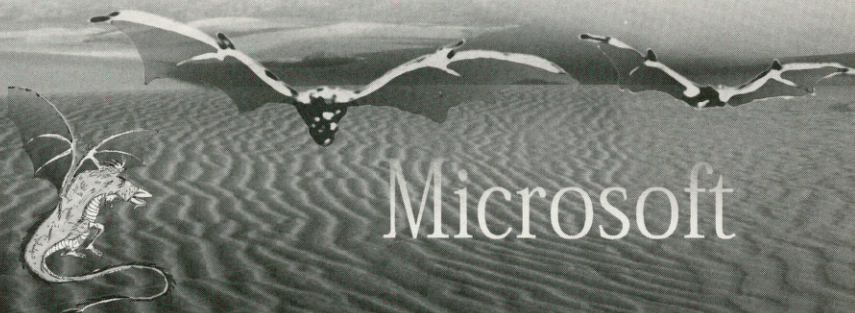
*Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him. (Matt. 4:1-11 NRSV)*

## Introduction

I have found our gospel challenging, so I shall not approach it in the usual way. Homilies and sermons usually come at a text through the discursive and analytical process of historical and moral analysis. There is nothing wrong with this approach. This morning, however, I shall attempt to put myself—not precisely but suggestively—into the text, on behalf of all of you. I shall do so in an imaginative, almost poetic way. My purpose is not to analyze but to open ourselves to the possibility that our own life histories may spiritually be merged with the history of Jesus of Nazareth. We are incorporated into the life of Jesus not so much by reason as by love, and the language of love is poetry.

The Spirit also led me into the wilderness.  
The Spirit led me into the wilderness,  
And there, as a child, the devils tempted me.  
In my childish fantasy I thought I spied a basilisk,

# LEXUS



# Microsoft

A cockatrice,  
And "Great bats on leathern wings."<sup>1</sup>  
I was afraid and did not know myself.

I wanted food and drink and nurture.  
I hungered to grow and to know.  
I wanted to rule our house.

My mother assured me that she loved me.  
"Turn my love into bread," she urged.  
My father was pleased with my choice of work.  
"Make my acceptance your drink."

Then I thought, my parents do not know the real me.  
Would they reclaim their love and approval if they  
read my heart?  
And then my mother died,  
My father passed away,  
And I remained alone and hungry after all.

The Spirit also led me into the wilderness.  
The Spirit led me into the wilderness,  
And there, as a child, the devils tempted me.  
In my childish fantasy I thought I spied a basilisk.  
A cockatrice,  
And "Great bats on leathern wings."

And then my mother died,  
My father passed away,  
And I remained alone and hungry after all.

Then I saw a pelican on Lake Ignorance.<sup>2</sup>  
"Child," she spoke, "Feed on me."  
"I am the bread of life.  
I bring strength for your journey,  
Food for your soul."

"Child," the Pelican spoke, "feed on me."  
In love I responded, "My Lord, my God."

So I ate and knew at once my Mother,  
My Father, my relation to the world.  
I was happy now even when I saw the basilisk,

the cockatrice,  
And "Great bats on leathern wings."

"Child," the Pelican spoke, "feed on me."  
In love I responded, "My Lord, my God."

||

For many days I continued to walk the desert,  
I grew older.  
I became an adolescent and youth.  
But the Spirit was not through with me.  
The devils returned.  
"How can you be certain?" they inquired.  
"How do you know that God spoke to you?"  
All we saw were your father and mother.  
So tell us, how can you be certain?"

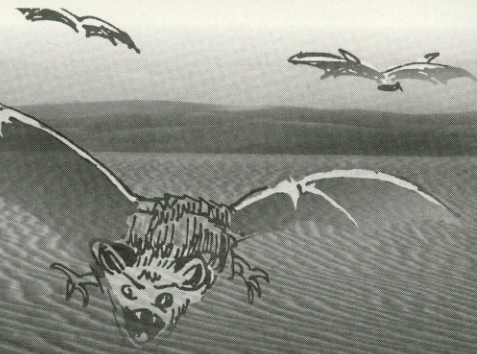
A loathsome snake out of the pit taunted me.  
A snake named Logic asked me,  
"How can you be certain?"  
A loathsome snake out of the pit taunted me,  
A snake named Logic asked me,  
"Did God speak to you?"  
Or was it not your father, your mother  
Who told you who you are?  
And now they are dead;  
You are alone.  
Did God give you his body and blood,  
Or were they not mere signs, metaphors?  
And now God himself is dead."

A loathsome snake out of the pit taunted me,  
A snake named Logic advised me,  
"If you want real proof, ask for a sign.  
If you want real proof, speak in an unknown  
tongue.  
If you want real proof, ask God to heal your  
body.  
Then you will learn: God can do nothing tangible."  
So I turned away in despair.



Mercedes

Apple



I slouched about the desert many days,  
And in the nights the devils taunted me:  
"God can do nothing tangible."  
I slouched about the desert many days,  
And in the nights the devils taunted me:  
"God can do nothing tangible."



But still the Spirit was not done with me.  
The demons returned.  
I had no peace.  
Once again I was not happy when I saw the basilisk,  
I was not pleased when I spied the cockatrice,  
I did not wish to find "Great bats on leathern wings."  
The loathsome snake out of the pit,  
The dragon named Logic, terrified me.

I cried out in my fear, and the unknown God heard.  
I cried out in my fear, and the unknown God heard.

Gradually the fears all passed away.  
The basilisk vanished.  
The cockatrice disappeared.  
"Great bats on leathern wings"  
Melted into air,  
Into thin air.

For were not all these childish fears?

Gradually the fears all passed away.  
The loathsome snake out of the pit,  
The dragon named Logic, fled.  
For was not this a fear of adolescence and youth?  
And was I not at last mature?

The lure of travel replaced the basilisk.  
A 401K promising ease in retirement  
Stood in for the cockatrice  
And a host of ads,  
Like "Great bats on leathern wings,"  
Offered endless satisfactions.

A host of ads sung the new song,  
"Our lost Eden has been restored  
By Proctor & Gamble,  
By Microsoft,  
By Nordstrom,  
By 10,000 companies.

Praise be our American way of life!  
Do not focus on the loathsome serpent.  
Fall down and worship Lexus,  
Offer incense to MacDonalds,  
Deliverance is here!"

To earn this happiness,  
For earn it you must,  
They all advised that  
I must worship them.  
And, in my way, I did worship.  
Emotion now replaced the serpent of logic  
And I was swept up on a wave of consumerism.

To earn this happiness,  
For earn it you must,  
They all advised that  
I must worship them.  
And, in my way, I did worship.  
Emotion now replaced the serpent of logic  
And I was swept up on a wave of consumerism.

But happiness never came.  
All promises were vain,  
Mere mirages,  
Will-'o-the-wisps.  
They did not reassure.  
They told me in a thousand ways,  
"You are not OK.  
Buy more.  
Get more."

In despair, I turned and cried,  
Things are not enough,



Thoughts are not enough,  
 Emotions are not enough.  
 I want to see more than a new piece of earth.  
 I want to live more than a good retirement.

Yet how can I be delivered from bondage to such  
 desires?  
 I have learned that parents are not enough,  
 That logic does not suffice,  
 That no thing,  
 No experience,  
 No emotion will endure.

I have learned this beautiful world is not enough.  
 I sense a restless longing in my soul.  
 From whence it comes I do not know.  
 Where it leads, who can say?

I have learned this beautiful world is not enough.  
 I sense a restless longing in my soul.  
 From whence it comes I do not know.  
 Where it leads, who can say?

And then the devils left and angels came.  
 One of them spoke,  
 "Seek after God," she said.  
 "Your heart will remain restless  
 until it rests in God.  
 Yet 'silence is not God,  
 Nor speaking is not God;  
 Fasting is not God,  
 Nor eating is not God;  
 Loneliness is not God,  
 Nor company is not God;  
 Nor yet any of all the other two such contraries.  
 God is hid between them.  
 He may not be found by any work of the soul,  
 But only by love of your heart.  
 He may not be known by reason,  
 He may not be gotten by thought,  
 Nor concluded by understanding;  
 But he may be loved and chosen  
 with the true lovely will of the heart. . . .  
 Such a blind shot with the sharp dart of longing  
 Love may never fail of the prick, the which is God."<sup>3</sup>

I have learned this beautiful world is not enough.  
 I sense a restless longing in my soul.  
 From whence it comes I do not know.  
 Where it leads, who can say?

And angels came and turned desert rocks into bread.

They came and struck a rock, and out flowed water.  
 And then the angels came and worshiped God.

Then God said, "I am the bread of life.  
 Eat of me."  
 Then the Son said, "I am the living fountain.  
 Drink of me."  
 And, in the Spirit, I eat and drink and live.

And then angels came and turned desert rocks into  
 bread.  
 They came and struck a rock, and out flowed water.  
 And then the angels came and worshiped God.

Then God said, "I am the bread of life.  
 Eat of me."  
 Then the Son said, "I am the living fountain.  
 Drink of me."  
 And, in the Spirit, I eat and drink and live.

Let us pray:

Almighty God, whose blessed Son was led by the  
 Spirit to be tempted by Satan: Come quickly to  
 help us who are assailed by many temptations;  
 and, as you know the weaknesses of each of us,  
 let us each one find you mighty to save; through  
 Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and  
 reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God,  
 now and for ever. Amen.\*

## Notes and References

1. In medieval legend, the basilisk and cockatrice were fabulous creatures, whose breath and even glance were said to kill. Here they are simply the fearful constructs of childish imagination. The images of basilisk, cockatrice, and bats were suggested by Robert Graves's poem "In the Wilderness," from *Chapters Into Verse*, eds. Robert Atwan and Laurence Wieder (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 2:53-54.

2. In the medieval bestiary, the pelican, for love, fed her young of her own blood. So she became a symbol of the redemptive work of Christ and also of Holy Communion.

3. "An Epistle of Discretion," in *The Cell of Self-Knowledge: Seven Early English Mystical Treatises* (1521), ed. Edmund G. Gardner (New York: Noble Offset, 1966), 257-59. From the online version in Christian Classics Ethereal Library <<http://www.ccel.org/g/gardner/cell/cell19.htm>>, accessed April 1, 2002.

4. Collect for the First Sunday of Lent, *The Book of Common Prayer* (New York: Seabury, 1979), 218.

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Robert Dunn is a professor of English at La Sierra University, Riverside, California. He originally presented this article as a homily at the 8:30 a.m. Sabbath service at the La Sierra University Church on February 16, 2002.

# The Pilate Principle:

“I wish I could, but I just can’t do the right thing until everyone agrees that it’s the right thing to do.”

By Merikay McLeod

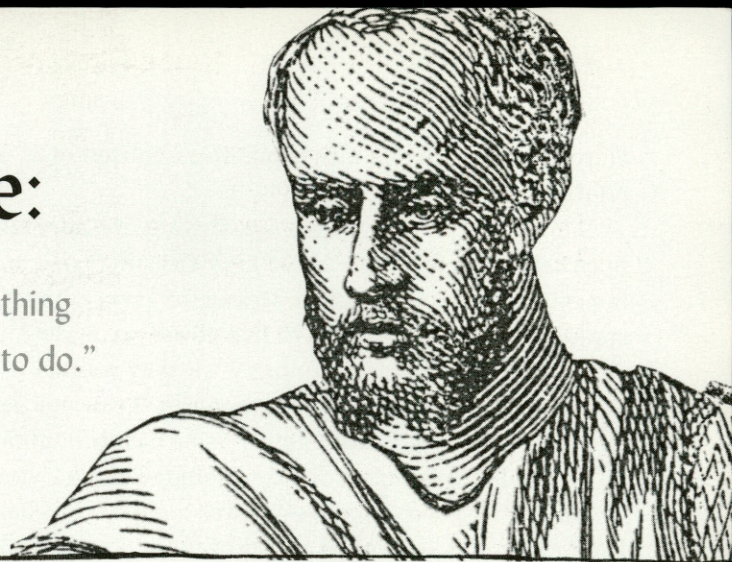


Photo: Dover, Inc.

If you’ve ever struggled to be true to yourself, struggled to get others in your family, the office, the PTA, and the church to support integrity and have failed, you know what Pilate went through.

The Gospels present an engrossing collection of human beings. As in a Dickens tale, the cast of Gospel characters creates intriguing plots and counterplots. Although Jesus is the drama’s hero, it is the colorful ensemble of secondary characters that often demands our attention. Like us, they struggle with confusion, prejudice, selfishness, hope, pride, fear, grief, and all the other ordinary human characteristics. Our strengths, weaknesses, courage, and cowardice weave like chords of raw silk throughout the Gospels’ rich tapestry.

One of the most gripping characters in the story, the civil governor, Pilate, finds himself thrust into an uncomfortable public dilemma. Through the carefully detailed portrayal in *The Gospel According to Luke*, we see a man struggling to be a conscientious ruler. Pilate strives to be true to the requirements of his office and the inner imperative of moral integrity. Four times in only twenty-five brief verses, Pilate reasons, argues, almost begs the crowd to acknowledge the innocence of Jesus (Luke 23:1-25). In this struggle, Pilate displays more strength of character than he’s usually recognized for.

Beginning with the tension between Pilate’s desire to render honest judgment and his desire to maintain a friendly relationship with Jewish community leaders, Luke presents a common struggle. We experience it in our own conflicting desires: How can we do what’s right if it means offending those we need or admire? How many times have we held our silence, knowing we should speak? How often have we carefully chosen our words to create an impression quite different from our true feelings?

Our need for approval or acceptance can overpower our need to be truthful and just.

After the elders accuse Jesus of capital offenses, Pilate examines the Nazarene and renders an honest judgment: “I find no basis for an accusation against this man” (Luke 23:4).

But the priests and crowd ignore his words and demand punishment. Instead of arguing with them, Pilate sends Jesus to Herod, the nominal ruler of Galilee. As a Galilean, Jesus was under Herod’s jurisdiction. Although intrigued by the Nazarene, Herod wants no part of the problem facing Pilate—that of protecting an innocent man against the bloodthirsty crowd bent on his execution—and sends Jesus back.

Three centers of human power jostle for position in this drama: Pilate, the governor of Judea; Herod, the ruler of Galilee; and the religious community leaders. They all believe they stand to gain if things work out the way they want.

If the priests can have Jesus executed, they can maintain control of the life and culture of their people. If Herod can make Pilate pass judgment, or if Pilate can make

Herod pass judgment, either one frees himself of a political hot potato.

Those who play power games, who love the adrenaline rush, often forget to factor in justice, integrity, and honesty when planning their strategies. It certainly appears that those involved in this power struggle considered little except winning what they wanted.

Jesus, the most powerful character in the drama, is an observer rather than an actor. As he has throughout the Gospels, he reveals a distinguishing characteristic of God by refusing to exercise power on his own behalf. He does not try to control or direct the action. He allows all involved to choose their own course freely.

Once Herod sends Jesus back, Pilate tries reason. "I have examined him in your presence and have not found this man guilty of any of your charges against him," he tells the priests and their followers. "Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us. Indeed, he has done nothing to deserve death" (Luke 23:14-15).

At this, the crowd becomes infuriated. Pilate endeavors to speak, to reason with them, but they shout him down. Clearly, Pilate wants to do what is right. He has rendered an honest judgment, but just as clearly he feels he must gain their approval of that judgment before he can enforce it if only he can convince them.

As Gospel readers, as observers from twenty-one centuries in Pilate's future, it's stirring for us to watch him argue and resist the dishonesty surrounding him. The crowd shouts, "Crucify, crucify him!" and again he speaks to them, "Why, what evil has he done? I have found in him no ground for the sentence of death" (Luke 23:21-22).

Pilate wants to let Jesus go. He has the power to do so. Yet his need for the crowd's approval complicates his good intentions. Why is their approval so vital?

Could it be for the same reason that the approval and acceptance of others is so vital to us? He, no doubt, thinks his job is at stake, or his *ability* to do his job. And maybe it is.

How often do we refuse to act justly because we think our employment is threatened? How often do we fail to do the right thing because we are afraid of losing our position or our next promotion or the regard of those we need or admire? The patient Christ waits for our decision.

If Pilate can only persuade the priests and their crowd—he works at it; he really tries.

Although it is often said that Pilate was a cowardly villain, Luke's Gospel shows him earnestly striving for

justice. We might write an anonymous letter to the church pastor or send a mild e-mail to the corporate vice president, but publicly take a stand for truth against a crowd of our employers or colleagues or peers? Not many of us have such emotional stamina.

Pilate struggles with the crowd, but he cannot persuade them. Because they will not relent, Pilate has to be brave or strong or authentic or honest all by himself. He has to act on principle rather than popular mandate. He, alone, must determine this innocent man's fate. He alone has the power to condemn Jesus or to set him free.

In this historic moment, Pilate is like the rest of us when we must decide between the demands of those around us and our own inner integrity. And like so many of us, Pilate gives in to the pressure of the crowd.

He is not as attentive to his conviction as he is to his fears. He is not as attentive to his conscience as he is to the clamor of the crowd. External pressure wins, just as it so often does in our own lives. Considering what we might suffer rather than what we must do to be moral adults, we follow Pilate's path.

Perhaps Pilate felt his position of power was more valuable than the life of an innocent person. Perhaps he rationalized that all these people were crazy anyway, so if they wanted to kill one of their own, why should he care? Whatever he decided to trade his integrity for—position, popularity, security—he first betrayed himself and his potential for greatness and then decided "that their demand should be granted. And he handed Jesus over as they wished" (Luke 23:24-25).

Matthew's Gospel says that Pilate performed a symbolic hand-washing to display his disagreement with the crowd's demands and to say that he would not accept responsibility for the death of Jesus. But it was his responsibility, and he was responsible, no matter who he wished to blame.

Blame is a very common choice in human life: we say our parents are to blame or our government or "society," when in fact the choice to be moral adults is always our own no matter what the external pressures. We are given many potential moments of greatness, which we so often trade for the feeling of security or popularity or approval.

Pilate stopped being true to himself when he gave more credence to the demands of the crowd than the demands of his own conscience. It was quite a struggle, much more of a battle than Judas seemed to wage. Yet in the end, Pilate was more attached to the approval of others than to his own well-founded judgment.

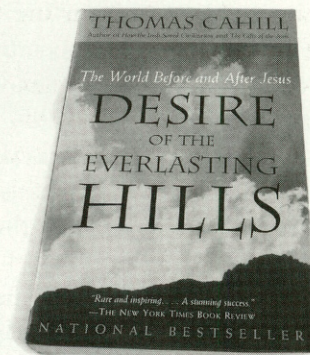
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# Inspiration to Live the Jesus Story

Thomas Cahill. *Desire of the Everlasting Hills: The World Before and After Jesus*. New York: Random House, 1999.

Reviewed by Glen Greenwalt



**T**homas Cahill's book, *Desire of the Everlasting Hills*, reminds me of my own world before and after Jesus.

I had gone off to college to escape the hard work of the farm. I was going to be a dentist, become rich (my perception of dentists at the time), attract a beautiful wife, build a house with a view, ski, play tennis, and travel the world.

Then in my first weeks at college I met some of Jesus' flesh-and-blood followers, and I gave up the first two items on my list and subordinated the others to my goal of following Jesus. The Jesus to which these disciples introduced me is the same Jesus I meet again in Cahill's book: A revolutionary figure out to change the world, not by violence, but by prayer and kindness—King of Kings, and Lord of Lords, who was, in fact, plain good news for ordinary, everyday people with all of our hurts, disappointments, and aspirations. This cannot be said of most kings and lords.

Cahill is above all a masterful storyteller. Although he introduces the novice reader into the world of critical Jesus studies, he writes as one so enmeshed in the story that he is untroubled by the discrepancies, biases, and personal agendas woven into every human fabrication of a story—including the Jesus Story.

Cahill begins his tale on the crest of the Janiculum. If you have been to Rome, you most likely know this hill, if not by name. If you haven't, put it on your agenda. The view that

overlooks Rome is spectacular, and as a bonus you can watch Italian families playing with their children in the park at the top of the hill. The Janiculum rises steeply from the west bank of the Tiber from St. Peter's Cathedral to the narrow, mazelike streets of Trastevere.

This ridge serves as the spine of the book, connecting the beginning to the end and giving posture to the book's central theme. For Cahill, "the history of the world, like the history of its hills, is written in the blood of barbaric warriors and bold partisans, of old women and beardless boys, of the guilty and the innocent" (8). Yet in this history resides the resilient hope of a world, where all the soldiers are sent home from war, and all the women are loved and cherished, and the children laugh and play.

On a summer's day, Janiculum gives the impression of being such a world. Italian lovers sit on the terrace wall and families spread blankets and picnic. But it was not always so. Cahill informs us that in 1849 an army of boys as young as fourteen battled seasoned French

and papal troops on this spot in an insane attempt to dissolve the Papal States and unite Italy. There are no monuments to these child-soldiers, Cahill tells us, but although they lost the battle, they won the war. Today, the peninsula of Italy is a single (if loosely united) country, and the once powerful papal temporal state is confined to the Vatican at the foot of the hill.

This scene is the visual icon of Cahill's story of Jesus. Here we see a microcosm of human history: the villainy of the powerful; the irrepressible desire of ordinary folk for freedom; and the unexpected victory of the weak over the strong. Although Jesus was the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, he bore little identity to those who assumed such titles in history. From an extended discussion of the lives of Alexander the Great and Octavian Caesar Augustus, Cahill shows us that a king or emperor proved himself fit for the job in Jesus' day by being "an excellent administrator, a politician of labyrinthine cunning, difficult, delusional, and cruel" (56). Peace in this world grew out of desolation and war: that was simply the way things were.

The prophets of Israel, however, harbored a vision so out of keeping with the usual travails of life that it reads, Cahill says, almost like a daydream. "A time is envisioned in which all wrongs shall be righted, the land once promised by God to

his people shall know everlasting peace, and a second David, appointed by God himself, will sit upon the throne of Israel" (60). What all people longed for in a leader was not an emperor, not an Exalted One—but a Just One (65). This vision, this daydream, if you will, the Gospel writers declared was fulfilled in the son of a carpenter family from the hill country of northern Palestine.

I am sure that New Testament scholars can find a good deal with which to quibble in Cahill's reading of the textual material. Cahill writes with the practiced eye of a storyteller, not as a scholar. As a nonscholar, I was entranced with the background information Cahill brings to his story. I found it so interesting, in fact, that I repeatedly called friends of mine who are New Testament scholars to see if they agreed with one point or another. As expected, they agreed with some but not others, and they shared a number of disagreements among themselves.

What I find refreshing about Cahill is that, although he allows for a great deal of authorial freedom in the construction of the New Testament, the force of the New Testament picture of Jesus is not eroded by the very human agendas that stand behind the text. This is unlike many conservative and liberal readings of the New Testament, which are so consumed with reconstructing or defending the text that they lose sight of the story's character.

Cahill's Jesus is the antithesis of the powerbrokers of the ancient world. In Mark's Gospel, his coming is announced by a figure right out of the prophet's ancient world: "a desert crazy" who told the people the "the time had come" and that they better get themselves ready (71). Mark is short and straight to the point. The unlikely

Gallilean that John the Baptist pointed out is the one predicted to come from ancient times. Matthew continues this theme, though with more subtly and mastery of intellectual discourse.

Jesus the actor is also Jesus the teacher. The theme of prophetic justice is still central, however. In the Beatitudes, Jesus never explicitly mentions Alexander or Augustus. "His references to oppression, war, torture, and the poverty created by military conquest are indirect (79). Instead of attacking them straight on, Jesus upholds a set of ideals:

Become one with the poor, defend their undefended interests, become sympathetic and forgiving toward others, make peace wherever you can. If you do these things, you will be happy. Indeed, these are the only ways to happiness. Power is an illusion and its exercise an excuse for cruelty. . . . Not exactly inspiration for Alexander, Augustus, or their admiring biographers. (78, 79)

Ordinary people stopped and listened. "This bold challenge to the existing mindset was unmistakable and arresting" (79).

Central to Jesus' vision, according to Cahill, is the following idea:

It is precisely the entitlement of the powerful and the disfranchisement of the powerless that make life so unlivable. And whether this enshrined and permanent injustice, taken for granted by all, issues in war, torture, and all the grand oppressions to which the Beatitudes allude or just in the petty tortures that we visit on one another—the casual oppression of women

by men, the interior wounds caused by quotidian mean-spiritedness, exclusiveness, and theatrical mendacity—spirit is crushed and ordinary life is made a torment. (83-84)

Truth told, we are all oppressors and victims at various moments. When we are at the bottom, Jesus taught that our "only 'obligation' (if that is not too strong a word) is to trust in God's mercy. But the obligation of those on top is to exhibit God's mercy toward those who have nothing" (84).

The irony, of course, is that Jesus himself experienced the fate of those he came to rescue. He himself was marginalized and finally killed, as have been countless others before and after. That Jesus' ignominious death by crucifixion troubled the early church is evident from the earliest pictures Christians left on catacomb walls. The images of the good shepherd, Noah's ark, doves, and the symbol of a fish (an acronym in Greek of Jesus Christ, God's Son, Savior) appear countless times—but never once a cross.

The apostle Paul, more than any other writer in the Bible, worked out a theology of Jesus' death.

The "death to sin" that Paul speaks of is basically a relinquishing of power; it is to live a life that is the opposite of the lives of the Alexanders and the Caesars and all the "gods." Now, you may say, most of his hearers had little chance of imitating such exalted and august models. But Paul makes clear that the power plays of the Great Ones are imitated over and over again in the lives of little ones—through acts of petty cruelty. But those who have "died with Christ," who

have allowed themselves—at least vicariously—to experience all the depth of human suffering, can never stoop to gaining advantage over another, even if the other is clearly in the wrong. (134)

Although Cahill is not a theologian, I find his reading of the atonement as fine as any I have ever read. As Cahill notes, the cross is not just about obtaining personal atonement through a vicarious death that took place two millennia ago in Palestine by the God/man of classical theology. Vicariously, we all participate in the death of Jesus when we shoulder the same cross Jesus bore for the sins of others.

Through identity with Jesus, the disciples of Jesus become conduits of God's mercy to the world. "Even if someone is caught red-handed," Paul admonishes, "you who have received the Spirit should restore such a one with all gentleness—and watch out that you don't end up in the same position yourself! Carry one another's burden: this is the way to fulfill the 'law' of Christ" (135). As the Mystical Body of Christ, the disciples of Christ are obliged above all else to show love to those who fall across their path (143).

Of all the Gospel writers, Luke is preeminently the evangelist of God's mercy. Here we see most clearly, Cahill believes, Paul's insistence that "God's love for us is shown in that, *while we were still sinners*, Christ died for us" (207). In Luke, we find the story of a prostitute accepted at the table fellowship, a prodigal child taken back into the arms of his father, and a healer who prays for the forgiveness of his executioners as they drive nails into his hands and feet. Luke's message is this: "God does not wait for our repentance;

he loves us *anyway*" (207). God is a spendthrift. He does not hoard his riches, nor should his followers. Their mission, like that of Jesus, is to comfort and heal.

The last witness to Jesus' life and work is the Gospel of John. This Gospel, as it has come down to us, represents a rather late

witness to the story of Jesus. Already, we see the beginnings of the imperial church, with its grand inquisitors and human bonfires. Although Jesus and his earliest disciples were all Jews, the enemies of Jesus in John are not Alexander and Augustus, but "the Jews."

Cahill suggests that Christian antagonism toward the Jews was born out of the persecution they received from the Jewish synagogues. Early Christians were thrown out of the synagogues and at times hunted down and killed. It can be said that rabbinical Judaism won the first round and continued to hold the upper hand for the next two centuries. However, the tide turned by the fourth century with Emperor Constantine's embrace of the Christian faith, "after which Christians will spend the next sixteen and a half centuries rounding up Jews, hunting them down, depriving them of civil rights, torturing, massacring, and ridiculing to their heart's content" (275).

How did those called to live differently than Alexander and Augustus become the Constantinian church of their imperial descendants? (275). Cahill insists that John, writing in the heat of controversy, can no more be blamed for the subsequent history of European anti-Semitism than can the *Birkat*

*ha-minim*, the Jewish ritual curse of the heretical Christians. Still, "his Gospel is capable of leaving Jewish readers purple with rage and Christians red with embarrassment" (275). The thing we can learn from the vendettas of John is that the very thing for which we are rejected becomes the treasure we must never

### Although Cahill is not a theologian, I find this as fine a reading of the atonement as any I have ever read.

give up. In the heat of controversy, names get called and our theology often becomes brittle and uncompromising. This was as true in biblical times as it is today.

Cahill shows us repeatedly that the biblical writers shared our human condition. Their authority derives from the witness they bore to a higher way. This is certainly true of the Gospel of John. Cahill allows that the difficulties of John's Gospel "are extreme enough that to this day Christian churches use its passages sparingly in their lectionaries" (273). Yet for all this, some of the most beautiful literature of the New Testament is found in the Johannine literature. "For God so loved the world that he gave away his only Son"; "I give you a new commandment: love one another"; "God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him."

It is the Gospel of John that smuggles into the text the story of the woman caught in adultery. The early church did not forgive adultery. "The Great Church quickly became far more interested in discipline and order than Jesus had ever shown himself to be" (280). However, in the story of the woman caught in adultery we find the

same Jesus who tells us that hell is filled with those who

turned their backs on the poor and needy—the very people they were meant to help—but that no matter what the Church may have taught in the many periods of its long, eventful history, no matter what a given society may deem “sexual transgression,” . . . hell is not filled with those, who, for whatever reason, awoke in the wrong bed. Nor does he condemn us. (281)

Cahill ends his book where he began, back in Rome. This time, Cahill looks down from the Janiculum toward Trastevere, rather than the Vatican. Here is a small collection of buildings, once a cloistered Renaissance convent, today the center of the Community of Sant’Egidio. This is the heart of an ecumenical community of lay people, founded in 1968 by a handful of Roman high school students who decided during the revolutionary foment of the 1960s to do something revolutionary themselves. They wished to live in Trastevere, just as the early Christians had. They began to gather together every night to pray and read the Bible together, especially the Gospels.

Have the Gospels made a difference? Each night the community still meets for prayer and singing. In addition, “each night in Trastevere fifteen hundred homeless are fed, not in soup lines but in sit-down dinners, served with style and graciousness” (313). The Trastevere community also runs three refuges for old people, two AIDS hospices, and a home for abused and abandoned children. The list goes on and on.

Cahill leaves us with an important question, “How many Sant’Egidios would it take to transform the social fabric, not just of Trastevere, but also of earth itself?” (316).

Reading Cahill, I am again inspired to live the Jesus story. Cahill’s Jesus does not easily fit within the parameters of most denominational structures. If Jesus came to our churches today, we would most likely crucify him again. Jesus would certainly call into question our dealings with each other. The kind of care and forgiveness of others that Jesus demanded leaves little room for pointing the finger or getting back at those who hurt us. The community Jesus called for is the one in which all are invited, even ourselves on our worst days.

My review has focused on the central thesis of Cahill’s book. I will close by saying a few things about Cahill’s style of writing and his use of sources.

I am completely enamoured with Cahill the writer. Things I have heard all my life leapt from the Bible while reading his book. Here are a couple examples that brought smiles.

In reference to Jesus’ charge that one should pluck out one’s eye if tempted with lust, Cahill writes: “[Jesus] is not really urging that you should slice off your testicles to stop unwanted erections (though in the third century poor, humorless Origin taking this passage literally will do great harm to himself)” (83).

In a passage appropriate on April 15, as I write: “Between the angelic entrances and exits, [Luke] gives us Mary and Joseph trudging along the road to Bethlehem, unable to get out from under an inopportune tax problem (though tax problems are never opportune)” (98). Cahill’s writing is full of such vivid images.

As for his use of sources, Cahill uses few footnotes, but instead offers brief descriptions of sources at the end of each chapter. Cahill cannot easily be labeled as a member of any particular school of Jesus

Studies—other than to say that he steers clear not only of fundamentalists, who tend to lose sight of the human person, but also the Jesus Seminar people, who see Jesus as little more than a sage and wit. The interesting thing about Cahill is that he is willing to absorb a great deal of critical readings of the text, and the Jesus that emerges from his study is one that not only challenges the reader to greater service and care, but also calls forth devotion.

Cahill appears to have more Catholic than Protestant sensibility. He certainly is not a fundamentalist whose faith depends upon making the Bible a literal history—something it certainly is not. For the most part, I found this very refreshing. Protestantism tends toward either being steeped in emotion with little scholarly interest, or scholarly without a drop of devotion. Cahill brings both together.

At a couple places this approach is foreign to my own sensibilities. The first is when Cahill draws conclusions about Peter and Paul’s theology from descriptions of their personalities and appearances that have come down to us through tradition. Cahill admits to liberties he has taken in his readings at this point, but believes a kernel of historical truth is preserved in the tradition. The other example is Cahill’s rather extended discussion of the Shroud of Turin as confirming evidence of the resurrection.

In the end, however, I appreciate Cahill’s emphasis while discussing the miraculous life of Jesus: “to have been rendered sane, or healthy or living once more must, after all, have struck the individual so cured as an overwhelming proof of God’s personal care—a miracle for *me*” (212).

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# Who Is My Neighbor?



Photo: ADRA International/ Tereza Byrne

The Rwandan conflict between the Hutus and Tutsis forced these young people to seek the shelter of a refugee camp in 1994.

*We all know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies. And if anyone thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know. But if anyone loves God, this one is known by Him. (1 Cor. 8:1-3 NKJV)*

# Reflections on Who Is My Neighbor?

*By John Wilcox*

**T**here is a space in time that each person enters at some point in life. It is a space that defies any relation to normal, rational time, a space where despair, tears, and loss seem to form the whole of one's horizon and where that better world of small and ordinary pleasures can hardly be remembered or imagined. Even if we do not enter into this space, we know people who are living there or have lived within it, and so are familiar with that seemingly infinite distance that seems to separate us from them.

I had never felt that distance so keenly until the summer of 1994, when ADRA International sent me to eastern Zaire to assess the needs of Rwandan refugees who had crossed the border into the town of Goma to escape conflict in their own country. I was confronted there not simply with the grief and suffering of an individual, but also with the crushing loss and suffering of a whole people.

Upon my return to Washington, D.C., I found it impossible to account for any relation between my existence in Washington and what I had seen in eastern Zaire, an impossibility that only deepened for me as I attempted to relate what I had witnessed to friends and acquaintances, and during several television interviews. Literary critic George Steiner wrestles with precisely this same relation in his essay, "Postscript."

The essay recounts the death of two men, Mehring and Langner, at Treblinka, a Nazi concentration camp. Steiner writes that at "the same hour in which Mehring and Langner were being done to death, the overwhelming plurality of human beings, two miles away on the Polish farms, 5,000 miles away in New York, were sleeping or eating or going to a film or making love or worrying about the dentist." For Steiner, this is where his "imagination balks." "The two orders of simultaneous experience are so different, so irreconcilable to any common norm of human values, their co-existence is so hideous a paradox," that he can only puzzle over time.<sup>1</sup>

Since my experience in Goma, my own awareness of this "hideous paradox" has been heightened as I have read the reports and seen the faces of those caught in other points of irrational time, such as those in Kosovo, New York City, the Middle East, and Afghanistan. How are we to relate to events such as these—or rather to the people living through them? More to the point, what is my relationship to the one who suffers? What is the nature of my responsibility to him or her?

It hardly seems necessary for me to argue for the existence of a relationship of responsibility with those who suffer, and throughout this article I assume that the existence is self-evident, at least for the Christian. Christ commands us, after all, to love God and our neighbor. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, he clearly taught that

culture, class, ethnicity, or any other human category we might use to divide and distinguish between humans must not circumscribe our definitions of the neighbor and our responsibility for his/her welfare.

Instead, I will approach the question of responsibility from what is perhaps an unusual starting point. I will explore how our ways of thinking about what is true may silence and deface both God and our neighbor so that we truly do not even encounter them in the process of forming our ideas about the world and taking actions that proceed from those ideas. Although the way in which I think about an inanimate object such as an apple may have little or no ethical consequences, if I apply the same process of knowing to God and others I immediately confront very significant problems, both in how I treat them and in the truth of my conclusions.

However, first a word of caution: In the argument that follows, there will be a particular danger for many readers to assume that the warnings expressed apply to those “unlike” us—conservatives, traditionalists, legalists, or, alternatively, liberals, iconoclasts, and abusers of grace, and the temptation to point the finger smugly and shake the head may be strong. This is precisely the kind of reaction that I argue against throughout this article. Indeed, indulging in that reaction will merely prove my point. This article should make the reader feel uncomfortable, as it has me. But I am getting ahead of myself.

## Two Ways of Knowing

In the March 27, 1997, issue of the *Adventist Review* Clifford Goldstein wrote a short essay in which he attacked postmodernism as being a significant factor in what he describes as the normalization of deviancy. He wrote that postmodernism “teaches that such concepts as truth and morality, right and wrong . . . don’t exist in any objective, absolute sense, but only as relative, indeterminate, fluctuating notions that each individual and community must define for themselves,” and that unlike modernity, which relies on the ability of human reason to determine objective reality, postmodernism “rejects the very notion of objectivity itself,” an act that inevitably leads to moral chaos.

In relation to this article, we need to ask ourselves what is meant by the word, “objectivity.” It is important to pause and define the word because it describes a

way of attempting to reach truth to which I will refer throughout this article. We are all familiar with statements that describe a newspaper reporter, or a judge, as objective in her news story or judicial opinions. What such statements usually mean is that personal biases or prejudices have not entered into her thinking about a particular issue, or at least she has attempted to minimize the influence of such irrational factors on her thinking. The theories, accounts, or opinions that such people present are, therefore, viewed as more reliable because by reducing or eliminating irrational influences they have gotten closer to what is really true in a universal, absolute sense.

From this example we can conclude that objectivity has at least three important characteristics. First, the idea of objectivity *assumes that out there somewhere is Truth*, like some perfect, shining holy grail to which all of our thoughts (however imperfectly) aspire, something

Photo: ADRA International/Tereza Byrne



For these Rwandan refugees medical treatment was a necessity.

like Plato’s concept of the ideal table from which all of our ideas and attempts to create tables ultimately are derived. Second, the concept of objectivity *affirms the possibility of achieving perfect knowledge* about how a thing really is. Third, the idea of objectivity requires that the subject—or the person thinking objectively—

assume a position of distance and sovereignty over the object of study, putting to the side those things that might obstruct or impede a clear, unfettered view of how a thing truly is.

Therefore, when Goldstein attacks postmodernism, he is defending the view that there is Truth to be discovered, that we can know it, and that to do so we must use human reason, which is clear-sighted and impartial in its method. The broader world view that

encompasses this way of knowing to which Goldstein appeals is typically called "modernity," in contrast to the "postmodern," which denies the possibility of objective reason and where foundational Truth is viewed as a mirage.

Goldstein is correct in identifying the postmodernist's discomfort with the ability of human reason to determine Truth and with the notion of objectivity itself, though this same discomfort is hardly new to the postmodernist. I share Goldstein's unease with the radical rejection of all foundations for human thought and belief, and certainly do not consider myself an apologist for postmodernism. However, I do not believe that as Christians we should be so quick to look only to modernism—of which the assumption of objectivity is central—as the intellectual basis for how we make moral decisions, particularly those that affect our treatment of others (though in making this assertion I do not deny the possibility of foundational, absolute Truth).

In the realm of people—and certainly of the Divine—our use of the cold, precise tool of objective reason has dangerous implications. As stated at the beginning of this article, a morality founded upon the assumption of objectivity is one that from the start incapacitates the moral self by eliminating the possibility of the revelation that the intrusion of otherness entails. What do I mean by this statement? To explain further, I would like to examine the relationship between the thinking self, or ego, and the object that it faces.

In Book 10 of his *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle states, "a wise man can practice contemplation by himself."<sup>2</sup> In making this statement he advances a particular theory of knowing the world that began

Photo: ADRA International / Tereza Byrne



In Goma, Democratic Republic of Congo, these people fled their homes after the eruption of the Nyiragongo volcano.

with the Greeks and has continued into what Goldstein and others have called "modernity." According to Aristotle's theory, the mind is a self-sufficient entity. All thought is conceived in a splendid isolation. Indeed, to breach this solitude is to compromise objectivity, hence the reliability of the thought that proceeds from objective thinking. Within this theory of knowledge thought is crafted in monologue; ideas emerge essentially from a conversation with self about the object of inquiry.

What are the implications of this theory of knowledge in relation to how you and I approach another person? To answer this question I would like to use two metaphors, the first to describe objective thinking and the second for what I will later describe as an alternative to objectivity. These metaphors are vision and language. First, let us look at knowledge as vision, which I would characterize as describing the modernist's approach to knowing truth.

### Knowledge as Vision

There are three characteristics of knowledge as vision. First and most telling is the silence of vision toward the objects it encounters. Vision does not require dialogue. To know a thing, to determine its nature, I must simply observe it. The silence of vision thus assumes sovereignty for the one exercising it. I place my thinking self in a position of absolute control over the objects of my gaze. This is so because objects receive their meaning, and thus their being, from the gaze of the omnipotent mind.

A second characteristic of knowledge as vision is



its assumption that what is seen or observed is the sum total of that which exists, and provided that an object is viewed clearly (or rationally), you and I should arrive at largely identical conclusions about an object's nature. The images that proceed from vision are thus fixed, forming a totality that captures the very being of an object.

A third characteristic of knowledge as vision is the way in which it acts upon its objects. Vision seizes, appropriates, or grasps the essence of its objects. The primary movement of vision is one of possession in which any independent existence for an object is neutralized. Nothing is allowed to remain beyond the power of vision. These characteristics of vision describe, I believe, the theory of how we know the world as objective thinkers.

As objective thinkers, we prize detachment from the object of our study. To compromise detachment by breaking silence with the object is to compromise the reliability of our conclusions as to its nature and behavior. This leads to the second characteristic of our metaphor of knowledge as vision, which is the belief that what is observed is what exists. Any residue of being that may escape the careful observation and analysis of our minds is viewed either as secondary or simply nonexistent. To paraphrase the well-known aphorism, what you see (or what can be understood through objective study) is what is. Objective knowledge, like vision, in explaining the nature of things does indeed grasp and possess them, admitting to no possibility of anything beyond the capacity of reason to understand.

Use of the metaphor of vision to describe objective thinking may appear abstract and detached from real life, particularly in relation to the questions about responsibility to other human beings posed in the introduction to this essay. But what I am describing strikes at the heart of what it is to be moral. The modernist strives after a height of sovereign self-sufficiency from which the world of perception may be surveyed as if from a throne. From this throne, high above the chaos of diversity and otherness that is the outside world, rules, systems, standards, codes of behavior, ideologies, and descriptions of reality can be formulated and handed down.

The problem with such a relation to the world is that it strips men and women and things of their

independence apart from my perception of them, thereby allowing me to manipulate them according to my purpose without danger of moral disturbance to myself or my ideas. Morality becomes subordinate to purpose. This is the ultimate irony: in their attempt to construct an absolute morality, modernists sever the link with the external point—the otherness of God and persons—upon which morality is grounded. In so doing, we set our moral system adrift within a sea of competing moral “authorities,” each with its own purpose.

I began this essay with a question: what is my relation to the one who suffers? I would like to summarize what I have said so far. My argument is that the modernist model of how we gain knowledge of the external world has compromised our capacity to care for the Other. Modernists have set up a relationship of distance and detachment between the thinker and the world of other men and women. Any other relationship is considered a breach of the modernist's objectivity, which directly affects the reliability, or truth, of his conclusions.

However, objectivity built upon such isolation is self-referential. It lacks the means of its own criticism, and so becomes purely instrumental. Instead of an ethic of responsibility for the welfare of Others, one is left with an ethic allied and subservient to the assertion of my own being. Thus, in the most fundamental sense possible the question of a true relation to the one who suffers—or any “other” for that matter—becomes an impossibility for us, or at least diminishes that relation and makes it subservient to the process of self-realization. Enclosed within the security of my own “objective” categories, I never even approach the Other (whether God or my fellow human). Furthermore, isolated from the Other, ethics may even become a tool by which the Other suffers.

Thus, my objections to a modernist morality are twofold: First, within such a morality the question of responsibility for others is simply not asked. Second, the result of the absence of this question is that morality is reduced to politics. In other words, morality becomes a means of asserting my own being rather than justifying it.<sup>3</sup>





Our ways of thinking about what is true may silence and deface both God and our neighbor so that we truly do not even encounter them in the process of forming our ideas about the world and taking actions that proceed from those ideas.

So what is the external point upon which morality is grounded if one does not resort to the modernist way of knowing truth through objective thinking? I have already suggested the answer to this question in my criticism of the way the objective relation to the external world strips men and women of their independence apart from my perception of them. It is indeed the Other that provides morality with its external reference point, or its foundation. To see how vital the independent existence of the Other is to the rules or codes of behavior that we use to govern our treatment of him/her, I shall now turn to the metaphor of language to describe the alternative to the modern way of knowing truth.

### The Metaphor of Language

Language represents the possibility of dialogue between persons. To communicate through language is to put my world into words and to offer it to another, to exchange meanings, however imperfectly. It represents an "initial act of generosity, a giving of my world to him [the Other] with all its dubious assumptions and arbitrary features."<sup>4</sup>

This concept of language contains within it an assumption that I and the others whom I encounter are completely separate from one another—that we are in a real sense "strangers." By speaking to an-Other, one transcends, or attempts to transcend, the isolation of sole being while still preserving the Other's independence apart from me and my thoughts. Thus, language does not entail simply the exchange of meanings, it also puts one into a relation with other persons, or in the context of prayer, with God.

The relation possible within language is one in which both parties to the dialogue maintain their autonomy, unlike vision, in which others are caught within the circle of my silent gaze. Indeed, there is even a distance between the speaker and what is spoken. I may change my mind and speak a totally

different meaning, or I may draw back and criticize or change what I have just said. My speech cannot finally bind me, nor I bind the other with his.

What occurs in language cannot be predicted, and after something is said it is open to interpretation and reinterpretation. My autonomy and that of the Other are only stimulated through language as I come into contact with a point of view not simply opposite from, but also genuinely other than mine. It is an approach to another person in which he maintains his own meanings and is able to explain and defend them. The "Other is not an object that must be interpreted and illumined by my alien light. He shines forth with his own light, and speaks for himself."<sup>5</sup>

This mode of thinking is not so much concerned with how objects appear to the sole self of the modernist, but rather with how things are in themselves, their otherness. This mode is what philosopher Emmanuel Levinas calls "metaphysical desire." In other words, conversation with the Other brings me into contact with a totally other world that allows me to escape from an uncriticized, arbitrary existence. To pursue knowledge based on metaphysical desire is to escape the monologue of the sole self and enter into a relation based upon language, or conversation, in which the Other is encountered, yet maintains his/her integrity as a separate, sacred being.

Moral capacity, then, is this encounter with infinity, or the Other, in which the sovereignty and spontaneity of the ego is brought into question and checked. As a Christian, I would further argue that it is in our encounter with God, the great "I Am," that moral capacity and the situation in which it is born are made possible. The capacity to be moral is not above all familiarity with a code of conduct, or even a noble yet abstract idea of altruism and love, but rather an encounter with God, who constantly overwhelms and goes beyond my idea of him. To become sensitive to the ethical is first an encounter that shatters the freedom and spontaneity of the sole self embodied by neutral reason (objectivity), and to open to criticism the categories and generalities by which I enclose God and other humans.

In the moment in which the ego is checked—in this crisis of the self, precipitated by a realization of the

Other's presence—one is called to responsibility, to a regard for the Other in his uniqueness and noninterchange-ability. This is a mode of being in which one returns to a "capacity to fear injustice more than death, to prefer to suffer than to commit injustice, and to prefer that which justifies being over that which assures it."<sup>6</sup> It is made possible most fully and decisively in the encounter with the Divine, but is also repeated and perhaps put into practice through our constant encounters with other persons and the call to care implicit in looking into another person's face and hearing his voice.

Emmanuel Levinas, the philosopher and Talmudic scholar to whom I owe a great debt for the ideas discussed here, writes that "politics left to itself bears a tyranny within itself."<sup>7</sup> It distorts individuals, judging them according to universal rules as if they were absent. It renders them little more than types to which common concepts may be applied. Furthermore, we are often told that politics represents a true reality against which morality becomes derisory, that politics represents the "very exercise of reason," and that to pursue the ethical is utopian. We are all familiar with the Hobbesian state of nature, of Thomas Hobbes's reference to existence as nasty and brutish; confronted with the exigencies of mere survival it is difficult to advance a convincing case for moral action that may endanger the self.

Yet if we allow the moral relation to the Other to become derisory in the face of war or the defense and maintenance of the institution, ideology, or idea—however progressive or noble they may be—we then enter a world in which politics is total; self-assertion is not only necessary, it is also identified as right. This is a step that comes dangerously close to obliterating human agency, or choice and will, and replacing it with instinct. Such a step necessarily restricts the definition of the possible in human affairs to those actions that enhance the chances for survival in the most immediate and basic sense.

This is my fundamental objection to uninterrupted politics—or the unquestioned maintenance and assertion of individual, group, or institutional being: it robs us of our individual will to contemplate action



Photo: ADRA International/Tereza Byrne

An ADRA worker examines a young boy left homeless by the Nyiragongo volcano.

beyond the circular logic of political necessity/self realization and in so doing severely reduces individual human existence and moral possibility.

My argument is not that personal, group, or institutional survival is unimportant. My argument is that at all times, even within the most desperate, we must maintain the relation with the Other, the ethical relation. Politics in which this relation is present are interrupted politics, politics that are not allowed to become totalizing, or panoramic. It is this transcendence made possible by ethics that makes a community open and just and loving, both within and outside its boundaries. The bulwark against totalizing politics is the irreducible ethical difference between myself and the Other. The just state, society, or community is one in which this ethical politics is at play.

This is the alternative to objective thinking as I defined it above: a way of dealing with and approaching truth that is open to otherness and adopts as its foundation responsibility for the Other's well-being. It is true that we must act, and to act is to make decisions from among various potential courses of action. Action requires us to form ideas and conclusions as to right behavior, to develop moral systems that we use in our own lives and that we encourage our children to adopt, as well.

If we did not have these, or if we—like postmodernists—reject all foundations for truth, the barrier against evil would be weak indeed. Can anyone describe our revulsion at the murder of millions of



Jews in Europe in the last century as merely a contingent, arbitrary construction of the victorious Allies who have now used the power gained by their military victory to impose their particular notion of right and wrong on the world? Can we really imagine a world where fascist ideologies were right in some universal, timeless sense? Is not my revulsion at the suffering I witnessed in Goma, Zaire something that we all share?

We must also avoid an opposite danger: that in our thinking, and the decisions to act that follow from our thoughts, we shut out the face and voice of otherness (both God's and man's) by a mode of thinking that is isolated and self-referential, which is fundamentally concerned with establishing the self. The effect of knowledge so gained drives God and our neighbor into a third world, that place where all whom we oppose (whether conservatives or liberals, white or black, Republican, Democrat, or Libertarian, heretic or orthodox believer) are safely silenced and imprisoned within our "objective" understandings of them, unable to interrupt the views of the world we have constructed and in which we so contentedly reside.

### Concluding Remarks

Here is a personal observation from my experience of growing up within North American Adventism during the 1980s. I grew up very aware of the debates that have occupied the Church's attention. Some of my earliest memories as an Adventist are of the breaking of what I shall simplistically call "traditional Adventism."

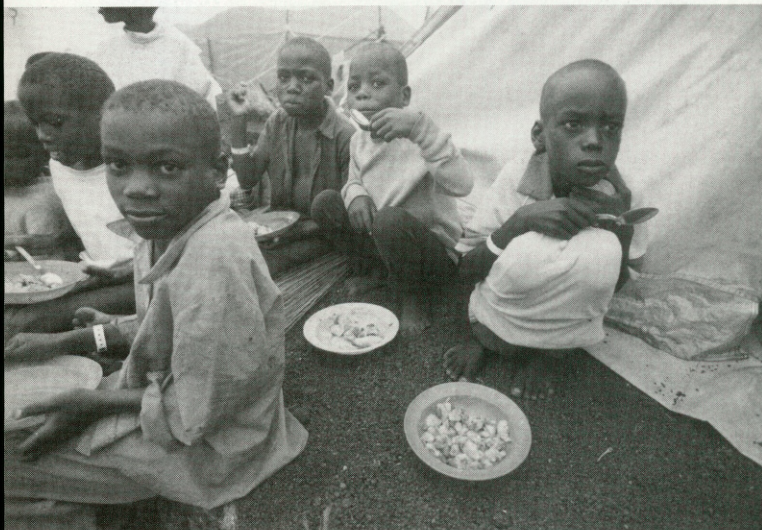


Photo: ADRA International/Tereza Byrne

Addressing the nutritional needs of refugees was important after the eruption of the Nyiragongo volcano.

What strikes me about many of the debates that have occupied us is the manner in which they have been conducted. My fear is that on all sides we have sought to carve out "our place in the sun" without any concern for the Other. At what point in our attempt to "win" the argument do we lose sight of the human across the table, or worse, God? At what point do we trap ourselves within a monologue, thereby losing the opportunity to hear a point of view wholly other than ours, which might even lead both sides toward greater truth?

I believe that in debates within the Adventist community we must constantly make the choice to keep in view the "face of the Other" who calls us to responsibility. Prior to all systems, institutions, policies, rules, intellectual constructions, and interpretations is a God who is being, presence, and Truth. The beings that he has created similarly are prior to our laws, norms, and systems of thought, however useful and necessary these may be. Is not the summation by Christ of the Law into the simple but infinite command to love God and to love one's neighbor a reminder that behind the great architecture of our beliefs, morals, and institutions is the simple duty to enter into a loving relationship with God and our neighbor?

Within the Church perhaps the very terms we use to describe each other—conservative and liberal—are wrong. Can we not move beyond these old categories to recapture an exclusive devotion to God, who will lead us into ways of thinking, ways of being, that will shatter our tired old ideas and rigid understandings of him and of each other? Should we not do as C. S. Lewis advised, and instead of thinking about our own potential glory at Christ's Second Coming, think about that of our neighbor?

The load, or weight, or burden of my neighbour's glory should be laid on my back, a load so heavy that only humility can carry it, and the backs of the proud will be broken. It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you can talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. All day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to one or other of these destinations. It is in the light of these overwhelming possibilities, it is with the awe and circumspection proper to them, that we should conduct all our dealings with one another, all





friendships, all loves, all play, all politics. . . .  
[I]t is immortals whom we joke with,  
work with, marry, snub and exploit.<sup>8</sup>

The modernist strives after a height of sovereign  
self-sufficiency from which the world of perception  
may be surveyed as if from a throne.

Finally, I wonder on both sides of any given debate whether our attentiveness to right doctrine and behavior has led to a mentality of preservation, maintenance/defense—both in terms of our doctrine and as an institution. Have we committed a subtle idolatry in our concern for constructing and maintaining—or reforming—Adventist thought, behavior, and institutions, rather than the worship of the God behind these, who lends them validity and life?

Furthermore, have we so focused on the task of maintaining our systems of thought and our institutions—or alternatively reforming or merely criticizing them—that the question of responsibility to the poor, to those who suffer oppression and injustice, simply fails to occur to us? Are we helping those who are marginalized in our world, the voiceless, the poor, and the oppressed toward the destination of glory that Lewis speaks about? As a church, are we more concerned with asserting our (individual concepts of a correct and true) corporate identity in the world—conservative or liberal—than in fulfilling Christ's command to love God and our neighbor?

For those tempted to counter that I favor an easier, wishy-washy law, or that I am antifoundationalist, I counter that the command to love is one that can never be filled or exhausted, and it is the true foundation for all of our action in the world. My responsibility to seek for others their place in the sun is infinite; I can never slip back into complacency because I have fulfilled my obligations. That is the duty against which all that I think and do must be measured, and against it all my efforts are indeed "filthy rags."

My own life, the way in which I am choosing to order it, is very much a response to the profound, unspeakable suffering that confronted me in Goma, Zaire. The days I passed there can only be described as an encounter with the Other who precipitated a crisis of the self in me that has led me to ask constantly whom I have "oppressed or starved or driven out in order to take my place" in the sun.<sup>9</sup>

Goma has conceived in me a fear for "all the violence which my existing might generate,"<sup>10</sup> resulting in a profound uneasiness of being that, in turn, has

created in me a resolve to treat with infinite caring the strange world inhabited by the Other; to lend to the Other the same dignity that I expect rather than treating him/her as a means to achieve my own purposes; and to treat my judgments, my ideas of the world and its people and things as contingent rather than final and absolute—always open to be remade through the intrusion of divine revelation into my closed mental categories and ideas.

Again, what is the relation between those who suffer and those who are not presently suffering? I was not guilty of the evil that resulted in Goma, in Kosovo, in East Timor, or in New York City. I did not kill. However, I am responsible. We are responsible for each other in as much as each of us has the capacity to care for each other. We become guilty when we repudiate our responsibility by enclosing another human being within our own, self-referential idea of what he is, and thereby excusing ourselves from caring for his well-being, or limiting our responsibility to act on his behalf.

If I may paraphrase Levinas, Hamlet had it wrong. The question is not "to be or not to be." It is, rather, how may I justify my being?

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# Profiles in Christian Neighborliness

*By Marilyn Glaim  
Photographs by C. Tom Turner*

Tourists driving California's Highway 29 see only mile after mile of beautiful vineyards. Eliseo Gonzalez and Jorge Foncecca see the grapes and care for them.

In California's beautiful Napa Valley there is a perennial shortage of decent housing for permanent and migrant workers who care for the grape vines that help make the valley one of the most popular and expensive tourist destinations on the West Coast. For the people who taste wine and dine their way up the valley, the men in the vineyards merely add to the scenery.

However, those who know the workers realize that their labor is backbreaking and that they toil in the vineyards long hours in the damp, foggy mornings of early spring, in the heat of summer, and in the chill air of the harvest. Most are family men with wives and children in Mexico. Wages start at \$8 per hour and go up to \$12 for more skilled jobs. The men keep only enough money to get by, sending the rest back to Mexico.

They cannot afford the typical \$1,000-dollar-per-month rent for an apartment, nor can they afford year-round leases. A few lucky ones get into the Calistoga Farmworker Center, a nonprofit establishment run by the California Human Development Corporation, where sixty men live dormitory style and eat in a common dining room hall for \$10 a day. Others stay with relatives, or they rent tiny apartments where a dozen men spread sleeping bags on the floor. Too many of these men camp in vineyards or under bridges or stay in city parks until the police move them on.

As the number of vineyard acres has increased, the need for workers has grown, but the number of farm worker camps has gone down. Vintners know that state rules for decent housing are both strict and enforced. They can make more money filling every spot of acreage with grapes than providing private housing for their laborers.

Many valley residents simply ignore these men—that is, when they're not complaining about their old cars and pickups. But the Farmworker Committee works to find permanent solutions to the housing shortage. Rosaura Segura chairs the committee. Monsignor John Brenkle and Issac Perez are two of its members. In the stories of these three individuals, who operate from a Christian perspective, lessons can be learned about what it means to live God's love for our neighbors as for ourselves.

## Learning Lessons in Africa

Monsignor Brenkle, affectionately known simply as "Father" to his many parishioners in the valley, began his career rather conventionally as an

academic in canon law and a priest in a California city. Now seventy, he says he might have stayed in an all-too-comfortable position had it not been for his sisters, who were Catholic missionaries in Africa. They persuaded him to spend some time with them, and he developed an understanding of people in desperate physical and spiritual need.

In 1978, he went back to Calistoga, California, a changed man, knowing that he would serve his people differently afterward than before. At his new church in the Napa Valley he found himself drawn into the housing needs of Mexican workers when people from a nearby worker housing area began lining up at the Catholic Church in search of help. He quickly discovered that their housing lacked water because the landlord had failed to keep up with the water bills. He discovered to his surprise that the workers did not appear to mind hauling water—they had done it in Mexico—and was troubled by their terrible living conditions. Thus began his first efforts to improve worker housing.

In Calistoga, they were shutting down these [housing] places one by one and tearing them down. Then the spas started coming in and buying up everything, so the housing stock for the farm workers was being decimated. I was asked to get on a citizens' advisory committee to look at housing, and through that committee we obtained two or maybe three federal grants for \$600,000.00 each to rehab housing. That is how I got started in the housing business. We saved forty or fifty houses that people would remodel and then agree to use them as Section Eight government subsidized housing.

For him, volunteer work for housing became almost a second job. Father Brenkle remembers a friend from Ecumenical Associates for Housing saying, "Listen Father, you're never going to do this on a volunteer basis. You've got to go professional on this—set up a corporation where you hire somebody that's working on housing, because it's too complicated to do it on a volunteer basis." Father Brenkle took his advice and worked with the community to begin Napa Valley Ecumenical Housing in 1986. In the beginning it was a "shoestring" operation, as he refers to it, and when a director was first hired, Father Brenkle at first shared his own salary with him.

Then the big breakthrough came when we applied for a grant for \$50,000 from the Irvine Foundation. We got the grant for \$50,000 from the Irvine Foundation. This was 1986 or 1987. Twenty-five thousand was given outright, but the second \$25,000 had to be matched by local industry. So we went to some of the vintners and had lunches, where we asked for the matching \$25,000.

I think it was Jim Barrett from Chateau Montelena who said, "What do you really need? Twenty-five thousand is not going to get you anywhere is it?"

We said, "Well, it will pay Bill's [part-time] salary for a few months.

But I said, "It would be nice, Jim, if you could just add a zero to that and we would have a quarter of a million."

And he said, "Well, now you're talking."

They contributed to this fund over a period of three years and came up with about \$407,000.00.

As we talked, Father Brenkle began to bring out brochures that feature the beautiful and affordable apartment complexes built since that time: Hunts Grove and Stonebridge in St. Helena, with a combined total of 137 units, and La Predero, a 48-unit complex in Calistoga. Father Brenkle recalls with a wry smile that Hunts Grove "took us five years of struggling and effort, battling with the neighbors. Some people still don't talk to me because we put affordable housing in their neighborhood. I think they're kind of getting over that right now." He chuckles.

It's hard to imagine anyone not talking to Father Brenkle, but then we remember a recent interview with a local businessman who disparaged affordable housing. "No one helped me get a start," he said. We did not remind this man that the previous generation of family members had handed his business to him. Usually people who resist affordable housing are those who truly did not have to start on their own.

Although we might imagine that the intense work involved in getting affordable housing for working families might leave little time for his church or other volunteer work, Father Brenkle has kept up with a full schedule of church duties, even taking on extra part-time duties at a nearby diocese that had run into serious financial difficulties due to mismanagement and lawsuits against a priest accused of sexual misconduct. Father Brenkle helped straighten out the financial and legal woes of the diocese without dropping a beat in his home church.

He also kept up his efforts to get community support for more housing to accommodate temporary farm workers, and this is where his story directly involves Rosaura Segura and Isaac Perez.

### Local Girl Makes Good

Segura grew up with her own reasons for being interested in Mexican farm workers: as a child, she came with her family to the Napa Valley from Mexico. Her father worked in the vineyards, and when she started school in St. Helena she knew only Spanish. She learned English quickly and fit into her new community well. In fact, she broke the usual Latina mold by going directly through college and into a management career in the wine industry.

While working as the tasting manager of the largest winery in the valley, she chanced upon her next job. Because of her facility with both Spanish and English, she was constantly asked to help new immigrants fill out their immigration papers. Though she was making good money at a place of employment she liked, she began to feel that her job was



Photo: C. Tom Turner

Monsignor John Brenkle worked to make affordable apartment complexes such as this one in St. Helena available for migrant workers.



more about money than helping people. In a leap of faith, she quit her secure winery job and started her own immigration services business, the only one of its kind in the Upper Napa Valley.

For a while I was by myself, and before I built a clientele, it was difficult financially. Father Brenkle knew I was struggling even though I wouldn't admit it: "Oh I'm doing fine, of course I am." But he could see I needed income, so he offered me a part-time job for the parish.

He said, "You know, you can do your stuff part time, and you can use the office there, but you've got to help me."

That is when all the housing development was going up—the low cost rentals—and I helped. I'm proud of that. I didn't do as much as I wish I had done, but just working by his side and learning from him was a great experience.

Segura's business is now successful and she remains active in the housing programs, having chaired the Farmworker Housing Committee for a number of years. She considers her immigration service to be a business as well as a helping agency, because she allows people who can't afford to pay in full to put something down and pay when they can. She says sometimes it's a long time before the final payment comes in, but everyone does eventually pay. They just come in with a pocket of cash and count out the money they still owe.

Unlike some social service entities in the valley, Segura does not resent the vintners. She credits two of the largest ones with great generosity toward farm workers and other needs in the valley. "I think that is why God has blessed them so much," she says.

Segura and Father Brenkle's latest victory is passage of a county measure that allows farm worker housing to be built on farm land. It took months to work out the legal difficulties and to persuade local residents that the measure would not provide legal precedent for ending the decades-old agricultural preserve law that prevents urban sprawl in the Napa Valley. Under the measure, a vintner is allowed to donate limited pieces of land for building nonprofit, communal-living labor camps similar to the Calistoga Farm Center. The first land donation, given by local vintner Joseph Phelps, has now been legally cleared for construction.

Until that new camp and others like it are built, farm workers continue to scramble for decent places to sleep. New men arrive each spring begging for places to stay. If Father Brenkle cannot find housing for them, he allows them to sleep on church property so close to his own residence that he can hear them getting up to dress for work in the mornings. He makes them as comfortable as possible, buying sleeping bags for men who come without bedding. He has a temporary shower installed, and he arranges for members of several churches in the valley to bring the men hot meals in the evenings. For the meals, the men pay a minimal fee; the sleeping accommodations are free. Father Brenkle and Rosaura Segura both dream and work toward the day when overflow accommodations will not have to be provided.

For a time, the Calistoga Farm Center was operated by the Isaac Perez family, shown here in the Farm Center kitchen.



## Good Samaritan Burnout

Photo: C. Tom Turner

Isaac Perez is the former director of the Calistoga Farm Center. A member of a local conservative Protestant church and the Farmworker Housing Committee, he once worked closely with Father Brenkle and Segura. When we first met him in 1998, he showed us around the camp where he and his family lived with and cared for forty men. We sat in the camp's small, plainly furnished dining room as he told us about his daunting schedule.

Perez and his wife arose each morning by 3:30 a.m. to prepare breakfast and sack lunches for the men. Afterward, they left for work, some by 5:30 a.m. Perez and his wife then cleaned up and started preparations for supper. Although his wife usually managed to go back to bed for a couple more hours of sleep, he usually went straight to his office, where he dealt with mountains of paperwork or met with various groups, such as the Farmworkers Housing Committee.

When we first met Perez he expressed frustration over the lack of housing for farm workers. Even though the forty-person rule for the camp was to be strictly enforced, he admitted that he sometimes allowed extra men to sleep in cots in the camp's recreation room. He told us not to mention this violation of rules. Two years later, the overcrowding came to



a head. By that time we had developed a close working relationship with Perez. Our English majors at Pacific Union College were providing English as a second language classes for the men two evenings a week.

One day he told us to go ahead and photograph the evidence of extra men at the camp. He could no longer deal with turning men away, knowing full well that they would end up sleeping outdoors. He showed us through all the rooms in the camp where he allowed men to sleep and store their belongings. He took us around the parking lot, where we met men sleeping in their vans, their boots neatly lined up under their vehicles. They were allowed to use the bathrooms and have meals for a small daily fee.

No longer was Perez keeping his decision secret, and before long he was in open revolt against the California Human Development Corporation and the Farmworker Housing Committee, both of which he saw as incapable of understanding the urgency of the situation. Even though these groups had quietly worked with local officials to increase the legal camp population to sixty men, Perez argued that farm worker housing needed to move forward faster.

The revolt came to a head when he had the men stand out on the highway with signs and invited the local press to run stories about the overcrowding. Others viewed his behavior as insubordinate, and Perez was told he could not continue as camp director unless he signed an agreement never to overcrowd again or go to the press. His refusal led to his resignation and the installation of a new director, and before long Perez took his family and moved to the south end of the valley.

In these examples of three dedicated Christians who idealize the concept of serving "the least of these" why were two able to keep on year after year working to improve living conditions for workers? Why did one self-destruct in the effort to do good?

Our assessment is that Father Brenkle and Rosaura Segura learned the art of pacing themselves and, even more importantly, of building community alliances so they did not work in isolation. Their work includes the full spectrum of community members, including many churches and local and county political organizations. They know when to press hard for change and when to allow themselves time to recuperate from the extra hours of volunteer work. The loss of Isaac Perez to the community seems to have occurred because he began to feel isolated in his work.

There is much to learn from all three stories. Truly caring for one's neighbors means more than the individual or single church approach. It means working together across boundaries of church and class to build lasting working relationships.

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Marilyn Glaim is professor of English at Pacific Union College. In 1998, she joined with Tom Turner, chair of the college's art department, in a project that interviewed and photographed workers in the Napa Valley. A Pew Research Grant supported the project. Among the several dozen people interviewed were three valley residents, who, for Glaim and Turner, defined Christianity in action.



Photo: C. Tom Turner

Rosaura Segura interviews a client at her immigration services agency.





# Homelessness:

What is Lost?

By Gail E. Catlin

**M**y shoes get muddy as I walk across Friendship Park. It has rained in the early hours of the day and the park is damp, muddy, and cold. I can see everyone's breath as they speak. I pull my sweater around myself closer and I realize that, even though this park is intended to be a safe place for those who have no home, I feel threatened by the drunkenness, mental illnesses, and anger that lurk in some of the faces.

This place was designed so that law enforcement personnel wouldn't constantly harass homeless families as they made it through another day, waiting for showers or a meal at the shelter, or applying for aid or services. However, like my students who spend time in that park every day, I am "on alert." I think how impossible it would be to embark from here on the journey back to self, the journey of a lifetime.

I am headed to the classroom, where I teach journaling to homeless women. It feels like another world when I walk through the door into the temporary building classroom—quiet, carpeted, adorned with flowers on the table, and decorated with an "altar" in one corner that has precious reminders and mementos. On the walls are posters of courageous women who have changed the world—Sojourner Truth, Rosa Parks, Florence Nightingale, Delores Huerta. This is a safe place; something different can be born and grow here. I have become increasingly aware that only when we are safe can we grow, change, and be transformed. The gift of sanctuary is the greatest gift we can give one another. This is a lesson with which I am familiar, from a different set of circumstances.

When I was six I admired my schoolmate, Adele. She had a beautiful name and long looped blonde curls that bounced off her shoulders. Every day at school she wore beautiful party dresses and patent leather shoes. I was more scattered, attired in flannel-lined dungarees and plaid blouses, my hair looking like flyaway feathers. Although Adele looked assembled every morning, I was lucky if my shoes matched. I was new to the school and desperate for Adele to be my friend. Much cajoling and planning with my mother landed Adele at our house one afternoon. I was pleased in spite of the fact that having friends in my chaotic household was risky because I could never be certain of my mother's emotional state.

Adele asked to go upstairs and see my sister's hamster. We vowed to my mother that we would not take it out of the cage. But once upstairs, Adele was relentless in her pressure to "keep a secret" and hold the pet. In an effort to secure her friendship, I agreed. When we returned downstairs, for some odd reason Adele immediately told my mother. I could see the heat rise in my mother's face and that "we'll see you later in my room, little girl" look in her eyes. However, for the moment, she was the sweetest of hostesses, sending Adele on her way with compliments about her dressy ensemble, shutting the door hospitably, and then turning suddenly on me. What happened next

isn't something I can detail publicly even yet, but it is an experience that has taught me about the importance of safety.

In those minutes I became aware of why I could never have patent leather shoes or dressy dresses. Attention to and maintenance of such things was too time consuming and would take attention away from the greater endeavor to keep myself safe. Self-nurture was not a privilege I had. I needed to wear dungarees and tennis shoes because hyper-vigilance and survival are costly and any distraction might have forced me to miss a clue that could have become a blow.

This isn't easy to confess, but in doing so I locate myself in the same neighborhood as the homeless women I teach. We share the tenuous and fragile realm of finding quiet both deep enough and safe enough to hear our hearts beat. We are struggling to release the frightened alertness in our heads, trying to heal and become strong once more. Within our circle there is little distance between physical and emotional homelessness.

In our classes we journal our lives in an effort to grieve our losses, retrace our steps, make meaning of our lives, and craft a future that reflects us. Each woman receives a "travel pack" as she embarks on this courageous path, complete with journal, glue stick, scissors, eraser, colored pens, and pencils. I share with them how journaling has been my way back to myself. It is through journaling, and the safe place it creates, that I have authenticated my life, found my voice, and retrieved my life's work of teaching and writing.

Many women who have faced hardship have turned to journaling as a solace and salvation. Anne Frank wrote her diary during the Holocaust. Little Zlata Filipovic wrote her diary as the war in Sarajevo raged outside her door and destroyed her community. May

Sarton wrote her diary to stay alive when depression knocked at her window. In this private and often invisible place we find ourselves and then turn to contribute to the world. Women's journals are a place of power.

It has proven the same for this women's circle. The

retrieval of voice in journaling has helped the students realize that "they are not their trauma" and that their selves are distinct from their circumstances. This fact is difficult to believe and feel when the world around them judges them harshly. Some folks who hear about the class wonder why the women are worth the effort. They see homeless women as lazy, undisciplined, and unmotivated, deserving of their circumstances, dependent on handouts, and begging for more welfare.

These are not my students. True, they arrive in class fresh from addictions, jail time, and protective custody hearings. But they have only found their way into those places from deeper wounds of incest, molestation, rape, domestic violence, death, abandonment, and neglect. They are all ages and all races. They come from private as well as public schools, affluent neighborhoods, as well as urban ghettos.

They show up every day for two months to "go to school." They learn computer skills, job skills, anger management, and budgeting, as well as journaling, sculpture, and

collage. Almost 90 percent of the class members leave the program with housing and a job. Women from this class are like those in every other women's group I've taught and they are just like my students at the university. The difference is that they are engaged in the battle of a lifetime.

The transformative property of journaling is that it provides a means to recover dreams and imagination, the

"Homeless" CONTINUED ON PAGE 34

## Blue Suede Skirt

By Pamela Cullen

The cowgirl wore a blue suede skirt  
Dripping with white heavy fringe  
That swooshed when she walked.

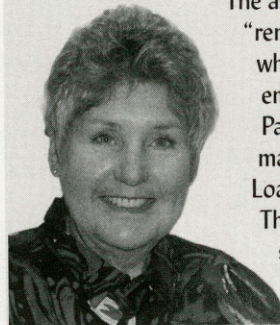
Her boots had silver buckles  
That rang like a dinner bell  
When she pranced in the dirt.

The six shooter on her hips  
Gleamed in the noonday sun  
As she aimed at the target.

Pamela found herself homeless almost overnight after the death of her husband. At middle age, she never expected to be living at the Salvation Army Shelter, her belongings in a storage shed. This poem about her childhood was her first entry into the journal for her class at the

Women's Empowerment Program.

The assignment was to "remember a time when you felt empowered." Today Pamela works in management at the Loaves and Fishes Thrift Shop, a position she has held for more than a year.



## Can You Imagine?

By *Claudia McKinney*

Can you imagine a young girl with a heroin addiction?  
Can you imagine her sleeping with different men just for the attention?  
Can you imagine drugs taking her into jails and institutions?  
Can you imagine her lying, stealing and even prostitution?  
Can you imagine her thinking about her life being so off track as she sits in her cell?  
Yet the first thing she does is get high once she gets out of jail.  
Can you imagine her loved ones dying and the ones no longer in her life?  
Can you imagine her a woman a mother a wife?  
Can you imagine her pain being hooked on drugs and feeling so all-alone?  
Can you imagine being raped and being left for dead?  
Can you imagine all of the ugly things that now live in her head?  
Can you imagine her days turned into years?  
Can you imagine her heartaches can you imagine her tears?  
Can you imagine her cheating death after getting a hot shot?  
I ask you again can you imagine it or not?  
Can you imagine the guilt can you imagine the shame?  
Can you imagine having no one else but yourself to blame?  
Can you imagine a woman fighting what seems to be a losing battle deep down within?  
Can you imagine the same woman going from 280 to 110?  
Can you imagine the bruises, the scars that her body bears?  
Can you imagine the glances or the looks she gets from people as some may stop and stare?  
Though every ones bottom is different and so is their perception  
Can you imagine her bottom being seeing her own reflection?  
GOD finally intervened and said, "Enough is enough"  
He said "I told you I'd be here for you when things got too tough"  
Can you imagine her learning how to live at age 45?  
Can you imagine her now waking up now thanking GOD just to be alive?  
Can you imagine being given a second chance at life in one lifetime?  
I don't have to imagine it cause the woman is me and the story is mine.  
All those things I swore I never would do.  
My addiction to drugs made all those things come true.  
And I pray every day never to return there again  
And pray no one else will ever have to if they  
stop and imagine.

---

Claudia McKinney wrote this poem while a student in the Women's Empowerment Program. She now lives in Quinn Cottages and works for Harm Reduction Services. She is pictured here, in the middle, with two of her classmates, LaShawna Clark (left) and Donna Gates (right).



building blocks for these women to become participants in the creation of their own lives. When we are not safe, we lose much more than only security. We lose our resilience and internal ability to envision our futures. We lose the gift of imagination. Understanding this has given me a new appreciation for the importance of "home," as well as the violent implications of "homelessness."

The courage that my journaling friends have is immense. Once protected here, they must write and discover some of the most difficult things. They must reclaim tragedy and horror to move beyond. One woman in my class can only write in the dark because "she cannot read yet what happened to her as a child." This woman sustained rape and incest and has longed to tell her story, but has never had a place. Each night she writes in the dark and admires herself because "at least now I'm writing it. Later I will read it."

Some women have lost children to protective custody battles or families to their addictions. Some women have lived with secrets until they are mute. Our society is loath to forgive them, but these women must forgive themselves in order to heal, move on, and contribute once more to their communities.

I admire and respect this arduous task and have learned many things. I have learned that no souls are lost, only hidden. I have learned that making meaning

of experience is the first and requisite step in moving forward. I have learned that compassion is much more powerful than justice and judgment. And I have learned that in spite of outward appearances, we are all engaged in keeping our flame alive.

When she received her journal packet, one of the students started weeping and said, "I'm so touched and thankful. I thought the world didn't think I had anything worthwhile to say." In my mind, a true community does not settle for such "acceptable losses." All efforts are made to retrieve those who are struggling. Two of my students had to drop out of class last session. They both have young children and the overflow housing facility in our city was closed because April marks the end of the "rainy season." I know these women now spend each day keeping their children safe on the streets. Their recovery of a future is over until they find shelter again.

This is a precious place of safety and security—an unconscious privilege to those who have it, and life-giving water for those who don't. In a safe place, a girl can wear patent leather shoes and keep them clean, seeing her reflection in their shine.

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Writer and teacher Gail Catlin lives in Carmichael, California. She volunteers at Mary House, a division of the nonprofit, nondenominational program Loaves and Fishes, which provides services for homeless people in Sacramento, California.



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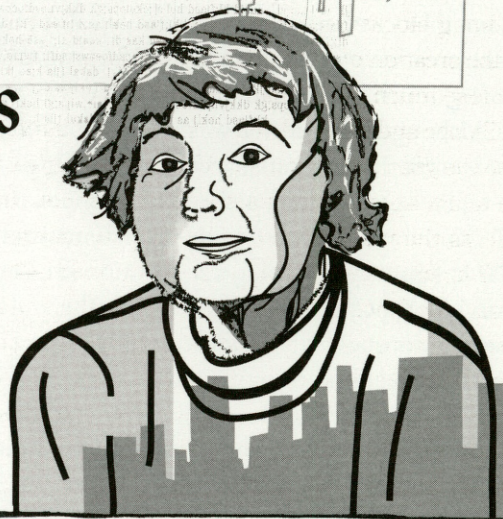
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# Creaking in the Beams

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Christianity,  
and the Third Reich

*An Interview with Renate Bethge*  
By Gary Blount



**L**utheran pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer was one of the most provocative and revered theologians of the twentieth century. The trajectory of his career was steep: he received a doctorate at the age of twenty-one and a university lectureship at twenty-five. By the age of twenty-nine, he had served as a pastor for German congregations in Barcelona and London and had been dean of a seminary, albeit one that conferred “invalid” credentials. In 1933, at the age of twenty-six, he gained brief fame in a national radio broadcast that warned the German people of National Socialism, particularly Adolf Hitler. As if to acknowledge the rising importance of young Bonhoeffer, the Nazis pulled the plug on his speech moments before it ended.

Bonhoeffer was the first German theologian to denounce persecution of the Jews, and in time he settled into a collision course with the National Socialists, the more-or-less legally constituted government of Germany. At the same time, he also came into conflict with Germany’s state Lutheran church, which for four centuries had embraced Martin Luther’s teaching of Two Kingdoms. Two mainstays of this belief were that the church should not interfere with the state, and that it was entitled to government support in ecclesiastical matters.

In June 1940, when Germany invaded France and quickly forced its surrender, Bonhoeffer was an avowed pacifist, a condition many considered a disorder restricted mainly to the English-speaking world, and he worked as a civilian employee of the Abwehr, or German military intelligence.<sup>1</sup> By then, he had also found his way into the heart of a disparate body of distinguished Germans determined to neutralize Hitler. A substantial number of these thoroughly decent Germans was determined to assassinate the Führer if necessary.

The son of the chair of the department of psychiatry at the University of Berlin, Bonhoeffer possessed a superb pedigree. He was raised in one of Berlin’s best neighborhoods and had in attendance seven servants while growing up. As a youth, he excelled at music and developed an interest in travel. During a post-doctoral, draft-deferring appointment at Union Seminary in New York City, Bonhoeffer found himself repelled by the harshness of racism in the United States, yet related well to the preaching and music of the black Christian culture.

Bonhoeffer fell in love twice, the second time becoming engaged to a member of the German aristocracy, Maria von Wedermeyer, a girl twenty years his junior. His arrest in 1943

at age thirty-seven ended the courtship abruptly and his death soon afterward ensured that he would never marry or have children.

Although Bonhoeffer was intense and complex, his life is nonetheless transparent. His writings are rich in metaphor and paradox and reveal a simple, irrepressible affection for the underdog. He insistently demanded that at some level, perhaps institutionally, certainly individually, Christians engage with the world. His theology is above all illustrative. His legacy is preeminently a recapitulation of God's solidarity with suffering humanity.

The fact that we know considerable amounts about Bonhoeffer, his formative years, his faith, and his actions is due in no small measure to his niece, Renate Schleicher. The daughter of Bonhoeffer's oldest sister, Ursula, Renate married Eberhard Bethge, Bonhoeffer's best friend and the man destined to become his biographer. Well known for decades in academic and pastoral circles around the world, Bethge died at his home in Wachtberg, Germany in 2000. His widow recently visited churches and college campuses in the United States. At one of these churches, I met her and asked if she would be willing to be interviewed for *Spectrum*. She readily agreed.

*Renate, as a Christmas present to his brother-in-law, Hans von Dohnanyi, fellow plotter Hans Oster, and closest friend Eberhard Bethge, Dietrich Bonhoeffer at the end of 1942 wrote an essay entitled "After Ten Years."<sup>2</sup> The essay is his summary of the German opposition to Hitler. It speaks of "no ground under our feet"; the opposition effort thus far*

*has been a failure. Among the reasons is the inaction of morally sensitive, humane, and educated Germans. What Bonhoeffer sees needed is "exclusive allegiance to God." He asks, "Are we still of any use? . . . Are there responsible people?" Were you aware of this letter to your fiancé, Eberhard Bethge? Did it discourage or frighten you?*

**RB** First, as you know, although Uncle Dietrich had already had some brushes with the Gestapo, he hadn't yet been arrested. The opposition was fragmented and ambivalent. Not only was I aware of this letter, several other family members gathered around as it was read aloud to us. We did not see this as a discouraging letter. We were familiar with Uncle Dietrich's views and they largely reflected the family's thinking. You must realize that we saw this as not simply a matter of being in one camp or the other. We realized that there were many good, responsible Germans who identified with the successes of Germany and wanted to win the war.

*You mention that as a teenager you were privy to news about the German resistance to Hitler. I believe that many discussions of various plots to eliminate Hitler were held in your home. It seems that the more I read about these plots, the more I discover that more of your family members were involved.*

*Let's start with Dietrich's uncle, Paul von Hase, who was commander of the garrison in Berlin. Next, there was your Uncle Dietrich's brother-in-law, Hans von Dohnanyi, chief of special projects for the Abwehr. Then there was your Uncle Klaus, legal advisor to Lufthansa. Finally, both your fiancé, a pastor, and your father, a high official in the air ministry, were involved in one or more of the conspiracies. Your grandparents, the eminent psychiatrist Karl Bonhoeffer and his wife, were also involved at some level.*

*As your uncle, Karl-Friedrich, said at the end of the war, "Our parents were aware of what they were doing, approved of it and gave their assistance. I believe there were very few families in Germany of which there was such complete agreement on political matters."<sup>3</sup>*

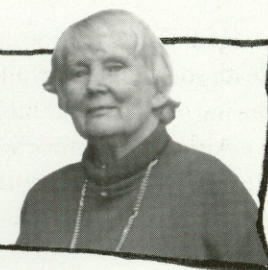
**RB** [Renate reflects.] You know, I often wondered if my family would have been as close without the Nazi threat and the evil of the regime. My parents walked a very fine line with my sister and me. Very early they recognized the dangers of National Socialism and tried to protect us from indoctrination.

On the other hand, they allowed us to participate in a limited way in youth activities such as Hitler Youth excursions, camping, and hiking. And I must confess, as a young girl I liked the brown uniforms. Dorothee and I would merrily sing the songs about bomb, bomb,



Gary Blount and Renate Bethge.

You know, I often wondered if my family would have been as close without the Nazi threat and the evil of the regime.



bomb England; most of the songs had very catchy tunes. [Renate and her sister, Dorothee, who has joined us, spontaneously break into singing one of their favorite National Youth songs.]

In school, we were expected to start each lesson with a hearty “Heil Hitler.” You must understand that the teachers were required to make this routine. To us, saying “Heil Hitler” was as normal as saying “Good morning.” Our neighbors sometimes walked around saluting one another with “Heil Hitler,” and Dorothee and I found this funny and strange. You must remember that by the mid-thirties Germany was an exciting place! We had the Olympics. People had jobs. I think we were just innocent children.

One day at school reality struck. I was fifteen I think, maybe sixteen, and in earnest I approached one of my friends who was in the party; we both had been elected to the student council. I felt I needed to tell this nice girl about the terrible concentration camps. She immediately told me that she would have to report me because the Germans must win the war.

I went home terrified, feeling stupid for having trusted another student. The next day the girl said that if she could convince me that the Nazis were good, she would not have to report me. She never said anything after that.

*Do you recall when your school curriculum changed? Did you get a big dose of Social Darwinism to support Hitler's race theories and politics?*

**RB** Race theories were introduced and biology was changed when the Nazis took over the schools.

*Did you have Jewish friends? As you know, your Aunt Sabine, who was Dietrich's twin sister, wrote in the family Portrait that the parents of some Jewish classmates did not allow them to come to the homes of Gentile friends.*

**RB** Oh yes, we all had Jewish friends. Many Christians were married to Jews. And of course, there were some Jewish Christians. I think my aunt was referring to the concern of some Jewish parents about dietary issues in their friends' homes.

*As a teenager, what was your knowledge about the plots against Hitler?*

**RB** Actually, there were many discussions, not only among my family members at my grandfather's house next door, but also with important officials. I think even General Oster came once.<sup>4</sup> As teenagers, we were not included in the adult conversations, but we were aware of the danger and importance of these matters.

When guests arrived at our home, the evening would begin with music and end in political discussions. Our parents would direct us to circle around the house to make sure no one was listening at the windows before tuning into the BBC. Uncle Klaus came up with the code, “There's a creaking in the beams.” This meant that the resistance movement and our family members were moving forward. There was a strong sense of unity for something dangerous but very important.

*Speaking of General Oster, didn't Fabian von Schlabrendorff say that he was “a man after God's own heart”? Hasn't Oster been called the managing director of the resistance? Weren't there many other devout Christians in the leadership of the resistance?*

**RB** Yes, yes, certainly. And as you probably know, there were three main paths into the German resistance to Hitler: military, religious, and political—extreme left to right.

*But the church in Germany has been roundly criticized for capitulating to Hitler's rantings and demands. Even though Hitler sent out mixed signals about his attitude toward the church, referring at times to “positive Christianity,” he made some disparaging remarks early on that should have served, it seems, as a dire warning. For instance: “You can do anything you want with them. They will submit, . . . they are insignificant little people, submissive as dogs.”<sup>5</sup> Was he right?*

**RB** No, I don't think so. You know that the man who was about to become my husband, Eberhard Bethge,

was not that determined to take up the political struggle initially. I think he was gradually persuaded during his time as Uncle Dietrich's assistant at Finkenwalde Seminary in the mid-thirties. Nonetheless, Eberhard was among the first to recognize the danger of the Nazification of the church.

*You speak of the famous Finkenwalde Seminary days from 1935 to 1937. Having broken with the state church, Dietrich and Eberhard were involved in a magnificent experiment, the spirit of which was captured in Life Together. Eberhard later characterized your uncle's type of extemporaneous praying as something "we had never heard before."*

*Do you think Eberhard came to regard this seminary routine as a model for training and worship? We have learned of the a cappella singing and the focus on prayers*

*Renate and Dorothee, did your Uncle Dietrich actually handle any of the explosives?*

**RB** [Laughter from both.] Oh no! But Uncle Hans [Dohnanyi] did.

*As the group focused in the late 1930s on neutralizing or containing Hitler before he could start a war, I believe your grandfather was prepared as a highly placed government psychiatrist to declare Hitler insane and to have him institutionalized as long as possible.*

**RB** That's correct. Our grandfather said there was enough evidence to commit him

*Then there was that obscure handful of Christian students*



It was not necessary to commit deeds to be found guilty.  
Nazi justice held you responsible for your beliefs.

*for the Confessing Church, for forgiveness, for failings in the ministry, for the sick, miserable and lonesome, and even for their enemies. Would you say this experience was transformative for Eberhard?*

**RB** Yes to both [questions]. Unfortunately, many of the men at these seminaries did not survive the struggle. I know that many of them felt relieved to get rid of the political pressure and were more comfortable in the army proving they were loyal Germans. And, Gary, I believe that you have discovered how these small, unapproved seminaries could threaten the mighty Nazis.

*By the late 1930s and throughout the war there was a wide spectrum of German opposition to Hitler. The mildest form was systematic criticism of him; the most extreme form included plans to kill not only him, but also his top henchmen. In the middle were strategies to contain him. Where did Dietrich's activities fall on this spectrum?*

**RB** Although I think for him this was mainly a political matter, he was on record for the need to exterminate Hitler. However, my Uncle Dietrich's emphasis was on ending the crimes against the Jews and the Nazis' political enemies and on establishing a link to the Allies and ending the war as soon as possible.

*and one or two professors at the University of Munich, mainly medical students, who distributed anti-Hitler leaflets in the middle of the war. Their movement was known as The White Rose.<sup>6</sup>*

**RB** Absolutely astonishing! We couldn't believe how brave those students were. And they were all beheaded. It was awful!

*That occurred in 1943, after one of the infamous trials of the People's Court.*

**RB** Yes, they were all condemned by the court of Roland Freisler, the dreaded judge who sentenced my father and thousands of others to death.

*I think one of the most striking ironies of the resistance story occurred on Saturday, February 3, 1945, when Fabian von Schlabrendorff went on trial in Freisler's court. Schlabrendorff, who was your Uncle Dietrich's fiancée's cousin, had actually carried two bombs to Hitler's plane but somehow they had failed to detonate and kill Hitler in midflight. Your Uncle Hans had prepared the bombs.*

*On that particular day, allied bombers struck the courthouse, and the only one in it seriously wounded was the iniquitous Freisler, who was struck in the head by a falling*



beam. He was pronounced dead by your Uncle Rolf, an army doctor in the courthouse that day to appeal for mercy for your father, who had been sentenced to death the previous day.

**RB** This is all true, and for leverage in the appeal Uncle Rolf refused to sign Freisler's death certificate.

*This same Judge Freisler had declared to the conspirator Moltke, at his trial a few weeks earlier, "Christianity and National Socialism have one thing in common, Count von Molke, and only one, we both demand the whole person."*

*Renate, let's step back a moment. During this terrible time, the late 1930s to the late 1940s, you lived part of your childhood, all of your adolescence, and then entered young adulthood. You were not only a witness to history, but also, one might say, a significant actor.*

**RB** I can tell you I was often frightened but hopeful. We were a family that went to church. In Germany, the tradition is that you go to your district or neighborhood church. But our minister was half Nazi. I recall my father having several conversations with the minister about this. Finally, my father said that we would have to have church at home. He said it is not a proper Sunday without church.

As a family, we would gather around the piano and sing our favorite hymns, such as "Gib Dich Zufrieden und Stille Sei." Sometimes Uncle Dietrich would drop by and give a little sermon.

After the arrest of several family members, I got a little involved in transporting and decoding messages among the imprisoned family. My father, who was not a particularly good conspirator, was known as a person who could not lie; he did distort the truth more than he liked.

I became involved in trying to free my father and my Uncle Dietrich. In my father's case, we tried to bribe his lawyer with liquor, and in my Uncle Dietrich's case we approached a friendly guard with a plan to supply a maintenance uniform in which my uncle could walk out of prison. At the last minute he [Uncle Dietrich] cancelled this plan because his brother Klaus had just been picked up by the Gestapo and Uncle Dietrich felt the whole family was in grave danger.

There are two German words and concepts that help explain the terror: *sippenhaft* and *gesinnungsstrafrecht*. In the first case, the Nazis extended a convicted person's responsibility to include his family; they sometimes went so far as to remove the children from the family and place them in orphanages, giving them new names. In the second case, it was not necessary to

commit deeds to be found guilty; Nazi justice held you responsible for your beliefs.

*In a letter sent to you from prison, which commemorated your first child's baptism, Dietrich wrote, "Our church, which has been fighting in these years only for its self-preservation, as though it were an end in itself, is incapable of taking the word of reconciliation and redemption to the world."<sup>28</sup>*

*Some in my church, the Adventist Church, are making an attempt to come to grips with the German Adventists' subordination of key church principles to National Socialism. These principles include a separation of church and state and a bias toward pacifism. Renate, do you have any advice for the Adventist Church?*

**RB** We all have made certain compromises, even our men who have been killed. Do you want to stay alive? Do you want your families to stay alive—where do you draw the line? Partly, it's a question of timing. As my Uncle Klaus said early in the war, "You don't step on the tail of a snake, you cut off its head."

*Would you say a word about your Uncle Dietrich's temperament and mood? At the end, do you think he became suicidal or felt terribly guilty?*

**RB** As a child, I remember Uncle Dietrich as fun and positive. He had firm opinions and was decisive. Before the July 20, 1944, coup against Hitler he seemed cheerful even though he was in prison. There was a scrap of paper found later suggesting that he was feeling hopeless but I think that mainly related to his concern about torture and revealing too much



Dietrich Bonhoeffer

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information that would place others in harm. I don't think he was ever ashamed or felt guilty.

And contrary to some reports, his name was not dropped from the intercessory prayer list by the church, but he himself asked for it to be taken off to protect members of the Confessing Church. Uncle Dietrich was very clear: if you sin, God will forgive you. God is looking out for the responsible person. He felt convicted to act as he was acting and if wrong, God would forgive him. He was resting on his belief in God.

*In one of his final messages to you and your husband your Uncle Dietrich wrote, "In Jesus, God has said Yes and Amen to it all and that Yes and Amen is the firm ground on which we stand."*

*You were a twenty-year-old Christian, a wife and new mother. Your father and your uncles were in prison and in great peril. Your husband would be caught up in the Gestapo sweep after July 20. How firm did the ground feel under your feet?*

**RB** The ground was, you might say, trembling. We had our faith and clung to hope that the war would soon end.

## The Rest of the Story

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was arrested in 1943 for currency violations related to transporting Jews out of Germany. He was eventually tried by a kangaroo court and officially declared an enemy of the state. After the July 20, 1944, coup attempt Bonhoeffer realized that Hitler's rage was now focused upon him and imprisoned coconspirators and told his family that "their life has been placed wholly in better and stronger hands."

Bonhoeffer was hanged at Flossenburg, April 9, 1945, two days before his SS guards fled in the face of the rapid Allied advance. He spoke his last known words to a fellow prisoner named Paine Best, a British secret service agent: "This is the end—for me, the beginning of life."

Dr. Karl Bonhoeffer was forced out of retirement at the end of the war to support his extended family, whose members the German people considered traitors. Karl is known for his work on treating alcoholism and classifying mental disorders. In postwar Germany, he was eventually acclaimed for his tireless efforts in support of Jewish colleagues before the war and for his vocal and persistent opposition to factions within the German medical establishment that promoted euthanasia. He died in Germany in 1948.

Eberhard Bethge spent several months in a Nazi prison before being liberated by the Soviet army. He was sent to the United States for a period of "reeducation" after the war. He and Renate Bethge also lived in England before returning to Germany, where he worked as a chaplain in both East and West Germany and organized continuing education for German pastors. He is best known as Dietrich Bonhoeffer's biographer.

Ursula Bonhoeffer Schleicher enjoyed singing as her brother Dietrich played the piano when they grew up in Berlin. She hid Jews during the war. She brought her husband's violin to him in prison. According to Sabine Bonhoeffer-Leibholz, Ursula often asked herself whether she had done right by dissuading her brother, Klaus, from committing suicide just prior to his arrest by the Gestapo.

Hans von Dohnanyi accumulated evidence of Nazi crimes starting in 1933 while working in the German Ministry of Justice. He became one of the highest ranking officials in German military intelligence and, after being arrested, arranged for his wife, Christine Bonhoeffer, to smuggle a diphtheria culture into prison, which he took to buy time and keep from implicating others. He was carried into court semiconscious, convicted, and then hanged on April 9, 1945.

Rüdiger Schleicher had been wounded in World War I. His office at the Institute for the Law of the Sky was one of the meeting places for those who opposed Hitler. The SS shot him, Klaus Bonhoeffer, and several other prisoners in the backs of their necks on April 23, 1945.

The Confessing Church was formed in 1934, when approximately one-fourth of German Protestant pastors declared their independence from the state church.

The Allies continued to turn a deaf ear to proposals by the German resistance to end the war early. Eventually, the Allies even ridiculed the resistance. Incredibly, the BBC, shortly after the failed coup on July 20, 1944, broadcast the names of high-ranking Germans thought to be involved. At least one scholar has referred to the resistance's tragic "illusion of solidarity" with the Allies.

## Notes and References

1. John W. de Grunchy, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 2. The Abwehr became locked in rivalry with other German intelligence agencies, especially the Gestapo. The Abwehr's chief, Admiral Wilhelm Canaris, was executed with Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Like Hitler and most Germans, Canaris was staunchly anti-communist. He was considered religious and highly moral and to the end maintained that he did not condone assassination.
2. De Grunchy, *Cambridge Companion*, 206.
3. Sabine Liebholz-Bonhoeffer, *The Bonhoeffers: Portrait of a*

*Family* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1971).

4. General Has Oster was deputy chief of military intelligence. According to Michael Burleigh, *The Third Reich* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000), 687, Oster betrayed to the Dutch, Belgians, Danes, and Norwegians German plans to invade their countries. He was also apparently the author of the plan to capture Hitler and have him certified insane.

5. Joan Winmill Brown, ed., *Dietrich Bonhoeffer, The Martyred Christian* (New York: Macmillan, 1995), 9.

6. About these students, Peter Selby has written, "The living out of Christianity in the modern world is the task of those who see themselves as people who are essentially godchildren, beneficiaries of the sacrifice and perception of Bonhoeffer and those like him, spared the abyss they endured and seeking to be prepared for the ones that lie ahead." De Gruchy, *Cambridge Companion*, 243.

7. Quoted in Joachim Fest, *Plotting Hitler's Death* (New York: Henry Holt, 1994), 316. Helmuth Count von Moltke headed the resistance faction known as the Kreisau Circle, a group of socialists and Christians, most of whom opposed violence.

8. De Gruchy, *Cambridge Companion*, 242.

9. *Ibid.*, 259.

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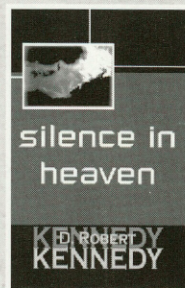
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Gary Blount practices adolescent psychiatry in St. Paul, Minnesota. His wife, Lee Blount, collaborated on this interview. The interviewers express their thanks to John Matthews, vice president of the International Bonhoeffer Society, for his encouragement, and to Renate Bethge and her sister, Dorothee Bracher, for their warm German hospitality. In addition, they are grateful for Renate's willingness to continue patiently telling the story.

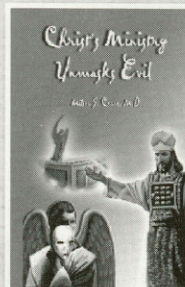
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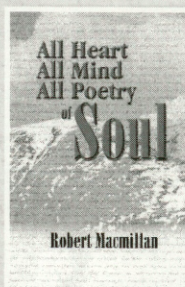
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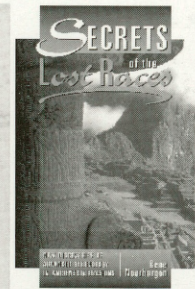
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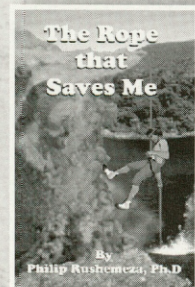
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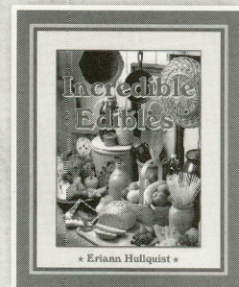
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# Changing Relationships with Our Muslim Neighbors:

The Effects of September 11

Holly Hughson interviews Borge Schantz

*From my student days at Newbold College, I know you were the pioneering director of the Islamic Study Centre. The September attacks continue to dominate much of the news and have forced those of us in the Western world to rethink our attitudes and the influence of our actions. Because you are known as a Seventh-day Adventist specialist on Islam, I would like to hear your perspective on the implications of the September attacks for the Church's eschatology and missions. But, first, tell me, how is a Dane involved in this enterprise?*

**Schantz** In my church employment I have worked thirty-two years outside Denmark. Of these, fourteen were in Islamic areas eight in West Africa and six in the Middle East. I did not know much about missology—the little I did know was instinctive anthropology—and I took the opportunity on prolonged leaves to obtain an M.A. in missions at Andrews University and a Ph.D. in intercultural studies at Fuller Theological Seminary. My dissertation was entitled “The Development of Seventh-day Adventist Missionary Thought: A Contemporary Appraisal.” My academic studies were somewhat focused on African traditional religions. This interested me more than Islamics.

I was lecturing and serving as chair of the religion department at Newbold College when one day I received a call from Neal Wilson, then president at the General Conference. He asked, “Will you start an Islamic Studies Centre?” I was not called because I was an Islamicist, but Wilson knew that I had missionary experience among Muslims in Africa and the Middle East and a Ph.D. in missology. I was interested in the opportunity to serve cross-cultural missionaries. I then began to study Islam, attended some postdoctoral courses, and was for more than six years in charge of that pioneering enterprise.

My approach to Islam took an angle that was less theological than anthropological and oriented toward church growth. This was probably because I had extensive experience living among non-Christians in Africa and the Middle East. In other words, I suggested broad approaches to Islamic people. I had excellent volunteer assistants in the Newbold neighborhood. We published literature on Islam, as well as a magazine called *Adventist-Muslim Review*. During these years, I traveled extensively to Muslim countries conducting seminars and even evangelistic meetings.

*I understand that your successors in the Islamic Study Centre have taken a somewhat different approach, with a daring acceptance of not only Islamic cultures, but also Islamic beliefs as part of their Christianity. Could you explain?*

**Schantz** I can certainly try in a rather general way. The traditional model for Muslim

evangelism is called "Missionary Extractionism," where the convert leaves the Muslim culture and religion and joins an existing Christian church in order to live and worship according to the newfound faith. This method has admittedly yielded limited results.

The *Al Hanif* approach follows something called the "Translational Model." This involves a movement of people to Christ that remains within Islam. The converts maintain part of their Muslim culture, worship form, and self-respect. They have not only the Old and New Testaments, but also the Koran as their bases for belief and lifestyle.

The *Al Hanif*'s name comes from a word used in the Koran for Abraham and those before Muhammad who stayed away from polytheism and paganism. Other mission agencies, mostly charismatic, who were active in the field before Adventists have various other names, such as "Christian Muslims" and "Jesus Mosque," for believers attracted by this same approach.

*What is your reaction to this new approach?*

**Shantz** Now you are leading me into a minefield; I must proceed with caution. I could easily sound like the grumbling has-been, the sulking old man. From what I have seen and heard, most of what I built up in six years in terms of suggested approaches, literature, and professional and academic networks was discarded.

You will understand when I say I felt I had wasted church money and time. I had to watch as the first Global Missions Study Centre was moved away from Europe and the name changed. I must admit that it was discouraging for me to see my efforts and approaches discarded. So what I say could be interpreted as me being somewhat envious. However, I want to be honest in my evaluations.

With this background, let me say that I respect Global Mission for allowing and funding this experiment. It has yielded some results in a certain South Asian setting, where it is operating side-by-side with charismatic Christian groups in a sort of "undercover evangelism." A thorough survey of the quality and quantity of the results is difficult, however, due to the circumstances. However, the experiment has resulted in some followers being left in a kind of "halfway house" between Islam and Christianity.

*A halfway house does not sound like a good place to leave a new believer.*

**Shantz** I agree, and I must confess that, as an Adventist missiologist, I have some problems when I  
[www.spectrummagazine.org](http://www.spectrummagazine.org)

study the approach. Several areas could be mentioned. Let me mention just one: for instance, allowing the use of the Koran as an authority to support Seventh-day Adventist doctrines.

The danger here is that the convert could claim that the same Koran that seems to support Sabbath observance also teaches that Muhammad is a true prophet of Allah. This necessarily creates ambiguity for the Muslim convert, in which the question could easily arise: What in the Koran should be followed and what left out? The Bible is the foundation of the Christian faith and must remain the sole basis for teaching and preaching. Of course, the Koran can be used in a supportive role; however, it should never be used as an authority.

Having been involved in evangelism in different countries, I could easily hear members say: "Why do we expect a convert from Methodism to cut ties with that tradition, which in many ways is very close to Adventism, and at same time not only allow but also encourage a Muslim convert to keep close ties to Islam?"

Naturally, the *Al Hanif* approach is discussed much. It seems to have some justifiable use in situations where there is no religious liberty. As a primary method for Muslim evangelism, however, it seems to be fairly limited.

Recent studies by Fuller Theological Seminary have shown that similar translational methods that have worked in Southern Asia have not worked in other places, for instance, in Africa. The SDA Centre for Adventist Muslim Studies must be prepared to accept the fact that among the 1.2 billion Muslims in the world there are more than one thousand cultures, each of which has people with various degrees of education, standards of living, and religious liberty.

The narrow focus of this one method has left many denominational structures and persons interested in participating in the mission among Muslims without a meaningful avenue of input in programs from the GC-funded center. Ironically, the void created by this focus has led to requests for lectures and seminars that have filled my time. So keen has been the interest in a different approach that the literature left at Newbold at the time of my retirement has been sold out.

*What has changed between Christianity and Islam since the September attacks?*

**Shantz** There is no doubt that September 11 has



changed everything: finance, air traffic security, employment, military strategies—it has all changed. I have rarely experienced an event that has received more attention and been analyzed more by all kinds of people, from psychologists to military strategists. Bin Laden and his people reaped some unexpected and certainly undeserved benefits. One of these was in the area of people's attitudes.

After 9/11 Christians and Muslims in a global situation became more suspicious of each other, and tensions in their relationships hardened. Also, Muslims are confronting each other. On the Danish scene, not far from where we sit in Copenhagen, extremist Islamic groups called a meeting in which they challenged Muslim guest workers, immigrants, and refugees to take a public stand for the war against the "Great Satan," the United States and her allies, Western Europe, including Denmark.

Even Christians in different denominations are

These unfortunate happenings have on a grassroots level generated animosity against Christian countries. As a result, the few Christian missionaries currently in Islamic nations could be in danger as targets for attack and kidnapping, and visas for new missionaries might be difficult to obtain.

*Last October, Ministry magazine published an article from the Centre for Adventist Islamic Relations that failed to mention the political dimension as a factor in its philosophy of missions approach. I find this omission significant in an article written one year after the start of the current Palestinian uprising against Israeli occupation, a situation whose reach was made devastatingly clear in the September attacks. Does this omission not betray an ignorance shamelessly endemic to the West, and apparently not lost on the Islamic Centre? Is there any sign that the Church's Global Mission initiative is re-examining the political level that invariably accompanies Christian missions into those Muslim countries*

Adventists are generally not known for paying much attention to political issues.

Religion and the role of the devil through these systems seem to interest us much more.

confronting each other on the same issue, some with a more lenient, relaxed attitude, others with an attitude that considers Islam a danger to Christianity.

*How have the conditions for mission to the Islamic world changed since September?*

**Shantz** Changes have taken place in some important areas. On the positive side, some Muslims in the West have become fed up with Islam and have turned to Christianity as an alternative. They cannot be counted in great numbers, still it is encouraging that this change has happened at all. A charismatic church in my country recently reported that it has fifty former Shi'ite Muslims now worshiping with it.

In Islamic countries, however, we find some negative reactions against Christians and Christianity. Overall, Muslims do not make a distinction between Christianity and Western politics. The terrorist attacks and suicide bombings have focused the attention of the common Muslim on Western, "Christian" support of Israel versus the Palestinians, as well as on the "Christian" embargo of Iraq, which has supposedly caused the deaths of many children for lack of medicine; and on the presence of American, "Christian" soldiers on holy ground in Saudi Arabia, the soil where Muhammad lived.

*that do not separate religious faith from government, and do not separate Christianity from the Western political agenda?*

**Shantz** The Global Missions Committee that I recently attended discussed the political aspects of the target populations. However, Adventists are generally not known for paying much attention to political issues. Religion and the role of the devil through these systems seem to interest us much more.

No doubt we have mistakenly paid too little attention in mission approaches to the political influence of religion. We have to understand that the Islamic worldview does not separate the sacred and secular, religion and politics. So President George W. Bush can say, "We are not fighting Islam but terrorists who happen to be Muslims." However, a Muslim will say that when you kill Muslims you are fighting Islam.

*True. If so, then perhaps Global Mission resources are better directed at the cause of religious liberty than individuals?*

**Shantz** Yes, the issue of religious liberty with a right of individuals to change religions is a most important issue in evangelism to Muslims. In *Shari'ah* law, execution with the sword is the punishment for apostasy from Islam, but it is fortunately not always practiced.

For this reason, the General Conference Department of Public Affairs and Religious Liberty is already heavily and actively involved in campaigns to secure this basic human right in Muslim states. However, it is an uphill battle, perhaps even hopeless. A change on this issue means that Muslims have to reverse a "law" issued by Allah.

*The issue of the death penalty for apostasy is a very frightening aspect of Islam. Is this religious movement mentioned in the Bible? Does Islam figure in the Church's eschatology?*

**Shantz** The traditional interpretation of the fifth and sixth trumpets in Revelation chapter 9 refers to Islam and the Ottoman Empire. However, the timeline for the prophecies in Revelation 9 did not go beyond 1840, according to Adventist traditional interpretations. About that time, it was becoming clear in Europe and the United States that the Ottoman Islamic empire was losing its influence; Turkey was being called the "sick man of Europe."

This concept is key; the Church presumed Islam would fade with the Ottoman Empire. We have, therefore, really only made brief references to Islam in our eschatology.

*What do you see as the significance of the September attacks for the Church?*

**Shantz** Just as it has changed so much in the world, September 11 should also force the Adventist Church back to the prophetic drawing board when it claims to be a prophetic movement. The Church needs to ask: Do we need to investigate further whether Islam as a movement is mentioned in the Scriptures? Could Islam be an anti-Christian power?

We find ourselves caught off guard, not just as Western Christians, but also as members of a Church that specializes in prophetic interpretations. We have not really taken time seriously to update our prophetic interpretation since Uriah Smith. Each generation of Christians standing on the shoulders of the pioneers experiences the Word of God for itself. This includes revisiting prophecy.

There are several points to consider in connection with Islam. For instance, 1 John 2:22 identifies antichrist with two points. The first sign of an antichrist is that it denies Jesus is the Christ. The second is that it denies the Father and the Son.

These statements could be said to point directly to Islam. Muslims accept Jesus as a prophet, but never as

the savior. Allah has ninety-nine names, according to Islam, but never is he called "father." And when we use "son" for Christ, Muslims call it blasphemous. On the folk level, some Muslims even suggest that if Allah is the father, then there must be a mother, and is that Mary?

It is interesting that almost all the signs traditionally used to identify the papal powers as "antichrist" also fit Islam.

*Are you suggesting that the Church revisit the issue of whether or not Islam is an antichrist? If so, does that mean the whole concept of antichrist is fluid and potentially changing? What is the threat of the Papacy today? Is it perhaps diminished or changed from the perspective of one hundred and fifty years ago and now replaced by the sleeping giant of Islam?*

**Shantz** These questions really cannot be answered in a few sentences. However, I shall try to give my opinion in a few brief remarks, and no doubt thereby expose myself to refutation, disapproval, and criticism. But since 9/11, I have been exposed to various Christian attempts to find meaning in what is going on. Here is my conclusion as of today.

In his epistles, John allows room for more than one anti-Christian power. We believe that the term John uses in these epistles means one who is opposed to or takes the place of Christ. Perhaps our focus on the papal powers being the great antichrist has taken us off guard in respect to other anti-Christian powers. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the Papacy does not seem to constitute a real physical danger to true Christianity.

Islam has hidden deep within its theology phrases that could be potential threats. This should cause all Christians—Roman Catholics included—to be on guard. Some people will claim that such attacks are a result of Muslims misinterpreting the Koran and the traditions, but I am not so sure. Today, Muslim people are aware of themselves. They generally blame the Western nations for their backwardness and past humiliations. Now they will in their writings find arguments to justify their actions.

*If the Church were to go so far as to name Islam as an anti-Christian system, wouldn't that only increase the potential for harm and encourage Christian fundamentalists?*

**Shantz** That is a good question. First, we are talking about identifying an anti-Christian system, not its people. Remember that the SDA Church has not



named Islam as an anti-Christian religion; I have my personal ideas on that issue.

My point is this: Look at the results we have gained from prophetic interpretations that have pointed directly at other anti-Christian systems. Well, pressed into a corner, we have to admit that our soul-winning progress and spiritual renewal come from areas where a power we have identified as being the Great Antichrist has had sway for centuries.

For example, look at the growing and powerful SDA church work in South America and the Philippines. These regions have for centuries been dominated by the Catholic Church. We have been prepared, also here, perhaps sometimes in private sessions, to call the papacy the "great antichrist." And we have had great success in these regions. I ask you, what do we lose in calling Islam an anti-Christian religion?

Perhaps our danger comes from living in an age where a spade is not called a spade. In our dealings with any anti-Christian power we are trying to identify a system that could be anti-Christian, but not

you always come to a point of confrontation if you want a person to change his mind or attitude. The wise person will not seek confrontation until he has established some points of agreement. But in my experience, in all soul winning sooner or later you come to a point where you must tell the other person what is wrong about his or her beliefs and offer a better way.

*Given the increased volatility of this time, what should guide our approach to Islam?*

**Shantz** There are 1.2 billion Muslims in the world, a population equal to that of China. All of these people are God's concern and embraced by his love. Most Muslims live in fifty countries, where there is very little or no religious liberty, no meaningful contact with the gospel, and no missionary contact. In addition, Muslims face the death penalty for leaving Islam.

We have to accept the fact that there are groups we cannot reach. The Gospels talk about shaking the dust off your feet. Wherever we have no right to approach Muslims we should do all we can to strengthen the

We have not really taken time seriously to update our prophetic interpretation since Uriah Smith. Each generation of Christians standing on the shoulders of the pioneers experiences the Word of God for itself. This includes revisiting prophecy.

condemning people. You could even say that we identify antichrist in order to warn the people to leave a false system. Confrontation is unavoidable.

*You say that sooner or later we will have confrontation. I must confess this is something I have great difficulty accepting. There is simply nothing in my experience that would lead me to take up arms or even words against another person in defense of my religious beliefs.*

*Of course, this is a comment on a life of relative comfort and freedom in the West. But I suspect this feeling is quite common among Western Christians and that Western churches have not even begun to appreciate it. Let's face it, the potential for confrontation creates a huge gap between the tithe-paying member in the United States or Europe, and what the missionary is preaching and asking new believers to accept in the field. Is this unavoidable?*

**Shantz** Perhaps the word "confrontation" is a strong one. Perhaps there could be a softer way to express the concept. What I am trying to say is that in religion, politics, and business—in all dealings between people—

few—often oppressed—Christian churches. As far as the unreachable Muslims are concerned, we have to leave them in God's hands. The Scriptures reveal that in the final judgment all facts will be taken into consideration. God is not only just, he is also love.

*Thank you for this compelling discussion.*

**Shantz** It has forced me to think through and express my experience and observations in more concise—but perhaps not always precise—terms.

Thank you for challenging me.

Borge Schantz is writing a book about Muslims among Christians. During his forty-seven-year career for the SDA Church he served as a pastor, evangelist, field president, division departmental director, teacher, head of a theology department (at Newbold), and founding director of the SDA Centre for Islamic Studies. He served as a missionary in Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Lebanon, and Cyprus. He received his Ph.D. from the School of World Mission at Fuller Theological Seminary.

Holly Hughson works for ADRA Denmark as an education coordinator in Kosovo.



# Why Christians and Jews Need Each Other

Jacques B. Doukhan. *Israel and the Church: Two Voices for the Same God*. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2002. x + 108 pages.

Reviewed by David R. Larson

**I**ntense and violent hostility toward Jewish people is one of Christianity's greatest moral failures. It is difficult to exaggerate how early this ugliness began, how widely it has spread, how long it has lasted, and how many it has wounded and killed. It is even more difficult to understand why influential Christians have so often condoned or even promoted it.

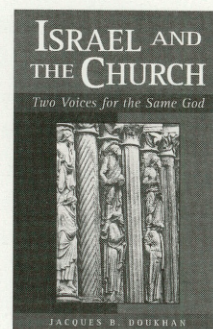
In this provocative, poignant, and often poetic book, Jacques B. Doukhan, professor of Hebrew Language, Exegesis, and Jewish Studies, and director of the Institute of Jewish-Christian Studies at Andrews University, ponders this legacy of bloodshed with an eye to the future. "After two thousand years of sad history and after the Holocaust," he asks, "is reconciliation between the two Jews, between Moses and Jesus, within the hearts, minds and lives of Christians and Jews, still possible?" (xx) Although we may not always be aware of it, this is an urgent moral question for all of us. For Doukhan, its importance is always felt. "It is the Jewish-Christian tension in my flesh and in my scholarly and professional life that has given birth to this book," he declares (ix).

## Jews and Christians in History

Doukhan begins his own answer to this vital question by reviewing the history of Jewish and Christian relations. Making use of fascinating historical, archaeological, and sociological evidence, he easily

establishes that both the life and the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth were thoroughly Jewish. So were virtually all of his first disciples, who were probably better educated than the uncouth rustics we so frequently imagine. We can say the same of most of the first Christian missionaries, especially the apostle Paul.

Although there were intermittent and sometimes intense conflicts between Jews and Christians from the time of Jesus onward, Doukhan reports, they did not actually part company until the fourth century, and then it was the Christians who forced the separation. This was the century of Constantine, the emperor who made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire. Taking political advantage of religious trends, Constantine and his company hammered a wedge between Judaism and Christianity. They went so far as to make Sunday, a holiday or holy day in many pagan circles, and the memorial of the resurrection of Jesus Christ in a growing number of Christian ones, the empire's official day of rest. From then on, the relatively peaceful coexistence



and intermingling of Jews and Christians that had lasted so long was no longer possible. People had to choose; eventually making the wrong decision proved fatal.

Christianity's rejection of Judaism was for many years "only of a theological nature," Doukhan writes (39). Yet over time, particularly with the Crusades that began in the last part of the eleventh century, and with the formation of Jewish ghettos in Europe during the thirteenth, things turned violent in a systematic fashion. One historian whom he quotes summarizes the way things unfolded as follows: "(1) In the fourth century Jews were told 'You have no right to live among us as Jews.' (2) From the Middle Ages to the nineteenth century, Jews were told 'You have no right to live among us.' (3) In the Nazi era, Jews were told, 'You have no right to live'" (53) Concepts have consequences. The outcomes of these ideas have been deadly.

After reviewing this historical evidence, Doukhan examines the doctrine of supersessionism, one of the most fatal of all ideas. In a refreshing expression of theological candor, Doukhan writes that "supersessionism is both the most pernicious and the most lethal theory. It contributed more than any theory to the Holocaust. It is anti-Semitism at its best (or at its worst). Its psychological mechanism is clear: because you are what I want to be, I wish that you do not exist.

And very soon, the crime or the support of the crime would follow" (59). Some may think that these claims are exaggerated. They aren't.

The apostle Paul insisted in Romans 9-11 that Christians are like branches grafted on to the *living* olive tree of Israel. Rejecting this view, the doctrine of supersessionism makes two hugely mistaken claims: "(1) God is finished with the Jews; and (2) the New Israel (the Christian church) takes the place of the Jewish people as the carrier of history" (55). Doukhan names the theological knaves that issue from the marriage of these two false notions: church replaces Israel, Spirit replaces flesh, grace replaces law, New Testament replaces Old Testament, Sunday replaces Sabbath. Sibling rogues include the specious convictions that sentiment replaces thought and action, individual replaces community, mournful asceticism replaces joyful living, and salvation replaces creation as the centerpiece in the architecture of Christian beliefs.

The so-called "final solution," the attempt by Christians and

others in the twentieth century to exterminate Jews and Judaism, was the practical outcome the doctrine of supersessionism. "I am acting in the sense of the Almighty Creator: By warding off the Jews I am fighting for the Lord's work," wrote Adolf Hitler in *Mein Kampf* (52). In a letter responding to questions about his racial policies, the Führer claimed that he was "only putting to effect what Christianity had preached and practiced for two thousand years" (ibid).

### Relating to Each Other

In view of this appalling history and theology, how should Christians and Jews relate to each other today? At one time, Doukhan writes, the question was whether Gentiles have to become Jews in order to be Christians. Now the issue is whether Jews have to become Gentiles in order to become members of the body of Christ. Although he spends more time on the second, Doukhan's answer to both questions is "no." He contends that, in harmony with the precedent established by the early

Christian council described in Acts 15, Jewish and Gentile Christians should not try to separate each other from their cultural legacies except in matters of basic theological and ethical principle.

Doukhan is both clear and correct: Christian evangelistic endeavors are ethically unacceptable if they seek to separate Jewish individuals and groups from the Hebrew heritage and culture, if they intend to transform Jews into Gentiles as they become Christians. His judgments regarding Messianic Judaism are mixed. Its best expressions provide a way for people to be both Jewish and Christian in the full senses of both terms. Its worst amount to yet another opportunity for Christians to abuse Jewish people by making cosmetic concessions to Judaism while continuing to erode its independent and continuing legitimacy.

In a gesture I find rhetorically effective, Doukhan applies to Judaism and Christianity the counsel of both the Old and the New Testaments that at least two witnesses are required to establish a report's credibility. As this analogy implies, neither Judaism nor Christianity is as effective alone as both are together. They can both thrive only if each flourishes in continuing interdependence and cooperation with the other.

Doukhan holds that the Christian community needs the people of Israel on a continuing basis. Israel preserves Hebrew Scripture and models serious ways of studying it. It emphasizes the value of God's law as well as justice and righteousness in concrete words and deeds. It exudes a joy of life and a comfort with things physical that are often missing in Christian circles. It gives the world the concept of the Messiah and it understands that salvation

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is "not just an existential subjective experience" (92). Mindful that now all things are not as they should be, it nurtures a hope that is more credible and creative than both despair and wishful thinking. By its very continuation and success, Judaism also demonstrates the unnecessary and unfair character of anti-Semitism.

Doukhan also believes that Judaism needs Christianity. From the New Testament, Jewish people can learn about their own heritage in the first centuries of our era. They can also gain a renewed appreciation for what the Old Testament says about grace, incarnation, divine suffering, and the anticipatory presence of the ultimate future. Most importantly, Christianity makes the religious treasures of Israel available to billions of people who are not physical descendants of Abraham and Sarah. "One of the most ironic and interesting paradoxes of history," Doukhan observes, is that "without the church the Jews might have remained a small, insignificant and obscure religion that might well have disappeared" (94).

### Questions

It seems clear, as Doukhan explains, that Constantine's endorsement in the fourth century of Sunday as the Roman Empire's official day of rest was, among other things, a concession to Christianity's increasing hostility toward Jews. But why did so many Christians want to distinguish themselves from Judaism in the first place? Doukhan traces the roots of anti-Semitism back to the soil of the first Christian centuries. To what extent, if any, was it also present in Greek and Roman cultures even before the time of Jesus?

What is the best way to understand the relationships between

Israel as a religious movement, cultural legacy, ethnic identity, and growing nation on the eastern shores of the Mediterranean? Although it is impossible and undesirable wholly to separate these four, I wonder if distinguishing among them somewhat more sharply than Doukhan does in this book might prove helpful.

How should Christianity relate to other world religions in addition to Judaism? There cannot be a perfect parallel between the way Christianity should correspond to Judaism and how it should interact with, say, Hinduism, Buddhism, or Confucianism. Nevertheless, when Doukhan rightly maintains that Jewish people need not become Gentiles in the course of becoming Christians, the thought occurs that in the same process Orientals need not become Occidentals, Africans need not become Europeans, Latins need not become Anglos, and so forth around the world. Separating the kernel of Christianity from its cultural husks is not always easy, however!

Doukhan serves us well in this book as an excellent Jewish *and* Christian theologian. Making use of Scripture, tradition, reason, and

experience in their proper relationships, he assesses the past and points the way forward with candor and courtesy. He writes in a cautiously hopeful voice, not merely as a mournful echo. All those who care about the future of humanity will benefit from studying and discussing his important contribution.

David R. Larson is a professor of religion at Loma Linda University.

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# Sexuality

# Sexuality in Biblical Perspective

By Ivan T. Blazen

## Part One

**T**here is a great deal of sensitivity about the topic of sexuality. Sexuality is not merely an academic subject; it touches people in very personal ways. University students, for example, are reticent to talk openly about sexuality in classes for fear of exposure and judgment, although many have a high level of interest and many questions.

My purpose here is not to register judgment or bring discomfort. God has created us as sexual beings, and that is cause for rejoicing. If any feel they have not always lived up to God's ideal for their sexuality and wish the past could be altered, it is most reassuring to know, as Scripture teaches, that God's grace accepts us and redirects us. So, in an atmosphere of grace, I would like to discuss the theme of sexuality as presented in Scripture.

## Good News Versus Bad News

The Bible contains good news, not only about salvation, but also about sexuality. Scripture teaches that sexuality is a very positive rather than negative aspect of creation. The first chapter of the Bible makes the point clear: On the sixth day "God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female created he them" (Gen. 1:27).<sup>1</sup> Genesis calls each day's creation good, and then in response to the entire creation it declares, "God saw everything he had made, and indeed, it was very good" (Gen. 1:31). "Everything" includes our sexuality, which is inherent in the phrase "male and female."

In the biblical tradition, sexuality is rooted in creation and in the goodness of creation, indeed in the *very* goodness of creation. In view of this, when I look at the history of negative thinking about sex, especially in the Christian church, I wonder why we so often have not celebrated our sexuality as something very good. It has long been looked upon as contrary to spirituality, to be hidden rather than publicly discussed, and not particularly to be enjoyed. Many have thought that sexual expression and satisfaction are at odds with the ideal in creation.

What factors have led to this adverse appraisal of sexuality? First, from ancient times and traditions comes the belief, which still influences us today (for example, in Christian Science), that the first created being was spiritual rather than physical. Materiality, body, and flesh were considered results of a fall from the primal reality.

There is a brief hint of this kind of belief in 1 Corinthians 15, a chapter on the resurrection of the dead. Paul observes that as we have borne the likeness of Adam, so in the resurrection we will bear the likeness of the risen Christ. In conformity with this and in apparent rebuttal of the idea that the physical is a secondary condition far removed from the original creation, Paul says that the spiritual is not first, but that the physical is, then comes the spiritual (vs. 46).

In addition to being spiritual, the first person was also thought to be androgynous (a composite term from the Greek words for male and female). In androgyny, male and female are not distinguishable. As Plato taught, the ideal person split into two halves, one male and the other female. A restive quest ensued by both halves to find their other half and become once again an androgynous being. Such a view implies that sexual differentiation and cohabitation between the two sexes represent a fallen state.

Nothing could be further from the biblical account in Genesis, where God created male and female as two individual persons. They are not halves looking for their other half, but each is a whole person looking for another whole person with which to enter into relationship.

Another idea inimical to a positive affirmation of human sexuality is dualism. Just as the primal man idea emphasizes the nonmaterial nature of the first person, so dualism emphasizes that in our present makeup we are a combination of spirit and body, the ideal and the nonideal, the eternal and the temporal. It is the spirit rather than the body that expresses the true self. Thus, in dualism, salvation is escape from the body into the realm of spirit, whereas in the Bible salvation involves the resurrection of the body.

From dualism's premise that the body is not really good or eternal, two options follow: libertinism or asceticism. One gives the body free reign, the other no reign. In 1 Corinthians 6 and 7 we see both tendencies operating in the same church. The idea inherent in asceticism is that one cannot be a sexual being and a spiritual being at the same time. Some Corinthians held this belief, as shown by Paul's answers to them in 1 Corinthians 7.

The history of the Christian church has been much affected by the ascetic tendency. Witness such notables as the outstanding theologian Augustine (A.D. 354-430), whose thought has affected the Christian church greatly. Augustine's position on sexuality is well summarized by Lewis Smedes, emeritus professor at Fuller Theological Seminary.

Augustine, to whom we otherwise owe more than most of us even imagine, interpreted the Christians' calling to struggle against evil as a calling to struggle against their sexuality. Intense desires for sexual fulfillment and intense pleasure from sexual action were for him marks of fallen man. Augustine could not imagine an innocent person in Paradise turned on sexually: a sinless Adam could never have been sexually aroused by a pure Eve; Adam and Eve could not have walked with God in the day and made spontaneous love at night. If we do this now it is only because we have not brought our bodies under the rule of Christ. The less one is driven toward sex and the less pleasure he receives from sexual expression, the more sure he can be of his own sanctification. The Lord, in his grace, tolerates our inconsistency; but we must know that he calls us to better, sexless things. This was how Augustine felt about sexuality. Some Christians still carry Augustine's feelings in their hearts; they can only hope that God tolerates their sexuality until their liberation from it in heaven.<sup>2</sup>

1 Timothy 4:1-4 mentions an early precursor to this understanding:

Now the Spirit expressly says that in later [or the last] times some will renounce the faith by paying attention to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, through the hypocrisy of liars whose consciences are seared with a hot iron. They forbid marriage and demand abstinence from foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. For everything created by God is good.

What is Paul talking about in this passage? Why would some forbid marriage? Why would they forbid certain foods, and what kind of foods would they forbid? On the latter issue, it seems clear that meats were among the forbidden foods. The recommended alternative is vegetarianism. For Paul, however, to forbid meat was heretical. As Seventh-day Adventists, we may have difficulty understanding the meaning of this text because Adventists have long promoted a vegetarian diet as the basis of better health.

Those who articulated the view mentioned in 1 Timothy were not at all concerned for the health of the body, but for the health of the spirit. Thinking dualistically, they considered meat too material and sensual.

## The Bible rejoices in the God-given sensuous nature of human beings with our capacity for intimacy.

As such, it would bind the meat eater to this material world and inhibit growth in spirituality and progress in returning to the spiritual realm. Vegetarian movements existed in Paul's day to promote spiritual welfare.

Paul's opponents advocated avoidance of marriage for the same reason they forbade meat. Marriage involves sex, and sex is so sensuous, so meaty as it were, that it contravenes the spiritual quest to ascend to the heavenly home from which the spirit has been separated. Asceticism's message was clear: sexuality and spirituality do not mix!

It is interesting that the word chosen in Genesis 2 to represent our union with each other is the word *flesh*. God sees that it is not good for a person to be alone, and creates a companion who is of the same nature and entirely complementary. Adam's response is: "Bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh" (vs. 23). Genesis provides a commentary: "Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh" (vs. 24). This passage embraces more than sexuality, but certainly includes the intimacy between two people by which they come into total union and communion with each other. A new community is formed and sexual engagement is its sacrament.

### Singing Love's Song

The Bible rejoices in the God-given sensuous nature of human beings with our capacity for intimacy. For example, Proverbs 5:15-19, in an admonition to husbands to focus on and be faithful to their partners, expressively and erotically declares: "Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth, a lovely deer, a graceful doe. May her breasts satisfy you at all times; may you be intoxicated always by her love."

What is found here in brief comes to full flower in the Song of Songs, which describes not only the feelings of the male toward the female, but also of the female toward the male.

I always find it fascinating how people are able to allegorize these texts. Some do it out of embarrassment over such erotic material, and some because they discern a deeper message. These allegorizations are often beautiful and ingenious, but I don't think they

represent what the book is truly about. The Song of Songs is not about God's love for Israel or the church, nor is it a metaphorical message about righteousness by faith. Rather, it is a series of love poems, very sensuous and earthy in their intention and manner of expression.

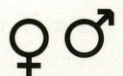
When I was teaching at Pacific Union College some years back, Louis Venden and I had a weekly radio broadcast. We did a series on the Song of Solomon, and requests for those tapes were greater than for any other. I would like to flatter myself that we were so interesting that people could not resist buying our tapes, but I think the real reason was that people felt liberated to think that in God's word there is a place for talk about sensuousness, and in very beautiful language at that. To turn the book into allegory is to lose a dimension of relationship the book actually intends and describes—a dimension we can ill afford to be without.

Biblical books may be understood in terms of three categories: Those that contain God's word *to us*, such as the Prophets and the Sermon on the Mount; those that express our words *to God*, such as the Psalms; and those that contain our words *to each other*, such as the Songs. To be without such a book, with the beauty of its depiction of amour between humans, would be a real loss indeed.

The existence of such a book in the canon of Scripture says that God is very interested in our sexuality and enjoyment of it. I agree with Judaism when it teaches that to deny who we are as sexual beings or not to enjoy what God has made for us to enjoy is to deny God's creation, and thus to be in trouble with God. So let's not mess with God by failing to be totally human!

The Song of Songs begins in a very dramatic way with the beloved's expression of strong desire for her lover's affection. "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth!" (1:2-4). This gets our attention immediately, does it not? If a woman is willing to be this earnest and open with her lover, it ought to get his attention.

The beloved then speaks directly to her lover with



words of praise and affirmation. "For your love is better than wine." Things get moving, and there is longing for the whole experience. "Draw me after you, let us make haste." Nothing cold or boring about this. Lovers need to hear from each other, "I can't wait!"

The love act itself is placed in the most romantic of settings—in the beauties of nature. "Come my beloved . . . let us go out early to the vineyards and see whether the vines have budded, whether the grape blossoms have opened and the pomegranates are in bloom. There I will give you my love" (7:11-12).

Love's passions are pictured as overwhelming. "Love is as strong as death, passions fierce as the grave. Its flashes are flashes of fire, a raging flame. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it" (8:6-7).

In a passage that may make us smile, the beloved sees the strength of love's passions as enervating and calls out for sustenance. "He brought me to the banqueting house [the place of sexual intimacy] and his intention toward me [KJV = banner over me] was love. *Sustain me with raisins, refresh me with apples; for I am faint with love*" (2:4-5).

It is very interesting to see how the lover responds to his beloved in chapter 4, verses 1 through 7. The language is ancient, and modern equivalents would be needed today, but in the Songs lovers appeal to their partners' imaginations by use of extended metaphor. The lover begins with words of adoration every woman needs to hear. "How beautiful you are, my darling! Oh how beautiful!" The language becomes specific as the lover describes how he sees the various parts of her body.

Your eyes behind your veils are doves. Your hair is like a flock of goats descending from Mount Gilead. Your teeth are like a flock of sheep just shorn. Your lips are like a scarlet ribbon; your mouth is lovely. Your temples behind your veil are like the halves of a pomegranate. Your neck is like the tower of David, built with elegance; on it hang a thousand shields, all of them shields of warriors. Your two breasts are like two fawns, like twin fawns of a gazelle that browse among the lilies.

He wants to spend all the time he can with her, his vision of loveliness, and therefore says: "Until the day breaks and the shadows flee, I will hasten to the mountain of myrrh and the hill of frankincense" (4:6). At that point the lover returns to his general premise, but with even stronger acclaim. "You are altogether beautiful my love; there is no flaw in you" (4:7). How irresistible an expression! Every relationship could be

strengthened with words such as these.

Not to be outdone by her lover's descriptiveness, the beloved extols her partner in equally vivid terms in chapter 5, verses 10 through 16. "My lover is radiant and ruddy, outstanding among ten thousand." What man would not wish to think that in the eyes of his partner he is the very best? A rather incredible description of the husband's body follows, which begins with "His head is purest gold," and culminates in verse 16 with, "his speech is most sweet, and he is altogether desirable. This is my beloved and this is my friend." The greatest lover should be the greatest friend. True friendship is the only atmosphere within which genuine intimacy can occur.

I think of a person who experienced trouble with his marriage. He thought the way to solve relational problems with his wife was to be more macho. He would prove himself and overcome her sexually. The more he approached her in that spirit, however, the more she fled, for the real issue in sexuality is not primarily physical prowess, but the quality of the relationship. What has to be reconstructed to make sexuality everything it is meant to be is a deep personal friendship based on mutual respect, admiration, and appreciation in which you know your partner cares about you supremely.

In Songs 8:14 the beloved speaks again to her lover and says, "Come away, my lover, and be like a gazelle or like a young stag on the spice-laden mountains." I think we need a little spice in our sexual lives, a little creativity and imagination, a new way of speaking and touching and, above all, a superb friendship that makes us want to be together sexually to express the depth of our love for each other.

## Does Scripture Contradict Itself?

So far, I have discussed positive Scriptural passages about sexuality. There are passages that some consider negative, and Matthew 5:27-30 is one. In Jesus' explanation of a deeper meaning to adultery he says that "everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (vs. 28). Some have thought that this passage refers to sexual attraction at the sight of a lovely person. Those who espouse this view think Jesus' admonition is not only negative, but also impossible to fulfill, for all humans have sexual attraction toward others.

This is true, but to think that Jesus refers to lust is incorrect, in my judgment. Jesus is not speaking about the awakening of sexual impulses but of purposive



The greatest lover should be the greatest friend. True friendship is the only atmosphere within which genuine intimacy can occur.

mental manipulation of others for one's own gratification. The way this text reads in the Greek suggests this meaning. Whoever looks at a woman in order to, for the purpose of, lust after her, is where the adultery comes in. Mental rape, not sexual attraction is the idea. The problem comes from treating others as objects for exploitation, rather than subjects to be respected in their own right and dignity.

With these thoughts in view, Matthew 5:17-20 is not a negative text at all, but very positive in its intent. It involves valuing the other person, precisely the quality that goes into a healthy sexuality. Jesus calls us to see another person not in the relation of subject/object, but of I/thou, as two subjects coming together in fellowship, two equals who both desire the same thing.

Sometimes the eschatological vision of God's redeemed people in Revelation 14:1-5 is understood to imply a negative appraisal of sex. Verse 4 characterizes the redeemed as "these who have not defiled themselves with women, for they are virgins." If taken literally, this statement makes celibacy a goal of human life, or rather male life, since it is intimacy with women that causes defilement. Thus, on literalistic assumptions, verse 4 presents two negative ideas: one about sex (redemption requires its avoidance), and the other about women (they are a source of pollution).

We forget the symbolic character of Revelation and of elements in this passage if we categorically espouse this view. The Lamb standing on Mount Zion is symbolic, as are the four living creatures and the 144,000. Also in accord with the figurative nature of the book is the woman of Revelation 18, with whom the kings of the earth commit fornication and from whose cup "full of abominations and the impurities of her fornication" (17:4) the inhabitants of the earth have become drunk (17:2). In chapter 17, verse 18, the woman is equated with "the great city that rules over the kings of the earth"—an obvious reference to Rome—and in chapter 18, verses 2 through 3, with Babylon. The whores of whom she is said to be the mother (17:5), may well be the defiling women of chapter 14, verse 4.

The concern of Revelation is with idolatry, otherwise specified as fornication. Idolatry involves calling someone "Lord" other than the one who truly is, Jesus Christ. At the time Revelation was written, the

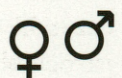
emperor had taken upon himself the title "Lord" and called for the worship of himself as divine.

In contrast to those who commit spiritual fornication with the woman (Rev. 18), worship the beast and its image, and have the mark of the beast on their foreheads (Rev. 13), the redeemed of Revelation 14 have the name of the Father inscribed on their foreheads (14:1). The explanation of their virginity is given, I believe, in the passage itself: They follow the Lamb wherever he goes (14:4) and in their mouths no lie is found, for they are blameless (14:5). Thus, the passage underscores the purity of the redeemed with respect to the nature of true religion and worship. This is the counterpoint to the false religion and worship described in Revelation 13.

But what about 1 Corinthians 7? Some people are sure this passage presents a negative view of sex. Paul's antisexual stance appears to be clear from his declaration that it is not good for a man to touch a woman (vs. 1), his recommendation of abstinence from sex for spiritual purposes (vs. 5), his advocacy of celibacy (vss. 7-8), his proposal that those who have wives live as though they had none (vs. 29), and his assertion that remaining unmarried is better than getting married (vs. 38).

Is this a decisive argument? I don't think so. This position does not reflect the perspectives from which Paul speaks or the fullness of detail he presents. It is extremely important to note from the outset that the perspective from which Paul begins his discussion is that of a respondent to questions posed and positions taken by the Corinthians in a letter they had written to him (vs. 1). If one turns Paul's statements inside out, so to speak, and reads between the lines, the thoughts of the Corinthians can be discerned.

At rock bottom, they argued that sexuality and spirituality do not mesh. It was they, not Paul, who urged men not to touch women, that is, to engage in sex with her. These can hardly be Paul's words, since he rebuts them in his response.<sup>3</sup> It was the Corinthians who held that married couples should abstain from sex



Paul, far from advocating sexual abstinence, promotes a healthy sex life, not merely for procreation, which is not mentioned in the text, but because of the need for sexual intimacy itself.

(and undoubtedly that singles should not marry for the same reason).

In contrast, Paul answered that, in view of cases of sexual immorality, each man should have relations with his own wife and each woman with her own husband (vs. 2). In other words, to attempt a celibate way of life, contrary to the natural sexual instinct, posed the danger of leading one into fornication (probably with prostitutes), as instances among the Corinthian Christians already evidenced. (Compare 1 Cor. 6:12-20.)

Furthermore, Paul argues that married couples need to engage in sex on a regular basis (vss. 3-5). In a revolutionary statement for a culture where wives remained at home to beget children and where husbands found their sexual fulfillment outside of marriage, Paul calls for men to give their wives what is due to them sexually, and for wives to do the same for their husbands. (Note the equality of the sexes.) Each had authority over (that is, a marital claim upon) the body of the other.

They were not to deprive each other unless—and here Paul makes the concession mentioned in verse 6—the Corinthians wished to abstain during special seasons of prayer. Paul does not command them to abstain, but writes that both married partners should agree (another indication of equality in marriage) and that such periods should have set termination dates, lest Satan tempt one partner or the other to go elsewhere for sexual intimacy. So Paul, far from advocating sexual abstinence, promotes a healthy sex life, not merely for procreation, which the text does not mention, but because of the need for sexual intimacy itself.

To be sure, Paul does express a wish that others could be celibate, as he was (probably a response to a Corinthian belief that Paul's own celibacy implied that others should be celibate, as well), but he also recognizes that such a decision takes a special gift, which only some had (vss. 7-8). For this reason he recommends that "it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion" (vs. 9). Paul's statements may seem limited as to the grounds for marriage (to avoid fornication, vs. 2; to satisfy sexual passion, vs. 9) because he is not developing a total philosophy of marriage in this passage, but is answering specific questions and countering particular antisexual opinions. Context is everything.

Some Corinthians apparently advocated ending marriages among couples who could not sustain celibate relationships, especially among new believers who had pagan partners (vss. 10-16). In answer, Paul says, No! Stay married, except in cases of desertion by unbelieving partners. In such situations believers are not bound to the marriages (vs. 15). Incredibly, Paul asserts that, among mixed couples, unbelievers do not pollute believers, as the Corinthians seem to have argued, but that unbelievers and any children born to such unions are sanctified through the presence of believers (vs. 14)!

What are we to make of Paul's statement that husbands should treat their wives as if they had none (vs. 29), which may be seen as destructive of any meaningful concept of marriage and sex? If Paul meant, "Don't treat your wife as a wife and sexual partner," he would be flying in the face of his own instruction early in the chapter (vss. 2-5). He would also be contradicting his own statement that one who has a wife should not seek to be free from her (vs. 27).

The explanation for Paul's call can be found in the eschatological perspective that frames his thoughts. He sees the distress of the last days (vs. 26), the shortness of time (vs. 29), and the fact that the form of this world is passing away (vs. 31, compare 1 Cor. 10:11: "The ends of the ages have come"), as affecting all aspects of human experience.

Paul mentions five major subjects: marriage, sadness, gladness, ownership, and commerce/culture. For each, he says "Be as if not." He does not in any way deny their reality or call for their abolition. Rather, since the end of history is on its way with the coming of Christ, each subject should be as if not. That is, believers were not to make these the be all and end all of human existence. They were advised to form a new attitude toward this world's realities and stake their claim primarily on what is ultimate and ahead.

In this context, there is no denial of marriage, but rather a reassessment of it in terms of the supreme value: God's intervention in human history. Such a view would lead to a positive transformation of marriage and all human values.

The eschatological perspective also undoubtedly stands behind Paul's view that the person who marries does what is good, but the one who refrains does

better (vs. 38). Paul cannot be contrasting a good state with one that is bad, for he acknowledges that marriage is good. The comparison is not a moral one, but arises principally from end time considerations.

In view of the eschaton, which Paul's Jewish apocalyptic heritage depicted as a period of unparalleled distress (vs. 26), it would be better, that is to say easier, more advantageous, if one were single. One would not have to worry about duties involved in marriage, and thus would be freer to focus on the coming Lord (vss. 32-35).

## Part Two

The importance of sexuality can be gauged by the way it is guarded. Two passages come into view: 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8 and 1 Corinthians 6:12-20. These passages are not at all antisexual unless one assumes that their common admonition to avoid fornication makes them so. In actuality, both imply the goodness of sexuality, for they take great pains to guard it from abuse and to place it in theocentric and soteriological perspective.

## Sanctification and Sex

Paul signals the nature of his concerns in 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8 with a prayer that precedes immediately, in chapter 3, verse 13: "And may he [God] so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints." Here Paul ties together ethics (holiness and blamelessness) and eschatology (the coming of the Lord), themes he more fully develops in chapter 4.

As to holiness, or its synonym, sanctification, Paul reminds his readers that apostolic instruction has taught believers to live in a way that pleases God (vss. 1-2). We please God and live in accordance with his will when we lead sanctified lives, that is, lives that express our separation from worldly values and our consecration to God (vs. 3).

What does this involve in terms of our sexuality? Paul delineates three points in relating sanctification to sex. First, believers are to avoid fornication (vs.

3). The Greek term that Paul uses is *porneia*, from which we derive the English word pornography. There is a degree of ambiguity in usage of this term, but it can be said that *porneia* has a number of nuances, all the way from the inclusive idea of sexual immorality (Gal. 5:19; Col. 3:5) to such specific meanings as sex with prostitutes (1 Cor. 6:12-21; the verb behind *porneia* means to buy); sexual relations with relatives, that is, incest (1 Cor. 5:1; compare Lev. 18:6-18); and adultery (Hos. 2:2; Rev. 2:21-22).

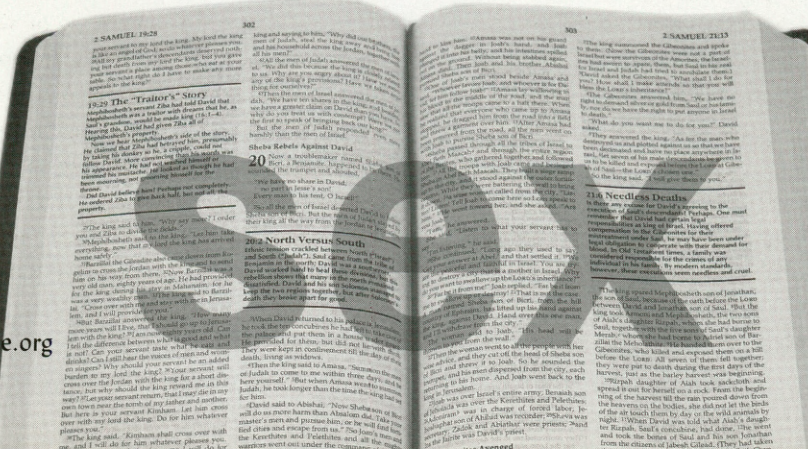
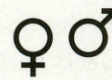
Intercourse outside of marriage, another possible meaning for *porneia*, is not condoned but hardly comes into clearly identifiable usage in the New Testament. Questionable references are found in John 8:41 and 1 Corinthians 7:2. In the former text, Jesus' Jewish adversaries maliciously accuse him of being born of fornication, meaning that he was an illegitimate child one or both of whose parents was unmarried at the time of conception. This text scarcely permits a "Thus saith the Lord" for all times and places. No rule for sexual conduct is being advanced here, for it involves only an expression of calumny toward Jesus.

As for 1 Corinthians 7:2, because of the presence and possibility of *porneia* in the community, each man is admonished to "have" his own wife and each woman her own husband. The question is whether "have" is a call to get married or for already married people to "have" sexual relations with their partners, in contrast to those who advocated celibacy in marriage.

The latter understanding is probably correct, for a number of reasons. First, the verses that immediately follow (3-5) call for a regular sex life among married people. Second, the use of "have" in 1 Corinthians 5:1 refers to a man living in a sexual relationship with his father's wife, that is, his stepmother, something forbidden in Leviticus 18:8. Third, Paul in 1 Corinthians 7:27 says that those who do not have a wife should not seek one. If Paul was calling for marriage in 7:2, he contradicted his own later instruction in the same chapter.

The term *porneia* in 1 Thessalonians 4:3 is probably general in scope, referring to any form of illicit sexual intercourse. In addition to pointing out various uses

of *porneia*, above, I offer the following general principles for recognizing



Sex, therefore, is not merely a social or secular event but a spiritual one,  
for how we relate to another human is how we relate to God.

the danger zone of fornication. These principles are predicated on the belief that intercourse is more than the achievement of pleasure or a procreative process, but that it represents and effects union between two persons. If this is true, fornication may be present when:

1. Sex is separated from love, and *eros* (self-satisfaction) from *agape* (self-giving).
2. Means are separated from ends and sexual functions from personal relationships. I well recall a single woman who attempted suicide out of deep distress and despair after a number of encounters with men who seemed to want just one thing. On one occasion she was even chased through her own home. Because she was a long-time friend, I later asked her what feelings or thoughts had pushed her to such a drastic decision. She explained, "they wanted something from me, but they did not want me!"
3. Parts are separated from persons. I once came across some magazines from a porn shop in New York City. As a youth, I took a look and was stunned. There were no faces, no whole bodies, only close-ups of body parts. Persons had vanished, and only parts with mechanical functions were left. Such pictures erase the concept of a human being made in the image of God and the meaning of love. You can only love a person, not a part.
4. A temporary sexual union is separated from a lifelong commitment and union of love.
5. Culture is separated from Christ and human proclivity from divine principle.

What is the answer for temptation to *porneia*? This is given in the second clause in 1 Thessalonians 4, which explicates the meaning of sanctification as applied to sex. Instead of engaging in sexual immorality, the believer is to "acquire or possess his own vessel" (vs. 4), which is the literal rendering of the text. The meaning of the clause, as reflected in English translations, is either to find a wife or to exercise self-control over one's body. Though arguments are adduced for both translations, the best seem to favor the one that involves marriage.

Whether Paul had this meaning in mind, or possibly self-control, his point is that the way of sanctification and honor should be followed rather than that of passion and lust, as exhibited by those who do not know God (vss. 4-5). Paul is not saying that sex should be passionless, a rather contradictory notion, but that the lust of immoral society should not characterize Christian living. Knowing God should make a profound difference in how we relate to people sexually, or any other way. The mores of the old world should not be the morals of the new world in Christ.

Not only should believers seek honorable marriage, but, as the third clause specifies, in their sexual activity they should in no way transgress against or defraud a brother, a fellow Christian (vs. 6). That is to say, not only should Christians seek a life partner for themselves, but they must never injure or destroy the present or future partnerships of others. Sexual misconduct is not merely a matter concerning oneself, but always defrauds another person.

Paul offers three motivators for placing sex in the arena of sanctification. The first has to do with future judgment by God: "The Lord is an avenger in all these things" (vs. 6). This statement may seem tough, but its intent is positive: God takes seriously our misuse of his gift of sexuality and the hurt we do to others through it. Justice will be done.

The second motivator deals with God's past call to Christian vocation. Coming to Christ was not a call to a life of uncleanness, but to a life-walk in sanctification.

Third, we are challenged to recognize that when we reject the apostolic summons to be sanctified sexuality, we reject not merely man, but also God (compare 1 Thess. 2:13), who is with us in all our life experiences through the presence of his Holy Spirit (vs. 8). Life in the Spirit means a life of holiness. This is a not a call to dethrone sex, but to ennoble and enjoy it within God's will.

Sex, therefore, is not merely a social or secular event but a spiritual one, for how we relate to another human is how we relate to God. The horizontal and vertical, the divine and human dimensions of reality, are intertwined. To love and respect each other is to love and respect God. To have no special concern for the body and being of another is to wound the heart of God.

## The Gospel and Sex

1 Corinthians 6:12-20 deepens the problem of *porneia* and relates sex to salvation. Certain members of the Corinthian congregation were frequenting prostitutes and, instead of experiencing qualms, had arguments to support their actions. "All things are lawful," they said (vs. 12), meaning, "I have the freedom to do as I please."

They may have developed this attitude by misconstruing Paul's teaching of salvation by faith apart from works of law. Even more likely, they may have premised their actions on eschatological certitude that their inner selves had been spiritually raised, that they were already reigning with Christ (1 Cor. 4:8) and thus were above the temptations and failures of historical existence (compare 1 Cor. 10:12). In other words, their bodily lives could not affect their spiritual lives. They, like certain "Christian" Gnostics of the second century, may even have thought that their indulgence in flesh was evidence of their freedom from flesh!

The Corinthians also had a naturalistic argument derived from the realm of food. They drew an analogy between eating and sex. Just as surely as "food is made for the stomach and the stomach for food" (one of their slogans), so, they reasoned, the body with its genitalia was made for sex and sex for the body. Going to prostitutes, therefore, accorded with reason, for their very vocation was to satisfy this natural need. Besides, as food and the stomach will eventually be destroyed (vs. 13), so the body and its sexual functions will be done away with. What difference would it make, then, if they continued the sexual customs of their former pagan days? The body is transient!

In combating Corinthian practice and philosophy Paul brings the gospel to bear upon the question of sex with prostitutes. His essential argument is that sexual activities should be evaluated in terms of the salvific realities the gospel announces. Paul bids us to concentrate on the following points:

1. Christ's death for us implied in "for the body" in verse 13 and "purchased with a price" according to verse 20. If Christ has made us his own through dying for us, then the Corinthian analogy between food and the stomach, on the one hand, and the body and fornication, on the other, is false. As the Lord gave his body for us, so our body is not to be for fornication but for the Lord (compare 2 Cor. 5:15).
2. Christ's resurrection from the dead and the future resurrection of all believers (vs. 14).

Thus, it cannot be argued, as the Corinthians did, that the body is temporary and hence not of great significance. On the contrary, our bodies will be raised to live with Christ!

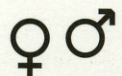
3. The concept of the body of Christ of which all believers are a part (vss. 16-17). Participation in this body negates participation in the body of a prostitute. The two unions are totally incompatible. One presupposition of Paul's thought here is that sex is not merely an external function or a casual event, but it is an act that unites persons. A bond is created, whether negative (as with a prostitute) or positive (as with a marriage partner). Paul's discussion implies that sex is the sacrament of the self, that is, a physical means by which a spiritual reality is effected. Through sexual intimacy we say (or should be saying), "I love you and need you always."
4. The dwelling of the Holy Spirit in the temple of the body as a sign of belonging to Christ (vs. 19; compare Rom. 8:9).

None of these points denies sexuality, but rather places it in its proper context. As a result of such weighty considerations, the believer is to glorify God in his body (vs. 20). This and not "I am free to do anything I please" (vs. 12) is the goal of Christian existence and the standard of Christian conduct. In both Thessalonians and Corinthians we see that religion and ethics are inextricably tied together. What God has done for us in Christ is the starting point and continuing basis for all ethical reasoning. Sexuality is to be understood in the light of God's sanctifying purpose for our lives. In Jesus Christ there is no abolition of sex, but its transformation into what God from the beginning intended it to be—*very good*.

## Notes and References

1. All biblical quotations are taken from the New Revised Standard Version.
2. Lewis Smede, *Sex for Christians: The Limits and Liberties of Sexual Living* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans), 5.
3. Scholars have identified a number of Corinthian slogans in Paul's letter, for example, 6:12, 13; 8:1, 4; 10:23.

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# Is There Such a Thing as “Christian” Sex?

Walking the Sexual Tightrope

By John M. Berez



To pastors and counselors who work in a Christian milieu, discussing sexuality sometimes seems like a “lose-lose” enterprise because one frequently fails to satisfy either the fundamentalists on the right (who feel sexuality is a personal matter and prefer to confine all detailed discussions of sexuality to the privacy of the bedroom), or the fundamentalists on the left (political correctness police who seek to enforce their own liberal biases with the same fervor and rigidity they despise in their conservative counterparts).

The problem with both of these fundamentalisms is their adherence to decontextualized literalism. Repressionists on the right seem so riveted to preventing a descent into hedonism or Bohemianism that sooner or later (and it’s usually sooner) they divert discussions of sexuality into an opportunity to present their pet prohibitions: pornography, abortion, gay marriages, sexually transmitted diseases, and so forth.

The politically correct fundamentalists also have their decontextualized literalisms. For example, in their enthusiasm to accord women equal respect and equal pay in the workplace, radical feminists have espoused the position that men and women are equal in all but the most negligible details, a patently absurd assumption that serves their political agenda but hardly squares with the reality that women are sometimes equal to men, sometimes inferior, and sometimes superior. Much depends on the context and the job requirements.

The knee-jerk reflex of radical feminists to argue that all or almost all perceived differences between males and females are a result of socially constructed, imprisoning stereotypes is simply wrong. Studies have revealed significant gender differences from the moment of birth. For example, total sleep for a twenty-four-hour period is significantly greater for female than for male neonates.<sup>1</sup> Female newborns also show greater mouth activity and more tongue involvement during feeding, as well as greater overall tactile sensitivity.<sup>2</sup> Male neonates show greater activity levels from birth onward. One can hardly attribute such basic differences to social constructions. A more reasoned and contextualized analysis might yield an array of tasks in which females were predominantly superior in some tasks whereas males showed exceptional aptitudes in others.

Frequently, the “eye of the beholder,” brings excessive baggage to the field of vision. Andrea Dworkin, for example, in ranting against the evils of pornography inadvertently reveals the fundamentalist’s proclivity to homogenize:

Given the fact that women's oppression has an ahistorical character—a *sameness* across time and cultures expressed in rape, battery, incest, and prostitution—it is no surprise that pornography, a central phenomenon in that oppression, has precisely that *quality of sameness*.<sup>3</sup>

Dworkin's radical feminist presuppositions that men are inevitably devoted to ahistorically suppressing women—in all times and in all places—blurs her perceptions of the male gender. She fails to see that numerous men are frequently tender, loving, and kind. Her feminist fervor endows her with a perceptual myopia that makes it impossible for her to appreciate the complexity of the hated and oppressing male gender, and it is hardly surprising that she reaches the conclusion that sexual intercourse is always an act of dominance wherein a more powerful male uses and “colonizes” a woman's body for purposes of power.<sup>4</sup>

In countering the “oppression-phobic” feminists, Christian fundamentalists have sometimes sounded like “submission-philiacs,” bolstering their nineteenth-century case for male-as-patriarch with carefully selected scriptural references interpreted with fundamentalistic exegesis. On nearly all sexual issues, opinions are galvanized and strident. Discussants enter debates spring-loaded. Abortion, pornography, gender differences, contraception, sex education, homosexuality are all topics certain to engender not only differences of opinion, but irritation, rancor, and bitterness, as well.

How, then, can Christian pastors and counselors discuss human sexuality in a way that brings healing rather than hatred, inspiration rather than irritation? Thoughtful discussion of sexual issues is most likely to occur when human sexuality is not seen primarily as an erotic encounter, an act of biological propagation, or as a power struggle between the sexes. Christians might emphasize that God designed sex to promote psychological intimacy. When sexuality is understood in this holistic way, Christians have an opportunity to enrich the interchange with their own unique perspective.

### Christian Sexuality as the Search For Intimacy

If I've learned anything in three decades of psychotherapy, it is this: sexual problems are personality problems. Most people searching for sexual satisfaction are not in need of anatomy lessons or “How-To”

manuals. What they lack is the courage or skills to establish and maintain intimacy. Here they get little help from either the right or the left. The “don't-stray, don't-play” exhortations of Christians and the “just do it” propositions of secularists fail to address the core component of Christian sexuality. The erotica-phobics on the right, the oppression-phobic feminists on the left, and the evolutionary biologists in the middle all miss the essential core of human sexuality. Christian sexuality is not essentially about eroticism, power, or propagation; it is primarily about maintaining boundaries that enhance family structure and promote psychological intimacy.

For Christians, sexuality is a search for intimacy. Psychological intimacy is a uniquely human phenomenon. For animals, sexual intercourse serves primarily to propagate the species, and not much else. But for humans—the only species that copulates face-to-face—sexuality was designed by God to be the ultimate experience of intimacy. Becoming “one flesh” was intended to be the pinnacle of psychological closeness. Sadly, as many know from personal experience, it is possible to have sex without intimacy. One can be physically naked yet psychologically shrouded. It's possible to “do it” without “making love.” One of my therapy clients once described sex with her husband in the following words: “When we make love, I feel like a semen receptacle.” That is, perhaps, the most graphic description of nonintimate sexuality I have ever heard.

The sexual challenge for humans, is not, as many evolutionary biologists would have us believe, to propagate as widely and efficiently as possible. For human beings, created in God's image, sexuality offers the most exquisite experience of psychological intimacy the creator could dream up. But in contemporary culture, the intimate sharing of one's soul is missing in far too many sexual relationships. That is why casual sex is so disappointing in the long run. In God's Edenic environment, sexual contact was the occasion for intimacy not only with one's opposite-sexed soulmate, but also with one's Creator. Becoming “one flesh” with your soulmate simultaneously provided the occasion for becoming a co-creator with the eternal I AM.

In the best of all worlds, Adam and Eve experienced uninterrupted naked intimacy with one another (even when not mating). When engaging in sexual intercourse—the pinnacle of their intimacy experiences—they “upped the ante,” by moving into the domain of divinity:



creatorship. By coupling sexually, they exercised their potential to become co-creators of the human race, contributing microscopic, but magnificent bits of DNA in the process of co-creating progeny who would be similar to themselves, but never exact replicas.

Only a divine mind could design an act of intimacy so abundant with excellent freight, and Christians have a unique opportunity to highlight the splendor of this bio-psychosocial-theological melding of excitement, bonding, and creativity called sexual intimacy. Other characterizations of sexuality seem limited by comparison. The evolutionary biologists' survival of the fittest is threatening and intimidating by comparison. The feminists' domination/subjugation motif is frightening to women and demeaning to men, creating self-defense classes instead of closeness. Finally, the fundamentalist Christians' emphasis on prohibitions unwittingly creates an obsession with boundaries that is antithetical to intimacy. Boundaries are important, but they are not the essential core of Christian sexuality. Intimacy is.

### Orgasms as Entertainment

Today, our culture is obsessed with orgasms as entertainment, and consequently much of the psychological intimacy and spiritual meaning of this essentially private encounter has been sabotaged. When sexual interactions are projected onto 50-by-100-foot screens for the primary purpose of titillating and entertaining an audience, most dimensions of genuine intimacy are lost. In addition to the "Truman-Show" quality of

such sex-as-entertainment scenes, the majority of sexual encounters are choreographed to occur outside the "confining"

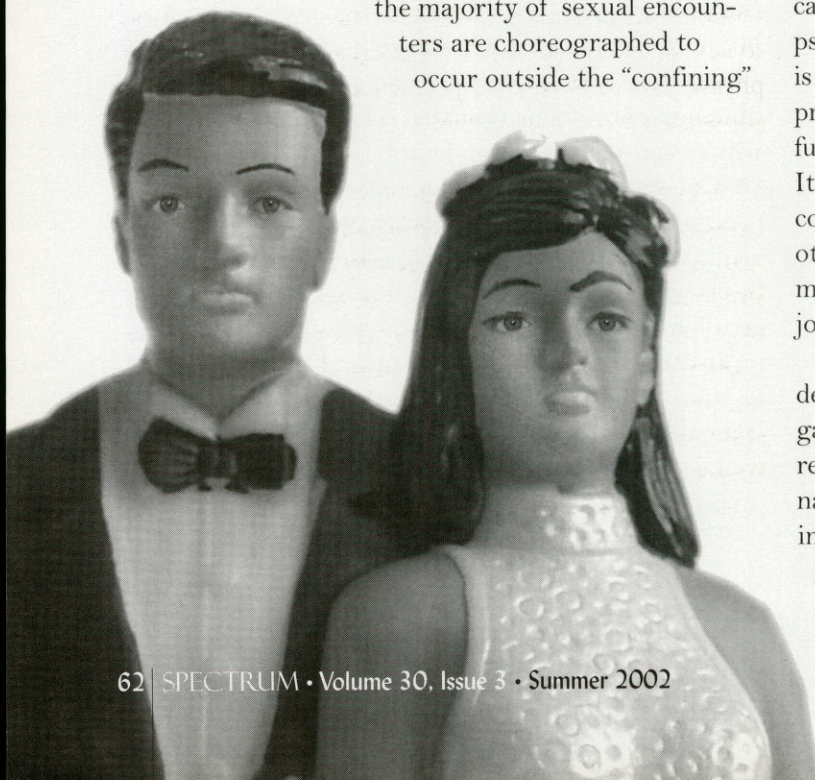
or "ordinary" context of marriage. They take place, instead, in the more "exciting" settings of extramarital or premarital encounters. The implicit message to audiences is that getting to know your partner ought to include rather than exclude sex, and if everything seems sexually compatible then you might consider a long-term psychological commitment.

Nothing could be more backward. A series of sexual encounters is a poor way to assess compatibility over the long haul. Ann Landers once said "Sex is a good basis for marriage if you can agree on what to do for the other twenty-three hours and forty-five minutes." Although all the cautions about "going too far" and "waiting until marriage" might seem archaic by today's standards, they are nonetheless based on the credible notion that psychological intimacy ought to come first in a good sexual relationship.

Once you get into making-out, raging chemicals cloud your mind about what kind of person you're encountering. Just as drinking four martinis or smoking a joint is not a favorable precursor for good decision making, so intense making-out does not help you know your friend better—quite the opposite, it seriously distorts your perceptions. Mark Twain once said that you should go into marriage with your eyes wide open and live in it with them half closed. Sadly, too many follow precisely the opposite path, going into marriage with their eyes half closed, and "waking up" later to find themselves married to a stranger—for a short time.

Ours is a culture awash in erotica, obsessed with sex. "Getting to Know You" (as the old song title puts it) has been replaced by "Getting to Bed." Christians ought to raise a voice that can be heard above the cultural cacophony of erotica, and invite listeners to cultivate psychological intimacy instead of sexual activity. This is best done not by producing a repressive list of sexual prohibitions, but by inviting others to participate more fully in real sexual intimacy—as God designed it to be. It was God, after all, who invented orgasms. God could have had us propagate by pollination, or in some other boring manner, but didn't. The Creator chose to meld intimacy with excitement, and even allowed us to join him as co-creators.

The sexual sins of this age are, at the core, sins of deconstruction. We have deconstructed God's seamless garment of sexual intimacy, dividing it—at best—into recreation and procreation, and—at worst—into domination and perversion. Christians seek to place spiritual intimacy at the core of sexuality: intimacy with one's lover, intimacy with one's Creator, intimacy that carries potential for creating offspring. In this





context, the very notion of “stranger sex” is exposed as a cultural oxymoron, for how can one share one’s soul, raise a family, or grow old together with a stranger?

Christian sex education ought to include, in addition to accurate and explicit discussions about things anatomical and sexual, serious consideration of how to facilitate psychological intimacy between lovers. In our prohibitory zeal to protect our youth from the destructive consequences of sexually transmitted diseases, rape, pornography, and other negative sexual experiences, we ought not to neglect the “weightier matters” of intimacy.

In my Human Sexuality classes I caution my students about the negative consequences of unbridled sexual activities, but I spend even more time encouraging them to think about intimacy. I stress the importance of becoming acquainted with their friends’ personalities: “Familiarize yourself with her brain instead of her breasts,” I suggest. “Have him show you his poetry instead of his pecs. Try revealing your dreams instead of your derriere. Practice French vocabulary instead of French kissing. Dare to bare your soul instead of your body,” I challenge. The list is essentially endless, because intimacy is about sharing everything, but it works out best when you give careful thought to proper sequencing.

### Worth Waiting

It is not easy today for young people to wait. They are bombarded by erotic stimuli from every segment of society. A few weeks ago I was driving to church when I stopped for a traffic light and was confronted with a bumper sticker that read IF THIS CAMPER’S ROCKIN’ DON’T BOTHER KNOCKIN’. So much for “church” thoughts. One simply cannot avoid sexuality in our contemporary culture, and in fairness to our adolescents and young adults we ought to remember that the decade between pubescence and marriage is long and intense—filled with hormones, as well as homework.

Sometimes it does not seem fair, because I suspect Adam and Eve’s “wait-until-marriage,” “let’s-get-acquainted” period did not span ten years or even ten days. It was likely closer to ten hours. But it probably spanned more than the typical ten minutes allocated to becoming sexual partners in today’s movies. I suspect that somewhere along the line, God had that father-son chat and told Adam, “begin with her mind, son, and things will work out better.”

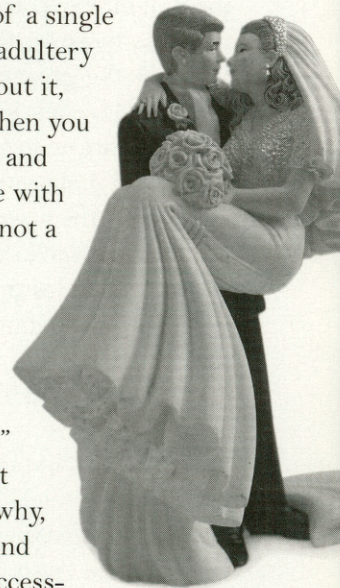
### The Boundaries of Sexuality

Without sounding like prudish prohibitionists, Christians ought to be mindful that whenever we operate outside of the Creator’s design someone always suffers. Succinctly stated: “When you stray or betray, someone always gets hurt.” In my years of practicing psychotherapy I have never known of a single instance when someone played the adultery game and won. Not once. Think about it, under the best of circumstances (when you successfully keep it secret, only you and your lover know) you end up in love with one person and living with another, not a pleasant situation. The misery that accompanies affairs when they become known—as they usually do—hardly needs documenting.

Even God’s accommodation to his creatures (reluctant “permission” to have more than one wife) has not worked out well over time. That is why, all these centuries later, the Arabs and Jews are still quarreling. Trying successfully to maintain sexual intimacy with more than one person was more than even Abraham and Sarah could manage, to say nothing about Jacob and Leah and Rachel . . . you know the whole sad history. It just does not work. Even when such relationships begin in a context of caring, they usually end in bitterness.

When boundaries are actively violated—as in rape, incest, or other kinds of sexual abuse—the consequences are even more devastating, and seem to include a significant gender difference. When it comes to sexual suffering, “life is not fair,” as the popular phrase puts it. Whenever people experience the consequences of inappropriate sexual encounters, females seem to suffer more.

Abortions are more painful both physically and emotionally for women. Anatomically, since females were designed for sexual receptivity and subsequent childbearing, they are less likely than males to experience orgasmic pleasure and are more susceptible to sexually transmitted diseases and other painful sexual consequences. Even optimal outcomes of sexuality, such as childbirth, seem to cost women more. Long, difficult labors are painful and sometimes life threatening for



women—not men. Little girls are more often the victims of sexual predators than are boys. Psychologically, women frequently seem to be more emotionally accessible than men, and this leaves them more vulnerable when sexual relationships go bad.

Consequently, when sexuality is permeated with psychological intimacy and surrounded with commitment, it offers protection and security for both partners, but even more for females. In this sense, Christian love becomes the great equalizer, making sexuality equally safe for both participants regardless of gender differences in musculature or physical power. This is why sins of rape, child molestation, or spouse abuse are so ethically egregious—the perpetrator is using physical power to violate boundaries that the victim is powerless to protect. Stated simply, if sexual interactions are not mutual they are not Christian.

### Heaven in Pastels?

At the risk of inducing instant deafness in some conservative readers, I would like to conclude by discussing the issue of our sexuality in the hereafter. I believe the quest for intimacy will find its fullest realization in the next life. This is frequently misunderstood, because our culture's obsession with orgasms has led us to think "Sex in the new earth? I don't think so!" Sadly, when it comes to sexuality, many Christians have neutered heaven to such an extent that it hardly came as a surprise to me when a graduate student told me, "When I think of heaven, I think in pastels."

I've never forgotten that statement, because this student—a talented artist—was acquainted with a wide range of mediums and could easily have said, "When I think of heaven, I think of rich primary colors." But her church had taught her the traditional "no-sex-in-the-hereafter" fundamentalism of the conservatives, and she saw heaven as a place devoid of primary colors or "earthy" experiences. Is it surprising that teenagers want to experience life "before Jesus returns?" If Christian adolescents were honest, I suspect most of their prayers would be "Come quickly Lord Jesus—after I get married."

I think one can argue convincingly that when Jesus offered his "no-marrying-or-giving-in-marriage" snapshot of the next life, he was not explicitly proscribing sex but merely saying "things are going to be different." Again intimacy offers us a splendid way of anticipating the richness of the next life. On planet earth, ultimate intimacy experiences (such as sexual

intercourse) are not meant to be shared. We seem to be wired for exclusivity. When the Platters sang their hit song "Only You" it was not a religiously inspired lyric nor did they consider themselves theologians. Yet the profound psychological and theological truth—often rendered in soulful popular songs—is that we do not want to share lovers.

I would suggest that in the next life we will be intimate with many, many friends. Time won't be a constraint, neither will our earthly jealousies (which are usually projected insecurities: "She'll like him better than me"; "He'll find her more fun to be with than me"). If one balances Jesus' statement "At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage" (Matt. 22:30 NIV) with "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him" (2 Cor. 2:9 NIV), it does not seem far-fetched to anticipate paradise as a place where you will be able to establish intimate relationships with all your former friends who have gone their separate ways—including those high school boyfriends and girlfriends.

So when I think of heaven, I do not think in pastels. And I do not think in terms of gold—I am not concerned about highway construction, and if the streets are paved with gravel, I will not be particularly disappointed. I do not think about sex in a procreative way, and I am not positive regarding what our new anatomies will look like, but I am certain we will have fresh, as yet undreamed-of capacities for intimacy. So leave your water colors behind, forget those pastels, and prepare for primary intimacy.

### Notes and References

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2. A. Korner, "Sex Differences in Newborns with Special Reference to Differences in the Organization of Oral Behavior," *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* (1973), 14:19-29.
3. Andrea Dworkin, *Letters from a War Zone: Writings, 1976-1987* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1988), reprinted in R. T. Francoeur and W. J. Taverner, eds., *Clashing Views on Controversial Issues in Human Sexuality*, 6th ed. (Guilford, Conn.: Dushkin/McGraw-Hill, 1998), 218, emphasis supplied.
4. Andrea Dworkin, *Intercourse* (New York: The Free Press, 1987).

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# Living Life in the Closet:

The Hidden Lives of Gay  
and Lesbian Adventists

By Rene Drumm

*All throughout my growing up years, I felt I was different. Not that I wasn't popular, I was one of the leaders in school. It's just that I wasn't "normal." My pastor-father worked as an administrator for the Church and I grew up in the mission field. Our family came back from overseas when I was in the eighth grade. I remember when I was fourteen or fifteen a good-looking boy liked me. It wasn't too long before he tried to kiss me. My first thought was, "Gross!" I knew I didn't like that at all. After that, I didn't date in academy because I knew something wasn't right.*

*In junior year in academy I realized that I had homosexual tendencies. I realized it over time, but I remember one incident when my roommate was crying and I was comforting her. I remember thinking that it felt good, but I didn't put any labels on it, didn't have any to put on it. In college as my realization grew, I became depressed. Finally, I forced myself to do something. I began to make myself date guys. All my energy went into liking guys as more than friends, but I wasn't successful at it. I made some friends that I could trust and told them of my struggle. I was tormented by trying to change my feelings. Some of my friends were helpful in finding Bible texts I could use to admonish myself and finding promises of overcoming.*

*I finally decided to become a student missionary. I thought that if I had a year off to do nothing but concentrate on ministering to others, that could overcome this. It was a great year, but things didn't change. But more and more I was finding myself attracted to women; the more I tried to fight it, the stronger it got. I was getting suicidal and I called mom and said that I needed to talk to Dad. Mom located Dad, who was traveling for the General Conference, and told him I was desperate to talk to him. My dad cancelled one week of his itinerary and on his own money flew to [my mission post]. That week after spending time with my dad, I got up the nerve and I told him I was a homosexual. (Sue)*

**A**re there really gay and lesbian Seventh-day Adventists? Isn't the term "gay Adventist" really an oxymoron? If you are Adventist, you certainly couldn't be a homosexual. Homosexuals have no true interest in a spiritual walk with God, right? Not true, according to over fifty gay and lesbian persons I interviewed before, during, and after completing my doctoral dissertation on identity development among gay and lesbian Seventh-day Adventists.

"How did a 'nice girl' like you get interested in studying such an off-color topic?" I've been asked that question on more than one occasion. As a teacher in Andrews University's department of social work in 1995, I was disappointed by my students' willingness to dismiss this population of at-risk people. When it came to women's rights, ethnic equality, or ageism, students were willing to advocate and support people's struggle to survive and thrive. However, when it came to gay and lesbian populations—the group most discriminated against in the United States—a typical response was,

## Growing Up Adventist

Most of the people I interviewed grew up in Adventist homes and were firmly entrenched in the Adventist religion. My first question to those I interviewed was, "How did you become an Adventist?" Here's how Marvin replied:

"I don't want anything to do with them."

When invited to speak at a Kinship Kampmeeting (a yearly gathering of gay, lesbian, transgendered, and bisexual Adventists), I saw the invitation as an opportunity to hear from this group directly. I wanted to gather stories from people who had Adventist backgrounds. I hoped that my students could come to understand the experience of individuals they despised, yet didn't even know. I was right; the engagement at the camp meeting did seem to help. Later that year, I used the stories in a qualitative data analysis research class that I was taking. The teacher scrawled at the bottom of my final paper, "This would make a great dissertation." The rest is history.

The following information is taken from in-depth interviews and autobiographies of more than fifty gay and lesbian, current and former Adventists. Their names have been changed to protect their privacy unless they specifically requested otherwise. I am not a theologian. I make no recommendations about what to do with this information in a theological sense. I offer this information simply to enlighten and educate others about people who are frequently invisible, ignored, and persecuted within our church.

My message is simple and threefold: (1) there are gay and lesbian Adventists, and they are much like "us"; (2) being gay or lesbian and Adventist is often painful; and (3) we can do something about the pain of the "different other."

To answer the question of how I became an Adventist, I'd have to say that I don't know—what else could I have been? I was born in an Adventist hospital (on the Sabbath, no less), to SDA parents who had graduated from SDA schools, sent there by their SDA parents. I went only to SDA churches and my parents socialized almost exclusively with SDAs. My aunts and uncles were SDAs. One set were missionary doctors, another uncle was an academy Bible teacher. My mother's father had been a missionary to Japan.

Most people I interviewed described having family worship, following a vegetarian diet, keeping the Sabbath, and attending Adventist schools. Almost all recounted that they came from close-knit families. "I come from a very loving and caring family. We are very close to this day. I call them all the time and assure them that I love them. They do the same" (Donald).

These findings challenge popular myths that gay and lesbian persons are products of dysfunctional homes with domineering mothers or absent fathers, or that they are, more frequently than the norm, victims of sexual abuse. The gay and lesbian persons I interviewed come from homes much like my own—loving, involved, and committed to the welfare of their children.

### The Pain of Self-Discovery

The Adventist Church traditionally teaches the sinfulness of homosexual behavior. The Church isn't very loud about this stance because if it were it would actually have to say something about sex. Our church is very quiet on issues that involve sexuality of any kind. Nevertheless, the question comes to mind, "How can someone who believes that she/he is condemned to hell for being attracted to the same sex come to identify him or herself as gay or lesbian?" The answer is, "Not easily!" Understanding one's sexuality, when it is not heterosexuality, is often a long and painful process.

Many gay and lesbian Adventists go through several common experiences trying to understand their sexuality. These experiences included being in



## The people claimed Bible promises that focused on “overcoming.” Some participated in such religious rituals as being anointed or prayed over by pastors or elders of the church with laying on of hands.

denial, turning to religion to overcome, and progressing toward self-acceptance. All the people I interviewed went through a period of denial, sometimes spanning years, and in some cases they had heterosexual marriages. The people I interviewed for my study often connected their denial with religion or God. One woman reported, “My first reaction [to realizing my homosexuality] was screaming inside, ‘No! God, No! I’d rather die.’”

After or during a period of denial, these lesbian and gay Adventists frequently used the tools they had learned in their family homes to “ward off” or resist their homosexuality. Since they believed homosexuality was a sin, they frequently relied on religious means to help overcome what they saw as temptation. These individuals prayed and got very involved in church activities hoping to rid themselves of same-sex attraction.

“I have prayed my entire life (since age thirteen) that the Lord would change me. I didn’t want to have these feelings. I didn’t want to go to hell. I didn’t want to be this way” (Mitch). “I did a lot of praying. I got involved with church activities like leading out in song service, youth activities; [I] helped out with Pathfinders and I led out in Sabbath School” (Nathan). Most of the people I interviewed also claimed Bible promises that focused on “overcoming.” Some participated in such religious rituals as being anointed or prayed over by pastors or elders of the church with laying on of hands.

Along with using religious mechanisms to fight homosexuality, the gay and lesbian Adventists that I interviewed tried many other means not be homosexual. Some got married, hoping to change. Some attempted suicide because they could not change. Others went through psychotherapy or a “change ministry” program. Probably the most painful experiences reported to me were from those who attended Quest Learning Center in Reading, Pennsylvania, a church-sponsored residential treatment center to help homosexual persons become heterosexual. The center was headed by an “ex-gay” former Adventist minister who sexually abused the gay men who came for treatment.<sup>1</sup>

As people came to realize or believe that their sexual orientation would not change, they took steps to move toward self-acceptance. One woman shared her experience.

I’ve prayed, memorized Scripture, fasted, changed my diet, been anointed, prayed for the Lord to “cast out the demon of homosexuality” from me, been in counseling—all in the attempt to eradicate this sexual orientation from my heart and mind. I’ve suppressed my desires and longings to express love, all with the one goal of living a life of holiness, in obedience to God’s commands and his ideal for my life. After nearly twenty-five years of praying for God to change me, to take these desires away, to give me the strength to “live a life of purity,” my sexual orientation was as strong as ever. (Joanne)

### The Pain of Coming Out

What happens to people after struggling to understand their sexuality? Some “came out of the closet,” admitting their homosexuality to spouses and family, friends, or other gay or lesbian persons. The coming out process was often one of the most painful life events for these gay and lesbian Adventists. When gay and lesbian Adventists came out to family members, they were frequently rejected. This rejection was primarily on religious grounds. Almost all the people I interviewed for this study experienced some rejection by family members. This rejection varied from mild distancing behavior to total disowning.

Sue, from the opening example above, felt acceptance from her father. After coming out to her dad, he said, “Sue, there’s one thing I have to tell you. There is no amount of fasting or prayer that will help you overcome this. For some reason, it’s not something that God chooses to change. I was in shock,” Sue reported, “and yet much relieved. Dad went home and told my mom. Mom had a more difficult time accepting it. I did feel a distance from her when I got home. Mom and I talked a couple of times and it was strained.”

Sue’s experience contrasts with that of another homosexual, a young man. He recalled the night he came out to his parents. “My dad took it hard. At one point he came into my bedroom and said, ‘if your mother and I would have known about this, she would



## When gay and lesbian Adventists came out to family members, they were frequently rejected. This rejection was primarily on religious grounds.

have had an abortion” (Nathan).

Sometimes, along with emotional rejection, these gay and lesbian Adventists were forced to leave home. Joel recalls, “One night I was out late and returned home. My parents started questioning me. They said, ‘We both think you are homosexual, tell us the truth, are you?’ ‘Yes,’ I told them. My mother immediately burst into tears, ‘What did we do wrong? What made you do this?’ My dad, on the other hand, stormed out of the room and slammed the door. He came back about thirty minutes later and said, ‘I won’t tolerate you in my house any more. Pack up and leave.’ And so I did. I left home at age eighteen.”

Over time, most families came to accept the sexual identity of the interviewee in varying degrees. Some families could accept lesbian or gay family members only as long as their sexual identity was downplayed or suppressed. For example, no one in such families spoke of same-sex partners. In other cases, families accepted the participant and his or her partner as an “in-law.”

One participant thinking about the process of his family’s acceptance shared the following observation:

I think that my family’s acceptance of me is related to *when* I chose to tell them about my sexuality. I was able to come out to them after I was comfortable with myself and could be positive and tell them that I felt that God was using me. When my partner came along, not many years later, they liked him and liked what they saw of us together. There was a very touching moment one morning when we were visiting them when dad and “mum” drew us together and dad made a little speech saying how much they liked him and welcomed him into the family. (Richard)

### Now that I’m Out, Can I Stay In [the Church]?

Not everyone I interviewed had decided to come out. Some gay and lesbian Adventists remain closeted. Two primary reasons for doing so involve fears of rejection from family or church. One individual I interviewed was deeply closeted, and to this day I don’t know his real name. I only know him as “Mitch,” the pseudonym I gave him during our first meeting. For people like Mitch, staying in the closet is the choice that seems

best. Staying closeted allows them to stay in the Church and close to family, and to carry on their lives with as little confrontation as possible.

That choice is not without its own pain, however. The fear that closeted individuals feel about the possibility of being discovered can be painful. I recently talked to an Adventist educator voted best teacher for many years in her educational institution and often invited to speak at commencement services because of the positive relationships she has with students. She confided, “Thinking about my employment and my church standing is sometimes sad for me. In spite of all of the accolades I’ve received in my years of service, the positive influence I’ve had on students, I know it would end if it was known that my ‘roommate,’ is also my soulmate” (Evona).

Another way of remaining in the Church is by choosing to remain celibate. Some people in my study are known to friends and family as lesbian or gay individuals, yet choose to live a celibate life. This choice is fraught with difficulties and pain. Sometimes “helpful” people in their churches and families do not accept the fact that sexual orientation seldom changes, and from time to time these people will “set them up” on a date, hoping that “the right one” will win them over. These situations are always uncomfortable and hurtful for the other unsuspecting person.

Another more dangerous issue with people who remain celibate is that few are able to live their entire lives without keeping the hope alive of someday having a life partner and experiencing sexual fulfillment. The dynamic sets in motion sexual tension that builds, ending with promiscuous episodes. These times of promiscuity leave individuals at greater risk for contracting HIV or some other sexually transmitted disease. One person reflected:

Right now, I know that total celibacy is possible but it may not be healthy for MY body. I think I needed the experience of celibacy to overcome what was probably an addiction to sex. Promiscuous sex, sexual activity without love and commitment can often exacerbate feelings of loneliness and lead to a “revolving door,” a vicious cycle of unproductive, unhappy behavior. What is the solution for me personally? I do not know yet. The jury is still out. But I am quite happy leaving it in God’s hands.

I do get lonely at times, but I pray and ask him to provide, and it gets better at once. He will provide. He always has. (Ernest)

The majority of people I interviewed try to integrate their religious heritage with their sexual orientation by coming to believe that they can remain Adventists and have a same-sex life partner. The gay and lesbian Adventists to whom I talked emphasized monogamy and commitment in the heterosexual tradition as part of this choice. The following interview excerpts illustrate the integration of homosexual orientation and Adventist affiliation.

Despite the church's official opinion, there are two things I've always been—always will be—a Seventh-day Adventist and a lesbian. God doesn't expect me to try to be something I'm not, or say I can't be something I believe in. (Nan)

I am still a quite conservative Adventist. The Adventist lifestyle is something that works for me and something that I worked out with God on my knees after many hours of prayer and studying and tearful contemplation. The same goes for my homosexuality. I have peace in my heart that God accepts me as I am. Being the omnipotent God that he is, he knew I was going to be gay long before I was a gleam in my Dad's eye. Now I see my homosexuality as a blessing. It took a long time to get there—thirty-four years. (Hans)

Yes, there are gay and lesbian Adventists. There is probably at least one gay or lesbian person who belongs to your church. He or she may be closeted, living a celibate life, or living singly and looking for a life partner. These individuals know the pain of believing that who they are is unredeemable. They have struggled to come to some self-understanding and realize what it means to be gay/lesbian AND Adventist.

As stated at the beginning of this article, I make no theological inferences about this information. However, I do know that, for me, the gospel commission is to "love one another." It is my mission to love. What does it mean to love our gay and lesbian brothers and sisters? Here are some ideas.

- Learn about sexual orientation. Most experts agree with participants in my study that sexual orientation is not a conscious choice. To my knowledge, there is no empirical evidence

(peer-reviewed studies) that change in *orientation* is likely.

- Make opportunities to get acquainted with gay or lesbian people in your congregation or community. It is difficult to "love" someone you do not understand or know. If no gay or lesbian people come to mind, go to the Kinship Web site <[www.sdakinship.org](http://www.sdakinship.org)> and get acquainted with someone there.
- Create caring environments in our home, work place, community, school, and church. Do whatever is in your power to ensure that the system in which you participate shows tolerance and respect to everyone. Speak up when you hear derogatory comments about gay or lesbian people.

In the end, I believe I will not be judged by my ability to be kind and good to people like me—people I automatically admire and understand. I believe I will be judged by how I treated the "different other," the person I didn't understand or agree with.

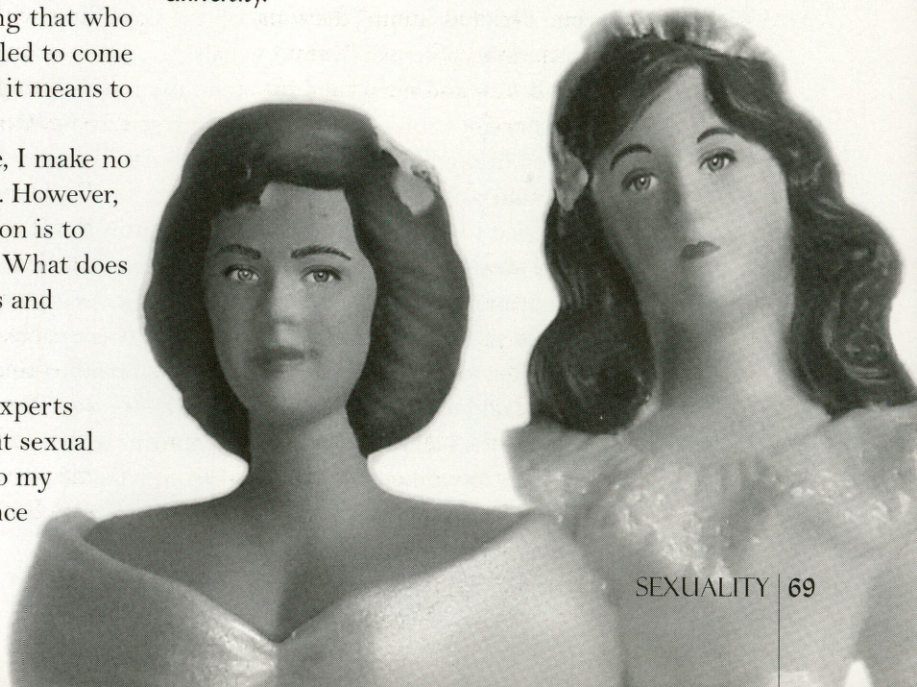
Lord, teach us to love.

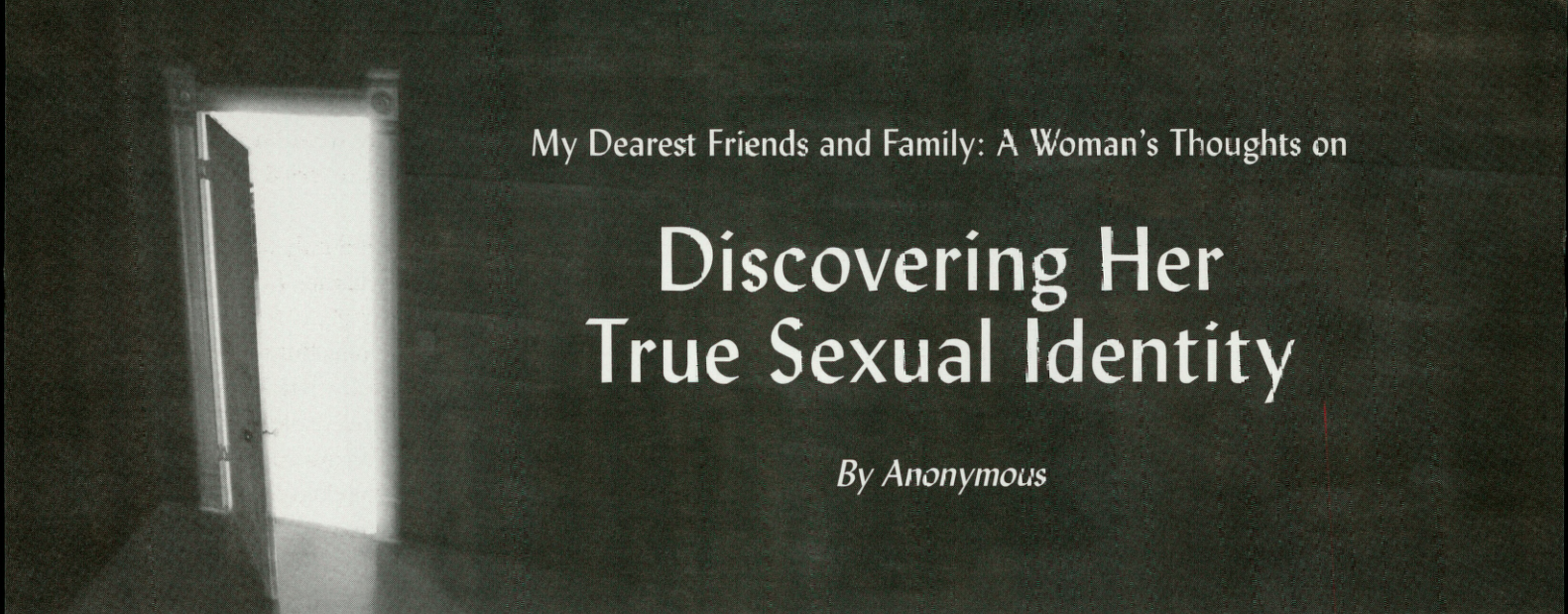
## Notes and References

1. The center eventually closed because of widespread abuse. Its history is documented in a paper by Ronald Lawson, "The Caring Church? The Seventh-day Adventist Church and its Homosexual Members," presented at the meeting of the Andrews Society for Religious Studies, San Francisco, November 1991.

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My Dearest Friends and Family: A Woman's Thoughts on

# Discovering Her True Sexual Identity

*By Anonymous*

**T**his is without a doubt the most difficult letter I have ever written. I have been writing it in my mind for months. It is difficult because it lays me wide open and makes me feel exposed . . . naked. It saddens me because it may be confusing, disturbing, and painful for you. It causes me fear because I love you and have felt safe and secure in your love for me. Even so, it is because of our love for one another that I muster the courage to share this. It is the desire of my heart that you hear the truth from me rather than hear some distorted version.

For a number of years I have been on a very personal journey—a journey to understand myself. Because I was in a marital relationship, my husband necessarily journeyed with me. I have been blessed by my husband.

I have had a puzzle in my life going way back to my first marriage. There is no way I can put into words or explain completely what I mean by puzzle, but I will try. In my first marriage I had much happiness. We were kindred spirits in many ways and enjoyed a lot of the same things. Though we had a wonderful family life, I often struggled with feeling at odds with myself. This was something my husband knew nothing about. I did not understand it, so I did not discuss it. I wrote it off as something wrong with me. In my second marriage, I have had these same feelings . . . same wonderings . . . feeling at odds.

Again, I am married to a wonderful man and share much joy with him and a wonderful family I love. I have felt a closeness with my stepchildren and have taken them into my heart. This has helped fill some of the void I have in my own life. Also, I am a proud grandma—an experience beyond words!

In the desire and need to understand my feelings, and lack of feelings, I have asked myself many questions. I have allowed myself to be honest about the mystery I have experienced in my life since my teenage years. You may have already guessed that the issue is sexual orientation.

I have tried to march to a certain drum, but it is not my drum. Had sexual orientation been talked about when I was young, I might have had more self-awareness and explanation of my admiration, and, yes, attraction to females. As it was, my feelings felt normal. Because of this, I did not question these feelings and was unable to identify the weight they had.

In the heterosexual world in which I lived, breathed, and had my being “boys liked girls” and “girls liked boys.” No question about it—end of discussion. I stepped into line and marched with the band. I never talked about this with anyone, so I truly did not realize that my attraction to women was different from what my female friends experienced. Was I naïve? I don't think so. I think I lived in an era of taboo attitudes where no one mentioned



the “unspeakable.”

As I entered my late teens and early twenties, I never had any thought other than that I would meet a really nice guy, marry, and have children—which I did. I have many wonderful memories. However, at times I felt a dissonance I could not understand or name. I thought to myself, “There’s something wrong with me,” but I made a good life and was a good wife.

Before I married the second time, I still could not identify my problem or comprehend the magnitude of trying to do and be what does not come naturally. “Men love women” and “women love men”; I still lived in that mind-set. When I met my second husband, I knew I had another great guy. We have had a deep love and caring for each other, and have enjoyed so many things together.

### The Core of One’s Being

It is here that I long for all to have an understanding as to the very significant role sexual orientation plays in one’s life. I am not sure that I can do the subject justice, but I can say something. You see, when both partners are heterosexual, orientation is not an issue. It is not something you give any thought to because you don’t have to. It just is.

The truth is that sexual orientation is at the core of a person’s being. In a marriage, it is the “energy” of the relationship. It is *not* just what happens in the bedroom. I have come to describe sexual orientation as “the sauce that permeates the spaghetti.” It mixes and mingles, coats every aspect of a marriage and helps keep it alive and well.

I have been and continue to be totally adored by my husband. I know this, and at one and the same time, it causes joy and sadness. Something that should be so good, whole, and beautiful is endangered by two separate orientations. Because of this, we cannot reach the core of each other, which is a necessary ingredient of marriage. We have longed for this and have been very disheartened that our longing could not be fulfilled.

Our journey has been tiring, and facing reality has been extremely painful. But we have traveled in patience, tenderness, and love. I have prayed for change again and again and have struggled with the “the silence of God”—the Almighty God who surely must be able to simply “flip the switch.” And why wouldn’t he?! Isn’t he a loving God?

You may surmise that I have been angry with God. I have driven up to the mountains (to be better heard, I guess) and there I have pled with him. Only silence. But I am not alone. Many, many have cried out the

same prayer for change. To be gay would not be quite so difficult to accept if I were not married. But I am, so there is great pain.

In discovering my orientation and fully understanding who I am, I am thankful for the partner I have. Most men, I fear, would put their wife out the front door and treat her in an un-Christlike manner. But my husband knows me, loves me, and respects me. He knows I did not choose to be gay. He has held onto me tightly when I have been down on myself and coming apart. He has literally saved my life more than once with his loving words and actions. It is because of him that I am able to hold my head high, with my self-esteem intact. I thank God for him! He has supported and kept me going while in the deepest pain himself. The deeper the love, the deeper the pain.

For several years we have worked with a number of incredibly skilled and caring therapists. We and they had only one goal in mind—to preserve our marriage. We have spent untold hours in earnest, ever agonizing conversation, with much crying and praying. Again and again there were late hours and lack of sleep for both of us. You see, most other marriage problems have the possibility of correction. It is not the same with our kind of problem. It is so debilitating to want with all of one’s heart to “fix” something and to find it “unfixable.” My husband is straight and I am gay. That is *unfixable*. I did not choose to be gay and I cannot change it, no matter how much we both wish and pray that I could.

We have blessed each other’s lives in many ways and do not at all regret but prize our years together. However, had we known of my sexual orientation when we first met, we would have immediately realized that our friendship could go no farther than just that—friendship. Marriage between people of different orientations is very problematic.

Pain over all this has been experienced at the depths not only by us but also by those family members and friends who thus far have come to know about it. We all love each other and feel devastated by what is happening. However, our ties of family and friendship remain strong. We all agree that we have become too important to one another to let our emotional attachments disintegrate. I feel very blessed.

The news about our situation has hit each family member very hard and taken considerable time to process. Some of our friends and family have a current knowledge of what homosexuality is and is not. This



is a tremendous help in their acceptance of me and in dealing with their own pain.

I am also fortunate to have a mother who has always shown unconditional love. As you might imagine, learning that your child is gay can be hard at any time, but when you're a parent up in years it is even harder. When it was time to share with my mom, I knew there would be many questions and much that she would not understand, but I never feared for one moment that her love would waiver.

She admits to knowing nothing about the subject and to being guilty of stereotyping. However, she knows her daughter, knows I would not *choose* to bring a "hell experience" into all our lives. She tells me over and over how much she loves me. She feels her own pain, and my pain. It is beyond comprehension how any parent can disown a child upon learning he or she is gay. Her words are, "They could not have truly loved their child in the first place." I agree and am thankful for my mom.

I pray God will wrap his arms around her and hold her tightly through this. I tell her she may have a new ministry because she is the ultimate example of "mother love."

## You May Have Questions

My wish is that I could say all the things that would make this easier for you. I'm sure that you have questions, questions I may not be able to answer in a way that will

give you complete understanding. One of the first things you may wonder about is whether I am really gay. "No way, she's not gay," you may say. With the certainty of my current knowledge that would be the same as me saying to you, "No way, you're not straight!"

Sexual orientation is something one ultimately knows within oneself. It took me a long time to get to this place, but I have arrived at clarity. I have come to know deep within my soul who I am—with no questions or doubts. Even in the midst of much turmoil I have felt a new peace. I'm ok, there's nothing "wrong" with me. It is sad because I'm married. But I am thankful I finally understand. . . .

Even though no one is the guilty party, I am the change agent in the relationship. To find healing, I need to reconstruct my life and find new purpose. One of my goals now will be to help bring some understanding to this very complex issue and redemption to those who have been hurt by it.

There is misunderstanding and much cruelty. Unfortunately, even Christians are all too often involved in this. Anyone who knows me knows I did not wake up one morning and say, "Gee, I think it might be fun to be gay." I am a wise woman, and I am the same woman I've always been. I truly pray that God can use me to help educate and relieve some of the suffering felt over the issue of homosexuality.

Why don't I stay in the closet?

That's not me! I have always been an up-front, honest person, and I have read too many stories about the loneliness of the "closet." I refuse to live like a fugitive.

Will coming out be hard? Yes, but how else can I help myself and aid in bringing about change for the good? I am a product of God and I am his child. There is nothing more I wish to do than serve him. Am I scared? Yes, but the love and acceptance of family and friends is the foundation on which I stand. I have chosen to live, and I refuse to live any other way than joyfully.

Should I worry about your reaction to me now?

I don't know—should I??

Nah, it's too late . . . you already love me!

Thank you for your caring, listening heart.

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# Avoiding Taking Sides in the Christian Debate about Homosexuality

L. R. Holben. *What Christians Think About Homosexuality: Six Representative Viewpoints*. N. Richland Hills, Tex.: D. and F. Scott Publishing, 1999. 320 pages.

*Reviewed by Ben Kemena*

**H**omosexuality is passionately debated in Christian circles today. The topic has joined abortion, racial equality, pacifism, and capital punishment as a concern that divides Christians into separate camps, though all still believe in the same God. To all groups, the Bible is the foundational defense, despite their widely divergent conclusions. So it is with the topic of homosexuality.

In *What Christians Think About Homosexuality*, L. R. Holben presents six different Christian viewpoints, each of which has sound theological, ethical, and scriptural support. Holben has done a masterful, if not pedantic, job of presenting these viewpoints with solid scholarship and rigorous attention to detail. His book is a joy to read, though many will find it unsettling.

Because the topic is so genuinely disquieting, Holben kindly and graciously appeals to the reader for an open mind and forgiving spirit. By doing so, he hopes to establish trust with the reader. His preface presents the six viewpoints along with twelve questions he asks of each in a format of point and counterpoint. He understands that some Christians may find terms like "queer theory" offensive and explains the reasoning behind his nomenclature and his punctuation.

Holben is to be applauded for beginning with this clear definition:

In referring to the gay, lesbian or homosexual person, I will not have in mind mere erotic itch, what "turns one on" physically and nothing more. Rather, I will be speaking of a person in whom not only the sexual drives but also the deepest emotional and psychological urges for self-revelation, intimacy, connectedness, closeness and commitment—all that we call romantic/erotic love—find their internal, spontaneous fulfillment not in the opposite sex but in the same. (xvii)

Even if he or she reads no more of the book than the "Introduction: The Historical Context," the Christian reader will be edified. In twenty-seven pages, Holben gives a precise summary of homosexuality and our human understanding of it throughout history, particularly from a Christian perspective. These pages should be considered "must reading" for anyone interested in

discussing or debating this topic further. In fact, this reviewer sorely wishes that this section could have been expanded.

Why? Because so many Christians are so concerned with questions about the causation of homosexuality and/or the possible transformation from homosexual to heterosexual orientations, and viewpoints on these subjects among Christians vary widely. For instance, Christians who believe that homosexuality is a conscious choice understand the issue quite differently from those who believe that homosexuality has a biological basis.

The American medical community declassified homosexuality as an illness approximately thirty years ago based on research and consensus peer review. This information has been part of a secular debate for years. When the U.S. Supreme Court overturned Colorado's Amendment 2 (a law meant to prohibit gay rights protection in Colorado), this literature was extensively reviewed and strongly influenced the legal debate.

One would hope that religious communities would spend as much time and care in the analysis of research on homosexuality. Much of this research is quite gruesome—from hormone injections to lobotomies (the last large study finished in 1959) to castration. On the topic of homosexuality, many Christians have already reached a personal opinion based on very little scientific information or understanding.

Science and Christian morality are not mutually exclusive—indeed, scientific understanding has often brought new enlightenment to ethics on issues such as race and gender. Although we may not have identified an exact causation for homosexual orientation, many Christians have spent little time

reviewing the significant amount of medical research that does exist. The main purpose of Holben's book is to introduce his readers to different Christian viewpoints regarding homosexuality rather than offering a biomedical review. However, issues of causation and immutability are at the core of the debate, particularly around the morality of homosexuality.

Holben is passionate about his topic, but he deftly avoids taking sides. His writing is masterfully concise and pithy, and he shows that each of the six views has a scriptural and moral basis. He walks the reader through the logic, exegesis, and common sense of each view and shows how the particular opinion can be defended or undermined. He shows how the views differ as part of a continuum in Christian thought. Some of these arguments and their defenses are brilliantly constructed.

Holben starts with "Condemnation," the so-called traditional Christian point of view. He defines this view by citing experts that include Greg Bahnsen and Harold Lindsell. According to this stance, all human beings are heterosexual and those who have strayed into homosexual behaviors are sinful and must repent. Those holding this opinion are also quick to point out that the Bible never clearly condones or supports homosexual activity of any kind. Furthermore, they believe there is no involuntary homosexual orientation. Those engaged in homosexual activities should not be pitied, but rather condemned. Homosexual relationships are evil and cannot be loving because these relationships fall far short of the marriage ideal outlined in Scripture.

In "A Promise of Healing," homosexuality is viewed as an

illness that must be healed, a moral and physical brokenness that can be cured. Holben cites C. S. Lewis, Elizabeth Moberly, and Andy Comiskey as representatives of this Christian viewpoint. Many ex-gay ministries use these arguments to support their programs and outreach efforts. Homosexuality is viewed as an addiction that should be addressed and conquered. In this way, those suffering from homosexual addiction can find re-enfranchisement into Christian fellowship.

Holben's "Call to Costly Discipleship," is the first of the six Christian viewpoints that accepts the notion of homosexual orientation. However, it calls on all homosexuals either to remain celibate (the majority) or to work toward embracing heterosexual behaviors (understanding that most can never achieve this ideal). Homosexual activity can never be condoned by Christians; this is a fact that all homosexuals must appreciate to remain in Christian fellowship. This view most closely reflects the beliefs of Roman Catholics and the official Catholic outreach program to homosexuals known as "Courage."

In "Pastoral Accommodation," Holben moves the reader to a viewpoint that claims all relationships—heterosexual or homosexual—are flawed. However, all Christians should aspire to their very best. Homosexuals are first called to attempt a heterosexual transformation. If that is impossible, they are called to celibacy. If that is impossible, a monogamous homosexual relationship may be tolerated. Although Christians who hold this opinion would never support homosexual relationships, they also understand that a monogamous homosexual relationship is preferable to sexual chaos (par-

ticularly in the HIV era) and would encourage all to strive to come as close as possible to the heterosexual marriage ideal. Only in this way can homosexual relationships be tolerated, though never condoned. Holben quotes Lewis Smedes and Helmut Thielicke extensively as representatives of this view.

"Affirmation," by its very name, suggests a Christian viewpoint that supports homosexual relationships. Homosexual relationships are held to the same moral scrutiny and standards as heterosexual relationships. For those believing in this particular viewpoint, the Bible simply doesn't address long-term committed homosexual relationships. However, Scripture does support the abiding principles of love and respect as the foundational basis for good relationships. Holben quotes Bruce Bawer and Ralph Blair as stalwarts of this viewpoint.

Finally, in "Liberation," Holben presents his last Christian viewpoint, which suggests that some Christians support biblical principles, but do not want the intrusions of patriarchy, heterosexism, and cultural bias to cloud their understanding of social equality. These Christians argue that the example of Jesus always speaks to fighting against oppression and prejudice and that gays and lesbians have been created in the image of God and given a full complement of God's love. Christians who hold this view argue that heterosexual norms have often been dehumanizing and evil. Will Leckie is quoted for this perspective: "our morality as sexual creatures . . . is about finding genuine, non-abusive ways of relating to one another, not about what we do with our genitals" (210).

Holben goes to great pains to avoid pushing his reader to any particular point of view. His

writing is engaging and broad enough to reach both layman and clergy. He has deciphered the core elements of Christian disagreement regarding homosexuality as presented in his six viewpoints. The book's appendices, bibliography, and supporting notes are ample. In particular, the bibliography he includes is an excellent general reading list for Christian communities addressing the topic of homosexuality.

Holben's "Afterword" makes a strong appeal to all Christians to respect differences of opinion in a loving manner. His underlying message is that Christians must avoid a dogmatic approach to homosexuality. Christians have had to learn how to negotiate differences with respect to other issues like abortion and pacifism, and Holben argues for the same sort of charity with respect to different views about homosexuality.

"I would not have written this present book," he states, "unless I believed that there are men and women of integrity, intellectual honesty and genuine Christian faith advancing each of the viewpoints surveyed. . . . If we are to love God with our "whole mind" as we approach difficult moral issues, we have an obligation to expose ourselves to and attempt to understand viewpoints which are uncongenial, even painful to us" (227).

This is a very ennobling and passionate goal on Holben's part. True to his word, Holben never suggests what he believes to be the most palatable of views. He leaves that to his readers.

Yet, because causation and immutability, at least as presented here, still cloud the issue of homosexuality as "choice" or "innate," some readers may find

Holben's arguments lacking moral credibility. Also, although Holben's command of the topic is considerable and salient, because he is a gay Christian, some of his readers, including many Christians whom he wants to reach, may dismiss the entire book as flawed because of what they regard as Holben's sinful personal choice. Holben hopes that by presenting different Christian views about homosexuality, his readers will reconsider the issue with open minds and charitable hearts. However, he does not

**On the topic of homosexuality, many Christians have already reached a personal opinion based on very little scientific information or understanding.**

persuasively make the case for why Christians should be willing to reconsider their traditional views in the first place.

As a gay Christian reviewing Holben's text, I am struck by his genuine neutrality and goodwill. Holben's book will not be easy reading for most Christians. It includes something to delight and concern all of his readers, but I hope his grace and charity will move hearts. Although some may not be willing to read a gay author's book regardless of its merits, those who give Holben's a chance will be richly rewarded.

### Recommended Reading

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## Developing a Personal Global Positioning System

As I read the “Why I Remain A Seventh-day Adventist” essays by John Brunt and Bonnie Dwyer and “The Gifts of the Spirit” piece by Schneider in your spring issue, I kept nodding in recognition and gratitude. We share having developed a distinct Sense of Place—a personal global positioning system—thanks to an extended community of adults who connected with us in our front yards, in our church pews, and in our school gymnasiums.

The adults always gave me personal recognition. They greeted me enthusiastically at church or in town, called me by name, smiled, shook my hand, and gave me a pat on the head or back. If they hadn’t seen me the week before, they let me know they had missed me.

They gave me roles at church appropriate to my developing abilities. One role began with me bringing Vegalink or Choplet labels up to the front for investment offerings and reciting memory verses. I could pass out programs or collect the offering. I turned the pages for the pianist or organist when I had learned how to read music. As my hands became steadier, I baked the unleavened bread or poured the grape juice into little glasses for communion. Eventually, giving a devotional thought or prayer and teaching the Sabbath School lesson or leading a Vacation Bible School session

became routine activities. Then I became old enough to go into the city and tutor kids, conduct health clinics, or build a house for a family. Participating, not just observing, was a defining difference.

I attended many baby dedications, memorial services, weddings, graduations, baptisms, ordinations, and prayer meetings at church. We prayed for the sick and discouraged. We prayed for our presidents and world leaders—and probably the Washington Redskins. We prayed for rain and for the ceasing of violence in the civil rights movement. We prayed for the Holy Spirit to come among us, and we prayed for the Lord to come quickly. We prayed all the time about everything. Life had its rhythms, occasions, and concerns. Coming together on our knees was how we addressed the important things in life. We followed this with a potluck of cashew nut loaves or Special K casseroles. One need never feel alone, abandoned, without hope.

Missionaries presented breathtaking stories and color slides of adventures and developments around the world, from the deserts of Africa to the jungles of South America, and from Pitcairn Island to Monument Valley. We were shown snakeskins and musical instruments, colorful costumes and customs, unusual weapons or utensils, exotic foods and birds. We heard “Jesus Loves Me” and “What A Friend We Have in Jesus” in strange tongues but recognizable

melodies. Earth was an enormous and diverse place, and there were wonderful and amazing people everywhere. I was awed by the Creator’s imagination and the opportunities for each one of us to be of service somewhere in the world.

In my neighborhood, we had families of many cultures and interests. Different aromas wafted out of the homes each evening, betraying cuisines from India, Bolivia, China, Germany, Holland, or Louisiana. Everyone’s screen door or back steps had a distinct sound, and one could hear someone practicing violin here, piano there, and a trumpet around the corner. The adults bought our lemonade in the summer and let us wash their cars or rake their leaves for a dollar. They taught us to play chess or Scrabble and marveled at our checkmates or use of all seven letters. When we broke a window with a snowball or baseball, they let us do chores to pay for the damage.

When we became more trustworthy, they allowed us to baby-sit or clean their houses. But the biggest thrill was when they hired us to work with them at their businesses—restaurants, grocery stores, construction companies, or offices. We were all different. We sometimes made mistakes. But we always belonged. And we had an evolutionary role to play in the world.

At school, we were told over and over again to do the best we could, to strive to be excellent, just like Daniel and his companions. We

were't to be sloppy, whether working at a math equation or maintaining our lockers and desks. We were to be punctual, polite, and positive. We were to solve our own problems as much as possible, not waiting for adults to do that for us. When we put on plays, it was as if we were on Broadway. The faculty advisors for the yearbook and newspaper treated us as if we were putting out *Life Magazine* or *The Wall Street Journal*. Our choir directors rehearsed us as if we were going to Carnegie Hall. What we did and how we did it mattered.

My life is a warning to adults. Someone may be watching, listening, absorbing, and saving what you say and do week after week, year after year, for their permanent internal hard drive. More than you might ever imagine, you could be providing the permanent navigational coordinates for someone's personal Sense of Place in the universe.

*Juli Miller*

El Dorado Hills, Calif.

## Sanctuary Doctrine Revisited

In regard to "The Sanctuary Doctrine Revisited?!" (*Spectrum*, spring 2002), attacks on the Adventist sanctuary doctrine generally rest on two pillars: (1) methods of Bible study in which "scholarly" presuppositions and higher criticism devalue or elevate certain passages, thus preventing Scripture from being its own interpreter; and (2) the evangelical Protestant gospel, which teaches salvation by justification alone and the imperfectability of Christian character. Take either of these pillars away, and the edifice built by critics of this doctrine crashes to earth like Dagon's temple.

Perhaps one reason (among others) why conservative

Adventists and church leaders refuse to accept the validity of attacks on the sanctuary doctrine is because they rightly wonder how any "gospel" can find a doctrine biblically wanting when it admittedly is based on a breathtakingly narrow strand of Scripture!

Contrary to evangelical Protestant and dispensational theology, Adventism has historically based its doctrines on the whole of Scripture, with no part having greater authority than another (2 Tim. 3:15-16). Criticism of distinctive Adventist doctrines inevitably arises when this Bible-based method of Bible study is set aside.

*Spectrum* and the Association of Adventist Forums might do the Church a real favor by sponsoring a true "forum" somewhere, in which those attacking and those defending this core doctrine of the Church might present papers and answer questions. As one who has offered such a challenge to AAF leaders and others of like mind in the past, I find the charge of "obscurantism" a bit strange when leveled at this doctrine's defenders, since I have found its opponents far less interested in an open exchange such as this.

*Kevin D. Paulson*

New York, N.Y.

I read Gordon M. Rick's "The Sanctuary Doctrine Revisited?!" with great interest. I wonder if this might be a good time to take a look at what went wrong with our interpretation of Daniel 8 back in 1844. When Jesus failed to return to this earth as predicted by William Miller, we concluded that the dates were correct, but that the event had been misinterpreted.

I want to suggest that perhaps Miller was wrong on two counts

instead of one. Maybe the dates were wrong as well. Consider the following: The question in Daniel 8: 13 is "How long is the vision." The vision starts with Alexander the Great (the goat) attacking Medo Persia (the ram). This takes us to the Battle of Granicus in 334 B.C. That should be the natural starting point for the 2300 years prophecy. There is no need to deal with chapter 9, which deals with other events. If you compute the dates, allowing for the lack of a zero year between B.C. and A.D., you get the year 1967. Did anything significant take place in connection with Daniel's people, the Jews? Yes, Israel defeated the Arabs and reconquered Jerusalem, the site of the Holy Temple.

The credit for this interpretation goes to an English theologian named John Newton, I believe, who advanced this unique interpretation a couple centuries ago. Unfortunately, Miller either ignored or failed to discover it. This reminds me of the wisdom of sticking to the text, since "a text without its context is just a pretext."

*Nic Samojluk*

Loma Linda, Calif.

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2. The Adventist heritage of decentralized, participatory ecclesial governance, epitomized by Ellen White's denunciation of the attempt to exercise "kingly power"
3. The necessity of intellectual openness for the spiritual health and maturity of the community as a whole
4. The role of college and university teachers in encouraging and facilitating the theological development of the community.

To put it bluntly, this project is not merely an organizational innovation, it is a betrayal of a fundamental Adventist principle.

The basic assumption underlying the IBMTE and its proposed BMTE clones is the notion that a few church officials, usually minimally educated in the scholarship and teaching of religion, are in a better position to evaluate the competence and impact of Adventist religion teachers than are professional colleagues, local administrators, and boards of trustees. This assumption is both arrogant and insulting—arrogant in its concentration of administrative authority in persons who may be far removed from the actual places and processes of education, and insulting in its distrust of persons of greater relevant experience and expertise, and greater knowledge of local circumstances and needs.

So the current IBMTE project must be vigorously opposed. The opposition needs to be *broadly based* because the potential danger encompasses the entire Adventist community. If it is only religion teachers who protest, their opposition will be dismissed as self-protective and self-serving—and cited as additional evidence that the IBMTE is exactly what Adventist higher education needs. So there must be protests from colleagues in other disciplines, and especially from thoughtful, articulate Adventists outside of academia.

The opposition needs to be *principled* rather than pragmatic. The potential loss of regional accreditation by Adventist universities and colleges, however realistic and disastrous, is evidently not taken seriously by most General Conference officials. So the objections must be based on the essential nature of our community of faith, which is subverted by the IBMTE as it is presently defined and designed.

The opposition needs therefore to be *official* and *institutional* as well as informal and individual. This is a time for administrators and boards of trustees not only to "call sin by its right name," but also to "stand for the right though the heavens fall" (*Education*, 57). This is a time to "just say No" and respectfully but firmly decline to participate.

Unfortunately, there is no guarantee that even this kind of opposition will succeed in ending—or at least radically revising—the IBMTE project. The envisioned efficiency of centralization, reinforced by the seductiveness of anticipated power to control, can be an irresistible temptation, especially in a time of ecclesial fragmentation. It is always easier to judge than to persuade. And there are people who, ignoring both the essence and history of Adventism, are quite willing to say, "Our leaders and administrators not only must define the parameters of our faith; they have the right—even the responsibility—to enforce them."<sup>4</sup> This is blatant hierarchicalism.

Without significant opposition, the IBMTE project will certainly continue to proceed down the track at full speed, and there may well be a major wreck in the Adventist future. Adventism could and probably would survive such a calamity. But would it be an Adventism in which intelligent, thoughtful Adventists—our children and grandchildren, for instance—could safely ride?

In the interest of the Adventist future, the present form of the IBMTE project must be resisted and rejected—respectfully but diligently and vigorously.

## Notes and References

1. Ellen G. White, in *General Conference Bulletin*, 1901, pp. 25–26, quoted in *Life Sketches of Ellen G. White* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1915), 386.

2. Ellen G. White, Aug. 4, 1903, "To the Leaders of the Medical Work," in *Testimonies for the Church*, 9 vols. in 4 (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1948), 8:232–33.

3. William G. Johnsson, *The Fragmenting of Adventism: Ten Issues Facing the Church Today: Why the Next Five Years Are Crucial* (Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press, 1995).

4. Clifford Goldstein, "The Pythagoras Factor," *Adventist Review*, July 26, 2001, 28.

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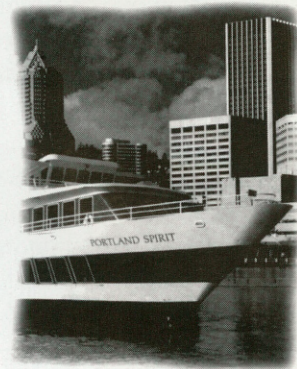
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## MEMORIAL GIFT

In honor of Sallie Lorenz  
Felix and Lucille Lorenz\*

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# ~Our Legacy~

By Darla Sidener



Darla Sidener wrote this poem while a student in the Women's Empowerment Program for homeless women in Sacramento, California. The story on page 25 tells more about this program.

We have all come together, each special and unique~  
Full of hurt and anger, from all of life's defeat~  
We all deal with issues, some big, some small~  
We search and struggle, some stumble and fall~  
With "God's" grace and will to carry,  
Faith in one another, together we've grown strong~  
In baby steps, we start to succeed,  
With courage and support, our cocoons we will leave~  
We lift our heads high, No~life won't pass us by,  
Thru a new vision, we are able to see~  
All of the things we can now achieve~  
We leave this place~neither here nor there,  
But free flying birds, soaring high in the air.

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