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Reading the Bible Together • Jesus Loves Me This I Know:
Common Descent and the Fall • **Ordinary and Dangerous: Sex in
the Christian Community** • Examining the Biblical Texts about
Homosexuality • **Public Policy Issues Involving Homosexuality** •
A Radical Reformation Conception of the Church

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Center for Adventist Research
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community through conversation

SPECTRUM

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ABOUT THE COVER ART AND ARTIST

San Francisco artist Morris Taylor took up watercolors in his retirement. Music was his previous professional life. In 2005 he took a trip to the Holy Land, and recorded his impressions of that trip with quick sketches. This one is titled *Phillipi at the Time of Paul*. He says, "I remember the day well. With considerable reverence I viewed the ruins of this ancient city. In the background you see the mountain where Phillip of Macedon mined the gold, the reason for his building the then-new city. The wealth financed the military adventures of his son, Alexander the Great. The pavement in the foreground is where Paul walked with Silas. Nearby is the traditional site of the prison where they sang the midnight duet."

Taylor's painting portfolio also includes abstracts, flowers, and fly fishing. It can be viewed at www.morris-taylor.net

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Editorial Correspondence

Direct all correspondence and letters to the editor to:

SPECTRUM
P. O. Box 619047
Roseville, CA 95661-9047

tel: (916) 774-1080
fax: (916) 791-4938
editor@spectrummagazine.org

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Subscriptions and Advertising

Julie Lorenz
subscriptions@spectrummagazine.org
(916) 774-1080



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Reading the Bible Together | BY BONNIE DWYER

Whatever church members' individual level of education, literacy and biblical expertise, they are constantly involved in a process of learning. And this process appears to give them great joy.

—Eva Keller, *The Road to Clarity* (2005)

The church members described above are Seventh-day Adventists in Madagascar, and the subjects of a study by anthropologist Eva Keller. Their joy in learning was one of her major findings as she sought to understand what being a practicing Seventh-day Adventist comes to mean to people once they have joined the church.

It is this joy of learning that we hope to spark with the articles in this issue of *Spectrum* as we read together texts from Old Testament and New, perhaps in new ways.

Loren Seibold starts us off in the Old Testament with a very frank discussion of the Seventh Commandment. John Jones shifts to the New Testament for an examination of texts concerning sexuality according to Paul. Chuck Scriven takes us to Corinthians to consider the beloved community. Ernest Bursey shares his journey with the Sermon on the Mount. Then we return to the Old Testament for a pastor's review of the newest book by Richard Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament*. It is an amazing scriptural journey with some of Adventism's finest biblical scholars. Although there are aspects of the text on which they may not agree, one primary point about sexuality that both Jones and Davidson, in particular, make is the equality of the sexes and the significance of that equality.

Along the way, we also take time to meet a very special, and yet very ordinary congregation in Hailey, Idaho, talk with a biologist about origins, and listen to the conversation that is always bubbling at www.spectrum-magazine.org. This time, we feature contributions from



the Collegiate Blog, a special section of the Web Site dedicated to and written by Adventist college students.

With the multiple voices con-

tributing to the conversation in this issue, I hope it will echo another facet of study as reported by Keller. [T]he goal of Bible study was not to learn doctrine by heart. Neither was it seen as a matter of one person teaching others, although it was inevitable that Claude and Papan' I Beby acted as teachers to a certain extent. The aim was clearly that everyone should reach an understanding of the issues under question by way of serious study, reflection and discussion with others" (90).

I guess part of the reason that I find Keller's study particularly fascinating is because she sees "conversion as merely the beginning of a long story, and not necessarily the most interesting part of that story." Her study, then, "was not a study of religious conversion, but of the nature of long-term religious commitment (7)."

Likewise in our history as a church: the beginnings are not necessarily the most interesting part of our story. Over time, our story is one of continual discussion of text and meaning. We embrace that conversation with joy. It is at the heart of our long-term religious commitment. ■



Let's Eliminate Hyperorthodoxy | BY CHARLES SCRIVEN

"When I was baptized, I had to promise I would not wear feathers."

My friend, James Reece, told me this a few months ago during a retreat we were both attending, and my mouth dropped open. Later he sent me a copy of his baptismal certificate, and I could see—I am not making this up—that question nine began: "Are you willing to follow the Bible rule of plainness in dress, refraining from the wearing of *plumes*...?"

I put in the italics myself. Amazing.

Reece, who had perfect recall for the spirit of the question, was baptized on December 19, 1936. Back then, I gather, "plumes" made hats (and who knows what else) ostentatious. I expect someone fought for years to keep plumes on the prohibited adornment list, but they dropped off. If they returned to fashion, no one today, I expect, would object to plume-y Adventists holding membership on church boards.

It's not just church "standards" that end up different from one decade to the next. Doctrines develop, too. Most Adventists would be surprised to learn that the pioneers once thought the "door" to salvation was "shut" for anyone who had not accepted the Millerite doctrine that Jesus would return in 1844. They would be equally surprised to learn that Adventists did not even mention the Trinity in their first declaration of basic beliefs, or that for decades church leaders did not believe in sending missionaries overseas.

When Ellen White died in 1915, the church, as Bull and Lockhart say, lost its "chief means of authorizing innovation."¹ She had lent support to a constant struggle for deeper

understanding, and while she was alive conversation flourished. Now those left behind began to focus on preserving the vision they had instead of reaching for one that was better and more faithful. Suddenly, Adventist voices were verging toward a single party line. An ethos of *hyperorthodoxy*, coming on like a bad cold, was stifling innovation.

The same writers say the 1960s opened the door a crack—to second thoughts and new ideas. But by the 1980s, many Adventist leaders wanted to push it shut again, and this was symbolized by a new statement of "fundamental beliefs," twenty-seven in all at the time. I have always thought the preamble to that document is a healthy acknowledgment of God's interest in further conversation, and Bull and Lockhart overlook this. But I have to admit that the preamble is often ignored. (In 1988, the General Conference Ministerial Association published a book-length exposition of the Fundamental Beliefs and *left out* (!) the preamble.²)

Once, I myself felt the door creaking shut. In the early 1990s, an article I wrote on the meaning of Christ's death raised questions about a single word out of the 120 or so that make up Belief Number 9. The word I focused on does not even *appear* in Scripture, but the idea it has come to stand for was widely held. I was throwing out a fresh—and as I hoped to show, more faithful—point of view.

Robert Folkenberg, then the General Conference president, believed my effort was misguided, and he commissioned two of his colleagues, Calvin Rock and Humberto Rasi,

**No human
institution
prosper
under
a ban on
innovation.**

to let me know. Both spoke with me at some length, and both were courteous *and* insistent. I needed, somehow, to issue a public change of mind.

Rasi transcribed the conversation we had, and the next day gave me the copy I still have. Absent the public change of mind, he was asking for, the “denominational accrediting body” would issue a “warning,” and possible “probationary status,” to the school that I was leading.

In the end, thanks to generous effort by Ralph Martin, who was then my boss, this threat fell stillborn, more or less, from its author’s mouth. Nothing seismic happened, and whatever the smaller-scale effects, I am still employed—and still passionate about Adventism.

But why not put a moat around the edifice of doctrine? Why not disallow challenges? Why not fend off all innovation?

For one thing, doing this would mock the Holy Spirit. When Jesus promised his followers that he would continue to be with them through his Spirit, he said: “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.” From then forward, however, the Spirit would be there to “guide” them “into all the truth” (John 16:12, 13).

For another, disallowing challenges would contradict the first words in the Statement of Fundamental Beliefs. These words embrace the Holy Spirit, and imagine “fuller understanding” and “better language” than the document itself contains. By its own account, the statement itself is revisable.

Finally, if you put a moat around the edifice of doctrine, you’d kill Adventism.

No human institution prospers under a ban on innovation. I’ve just read *Better*, a book about improving performance in medicine by the physician and *New Yorker* writer Atul Gawande. He says one requirement for more effective healthcare is “ingenuity,” which he defines as “thinking anew.” This is never easy. Not even “superior intelligence” is enough. Success depends on “character.” And with the right character, what happens? You are willing “to recognize failure.” You refuse “to paper over the cracks.” You are ready, even eager, “to change.”³

That’s important for the institution of medicine, and that’s just the spirit the Bible recommends for followers

of Christ. By God’s grace, you own up to your shortcomings, and then you grow. Your goal is always ahead of you. Change—within faithfulness—is how you live.

Though it’s as simple as that, it’s not easy. “Betterment,” as Gewande says, “is perpetual labor.”

In thought and practice alike, you can embrace this labor without saying that anything goes. None of us has the last word on orthodoxy, but *orthodoxy does matter*. My own idea is that, to be Adventist, you must agree, minimally, on something like the following: *In response to the grace and peace of Christ, and in the hope of his return, we promise together that we will change the world by keeping the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.*

This is just one point of view. But more conversation about a new orthodoxy—a new sense of what is most basic in Adventism—would *enliven* the church. Hyperorthodoxy—resistance to innovation, the fear of the Holy Spirit—has the capacity, in contrast, to kill. Put another way, hyperorthodoxy is the Berlin Wall standing between today and a better tomorrow for Adventism.

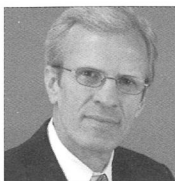
Unless, of course, it is torn down. ■

Notes and References

1. Malcolm Bull and Keith Lockhart, *Seeking a Sanctuary: Seventh-day Adventism and the American Dream*, 2d ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University press, 2007), 105.

2. P. Gerard Damsteegt, principal author, *Seventh-day Adventists Believe...: A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines* (Washington, D.C.: Ministerial Association, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1988). By the third printing (if not the second), the words of preamble were restored—but to the book “front matter,” or introductory remarks, and not their honored place as the beginning of the statement. On the Web, Damsteegt identifies himself as principle author; the book’s front matter says that he wrote initial drafts for each chapter. I thank Alden Thompson for help with these details.

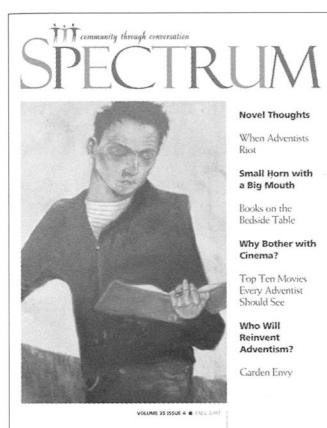
3. Atul Gawande, *Better: A Surgeon’s Notes on Performance* (New York: Henry Holt, 2007), 9.



Charles Scriven is chairman of the Adventist Forum board of directors.



Critiquing the Movie Critics



The Good, the Bad, and the Wicked

SPECTRUM IS TO BE COMMENDED for its fall 2007 series of articles on the cinema. The "Top Ten Movies Every Adventist Should See," as listed and explained by Winona Wendth, especially caught my attention. The word

should in this context is not far from the word *ought*. Moreover, if there are identifiable movies that Adventists should see, there must also be a list of films that Adventists should not see.

My daughter-in-law is a devout Southern Baptist, and she has made her decisions regarding which movies to see based on ratings, thus avoiding all R-rated films. I have pointed out to her that many PG and PG-13 movies are a waste of time, whereas R-rated movies often teach important truths about the human condition and promote values that are good. This is an easy argument to make and still does not give a definitive answer to the ethical question regarding whether there are movies that Adventists or Baptists ought not to see, and, if so, which ones.

Plantak addresses this issue in what he calls his "main premise." He describes seeing a sign on a bridge in Venice that reads "More Ethics and Less Aesthetics." Thinking about this slogan, he decides it has the argument "utterly upside down." "The more aesthetics we allow into our lives the more ethically we grow," he asserts. He then makes a somewhat illogical leap back to safer ground by calling for "more beauty in the world."

Let us use a practical and current example to examine the relation between ethics and aesthetics. I recently saw the film *No Country for Old Men*. This movie got the best critical reviews of any in years. I was immediately drawn into it. It had a perfect harmony of script, cinematography, sound,

editing, and general production values. The ending was in perfect accord with the theme of the movie, which was a portrayal of evil as random, implacable, and inescapable. The movie took no moralistic position on this issue, other than to express wonderment that such evil could exist.

This movie was aesthetically perfect. Should it be on a list of movies Adventist should see? Or on a list that Adventists should not see? Or should there be no such list?

ADRIAN ZYTOKSKEE
PLACERVILLE, CALIF.

YOUR FALL 2007 ISSUE, which contains discussions about the need to take movies seriously, interested me greatly. I have seen many movies and formally studied their history. But I have watched most of them with guilt.

In general, movies tend to elevate the trivial and make trivial those things that are powerful and important. Furthermore, visual representations have subtle effects, even as a whisper, creating impressions that travel through the eyes to the mind. Over time, these impressions claim space and may dull our sensitivities.

As Jack Provonsa used to warn us, certain things should make us ill; we ought never to get used to their sight. What kind of shallow need do terror and violence fill? Why be embarrassed not to have seen yet another examination of violent behavior? What possible purpose can it serve us to watch graphic violence?

Maybe we should insist on a frank discussion about the direct link between movies, on one hand, and sex and violence, on the other.

It was wrong in the past to forbid all movie watching. It is just as wrong today to deny the need to be very cautious about watching them.

R. MUNSEY
BOISE, IDAHO



Jesus Loves Me This I Know: *Common Descent and the Fall*

Letter from an ecologist to a friend | BY DANA SCHUSTER

Dear Bill,

I read your letter of December 27 with interest. I appreciated the honest quality of your question as to whether I see a logical contradiction between the scientific data and the teachings of Genesis. My resolution to stay out of the Adventist controversy over science and faith is not due to a lack of interest or a belief that no progress can be made. Rather, I stay out of it because I believe the stridence exhibited by some is motivated primarily by fear, and I have no wish to be involved in those dynamics. However, I am willing to reply to the queries of a friend, and so I am sharing my thoughts with you in this letter.

Let me preface my remarks by explaining the context from which I write. First, I believe in being completely honest with data, and for now I feel the data are becoming more and more convincing for some significant level of common descent. Note that I do not accept a postmodern dismissal of data, nor can I accept a purely deductive worldview. Second, I take the teachings of Genesis very seriously indeed. When I say this I am not necessarily referring to a "creation-science" reading of Genesis, but rather a traditional understanding of its *teachings* such as the Creatorship of God and the Fall.

In this letter, I hope merely to



explain why I feel the data and Genesis are not contradictory. It is not my intention to describe what actually happened. In this regard, let me be perfectly clear that I do not know the answer, even after (and especially after) thinking about these matters for many years. I do believe, however, that I finally know the question, so I would like to start there.

In my mind, the big question is theodicy. This should come as no surprise, because theodicy, as we know from the ancient book of Job, has been an insoluble riddle for a very long time. For theists, the mystery of evil is likely to outlive every model we construct of it and survive every scientific advance.

Let me go a bit further and say that, with regard to the data and Genesis, the *only* real problem is theodicy. Now, please understand that I am totally loyal to the Sabbath, both in its identity as the seventh day and its rich mosaic of meanings. But, in fact, I do not see any problem whatsoever between the Sab-

bath and the scientific data. We know that this sanctuary in time was set aside and given to the Hebrews, and all of humanity, as a memorial and experience of God's re-creating and liberating presence. Jesus claimed the day as his own. That is good enough for me; I simply accept this sacrament with joy. There are other issues that challenge some conservative Christians, such as the nature of inspiration and whether the Bible can be read as a scientific text. Other writers, however, have dealt more skillfully with these topics than I can here.

Theodicy is a serious problem for a theistic understanding of evolution. Given the scientific data, the natural conclusion of many theists is that God must have created by means of evolution. This sets up a contradiction with the traditional understanding of the Fall, because evolution, as we know it, works via what were traditionally considered post-Fall mechanisms, and apparently these mechanisms were at work long before the appearance of human beings. The implication is that suffering did not arise initially because of the choices of human beings, but rather that suffering is part of the very fabric of God's creative activity.

It is difficult for many of us to imagine that the God we know through Jesus Christ chose to create life on this

earth via the process of natural selection. Marveling at the grand scheme of evolution as God's master design is a bit like marveling at the beauty of a palace constructed with slave labor: one conveniently ignores the ugly truth that it was built on the backs of suffering individuals who had no desire to be thus employed.

I would like to elaborate on this point about the suffering of the individual in order to emphasize why I think it is such a problem in evolution-as-creation. There are two modes in which a whole-organism biologist such as myself experiences the natural world. One mode is spiritual and sacramental. As I traverse alpine cirques, peer into the ocean depths, or look up into the Milky Way from a mountain peak, my being is still, and in that silence I am able to experience the presence and mighty creative power of God. The other mode is scientific. In my work, I see natural selection at close range, and believe me it is not pretty. Those of us who have observed the lives of individual animals for hours, days, and months on end know well the ugly side of nature. Creatures suffer, often horrendously. This suffering is part of natural selection and evolution as we know it.

Now, I have heard at least two prominent scientist-theologians claim that animals do not suffer. They say that animals feel pain and die, but do not suffer. This is a staggering assumption for one species to make about another. Furthermore, having observed animals all my life, I simply do not believe it. It strikes me as odd that these particular theologians accept an unbroken scientific continuum between humans and animals, on the one hand, while simultaneously positing an unbridgeable gulf between humans and

animals, on the other, when it comes to the quality of suffering and morality.

Such a gulf does not make sense to me. I do not think that the qualities of "good" and "evil" are equivalent to moral culpability and definable only in relation to human beings. I think suffering is of the same essential substance wherever it is found. That is, if suffering is evil in human beings (in the sense that it is a deviation from God's original plan), then it is evil in animals, including those without any possibility of moral culpability. After a day in the field observing the lives of animals, I resonate with the words of Romans 8: indeed, the whole creation has been groaning to be set free from its bondage to decay.

My point is that I think a whole continuum of species suffers, and that suffering is of the same essence wherever it is found. Thus, I, for one, am not willing to say that evolution as we know it was God's best plan for creation. Indeed, many of my research colleagues are



agnostic for exactly this reason: they cannot believe in a God who would design life to progress to a grand scale on the backs of suffering individuals. Charles Darwin, a kindly and gentle man, was not willing to believe in that sort of God, so he preferred not to believe. (My own feeling is that Darwin rightly rejected a false view of God. I imagine God remembers his honesty and gentleness with much grace and



kindness.) Although I realize that it may be absurd for me to consider myself the guardian of God's reputation, I think it is important not to assert that God is the architect of suffering for the same reason it is important not to tell a person who just lost a child that it was "God's will."

So here lies the apparent conundrum. I myself am (1) unwilling to discount the scientific data, and (2) unwilling to believe that God's best plan for creating was via evolution, which, although very beautiful on the large scale, can be horrendous on the individual scale. Many think these two statements are contradictory, but I do not believe they are. I would argue that a traditional understanding of the theological teachings of Genesis does *not* logically contradict the data.

To establish the lack of logical contradiction between two statements, all one needs to do is to construct at least one logically consistent scenario (model) in which both statements can be true. So the question is this: can we imagine a scenario in which both the Genesis teachings and the data regarding common descent are true? There is any number of such hypothetical scenarios; I will mention only one.

One might imagine that the reality portrayed by the Genesis story, including the Fall, happened before the Big Bang, in another universe. Our universe,

and all its processes, including evolution, would be post-Fall. In this scenario, God would be creating something marvelous through evolution in the same way that he creates rich blessings from our personal sufferings and regenerates hearts through his suffering. But we would not be saying that evolution was God's first or best plan for creation.

Please understand that I realize there is no evidence, whether biblical or scientific, for this model. I reiterate that the point is merely to demonstrate a lack of logical contradiction between the teachings of Genesis and the scientific data.

Because there is no logical contradiction, I can accept the scientific data and also affirm a traditional view of the Fall, but this does not mean that I know what actually happened. One thing I do know, however: whatever happened, happened, and no amount of post-hoc reasoning or angst can change it.

This leads to my final point: it is okay not to know, because not knowing is what allows faith. Faith is the evidence of things not seen. I do not need scientific evidence to believe that Jesus loves me. Indeed, I cannot obtain it, for "Jesus loves me" is not a scientific hypothesis. No scientific data, no matter how unexpected or paradigm shifting, can destroy my faith in Jesus, my

experience of his love, or my choice to follow him.

Let me summarize my thoughts. Although I do not lose any sleep over this topic or take my own ideas terribly seriously, I do have three concerns. First, I think it is important to be honest with data. Second, I think it is important to affirm the loving kindness of God. Third, I think it is important to cultivate humility and to allow the love of Jesus to release us from fear of the unknown. If I may paraphrase Roman 8:38–39, I am persuaded that neither ice cores, nor pseudogenes, nor weird fossils, nor inconceivable distances, nor unimaginably long time spans, nor any other thing in creation can separate us from the love of Christ.

Please forgive this lengthy reply to your question. I trust you will take my comments in the spirit of humility and honesty in which they are intended. I also trust that you will safeguard my reputation as the Lord watches over both of us with infinite kindness.

Warmly,
Dana

Dana Schuster is a pseudonym.

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Adventists Through Academic Eyes

An Interview with Eva Keller | BY ALITA BYRD

Editor's Note: In 2005, Palgrave Macmillan published *The Road to Clarity: Seventh-day Adventism in Madagascar*. This social anthropological study, written after two years of fieldwork by Eva Keller (right), has been acclaimed by academics and read with interest by Adventists.

The study, which began as a Ph.D. thesis for the London School of Economics in 2002, examines the intellectual life of Malagasy Adventists, and examines the reasons they remain members of the church.

Eva Keller says she did not know much about Adventists before she began her study, but her objective approach offers instructive insights into our worldwide church, particularly its growth and impact in the third world.

Spectrum asked Keller about how Malagasy Adventists interpret the Bible and what she learned while living among them.

Q: Why did you decide to study Adventism in Madagascar?



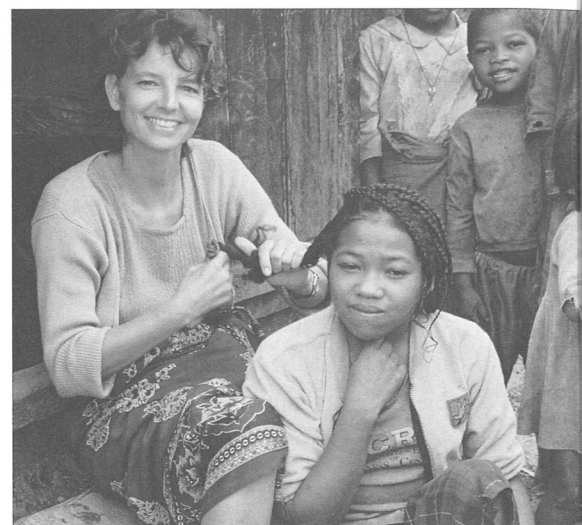
A: I first traveled to Madagascar in 1987 together with a Swiss friend of mine who has family there. While traveling, we met a family in Maroantsetra [a seaport town on the east of the island]. I then stayed in touch with them for eleven years before returning to Madagascar.

Close contact with local people is very important in social anthropology. So when I was preparing for fieldwork—as a Ph.D. student at the London School of Economics—I decided to go and do my research where my friends lived.

I thought that my friends in Madagascar were Jehovah's Witnesses, and so I decided to research Jehovah's Witnesses, as there are practically no social anthropological studies of this kind of "fundamentalist" church in Africa, while its membership grows by the day. I only found out upon arrival that I was wrong, and my friends were actually Seventh-day Adventists! Thus I changed my study to Seventh-day Adventism.

Q: You spent two years among the Malagasy Adventist community. What was your first impression of Malagasy Adventists? How did your impression change over the time you spent there?

A: I had assumed, completely wrongly as I found out, that the Malagasy Adventists would be very strict fundamental-



ists. I imagined them to be sectarian and, frankly, unpleasant people to be with.

I soon realized this was not at all the case, and that they were perfectly "normal" people and extremely nice, as most Malagasy people are. I was received with warmth and openness.

I was also struck by the importance of "knowledge" for the Seventh-day Adventists in Madagascar. There is an entry to that effect in my field notes as early as day two. I was taken aback because this was not at all what I had expected. I had expected narrow-minded fundamentalists and instead I found open-minded, friendly people who seemed to be very concerned with learning from the Bible.

Q: Can you explain the main thesis you came to through your study in Madagascar? Why is Adventism growing?

A: My study focuses not so much on why people join the church, but

rather why they remain in it, and on what they find fascinating once they are in it. The reasons for joining, which are often very pragmatic, do not necessarily need to be the reasons for remaining, and the former do not explain the attraction of the church.

This is a key argument in my book and also a criticism of the available literature in the social sciences, which focuses almost exclusively on the reasons for conversion. But the story doesn't end there—in fact, that is only the beginning.

My main conclusion, which is well summarized in Rich Hannon's review of my book (page 75, below), is that the key attraction of Adventism for members in Madagascar is the intellectual activity that goes with being a Seventh-day Adventist, that is, with studying the Bible very thoroughly (this is so, too, for people with very little formal education). This is the "Road" in the title of the book.

The second part of the argument, which follows from the first, is that this road of intellectual engagement leads to an emphasis on rationally understanding the workings of the cosmos. Thus, Malagasy Adventists' ideas of Paradise refer not primarily to a place of bliss and prosperity or the like, but to a place where the truth will be clear and visible, where there will be no more doubt or misunderstanding about what is going on in the world, where those living in Paradise together with God will know and understand. This is the "Clarity" of the title of the book.

Both aspects, the *Road* and the *Clarity*, reveal a strong emphasis on learning, rationality, knowledge of facts, and understanding. This conclusion is quite radical in comparison to other studies of "evangelical/fundamentalist"

churches in the social sciences. These tend to argue that fundamentalists are poor or otherwise marginalized people who see membership in such a church as an escape route from their destitute situation and who are misled by their leaders who promise them easy access to wealth and health.

Q: Do you think your findings can be extrapolated into other countries and other communities?

A: I do not know. However, a key argument in my book is that not everything can be explained by cultural and historical context (as tends to be the case in the social sciences).

The fascination with intellectual activity among the Adventists in Madagascar cannot satisfactorily be explained or understood by context alone. Indeed, Adventists in Madagascar create a lot of trouble between themselves and their non-Adventist kin by becoming practicing members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

This is because Adventists cannot and do not participate in some of the most fundamental kinship activities in Madagascar—especially the communication with one's ancestors. For their kin who are not Adventists, which is the great majority, this is beyond comprehension and amounts to a refusal of kinship.

Q: Were the people open and honest and willing to talk about their religion? Where did you live while you were on the island? Did you travel throughout the island, or did you concentrate on a few communities?

A: As Rich Hannon writes so nicely in his review, social anthropological

studies are "an inch wide and a mile deep." This means that one usually lives for a long time in the same local community sharing people's daily lives, worries, and joys. In my case, I lived for the most part with the above-mentioned family in a small, almost rural, town, and I spent about five months in a village in the vicinity with another Adventist family. This was really to broaden my view and to kind of check on what I had found in the town. What I say comes from these locations, but there is no reason to think that it would be different elsewhere in Madagascar.

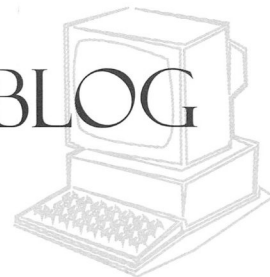
Apart from participant observation, I also interviewed people about specific topics such as ancestor worship.

All Adventists in these two places were extremely friendly and welcomed me with openness and warmth into their community. I shared their religious life, though I never made a secret out of the fact that I am myself not an Adventist. Though my friends sometimes wondered why I didn't convert, they never tried to pressure me into doing so—again, this was completely contrary to what I had expected.

I explained to them that I was writing a book about them and they felt honored by that fact and were more than willing to talk to me about all sorts of things and to have me there during their religious activities. (The only thing I was not allowed to actively participate in was the foot-washing ritual and communion.)

Though many of the people in Madagascar probably overestimated the influence of my book (recall that most people have very little formal education and no experience of the world beyond their dis-

Continued on page 77...

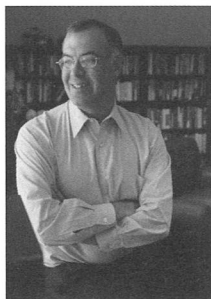


The Language of Morality | BY JONATHAN PICHOT

Published in Spectrum Collegiate Blog (<http://www.spectrummagazine.org>)

Jan. 28, 2008

A few years ago, David Brooks (right) visited Princeton University (below) in an attempt to understand my generation's meritocratic elite. What he found were trained workaholics, their eighteen-hours-a-day schedules packed with classes, work, extracurriculars, and sports. These students he dubbed Organizational Kids. They were smart, friendly, tolerant, and driven. Yet, whenever he tried to speak to them about anything other than their careerism, about ideas of good and evil, sacrifice and sin, the students were lost. As he recounts:



In talking to Princeton students about character, I noticed two things. First, they're a little nervous about the subject. When I asked if Princeton builds character, they would inevitably mention the honor code against cheating, or policies to reduce drinking. When I asked about moral questions, they would often flee such talk and start discussing legislative questions....When it comes to character and virtue, these young people have been left on their

own. Today's go-getter parents and today's educational institutions work frantically to cultivate neural synapses, to foster good study skills, to promote musical talents. We fly our children around the world so that they can experience different cultures. We spend huge amounts of money on safety equipment and sports coaching. We sermonize about the evils of drunk driving. We expend enormous energy guiding and regulating their lives. But when it comes to character and virtue, the most mysterious area of all, suddenly the laissez-faire ethic rules: You're on your own, Jack and Jill; go figure out what is true and just for yourselves.

Apparently, in the sanitized world of secular academia, religion and its uncomfortable ideas of a fallen world, sacrifice, and virtue have been replaced with vague ideas of playing by the rules. These students, Brooks observes, have been raised in unprecedented peace and prosperity. They have had nothing to rebel against and so are happy to simply conform themselves to the modern world. They believe the world is fundamentally just because their upbringing gives no evidence otherwise.

My generation's elite is certainly not unaware of the injustices in the world. On the contrary, they're very engaged. But they interpret the problems of the world as largely structural, to be fixed by better policy and education, not, as some religions would posit, created by the deeper dilemma of human nature. Most elite graduates can't speak eloquently about virtue and vice because they were never taught to. The problems they're trained to fix—technical, business, law, medical—are external. And so they approach injustice, and thus morality, the same way they would a problem set in calculus.

On the contrary, in the Adventist subculture, one cannot help but be saturated by the vocabulary of morality. This creates a significant difference between thoughtful Christian students and other students in my generation: believers, in general, speak more eloquently about virtue and morality. Having been exposed to the biblical narratives, we've dealt with the tragic and the mystical, with inconsistency and moral obligation. We



also have had the added advantage that we actually believe this stuff.

These ideas are not just mental exercises from which we can walk away at the end of class. These questions and their answers have far-reaching consequences in our lives and our most personal understanding of ourselves. This dynamic is quickly observed, for example, in any good Pacific Union College Honors class. When a group of students who have spent their lives fervently believing in the literal nature of the Bible are exposed to the very real possibility that this is not true, the reaction is not simply intellectual, it is physical and emotional. Students lose sleep over this sort of thing.

For anyone who believes a biblically inspired interpretation of reality is closer to the truth than a secular one, the advantage of growing up Christian is obvious. But that upbringing does not translate into moral literacy unless it is honed through education. As Adventist colleges in North America face a growing identity crisis, an emphasis on moral literacy is one advantage a secular school cannot replicate.

Jonathan Pichot is in his sophomore year at Pacific Union College, Angwin, California.

Evangelism—Like Elections?

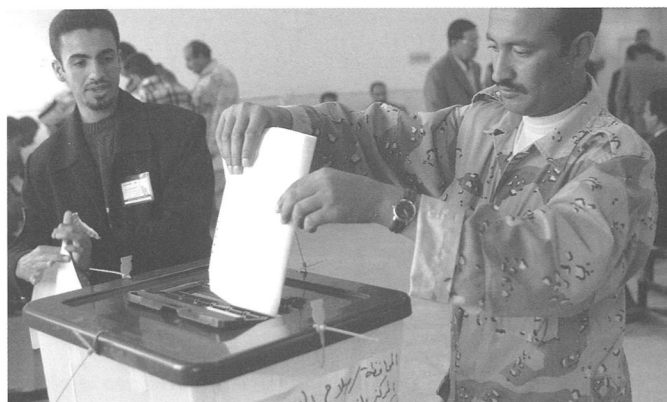
BY JARED WRIGHT

Jan. 17, 2008



WE'VE BEEN BANTERING about both elections and evangelism for a while here, and in discussing them side-by-side, I couldn't help noticing the parallels.

Elections. First, elections are primarily about drumming up support for a person who represents a package of ideas. That candidate may be eloquent, forceful, sympathetic, or persuasive in some way, and those personal qualities might draw potential voters.



Second, every candidate is selling something to the voters—whether the promise of affordable health care, a more “secure” nation, a stronger economy, or better education—a candidate’s viability depends on his or her ability to peddle his or her platform.

Third, in elections, although personal qualities and platforms matter a lot, sometimes just showing up in the neighborhood can be enough. The 2008 campaign trail is littered with stories of people who were going to support X candidate until Y candidate spoke at the local high school, shook my hand, held my baby, stopped on my block. People are persuaded by personal contact.

Evangelism. The same three things hold true when evangelists seek votes for their respective religious party (denomination): personal qualities (charisma, eloquence, and so forth), a convincing platform with promise of change for the better, and simply being present and making face-to-face contact all play a part in the “success” of evangelistic campaigns. Success is measured in similar ways—by the number of voters who show up and check “yes.”

It isn't difficult to “turn out the vote” when tapping into people's needs for personal contact, the hope of a better life, and the promise of personal gain of some kind. However, as Christians who care about fostering spiritual formation and growing spiritual community, we need to remember that the spiritual life is very different from voting for president.

Chris Blake put it very well when noting that the charge to Jesus' followers is to make disciples, not decisions. Campaigns are about decisions. The Kingdom of Heaven is about discipleship.

We would do well to remember the differences.

Jared Wright, a graduate of Southern Adventist University, is studying for his M.Div. at La Sierra University. He created the Adventist Environmental Advocacy blog.

COMMENT

Whatever the outcome of the nomination process resulting from the presidential primaries and eventual election of this country's chief executive, American culture will still be the same. That's as far as elections go in the United States of America.

The same may also be true in a former American colony, the Philippines, but with one important difference: political candidates in the latter change political parties as often as Americans buy a new car. A new car simply makes one feel more comfortable with one's presumed social position, whatever that is.

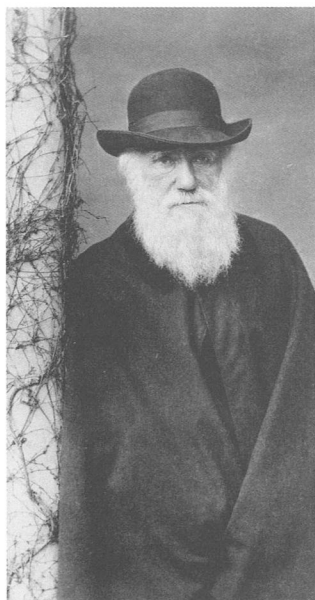
Needless to say, changing one's religion for another can also result in nothing less than a radical change, especially when the shift we're asking is from a religion that has been part of one's native culture to one that's completely foreign. This sounds like stating the obvious, but don't many evangelists fail to consider this? Why is it so much harder for Buddhists to convert to Christianity, for example, yet it seems easier for Roman Catholic Christians in Latin America and the Philippines to become Protestants? That said, elections or evangelism, such as those conducted on behalf of a foreign government, usually don't result in any significant change in the colonial culture. Social scientists, at least in my country, sometimes refer to this phenomenon as Split-level Christianity. Simply put: many professed Christians (Adventists), especially those residing in the colonies, may have only been half converted regardless of what the growth charts and accession rates seem to project.

Joselito Co, Jan. 18, 2008

UAP: Creation, Evolution, and Education

BY KIRSTEN NIXON

Feb. 12, 2008



SINCE DARWIN (left) published his *Origin of the Species* in 1859, the debate over the origin of the world among evolutionists and creationists has degraded into a mess of uncommunicative polarization. This bitter dialogue has infiltrated, and in some ways paralyzed, one of the most profound and mysterious topics of the human race. However, not all have the view that science and religion are incompatible.

One such group that

works to integrate science and faith is the Geoscience Research Institute, based in Loma Linda, California. This Adventist organization recently helped to conduct a four-day conference (February 4–7, 2008) in conjunction with the Universidad Adventista del Plata, in Argentina.

The conference, titled "Jornadas de Creación, Evolución, y Educación," hosted more than three hundred elementary and secondary school teachers from Argentina, Paraguay, and Uruguay. Presentations covered topics concerning theology, the story of Genesis, biology, geology, genetics, and the impacts of Darwinism on society, among other things. Interlaced throughout the program was an emphasis on the role of science in Adventist education.

The conference spotlighted the relationship between science and the Bible and the ways in which one can serve to compliment the understanding of the other. One such example was given that there exist two types of questions: those that can be answered by science, and those that cannot. If a question can be proven with an experiment, it is scientific.

Those that cannot, require faith. Science cannot prove whether or not God exists, because there is no way to make a definitive test that can do so. Nor can science prove whether or not God is under the same laws of physics as man. The answers to these questions are subjective, and the answer you get depends on the worldview you decide to use. The Bible is one of these worldviews.

In a world dominated by science and public opinion, conventions such as these serve a unique purpose for evolutionists and creationists alike. Openly discussing these topics allows us not only to form more comprehensive pictures of the origin of life, but also to guard against the dangerous idea that we have all of the answers.

Kirsten Nixon is a student at La Sierra University.

COMMENT

Thanks, Kirsten, for the information. It is true that it is important to the discussion to recognize what science can address and what it can't.

There are a couple of things that I would like to clarify though, and, if it seems like nit-picking, I'm sorry. I do think it is vital to be working off the same page and misunderstanding is so easy.

First, the theory of evolution (T of E) is often lumped into discussions around how life began, how the world began, and the age of the earth. While T of E compliments findings from other fields in these areas, evolution itself is separate. If you confuse T of E with geology, physics, and abiogenesis, you are going to be working at a disadvantage (and I say "you"

not meaning you, Kirsten, but anyone). By which I mean scientists are going to immediately peg you as someone who is ignorant about evolution and ignore you (at best).

Second, saying that "if a question can be proved by an experiment, it is science," is really misleading in a couple of ways. Science never proves anything. Evidence can accumulate to the point that scientists can say something is pretty sure but it is ALWAYS open to the possibility of changing—based again on evidence. So when someone critiques T of E by saying, "But scientists can't prove it," again, you are showing your ignorance and scientists will ignore you (at best).

The other problem with that statement is, it sounds like science is limited to findings from experiments. This is a pervasive but profoundly wrong belief about science, which leads to another common but wrong critique of T of E: that you can't do experiments on something that happened so long ago, so scientists are just guessing anyway. This actually implies that evolution is not happening now, too, which is wrong.

Science is about providing natural explanations for the natural world. It uses the process of observation to do this. Experimentation is a wonderful way to refine the observations to reduce bias and alternative explanations, but it is simply one tool of science. One can make observations, develop hypotheses, test those hypotheses against more observations, and so forth, all without designing a traditional experiment. If this idea was true what

would I expect to see? Do I see it? How would I recognize it?

If it were false what might I see? And so on. And then there are your peers always refining and critiquing your conclusions as well in an ongoing pursuit of what the evidence shows.

I know that you, Kirsten, are not necessarily making any of the arguments I was discussing above. You are just reporting here. I have heard them so often though and I think they are based on misunderstandings that need to be clarified so the discussion can continue.

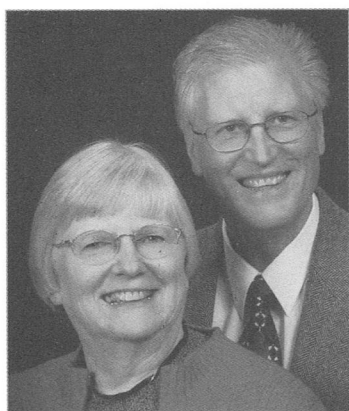
Beth, Feb. 12, 2008

COMMENT

Steve Hindes (2005) suggests a number of ways that science is different from religion. In science,

- Nothing is beyond question
 - There is no preset range of acceptable answers and unacceptable answers
 - Blind faith in science is appalling to scientists
 - Emotionalism is discouraged
 - Substantive debate of the evidence by knowledgeable proponents of all points of view is encouraged, invited, and given top priority at gatherings
- It's pretty obvious that, in the debate over evolution and creationism, creationists mostly demonstrate an unwillingness to subscribe to these principles.

Steve Parker, Feb. 13, 2008



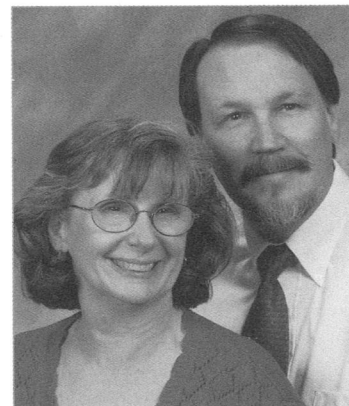
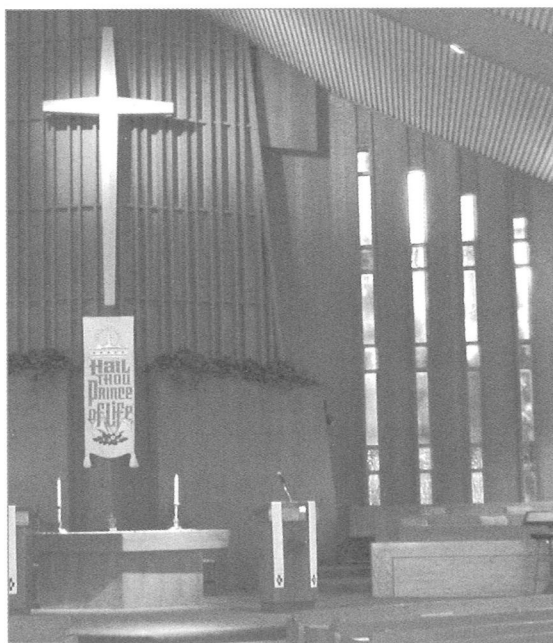
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Change and the Adventist Church

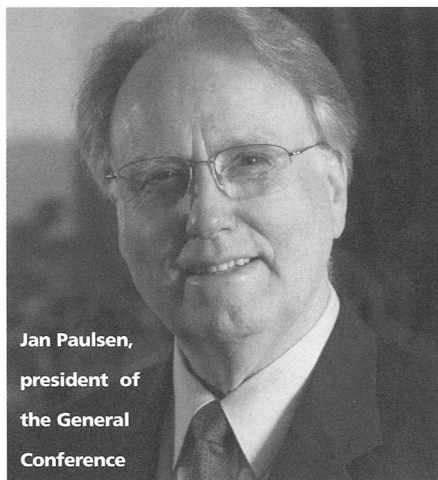
Analyzing the Latest Actions at the General Conference

BY MICHAEL E. CAFFERKY

What does it take to bring change to the structure of the Seventh-day Adventist Church? A methodical, incremental process that would protect core values as it tiptoes through the political minefields. The Commission on Ministries, Services, and Structures, a hundred-member committee that studied the subject, brought a report to the 2007 Annual Council recommending a few procedural adjustments that were voted. The changes outlined in the approved measure suggest that organizational mission and unity seem to have Rook®—power over efficiency or financial savings.

The commission argued that:

- Structural diversity in the Seventh-day Adventist Church already exists,
- Geographical, political, and cultural diversity across the world is great,
- Local capacity and resources for church ministry vary widely from region to region,
- The varieties of technology for travel, telecommunications, and computing are not equally available worldwide,



Jan Paulsen,
president of
the General
Conference

- A precedent exists for using additional structural designs that address the issues of vertical separation between power and authority,
- Changes have taken place in the church's external environment.¹

In a nutshell, approval of the commission's recommendations means that the little-used union of churches provision existing in the General Conference Working Policy since the 1960s and designed for unusual operational conditions will now be available for use as an acceptable mainstream approach. This action legitimizes consolidations and mergers of traditional organizational units but does not mandate that such actions occur.

The Commission and Its Work

In his opening remarks to the commis-

sion at its first meeting in 2006, General Conference president Jan Paulsen, who chaired the commission, stated, "no organizational structure in government or industry can serve as a model for what we must have." He identified three main issues for the commission to keep in focus: (a) the global unity of the church, (b) the global mission of the church, and (c) the best use of resources.²

Presentations followed regarding the rationale for the commission; the history of Seventh-day Adventist Church organization and reorganization; biblical teaching on ecclesiology relevant to the issues of unity, identity and mission; and issues regarding functional departments of the church and some of the options available for reconfiguration of these departments.³ In addition, study groups were formed to focus on two topics: the concept of flexibility and the concept of union of churches, a little-used alternative available under General Conference policy where geopolitical constraints make it impossible to follow the typical church structure.⁴

When the commission met again, one group discussed ways in which currently authorized structural patterns might be modified rather than putting forward an entirely new organizational plan. Another study group,

chaired by Michael Ryan, presented a paper exploring the union of churches concept and its potential for wider application than when it was first developed under the leadership of Robert H. Pierson in the 1960s.

Ryan's group suggested use of the concept could help reduce the number of levels of organization from four to three and help redistribute financial resources to areas of the work that are currently languishing. It could also enable redistribution of personnel, which would provide additional pastors for local churches. Furthermore, the group suggested that the concept could facilitate access to a country's legal authorities and enable faster communication and more appropriate decision making.⁵

By 2007, the commission had agreed on a six-point recommendation for Annual Council, which it voted.

1. Structural Flexibility

The opportunity is currently available for one or more conferences and/or unions to obtain division executive committee authorization and constituency consent to merge, which would remove one level of church hierarchy. The question is whether or not this will be attractive in the North American Division.

2. Alternate Structures

With the flexibility principle as a foundation, the commission recommended that each geographic division territory be given full access to the range of designs when making structural changes to the mid-level administrative units that connect local congregations to their divisions. Essentially, these organizational units can have the same

relationship and status they now have. In contrast, with General Conference division approval and constituency consent, they can change to one of the following alternatives:

- a. Complementary staffing model. This model maintains organizationally separate conferences, missions, and unions, where the departmental staffing at the mission and/or conference level does not parallel that of the union.
- b. Shared administration/services model. Under this model, the local conference or mission will have reduced administrative personnel and will share administrative and support personnel with the union.
- c. Constituency-based (union of churches) model. Under this model, conferences and missions as separate organizational levels would disappear and be replaced by a union of churches. With this model, one administrative office would be established in a defined geographic territory currently considered a union, but a union of churches—essentially only a union—would replace the union and its conferences. Some unions that accomplish this change may choose to appoint directors over geographic areas.

The intent of the Annual Council action is prevention of multiple unions of churches operating within the same geographic territory. In North America, it will be interesting to see how the regional conferences take to this provision.

The shared administration/services model looks good on paper, but compared with the other models its

administrators will experience more time pressures because they will be working for two organizations simultaneously. They will be accountable to two sets of constituencies. Because of this, there may be migration either backward toward the traditional model or forward to the more streamlined union of churches model.

Under a consolidated union of churches model, geographic assignments of administrative and support personnel will widen, and administrative personnel may be reassigned pastoral roles. The number of churches with which union departments will interact will increase, thus requiring more efficient use of resources.

Potential divestures of property, plant, and equipment assets that result from consolidation will raise the stakes and the emotional intensity of issues during the discussions.

3. Nonstructural Changes

In its work, the commission attempted to distinguish between structural and nonstructural changes. Structural changes are those made to relationships between conferences, missions, and unions. Nonstructural changes include mergers of organizations, consolidation of functional services across organizations, and outsourcing. They can also include realignment of geographic territories within a division. Although some nonstructural changes will not require changes in the new overall design of the mid-level administrative structure, in fact, the kinds of changes given as examples represent potential structural and operational changes both within and across organizational units.

The commission recognized that some complicating factors still remain to be resolved as the new provisions

are put into practice. One example is the status of educational institutions located within a territory that might be restructured.

Organizations that wish to merge without going through the extensive procedures in the General Conference *Working Policy* may have a loophole to get around them by claiming that a desired change is nonstructural.

This recommendation has the potential to cause the most confusion. Division officers hold authority to advise and direct decision makers who grapple with nonstructural changes. In practice, this means that two levels of decision making will be necessary to accomplish a nonstructural change.

4. Decision Making

Decisions to change structure in one territory will be made in ways that

preserve governance practices, church authority, policies and procedures, unity, organizational identity, fairness, and accountability. Without this foundation, organizational changes that might be created for local interests would have the potential to destroy unity, authority, and the broader mission of the church. The issues of authority, fair representation, and unity are prominent in the report, although it also mentions efficiency and effectiveness many times as important considerations when deciding structural changes.

No structural changes can result in the formation of an independent organizational unit that is left unattached to church structure. Fair representation in the governance structure and equitable distribution of financial resources must be maintained.

Although existing organizational units can initiate a request for an organizational change, no approval for structural change can be self-determined. The unit desiring structural change must obtain the approval of the next larger (administratively higher) organizational unit.

5. Implementation

Implementation of changes to structure will proceed with authorization from the division executive committee or the General Conference Executive Committee, depending on the level of organization that wants to reorganize. Before it gives its authorization, the executive committee will give local constituencies the opportunity to express their opinions. But the executive committee will expect more than mere opinions. It will want to see that

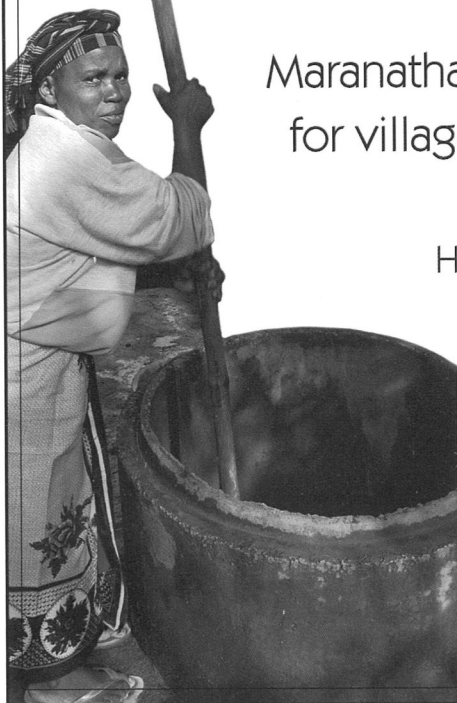
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the constituencies consent to a proposed change. Although consent is not defined, it is implied that constituencies will take formal action to provide or withhold support for a proposed change.

Most design changes, such as to the union of churches model, will come slowly to North America. Getting multiple conference constituencies and union leaders and division leaders to consent to a proposed change will require patience.

6. Representation

The question of representation has surfaced in many discussions of church structure during the last three decades.⁶ The action at Annual Council is no different. The commission was sensitive to two paradoxical forces at work. On the one hand, it recognized the need to preserve fair representation on executive committees. Because of the diversity of the church, wide representation is required. On the other hand, the practical reality of managing the work of an executive committee requires that these decision-making groups be limited in size.

Paradoxes of this kind will never go away. The commission sees resolution in terms of attempting to achieve a balance. Balance will best be achieved, it suggests, when representation on executive committees is a function of size (for participating organizations) and employees of organizational units (conferences, unions, and missions), and selected on an at-large basis.

Another issue is preservation of two-way communication and accountability between officers of smaller organizational units (lower in hierarchy) and officers of their related

administrative units over larger territories (higher in hierarchy). In this regard, executive committee members who come from higher levels of authority (such as division administrators) will be limited to 10 percent of the voting members of the executive committee at the lower level (such as the union executive committee), allowing for 90 percent of voting members to come from the smaller geographic area.

In an attempt to close the gap between the executive committee and lay members, the commission recommended that church members and employees who are not executive committee members be given an opportunity to comment on executive committee issues "when and where appropriate." No specific process was spelled out in terms of informing and then accommodating the comments of church members and of church employees when accomplishing the work of the executive committee.

Other Issues

Most organizations, whether for-profit or nonprofit, have a vertical (hierarchical) order of responsibility between those who perform the work and those who administer it. Although other factors are important, vertical specialization is valuable for coordination and for ensuring accountability.⁷

The reality is that, as a worldwide church, we have one overarching mission, but we also have multiple missions represented by the variety of church ministries, parachurch ministries, independent-but-affiliated ministries, support services, and departments and institutions affiliated with the church. In a complex, func-

tionally organized bureaucracy like the church, which has limited resources for coordination, vertical authority often becomes the default approach to integration, although top leaders might personally prefer some other arrangement. Church administrators may feel stuck with few other options.

In this context, there are two fears. On the one hand, church members and pastors may fear that centralization will lead to too much top-down control, and bottom-up trust would be undermined. On the other hand, church administrators may fear that decentralization will lead toward unity—destroying independence. Both fears are well founded.

High-level administrators have been entrusted by constituents with authority to exercise a great degree of control to move the church forward. Thus, in centralized organizations, leaders near the top of the hierarchy tend to make the important decisions. Those at the front lines tend to feel left out. Decentralized organizations attempt to put key decisions closer to those most familiar with the situations, where decisions are relevant, but within the boundaries of organizational identity. But increased autonomy that results from decentralization increases the risks that some control will be sacrificed. Regardless of the mid-level structural design chosen, this tension point will still be there.

So if consolidation leads to a union of churches in a particular territory, is it a move toward greater or less centralization? From the perspective of hierarchical layers, the organization would be flattened by one level, with local church members one level closer to organizational influence over valuable resources. Top-down vertical

coordination and control would be more efficient between organizational leadership and congregational pastors. But as the commission pointed out, communication is a two-way process.

From the perspective of the local congregation and pastor, bottom-up communication might be less efficient in the sense that union of churches leadership will have a much broader span of control for managing the competing interests of the diverse set of interest groups (congregations and institutions).

Congregations and institutions within the territory of the union of churches that need financial assistance may find a larger pool of financial resources available. That's the good news. The bad news would be that the larger pool of available resources also has a correspondingly larger, more diverse group of stakeholders lined up to capture its benefits.

However, there is a more important issue to consider.

Vertical vs. Horizontal Changes

Based on the study papers the commission produced, discussions of vertical integration and the allowance for vertical consolidations into unions of churches have dominated its work. The action at Annual Council has the potential risk of fixing the discussion even more firmly on issues related to vertical coordination.

As a church, we must become mature enough to embrace continued discussions about vertical power and authority as we move on to include other discussions about the horizontal connections that are needed. Without horizontal integration efforts, we will make slow progress toward improved flexibility. The net result will be only

marginal progress toward mission accomplishment.

Thus, let us not forget the fundamental principle that still needs to be raised in discussions about church structure: it is always at the point of organizational separation that coordination issues arise. This applies as much to points of horizontal separation of function and task as it does to the vertical separation of power.

Over the last thirty-some years, the church has developed great diversity in the horizontal division of tasks. It now has multiple specialized ministries, parachurch ministries, support services, and specialized departmental functions. One of the unintended consequences has been development of separate mental orientations regarding goals, controls, rewards, formality, and mission.

These differences make it difficult for the organization to collaborate. Strategy-critical activities become fragmented. The processes of acquiring new members, edifying the church body, connecting with communities, and educating become fragmented. This is especially true when the organization has depended primarily upon vertical coordination and control mechanisms, as well as the policies that govern vertical power over resources.

Horizontal separations between the various functional tasks and specialized work units require both vertical and horizontal integration efforts. In a changing environment, reorganized vertical integration efforts alone, such

as the union of churches, will be insufficient to help the church deal with the challenges it faces as it adapts to its environment. Such efforts might even lull it to sleep if it thinks these alone will resolve the need of the church to be responsive to the external environment. But they ignore the crucial strategic importance of horizontal linkages.

We need the commission or another group to study ways to improve horizontal integration across functions,



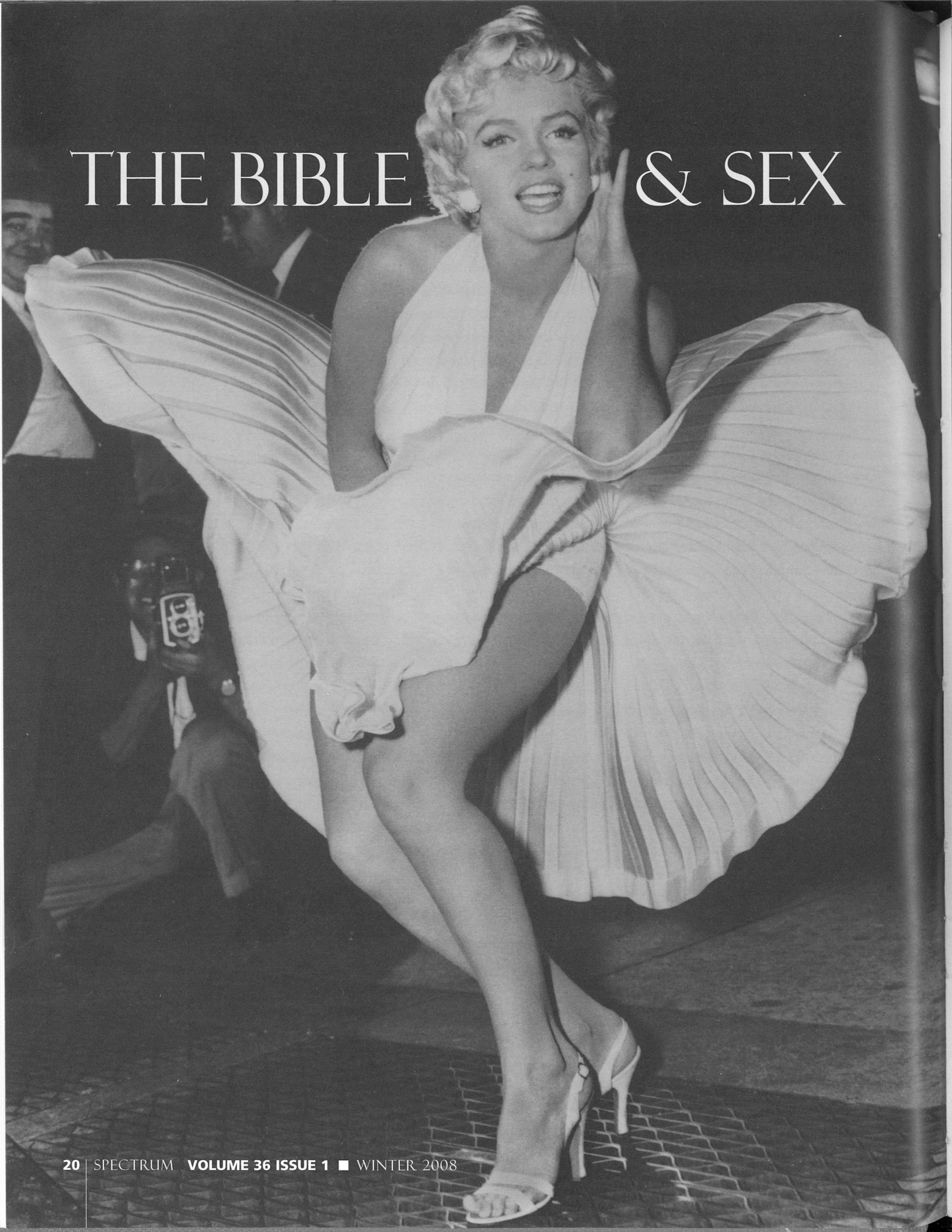
departments, support services, specialized ministries, and organizations that share common goals. Discussions like this offer the potential for helping us learn how different perspectives can be unified, and how we can come to agreement on our priorities. ■

Notes and References

1. "Principles, Possibilities, and Limits of Flexibility in the Design of Seventh-day Adventist Organizational Structure" (2006), 9–11. Accessible at <http://www.adventist.org/world_church/commission-ministries-services-structures/Flexibility-Paper-October-2006.pdf>.
2. Although Paulsen identifies differences between the nonprofit and for-profit sectors, it is unfortunate that he chose to criticize both government and industry as sometimes driven by selfishness and greed.
3. L. C. Cooper, "Reasons for Considering

Continued on page 78...

THE BIBLE & SEX



Ordinary and Dangerous:

Sex in the Christian Community | BY LOREN SEIBOLD

Because they lived on the adjacent farm, I spent a lot of my childhood at Grandpa and Grandma's house. Grandpa and Grandma always had a subscription to the big glossy *Look* and *Life* photo magazines, which I enjoyed paging through at about the age of six or seven. One evening, I voiced a totally innocent question to Grandpa as I was looking through the magazine: "There are so many pictures of Marilyn Monroe. What's so great about her?" Grandpa laughed, and said, "That's something you'll understand when you get older."



About the same time, I got my first Bible, a King James Version with a brightly colored cloth cover of Jesus holding children. Right before the contents page was a table of diacritical marks, which then hashed through every proper name in the book. I asked Grandma this time: "What are all these little marks above the letters?"

Grandma said, "That's something you'll understand when you get older."

I vividly remember thinking, "Marilyn Monroe and these words in the Bible: they must both have to do with the same secret thing that someday, when I grow up, I'll learn about!"

And I have, though it hasn't been quite what I expected. Somewhere along the line, it became apparent to me that at least some of

what people do with religion has to do with sex: to control it, justify it, suppress it, hide it, separate others on the basis of it, and manage the guilt associated with it.

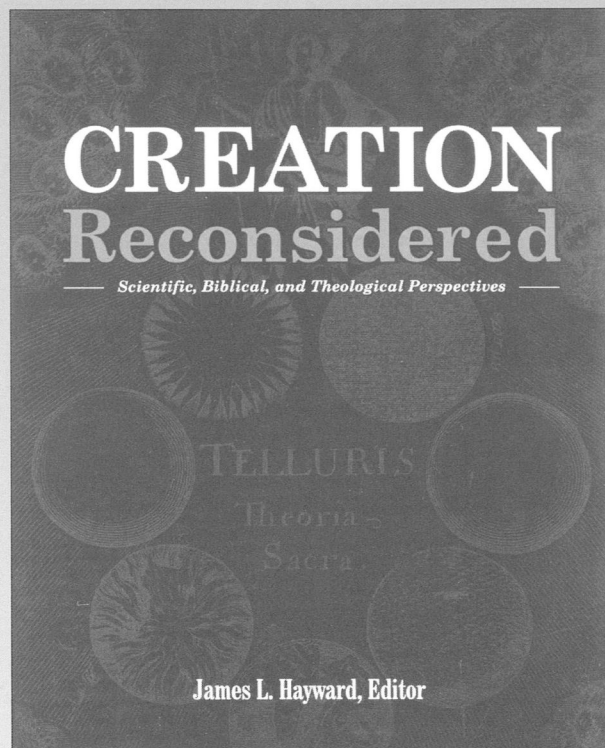
There is plenty of sex in the Bible, though as a child in the 1950s I didn't understand most of it. After I was assured that winter wasn't as cold in Eden as it was in North Dakota, Adam and Eve's doing their gardening sans clothing became a source of titillating curiosity.¹ From my Sabbath School teacher's explanation of the Seventh Commandment, I gathered it was something like divorce. That Ham was punished for seeing his father's nakedness puzzled me, since my dad and I changed clothes in the same locker room when we went swimming. What was supposed to have happened in Sodom was impossible to figure out, but, fortunately for the teacher, I was more interested in how a person could turn into a salt statue.

Every new leap in Bible knowledge opened new questions, and the glossing over of them suggested to us that sex was something we don't talk about, except sotto voce and with giggles in the back of the school bus. And so to some extent, my friends and I assumed that what we knew about sex was original information.

At Sheyenne River Academy, my Bible teacher attempted some low-key Christian sex education with a book called *Dialogue in Romantic Love*.² By today's standards, it would be mild; but Mr. Kahler was probably something of a pioneer. It was the first time I'd ever seen such

**Marilyn
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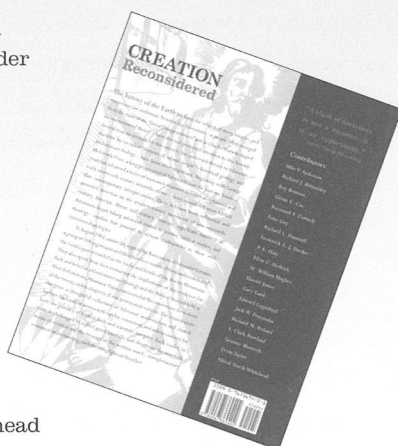
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things in print, and it made a deep impression, although I also found it a little creepy that my old teacher (he was in his thirties) was up in front talking about it.

But the cat was beginning to find its way out of the bag. The 1970s came on, and a lot of stuff was laying right out there for us to see. Things like homosexuality and sexual abuse and rape and harassment. Much of what happens on college campuses has to do with sex, then as now, though it was still a somewhat guiltier place then.

It is mostly in the church that we continue to handle sex gingerly. We speak of it little and cautiously (compared to, say, persecution by Catholics), though it is an unmentioned subtext to nearly every life. We get suspicious of any pastor or teacher who makes sex an especially loud string on his fiddle, and probably not without reason: because, to fit well into Adventist culture, you sort of have to know how we *don't* address it.

In *Midnight's Children*, Salman Rushdie tells of a young unmarried Muslim physician called to examine the daughter of a rich landowner. When he enters her bedroom, he sees her maids holding a sheet with a seven-inch hole cut in the middle. She's a proper girl, the father tells him, and it would be wrong for him to see all of her. She would tell him the complaint, and the maids would move the sheet so he could look at just the offending part. Over the months that he treated her, he found himself trying to put together the pieces of the girl that he had seen in an attempt to picture the whole girl; and was grateful when she finally got a headache so he could see her face.³

That isn't a bad metaphor for what Western culture has done with sex. At any given time, we focus on one problem, or set of problems, but leave the rest covered. For years (for much of my life, and a century earlier), the focus was on marriage: getting people to honor marriage, no matter how bad, and punishing them for leaving it. The goal seemed to be to corral sex into a very small space, in the hope that it could never get up enough momentum to punch its way out and force us to deal with it openly.

How else can you explain churches freezing out the divorced, and ruthlessly expelling those who remarried? But in the church, as well as society at large, we ignored,

or even denied, those more frightening expressions of sex, like incest, pedophilia, homosexuality, and rape.⁴

Only a few groups—Mormons and Roman Catholics—have focused particularly on masturbation. Is it a coincidence that these groups covered the worst secrets of all: child marriage in one case, pederasty in the other?⁵ Roman Catholics have legislated the laity's sex and reproduction most broadly—while hiding one of the worst sexual scandals in Christian history. The perforated sheet generally covers as much as it exposes.

The opening in the sheet takes time to move, but it has. Sex in American culture is regarded quite differently than it was in the 1950s. We now allow inspection of the very things we once avoided talking about. An average American today is indignant over child sexual abuse, has strong,

expressed opinions on homosexual issues, and knows way more about aberrant sexual practices than he or she can ever make practical use of. But the usual moral trespasses, with all the damage they do to families, now seem less critical: most Americans, most of the time, act as though what others do in the privacy of their own homes (or of others' homes, motel rooms, or clubs) is their business. Every movement of the sheet exposes one problem, while putting others out of sight.

Now, all the bile that was once spent on infidelity and divorce is directed toward fringe sexual activity. The upside is to make us watch our children more carefully. But there are downsides, too, to this paranoia of the deviant: witch-hunt enthusiasm for prosecuting an accused preschool teacher, for example; or those charged with sex crimes (rapists to be sure, but also a twenty-one-year-old having sex with a younger girlfriend) marked with a scarlet letter until death. Indignant morality in one area might be transference from insufficient moral reflection in another.

Freud is accused of overstating the case when he said everything is about sex, but I don't think he overstated it by much. Because it hadn't happened to me, I assumed that child sexual abuse was a rare thing. When I became a pastor in a secret-telling era, I was shocked at the number of



people, some well past retirement, who quietly confessed to having been raped or abused in childhood. Although it doesn't happen to everyone, it isn't rare. As a middle-aged pastor, I listen more, and hear more, and now know that there is a world of sexual secrets around us, even in a happy, conservative congregation. Religion doesn't seem to help much in suppressing sex, but it does provide means to conceal illicit sex, and sometimes even justify it. (The adulterous couple who always had a session of earnest prayer after their Motel 6 tryst comes to mind.)

It comes down to this: sex is both ordinary and dangerous. It makes babies, but also inflames sick minds. It is rooted in the deepest part of our souls, but may have tethers into the most unstable, pathological parts of us. It is pursued in rather ordinary ways in most relationships, but it can also be expressed in threatening, hurtful ways.

The model we were taught is of a young person who never thinks about sex, only about happy homes and

children, until he or she is married; discreetly does what is necessary to create babies; and forgets about it again afterwards. It is a Victorian ideal that didn't even work during Victorian times. It has never worked very well—just read the Bible. Young people experience sexual feelings before they even know what they are. Almost all men and many women have had some level of sexual



experience when alone.

Those who remain faithful through marriage (and in spite of how popular culture makes it sound, there are many) still have sexual attractions to others. There are those who, from the security of marriage, in the shadow of the church, find themselves drawn (for reasons we don't fully understand) to the terrible and frightening attraction of sex with children, or accompanied by violence. These aren't culturally acceptable in the church and rarely outside of it, but piety is a good camouflage and sometimes an astonishingly successful one.

I have a friend who was raped repeatedly by her church school teacher at about the age of thirteen. Enough suspicion had been raised that the pastor and elders called her in. (Surprisingly—or perhaps not—they didn't question the teacher.) When my friend came before them, she read the future in their faces: they were disposed to disbelieve her, or at least hoped they could find some way not to deal with it. So not to prolong the agony, she (showing the most sense of them all) denied anything had happened, and it was dropped. He moved on to another church school, she to a period of depression and promiscuity.

Deceit, it seems to me, is at the core of sexual sin. But the Christian church has been quite as deceitful as its members. The lie has been that if you set a high fence between marriage sex and everything else, it will always hold. The lie is that we can control sexual behavior with threats. The lie is that once the barrier is breached, it can never again be repaired. The lie is that sexual sins are the worst of all sins, and unusually difficult for God to forgive, if he can forgive them at all.⁶ The lie may be that it simply doesn't happen here. Some believe these things sincerely, and others know better but keep up the fiction because they're afraid of what they might let loose if they don't—as though our denial is holding back the tide of sexual attraction.

Our children haven't bought all this without question. Many (even Christian) young people believe that sex with a boyfriend or girlfriend, or even with several, doesn't necessarily destroy your life. The virginity myth that was widely accepted (if carelessly practiced) for thousands of years has lost adherents. I do not ask young unmarried couples attending church if they are sleeping together; whether or not, my goal is to get them married, not embarrass them and make them unwelcome. From a traditional point of view this may be regrettable, but it is also realistic.

It's hard to fault the traditional model on the grounds of either moral principle or common sense: sex is deeply, spiritually, wired into the soul, and it creates new human beings (or at least it can); and for both reasons it serves us best in the context of a stable relationship.⁷ In a perfect world, that would be self-evident to everyone. But this is far from a perfect world. It is deeply damaged, with deeply damaged inhabitants. And in this context, the criticism that can be advanced against our (the Christian church's) attitude toward sex is not that the ideal is bad, but that there's not much of a fallback position to the inevitable failures. It begins with a refusal to admit that sexual sins are relatively easy to commit, and are surprisingly common, even among Christians.

We hate to acknowledge that, of course, because sex excites the church's deepest shame. For all the simple earthiness about sex in the Bible, the church still does its best to dodge it. We church people sometimes complain that sex is no longer a secret; it is everywhere in Western culture. But that doesn't mean anyone address-

es it constructively.⁸ Because we don't speak of it, we are likely to either overreact, or underreact, when its non-traditional forms present to us.

What I find most regrettable as a pastor is that the unreflective attitudes that form the traditional position fulfill their own expectations. There is no doubt that an extramarital affair is a hurtful thing. To churches inclined to proactivity, the case seems easy to prosecute: indict the first partner to make physical contact with an outsider. The church may then censure or disfellowship.

Informally, friends take sides. That a couple *may* divorce because of infidelity (according to some interpretations of Matthew 19) may even imply that they *ought* to. So marriages that could be saved, or where damage could at least be minimized, are not because we are more interested in enforcement than healing.

But because sexual trespasses are so threatening, they are equally easy to ignore. We find it difficult to confront our church members about them. We may in the process stir up our own fear and guilt. If left alone, those involved may slip away and save us the trouble, and they often do.

Neither response is appropriate for a people whose theological foundation is the healing, restorative grace of God through Jesus Christ. The punitive response supposes that churches are the private club of the sinless—a stupid supposition. Ignoring it achieves no Christian purpose, either, not least because it leaves perpetrators unaccountable and all parties lonely.

Better would be the response like Jesus' to the woman caught in adultery: clear engagement with both the victim and perpetrator, attentive, compassionate, and reassuring of the ubiquity of sin among us and our mutual attempts to grow beyond it. But as long as sexual sins amplify our anxiety beyond almost every other kind of sin, we won't be very redemptive with them. We'll either deny them, or deal harshly with them, but there will be little insight and little healing for what is really a fairly common problem of human life—again, read the Bible.

Should we learn to regard these trespasses with neither panic nor denial, we may discover some advantages. Sexual sins are a major reason that people leave the Adventist church, or are expelled from it. I wonder how many would still be here had we enculturated a redemptive, rather than a punitive,

framework to assist us? We might have thirty million church members rather than half that number.

I suspect benefits would be apparent in dealing with "normal" sexual sins (assuming that an extramarital affair is more normal than, say, rape) as well as criminal and pathological ones. At the very least, it would prevent people from having to go through these experiences alone and give them a place for healing and hope rather than becoming perpetual victims. I've seen those who have been raped or abused (such as my friend mentioned earlier) recover in remarkable ways when placed in a thoughtful and supportive environment, where healing, rather than a ruined life, is assumed.

Like the continuum between anger and murder, the psychological territory between sexual trespass and rape or pedophilia is complex and difficult to map. Yet even rape and pedophilia, which must be dealt with criminally, and whose perpetrators must be removed from society, have to be seen in light of a world broken in just about every particular. That takes an almost Christ-like maturity; but prove to me that God can't forgive, and save, and have living next to you in heaven, someone we wouldn't allow near our children down here!

Much of what I'm talking about might fall together naturally were we to give a proper weight to this sin, against all the others. About sexual sin, C. S. Lewis wrote,

I want to make it clear that the centre of Christian morality is not here. . . . The sins of the flesh are bad, but they are the least bad of all sins. All the worst pleasures are purely spiritual: the pleasure of putting other people in the wrong, of bossing and patronising and spoiling sport, and backbiting; the pleasures of power, of hatred. For there are two things inside me, competing with the human self which I must try to become. They are the Animal self, and the Diabolical self. The Diabolical self is the worse of the two. That is why a cold, self-righteous prig who goes regularly to church may be far nearer to hell than a prostitute.

"But of course," he added, "it is better to be neither."⁹ ■

Notes and References

1. My Sabbath School teacher insisted that they weren't really naked, but clothed with light, an idea that finds support in Ellen White's *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 3 (Battle Creek, Mich., 1864), 34.
2. Prentiss L. Pemberton, *Dialogue in Romantic Love: Promise and*

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Communication (Valley Forge, Penn.: Judson Books, 1961). It had the advantage of being a bit more progressive than the Adventist alternatives, *On Becoming a Man*, and *On Becoming a Woman*, in the latter of which Harold Shryock, in at least one edition, recommended female circumcision. "There are teenage girls who, impelled by an unwholesome curiosity or by the example of unscrupulous girl friends, have fallen into the habit of manipulating these sensitive tissues as a means of excitement. This habit is spoken of as masturbation. . . . There is an anatomical factor that sometimes causes irritation about the clitoris and thus encourages a manipulation of the delicate reproductive organs. . . . Oftentimes the remedy for this situation consists of a minor surgical operation spoken of as circumcision. This operation is not hazardous and is much to be preferred to allowing the condition of irritation to continue." Harold Shryock, *On Becoming a Woman: A Book for Teen-Age Girls* (Victoria, Australia: Signs, 1968), 38.

3. Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* (New York: Penguin, 1980).

4. Please understand: I am not equating homosexuality with pedophilia and rape, only that it fell into the same unmentionable category in many minds.

5. It is surprising that Adventists have, for the most part, dodged the issue of masturbation, given an early revelation of our prophet on the topic. See Ellen White, *An Appeal to Mothers* (Battle Creek, Mich., 1864).

6. Many a pastor has heard a church member say that because of a past sexual trespass he or she fears having committed the unpardonable sin.

7. I say traditional, rather than biblical, because the biblical model isn't all that clear. Could you recommend that a young person emulate the family life of most of the Old Testament's major characters? Also, although the New Testament gives more practical guidelines, it still permits polygamy.

8. C. S. Lewis explains it this way: "They tell you sex is a mess because it has been hushed up. But for the last twenty years it has not been hushed up.... I think it is the other way around. I think the human race originally hushed it up because it had become such a mess." C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Collier, 1960), 91.

9. *Ibid.*, 94.

Loren Seibold is senior pastor of the Worthington, Ohio, Seventh-day Adventist Church.

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Examining the Biblical Texts about Homosexuality *Toward the Unity of the Body of Christ* | BY JOHN R. JONES

For Seventh-day Adventists, human considerations matter.¹ But such considerations do not suffice. As “people of the Book,” we instinctively turn to Scripture for guidance. We want help, and we want it on authority that transcends anecdotal or “common sense” appeals. So it is with questions of our sexual relationships. Early in any discussion of how we should sexually express our love for one another, the question of “what the Bible says” urges itself upon us. We experience it as foundational, *a priori*.

I write from the perspective of a heterosexual Caucasian male who through schooling and practice has arrived at certain insights into scriptural interpretation. My sociocultural location inevitably affects my perspective, even as I seek to listen sincerely to the voices (scriptural and contemporary) engaged in this conversation. As a student of Scripture, I come to the text with the scholarly tools of both traditional historical analysis and more recent literary approaches. These two locations—sociocultural and academic—I take as grounds for humility and continuing open-mindedness in proffering what follows.

What the Texts Meant

We will cut through much underbrush if we keep our questions framed correctly. In asking, *What biblical implications can we find for the ethics and boundaries of sexual expression in the context of loving same-sex relationships?* we can immediately set aside the horrific stories of Genesis 19 and Judges 19 as irrelevant. These accounts may have much to say about patriarchal hospitality codes, male control over women’s sexuality, and ethnic/tribal identity in ancient Israel, but we can only regard the same-sex aspect as serving at most to underscore the sense of contravention of boundaries.² Sodom and Gomorrah

subsequently function in Hebrew Scripture as bywords for a variety of evils from pride to oppression, but without reference to homosexuality.³

The Holiness Code

Leviticus 17–26 encodes the legal framework of Israelite society as attributed back to Moses.⁴ This framework structures an ethic of ritual purity, a code of sacral taboos through which Israel is to maintain a state of holiness before God. Always fragile and subject to threat, this state is constantly to be reinforced not only through ritual ceremonies, but also through meticulous observances in the sphere of everyday life. Included among its injunctions are the two instances of outright prohibition of same-sex intercourse to be found in the Bible: “You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination” (18:22); and “If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall be put to death, their blood is upon them” (20:13).⁵

Throughout the Holiness Code, it is only the adult males of the community, the “sons of Israel,” who are addressed; what women do sexually with women is not on the horizon. In the prohibition in Chapter 18, together with its sanction in Chapter 20, the wrongness resides in the feminizing treatment of one male by another: “as with a woman.” This pattern of concern over the blurring of distinctions in the conventional order is evident in many of the ceremonial law’s stipulations.⁶

Such stipulations forbid the mixing of two kinds of crops in one field, the wearing of garments composed of more than one type of fabric, or the crossbreeding of animals (Lev. 19:19).⁷ Some of them have to do with dietary practices (17:10–16), some with degrees of consanguinity for sexual relations (18:6–18), some with the trimming of hair and beard (19:27), and much else. In all, the

expressed intent is to avoid contamination by association with any practices that characterize other peoples. "You shall be holy to me; for I the LORD am holy, and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be mine" (20:26). This holiness, then, is marked not only by separation from surrounding nations, but also by observance of other separations that the Israelites understood to express the canonic order of the universe.

Furthermore, the proscription against sex between males is understood to apply only to penetrative sex, for only so is the ancient taboo against the mixing of kinds violated.

With regard to the distinction between sexes, such a practice caused a man to be used as a woman—as a passive recipient of male "seed." With regard to the cultic identity of Israel, it contaminated their ceremonial purity by bringing in activities identified with the Canaanites. On both counts, the concern was not over an individual's sexual orientation or expression per se; homosexuality as we understand it today from the standpoint of the individual was simply absent from the thinking behind these injunctions.⁸ Rather, the concern was wholly corporate: it was to protect the symbolic markers between Israel and her neighbors. In this perspective, one's sexual conduct was no mere personal matter; it was loaded with overtones of cultural and national identity. And it was these overtones that determined the attitudes and sanctions regarding sexual behavior.

All of this, of course, comes to us as background. It participates in that larger conversation between Judaism and Christianity that began in New Testament times. And it poses again for us, as for the earliest Christian thinkers, the question, *How does scriptural fidelity relate to a religious heritage that vests its sexual norms in precisely those distinctions that are overcome in Christ?*

This article turns on that question. In the New Testament, the question brings into conversation three religio-cultural worlds—the ancient Israelite, the Hellenistic Roman, and the emerging Christian. Although

early Christians interact with both their Hebraic heritage and the thought world of gentile society, they are nonetheless shaping a new moral order. And in that order, they see themselves pushing beyond their two roots. It started with Jesus: he was understood to have both demonstrated and authorized the process. In him, questions of gender roles and relations, of the Holiness Code, of Jew/gentile interactions and much else are laid open to new perspectives.

With explicit regard to same-sex relations, however, we must wait for Paul to open the discussion; here the canonical Gospels provide no input from Jesus.⁹

For you were
called to free-
dom, brothers
and sisters;
only do not
use your
freedom as an
opportunity
for self-
indulgence.

Gal. 5:13

brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence" (Gal. 5:13; compare v. 16). For Paul, flesh and spirit represent two opposite principles at work in human life. Even with all of his instinctive holism, he juxtaposes the works of one and the fruits of the other as setting the terms of our reach toward wholeness and freedom in Christ.¹¹

The implications are many and far reaching. But when it comes to how we shall live as Christians in this world,

The Gospel According to Paul

For Paul, the fact that the core of the gospel is the divine initiative toward humankind, centering in Jesus' death and resurrection, provides the lodestone from which he constantly takes his theological and ethical bearings. His construction of Christian theology around the cross of Christ provides the decisive standard for Christian life; nothing must be allowed to impinge on the believer's freedom, purchased at highest cost.¹⁰ It is for the sake of freedom that Christ has liberated us. This is no trivial matter; we are summoned to stand firm in that freedom, refusing to compromise the efficacy of Christ's cross by reintroducing superstitions of either pagan or Judaic origin into our walk by faith.

At the same time, this is no license for irresponsible or profligate behavior. "For you were called to freedom,

Paul is nowhere more pointed than in his famous summation at the close of Galatians 3: "As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise." This single visionary statement demonstrates what the cross of Jesus means for Paul. It provides a focal lens through which to view all of his pronouncements on human relations, and points the trajectory for our own ongoing hermeneutic as we take up the task of appropriating his principles for our own time.

In light of Paul's first pairing above, our first question, "What biblical implications can we find for the ethics and boundaries of sexual expression in the context of loving same-sex relationships?" gets pulled directly into the second, "How does scriptural fidelity relate to a religious heritage that vests its sexual norms in precisely those distinctions that are overcome in Christ?"

We have observed the Levitical conviction that sex between Israelite males breaches the ethnic identity of the Hebrew people, who defined their chosenness and ceremonial purity in terms of their descent from Abraham. Now when these cultural and national bounds are transcended in Christ, the ground is cut out from under the proscriptions in Leviticus 18 and 20. When Paul affirms the equality of Jew and gentile before God, he is dismantling the framework on which these proscriptions stand.

To be sure, the distinction remains between God's holy people ("saints," as Paul regularly addresses them) and an unholy world. But if the distinction is now to be marked along nontribal lines, then any of the traditional markers must now be shown to carry other water, or go the way of that central symbol of tribal identity, circumcision. Paul's principle becomes more interesting as he pushes further: Just how far does this erasure of difference, in Christ, extend?

Clearly it goes far enough that when Paul wants to differentiate between life in the Spirit and the life of

fleshly indulgence, he can readily reach beyond the Judaic pale to gentile norms for support. His frequent use of catalogs of vices (as well as of virtues) appears to be shaped not so much by one-to-one correspondences with specific behaviors in a given situation as by conventional listings in popular Greco-Roman literature of the day.¹² Whether appropriated directly from commonplace moralizing in the larger world or mediated through Hellenistic Jewish tradition, these concatenations provide Paul with ready-made markers for the bounds of conduct for those who belong to the Kingdom.¹³

Sexual references make limited appearances in these lists. Unsurprisingly, the general term *pornos* , designating a fornicator, adulterer, or otherwise sexually immoral person, is the most common sexual term in such New Testament catalogs, occurring at 1 Corinthians 5:9, 10 and 11; 6:9; 1 Timothy 1:10; and Revelation 21:8 and 22:15.¹⁴

Same-sex considerations do, however, arise at two points, in 1 Corinthians 6:9, and 1 Timothy 1:10, with the terms *arsenokoitēs* and *malakos* .

The Pauline Vice Lists

In 1 Corinthians 6, Paul is working against the readiness of some Christians to go to court against their fellow believers over perceived wrongs. In

reproving them, he lists the kind of people in the world to whom they are turning for justice: "Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, sodomites, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers—none of these will inherit the kingdom of God" (6:9–10). Where the 1952 Revised Standard Version has "homosexuals," the 1972 edition has "sexual perverts." In either case (as with the New International Version's "homosexual offenders"), these expressions combine a pair of terms in the Greek text, *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai* . These two terms stand behind the expressions *male prostitutes* and *sodomites* in the New Revised Standard Version.

Paul is progressively building up a conventional catalog of kinds of people who carried some stigma in the larger

Do you not
know that
wrongdoers
will not
inherit the
kingdom of
God?

1 Cor. 6:9

society, to make his point of Christian distinctiveness. To the four examples in 5:10, he adds two more in verse 11 and an additional four in 6:9–10:¹⁵

1 Corinthians 5:10	1 Corinthians 5:11	1 Corinthians 6:9–10
immoral	immoral	immoral
greedy	greedy	idolators
robbers	idolators	adulterers
idolators	revilers	<i>malakoi</i>
	drunkards	<i>arsenokoitai</i>
	robbers	thieves
		greedy
		drunkards
		revilers
		robbers

This may be evidence that Paul is here depending on pre-established catalogs, without focusing on any particular item. The lists lengthen for rhetorical effect.¹⁶ As for *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai*, the two terms are not grammatically paired—as are the “greedy” and the “robbers” of the first list. Rather, they are separated by the same “or” as are the other terms. Accordingly, we will consider them separately.

Malakos. Used adjectivally, this term carries the basic quality of “softness.” In the New Testament, it appears three times in this usage (twice in Matt. 11:8; and in the parallel, Luke 7:25); modifying the noun *clothing*. Jesus contrasts the ruggedness of anyone who lives in the desert with those who live luxuriously in palaces, and his peasant hearers would have appreciated the jibe. But the fact that this saying is preserved in the Gospels implies that it also resonated later with Christians in the larger Roman world who found themselves under duress from the rulers of their day. If soft living was a marker of the oppressor, then by contrast the oppressed were bound to see themselves at its opposite, more stringent pole. Such a stance could stiffen their resistance to persecution, strengthening spines by means of a certain hard-edged style.

So natural was this tendency that it could descend into outright bravado. Again it is Matthew and Luke who give us the picture of a macho Peter at the Last Supper, avowing his steadfastness and prompting his fellow disciples to join in (Matt. 26:33–35 = Luke 22:33–34). The incident, surely, is recorded as a cautionary word to later believers, as to how the threat of persecution is to be met: not with swagger but with the steadfast firmness

of faith.¹⁷ Evidently the caution was needed.

This connotation provides an important interpretive frame for the one time the term *malakos* appears as a noun in the New Testament. In its plural form, *malakoi* is included in the listing of unworthy types in 1 Corinthians 6. Polycarp (d. 155 C.E.), himself a voluntary martyr, similarly uses it in his listing of those who will not inherit the Kingdom.¹⁸ By contrast, when Polycarp enters the arena of his death, he hears a voice from heaven: “Be strong, Polycarp, and play the man [*andrizou*].”¹⁹

For a community under such pressure, it is hardly surprising that a certain semantic polarity would evolve between the strength of character that endures and the kind of weakness that folds. And given the dualistic assumptions of the Greco-Roman world, it was equally predictable that the former would be invested with overtones of manly virtue, whereas the latter would be projected as effeminate.²⁰

Such a construct, under life-and-death conditions, goes well beyond mere dismissals of wimpiness as a personal affect. This was serious business. The gospel’s summons, even in its call to freedom, was also a summons to a certain stern and austere ethos. Paul’s military metaphors draw upon what was doubtless the standard view, in early Christian circles, of their situation. Members saw themselves engaged in a vital “struggle” (Eph. 6:12) against forces both spiritual and physical (Rom. 8:38–39). They were called to become “more than conquerors” (8:37) over the hardship, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, and sword they confronted in an alien world. Such conditions inevitably shape the social codes of any group so positioned. Clearly, early Christians found themselves threading their way between the two extremes of overassertiveness and capitulation.

Even short of voluntary martyrdom, then, there could be little room for “softness.” That *malakoi* would come to appear among conventional listings of undesirables in such circles is hardly surprising. In such a world, whether in a Palestinian Jewish setting or a gentile Christian context, Jesus’ dig at voluptuaries who wear soft clothing would have served to caricature who the oppressors were—and who his followers were not. With or without intimations of any particular sexual conduct, the term would certainly have addressed a larger issue having to do with the integrity of the community: Would they all prove faithful under duress? Were they made of the right stuff?

Viewed through sociological glasses, a certain rough-hewn ethos would seem to have already been natural to the underclass who made up much of the Christian community in Corinth (1 Cor. 1:26–28). Prior to their conversion, it would have served as a class marker, and now as Christians they could readily carry forward that same code to mark their even greater distance from the alien world of privileged social elites who were additionally becoming their oppressors. Within the faith, Paul could play to such attitudes by contrasting the “super-apostles” (2 Cor. 11:5; 12:11), who always escaped hardship, with his own sufferings for Christ (11:23–29). All the more, then, could he appeal to that code as a way of distancing the believers from the outsiders to whom they were turning for redress of disagreements among themselves. How could they take individual recourse to such *malakoi*, the silken magistrates of a legal system that was the instrument of their oppression as a group?

None of this, of course, negates the possibility that the term *malakos* included male homosexual behavior. It simply locates the opprobrium where it belongs: as part of a larger pattern of self-indulgent, lustful living that was precisely the opposite of the values the threatened underclass of Christians espoused.²¹ Under the duress of worldly challenges and the shortness of the hour, even heterosexual marriage could be but grudgingly accommodated as an alternative to “burning” (1 Cor. 7:6–9). Given the universal assumption of the day that homosexual relations were motivated simply by fleshly passion, neither the conduct nor the self-indulgent style of which it was perceived to be a part had any place in the beleaguered community’s life.

Arsenokoitēs. This noun, composed as it is of two Greek words *arsēn* (male) and *koitē* (a bed, euphemistically used for sexual intercourse), invites a straightforward interpretation as a male who engages sexually with other males. But if we take seriously the appropriate cautions against

mechanically turning to etymologies—actual or supposed—to define the semantic domain of a term, we must dig deeper.²² Given the fact that meaning is contextually determined, a term’s signification is best traced by observing its function in as many contexts as possible—especially those closest in time and subject matter.

When it comes to the noun *Arsenokoitēs* or the verb *arsenokoitein*, however, we have few such resources. The term appears to be a coinage of the Jewish community of Paul’s day; the first instances of any form are its two appearances in the New Testament letters (*arsenokoitai*, 1 Cor. 6:9;

arsenokoitais, 1 Tim. 1:10). The two halves of the word appear as separate words in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, at the two Levitical prohibitions considered above.²³ The composite term, then, may well have been a common usage in Hellenistic Jewish circles, derived from these Levitical texts.

Essentially, we are dependent on the appearances of this term in the vice lists of the Greek Christian writings. Still, certain clear pointers reside there, providing important guidance. First, the vices in the conventional catalogs of undesirable behaviors can be seen to cluster themselves in overarching categories, such as sexual misconduct, violence, injustice, and others. Second, in the two New Testament occurrences of the term, it appears precisely in between sexual and other sins—especially greed, selfishness, and exploitation. Third, the same ordering appears in a comparable list in a second-century Christian treatise by Theophilus of Antioch, *To*

Autolychnus. This pattern suggests that the sequence may have been conventional and the term may well have incorporated both elements—exploitive and selfish behavior of a sexual sort. This implication of the ordering receives some reinforcement from the term’s occurrence in another second century source, Aristides’ *Apologia*, where it is connected with the idea of being “an obsessive corrupter of boys.”²⁴



Indeed, if we ask which of the two aspects is the leading one, the emphasis may well be on that of economic or even violent coercion. At an earlier point in Theophilus's work, there is a similar listing, in which *arsenokoitēs* is separated from sins of sexual immorality, to appear among those of economic injustice.²⁵ The case is bolstered by other extracanonical examples, drawn from the *Sibylline Oracle* (2:70–77) and from the second-century *Acts of John* (2:279–82), showing that *arsenokoitēs* occurs in these vice lists, “not where we would expect to find reference to homosexual intercourse—that is, along with adultery (*moicheia*) and prostitution or illicit sex (*porneia*)—but among vices related to economic injustice or exploitation.”²⁶ The plural form *koitai* (as in Rom. 13:13) evidently points to repetitive conduct, excessive sexual behavior, whether as obsession or prostitution. It is quite possible “that the author attached to the compound a meaning like ‘male prostitution.’”²⁷

So we almost certainly have to do with homoerotic activity of an exploitative sort. This is about as far as the rather cryptic references in vice lists can get us.

The Significance of Romans 1

Romans 1:24–27 contains the Bible's only substantive consideration of homosexual conduct. The two sentences in verses 26b and 27 are the interpretive crux of debates concerning scriptural teachings on same-sex relations. Yet even here this matter is subsidiary to Paul's larger and more central purpose in writing to the Christian community in Rome: winning acceptance both for himself personally and for his understanding of the gospel. And he is trying to do this among people whom he has not met and who number both Jewish and gentile believers—among whom there were bound to be tensions. So he has thought out his approach with care.

Building on his conviction that in Christ there is neither Jew nor gentile, he wants to unite both groups of believers at the foot of the cross. He is headed for the point (in Chapter 3) where he can speak of the central revelation from God: all are equally sinful, and all, whether or not they have the Judaic law in their background, are equally justified on the basis of faith (3:21–26). So in Romans 1:16–17, Paul boldly sets out the good news of God's righteousness: “The one who is righteous will live by faith.”

To bring out the implications for Jews and non-Jews alike, Paul then makes the standard move of Christian evan-

gelism. He steps back to a prior revelation that is not news—certainly not to his Jewish-Christian audience, whom he is especially addressing here: God's wrath has already been revealed against all who suppress the truth (1:18). This case is developed through four paragraphs in Chapter 1, beginning with verses 18, 24, 26, and 28, respectively.²⁸ The first paragraph (1:18–23) makes clear that this entire section (1:18–32) is an indictment of non-Jewish inhabitants of the Greco-Roman world. Their idolatry is the source of the problems in the following verses, for they have turned away from the divine revelation that they have received via the observable world, exchanging the Creator's glory for images of the creatures—human and subhuman:

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of those who by their wickedness suppress the truth. “For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. “Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made. So they are without excuse; “for though they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened. “Claiming to be wise, they became fools; “and they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling a mortal human being or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles.

The next three paragraphs unfold God's continuing withdrawal in consequence of this idolatry. This progressive divine resignation can be traced through two levels of depravity, one having to do with impurity (*akatharsia*, uncleanness), and the other with moral evil (*adikia*, *ponēria*, wickedness, evil). The distinction is marked: on the second level, in the two paragraphs dealing with the dishonoring of their bodies in impurity (1:24), Paul disparages their conduct along lines of Hellenistic Jewish propaganda against gentiles, which in turn draws upon attitudes of certain Greco-Roman thinkers themselves.²⁹ The fourth paragraph (1:28–32) returns to the “ungodliness and wickedness” (*asebeia*, *adikia*, v. 18) of the first level and the first paragraph:

Level 1	Paragraph 1	Paragraph 4
moral evil	18–23	28–32
Level 2	Paragraph 2	Paragraph 3
ceremonial impurity	24–25	26–27

There is a certain crescendo in all this, discernable even within Level 2. In true rhetorical style, Paul rounds off his second paragraph with a ritual invocation of God's name:

²⁴*Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the degrading of their bodies among themselves, ²⁵because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.*

It goes without saying that the "Amen" signals a chorus of assent from his Jewish hearers.

That interruption, however, requires him to repeat his refrain with the beginning of his third paragraph:

²⁶*For this reason God gave them up to degrading passions. Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, ²⁷and in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion with one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the due penalty for their error.*

Then Paul's technique of the ascending effect becomes more marked as he shifts levels. Again the refrain, "God gave them up," at the beginning of his fourth paragraph:

²⁸*And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind and to things that should not be done.*

²⁹*They were filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice. Full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, craftiness, they are gossips, ³⁰slanderers, God-haters, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, rebellious toward parents, ³¹foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. ³²They know God's decree, that those who practice such things deserve to die—yet they not only do them but even applaud others who practice them.*

This extensive vice list deepens the wrongness from what is shameful (literally, "shameless," "disgraceful") and unnatural to outright evil. Such moral language is anticipated in the first paragraph but is absent in the middle two paragraphs, which deal with same-sex relations. At the same time, the matter of same-sex relations is lacking in the catalog of evils in the final paragraph.³⁰ Even as his cadence quickens, Paul's declamation deepens his charge.

In all of this, we see the dynamic of a new religious movement in conversation with its religious and philo-

sophical precedents. This process is just getting under way in the first Christian century.

Vis-à-vis Greco-Roman thought, three main issues emerge: attitudes toward pleasure, attitudes toward procreation, and understandings of natural order. The first two considerations interact to some extent. Already with Plato, any sexual act pursued for the sake of pleasure over the citizen's duty to produce offspring for the state is a personal defeat in one's struggle against self-indulgence.³¹ The Stoics would largely have concurred, primarily on grounds of natural law.³²

Paul's admonition to make no provision for gratifying fleshly desires (Gal. 5:16) would at first seem to be of a piece with the stern voice of self-governance (*autarcheia*) as a Greco-Roman ideal. Yet even though his attitude toward marriage is concessive, his reminder to couples to attend to each other's sexual desires (1 Cor. 7:1–7) grants the legitimacy of pleasure in the Christian life.³³ And with time in this world running out (7:29), Paul would hardly have subordinated sexual fulfillment to an imperative for procreation. In these two regards, then, he stands over against an important current of his time. In Romans 1, however, his opposition lies elsewhere.

With the expression "unnatural" (*para phusin*, "contrary to nature") Paul moves into conversation with both the gentile and Judaic perspectives. On the Greek side, Plato had already used the expression to characterize male homogenital sex.³⁴ Additional instances from around the ancient Mediterranean world, using the same expression as a regular reference, can readily be cited.³⁵

In what senses is homogenital sex thought of as contrary to nature in the gentile world? Its nonprocreative character is part of the picture, together with the popular notion that animals, as exemplifying the "natural" order, engage only in opposite-sex mating.³⁶ Greco-Roman writers do not seem to be personalizing the matter, as if same-sex intercourse were a contravention of the particular individual's heterosexual nature.³⁷ It is possible, but less likely, that *para phusin* is to be translated in these references as "beyond natural passion," given popular notions of the day that associated pederasty with excessive lustfulness.³⁸ Essentially, it means that which is nonstandard, outside the norm. While the expression in gentile usage could refer to a number of sexual practices, it certainly included same-sex intercourse, as here in Romans 1.³⁹

The issue, of course, is to what extent this common-

place way of referring to homogenital sex involved a moral judgment in Hellenistic Roman society. It is true that "the concept of 'natural law' was not fully developed until more than a millennium after Paul's death, and it is anachronistic to read it into his words."⁴⁰ Even so, four popular notions seem to have entered into conventional ideas about homogenital sex in relation to what was understood to be natural.⁴¹ First, while heterosexuality and homosexuality as constructions of the self, together with any underlying considerations of biology, psychology, or sociology, were far from the conceptual horizon of that day, the standard assumption was that same-sex intercourse was a deliberate overriding of a universal "natural" desire for the opposite sex. It was, in short, regarded as a choice. Second, that choice was assumed to be motivated by inordinate and overly indulged sexual appetites. Third, the practices of the time, whether involving pederasty, male prostitution, or male/male intercourse between master and slave, were uniformly understood to involve established relations of dominance and submission—thus demeaning a male into assuming what was "naturally" the female role. The ostensible natural order was thereby being confused. Fourth, it was feared that homoerotic practice could lead to infertility—with potential for the extinction of the human race. This was predicated on an assumption that, just as heterosexual attraction was the natural and universal norm, so same-sex attraction was a temptation for everyone.

Two key observations immediately follow. First, what passed for "natural" in the Greco-Roman world was in fact "what was culturally prevalent and socially accepted."⁴² Second, homogenital sex, at least between males, was starting to be disparaged as indecent conduct. Although there were several reservations about the practice, they converged in the appeal to what nature, however construed, seemed to imply. It was not condemned on moral grounds; but by Paul's time, even the gentile world was beginning to voice disapproval.⁴³



Paul builds on this. In so doing, he has ample precedent from Jewish sources, which in turn found ready ammunition in the reservations emerging in the larger Roman world. So the Jewish philosopher Philo writes from Alexandria at about the same time, disparaging same-sex practices as a gentile vice. For him, the epitome of the problem was its shameless alteration of nature. "In fact, the transformation of the male nature to the female is practiced by them as an art and does not raise a blush."⁴⁴

Just as Paul shares the common assumption among Greeks and Jews about same-sex relations as flying in

nature's face, so he also shares the common conception as to what nature is. First, he consistently uses the term *phusis* to refer not to an overarching principle, but to specific instances of the "nature of" some particular person or thing.⁴⁵ Second, of the eleven occurrences of "nature" (*phusis*) or "natural" (*phusikōs*) in the Pauline writings, this passage in Romans 1 is the only one into which one could read a moral principle.⁴⁶ Third, Paul is as indebted to his contemporary cultural norms for his allusions to "nature" as are his gentile counterparts.⁴⁷ It is this cultural element that accounts for the shading of "unnatural" (*para phusin*) over into "shameless" (*aschēmosunē*) in Romans 1:27, a common judgment on pederasty in Paul's time. These considerations, taken together, locate Paul's reference to nature within the conventional grounds on which Hellenistic Roman criticisms were being expressed.

The Jewish perspective, however, does impose a further judgment on homoerotic acts, beyond the gentile reservations. Standard Jewish associations of homoerotic sex with pagan idolatry do add an overlay of moral judgment, which comes through in the first paragraph (that is, Level 1) of this passage. The most obvious connection is with temple prostitution, though Paul, like his fellow Jews, views the whole matter more broadly. Here in Romans 1, homogenital sexual practices

symbolize the whole problem of the estrangement from God that follows from false religion.

This, of course, is a rhetorical choice on Paul's part. From a Christian standpoint all false divinities are nothing.⁴⁸ But here in Romans 1, Paul chooses another stance, involving a twofold shift of perspective. First, the practitioners are envisioned here apart from any reference to Christianity; it is their pagan devotion to the creature rather than to the Creator that, ironically, leads them to act against the nature they claim to venerate. Second, Paul is speaking here in the voice of pre-Christian Jews in echoing their denunciations of what they especially regarded as a gentile vice.

While Paul is indeed driving toward a united community of gentile and Jewish Christians at the foot of the Cross, the only way to get there, he understands, is to bring home to each group their absolute dependence on God's forgiveness. There is to be no distinction: all have sinned and fallen short of God's glory; all are now justified only by God's grace (Rom. 3:22–24). Any vestige of their pre-Christian superiorities toward each other will prevent their acceptance of what Christ has done for all. Hence the double shift: In order to get at the problem of any such vestiges, Paul has clearly backed up to the pre-Christian conditions and attitudes of both groups.

Paul's primary target in this is his fellow Jews. The point, ultimately, is less what gentiles have done than what the Jews' attitude toward them has been.⁴⁹ His strategy, accordingly, is to bring to the surface those old judgments so as to deal with them from a Christian standpoint. By aligning himself with the pre-Christian Jewish perspective in Romans 1, Paul positions himself to hold up a mirror before their eyes in Chapter 2.

To be sure, when he gets there he will undercut Jewish judgmentalism, not by defending the gentiles' behavior but by extending the guilt to their Jewish critics. "Therefore you have no excuse, whoever you are, when you judge others, for in passing judgment on another you condemn

yourself, because you, the judge, are doing the very same things" (Rom. 2:1). Even so, his point of departure in Romans 1 is a judgment that has its native roots in ancient Hebraic convictions—and so owes nothing to the reservations that were beginning to arise in the surrounding gentile world.⁵⁰ Paul must engage his compatriots on their own terms. In so doing, he falls back upon the locutions of his years of proclaiming the gospel in Jewish synagogues.⁵¹

This helps us understand why Paul as a Christian relies on pre-Christian Jewish sources for his language. There is hardly a word in Romans 1:24–27, that does not echo

Hellenistic Jewish propaganda against gentiles.⁵² Paul's indebtedness brings with it the language of impurity (*akatharsia*), dishonor (*atimazesthai*, *atimias*), and shame (*aschēmosunēn*).⁵³

None of this implies that Paul does not disparage the conduct in these verses; he clearly does. But in aligning himself with traditional Jewish judgments he reverts into that earlier world of condemnation. Here the ancient cultic taboos still operate. Here the wrongness once again expresses the tribal markers. Level 2 (paragraphs 2 and 3) of this passage reprieves precisely those elements of Judaic separatism that Paul wants to evoke.

If his Jewish compatriots regard homogenital relations as the epitome of pagan difference from themselves, Paul moves to shift the ground of the discussion. He can indeed speak of godlessness (*asebeia*), wickedness (*adikia*), outright evil, and malice (*ponēria*, *kakia*).

Rom. 2:1

This deeply moralizing language of

Level 1 (paragraphs 1 and 4) makes clear

that, for Paul, the first and deepest result of idolatry is outright sinfulness, as catalogued in the longest and most explicit vice list in his writings.⁵⁴ On this Level 1, devoid of all reference to sexual misconduct, Paul will eventually turn the table on his compatriots, accusing them, too, of openly flouting the divine will. Then, having already been filled up with such evil, the gentiles further experience the impurity to which God resigns them.⁵⁵ This is the second, and secondary, negative outcome of idolatry, which Paul carefully restricts to Level 2 of the

You have
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passage, and for which he uses quite different language.

Here in Romans 1 the real conversation between Christianity and Judaism has not yet begun. It will begin with the Jews' culpability in Chapter 2 and will emerge more fully with the divine remedy in 3:21f. But in our present passage, Paul has so positioned himself that no daylight yet opens up between the Judaism of his day and his rhetorical stance. It is mistaken, then, to look here for the definitive word on same-sex relations or anything else from a developed Christian standpoint.

What the Texts Mean for Us Today

Our overarching question, "What biblical implications can we find for the ethics and boundaries of sexual expression in the context of loving same-sex relationships?" turns in part on the subsidiary question, "How does scriptural fidelity relate to a religious heritage that vests its sexual norms in precisely those distinctions that are overcome in Christ?" So let us consider them in reverse order, with particular reference to Romans 1.

Sexual Norms and the Distinctions Overcome in Christ

Today's discussion of Romans 1 centers primarily on the issue of the moral status of the same-sex conduct that Paul adduces there. There is no question of his strongly negative perception; the question is, *What are the grounds for that negativity?* Several issues feed into the various attempts to answer this question. One's answer can largely be predicted from which of these issues rises to the top in the eyes of a given interpreter.

Sin or uncleanness? For some who take their cue from Paul's expression "unnatural" (*para phusin*), the determinative considerations remain those of natural law.⁵⁶ For such, this principle moves to the fore as a divinely ordained creation order, despite the culturally conditioned character of the gender assumptions reflected in the New Testament and the Greco-Roman world. This approach regularly accompanies a reading of the Levitical taboos as absolute, definitive scriptural injunctions for all times and circumstances. By privileging this issue of natural law, these interpreters seek to present the Holiness Code as still morally binding in Christ. Paul's language in Romans 1:26f, though admittedly couched in terms of impurity, is then regarded as a reaffirmation of unexceptionable regulations reflecting a universal order.

But the difficulties remain: The ancient Holiness Code did indeed proceed from a perceived creation order, but it is at most an open question whether such an order as a theological principle can be traced through Romans 1. If so, it has to be taken as a singular use of an argument from nature as a cosmic principle of morality on Paul's part. If so, one must explain the marked difference between Levels 1 and 2 in this passage, where Paul so consistently references homogenital sex in cultic rather than moral terms.

Above all, we are left with the reduction of morality to casuistry. The focus on homosexual acts can become a device for working around contemporary insights into sexual orientation: One can treat same-sex orientation as a morally neutral phenomenon, while proscribing its expression as a moral evil.⁵⁷ But so behavioral an approach, while mirroring that of the Levitical codes, falls short of an adequately Christian perspective.⁵⁸ "If homosexual practice is to be discussed in a Christian context as culpable in all cases, it should be articulated as sin and not as uncleanness—because the New Testament has delegitimized the latter category."⁵⁹ In regarding uncleanness as sin, we risk collapsing together categories that, even prior to Christ, are distinguished in Scripture.

Alternatively, interpreters who recognize the strongly cultic nature of the Level 2 language in the Romans 1 passage do not attempt to stretch it beyond the symbolic world of ritual purity. From this standpoint, it is enough to state,

While Paul wrote of such acts as being unclean, dishonorable, improper, and "over against nature," he did not apply the language of sin to them at all. Instead, he treated homosexual behavior as an integral if unpleasingly dirty aspect of Gentile culture. It was not in itself sinful, but had been visited upon the Gentiles as recompense for sins, chiefly the sin of idolatry but also those of social disruption.⁶⁰

Such a reading has the advantage of allowing the texts to function in the mode in which they actually speak. By respecting the distinction Paul himself observed, it avoids the fallacy of arguing that somehow in Christ the two levels are collapsed into one.

Seventh-day Adventists have been particularly sensitive to the distinction between the ceremonial and the moral law, taking the seventh-day Sabbath's inclusion in the Decalogue precisely as the criterion of its endurance into the Christian era.⁶¹ The ceremonial law, by contrast, fades

out in the face of the new reality that Christ brings.⁶² The question now becomes one of our readiness to indeed accept that new reality in Christ.

Christian or pre-Christian? All of these interpretations take some passing notice of Paul's rhetorical strategy in the opening chapters of Romans. His intent, it is universally understood, is comparable to that of a parable in which the hearer is drawn in to a particular perspective, then is caught by surprise as that perspective is applied to the hearer in unanticipated ways. So the Jews here, having had their judgments against gentiles brought to the surface, are to be shown their own need of divine grace. But as correct as this observation is, Paul's strategy of speaking requires it to be met on our part with a more considered strategy of reading. Most interpretations proceed from an apparently unexamined assumption that Paul's voice in Romans 1:18–32, is that of a Christian theologian making definitive pronouncements about homoeroticism. This flattening of the text simply fails to catch the voice in which Paul speaks.

For here in Romans 1:18–32, it is not fully Paul's own Christian voice. Indeed, even in Romans 2, where he turns the table on his compatriots, he is still addressing them simply as Jews, not yet as converts to Christ. This is not to make of his presentation a pretense; he is utterly serious about what he is saying. But he is saying it in a way that reaches back behind the Jewish Christians' experience of Christ. In so doing, both his terms and his tone deepen the Jews' revulsion toward gentiles by starting with the way they have traditionally regarded them. Shortly this will play out into some explicit lessons as to how they shall regard themselves, and then into their regard for their gentile fellow believers from the Kingdom's fresh perspective. But all of that comes later. Here in his opening chapter, it is enough for Paul to locate himself, the Jews, and even his Jewish Christian hearers in their conventional Judaic ways of thinking about these things.

It becomes important, then, to cut the question of our passage in Romans 1 in two ways: The traditional standard inquiry as to "sin or uncleanness?" needs to be complemented with the further question, "Christian or pre-Christian?" Helpful as it is for setting up his topic of the universal need for deliverance, Paul's approach is not aimed at sketching the Christian life. The only way questions of same-sex relations could be pressed into such an agenda, beyond simply flagging the very boundaries Paul

means to break down, is to show when and how homogenital intercourse in and of itself came to be deepened into sin. And here Paul does not oblige us. His two sentences in Romans 1, for all their vehemence, have served his rhetorical purposes; he doesn't pursue the matter for its own sake.

Our reading, then, will respect Paul's purposes and allow him to speak to them in his own way. We do Paul no justice when we seize upon a subsidiary point and make it function beyond his intent. What we owe him is serious attention to what he is about: the tragic consequences of human sinfulness, especially stemming from various forms of idolatry, and the rifts that can result in the Body of Christ when arrogance on either side, indecent conduct, moral evil, and religio-cultural elitism take hold. These are the problems that occupy the body of his letter; the cultic issues resurface only afterward, in Chapter 14. The contours of our reading, then, are to match those of Paul's writing.

Paul's world and ours. We have noted something of the interactions between Paul's own conceptual horizon and those of his various audiences in his letter. This is important for how we are to read him. But if we are to read him without wresting his thought, we must further consider the relationship between Paul's frame of reference and our own.

Part of the disconnection between Paul's interests and ours derives from the difference between our thought categories and his. The difference first arises with the English term *homosexual* itself. Given that both the label and the concept behind it are of comparatively modern origin, we can too glibly assimilate his frame of reference into our own.⁶³ But "what we mean by the term 'homosexuality' in the late twentieth century is for the most part rather different from what the biblical texts are discussing." This is not a trivial problem. Indeed, in order to preclude reading our modern understandings of homosexuality anachronistically back into the biblical texts, "we should stop talking about what the Bible has to say regarding 'homosexuality.'"⁶⁴

And yet Scripture matters. It matters to the extent that we can establish legitimate overlaps in fields of meaning between scriptural conceptions and ours. In holding together certain people and certain biblical passages—all individuals who engage in homogenital sexual activity of any kind and context together with all texts that mention such activity of any kind and context—we can legitimate-

ly get a partial overlap. The scriptural condemnations of various exploitative and lustful sexual behaviors (same-sex or opposite-sex) in Paul's time are rightly applied to such behaviors (same-sex or opposite-sex) today. But let us note that the two horizons—textual and contemporary—are now converging around the relational and character issues rather than around the question of sexual orientation as such.

Clearly in Romans 1, we have to do with at least a partial incongruence between conceptual horizons, between the box within which Paul was writing, and our box into which we want to fit him. In our quest for answers concerning "homosexuality" as a condition (even if we regard it as a mutable condition), we are asking Paul to address a category of being that was essentially uncomprehended in his world. If the Greeks assumed everyone was, at least potentially, bisexual, the Jews assumed everyone was naturally heterosexual.⁶⁵ The standard models of the day for same-sex eroticism were all exploitative to one degree or another, and understood to be more or less transitory—whether involving pederasty, temple prostitution, or master/slave relations. Thus, for Paul and all other ancient writers, Christian or not, the horizon of possibilities hardly provided for a developed notion of inherent homosexuality, or, concomitantly, of loving, enduring bonds between same-sex partners in committed, consensual, and exclusive relationships.⁶⁶

Here we must recognize that our essentializing of homosexuality can lead us into inappropriately limiting our selection of texts when we look for scriptural guidance today. We illegitimately try to force an overlap when we attempt to stretch the ancient models to cover the entire contemporary spectrum. For this leads us into category errors. If we want to hear the Scriptures fully, we must allow them to point us toward additional legitimate lines of thought that can broaden our selection of texts—thus enabling the Bible to build its own bridges between its world and ours. On doing so, we find that there are indeed pertinent axes of connection

that provide some real guidance without forcing the text.

What are the criteria of this legitimacy? For present purposes, two. First, a Christian interpretation must be carried out within a Christian framework. This does not exclude pre-Christian scriptural passages from Christian reflection, but the early Christian communities, through many challenges, pointed the way: They understood that their interpretations of the Scriptures, like interpretations of the meaning of Jesus himself, must be carried out from within the new perspectives that Jesus brought to the human situation. The implications and outcomes of this

process were not always self-evident to those pioneers of faith; this was no simple matter. When we trace the dynamics of their struggles we see how surprised they were at God's gradually emerging intentions for them. And we are astonished at their gutsiness, ultimately, as they tried to follow where the Spirit was leading.

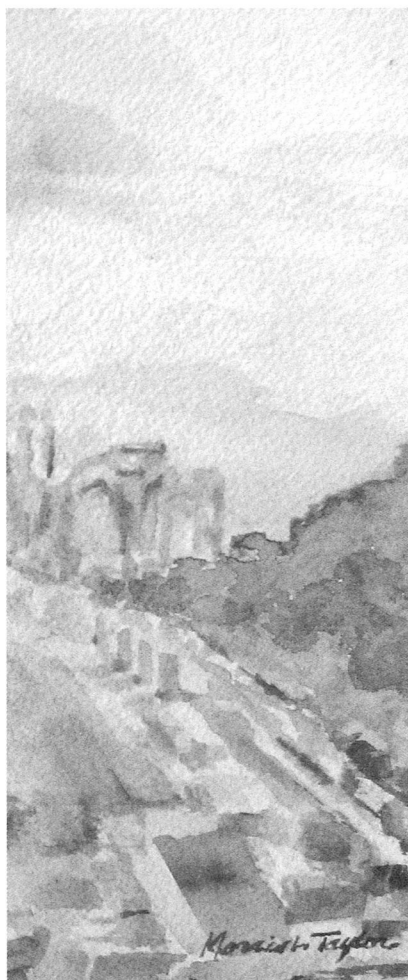
Even so, their advances were partial—which brings our second criterion: It is not required that everything must be fully realized in Scripture. It is required that the Scriptures genuinely point the way to any values and truths we espouse. This is because Scripture remains authoritative for us. In modeling for us the faithful discipleship of the first followers of Christ, the Bible sets our feet on the path of our own onward pilgrimage. A legitimate trajectory between scriptural understandings and our own is necessary; but it is just that: a trajectory. Our task is to extend that potential into our own lives, and to do this

along lines consistent with the Christian perspectives that Scripture itself provides for us.

These principles of reading bring us to the pay-off, in principles for our living. How shall we then live?

Sexual Expression in Loving Same-Sex Relationships

We return to the first question with which we opened this chapter: "What biblical implications can we find for the



ethics and boundaries of sexual expression in the context of loving same-sex relationships?" How might this look, as we seek scriptural fidelity today? Three broad brushstrokes follow, as illustrations of characteristic features.

The first brushstroke has to do with the ethics of our interpretations.⁶⁷ Discussions of issues of homosexuality (as of much else) too often take place on only one of two planes, without allowing either to intersect the other. For some, the strong inner sense of self-evident right and wrong leads them to turn away from Scripture as simply not helpful. Others, unwilling to abandon the Bible as authoritative for faith and practice, refuse to set its witness aside. The latter may, however, take exegesis to be a process of drawing out a single particular message as the text's only potential meaning. This way of thinking can fail to see that all readings, including those of scholars who mean to be as objective as possible, reflect the perspectives one brings to the text. Meaning, it turns out, arises in the encounter between text and reader.⁶⁸

In this light, our very act of reading assumes an ethical dimension. We must own responsibility for the impact that our interpretations exert in the lives of others. Far from presenting our findings with a take-it-or-leave-it shrug that absolves us of accountability toward those impacted by our ostensibly objective analyses, we must recognize the potential for additional insights when the Bible is read by other believers. Seen through other eyes, the Bible provides other connections through other texts that too often escape our own limited vision.⁶⁹

The ethics of reading and interpretation require that those who have most at stake in the outcomes actively participate as equals in the interpretive conversation. We must complement our reading with our listening, so that the planes of our responsibility to the text and of our accountability toward others can be brought into interaction. Only so can we continue something of the dynamic give-and-take that characterized the process of evolving revelation among the earliest communities of Christian believers. By definition, this process will not be unidirec-

tional, and will not always move in a "liberalizing" direction. Nonetheless, it comprises a vital aspect of our accountability to one another, in the Christian unity toward which Paul summons us.

In certain denominations today, the debates have turned deeply rancorous. This may be, in part, because they have not truly been conversations—exchanges in which all voices have equal expression and are equally heard. One of the most telling undertones of Paul's approach to Jew/gentile relations in the opening two chapters of Romans is the recognition of some arrogance on

the part of both groups, against which he has to warn both in the body of his letter. The problem is not that there were some tensions. A creative theological dynamism will always entail tensions. The point is to harness the energy of those tensions, under the reign of Christ, as part of a process of mutual speaking and hearing, in which we truly hear one another, render account to one another, and trust one another. This has happened in the most formative periods of Christian history, and under the guidance of the Spirit can certainly happen again.⁷⁰

This dynamism in the theological life and thought of the first Christians comprised only the beginnings of the conversation to which the church is called for all time. Even as theological

benchmarks continue to be established along the way, these are not grounds for stasis.

Interpretation through conversation. Sexual expression in the context of loving same-sex relationships in Christ will answer to and build upon interpretive parameters established through shared perspectives, voiced in conversations, rather than through any dominant structure of authority—ecclesiastical, academic, or other.

The second brushstroke is a double one, addressing the wellsprings of our moral life. With regard to sexual morality, the first and most important truth is the one most visible in Paul's guidance to the Corinthians. Their lives are now to be different, simply because they are now in Christ. The famous profligacy of their city, in which some of them had previously shared (1 Cor. 6:11), has no more place in their

I know and
am persuaded
in the
Lord Jesus
that nothing
is unclean
in itself.

Rom. 14:14

lives.⁷¹ Christ has lifted them above the pagan temples, to a new respect for others and for their own bodies as temples of the Spirit (6:19). This is precisely the result of their newfound freedom in Christ; they are delivered from the old enslavements. The fundamental principle of agapaic love, as Paul sets it forth (1 Cor. 13), means that there is no place for any kind of sexual immorality (*porneia*), exploitation, or idolatry in the Christian life.

Moral quality. Sexual expression in the context of loving same-sex relationships in Christ does not stand beyond the pale of divine sovereignty. Rather, as with all of holistic Christian life, it comes under the governing framework of Christian morality—with all that this implies for commitment, faithfulness, bodily discipleship, and spiritual growth.

The second aspect of this brushstroke has to do with our deliverance not only from the grip of sin and idolatry but also from ritual strictures. Paul explicitly parallels both kinds of bondage in Galatians 4:1–11, warning against replacing one with the other. In Christ, faithfulness in our sexuality, as in all things, reaches beyond codes of ceremonial purity to deeper levels of responsibility. When Paul in Romans 14 returns to these cultic issues from within his own explicitly Christian stance, he shows the way. There we see that he is less interested in the details of dietary practices or calendrical observances than in the solidarity and mutuality of the congregation. In other words, his concern on the cultic level, as on the moral level, is the same: that all of Christ's followers live in ways that express the unity of the Body. The only difference is that he gets at this via moral principles of salvation theology when dealing with our moral sinfulness, whereas on the level of cultic observances he is quite indifferent as to how his hearers negotiate their harmony.

For most of us under the banner of the new order in Christ, the ancient ritual taboos have largely been emptied; yet we still feel something of the shock Paul's readers must have felt on hearing his pronouncement, "I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself" (Rom. 14:14). He is talking about matters that in the eyes of some of his fellow believers were as sensitive as homosexual practice. Yet in Christ Paul can go on to relativize the whole scheme of ceremonial purity acknowledging that ritual contamination exists in the eye of the beholder. "But it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean."

Like some of the Corinthian believers (1 Cor. 8:7), not

all in Rome know that. So Paul seeks to carry his hearers along with him as he moves them toward fuller knowledge—from a pre-Christian to a Christian stance. He obviously understands the lingering distaste on the part of some of his fellow Jewish believers; he may well share it. As far as same-sex relations are concerned, there can be little doubt that he thought of such as unworthy behavior, even this side of the Cross. But given popular understandings of the day, this may have differed only in degree from his reservations toward heterosexual marriage, which he saw primarily as an outlet for sexual passions.

So if Paul retains something of the Judaic aversion toward same-sex relations, he also retains the Judaic assignment of the matter to the level of ceremonial observance. That assignment points the direction. His open-eyed understanding of Calvary's implications, and his principled devotion to those implications as the core of his gospel, lead Paul to treat the ceremonial matters as nothing more than occasions for mutual forbearance, in Christ. The questions of dietary and other observances emerge in Romans 14 as clear parallels to the sexual issues in Romans 1. We may wish that Paul had returned to an explicit showing of how this works out in the Christian's sex life, but he is content to allow the matter to stand. In his analogies of food and festival, he has provided sufficient guideposts for the day when the church would be ready to follow through.⁷²

That day will be marked by an erasure not only of difference between Jew and Greek, but also of difference between "weak" and "strong." Whatever Paul's personal predilections may be, when it comes to matters of ritual observance he consistently positions himself with the "strong," while urging those like himself to respect the sensibilities of the "weak." Until the happy day of collective spiritual maturity, as far as the ritual observances in Romans 14 are concerned, each believer is to make up his/her own mind (14:5), and by implication, to give every other believer room to do the same.⁷³ This conclusion is obviously a major leap for many, and Paul has pressed it quite far enough for his time. It remains for us in our time to consider anew whether the Spirit is leading us further in continuation of this process.

Beyond ritual observance. Sexual expression in the context of loving same-sex relationships in Christ will be validated on the grounds of a deeper morality that goes beyond ritual observance, in the context of a faith community

that sees itself as growing in Christian understanding toward a unity that transcends "weak" and "strong."

The third brushstroke has to do with our selection of scriptural themes and passages that emerge as relevant. Our discipleship in Christ means being faithful to the Christian principles that Scripture provides to govern our sexual relations. At the same time, this very faithfulness broadens the definition and thus multiplies the lines of our accountability in Christ to scriptural mandates. Now that the issues define themselves as issues of relational responsibility and integrity, genuine morality, and agapaic love, new potentials emerge for bridges between the ancient text and our lives today.

Limiting our quest for guidance to those texts that deal explicitly with same-sex relations, especially given their focus on particular acts as viewed from perspectives of ceremonial uncleanness, proves inadequate precisely because such a limitation derives from a category error on our part. From a Christian standpoint, it is fair to ask whether our questions today about homosexuality are more naturally addressed in just those passages that point to the new levels of responsibility Christ brings into all our relationships, especially our domestic ones. Once the revolutionary message of mutuality between life partners is received, if this message is predicated on the core value of Christ's modeling and salvation, its leverage must extend across all relations. If under Christ's lordship, husband and wife are led beyond conventional cultural norms to new levels of mutuality and consideration toward one another (1 Cor. 7), ought not the same principles govern the relationships of all couples in Christ?

New perspectives; other Scriptures. Sexual expression in the context of loving, same-sex relationships in Christ manifests the qualities of mutuality, equality, respect, and consideration that derive from scriptural passages that address heterosexual couples in Christ.

While not exhaustive, these three brushstrokes suggest some characteristic features of scriptural fidelity in regard

to these issues today. Taken together, they illustrate the same spirit of accountability to fellow believers, agapiac love, profound and genuine morality, and deliverance from ceremonial law that guides all of Christian life.

Conclusion

"There is no longer Jew or Greek." The struggles among early Christians over ethnicity in all its implications were no less riveting than those we are encountering today over homosexuality. Indeed, given that issues of homoeroticism were perceived from the outset as having to do with the

distinction between Jews and gentiles, the erasure of the barriers between them, in Christ, carries implications for how we should regard same-sex relations today.

As we follow Paul's thought we see that this is not merely a matter of juxtaposing a "modern" concept of sexual orientation against an ancient one, as if we simply "know better" now. Rather, it involves coming to terms with theological developments already emerging in early Christian reflection. Precisely because in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek the symbols of ethnically defined sanctity lose their substance.

"There is no longer slave or free." In part, the Christian rejection of slavery's accompanying sexual abuses (whether across gender lines or not) may have contributed to the evolving Christian instinct that this polarity, as well, must erode in Christ.

"There is no longer male and female." With this pronouncement,

Gal. 3:28

Paul's vision continues to challenge the church. Given that much of the ancient and contemporary objection to same-sex relations is predicated on the alleged confusion of this distinction, the implications of Christ's reign in this regard still summon us beyond our conventional assumptions. The biblical associations of sexism with patriarchalism should alert us to our unfinished work here.

There is no question that the Spirit's onward call, from comfortable stasis to destabilizing rethinking in line with

There is no
longer Jew
nor Greek...
slave or
free...male
and female
...for all of
you are one
in Christ
Jesus.

Christ's rule, will continue to affront many. And I realize how readily the perspective represented in this article can be cheapened with a dismissive label of "situational ethics." But this perspective does not mean that "anything goes." For all of us, true discipleship can only mean that all aspects of our lives are gladly placed under the criteria that we have identified above: full acceptance of what Christ has done on Calvary, genuine morality, honest engagement with the Scriptures, accountability to one another, openness to new light, sincere regard for the conscience of others and for the unity of Christ's Body. If we citizens of the Kingdom are to continue our journey toward ever fuller living out of that Kingdom's values in this world, we can only seek to grow beyond the level of mechanical obedience to ordinances that Paul calls "bondage," and into the joyous discipleship that he calls "freedom" (Gal. 5:1).

How else shall we move beyond Hellenism's (admittedly increasingly reserved) acceptance of even exploitative same-sex activities, and Judaism's unqualified condemnation of every homoerotic expression (no matter what the relational context) on grounds of ethnic and ceremonial separateness? We must follow Paul's pointing; we must do what he did not fully spell out, but which he pointed us toward. If Paul doesn't get us there, he nonetheless opens up the way for us to go there in accord with his principles.

John's Gospel, the latest of the canonical lives of Jesus, still points his readers forward to the Spirit's continuing revelations in the life of the church. Among his final words to his followers, Jesus says "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of Truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come" (John 16:12–13). If John's Gospel, in which the new wine is better (2:10), still speaks to us today in new ways, can we now bear to hear? Jesus, who is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Heb. 13:8), still reserves the right to surprise us. ■

Notes and References

1. We may be a little nervous about Jesus' dictum concerning the relation between humankind and the Sabbath in Mark 2:27, but we do accept it.
2. Among those who deny that these stories have anything to do with same-sex intentions is D. Sherwin Bailey, *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition* (New York: Longmans, 1955), 1–28, as dis-

cussed at length in John J. McNeill, *The Church and the Homosexual*, 4th ed. (Boston: Beacon, 1976, 1993), 42–50.

3. Amos 4:11; Isa. 1:9–10; 13:19; Jer. 49:18; Lam. 4:6; Ezek. 16:46, 48–49, 53, 55–56; Zeph. 2:9; Deut. 29:22; 32:32. The expression "abominable things" in Ezek. 16:50 is too broad to depend on connections with Lev. 18:22 and 20:13. So also in the New Testament: Matt. 10:15, 11:23–24; Luke 10:12, 17:29; 2 Pet. 2:6; Rev. 11:8.

4. August Klostermann in 1877 first named it the "Holiness Code" (*Heiligkeitsetze*) in light of its regular invocation of holiness formulas.

5. The term *abomination* (Heb. *to'evah*) denotes anything that is culturally or ritually forbidden in Jewish law. The Septuagint translates it with "uncleanness" (*akatharsia*) in several places, for instance Prov. 3:22, 6:16, 16:5. In Lev. 18:22, 20:13, the Septuagint uses *bdelugma*, a ritual offense.

6. This insight has enabled Mary Douglas to unlock the structures underlying the Levitical code of distinction between clean and unclean animals. See Mary Douglas, "The Abominations of Leviticus," in *Purity and Danger* (New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966, 2002), 51–71.

7. The term *kil'ayim*, used in all three of these prohibitions, means a separate or distinct kind. Similar injunctions in Deut. 22:9–11, also forbid yoking an ox and ass together for plowing.

8. As a construction of the self, the concepts of "homosexuality" and "heterosexuality" appear to arise only in the late nineteenth century. See Seward Hiltner, "Homosexuality: Psychological and Theological Perspectives," *Bulletin of the Christian Association for Psychological Studies* 3, no. 4 (1977):4. The term *sodomite* is unknown to either the Hebrew or the Greek Scriptures, even simply denoting citizens of Sodom.

9. Jesus' saying about eunuchs in Matt. 19:12, envisions three categories. It is possible that the first class, "eunuchs who have been so from birth," could be understood as males who had a physical deformity and/or whose sexual orientation was toward males. Accordingly, it is further possible that the Ethiopian officer whom Philip baptized (Acts 8:26–40) may have been an individual whom we today would call homosexual. It is also possible that the centurion's servant, who was precious to him and whom Jesus healed (Matt. 8:5–13 = Luke 7:1–10), may have been understood as serving his master in sexual as well as in other ways. Plato, *Republic* IX, 574b–c, speaks of a man's erotic love toward a young boy (*pais*, the term used in John 4:51) who has become "dear" (*entimos*) to him—the same term as used in the Lucan account.

10. Regarding the importance of the cross: "For I decided to know nothing among you, except Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2). In regard to freedom: "For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery" (Gal. 5:1). All scriptural quotations in this chapter are from the New Revised Standard Version (1989), except for the allusion to Gal. 3:28, in the title, which uses the familiar wording of the King James Version (1611).

11. See the juxtaposed vice and virtue lists in Gal. 5:16–24.
12. For vices: Gal. 5:19–21; 1 Cor. 5:10, 11, 6:9, 10; 2 Cor. 12:20; Rom. 1:19–31, 13:13; compare 1 Tim. 1:9, 10; 2 Tim. 3:2–5. Regarding virtues: Gal. 5:22, 23; 2 Cor. 6:6; Phil. 4:8; compare 1 Tim. 6:11. For examples of popular listings, see Robin Scroggs, *The New Testament and Homosexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 102, n. 6, which cites Maximus of Tyre XVIII.84b; XIX.90a; *Sybillene Oracles* III.36–39; and Epictetus II.16.45, with the observation, “One finds such catalogs everywhere.”
13. Philo Judaeus, *Sacrifices of Abel and Cain* 32, comes up with a list of 147 vices.
14. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), q.v. *pornos*. Apart from vice lists, the term *pornos* is also used in Eph. 5:5, and Heb. 12:16, 13:14, as well as twice in the Septuagint (Sirach 23:17). The abstract noun *porneia* appears twenty-five times in the New Testament, including three references to the decision of the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25).
15. In this arrangement, I am following Scroggs, *New Testament and Homosexuality*, 103.
16. *Ibid.*, 104–5.
17. The phenomenon of voluntary martyrdom, which soon became an issue in some congregations, was an extreme but not uncommon expression of the assertive tendency. The ecclesiastical disavowal of such spontaneous initiatives (*Martyrdom of Polycarp* IV.1) attests the practice among some who may have been motivated by desire for approval among their fellows.
18. Polycarp, *To the Philippians* 5.3. *The Apostolic Fathers*, trans. Kirsopp Lake (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1912, 1959), 1:289, 291.
19. *Martyrdom of Polycarp* IX.1; *Apostolic Fathers*, 2:323.
20. The feminine cognate *malakia* is regularly used to express illness, weakness, or faint-heartedness. See Arndt and Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon*, viz. *malakia*.
21. Dale B. Martin, “Arsenokoites and Malakos: Meanings and Consequences,” in *Biblical Ethics and Homosexuality: Listening to Scripture*, ed. Robert L. Brawley (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 125–26, finds that in Greco-Roman culture, “In fact, *malakos* more often referred to men who prettied themselves up to further their heterosexual exploits” (emphasis original). Compare 127: “The word *malakos* refers to the entire ancient complex of the devaluation of the feminine. Thus people could use *malakos* as an insult directed against men who love women too much.”
22. See, for example, James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 107.
23. “You shall not lie (*koimêthêsên*) with a male (*arsenos*) [as with] the lying (*koitên*) of a woman” (Lev. 18:22; similarly in 20:13).
24. For this observation, I am dependent upon McNeill, *The Church and the Homosexual*, 52–53.
25. See Robert M. Grant, *Ad Autolycum* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1970), cited in Martin, “Arsenokoites and Malakos,” 122.
26. Martin, “Arsenokoites and Malakos,” 120.
27. McNeill, *The Church and the Homosexual*, 53.
28. In NRSV; the Greek text originally had no chapter or verse divisions, much less modern paragraphs.
29. As pointed out by Scroggs, *New Testament and Homosexuality*, 109–10; and Jeffrey S. Siker, “Gentile Wheat and Homosexual Christians: New Testament Directions for the Heterosexual Church,” in *Biblical Ethics and Homosexuality*, 142–43.
30. There are, in fact, no sexual references at this level in either paragraph. The term *ponêria* (“evil”) is better attested in the ancient manuscripts at v. 30 than is the alternative reading *porneia*, which would be a general reference to sexual immorality.
31. Plato, *Laws* 772d–e, 773b, 840c.
32. This despite the known same-sex preferences of Seneca and certain other Stoic figures.
33. The chapter “Same-Sex Love” in Adventist Forum’s forthcoming book, *Christianity and Homosexuality*, explores the theological significance of giving and receiving pleasure in the Christian life.
34. Plato, *Phaedrus*, 250e.
35. Plutarch, *Erôtikos* 751c, for example, has Daphnaeus refer to pederasty as a “union contrary to nature,” in contrast to heterogenital sex. Athenaeus, *Deipnosophists* XIII, 565c (Egypt, c. 200 C.E.), quotes a dinner guest warning philosophers against indulging in passion that is contrary to nature.
36. This opinion is expressed as a common assumption in several Greek and Roman sources, including Plato, *Laws* 836c, 840d–e; and Plutarch, *Whether Beasts are Rational*, 990d–f.
37. John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 58.
38. Used with the accusative case (as here) the preposition *para* has the basic spatial meaning of “alongside.” Used metaphorically, it typically means “against,” “contrary to,” or, more mildly, “in contradistinction to.” So used, it does sometimes carry the comparative idea of “more than.” F. Blass and A. Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Christian Literature*, 9th ed., trans. Robert W. Funk (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961) §236.
39. At least with reference to males, in Rom. 1:27. As for females (v. 26), despite the contrary view by interpreters from St. Augustine to Daniel Helminiak, *What the Bible Really Says about Homosexuality* (Tajique, N.M.: Alamo Square, 1994, 2000), 87–89, the *homoiois* between vv. 26 and 27 sets up a parallel between the two genders, which surely must include engagement in same-sex activities since that is what is in view here.
40. Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality*, 110.
41. Victor Paul Furnish adduces these four points in “The Bible and Homosexuality: Reading the Texts in Context,” in *Homosexuality in the Church: Both Sides of the Debate*, ed. Jeffrey S. Siker (Louisville, Ky.:

Westminster John Knox, 1994), 26–27. Siker recapitulates them in “New Testament Directions for the Heterosexual Church,” in *Biblical Ethics and Homosexuality*, 142–43.

42. Helminiak, *What the Bible Really Says*, 85.

43. At least with regard to adult Roman citizens, especially in passive roles. See Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality*, 74–75.

44. Philo Judaeus, *Special Laws* III.37, quoted in Scroggs, *New Testament and Homosexuality*, 74–75. Compare Plato, *Laws* I.636c, in Scroggs, *New Testament and Homosexuality*, 59–60.

45. For example, “Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to beings that by nature [that is, by their nature] are not gods” (Gal. 4:8).

46. The occurrences are in Rom. 1:26; 2:14, 27; 11:21, 24; 1 Cor. 11:14; Gal. 2:15; 4:8; Eph. 2:3.

47. For example, “Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair, it is degrading to him, but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory?” (1 Cor. 11:14, 15).

48. So Paul can quote with agreement the slogan of some in Corinth that “no idol in the world really exists” (1 Cor. 8:4).

49. In this, Paul’s approach is comparable to the one he adopts in Rom. 14, where he is less interested in the rightness or wrongness of one or another position regarding diet or observance of holy days than in allaying the spirit of mutual judgment that is destroying the unity of

the body of Christ.

50. Paul’s treatment, in common with the Jewish thought of his day, is utterly uninterested in distinguishing among any of the various forms of same-sex interactions that shape discussions from the Hellenistic standpoint. For the Greco-Roman world, there were male-male relations between teachers and students, between temple prostitutes and their clients, between masters and slaves. The character of these interactions certainly varied from one context to another. The Greek vocabulary itself tells the story: One could speak, for example, of a *paiderastēs* (“boy-lover”), a *kinaidos* or *erōmenos* (a beloved one), or even a *paidophthoros* (a seducer or kidnapper of boys). Thus, any particular gentile discussion tends to be about one or another of these defined interactions, rather than about an overarching topic of same-sex relations as such.

When Paul, by contrast, baldly treats the matter in terms of the act itself, his thought runs along lines of classic rabbinic casuistry—ethical judgments of specific deeds in and of themselves. Such a model essentializes all same-sex activity in ways that reflect the Jewish perspectives of Paul’s time more than those of his larger world.

51. This is not the last place in Romans where Paul will provisionally ally himself with the prejudices of his Jewish Christian hearers, in order to keep them with him. He employs similar strategies in dealing with their impatient demands.

52. Furnish, *Bible and Homosexuality*, 28, notes, “it is apparent from both the wording and the content of Paul’s remark in Romans that he

Christianity And Homosexuality: Some Seventh-day Adventist Perspectives

Edited by David Ferguson, Fritz Guy and David Larson

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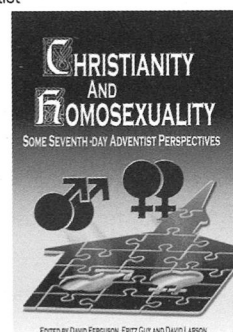
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shared the common Hellenistic-Jewish view of 'homosexuality.' There is nothing distinctively Pauline, or even Christian, about that remark. Philo himself could have written it—and so could any number of pagan moralists, given just a few changes."

53. Countryman, *Dirt, Greed and Sex*, 115–16, points out that the "error" (*planē*) at the end of Rom. 1:27, is best understood as the gentiles' idolatry. The result, then, in accord with the rest of the passage, is the gentiles' impure passions and practices.

54. In accord with the grammatical principle that the demonstrative pronoun "such things" (*toiauta*) in v. 32 should take as its antecedent the nearest possible referent, it is the vices of 1:28–31, that deserve death, not the homogenital acts back in vv. 26–27.

55. Helminiak, *What the Bible Really Says*, 96; and Countryman, *Dirt, Greed and Sex*, 116, both correctly catch the implication of the perfect participle *peplērōmenous* in v. 29. In parallel with v. 28, God surrendered the gentiles to their homoerotic practices in the wake of their profound sinfulness.

56. For example, Gagnon, *Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 255–56, where natural law is an expression not so much of culturally defined gender roles as of the sheer physical complementarity of the sexes.

57. So Stanton L. Jones and Mark A. Yarhouse, *Homosexuality: The Use of Scientific Research in the Church's Moral Debate* (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 179. Similarly, Gagnon, *Bible and Homosexual Practice*; also, Hays, *Moral Vision of the New Testament*.

58. Part of the problem is our tendency to single out individual verses and absolutize them by reading them in isolation from their religious-cultural matrix. In the case of the Levitical materials this masks from us the larger issues of the overall attitude expressed throughout the individual prohibitions. As Gary David Comstock, *Gay Theology without Apology* (Cleveland, Ohio: Pilgrim, 1993), 63–64, says, "One looks in vain for an example of inclusive community, egalitarian principles, or a theology of loving outreach and pluralistic justice in Leviticus."

59. Dan O. Via, "The Bible, the Church, and Homosexuality," in Dan O. Via and Robert A. J. Gagnon, *Homosexuality and the Bible: Two Views* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 28.

60. Countryman, *Dirt, Greed and Sex*, 117. Compare Helminiak, *What the Bible Really Says*, 101.

61. M. L. Andreasen, *The Sabbath* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1942), 145, is typical of the classic line of argument among Seventh-day Adventists: "These ceremonial and temple laws terminated when the temple service ceased to be of value at the death of Christ. All Christians believe that they were abolished and annulled in the great sacrifice on Calvary. Col. 2:14. It is not of these laws that we speak, but of the law of God contained in the ten precepts. This law we believe to be of as much force as ever, and binding upon Christians and upon all men in all ages."

62. "These are only a shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ" (Col. 2:17).

63. For example, Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality I: An Introduc-*

tion, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Random House, 1978), 43, traces out the notion of sexual orientation, analyzing how the construction of same-sex orientation as a clinical or psychological "disorder" first arose in the nineteenth century.

64. Siker, "Gentile Wheat and Homosexual Christians," 140.

65. The myth of human origins in Plato, *Symposium* 189c–193d, hinting at a primordial third sex oriented toward its own gender, does not refute this.

66. The point is not how relatively common or uncommon such examples are. It is enough that they do exist, and that, as will be indicated below, the Scriptures do have pertinent words to apply to such.

67. This point is prompted by the challenge presented to the Society of Biblical Literature by Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, in a presidential address, "The Ethics of Interpretation: Decentering Biblical Scholarship," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 107 (1988):3–17.

68. This does not reduce the text to a mirror, merely reflecting the reader's own preconceptions. The text does exert controls, by means of its underlying structures of meaning-potential. Such potential is variously actualized, however, through varied acts of reading. Even so, the resultant meanings do have the potential to cut across a given reader's preconceptions, awakening new insights.

69. For example, Comstock, *Gay Theology*, Chap. 3, finds insightful parallels between the situation and response of Queen Vashti in the book of Esther and his experience as a homosexual male in today's society.

70. Carl S. Dudley and Earle E. Hilgert, *New Testament Tensions and the Contemporary Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987) trace out the way in which deep disagreements were not papered over in the early church but were used as occasions for fuller understanding and theological advancement when the tensions were worked through with mutual respect.

71. There is some evidence that already by Paul's time a verb "to Corinthianize" (*korinthiazesthai*) had been coined to denote living in a luxurious and profligate manner.

72. That Paul and his converts saw direct parallels between issues of dietary and sexual purity is clear in 1 Cor. 6:12–20, where he argues by analogy from the former to the latter.

73. Compare Jesus: "And why do you not judge for yourselves what is right?" (Luke 12:57). Evidently, the priesthood of every believer is to be exercised under the high priesthood of Christ, who sympathizes with our limitations (Heb. 4:15) in ways that give us courage to grow as new insights become available (5:11–14).

John R. Jones is associate professor of New Testament Studies and World Religions at La Sierra University. This material is from the forthcoming book *Christianity and Homosexuality: Some Seventh-day Adventist Perspectives*.

Public Policy Issues Involving Homosexuality:

An Adventist Response | BY MITCHELL A. TYNER

Homosexuality—more particularly, the status of homosexuals and their relationships before the law—has become one of the most confrontational, divisive topics of our time, both politically and theologically. Numerous writers have identified well over one thousand instances where homosexual couples are denied the rights and privileges available to heterosexual couples, and this revelation has led many to advocate the legal recognition of homosexual marriage or the functional equivalent thereof. Their efforts, in turn, have produced the most vociferous backlash from those who argue that to do such a thing will be to remove the moral underpinnings of American society. Other writers have described the nonmarriage-related inequality of homosexuals in current society, involving such issues as the nonprotection of homosexuals as a suspect category, leading to denial of protection in such fundamental rights as employment and housing.

Recently, numerous jurisdictions have moved significantly toward legal equality for homosexuals, including listing sexual orientation as a protected category in local or state human rights statutes and recognizing homosexual marriage or domestic partnerships. The most significant judicial move was the 2004 decision of the U.S. Supreme Court in *Lawrence vs. Texas*, which ruled that antisodomy laws could not be applied to homosexuals. In the *Lawrence* ruling, the Court overruled its infamous previous decision in *Bowers vs. Hardwick* and recognized the existence of a right to privacy in sexual matters.

Legally, this movement continues apace, as several states and nations enact protective statutes. It is not the purpose of this discussion to address the current legal and political realities, as others have done so admirably. Others have addressed the questions of how Seventh-day Adventists, both corporately and individually,

should understand the phenomenon of homosexuality in Scripture, the existence and experience of Seventh-day Adventist homosexuals, and the responsibilities of both the Church and its members to them. That leaves a further question: how do we, corporately and individually, relate to the religio-political questions involving homosexuality that are currently producing so much heat and so little light? What are the considerations that should be involved in the formation of an Adventist response to such public issues? This chapter looks at four, the first two scriptural and timeless, the last two more contemporary. The list is not exhaustive; it should include but is not limited to the following:

1. Does the proposed position maximize human freedom?

To be faithful to Scripture, our positions on public policy issues should work to maximize human freedom to the highest appropriate level. Arguably, the most revealing Scripture passage that involves freedom is not the little horn or Revelation 13, but Luke 15, the passage we refer to as the story of the Prodigal Son, although it might better be called the story of the Waiting Father.

A young man, raised on an affluent but remote farm went to his father and said "Dad, I'm bored. I'm tired of living way out here. I want to experience the world for myself; I want to go to the big city; I want to do my own thing. And Dad, I want you to give me an advance on my inheritance to finance the trip."

Nothing in either Jewish or Roman law gave the father any obligation to grant that request, but he did. The son left, wealth in hand, and headed for the bright lights. As long as the money lasted, so did his social status. But soon he found himself in a descending socioeconomic spiral. His money gone, he was forced to earn his livelihood by doing something most hateful to a young Jew: feeding

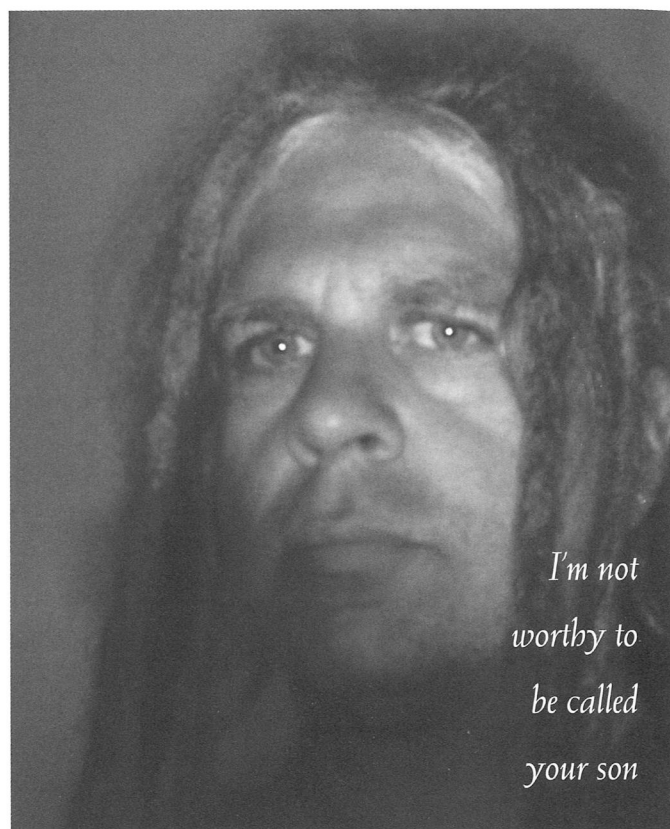
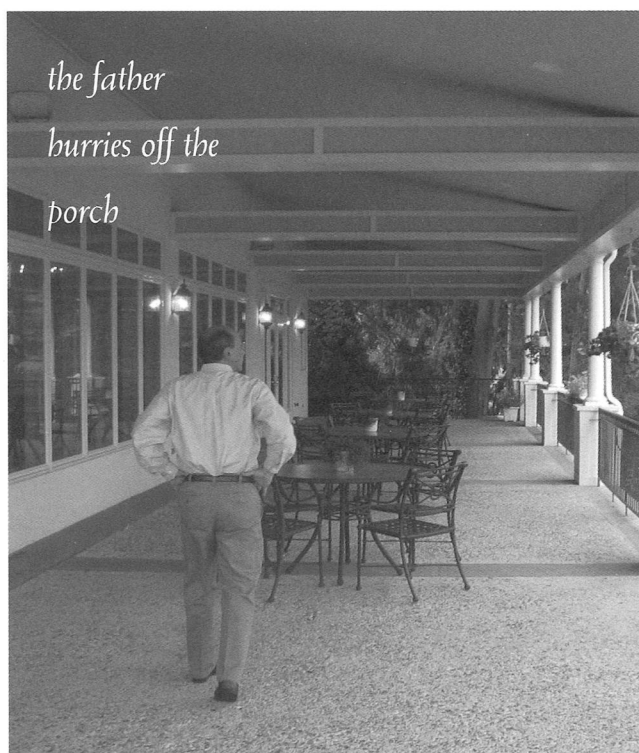
hogs. He awoke one morning in the pigpen, looked around him, and said, "What a miserable state of affairs! What a genuine wreck I have made of my life."

To put this story in Seventh-day Adventist terms, imagine a young man from a farm in eastern Montana who, having gone to New York, awakens in a drug-induced stupor in one of those neighborhoods you don't want to enter at night. He has been making his living dealing drugs. He awakens and thinks, "This is Sabbath morning. Mom and Dad are in church, and look at me. Look how far I've come."

The Bible simply says, "He came to himself." He realized his position. He looked around and said, "I have ruined my life, I have nothing: nowhere to sleep, no means of support, nothing to eat, and I can't go home. I've had my share of the family wealth and I've squandered that. It's gone. Even my dad's hired hands out there on the farm are better off. I ought to go home and just ask Dad to hire me."

He sat there in the mud and composed the speech he would offer his father. He would say, "Father, I have sinned before you and before God. I am no longer worthy to be called your son—just hire me and let me live out in the bunkhouse with the hired hands." With that, he started home.

Imagine the father, sitting on the veranda of one of



those old farm houses—the kind with the long porch that runs the width of the house. The family sat there in the evening catching the cool breeze, talking about the weather, the crops, and family news.

The father has been sitting there every afternoon since his son left. He's never given up on his son's return. Then one day, far off down the road, he sees a pathetic figure limping along. He's lame, he's ill-kept, and he's dirty. But the father immediately recognizes him as his son. The father doesn't wait for the son to come to him. Instead, the father hurries off the porch, down the path, through the gate, and down the road to meet his son. As they meet, the son begins his prepared speech of contrition: "Dad, I've blown it, I'm not worthy to be called your son...." and he never gets to finish the speech.

It's as though the father said, "Son, I know, I understand. We'll talk about that another time. For now, all that matters is that you're home. Come inside, we'll celebrate your return!" With that, he covered this filthy figure with his best cloak, put a ring on his finger, and led him to the house, where the celebration began.

The older son heard the sound of the celebration and asked one of the hired hands what was happening. He was told, "Your brother's back and your father's throwing a

party." But the older brother refused to join the celebration.

Eventually, the father came to him and said, "We're celebrating your brother's return—come in and join us!"

The elder brother said, "Look, Dad, I've been with you all these years. I have obeyed your every command. I have done everything you have asked but you never threw a party for me. Now this son of yours comes home after wasting your money and his life and you expect me to celebrate? Why should I?"

Notice that the elder brother was factually correct, which merely shows that one may be quite correct but very wrong as to the correct interpretation and application of those facts. Notice also that the elder brother referred to "your son", not, "my brother."

The father replied, "Your brother was lost, and has been found; he was dead and he is alive to us again. It is proper that we celebrate!"

Who was right in that story, the father or the son? The father, of course. The father represents God, our Father. The son represents us, for each of us has at one time or another wandered away from our spiritual home.

Why did the father let that happen? The father could have prevented it. He didn't have to give his son the money, but he did. It can even be alleged that by funding the journey of the prodigal, the father aided and abetted prodigality. Why? Because the father was more interested in his son than in his money. Because ultimately he was interested in his relationship with his son. Because he wanted a relationship with his son that was possible only when the son was ready to enter into it voluntarily. The father would not force his son to stay at home. He would not be satisfied with coerced obedience.

Isn't that a marvelous parable of our heavenly Father! Our Father put such a high value on his relationship with us that he paid the price of Calvary to avoid coercing us. He could have forced us to stay at home with him, and no one could have faulted him for doing so. But he will not be satisfied with coerced obedience. Yes, he's interested in our conduct. But when we come back to him, he doesn't say, "All right, before you come in the house let's talk about that time in the pigpen. Let's talk about what you did, let's talk about the money you wasted, let's get all of this straightened out." No, he puts his robe of righteousness around us and says, "Come inside. The party is ready to start—in your honor."

Here is a parable that illustrates an important facet of

the great controversy between good and evil, a key historic Adventist teaching. God could have created us in such a manner that we could not have sinned. He didn't, because he wanted a relationship with us based on our choice to establish it. He refused to coerce us. But doing that cost him dearly. It cost him the life of his son at Calvary, paid so that we could relate to him freely. Every man, woman, boy, and girl is free to relate to God freely, according to his or her conscience, not someone else's.

What are we to learn from this story? First, that God put a tremendous value on freedom. He could have prevented Calvary, but didn't, because he would not coerce our obedience. Second, we have no business, like the older brother, being more judgmental with each other than our Father is with us. Third, we have been given an example that speaks to our own attitudes and actions: If God went to that length not to coerce us, then how dare we, his children, coerce each other?

2. Does the suggested position maximize equality?

Again, to be faithful to Scripture, our positions on public policy issues should work to maximize human equality to the highest appropriate level.

Consider the Gospel of Luke, Chapter 10. Jesus was confronted with a questioner—a lawyer, a young scholar of religious law who had heard of Jesus and wanted to put Jesus' teaching on the record. The dialogue went something like this:

Lawyer: "Rabbi, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"

Jesus: "What do you read in the law?"

Lawyer: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself."

Jesus: "You read well. Now go and do that and you will live."

When confronted with an unwanted answer, one may acquire at least a little wiggle room by seeking to define further one or more terms used in the answer. So the lawyer replied, "And just who is my neighbor?"

Knowing that his questioner was not amenable to a direct answer, Jesus chose to answer indirectly, through a story, the Parable of the Good Samaritan.

"A certain man," said Jesus, "went down from Jerusalem to Jericho." Mr. Anonymous chose a narrow, twisting mountain road that descends rapidly from the Judean hills to the Dead Sea Valley. It is a dangerous route today, and

surely was much more so in Roman times. During the course of his journey, Mr. Anonymous was mugged: he was attacked by thieves, assaulted, stripped of everything of value, and left for dead.

Jesus then presented his audience with an interesting procession of observers. First to come on the scene was a priest, clergy, one trained to identify with and alleviate human need. True to his calling, he viewed the wounded man and thought, "This is terrible! This man has been wounded through no fault of his own, yet here he lies." But he quickly caught himself before his empathy got him into trouble. He thought,

The thieves who did this may still be nearby. They could well do the same to me. And after all, my first responsibility is to my family and to my ministry. This man is part of neither. I don't know him and I don't owe him! If I am injured or killed, who will care for them? Surely the proper and prudent thing for me to do is to go on and report this to the authorities. And besides, I'm carrying a month's tithe from all the local congregations down to the National Bank of Jericho for deposit. We can't risk losing that.

Having armed himself with good excuses, he passed by the wounded man. But he did not pass by too closely—so close that he would have to look in the man's eyes and sense his pain. Instead, he passed by on the far side, evidence that the pacification of his conscience was not working all that well.

Next came a Levite. Here was another man trained much like the priest. He, too, was taught to be a shepherd of the flock, but he was not serving in a direct pastoral role. Perhaps in modern parlance we could call him a religious bureaucrat, a denominational administrator. The Levite also reacted as trained. He, too, saw the injured man and began to empathize. But his mind wandered a bit: "This is awful! We must regain control of our streets and put these criminals away where they belong!" As he worked himself up on the subject of the shortcomings of the criminal justice system, he also began to sense the priest's predicament: "They could do the same to me." And he also reasoned his way out of that bind: "I'm going down to Jericho to deliver an address on the ethical treatment of strangers. If I stop here, I help only one person. But if I go on, my lecture could be the start of a whole new Good Samaritan Society in Jericho. Surely, the responsible thing is for me to proceed." And so, for the sake of giving a lec-

ture on loving others, he left his neighbor to languish in pain and distress. He followed the priest's detour and passed by on the far side.

And then came a Samaritan. Why did Jesus choose a Samaritan for this role? Perhaps it was because he well knew the reaction of his questioner to such a person. Samaritans were the outcasts of the day. Public opinion was that they were not pure Jews; they came from an inferior stock, inferior social position, an inferior education. They could not be trusted. If we had passed through the streets of Jerusalem, we might have overheard conversations in which it was said, "You can't trust those Samaritans. They'll lie and cheat and steal. They'd rather draw welfare than work for a living. Best to have nothing to do with them for your own safety." If the injured man had known a Samaritan was approaching, he probably would have shuddered in anticipation of further harm.

But the Samaritan stopped, the only one of the three observers to do so. He stopped to give aid to someone who otherwise might have despised him.

The Samaritan's reaction was neither ivory tower theory nor mere emotional response. He methodically poured oil and wine (the only cleansing/disinfecting agents available to him) into the injured man's wounds, bound them, put the man on his pack animal, and took him to the nearest inn. Before leaving, he said to the innkeeper, "Take care of him, and when I return I'll settle the cost with you." The Samaritan disregarded the threats to his own safety that had been correctly noted by the priest and the Levite. He just acted, on behalf of someone very much not like him.

At this point, the dialogue between Jesus and his interrogator resumed.

Jesus: "Now, which of these three do you think acted as a neighbor to the injured man?"

Lawyer: "Obviously, the one who stopped to help."

Jesus: "Exactly. Go and do likewise."

Isn't it interesting what Jesus did *not* say to the lawyer? He did not say to him, "Go and study the scrolls. When you can properly and coherently exegete the prophecies and explain Ezekiel's vision of the wheels within wheels, then come back and we will discuss your future course of action." Jesus spoke nothing of what the questioner should know or believe, only of what he should *do*. He spoke not of orthodoxy, but of orthopraxy. He simply said, "Go and do likewise."

Four characteristics of the Samaritan's response bear

emulation. First, it was a *caring* response. The Samaritan obviously cared enough about the injured man's predicament to endanger himself in order to help. The act of not taking the detour mapped out by the preceding observers was motivated by recognition of the value of another



*he did what needed to be done
at that moment*

human in need—in other words, *caring*.

Second, it was an *involved* response. It is all too easy for moderns to trust groups—relief groups, state agencies, religious organizations—to react to human need while we comfortably sit back and make donations of a bit of money and a bit of time. The Samaritan put far more than that into the project.

Third, it was a *committed* response. The Samaritan not only bound the wounds of the victim, he also volunteered to underwrite his care for an indeterminate period. Now that's commitment!

Fourth, it was a *relevant* response. The Samaritan could have continued on his way, and on arrival in Jericho sought to convene a council on the causes and remedies for highway crime. Not a bad thing in itself, but not relevant to the man lying in the road. Rather, the Samaritan got immediately involved, and he did what needed to be done at that moment. He acted relevantly.

Perhaps most importantly for this discussion, all of this was for someone with whom the Samaritan would have been in profound disagreement theologically, politically, and otherwise. There was no pondering of theological convergences, of historic ties, of cultural affinities. There was no consideration of public opinion or of the opinion of other Samaritans, no mapping of potential geopolitical consequences. The Samaritan did not see a Jew (or an Edomite, or a Roman or Greek, or whoever the victim was), he just saw a person in need and recognized that he had the ability to meet the need.

How does this story inform our response to such questions as equal rights for homosexuals—or anyone else? It says that our response must be caring, involved, committed, and relevant. It must not be deterred by the approbation of many for the object of our care, or by the potential threat to our own standing. We must be prepared to evenhandedly aid those for whom we can be of service, regardless of their agreement—or lack thereof—with our beliefs and interpretations. How could such considerations ever lead us to deny equal rights to homosexuals, or anyone else?

In the current context, a consideration of the interrelationship of freedom and equality is necessary, for equal rights not infrequently act as a restraint on freedom. We do not exercise our freedom in a vacuum, but in the context of social relationships. As the apostle Paul said, "None of us lives to himself." Paul also observed, "All things are lawful to me, but all things are not expedient." A responsible exercise of our freedom always considers the effect of our actions on the rights and needs of others.

Since the late 1990s, there has been, within the church-state community, a running discussion concerning whether or not sincere religious belief should constitute a valid defense to a charge of violating the equality rights of others. The question arose in this fashion. In 1990, in the case of *Employment Division, Department of Human Resources of Oregon vs. Smith*, the U.S. Supreme Court severely cut back the reach of the Free Exercise Clause of the First Amendment

to the U.S. Constitution. One result was the formation of a broad coalition that sought legislation to moderate the damage done to religious freedom. This brought about the passage of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA) in 1993. The Court responded a few years later, in *Boerne vs. Flores*, by ruling RFRA inapplicable to the states. The coalition then prepared a bill known as the Religious Liberty Protection Act (RLPA). RLPA never got off the ground. It foundered on the question of religious belief as a defense. One side said, "If religious belief is not included in the bill as a legitimate defense, we will leave the coalition."

The other side said, "If religious belief is recognized as a defense, we will leave the coalition." The coalition then foundered.

What was this discussion really about? Homosexuality. The question was whether a sincerely held religious belief that one should not employ or rent to homosexuals should be a valid defense to a charge of violating protected rights. Difference of opinion on that question is so deeply held that it has prevented the religious community from achieving broad-based protection for free exercise of religion since that time.

How do we answer that question? Should our religious beliefs allow us to discriminate? When we put the question in the context of race, the answer is clear for most people: Just because a person sincerely believes that he or she should not hire or rent to a person of color should not relieve him or her of the duty of nondiscrimination. In this instance, the equality rights of one person trump the religiously motivated practice of the other. Few will argue against that position—until they recognize that it cannot be distinguished on any principled basis from the question of equality rights of homosexuals. It simply comes down to the fact that one is generally accepted in our society and the other is not—yet. Surely our response to such questions should maximize both freedom and equality, properly balancing the two, rather than merely reflecting popular opinion.

3. Is the proposed position informed by our history?

To be responsible, our positions on public policy issues should take cognizance of the applicable lessons found in our own history. We have experience with the negative results of efforts by well-meaning people to enact their views and religious convictions into law. Consider the effects of the national Sunday law drive of the late-nine-

teenth century.

In 1888, Senator H. W. Blair of New Hampshire sponsored a Senate bill (N. 2983) to promote Sunday observance as a day of worship. Blair's bill (and a similar one in 1889) was defeated, at least in part due to the five hundred thousand signatures secured against it by the then-tiny Seventh-day Adventist Church, spurred on by the enthusiasm of A. T. Jones, among others. The national bill was stopped, but the effort to enforce Sunday observance was not. Rather, the scene of activity shifted to the states.

During 1895 and 1896, at least seventy-five Seventh-day Adventists were prosecuted in the United States and Canada under state or provincial Sunday laws. Some were fined; a few were acquitted or were lucky enough to have their cases dismissed. But 28 served jail terms, aggregating 1,144 days: almost 3½ years in total.¹ Such prosecution was not happenstance or just a small part of a broader picture of thousands of Americans arrested for a wide variety of Sunday activities. To the contrary, it was a matter of selective enforcement. Those prosecuted were targeted not just for their conduct, but for the reason behind it.

Perhaps the most significant of these cases was that of R. M. King of Obion County, Tennessee.² King had farmed in the community for twenty years and was held in high esteem by his neighbors, although they disagreed with the practice he followed as a Seventh-day Adventist of tilling his fields on Sunday. His neighbors tried to persuade King not to work on Sunday, but he resisted. Finally, "they insisted that he must keep Sunday and not teach their children by his example that the seventh day is the Sabbath and if he did not comply with their wishes he would be prosecuted." King was subsequently arrested for working in his fields on Sunday, June 23, 1889. On July 6, Obion County Justice J. A. Barker found King guilty as charged and fined him a total of \$12.85. Since King refused to stop Sunday work, his neighbors had him indicted by a grand jury for virtually the same offense.

Judge Swiggart and a jury heard the matter in Troy, Tennessee, on March 6, 1890, Attorney General Bond appearing for the state and Colonel T. E. Richardson for King. The charge was that King's repeated Sunday breaking constituted a public nuisance—a charge that opened the way to a harsher penalty than did mere violation of the Sunday law. The jury heard five witnesses for the prosecution and one for the defense. It deliberated only half an hour before returning a guilty verdict and assessing a fine

of seventy-five dollars. The judge denied a motion for a new trial and warned that King and his ilk must obey the law or leave the country.

Colonel Richardson appealed on King's behalf to the state supreme court, which in 1891 merely affirmed the trial court without opinion. Then Richardson, joined by Donald M. Dickinson, U.S. postmaster general from 1888 to 1889, appealed to the United States Circuit Court for the Western District of Tennessee.³ Their theory on appeal was a new one: Since no previous case recognized habitual Sunday breaking as a public nuisance and no state

Nevertheless, the state court decision was sustained.

Was it proper to define such conduct as a public nuisance? It was, said Hammond, if a state court said so. A federal court would not second-guess a state court on the meaning of that state's law. Hence, no deprivation of due process existed. King also lost on his First Amendment claims, said Hammond, because that amendment did not apply to the states. According to the decision, "the Fourteenth Amendment of the Constitution of the United States has not abrogated the Sunday laws of the states, and established religious freedom therein. The states may

...arrested for working in his fields on Sunday...



statute described it as such, to convict King for such activity constituted denial of the due process and equal protection of law as guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution. Significantly, they also argued that he had been denied the religious freedom guaranteed him by the First Amendment religion clauses.

On August 1, 1891, Judge Hammond rendered his decision. He acknowledged:

By a sort of factitious advantage, the observers of Sunday have secured the aid of the civil law, and adhere to that advantage with great tenacity, and in spite of the clamor for religious freedom and the progress that has been made in the absolute separation of church and state, and in spite of the strong and merciless attack that has always been ready, in the field of controversial theology, to be made, as it has been made here, upon the claim for divine authority for the change from the seventh to the first day of the week.⁴

establish a church or creed...."⁵

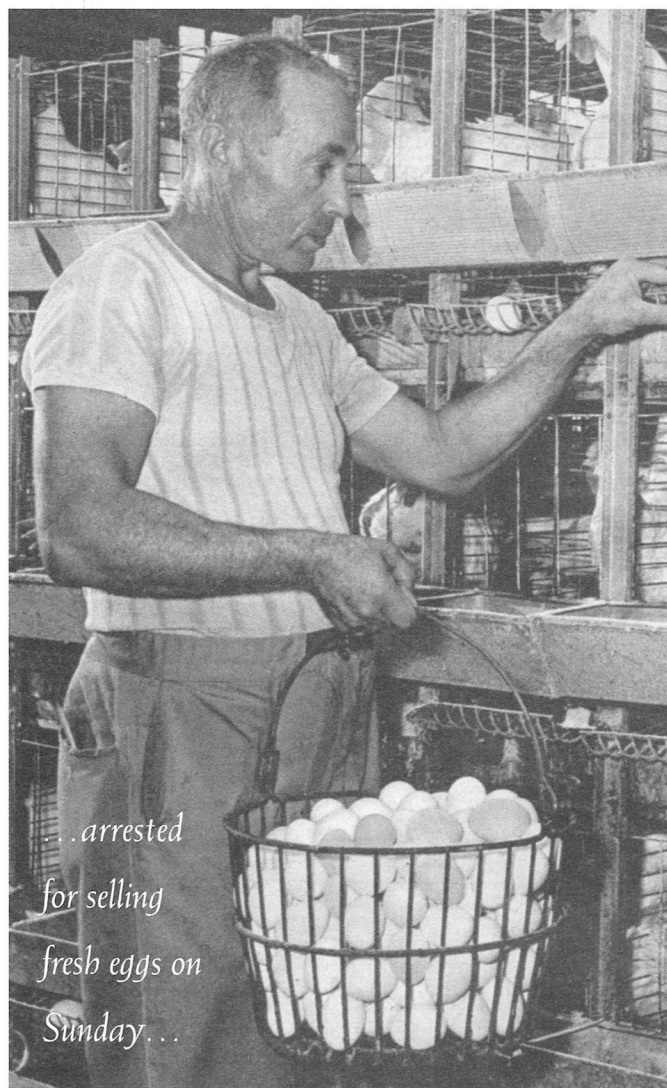
Upon that point, King's lawyers appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court in the fall of 1891, asking the Court to clarify whether the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment made First Amendment guarantees binding upon the state. It was a strategy used successfully by Jehovah's Witnesses in 1940.⁶ If the Supreme Court had adopted that theory in 1891, the course of Sunday legislation, and indeed all religion clause jurisprudence, would have been different. But the Court did not have the opportunity to rule on the question: R. M. King died on November 12, 1891, before his case came before the Court.

The 1890s may have been the high-water mark in the prosecution of Sabbatarians, but the flood did not recede immediately. As the tide of fundamentalism rolled toward its crest about the time of the famous Scopes trial, it carried with it a continuing volume of such prosecutions.⁷

Well into the twentieth century, as America experienced increasing industrialization and urbanization, with the concomitant rise of secularism and liberal thought, the pattern continued—and not just in the rural South. In 1923, three Seventh-day Adventists were arrested in Massachusetts and fined for painting the interior of a house on Sunday in order to get it ready for occupancy the next day. In 1932, a deputy sheriff of Washington County, Virginia, arrested two Seventh-day Adventists for Sunday work: one, a crippled mother who walked on crutches, for washing clothes on her own premises, and, the other, a man who donated and hauled a load of wood to a church to heat it for religious services.

As late as 1938, a Massachusetts storekeeper was arrested for selling fresh eggs on Sunday, at a time when it was legal to buy cooked eggs, beer, and liquor, and to attend sports events and movies on the same day.⁸

Beginning in 1940, a line of U.S. Supreme Court cases



...arrested
for selling
fresh eggs on
Sunday...

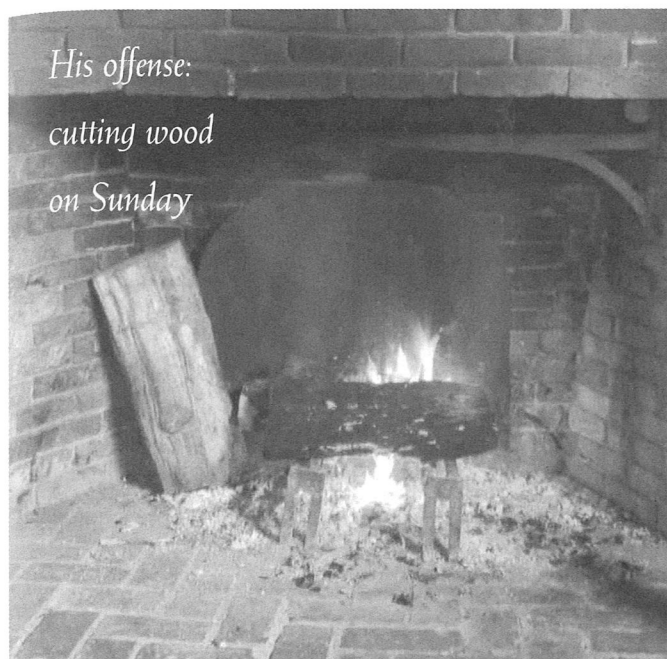
established that the First Amendment, including the religion clauses, had indeed been made applicable to state and local governments via the Fourteenth Amendment, thus opening the door to Sunday law challenges based on those clauses, and in 1961 those challenges found their way to the Court. The questions raised in *R. M. King's* case in 1891 would finally be answered by the high court seventy years later. It's just as well that King didn't live to hear the answer: Sunday laws were upheld as no longer religious in nature. That claim would have been impossible to make with a straight face in 1891.

The point? That Adventist activism of an earlier day averted two bills in Congress, and came very close to producing a fundamental change in the law, one that the Court might have reached a half-century earlier but for the death of R. M. King. Not until 1963, in the case of *Sherbert vs. Verner*, did the Court accord religious belief and practice the protection it deserves. And Adele Sherbert was also a Seventh-day Adventist! Our own history should teach us what we can accomplish in the area of human rights when we put sufficient resources into the effort.

Another case in point was that of Day Conklin of Big Creek, Forsyth County, Georgia, who in March 1889 was arrested, tried before a jury, and fined twenty-five dollars and costs, amounting in all to eighty-three dollars. His offense: cutting wood near his front door on Sunday, November 18, 1888. Attorney William F. Findley later gave the following recollection of the case:

One of these Seventh-day Adventists was tried over here in Forsyth County, and I think there never was a more unrighteous conviction. There was a man named Day Conklin, who was moving on Friday. He got his goods wet on Friday, and it turned off cold. On Saturday he went out and cut enough wood to keep his family from freezing. On Sunday, he still hadn't his things dry, and it was still as cold as it had been on Saturday. He still cut enough wood to keep his family warm, and they convicted him for doing this. I say that is an outrage, an unrighteous conviction, for he was doing the best he could. One of the jurymen told me that they did not convict him for what he had done, but for what he said he had a right to do. He said he had a right to work on Sunday.⁹

Notice, "we convicted him because he said he had a right." In reality, Conklin was convicted because he claimed that his religious practice was of equal dignity and



deserved the same respect and protection as that of the majority. His real crime was to claim equality.

Today, much of the resentment of homosexual claims for equal rights at bottom is resentment of a claim of equality. "They have the temerity to claim that they are our equals." In the homosexual marriage debate, many are willing to approve some arrangement that affords homosexuals all or most of the rights pertaining to marriage, as long as it is called something else—as long as there is not a claim of equality! That is sadly reminiscent of the fate of Day Conklin.

Our own history teaches us that when even sincere, well-meaning people seek to use the law to enforce their views of morality on others who do not share those views, bad things happen to good people. That lesson, coupled with an awareness of the potency of our advocacy, rightly motivated and focused, should place us in the front lines of those who defend equality rights today.

4. Is the proposed position in the best interest of the Church?

Certainly the best interest of the Church is a valid consideration. None will wish to jeopardize the Church by advocating, in its name, a particular position. Some will argue that the best interest of the Church is served by keeping a low profile on social and political issues. They will cite Ellen White's advice that the Church in the South should remain segregated, at least for the time, and that we should not publicly oppose Bible reading in the public schools. Those statements must be read and understood in

the context of a time in which the Church was fragile and vulnerable. Public opinion was such that advocacy on those issues would have cut off almost all avenues of witness.

Is that true today? Would advocacy on behalf of equality rights for homosexuals negate the ability of the Church to witness to society? In contrast, will continued silence on the issue negate our ability to communicate with thinking people who espouse a principled view of the matter? Our society is no longer monolithic on these issues; we do not face a situation analogous to the times in which Ellen White wrote.

More fundamentally, how can it ever be in the Church's interest to act other than in accordance with scriptural counsel and instruction? The Bible clearly tells us that God puts a tremendous value on human freedom. Our divinely given example is one who rendered aid where it was needed, not as a "respector of persons." Our own history shows the dangers that follow the legislation and imposition of religious beliefs and religiously based moral convictions on those who do not share them. To act on these principles is in the best interest of the Church. Indeed, to fail to do so would be an indictment of the Church, an irresponsible neglect of its best interest. ■

Notes and References

1. Quoted in William Addison Blakely, *American State Papers*, 4th rev. ed. (Washington, D.C.: *Review and Herald*, 1949), 514.
2. *In Re King*, 46 P. 905 (U.S. Cir. Ct., West Tenn., Aug. 1, 1891).
3. Now known as the United States District Court for the Western District of Tennessee.
4. *In Re King*, quoted in Blakely, *American State Papers*.
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Cantwell vs. Connecticut*, 310 US 296 (U.S. Supreme Court, 1940).
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9. *Ibid.*, 488–91.

Mitchell A. Tyner, minister and lawyer, recently retired as associate general counsel for the General Conference and North American Division, with responsibility for church-state and religious discrimination matters. This material is from the forthcoming book *Christianity and Homosexuality: Some Seventh-day Adventist Perspectives*.

The Beloved Community: A Radical Reformation

Conception of the Church | BY CHARLES SCRIVEN

Note: This article assumes awareness that the Adventist tradition, with its roots in the Baptist, Methodist, and Christian Connection communities, reflects the "believer's church," or Radical Reformation experience, and point of view. It also assumes awareness of the key elements (as expressed, classically, in Anabaptism) of that experience and point of view: (1) Discipleship, or unstinting identification with Christ; (2) New Life, or growth into the mind and character of Christ; (3) Witness, or the believer's responsibility to teach and live the way of Christ; (4) Community, or sharing of the joys and sorrows of faithful Christian life; and (5) Apocalyptic Consciousness, or the sense that Christ, at his soon return, will fully overcome the rulers and institutions of the present age.

The church is the beloved community, and the beloved community is...a mess. The beloved community is also, however, the new world on its way. It is nothing less than the body of the risen and returning Christ—existing on earth today.

The congregation at Corinth, one of the earliest, was rife with lawsuits, sexual sin, and quarrels over doctrine, idols, and food. Yet Paul, who loved and served the people there, could say that God had chosen *them* to shame and overturn the evil powers.¹

How can this be?

It's easy enough to see why problems come in. Just consider the ideal of full loyalty to Christ. The first Adventists looked back to New Testament times and embraced this ideal themselves. But for any congregation, that ideal—that pledge to keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus—can be overwhelming. With a standard this high, you fall short. Even when you pray and work to reach the standard, you fall short. And inside the church there are always worrywarts—people more attentive to God's commands than God's grace—who poison the air by turning disappointment with shortfalls into constant fretting over them.

When this happens, anyone can live a jittery, unadventurous life.

Christians who are jittery look inward, obsessed with how they are doing and afraid of what God thinks. Then, in order to cope, they find fault with how others are doing. And when there is enough of all this, it saps everyone's energy and patience, and the church turns into a community of worrywarts and faultfinders. A cloud of fear and resentment descends over everything.

Say that I myself am one of the worrywarts and faultfinders, and that I myself live under this cloud of fear and resentment. Then I will frown on others who fall short. Moreover, I will frown on those who, from a different vantage point, look beyond the gray to glimpse the sun. Sunk in my insecurity and self-doubt, I will look askance when visionaries see the world as a gift to enjoy, or give a bigger definition to discipleship than I do, or try daring initiatives, or move onto a bigger stage than I am used to. On the other hand, if I am one who looks past fear and resentment into the sunshine, while those around me stay under the cloud, I will begin to feel lonely and misunderstood. In the end, I will think the church is stifling.

Such an atmosphere can be no home for the adventurous. So the ones who are adventurous may leave—or the oppressiveness all around may gradually eat their own hearts out and make them unadventurous, too. Then they themselves will lose sight of how big a world God has made, and how many opportunities there are to be creative and to make a difference.

All this unhappiness and dysfunction results from salvation anxiety. But there is a cure for it, and the cure is a firm grasp on what we considered before, the good news that Jesus saves. Once you fully grasp this good news—and not least its message of forgiveness—the beloved community becomes, for all its faults, one of the great marvels of

THE BELOVED COMMUNITY



Ben Shahn

divine grace. It becomes nothing less than...the new world on its way, a place where hope runs deeply, and imagination leaps ahead, like a beacon cutting through the dark. Stale sanctimony you will find—on earth it never goes away—but you will find the story of Jesus, too, and also find a people emboldened by that story to live their best and deepest dreams.

The risen Jesus, so Luke tells us, assured his disciples that they would become his “witnesses,” both at home and “to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). By God’s grace, it wasn’t long until these witnesses had established a community of people who, with “glad and generous hearts,” were attempting to *be* Christ on earth (Acts 2:46). They were praising God together, taking care of one another, pursuing a ministry of healing deeds and words. All the while, they were growing—taking the story to the wider world, finding new members, enlarging the circle of compassion.

Later, Paul would say that the early Christians underwent baptism “into Christ Jesus.” By this rite, their old selves were “buried” and new selves “raised from the dead” so that, together with one another, they could “walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6:1–4). As Jesus, at his baptism, had come to see himself as God’s “beloved son,” so these new Christians came to see themselves as God’s beloved children.² And as Jesus, fortified by this love and aflame with new purpose, had sought to renew vision and heal humanity, so did these new Christians. They came to see, indeed, that in responding to the grace and peace of Christ, they would change the world. They would change it by keeping the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.

This they would *dare* to do. Their hope was a radical hope. Its focus was *practice*—sharing a way of life—and it galvanized their whole community to aspiration and adventure.

Practicing Community

Suzie is the nurse in *Wit*, the Pulitzer-Prize-winning play about a fifty-year-old English professor who is dying from ovarian cancer. One day, she brings a Popsicle into the room, and her patient gladly accepts half of it. Then, taking a seat on the commode by her patient’s bedside, the nurse tells this story:

“When I was a kid, we used to get these from a truck. The man would come around and ring his bell and we’d all run over. Then we’d sit on the curb and eat our Popsicles.”

She pauses. “Pretty profound, huh?”³

Yes it is.

Suzie’s story is profound because when you do something together with others, and do it repeatedly, the experience sticks with you, and it affects your whole outlook. It shapes how you see the world, how you feel about it, and how you carry out your daily life. That’s why, from the beginning, the beloved community put *shared practices* at the center of their lives. Doing things together, and doing them repeatedly, was a key strategy for keeping focused on God, and on God’s will and way.

Much of popular Christianity thinks of a “relationship with Christ” as a personal, almost a private, matter. The relationship is not so much a connection that you and others share as a connection that you have on your own. For people who think this way, it is more natural to speak of *my* Savior than to speak of *ours*; the words *I* and *me* roll off the tongue more easily than *we* and *us*.

This reflects the individualism of today’s Western culture, and its obsession with independence and personal choice. The most mature human beings, it is thought, are the ones who thrust off dependence on others for direction. Autonomy is the ideal. For Christians who accept all this uncritically, a relationship with God may seem to depend little, or not at all, on a relationship with other human beings.

But the first accounts of the church show men and women linked inseparably with one another. Autumn leaves piled together withstand the wind; solitary leaves do not. The first Christians understood this. Through constant connection, and through practices that reinforced it, they withstood the pressures that might otherwise have scattered them into insignificance. Together, they kept their memories alive; they resisted the dominant culture; they strengthened their resolve against indifference and barbarity. Together, they embodied (though imperfectly) the risen Christ, and became the vanguard for a new humanity.

At the same time, of course, all this was God’s doing. To use Paul’s language, they were what they were by the grace of God. They worked hard to be Christian, and yet were always aware of the gifts they’d received. Their very lives and effort were a gift, and they gave constant thanks and praise to God for what they had received.⁴

One occasion for thanksgiving and praise was the Sabbath, when routine and sweaty haste came to a stop, and the first Christians found time, together, for wonder and renewal. On Sabbath, work lost its power to oppress,

monotony its power to hypnotize. Now the first Christians could awake to a heightened sense of divine presence. They could hear the re-telling of their story, adjust their lives accordingly, feel the darkness tremble when they joined together in one song. Now they could renew their watchcare over one another, and find in the friendship of the faithful new energy for mission.

On Sabbath, in other words, they stopped so that they could begin again. They stopped so that, renewed by rest, they could go forth in the peace of Christ to love and serve the wider world.

It was the same when the first Christians broke bread. Often they did this together—one body, as Paul would say, with many members. And again the story was central. You took food in the company of others, and then, in a much-repeated ritual, you heard how Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, washed the disciples' feet and afterward shared bread and wine with them so they would always look backward with thanks and forward with hope.⁵

They were called, these first Christians, to live connected and illuminating lives, and so to *be* the earthly embodiment of Christ. If you took this to require flawlessness, it would be, of course, an impossible ideal. As for the first Christians, they acknowledged that humans are flawed and goodness fragile. But they also knew that when they fell short of goodness, and hurt someone, or were hurt, they had one another for healing.

All the way back to Abraham, the Hebrew people had pursued daunting ideals. Now, under Jesus' influence, forgiveness had taken center stage. Practicing forgiveness was how the church would deal with human imperfection. The church would meet failure with forgiveness. It would meet even egregious failure—even violence—with forgiveness. That is how it would offer new life in the face of brokenness, and keep alive the hope of reconciliation and renewal. Thus the church, though flawed, would embody God's point of view on earth, and be the place where God's true colors shine through on earth.

It was not that forgiveness would be offered willy-nilly. In Matthew 18, you find Jesus putting forgiveness at the forefront. Yet in that chapter, he also envisions a disciple community in which people watch over and correct one another. For enough refusal to listen, an offender can even lose, at least for the time being, the privilege of membership. But the point, always, is the "restoration of a rupture in the community." The point, always, is healing—healing

of broken people, healing of the broken church.⁶

In Jesus' vision for all this, the watchcare involves conversation—two or three or more considering what to do in the face of disagreement. How do you reach, how do you learn from, how if necessary do you correct the offending person or group? Thus, the point when you refine your understanding of Christian life is always *practical*: it is how you enhance—how you *improve*—the life and witness of the community.

The practice of conversation, then, was like remember-



ing the Sabbath or sharing the gospel meal. It was another way of keeping the community strong, another way to resist dysfunction and strengthen resolve and assure that God's true colors can shine through.

In the Adventism that grew up in response to what Ellen White called the "primitive godliness" of the early church, the Sabbath School came to be the occasion for this practice.⁷ Crisis or not, conversation would take place, and take place regularly. Being Adventist, after all, meant *becoming* Adventist—staying on the move, looking forward, always, to God's next transformation of shared life. Instead of feeling entirely at home with itself, the church would conduct a never-ending conversation.⁸ So it would guard against the ebbing of faithfulness. So it would make its journey, every week, into deeper understanding.

Never, when you follow the New Testament way, do you burrow into sheer solitude. You practice community. You do so by participating in the *practices* that reinforce community. You and others are thus connected—like

mountain climbers. And with the gift of shared strength, you become adventurous. You become adventurous enough to be an alternative to the commonplace, and even to be a revolution in the making.

Changing the World

In the year 390, a wealthy Christian woman named Fabiola, from the city of Rome, helped invent a new institution. She'd been through a divorce, but she didn't hole up inside her wounded self, didn't let the pain define her life.

Instead, she began attending to victims of disease and hunger in her city, victims the dominant pagan culture didn't really care about. Her teacher had been St. Jerome, and he said: "I have often seen her washing wounds which others—even men—could hardly bear to look at." In doing this, in giving "sufferers from the streets...all the attention of a nurse," she was founding...the hospital.

Organizations focused on the care of the vulnerable hadn't existed before Fabiola. Even the leading citizens of Rome lacked the right frame of mind, and emperors of the time, leaders among leading citizens, considered it their right to butcher and steal in order to expand and sustain imperial power. Pagans in general, both Roman and Greek, gave little attention to the vulnerable, and thought pity and mercy were pathological emotions. Plato, the brilliant philosopher, believed the best way to deal with beggars was to dump them outside the (ideal) boundaries of the community.

The first Christians, building on Jewish ideals of hospital-

ity, defied the heartlessness of the dominant culture. They cared about the poor as well as the rich, the unattractive as well as the good-looking, the powerless as well as the powerful. The hospitals that came into being with Fabiola and those who followed her drew circles large enough to include even people usually dismissed as undeserving.

Together, they were light—a beacon cutting through the dark. Today, institutions like this exist almost everywhere. But as the medical historian Roy Porter declares: "Christianity planted the hospital."⁹

Paul told the Corinthian Christians, "If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away" (2 Cor. 5:17). What he meant, it seems, is that a tiny filament of light can defy the darkness and bring new possibilities to view. A small number, even as few as one, can effect great change. So when a thoughtful few, joined to the church, cast off the jitters and begin to *resist* convention and actually to *be* the risen Christ on earth, the beauty of their holiness redeems the world.

Jesus had meant something like this when he told the disciples: "You are the salt of the earth" and "the light of the world" (Matt. 5:13, 14). God's joyous few—the ones the book of Revelation calls the "remnant" (Rev. 14:12 KJV)—would somehow break the stranglehold of evil. And when, after Luther, the Radical Reformers objected to "Christendom," or the idea of church and society as one, they were saying that the church is the company of *committed*. You can't have a "Christian" nation, or a "Christian" civilization, where the mere fact of your birth makes you a believer. You can only have volunteer Christians who have chosen to be baptized into Christ, and whose old selves have been buried and new selves raised from the dead. Only then, does the beloved community become a "lantern of righteousness" against the dark monotony of harm and hurt. Only then does it become...a revolution in the making.¹⁰

Jews pioneered the idea of being a people who were "in but not of" the dominant, surrounding culture. It was always a costly experiment, a way of being that "required deep and unshakable conviction."¹¹ You had to have the courage to be different, to be the minority and not the majority. Jesus, himself a Jew, exemplified this courage. And the first Christians knew that anyone who would belong to a lantern community, anyone who would be true salt and true light, must exemplify it, too.

The reward of so doing is that *by being different you make a*





difference. Along with others, you are the tiny filament of light that defies the darkness. You find yourself in league with Fabiola and the inventors of the hospital. Or, to bring in a recent witness, you identify with Martin Luther King, who in both spirit and power lived at the margin of American society, yet was the key to the civil rights revolution. Or you look with pride on the Adventist pioneers of better health, who, also from the American margin, have made an ever stronger case for plant-based food and other forms of attention to bodily, as well as spiritual, well-being.

One twentieth-century giant among theologians with roots in the Radical Reformation was John Howard Yoder. "Social creativity," he wrote, "is a minority function." For him, the church was not only an alternative to business as usual, but also, by its example, a sign of hope and an architect of "restored humanity." In a sentence on the church as lovely and evocative as the dawn of day, he said: "The confessing people of God is the new world on its way."¹²

That is the ideal, or better (from a believer's standpoint), the reality: the beloved community is the new world on its way.

But when problems boil up in the church, how can this be plausible?

I have a friend who one day told my colleagues and me, at the college where I work, that hypocrisy "is bad, but the existence of hypocrisy is good." When we first heard this we were puzzled. But we came to see the point. If your ideals are so low a troglodyte can reach them, that's hardly wonderful, hardly a reason to stand tall. It's like saying you

have a moral vision and it's to keep out of jail, or stay sober at breakfast, or tell the truth for ten minutes. If you aspire to be way below average, you can say you're not a hypocrite, but so what?

When you think about it, you want ideals that stretch you so far you might not reach them. And from day one, that's been at the heart of the Hebrew response to God.

All the way back to Abraham, the Hebrew people have pursued daunting ideals, impossible dreams. A single family would bless all families? The church would be Christ on earth? A mere remnant would be a revolution in the making? Yes, that was the idea.

Life with this family, this remnant, was often underwhelming, disappointing, maddening. Still, the best people *believed*. It wasn't optimism that kept them going, it was *faith*. All that was good was God's. Their hope, however outlandish, was good, and like every ounce of effort they put in, and like their very lives, it was... God's. God's dream. God's gift. God's work.

The divine patience somehow reinforced this sense of things. As underwhelming, disappointing, and maddening as they might be, God would not give up on them. God was always ready to open another door to yet another beginning. And if God did not give up on them, they would not give up on God.

That patience, that readiness to forgive, came not only to define the idea of God, but also to define the ideal response to God. Saying Yes to God meant saying Yes to the people God had made. With Jesus, this sensibility took center stage. As God did not give up on you, you did not give up on others. Meeting failure with forgiveness was how to deal with human imperfection.

And that is why the faults of the beloved community do not doom its revolutionary project. It remains, though imperfectly, the embodiment of divine forgiveness, and just for this reason it can provide, despite the faults, a "facilitating environment," a framework, that is, for the development of trust and moral sensitivity.¹³ It can provide enough support, enough patience, and enough hope to nourish and sustain a Fabiola, a Martin Luther King, a band of health researchers at Loma Linda University.

What is more, the beloved community can provide enough of these to nourish and sustain... *us*, and, by its shared practices and outlandish hope, embolden *us* to live our best and deepest dreams, and actually to *be*, by God's grace, a revolution in the making. ■

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Notes and References

1. For the problems, see the first few chapters of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. In his first chapter, though, he can say (1 Cor. 1:28) that the Corinthian members have been called to shame the “strong” and “reduce to nothing things that are....” A few lines down (2:8)—here is a clue to what he means by the “things that are”—he speaks of the “rulers of this age” who have “crucified the Lord of glory.” Unless otherwise noted, scriptural quotes in this paper are from the NRSV.

2. See, for example, Romans 12:19 and 1 John 2:7.

3. Margaret Edson, *Wit* (New York: Faber and Faber, 1999), 66.

4. See 1 Corinthians 15:9, 10, 57; see, too, Chapter 12 for the sense of Christian life as a gift.

5. On the church as the body of Christ, see 1 Corinthians 12, especially verse 27. On footwashing, see John 13:1–12. For Paul's account of what came to be called the Lord's Supper, see 11:23–33.

6. I rely here on James William McClendon Jr., *Ethics: Systematic Theology*, 2d ed. (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), 1:225–27.

7. In *The Great Controversy*, 464, Ellen White associated such godliness with “apostolic times.” What happened then provided guidance for what happens now.

8. McClendon speaks from his Radical Reformation perspective, of “never-ending congregational conversation.” *Ethics*, 225.

9. For the story and the final quote, see Roy Porter, *The Greatest Benefit to Mankind: A Medical History of Humanity* (New York: Norton, 1998), 88. For the account of pagan sensibility, I depend also on Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders History* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996), 212.

10. The “lantern” metaphor is from Anabaptist Balthasar Hubmaier, and is quoted in Walter Klaassen, ed., *Anabaptism in Outline: Selected Primary Sources* (Scottsdale, Penn.: Herald Press, 1981), 102.

11. James William McClendon, *Doctrine: Systematic Theology*, (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 2:356.

12. John Howard Yoder, *The Royal Priesthood: Essays Ecclesiological and Ecumenical* (Scottsdale, Penn.: Herald Press, 1998), 315, 373. The words on social creativity are reminiscent of a famous quote—hard to pin down; it may be from a newspaper interview—attributed to anthropologist Margaret Mead: “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

13. The quoted phrase appears in remarks on infancy by pediatrician Donald Winnicott. See Martha Nussbaum's discussion of Winnicott in *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 185, 186, and 224–29.

The Adventist Community as the Light of the World: *Claiming the Whole of Matthew's Vision* | BY ERNEST J. BURSEY

SERMON ON THE MOUNT, MATT. 5:1, FRANZ GUILLEMY



I live with the notion that texts shape communities, sometimes perversely. Surely sacred texts should shape sacred communities in honorable ways. That is why they were written. What sort of community would emerge from a faithful reading of the Sermon on the Mount, the major address in the Gospel of Matthew? Communities of faith have long looked to the Sermon on the Mount for a sense of identity. The Puritans of New England considered themselves the light on the hill in the wilderness of the New World. The Amish have succeeded in freezing a cultural expression of the Sermon on the Mount.

What if our community of faith, the Seventh-day Adventist community, took more seriously its identity as a community of light and salt, obedient to the vision of Jesus and Matthew? Would it become more perfectionist, or even legalistic, in dire need of the Pauline or even Johannine perspectives on salvation and experiential religion? Would such a focus lead to denominational pride, the downside of possessing the truth? The following article reviews my conclusions and convictions.

I grew up believing that my church had exclusive ownership of Revelation 14:6–12. I memorized its horrific language. But as a ten-year-old in Mrs. Pitts' fifth-grade classroom in Loma Linda, I also memorized the Beatitudes in order to be invested as a Junior Missionary Volunteer Friend. It took all of ten minutes of focused attention to plant the words lightly on my brain so as to repeat them back without error. No one instructed me on the sense or significance of these words. They left before dawn the next day.

Aside from the fleeting Beatitudes, there was the often-quoted collection that followed:

Ye are the light of the world. . . . Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. Think not that I have come to abolish

the Law and the prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not a jot or a tittle will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. (Matt. 5:13, 16–18)

Jesus' summons in Matthew 5:48, "Be ye therefore perfect even as your heavenly Father is perfect," was repeated in sermons to support the call to sinlessness, especially for those of us living in the end-time, even as its possibilities of achievement were less openly debated. Other verses throughout Matthew about the Sabbath and the Second Coming seemed to support my community's appropriation and reading of the Sermon on the Mount, with its high view of the Law and the importance of keeping all the commandments, including the forgotten Fourth.

The periodic decisions of religion departments and committees to revise curricula can have huge impact not only on the students taking the new courses, but as much or more on the teachers assigned to teach them. Returning to full-time teaching at Walla Walla College from graduate school in 1982, I was handed a new course to teach—the two-quarter-hour course, Sermon on the Mount.

My personal attention to the Sermon on the Mount had lagged for perhaps thirty years after the fifth grade. It is only a modest exaggeration to say that the subsequent twenty-five years of my professional and spiritual life are a postscript to that curriculum decision and course assignment.

In the wisdom of the faculty during my academic absence, the old Life and Teachings of Jesus course had been laid to rest, with three new courses constructed from its remains, one of which was the Sermon on the Mount. The textbook was ostensibly three chapters in Matthew and a few verses in Luke 6. Ellen White's slim *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessings* was a presumed supplement.

On the first day of class, I waved a single sheet of paper in front of the students, offered them multiple copies of the textbook, and began the process of public reflection on the exegetical riches and practical value of these few

lines. In time, I managed to put together the substance of twenty class lectures and matching assignments, and I even memorized the textbook.

As I read widely in the vast scholarly and devotional literature on the Sermon, I developed a deep appreciation for the little book abbreviated in class notes as *MB*. If the Sermon on the Mount had become my central turf and Matthew my spiritual guide, Ellen White remained my spiritual mother.

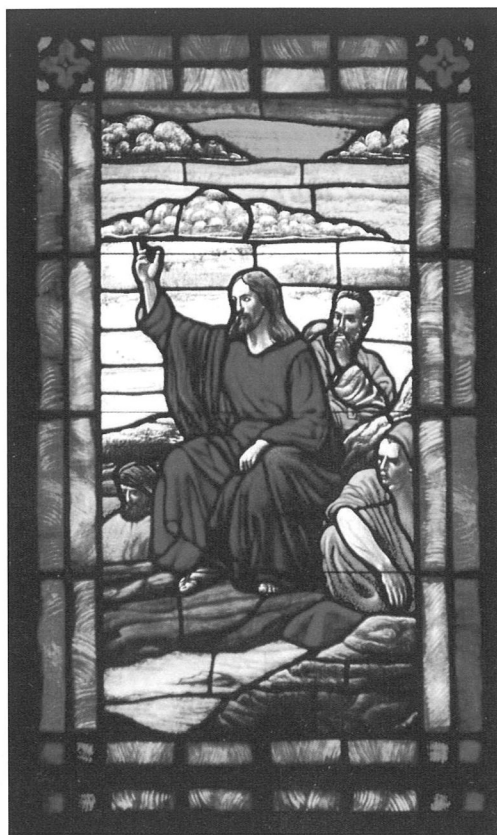
In the meantime, I searched to find an original Ph.D. dissertation topic that could please my committee on the other side of the country and then began a decades' long struggle to complete a dissertation that involved a close reading of Matthew on the subject of exorcism. These close readings for the dissertation convinced me that the book of Matthew had been carefully, even meticulously, constructed from the available materials and led me to discern inner connections and developments I had missed before entering the doctoral program.

In addition, regular opportunities to teach an upper division general studies course on the Gospel of Matthew as well as separate com-

panion courses on the Gospel of Mark and the Gospel of John allowed me to live as a privileged house guest in each Gospel for up to three months at a time.

Over time, I became convinced that the book of Matthew was intended in its entirety as a manual for missionaries (Matt. 28:18–20). Its construction spoke to the skill of a Master Teacher being well-served by a master writer-teacher who edited Mark's story to allow room for several lectures constructed out of the available sayings.

Roughly speaking, what Mark had done in constructing a powerful narrative, albeit in mosaic form, out of the pieces of the Jesus traditions was matched by Matthew's subsequent feat in constructing a corresponding series of lectures out of the available sayings collections in the Jesus tradition. What the product, the Gospel of Matthew, lacked in narrative color, when compared with Mark or Luke, was replaced



by a high level of order, making it an accessible guidebook for the student or apprentice engaged in church planting.

I began to read the Sermon on the Mount as a speech event designed to be re-enacted again and again. I recited it by memory in its entirety at the beginning of the course, in public sermons, and even at Adventist ministerial seminars, where I recommended it as the source for balanced sermonic fair in confronting the central issues of Adventist engagement with the world alongside the essential spiritual disciplines.

The Beatitudes were now back with a vengeance. I came to see them as a sort of portable three-by-five review card, punctuated with the repetitive sounds of *pi* for easier recall—note the “p” sounds in *ptochoi* to *pneumatic*, v. 3; *penthountes* and *paraklythesontai*, v. 4; *prais*, v. 5; and *peinontes*, v. 6. In short, the Beatitudes stand as a carefully constructed summary of the Christian way designed to be memorized and retained.

The Beatitudes are divided into two equal halves of thirty-six Greek words each. Each half ends with attention to “righteous-

ness” (5:6 and 5:10). To simplify, the first half, the four beatitudes in Matthew 5:3–6, seemed directed primarily to the disciple’s relation with God, culminating in a hunger for righteousness. The second half, the four beatitudes in Matthew 5:7–10, appeared to be directed primarily to the righteous relationship of the disciple with the community and the world.

The overarching “kingdom of heaven,” highlighted in the first and last beatitudes (5:3 and 5:10), holds in its embrace the cluster of rewards in 5:4–5:9. Then Matthew unpacked and illustrated the elements of the Beatitudes in the rest of the Sermon, which itself was echoed and expanded in the remaining lectures in the book, and illustrated by the

actions of Jesus in the narrative. I imagined a widening wedge, starting with the Beatitudes. I was finding the sense in the arrangement of the whole book as well as its parts.

Another Walla Walla College School of Theology curriculum revision committee in the 1990s and the teaching assignment from my encouraging peers pitched me forward into developing a new course on Spiritual Formation for incoming theology and religion majors team taught with Pastor Bill Knott, now of the *Adventist Review*. Utterly out of my league in terms of academic and personal preparation for a course on spirituality, I began to search for help.

I walked into Jon Dybdahl’s office at Andrews University and asked, “Jon, what is unique about Christian spirituality?”

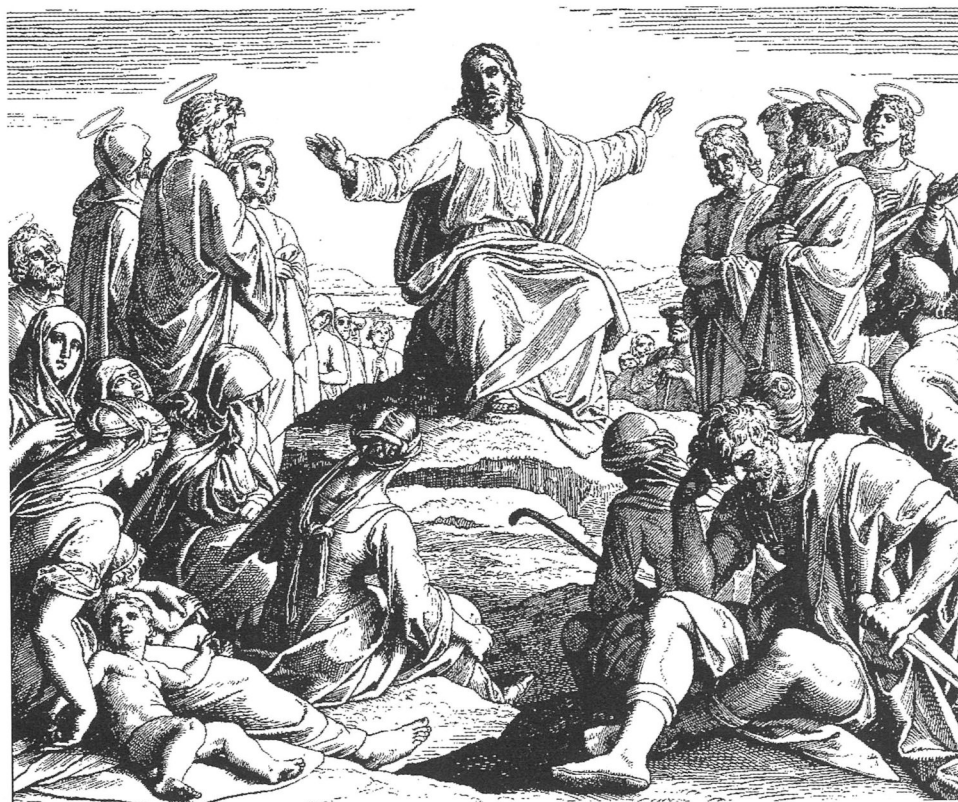
Without hesitation he said, “Repentance.” Of course. That was Jesus’ mantra in Matthew 4:17. His reminder

gave me not only direction in the new course but also fresh impetus in revisiting the older course on the Sermon on the Mount.

Just a few verses before the Sermon on the Mount in chapters 5–7, we see Jesus touring Galilee with the call, “Repent for the kingdom of

heaven is at hand” (4:17; compare 3:2). I began to consider the tie between Jesus’ public call for repentance and the Beatitudes that followed a few verses later in 5:1, 2, where he teaches the disciples and the crowds that followed him.

Given Matthew’s skills in development and Jesus’ evident interest in both repentance and the kingdom, it seemed to me most unlikely that the call to repentance



in light of the coming kingdom remained merely a slogan encountered by the reader near the beginning of the book only to be left at the side of the road for other more important matters. If the Beatitudes were intended to take up the bare threads of Jesus' mantra to "Repent" and his announcement of the kingdom's nearness, then the first beatitude, at least, and others, as well, would need to be understood in the light of that mantra.

In fact, the Beatitudes do take up the "kingdom of heaven" as the central reality encountered as one enters and leaves the Beatitudes (5:3, 5:10). Scholarly debates about how to interpret Matthew's version of the Beatitudes in light of Luke's quite different formulations of both the Beatitudes and the Woes or in light of Jewish understandings of the "poor" have to make room for Matthew's own views revealed by Matthew's intratextual connections.

I was driven by conviction from years of reading Matthew's careful work that he would not leave Jesus' mantra, "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand," to languish on the side of the road, ignored and underdeveloped.

Instead, the Beatitudes emerged to me as an artful and accessible description of both repentance and the kingdom of heaven. For Matthew, the "poor in spirit" (5:3) described the core of repentance. Surely not everyone who mourns (5:4) is or will be comforted. But surely those who mourn in the state of repentance will be comforted. If repentance is the appropriate response to the presence of the kingdom, it is also the appropriate entrance to the kingdom of heaven.

Repentance for Matthew's Jesus is not a formal act but a profound movement, transforming the whole being. The meekness, the gentleness and accessibility of their Teacher (11:29), who himself has already received all authority in heaven and on earth (28:18–20), is to be met with the meekness, humility, and "teachableness" of the learners (5:5), willing now to set aside their own views about the kingdom and righteousness.

Hungering and thirsting for righteousness (5:6), whether understood as holiness or justice or both, that intense desire to be a better person and to seek a better world, is the swelling bud that flowers in the final four beatitudes, where mercy, integrity, assertive peacemaking characterize the disciples' righteousness in a community of salt and light (5:7–10).

It was coming together for me—the pieces were connected: the call to repent, the beatitudes, and on to Matthew's vision of the community of salt and light. The expanding wedge started with that call to repentance. We may apply and expand our understanding of the Beatitudes beyond Matthew's description of repentance in light of the coming kingdom of heaven. We may insist on more. But we must start with that as most likely Matthew's intention.

There were other important pieces that I cannot overlook in this brief recital of an exegetical journey toward spiritual truth. The austere rigor of the Sermon has led many interpreters and lay readers to see it as law instead of gospel. The warnings against anger and against sinning with the eyes, the call to perfection—all these the beginning student finds daunting.

Should the Sermon on the Mount be retained as preparation for the Gospel by setting the standard of righteousness too high for human achievement? Should it be seen as merely provisional, intended for the Jews of Jesus' time, in the interim awaiting the end of the world? Why not admit that its author, a Jewish Christian scribe too closely tied to his perfectionistic past, misunderstood or even betrayed Jesus' message?

Too loyal myself to both Matthew and Jesus to embrace any of these suggestions, I stumbled on the first beatitude. "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." "Is." Present tense. *Estin*. Not in the future tense, like all the other verbs in the six next verses. Present tense. Why? And why hadn't I noticed the "is" sooner? Why take an "is" for granted?

Somewhere in the countless cycles of repeating the Sermon and the Beatitudes I heard the "is" in this first foundational Beatitude and began reflecting on its implications. All the calls to righteous thought and action in the rest of the Sermon have to be read in light of that "is." If the Beatitudes connect up with Jesus' call to "repent" (4:16), then the first Beatitude is an offer of sheer grace, a present possession of or inclusion in the kingdom of heaven.

Membership in the kingdom of heaven is not based on the achievement of ethical perfection or even the performance of a mature believer but on the response of the humbled spirit to the presence of the kingdom. Those who acknowledge their brokenness in the presence of God are

accounted as part of his kingdom. That kingdom is present, though its full flowering remains a promise—the reason for the future tense verbs used in describing all the other rewards in 5:4–9.

The gap between Paul and Matthew's Jesus diminishes, if not completely disappears. Salvation becomes a present reality for the repentant. We can say we are saved. As I coined it for my students, "You are not on trial but in training."

Matthew presents repentance as the foundation for all spiritual and ethical progress. Repentance becomes normative for the disciple when understood as poverty in spirit and sensitivity to the consequences of our ethical and moral failures, and by an appropriate humility and an intense desire for holiness. From this point of view, it is healthy, normal, and right to repent, to be in the process of repenting.

It is morbid, abnormal, and wrong to live and act otherwise. Repentance is but

acknowledging the truth of my spiritual poverty in the presence of the One who knows much more about my spiritual poverty than I imagine. To lightly paraphrase Ellen White, "Every advance in the life of the Spirit is marked by a deepening sense of repentance."

However, to stop here would fall far short of representing Matthew's vision. So far, I have written of the disciple in the singular, as if Jesus had said, "Blessed is the one who is poor in spirit, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to him." Our English translations allow us to imagine that Jesus' words, "You are the light of the world," really mean "This little light of mine."

No, what Jesus had in mind was a community of the

repentant. The Greek word, *humeis*, "you" in "You are the light," is plural, as the old King James Version clarifies, "Ye are the light of the world." Even the call to "Be ye therefore perfect" is addressed to the community as a whole. One does not develop spiritual maturity in isolation. Jesus did not envision a solitary goodness, a singular maturity.¹

The purpose of the good works of an enlightening

community of the repentant is to lead to the praise of our Father, just as the praiseworthy deeds of children bring praise to the parent who brought them to life, and fed and trained them. But what good deeds dare the community pursue?

Matthew provides six illustrations in Matthew 5:21–48. The good works, alluded to in the Beatitudes and acclaimed in the call to let your light shine, are displayed in the six cases that follow—starting with the making of peace within the



family as Jesus' way of keeping the commandment, "You shall not kill." A community not at peace with itself cannot bring peace.

But Jesus goes deeper. We are to abort the evil deed while it is still in the womb of our heart. Vows of faithfulness are to be kept. Truth is to be spoken without props. In the final two illustrations, Jesus pushes us forward to deeds of assertive surprising love in the face of evil. Not only forego vengeance, but also "turn the other cheek" and "walk the second mile," disrupting the routinizations of violence and control.

This is not a call to passivity, not a retreat to quietism, but the assertive love for even the enemy. The

call to perfection or, more accurately, maturity, is issued right after the command to love the enemies and pray for the persecutors.

This article cannot be comprehensive. I must soon stop. But first, here is one more vital insight. Listen to the apparent contradiction between Matthew 5:16, "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven," and Matthew 6:1, "Beware of practicing your righteousness before men in order to be seen by them; for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven."

The tension is clearly evident. It can only be resolved by recognizing that the good works to be witnessed by men mentioned in 5:16 are illustrated by the descriptions of the good works of the righteous that follow in Matthew 5:21–48. Peacemaking, faithfulness, integrity, assertive and loving responses to evil—these are to be on display.

However, the mention of the righteousness not to be witnessed by men (6:1) is followed by the descriptions of the religious practices of alms, prayer, and fasting in 6:2–18, and characteristic of the pious in every religion. Within Judaism, these deeds of piety can also be technically described as "righteousness" (compare Phil. 3:6).

I suspect Matthew intentionally edited Jesus' speech to give the hearers a jolt in 6:1 that could only be resolved by listening to the implicit resolution that follows. He intended that they listen carefully to what follows. For us, this means that Jesus acknowledges the spiritual disciplines of a religious community. But in no way are these ever on display.

The community of salt and light may keep the Sabbath but its members are not to be known as "the Sabbath keepers." The community of Jesus' apprentices, as the collective light of the world, exists for the sake of the world. Its good works of mercy, integrity, peacemaking, and assertive love—not its religious exercises, vital as they are for the benefit of the community—are to engage the heart and imagination of the world. Besides, one does not take one's pills in full view of the neighbors.

At the beginning of this article, I asked, "What if our community of faith, the Seventh-day Adventist community, took more seriously its identity as a community of light and salt, obedient to the vision of Jesus and Matthew? What sort of community would emerge from a faithful reading of the major address in that Gospel?" In this article, I have operated with the belief that faithfulness must start with a careful reading of the whole text. I have proposed a number of readings that I believe would enrich the traditional Adventist reading of the Sermon, to snatch a few verses here and there in support of distinctive Adventist beliefs.

What benefits might then accrue from our taking up Matthew's comprehensive vision of a community of Jesus' apprentices? In response, I must lay aside any imagined exegetical authority I possess and simply offer suggestions as a fellow believer.

Denominational attention would be directed to the weightier matters of the law like justice, mercy, and faithfulness (23:23). Local congregations would provide honest mutual support in the journey to maturity (18:1–34). The church would be a safe place to grow. And a renewed appreciation might arise for the mature moral vision of Ellen White (or, if you prefer, the moral vision of the mature Ellen White).

In summary, this would be a church with a balanced and realistic view of the normal spiritual life with the assurance of a present salvation for the repentant. It would be a church with humility in place of religious arrogance; a church with a sense of identity and mission beyond pointing out who and what is dangerous out there; and a church with members who are actively and creatively loving their evil world instead of isolating themselves from it. ■

Notes and References

1. The switch between the singular and plural pronouns in the pronouncements throughout the Sermon on the Mount allows for some debate—is the brief Lord's Prayer intended for public or private use, since it follows the command in the singular to go into one's closet to pray? Surely, if uttered by a solitary person the prayer's sentiments could only be claimed if that solitary pray-er was aware of a larger "our" and "us" for whom she was praying.

Ernest J. Bursey teaches religion at the Florida Hospital College of Health Sciences, in Orlando, Florida.

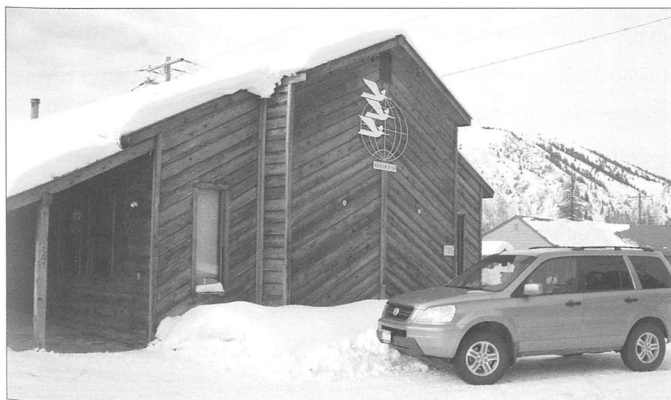
Blest Be the Tie that Binds | BY JULI MILLER

*Blest be the tie that binds
Our hearts in Christian love!
The fellowship of kindred minds
Is like to that above. . . .*

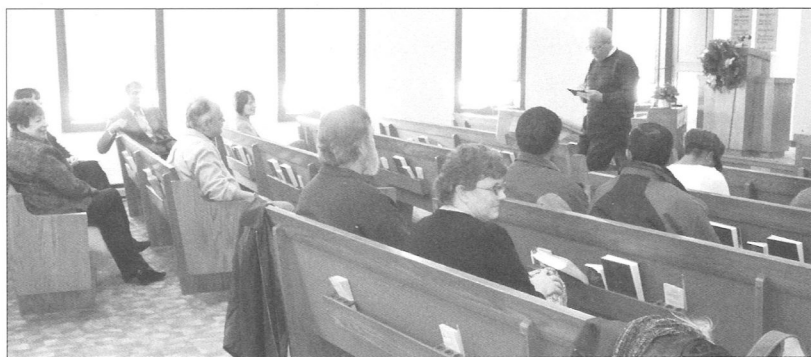
(John Fawcette, 1772)

If a dozen of us are present on Sabbath morning at the Wood River Seventh-day Adventist Church, we consider it a good turnout. However, as we pass through the dramatic seasons of the Sun Valley, Idaho, area, we are blessed by a steady trickle of visitors who find their way to our nondescript brown sanctuary next to a discount gas station and no-frills motel.

The faces that appeared in our pews in the past year represent an exhilarating tapestry of culture, talents, and dreams. From Jamaica came young bookkeeper Tammica with the gorgeous voice, after surfing "the Internet for an adventure" somewhere with snow, mountains, and a totally different kind of work. Emanouil, a veterinarian from Bulgaria with a gigantic smile and laugh, was attending an international orthopedic veterinary conference here and checking out the legendary ski runs on Mount Baldy



between sessions. Tianna, who will soon complete her degree at Brooks Institute of Photography in California before moving to Iceland, came here for a short internship with a local photographer whose portraits of horses and Native Americans have an international market. Ben, a pediatric neurosurgeon and author from the East Coast, was in town with his wife for a board meeting of a high-profile retail organization.



Young and restless and ponytailed Abram, escaping from an isolated stop along the river in northern Idaho, is doing a half-year stint with the U.S. Forest Service and revising his short stories during his time off. Mary, who had just spent a season working in Antarctica after living in Alaska, decided to hang out in Sun Valley while her boyfriend was traveling in South America. Not long ago, a New Zealand helicopter pilot who was part of the airborne assault on our Castle Rock wildfire lingered after potluck for a good afternoon visit before returning to the incident base camp. Just last week, a Romanian couple touring Idaho for ten days shared their stories of homeland persecution and pursuit of freedom and new careers in American.

No visitor goes unnoticed. You are quickly engulfed with questions, asked if you can play the piano, read a passage from Scripture, or present a worship hour message. We insist you stay for potluck.



"the work" is advancing in the various publications and broadcasts. The Adventist world also shrinks the space between people. A popular idea today is that there are only six degrees of separation between people in a world flattened by commerce and technology. Having some kind of link with Adventist culture probably shrinks the separation to a mere 1.5 degrees. Within

How would one describe the kind of relationship any of these visitors have with God? With the world? With their own heart or soul? With Adventism? Much remains a mystery after our brief fellowship of a day, a few weeks, or sometimes a few months. Yet there is the immediate sense of kinship no matter the manifested or unknown differences. Each guest's time with our small congregation invigorates us long after the God-be-with-you's have been spoken. Perhaps this is what it felt like for one of the early small churches to get a letter of encouragement from the Apostle Paul. It reminds us of being part of something bigger, without boundaries of place or time.

*Our fears, our hopes, our aims are one,
Our comforts and our cares.*

Once one has a certain exposure to Adventist culture, the world becomes both very large and very small. It expands because Adventism goes to all corners of the earth, and we hear and see the global stories as part of the Mission Spotlight moments at church and the reports of how

a few minutes, we can usually identify someone we both know somewhere on Earth.

I am connected with people who represent a Whitman's Sampler box of beliefs and lifestyles as a result of having lived in many places, worked in numerous industries, and pursued an eclectic variety of personal passions. One thing that has always served as immediate common ground in all these realms of my life: growing up in an Adventist culture. This priceless passport I carry offers me special passage in this chaotic journey through an often heartbreaking and breathtaking world. Discovering that someone else shares even a tiny sliver of the same heritage is consistently a meaningful event, though they may not profess any current connection to those "Seventh-day-in-Venice" folks.

After spying a couple cans of Worthington Choplets tucked behind the tomato sauce in another pilot's pantry, I could better explain why, among the two dozen or so pilots in a multistate group of pilots, she and I seemed to have the most similar approaches to many things related to flying as well as to life. During the years I recruited physicians for hospitals or medical groups, seeing on a curricu-

lum vitae that someone had attended an Adventist school somewhere along the way ensured that it would not take long for us to establish a good working relationship.

When I learn that the person next to me on a commercial flight or conference session attended an Adventist boarding school or college, we always have much to laugh and wonder about together. If someone mentions being in a band or choir in their youth, there is a 50 percent probability they had some connection with Adventist education. Identifying books of Uncle Arthur or Eric B. Hare in someone's library inevitably leads to rich reminiscing about one's childhood and young imaginations.

*But we shall still be joined in heart,
And hope to meet again.*

Indeed, a good number of my closest friends today attended an Adventist school with me but have not maintained church involvement. I also frequently see these lasting school-formed friendships among people where nobody in the circle would acknowledge any current ties with the Adventist Church. In fact, a common bond is often shared horror stories of school experiences or treatment by church members or institutional representatives.

But there is a tie. And I wish more of these brothers and sisters could feel they are still very welcome at family gatherings whenever and however they are able to be with us. Of course, we understand that as one grows up, one continues to decide what one wants to keep, discard, remodel, or merely remember from one's past. But we miss them. Their total absence is a tragedy.

I met Colleen as a coworker at an international consulting firm in San Francisco in the early 1970s. I admire her

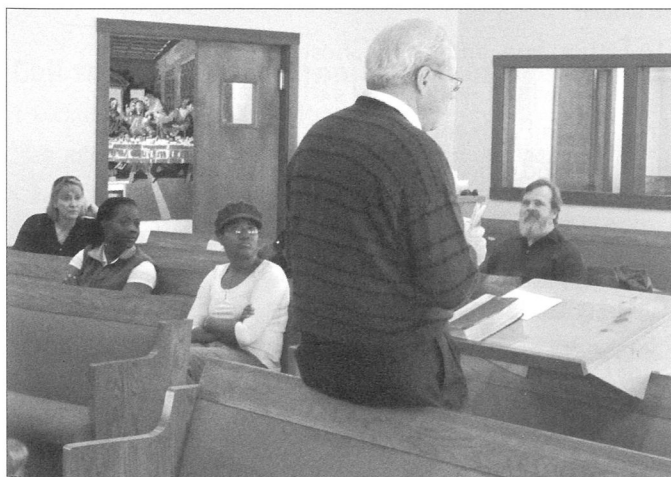


superior intellect and wit, her stunning looks, and gracious charm, her Stanford and Harvard degrees, and her stellar performance with numerous successful Silicon Valley start-up companies.

As we have traveled widely together for more than thirty years, she has witnessed the magical Global Positioning System and common citizenship that the Adventist culture affords me, opening doors and providing an instant sense of familiarity and unspoken understandings. She's never known anything quite like it. I can go anywhere and find someone who knows someone I know or who is familiar with people, traditions, music, foods, or literature, and stories I know, too. Colleen kept wondering how this happened. Could this somehow be duplicated for others seeking a universal sense of belonging?

I finally brought her with me to one of my Takoma Academy class reunions. Because she knew me, she was treated as if she were a Takoman, as well. She loved finally meeting in person so many people she had heard me talk about for so many years. They were even more fun and interesting than she had imagined. She would have traded me a lot of her stock options or some of her degrees for my Adventist heritage.

In this era of social networks via the Internet, such as YouTube and FaceBook, the old-fashioned enduring power of the Adventist network is impressive. Log on! ■



A member of *Spectrum's* editorial board, **Juli Miller** is a marketing communication consultant based in El Dorado Hills, California.

Call to Community *A Liturgy Celebrating God's Call to Experience Authentic Community* | BY CHARLES TEEL, JR.

Editor's Note: This liturgy was created for the November 17, 2007, worship service during the Adventist Society for Religious Studies meeting in San Diego, California.

Banners based on the Seven Churches hung at the front of the meeting room. Cultural artifacts from the Stahl Center Museum of Culture at La Sierra University were displayed, along with clay candleholders made from the clays in the Sinai Peninsula, Jerusalem, and Bethlehem.

Introducing the service and the work that is worship, the liturgist wrote:

In worship, humankind draws on rite, symbol, sacred text, and shared tradition in enacting our best hopes and understandings of the Divine. By engaging in such activity we hold up what "ought to be" against what "is." Worship at once calls us to confession no less than to celebration.

On this day as we celebrate our best hopes for authentic community, we are thus also called to confess how far we fall short. . . . More specific to our religious studies guild, major divisions exist with regard to how we approach the sacred text. And in such settings of "conflict" no less than in "concord," with Dietrich Bonhoeffer. . . we are called to kneel in humility before that One who is parent of us all, to seek reconciliation, and to give thanks for the gift of grace.

Call to Worship

Introduction

Word

ISAIAH 66

Hear the word of Yahweh:

Heaven is my throne and earth my footstool.

I myself will come to gather all nations and races,
and they will come and see my glory;

And I will perform a sign among them.

Distant coasts and islands that have never heard of me
shall announce my glory among the nations.

From every nation they shall bring countrymen on horses
and camels, and in chariots and wagons
as an offering to God.

And from one Sabbath to another and from one new moon
to another shall all people worship before me.

Hymn

"All People that on Earth Do Dwell"

Vaughn Williams

All people that on earth do dwell
Sing to our God with cheerful voice.
Come now with mirth, God's praise foretell;
Come ye before God and rejoice.

Know that our God is God indeed,
Who did without our aid us make.
We are the folk that God doth lead,
And for his sheep he doth us take.

O enter in God's gates with praise;
Approach with joy God's courts unto.
Praise, laud, and bless God's name always,
For it is seemly so to do.
For why the God of all is good,
Whose mercy is forever sure,
Whose truth at all times firmly stood,
And shall from age to age endure.

In unison:

To Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,
The God whom heaven and earth adore;
From all on Earth and angel host,
Be praise and glory evermore. Amen.

Invocation

Call to Community From the Torah

GENESIS 1

Hear and respond to the word of the Lord from the Torah:

God said,

Let us make humankind in our image, after our likeness:

So God created persons male and female in God's image.
God said,
Be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth
and steward that creation which I give unto you.
It was so.
God saw everything that he had made.
Behold, it was good.

Call to Community From the Prophets

MICAH VI

Hear and respond to the word of the Lord from the Prophets:
With what shall I come before the Lord?
And bow down before the exalted God?
Shall I come before him with burnt offerings?
Shall I come before him with sacrifices?
God has showed thee, my people, what is good;
For what does God require of thee?
To do justice, to love mercy, and
to walk humbly with thy God.

Call to Community From the Gospels

MATTHEW V

Hear and respond to the word of the Lord from the Gospel:
You are the salt of the earth, but if the salt has lost its savor
how may its saltiness be restored?
It is no longer good for anything,
but is thrown out and trampled under foot.
You are the light of the world.
A City built on a hill cannot be hid.
No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the basket,
but on the lamp stand and it gives light to all the house.
Let your light shine before others
so that they may see your good works.
And they will give glory to your Father in heaven.

Call to Community From the Primitive Church

1 CORINTHIANS XII/XIII / ROMANS X

Hear and respond to the word of the Lord from of the Apostle:
Christ is like a single body with its many limbs and
organs, which, though many, together make up one body.
Indeed we were all brought into one body by baptism,
in the one Spirit, whether we are Jews or Greeks,
whether slaves or free.
God has combined the various parts of the body that all
its organs might feel the same concern for one another.
If one organ suffers, they all suffer together.

If one flourishes, they all rejoice together.
Now you are Christ's body, and each members of it.

Eagerly desire the greater gifts.
Now I will show you a more excellent way.
If I speak in the tongues of humankind and of angels,
But if I have not love, I am only a sounding gong or a
clanging cymbal.

If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries
and all knowledge and if I have a faith that can move
mountains, but if I have not love,
I gain nothing.
If I give all I possess to the poor and if I surrender my
body to be burned, but if I have not love,
I gain nothing.

Love is patient, love is kind, love does not envy.
Love does not boast, love is not proud.
Love is not rude; love is not self-seeking.
Love is not easily angered.

Love keeps no records of wrongs.
Love does not delight in evil,
but rejoices with the truth.

Love always protects, always trusts,
always hopes, always perseveres.
Love never fails.

But where there are prophesies, they will cease.
Where there are tongues, they will be stilled.
Where there is knowledge, it will pass away.
Now we know in part and we prophesy in part.
But when that which is perfect is come,
That which is imperfect will disappear.

When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I thought as a child,
and I reasoned as a child.

When I reached adulthood, I put away childish things.
Now we see through a glass darkly,
But then we shall see face to face.

Now we know in part,
But then we shall know fully, even as we are known.
And now abideth faith, hope, and love.
But the greatest of these is love.

Bless those who persecute you;
bless and do not curse them.
Rejoice with those who rejoice,
weep with those who weep.
Live in harmony with one another.
Do not claim to be wiser than you are.

Do not repay anyone evil for evil,

But take thought for what is noble in the sight of all.

If it is possible, so far as it depends on you,
live peaceably with all.

*Do not be overcome by evil,
but overcome evil with good.*

Call to Community From 20th Century People of God

"In Thee, In Me"

Hear from traditional words translated by Mobandas Ghandi:

In thee / In me / In all persons there dwelleth the One God.
In all/ God suffers/ And God suffers for all;
In all everywhere/ See thyself.
Abandon this thy ignorant conceit
Which holds that thou are separate from other persons.

"No Man is an Island"

Hear the words of John Donne:

No one is an Island entire of it self;
every one is a piece of the Continent, a part of the maine;
any one's death diminishes me, because I am involved in
Humankind; and therefore never send to know for whom
the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.

"Strength to Love"

Hear the words of Martin Luther King, Jr.:

Any religion that ends with the individual ends. All life is
inter-related. We are caught in an inescapable network of
mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. What affects
one directly, affects all indirectly.

"Life Together"

Hear the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer:

Unity shines more brightly in the conflict of wills than in
concord, for as brothers and sisters disagree we are called
to kneel in humility before the One who is parent of us all.

Confession, Meditation, Benediction

Let us in silence confess the conflict of wills we experience.
Let us in silence celebrate the concord we experience.

Hymn

"Blest Be the Tie That Binds"

(Arr. Lowell Mason)

Blest be the tie that binds
Our hearts in Christian love!
The fellowship of kindred minds

Is like to that above.

Before the Creator's throne
We pour our ardent prayers;
Our fears, our hopes, our aims are one,
Our comforts, and our cares.

We share our mutual woes,
Our mutual burdens bear;
And often for each other flows
The sympathizing tear.
When we asunder part,
It gives us inward pain;
But we shall still be joined in heart,
And hope to meet again.

Homily

Benedictory Hymn

"For All The Saints"

Vaughn Williams

For all the saints who from their labors rest,
All who by faith before the world confessed.
Your name, O Savior, be forever blest.
Alleluia! Alleluia!

You were their rock, their fortress, and their might;
You, Lord, their captain in the well-fought fight;
You, in the darkness drear, their one true light.
Alleluia! Alleluia!

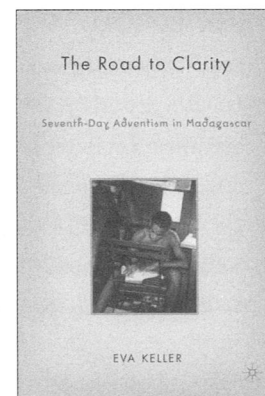
O blest communion, fellowship divine!
We carry on and in thy glory shine;
And all are one within your great design,
Alleluia! Alleluia!

The golden evening brightens in the west;
Soon, soon to faithful warriors comes their rest.
Sweet is the calm of paradise the blest.
Alleluia! Alleluia!

From earth's wide bounds, from ocean's farthest host,
Through gates of pearl streams in the countless host,
Singing to Father, Son, and Holy Ghost:
Alleluia! Alleluia!

Benediction

Charles Teel, Jr., is professor of religion and society at La Sierra University
and director of the Stahl Center for World Service.



The Road to Clarity:

Seventh-day Adventism in Madagascar | REVIEWED BY RICH HANNON

From September 1998 until May 2000, Eva Keller lived in northeastern Madagascar to study the Adventist Church, or more accurately, the ordinary people who comprised the local church communities. She lived with Adventist families, first for sixteen months in Maroantsetra, a coastal district government town of twenty thousand, then for four months in Sahameloka, a village of one thousand, twenty kilometers upriver, accessible only on foot.

This fieldwork was initially in support of her dissertation, which culminated in a Ph.D. in social anthropology from the London School of Economics in 2002. It was subsequently revised to create this book.

The book is divided into three parts. Part 1 is an orientation to the region and local Adventism. Part 2 tries to analyze the nature of the people's commitment to Adventism. Part 3 looks at the issues of integrating Adventism into the member's wider world.

Keller, a non-Adventist, wanted to understand what might motivate someone to devote so much time to Adventism, to see what they would find attractive. The Introduction begins with a story of her accompanying members on a proselytizing weekend. Sabbath evening, after a long day of visiting and conducting services, she observed a young man intently studying his Bible, by candlelight, for three and one-half hours. What underlying, motivating passion would produce such involvement? The book's title attempts to embody her conclusion. She writes:

The central question this book addresses concerns the nature of the attraction of Seventh-day Adventism for church members in Maroantsetra and Sahameloka. The answer to this question, in a nutshell, is that it is the intellectual excitement linked to the process of studying the Bible that is the key to local people's commitment to the Adventist church... Bible study is perceived by the local Adventists to be the road to clarity. (179)

As you might expect, there is considerable sociology, anthropology, and historical background found in the book. But the question I would raise is this: why might an educated, westernized Adventist find a book like this to be sufficiently interesting to actually read it? It is likely that many of us would have, at best, only a passing interest in anthropology, and even less interest in Madagascar. Yes, it is a book concerned with Adventism, but in a context few of us are likely to confront. So what might we gain by spending time reading it? Life is busy enough.

I can only respond to that question personally, but I think my answer might apply to others also. This book, which examines Adventism an inch wide and a mile deep in a radically unfamiliar context, has much to say to me about Adventism universally. It helps me understand what parts seem successfully to transcend culture and what parts fail. That is valuable.

Adventism is a worldwide church surprisingly monolithic in its implementation. Reading this book and also being a thoroughly acculturated Adventist, I was struck with how inflexibly at times an American-rooted church has tried to plant itself into such non-American soil. We find unions, conferences, churches, and companies. There are Pathfinders, Sabbath School (even with the little bell rung to terminate lesson study), tithe envelopes, colporteur, and Morning Watch books.

Sometimes, familiar church programs and materials are instantiated there in ways that don't always fit and can have ridiculous results. For example:

Because the text of every Study Guide is, in literally translated versions, exactly the same around the world, it is inevitable that some lessons are, at least in part, inappropriate for readers in places like Sahameloka or Maroantsetra. On June 16, 1999, for example, it remained a complete mystery to everyone present in church, what on earth was to be understood by the term "New Age," upon which the day's lesson was based and which it criti-

cized, but which I, being asked to explain this bizarre expression, could only partly succeed in clarifying. Moreover, the Study Guide is obviously not produced for readers with little formal education. Given the fact that most church members today live in countries of the Third World, this is rather surprising. However, the Adventists in Sabameloka and Maroantsetra never failed to make the text meaningful for themselves by concentrating on those passages to which they could relate. (87)

Or consider how colporteurism works:

[A] dozen members of the Adventist church in Maroantsetra town were employed by the church as professional door-to-door booksellers... [P]ractically all of these books were written in French, which most of those who sold them, and I guess many of those who bought them, could not read at all... These books are primarily produced for European readers and concern such things as healthy nutrition... But to the people in Maroantsetra, the recipes presented would not make much sense even if they could read them, nor would they have the required ingredients—muesli, strawberries, fresh vegetables, soya milk—to prepare them....

The prize book for both sellers and potential buyers was a massive French Catholic Bible with golden page edges and rich in colorful illustrations of popes and cathedrals. I was extremely surprised that the Adventist church would distribute a Catholic Bible that glorifies the papacy... This Bible cost the equivalent of a civil servant's monthly salary... It was everyone's dream, including the members of the Adventist church, to own such a Bible... The purpose of buying any of these books is quite clearly possession and display. In fact people sometimes bought books that were still wrapped up in plastic solely on the basis of descriptions of what was to be found inside. (139–41)

It is also interesting that this desire for "display literature" stands in sharp contrast to how Adventist members use their study Bibles. Those books are worn from use and appear to be viewed instrumentally rather than as reverential objects in themselves.

However, more interesting than misapplication is where the church seems to have gotten it right. Keller discusses and extensively documents how members are excited by their study. The nondogmatic climate stimulates idea exchange and excitement from shaping a world rich with meaning:

Seventh-day Adventist practice in Maroantsetra and Sabameloka is of a distinctly Socratic nature. I chose the expression Socratic,

because Bible study is aimed at understanding biblical truth through reflection and dialogue, rather than encouraging the consumption of ready-made doctrine... In every context I was able to observe, Bible study was of a dialogical, discursive and participatory nature, and involved much intellectual engagement and critical thinking for those taking part. And indeed, it seems to be the very activity of studying and learning, which fascinates and interests local church members, and which gives them pleasure, perhaps even more so than the answers they get from studying. Whenever I asked any of them what they liked about the Adventist church, their answers were saturated with the word "to study" (mianatra). (114)

The worldview of the Adventist members Keller lived with is, as might be expected, one that takes the Bible as completely literal and normative. Consequently, you get "clarity" upon correct understanding. This provides meaning but is also a limiting factor:

With time, I became knowledgeable about the basic facts of Adventist doctrine, and familiar with Adventist practice. And the people who taught me noticed my growing expertise with delight... In fact some people observed that I knew more about Adventist teachings than many members of the church. However, I did not get baptized, and this puzzled many of my Adventist friends... They would inquire: "Is there anything which is not clear to you yet, anything that you haven't understood?"... The only reason they could think of for my not getting baptized, despite the fact that I had obviously acquired sufficient knowledge of the Bible, was that something must not be clear to me... Nobody ever asked me whether I perhaps did not accept as true what I had learnt. (120)

This mindset of "once you know what the Bible says you inevitably should convert" resembles the way evangelism proceeded universally not too long ago. Adventism has struggled with how to reach people who no longer walk the philosophical ground Keller found in Madagascar. She didn't convert, in part, because her world was more complicated and the motivations provided her by the local church members were inadequate for that world.

Vicariously visiting an Adventism planted in such a different culture felt, for me, a bit like Alice might have felt in *Through the Looking Glass*. But I was well rewarded by the insights I hopefully gained into my own church experience. ■

Rich Hannon is a software engineer who lives in Salt Lake City. His reading interests focus on philosophy and medieval history.

CONVERSATIONS

Continued from page 10...

trict), they felt pleased that it would help to make their religion known to people elsewhere.

Q: Did you find Adventists in Madagascar deeply committed to Adventism?

A: Yes indeed! To the extent that they are ready to face serious problems with their kin because of their commitment to the church.

Q: Do Malagasy Adventists interpret the Bible any differently than their Western counterparts? Overall, are they more conservative or more liberal in their interpretation of the Bible?

A: As a non-Adventist, I cannot really answer this question. I can only mention perhaps that my Adventist friends in my hometown in Switzerland, who are themselves deeply committed Adventists and who have read my book with great interest, have commented that their brothers and sisters in Madagascar seem to be much more conservative—not necessarily in a negative sense—than themselves.

Q: Did you find areas where Adventist culture and beliefs clash with local and traditional culture and beliefs? When the two cultures diverge, which direction do the Adventists go?

A: The third part of my book is dedicated to a discussion of what clashes there are and how Seventh-day Adventists deal with them. In a nutshell, one can say that the clashes concern fundamental aspects of Malagasy culture and that the Seventh-day Adventists try, as much as possible within the framework of their religion, to walk a conciliatory path. But conflict can often not be avoided.

Q: There has been a lot of discussion about “true conversion” and how to ensure baptized Adventists actually live according to Adventist morals and beliefs. Rwanda is the example people always come back to. (And of course there are plenty of Western Adventists who lie, steal, rape, and abuse.) When push comes to shove, would Mala-

gasy Adventists act according to their Adventist beliefs?

A: There are the problems I mentioned with non-Adventist kin. In the book I give an example of a man who insisted on not taking part at the exhumation of his own father. This is the ultimate insult toward one's kin in the eyes of the non-Adventist Malagasy. As a consequence, the man lost contact with most of his family—in a kin-based society, this is dramatic.

However, there were also people who seemed to sleep during Sabbath School or even, in a few cases, people who continued to engage with the ancestors secretly because they couldn't bear the conflict with their kin. But all in all, the Malagasy Adventists I know are deeply committed members of the church.

Q: Are Adventist leaders in Madagascar mostly local people, or do church leaders tend to include Western missionaries or other foreigners?

A: They are all Malagasy, including in the capital city of Antananarivo, where the headquarters of the Indian Ocean Division is located.

Q: How big is the Adventist church on the island? How does it compare to other religions in Madagascar?

A: In 2003, about 0.5 percent of the overall population in Madagascar was Adventist, though members are concentrated in certain areas of the island and almost absent in others. In the town where I lived, about 1 percent were Adventists, and in the village almost 10 percent. In comparison with the Catholic and the Protestant churches—to whom some 50 percent of the population of Madagascar belong—the Adventist church is tiny, but among the churches that have begun to grow only relatively recently (evangelical and Pentecostal), the Adventist church is among the largest and growing fast.

Q: Would you say the people of Madagascar are particularly susceptible to proselytizing religions?

A: I don't know, but I don't see any reason why they should be more or less so than anybody else. However, one point that might be relevant is the fact that the written word in general is considered by Malagasy people

with awe. Almost anything written has high status. This has to do with the history of Madagascar. Although this is a complicated and ambiguous issue, perhaps this specifically Malagasy perception of the written word and of books makes a church that puts emphasis on reading and studying the Bible particularly attractive.

Q: What kind of feedback have you received on your book?

A: It has been very well received among social anthropologists (there have been several very favorable reviews in important academic journals). And—what for me is in a way even more important—among members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Europe and the United States.

I also brought copies back to Madagascar to the Seventh-day Adventist headquarters in the capital, to university departments, and to my friends in Maroantsetra and Sahameloka. They were all very pleased, especially Ranala Isaac (who was the pastor in Maroantsetra when I lived there), who was enthusiastic about the book's emphasis on study and learning.

Q: What new project are you working on now?

A: I am still working in the same region in Madagascar, though on an entirely different research project. However, I continue to live with my Adventist friends when I am there. I presently study representations of nature and nature conservation in Madagascar as well as in Switzerland. ■

The Road to Clarity is available from Amazon.com

Read Adventist reviews of the *Road to Clarity*, by Stefan Höschele, in *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 44 (autumn 2006), and by Rich Hanon in *Spectrum* on page 75, above.

Eva Keller is a research fellow at the University of Zurich. She received her Ph.D. in social anthropology from the London School of Economics and Political Science in 2002. She is currently carrying out research on a national park in Madagascar.

Alita Byrd received her masters in the history of international relations from the London School of Economics in 2001. She lives in Dublin, where she works as an online journalist for the national broadcaster, and *Spectrum*.

Noteworthy

Continued from page 19...

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Michael E. Cafferky is associate professor of business administration at Southern Adventist University, Collegedale, Tennessee.

Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament

REVIEWED BY JAMES D. LORENZ

As a pastor, I find few sermon topics more challenging than human sexuality, so when I heard about Richard Davidson's new book *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament*, I was curious about this potential resource.

When I opened the box from Amazon.com, I was immediately struck by two things: (1) how big this book is (844 pages!); and (2) it's a book on sex without pictures. I guess I don't have to worry about my adolescent son hiding this tome under his mattress unless he wants to sit up in bed. The sheer scope of this volume makes it both fascinating and not a little controversial. I found myself leafing through *Flame of Yahweh*, amazed at what it includes and wondering how the author would address certain passages.

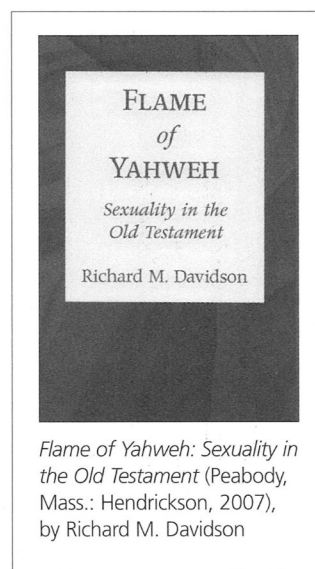
Davidson, professor of Old Testament studies at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, has written what is sure to be a landmark book on Old Testament sexuality. Davidson states in the Introduction that he is attempting to bring back Edenic sexual wholeness—a worthy aim. (Of note, Davidson's mother-in-law, Alberta Mazat, wrote an Adventist groundbreaking book called *That Friday in Eden: Sharing and Enhancing Sexuality in Marriage*, which came out in 1981—seemingly about the time that Davidson started working on *Flame of Yahweh*.)

Davidson's unblushing approach makes this book the equivalent of everything you wanted to know about Old Testament sexuality but were afraid to ask. One of the real values of the work is Davidson's exhaustive research of sexual practices not only of Israel, but also of the pagan cultures that surrounded it. Readers might be surprised by how pervasive the topic is in the Bible. Trust me, you will never read your Bible the same way again.

Davidson targets three audiences: the Evangelical, Adventist, and scholarly communities. While *Flame of Yahweh* addresses the wider Evangelical community with its more conservative approach to biblical interpretation and references to the community itself, no doubt Davidson also had an eye on his own Adventist community, which is struggling with some of the same issues.

Thankfully, Davidson and his editor have not limited the audience by using academic language. Hebrew and Greek words are transliterated and translated, making this volume accessible to any serious Bible student, even those without a biblical languages background. *Flame of Yahweh* might not be carried by the local Adventist Book Center, but it reads more easily (and definitely more excitingly) than some books sold there.

However, because *Flame of Yahweh* is also a first of its kind to bring together



Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2007), by Richard M. Davidson

...for love is as strong

as death,

its jealousy unyielding

as the grave.

It burns like blazing fire,

like a mighty flame.

—Song of Songs 8:6

FLAME of YAHWEH

*Sexuality in the
Old Testament*

Richard M. Davidson

Flame of Yahweh *Sexuality in the Old Testament*

RICHARD M. DAVIDSON

"This volume represents a most remarkable achievement. With encyclopedic breadth and extraordinary depth the author explores what the Old Testament has to say about every conceivable subject related to human sexuality. His discussions of the ancient Near Eastern cultural contexts, from which Old Testament writings emerged and to which they appear to have responded, are exceptional; and his treatment of specific biblical passages is generally balanced and thorough. Regardless where readers find themselves in debates concerning sexual morality or gender relations, in the future, all who embark on serious study of biblical perspectives on these issues would do well to start with Davidson's work. The bibliography alone takes up 140 pages!"

— DANIEL L. BLOCK, Professor of Old Testament,
Wheaton College

Richard M. Davidson is J. N. Andrews Professor of Old Testament Interpretation at Andrews University. He is the author of *In the Footsteps of Joshua* and *A Love Song for the Sabbath* as well as of many encyclopedia and journal articles.

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deep and comprehensive discussion on so many aspects of Old Testament sexuality (it has generous footnotes and almost two hundred pages of documentation in the back), no doubt the scholarly community will be forced to reference this work for years to come.

Flame of Yahweh includes a discussion on Song of Songs, something a reader would expect, from which Davidson derives the book's title and takes what he sees as the Bible's ultimate statement on sexuality (8:6). It also includes discussions about marriage, divorce, and homosexuality. Davidson not only delves into the pertinent Old Testament passages addressing homosexuality, but also frankly discusses related practices and writings of the surrounding pagan cultures. Given Davidson's approach to Scripture and his target Evangelical audience, one is not surprised on which side of the debate he lands. But again, regardless of your views on this topic, the breadth of discussion is one of the work's real values.

Merely reading the table of contents will not tell the whole story of Davidson's approach to various topics. He willingly steps into the ring with both "loyalists" (read traditionalists) and "rejectionists" (those who dismiss certain biblical passages outright), so this book has plenty to attract fire from both sides, quite possibly its greatest recommendation to the reader.

Perhaps the most surprising aspect of the book is the great length to which Davidson goes to demonstrate what he calls "the high valuation of women" in the Old Testament. Here Davidson leaves his Evangelical base and walks into the no-man's land between the two sides, inviting what will no doubt be withering fire from loyalists and rejectionists.

Although not directly addressed in the book, women's ordination seems to lie just beneath the surface. Davidson encourages "the covenant community to utilize and officially recognize the Spirit-endowed leadership gifts of women in church and synagogue" (295).

Now I am in a quandary: how prominently should I display this impressive reference in my church office? ■

James D. Lorenz pastors the Woodside Seventh-day Adventist Church, in Sacramento, California.

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DEBBI CHRISTENSEN ■ ADVENTIST FORUMS

P.O. Box 619047 • Roseville, CA 95661-9047

tel: (916) 774-1080 fax: (916) 791-4938

A DREAM OF

By Andrew Cockerham

looking
through my history book, I fell
into heresy
past flames and faggots
Gatling guns, atomic suicide bombs
gas chambers and
cathartic murders and I

falling
thought of Sabellius
the ancient heretic
whose desperate move
to prove there was no god
but God split his church

incurring
the ire of the philosophers
who said he said the Father
suffered on
the cross
and I

passing
downward through a hall of
smoking guns and
mirrors
began to see
my face reflecting
infinite desire for somegod tangible

grasping
for a handhold
I hit the dirt

forming
a little image
of myself (like God
forming

Adam)
looked up and
seeing

Sabellius himself
asked whether
he meant what he said
that God, for three days,
was not
anything

and he
said human vision was
inadequate
was all
that we could see
being

mortal as we are
blind to all
the θεός
that surrounds us, he said
like vapor rings the moon
shimmering

and he said it was easier not to

know what a heretic knows:
Nanking and Wounded Knee,
Jebus, Yerushalaim, al-Quds, Jerusalem
Sarajevo and Calvary were crimes
against
Being

(One God
beside whom, much
as I would wish, there is
no Other)

Source: Nari Kirk, ed., *Gadfly* 2007

(College Place, Wash: Walla Walla College
English Department, 2007).

