

Jesus, the Work, and the Kingdom

Reflections on Church Life and Mission | BY LOWELL C. COOPER



Papua New Guinea



Northern Thailand



Varanasi, India



Japan

Some church historians suggest that the legalization of Christianity in the early part of the fourth century fundamentally changed the Church's self-understanding and conception of its task, with the result that it transitioned from being a movement to being an institution.

Maybe some of the legacy from that time shapes the ongoing tension between mission and machinery, between form and function, proclamation and practice. It is important that both scholarly and administrative pursuits engage with the constant challenge of communicating present truth in the ever-changing contexts of society. Propositional truth must be expressed also in practical and relational terms.

"In the name of Jesus"—What does it mean?

The Apostle Paul concludes a series of statements about the character of the "new" man with these words: "Let every detail in your lives—words, actions, whatever—be done in the name of the Master, Jesus, thanking God the Father every step of the way" (Col. 3:17 *The Message*). "In the name of Jesus" has become something of a subtitle

for much, perhaps all, of what the Church does. We pray, sing, plan, build, dedicate, inaugurate, celebrate, teach, preach, and heal in the name of Jesus.

The phrase is somewhat of a brand identity for Christian life and action. What does it mean? Jesus used the phrase on several occasions as the qualifier of authentic Christian action.

Matthew 18:5: "Whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me."

Matthew 18:20: "For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them."

Mark 9:39: "...no one who works a miracle in My name can soon afterward speak evil of Me."

Mark 9:41: "...whoever gives you a cup of water to drink in My name, because you belong to Christ, assuredly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward."

Mark 16:17, 18: "...these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover."

John 14:13,14: "And whatever you ask *in My name*, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything *in My name*, I will do it."

John 14:26: "...the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send *in My name*, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you."

John 16:23, 24: "...whatever you ask the Father *in My name* He will give you. Until now you have asked nothing *in My name*. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full."

It is obvious that doing or saying things in the name of Jesus is somehow qualitatively different from doing/saying things without employing the name of Jesus. What difference could the name make?

A recent item of mail contained a letter thanking me for ordering a new feature in the phone and Internet service at our house. I had not recalled ever ordering the third-party convenience that was described. I sinned grievously by concluding that my wife had done it. When she came home from work, she was not halfway through the doorway when I addressed her in the interrogative case and the accusative voice.

Of course, she had not done what I had assumed. In a phone conversation with the company that sent the letter, I learned the date on which the order had been placed. Furthermore, the request had come via the Internet by someone using my name. I denied ever authorizing the order and decried the presumptuous and unlawful intent of the party who had done so. Though the matter was not life threatening, I felt violated.

Jesus spoke not only about the promise of doing things in his name, he spoke also about the peril of using his name. One can presume to act in his name, but it is only a pretense and Jesus has nothing to do with it.

Matthew 7:22-23: "Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied *in Your name*, cast out demons *in Your name*, and done many wonders *in Your name*?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you....'"

Matthew 24:5 "...many will come *in My name*, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many." (See also Mark 13:6)

The promise and the peril of acting in the name of Jesus has profound implications for the Christian. What shall we understand as the meaning of this phrase and

what impact should it have on the life of the believer and the Church? At a minimum, to do something "in the name of Jesus" means:

- To act under the authority of Jesus
- To act in the interest of Jesus
- To act like Jesus

If this is so, it is worthwhile to review the life of Jesus to be sure that one understands the convictions and values that shaped his ministry. Though this is by no means an exhaustive summary about Jesus, a serious reader of the Gospels cannot help but discern at least these characteristics of Jesus life and ministry.

Jesus Valued the Least, the Lost, the Last, and the Lowest

He gave much attention to those overlooked by society: children, the poor, the sick, those maimed or mentally challenged, and sinners of the worst kind (Matt. 4:23, 24). In the minds of many, his reputation was sullied by the time and attention he gave to those society had marginalized.

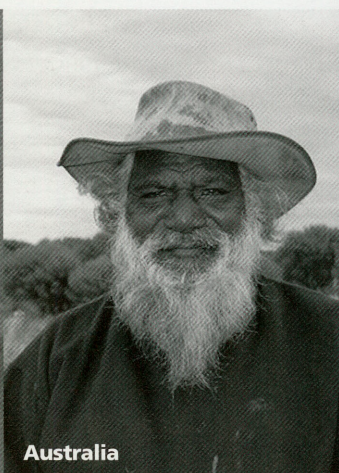
The contrast between Jesus and the crowd, between Jesus and his disciples, is highlighted in the story about the healing of blind Bartimaeus. This is the second last healing miracle recorded in the Gospels. It occurs when Jesus and his disciples are on their way to Jerusalem, his trial and crucifixion. Just fifteen miles from his goal he stops for roadside ministry, which really would make no difference to the great end he had in view.

Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem, where the final scenes of his earthly life will be played out in awful and public array. His ministry is coming to a climax. All the strands of his teaching, the great focus of prophecy, are about to be revealed. Big things are at stake. Yet the Master stops! This single moment, which really would be unnoticed amidst the heightening drama just on the horizon, represents a moment of destiny for a solitary soul. A work of love is never a small thing. Jesus put a high value on small acts: the widow's mite, the cup of cold water....

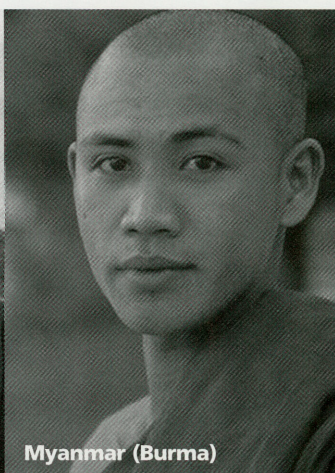
Jesus arrests our preoccupation with quantity and mass by demonstrating a consuming interest in the plight of one person. The message of Jesus is that an individual matters greatly. The growth of the Kingdom



Lesotho in southern Africa



Australia



Myanmar (Burma)



Mongolia

is not measured in averages or rates or bushels or in millions. It is prefaced upon the importance of one. One sheep out of a hundred, one coin out of many, one planet out of billions.

This story exposes and explodes the tension between the spiritual and the secular, between theology and sociology. The crowds that followed Jesus and his disciples heard the same cry he did. But they dismissed it as something that was not of interest or concern to him because it wasn't of interest or concern to them. They had built a wall of distinction between the religion and relief. The burning issues of the day were theological: Who is the Christ? Have you kept the Sabbath? How much tithe did you pay? Is it all right for the chosen to eat cheese? And the crying need of humanity was relegated to the periphery of life.

Jesus shows that theology and service belong together. Any attempt to segregate the two diminishes both. Jesus' response to the cry of Bartimaeus shows that poverty, suffering, unemployment, sickness, and hunger are also religious questions. Yet we often say: Keep the church out of economic and social issues, stick to salvation themes. Jesus demonstrated that all human need is his business. It still is.

Could it be that the Church concentrates itself in the realm of theology and doctrine to the exclusion of ministry? That we use our brains and our tongues more than our hands and our feet? That our investment of energy in questions of doctrine leaves us little time and strength for service? Offering a prayer is hardly a sufficient Christian response when what the person needs is potatoes.

Christ claims our help in many a strange disguise:

Now, fever ridden, on a bed He lies;

Homeless He wanders now beneath the stars;

Now counts the number of His prison bars;

Now bends beside us, crowned with hoary hairs.

No need have we to climb the heavenly stairs

And press our kisses on His feet and hands;

In every man that suffers, He, the Man of Sorrows, stands.

—Anonymous

Surveys of Seventh-day Adventist lifestyle and practices reveal that one of our weakest religious practices is engagement in and service to the community where we live. If we are truly living and acting in the name of Jesus, shouldn't we expect a very visible presence at sites of deepest human need?

There are signs that things may be changing. Seventh-day Adventist educational institutions are increasingly adopting service modules as part of the educational curriculum. A church in Seoul, Korea, features a special ministry for elderly people in its community. Aged people come in large numbers on Sabbath. After worship service and a meal provided by the church, medical professionals from the congregation conduct a free medical clinic. Other members operate a hair salon. Still others provide a massage service. All this, in the name of Jesus.

Jesus Placed Emphasis on the "Nowness" of the Kingdom

The good news that Jesus brought was good news about today, not just the future. When he sent out the twelve, he instructed them: "as you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.'"

The Sermon on the Mount and the kingdom stories are full of immediate meaning for the hearers. The imagery of Jesus' followers being light and salt speaks of kingdom realities in the present.

The whole point of what Jesus was up to was that he was doing, close up, in the present, what he was promising long-term, in the future. And what he was promising for that future, and doing in that present, was not saving souls for a disembodied eternity but rescuing people from the corruption and decay of the way the world presently is so they could enjoy, already in the present, that renewal which is God's ultimate purpose—and so they could thus become colleagues and partners in that larger project. (N. T. Wright, Surprised By Hope, 192)

Acts 1 presents an inside look at the big concerns of the disciples and the big concerns of Jesus.

After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." So when they met together they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"

You cannot blame them for asking the question. The Messiah and his Kingdom were centuries-old dreams of the Jews. They decorated their national life with pronouncements of the prophets. During the repeated cycles of oppression and subservience to their enemies, they polished the dream of ultimate victory and dominance. So it is not surprising that they would think of this as the appropriate time for its fulfillment. Their hopes and dreams had been dashed by the Cross and revived by the resurrection. They had become hungry for miracles. The momentum was all on their side. Surely this was the right time.

Throughout the centuries since the book of Acts, there have been many who have watched and waited with the same question uppermost in their minds. We also have been watching the signs, not only watching them but interpreting them, plotting them on timelines and charts, and proposing various scenarios as to how the end—or is it the beginning—will take place. Surely

we are even now at the edge of an auspicious time.

Hence, the question also lingers on our lips: "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the Kingdom...?"

It is interesting, and puzzling, that Jesus didn't answer the question. Here was the opportunity to paint the mother of all end-time charts, thus sparing us decades of conflict and injury to each other. Instead of answering their question about the future, he shifted their attention to the present.

He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

There are three important things to note here:

1. Jesus' reply indicates that, for the followers of Jesus, preoccupation over the timing of the Kingdom shouldn't be allowed to divert one from service in the kingdom that is already here.
2. Jesus shifts the emphasis from speculation about the future to demonstration in the present. He urges us to leave the future in God's hand and instead show people what it means to live here and now as the children of God.
3. Jesus shifts the emphasis from restoration of the past to transformation of the current. You can't take refuge in the "good old days." The disciples were doing just that when they asked for the restoration of a kingdom that was like the echo of David's day. Jesus' answer implies that you cannot set the clock back. But we can, under the power of the Holy Spirit, help to transform the present, to shape and mold today so that it can be used for the purposes of God.

True, Jesus did teach that we should be mindful of the times in which we live. His parables of watchfulness and readiness have an enduring application to any age—and especially to ours. But his answer to the disciples is a clear indication that we are not to become preoccupied with the time of his return. Instead, we are to seize the opportunities of the present moment for the glory of his name and the illustration of his character. Some things we can work for; other things we must wait for. You can work for a living, but you must wait for sunrise. You can plant a garden, but you must wait for spring.



Jesus Understood the Nature of a Finished Work

"Finishing the work" is a favorite among Adventist expressions. One can hear it used worldwide but its use is rarely, if ever, accompanied by an explanation of what it might mean. It is most often, almost exclusively, used in connection with quantitative analyses of where we are and what we have done.

Perhaps we do this somewhat reflexively because of the Great Commission to go into all the world and make disciples. Although no one ever says it directly, the implication, at least from some of our reports, suggests that the task is being accomplished at a good pace. Still others leave one with the impression that we are done when the last person on earth is baptized.

When is the work really finished? It is a tough question and loaded with assumptions. There is a danger that even thinking about the question and searching for a definition of "finished work" will lead one to discouragement and despair.

It was not so for Jesus. He could confidently declare: "I have finished the work which You have given Me to do" (John 17:4).

How could this possibly be true? When Jesus made the claim, recorded as part of his prayer in John 17, not all sick people were healed. There were still blind people, poor people, corrupt leaders, faulty religious systems, and all kinds of fallen humanity at every turn. He had barely gone beyond the borders of his own nation, let alone the whole world. There is no evidence of his having visited ancient civilizations elsewhere on the globe. No record exists of him having been to North America. Yet he declares, "I have

finished the work You gave me to do."

Surely the secret to understanding this bold statement lies in the adjacent declaration, "I have glorified You on the earth." It is a qualitative claim more than a quantitative one.

Although the work role given to us is different from that given to Jesus, can we not also view our task as bringing glory to God? If so, can we not capture a new sense in which we can be engaged in finishing the work—by focusing on the qualitative aspects of all that we are and do.

Here lies the power of truth. The unstudied, unconscious influence of a holy life is the most convincing sermon that can be given in favor of Christianity. Argument, even when unanswerable, may provoke only opposition; but a godly example has a power that it is impossible wholly to resist. (Ellen G. White, Acts of the Apostles, 510)

It was said of Basil the Great that his words were like thunder because his life was like lightning. What if that could be said of the Church? What if the qualitative aspects of our living in the name of Jesus became so noticeable that the world would stop to listen to our words? Whenever I hear that term *finishing the work* I am reminded of some words that were written for occasions when we painfully realize that we cannot do it all.





The Prayer of Oscar Romero

It helps, now and then, to step back and take a long view.

The kingdom is not only beyond our efforts, it is even beyond our vision.

We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work.

Nothing we do is complete, which is a way of saying that the kingdom always lies beyond us.

No statement says all that could be said.

No prayer fully expresses our faith.

No confession brings perfection.

No pastoral visit brings wholeness.

No program accomplishes the church's mission.

No set of goals and objectives includes everything.

This is what we are about.

We plant the seeds that one day will grow.

We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise.

We lay foundations that will need further development.

We provide yeast that produces far beyond our capabilities.

We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that. This enables us to do something, and to do it very well. It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for the Lord's grace to enter and do the rest.

We may never see the end results, but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker.

We are workers, not master builders; ministers, not messiahs.

We are prophets of a future not our own.

Amen.¹

The Southern Asia Division ministerial secretary conducted a workers' meeting during my early days of service in India. I have no recollection of the presentations during the entire day. At the end of the day, the ministerial secretary said, "Now to close the day,

I will give you a short quiz."

He wrote on the chalkboard a simple but incomplete statement: "_____ will do the work if _____ will provide the _____." He then invited us to fill in the blanks. We made several attempts.

"Pastors will do the work if the laymembers will provide the funds."

"Laymembers will do the work if pastors will provide the training."

"Seventh-day Adventists will do the work if God will provide the Holy Spirit."

With obvious disappointment in his scholars, the ministerial secretary shook his head in dismay at every suggestion we made. We just couldn't get it right—and we realized it, too. After a time of silence he began, "Fellows, if you ever forget this you will end up spinning your wheels and going nowhere, you will rev your engines but never find the gears." Then he filled the blanks and informed us of the statement's source: "God will do the work if we will furnish Him the instruments." (Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 9:107)

Conclusion

Carrying out Christian mission and witness in the name of Jesus is a marvelous privilege for every believer. The promises and prospects are really limitless when you listen to what Jesus said about things done in his name. From his own example, we learn the importance of people, even the lowest; the power of the kingdom is a present reality; and that finishing the work is deeply qualitative. It consists first of all in bringing glory to God. Ultimately, this is what it means to live and work "in Jesus name." ■

Notes and References

1. The words of this prayer are attributed to Oscar Romero, but they were never spoken by him. They were written by Ken Untener for a homily spoken by John Cardinal Dearden in November of 1979 at a mass for deceased priests.

Lowell C. Cooper is a vice president of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. He presented this sermon at a worship service for the Adventist Society of Religion Scholars, Boston, Massachusetts, on November 22, 2008.

community of faith may become co-opted by it. All "isms" may represent, at best, only temporary steps toward the Kingdom, taken within a very provisional order.

The only absolute order for those who seek first the Kingdom is the far distant one. At this particular moment, that transcendent order calls us to read signs of the times with a discerning eye in an unencumbered manner to witness to that which God has declared will be. As the Cuenavaca bishop cautioned: "When the community of faith reduces the Kingdom of God to any 'ism' of humankind, it loses its capacity to perform the critical prophetic function entrusted to it."

2008 POSTSCRIPT ON GAP CLOSING It should be pointed out that evangelicals of the twenty-first century—perhaps having taken a page from such socially conscious evangelist colleagues as Jim Wallis, Tony Campolo, and Ron Sider—are currently embracing programs that take salvation well beyond the personal realm.⁵ Witness heightened evangelical involvement in environmental concerns, the HIV/AIDS epidemic, and prolife definitions that go well beyond a traditional anti-abortion stance.

No less personage than the "father of liberation theology," Gustavo Gutierrez, praises the work of Fernando and Ana Stahl for the manner in which they combined personal transformation and social transformation: "In the face of severe injustice, suffering, and oppression, the Stahls identified with the poorest of the poor and incarnated the gospel in ways which profoundly impacted the spiritual, social, economic, and political life of the Peruvian highlands."

Gutiérrez echoes the endorsement of fellow progressive Catholic priest Estéban Judd Zannon, who reintroduced this author to the Stahl story almost two decades ago. At that time, he declared with enthusiasm, "The Stahls are our spiritual forbears." He went on to note that the Stahls "incarnated" the gospel not merely in churches and chapels, but also in clinics, health education programs, in open markets, and—above all—in establishing the first coeducational and indigenous education in the Peruvian highlands. Recall the priest's conclusion, delivered with a drum roll flourish: "The Stahls were missionaries, visionaries, and revolutionaries!"

2008 PERSONAL POSTSCRIPT I was raised in parochial Loma Linda, California, during the 1950s. Dwight D. Eisenhower

was in the White House and all was well with the world. This was a Loma Linda of orange groves and void of freeways, minorities, or sin. *Leave it to Beaver* portrayed the promise of an idyllic family life to families of that unincorporated town who had rationalized the virtues of television. Our local populous avoided public policy issues to the extent that its citizens eschewed voting—until John F. Kennedy ran for the U.S. presidency.

Personal rewards garnered from participating in these international study tours include the privilege of meeting a wide variety of people, gaining insights from seeing new corners of the world, and experiencing new takes on religion and public policy. Additional rewards, some discussed earlier, include visiting such sites as the vast Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City, with its thousands of artifacts; learning about different cosmologies while watching the sun set and/or rise at Mexico's Chitizén Itzá pyramid and Peru's incomparable Machu Picchu; and touring the Cathedral in Cusco while witnessing the syncretism that emerges as cultures connect.

The rewards also include sailing Lake Titicaca en route to worshiping with an Adventist congregation, standing at the Stahl statue in Plateria on the lake's shores, and cruising the mighty Amazon, along which Ana Stahl delivered thousands of babies. Then there is the excitement of hearing firsthand from informed academics within and beyond the community of faith, no less than from professors and peasants who have experienced salvation, in part, through the witness of evangelists as well as liberationists. Even from evangelists cum liberationists?

But the most valued reward comes in the form of comments by students and community participants who echo the gist of the following sentence: "On this study tour, God, God's church, and God's world have grown bigger for me."

The sociology of religion suggests that the tension that arises between withdrawing evangelist types and the social engineering liberationist types is an ever-present reality. As a sociological phenomenon, the Christian church faces in each generation the paradox of the evangelists' demand for the sanctification of the self through a witness to the gospel that demands detachment from the world and the liberationists' demand that puts hands and feet on such terms as justice and righteousness in an effort to face down

the tensions and struggles manifest in the external order.

Evangelist types tend to caution that the religious community is to function as a colony of heaven, and thus remain unspotted from the world and save persons from it, whereas liberationist types tend to assert that the roles of salt of the earth and the light of the world demand individual and social commitment to the world that God so loved as expressed through endeavors of social transformation.

The evangelist cautions against false doctrines that lead to accommodation. The liberationist counters that calls proclaiming good news to the poor, release of the captives, sight for the blind, and liberty for the oppressed inform a platform that may find guidance as directly from the Gospel of Mark (read Luke, Isaiah, and Amos) as from the philosophy of Marx.

Ernst Troeltsch suggests that there will always be a historical sea saw as church types compromise with culture to embrace the world and as sect types resist such compromise. Might conditions exist in which evangelist and liberationist types find sufficient space for an ongoing dialogue from which a "prophetic remnant" type might emerge? ■

Notes and References

1. Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Liberation Theology* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1973).
2. Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teachings of the Christian Churches*, 2 vols., trans. Olive Wyon (New York: Harper and Row, 1960). Troeltsch is credited with plowing the first substantial sociological ground in laying out and drawing upon "ideal type" analysis to examine the relationship between religious communities and the social order. The "sect" type organization tends to evolve toward "church type" organization, the "prophet type" leadership tends to evolve toward the "priest type" leadership, and the "charismatic type" authority tends to evolve toward the "bureaucratic type" authority.
3. Charles Teel, "The Radical Roots of Peruvian Adventism," *Spectrum* 21.1 (Dec. 1990):5-18; and Charles Teel, "Revolutionary Missionaries in Peru; Fernando and Anna Stahl," *Spectrum* 18.3 (Feb. 1988):50-52.
4. Ferdinand Anthony Stahl, *In the Land of the Incas* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1920).
5. Examples include: Jim Wallis, *Why the Right Gets It Wrong and the Left Doesn't Get It* (San Francisco: HarperSan Francisco, 2005); Jim Wallis, *The Great Awakening: Reviving Faith and Politics in a Post-Religious Right America* (New York: Harper One, 2008); Tony Campolo, *Wake Up America!: Answering God's Radical Call While Living in the Real World* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991); and Ron Sider, *Evangelicals and Development: Toward a Theology of Social Change* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1982).

Charles Teel is professor of religion and society at La Sierra University, Riverside, California.

FREEDOM ■ Continued from page 45...

shown to consist of a series of physical phenomena with no evidence for a decision point where the brain can exercise free will. There is no evidence pointing toward René Descartes' "soul" living in the pineal gland, which makes free choices. There is no President George W. Bush within our brains declaring, "I am the decider."

Let's pause here to make sure we are clear on what we are NOT discussing.

1. This is not the question of whether our behavior is based up genetics or environment—nature versus nurture. As mentioned before, the answer to that is a resounding, Both! Neuroscientists are finding evidence that our genetics play a greater role than we usually suspect. However, all cognitive and behavioral phenomena appear to result from one or the other with no apparent role for "free will."
2. This is not a question of whether scientific thinking is superior to other forms of thought or truth, such as poetry or philosophy. The neurophysiology of all thought is based on physical processes of the brain. The brain is the mind. Seventh-day Adventists, as monists, have been saying that for more than a century; we may not have always fully realized the implications.
3. This is not a question of whether the brain can grow or come up with novel thoughts. Once again, the answer is a resounding, Yes! However, novel thoughts are the result of the brain reacting to its genetic and environmental cues through the strengthening of certain circuits and the dying away of other circuits based, once again, on physics. Neurons do not "decide" which direction to grow or when to initiate cell death (apoptosis). These are based on genetic "programs" and environmental cues. Yet novel thoughts occur as a result of genetic and environmental interactions.

The thought that neuroscientists have lost our minds disturbs even those who subscribe to it. Science writer John Horgan writes in a *New York Times* opinion piece, "Free will is something I cherish. I can live with the idea of science killing off God. But free will? That's going too far."⁷ Postmodern thinkers find it acceptable that neurobiology explains Jane Seymour's near-death experience as a result of activation of the right angular-

supramarginal gyrus and superior temporal gyrus rather than God. But it is much more troubling that neurobiology further suggests we have no free will.

Several theories have been advanced that attempt to salvage some shred of free will for humanity in the face of neurosciences discoveries and implications that lean toward determinism.

For example, Stuart Hameroff suggests that because of the random nature of quantum physics, not all the future is determined.⁸ However, this reduces "libertarian free will" to random actions. Rather than supporting a person's ability to make choices, it simply acknowledges that quantum physics introduces an element of randomness because the workings of our nervous system are based on physics. However, a brain that decides on the basis of randomness is no more "free" than a brain that decides based on other forms of physics.

In contrast, William Newsome proposes that complex systems like the stock market or a supercomputer that performs artificial intelligence may transcend more simple processes from which they arise.⁹ Termed "emergent phenomena," such complex systems are capable of developing novel, unforeseen decisions. Although the brain is undoubtedly marvelously complex, it is not comprised of millions of self-conscious Lilliputians trading shares of Google.

Rather, it is made of millions of neurons aggregating electrical potentials and firing or not firing based on this aggregation. The fact that intelligence emerges from the neurons of the brain (or the circuits of a supercomputer) exemplifies this, but in what sense does this provide free will?

A number of philosophers have proposed that, although the non-conscious brain might propose which arm to move, the conscious brain is still free to reject the proposal. Although we may not have "free will," at least we have "free won't." This does not account for the fact that the rejection of the proposal is itself based upon the firing or non-firing of sequences of neurons initiated in the non-conscious stages of thought.

Still, most humans think they have free will. According to Mark Hallett, a movement disorders researcher at the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke, "Free will does exist, but it's a perception, not a

power or a driving force. People experience free will. They have the sense they are free. The more you scrutinize it, the more you realize you don't have it."¹⁰ All you can see when studying the brain is, in Overbye's phrase, "physics all the way down."

Scientist Michael Silberstein summed it up for Overbye by noting that every physical system ever investigated turned out to be deterministic (one action causing the next reaction) or random (like quantum physics). "Both are bad news for free will," writes Silberstein. If humans have free will outside of the reach of physics, "It must be—what—some weird magical power?"¹¹ The only way to escape the determinism of physics appears to be...metaphysics.

What practical difference would it make if we did not possess libertarian free will intrinsically? Not much, I suspect. After all, most people believe they have free will. Furthermore, most people assume that most other people also have free will and act accordingly. Perhaps this is a question of importance only to philosophers and theologians. Most of us will continue to assume that we choose what to wear each morning (except for those who rely on spouses).

For Calvinist Christians, this should merely reinforce John Calvin's insights developed long before modern neurosciences. God creates some brains to respond to him, others cannot. It's all in Romans 9. End of story.

For Arminian Christians who espouse dualism, a deterministic brain also poses no serious problems. As long as a metaphysical soul exists, it can be, in George W. Bush's terms, "the Decider." The soul is free of the constraints of physics and thus free to decide.

This leaves atheists and Adventists.

If one accepts a purely physical universe, it's physics (classical and quantum) all the way down, and there does not seem to be free will—at least in a meaningful form. If so, I suggest that atheists must be careful to tamper with the brains that have evolved. The vast majority of the people in this world have their brains wired for the metaphysical. Wresting the supernatural away from them may have serious, unforeseen consequences.

Realizing that humans generally appear to seek a

"higher purpose" for their existence, I suggest it would be better to encourage people to find meaning in benign religions (let's say Buddhism) rather than trying to prove atheism for themselves. Better to keep their brains occupied contemplating non-existent realms than to allow their brains to turn into genocidal Khmer Rouge trying to coerce compliance to a human utopia. But don't blame Pol Pot. Although he had an unfortunate set of genes and experiences, he did not have a choice.

For Seventh-day Adventists, who believe that humans are unitary organisms not dualistic body-soul (or brain-mind) combinations, it seems to me that God must relate to the diseased, impaired organs of our brains if he is to interact with humans. Since my brain continues to believe in God and free will, it continues trying to fit the discoveries of neurotheology and neurobiology into an open Arminian worldview.

Did God, like a computer operating system designer, make our brains with "back doors," where he can influence the physics of our brain? Perhaps God designed into human brains centers that appreciated the mystical experiences or mechanisms that allowed for trust. Certainly the human aspiration for higher meaning in life that causes us to devote our lives to ideals like God, democracy, or communism has long been cited by Christian apologists as evidence of God's existence. Now we may have some ideas of how he accomplished that.

I do not know how a supernatural God balances all the neuronal and synaptic mechanisms to allow our physical brains to make a free choice, but it seems that it would be possible for God to present our brains such a choice and then politely step back into the waiting room to give them time to think. Thus, God presents our brains with choices without foreknowing our ultimate decision in the matter. I sense echoes of such a process in the Genesis 3 account of the Fall. Perhaps we could call this limited form of free will theogenic free will. As an Adventist neurologist, that is what my brain likes to believe.

An alternative and equally satisfactory Adventist solution proposes that God endows each person with a metaphysical entity beyond the physics of our brains that can retain free will. Although not capable of independent consciousness, this demi-soul can be "the

Decider." We might term this intermediate condition between monism and dualism "1.5ism."

All people who accept metaphysics have something to offer our postmodern, materialistic world: the possibility of choice. Surely a dialog with secularists on the issue of neurobiology and free will would prove more fruitful than endlessly debating embryology or the age of the earth.

If our brains accept God, we have the metaphysical "magic" necessary to allow for free will as a direct, miraculous, magical gift from God. Perhaps God was actually giving Jane Seymour's brain a choice to enter into a deeper relationship while she experienced floating over the resuscitation team. Perhaps Jane's brain responded by promising to respect him more. Perhaps God, who loves you, Jane, and me just as we are—as physical organisms (not mystical souls or minds)—accepted her vow and came in. ■

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Daniel Giang is a professor of neurology at Loma Linda University.