

Ministry

International Journal for Pastors

January 1997



Det Nye Testamente

Essentials of Relevant Biblical Preaching

Music and worship: keeping the harmony

Your excellent work should be commended. The magazine featuring articles on music (September 1996) contained some of the best material I have seen anywhere. Much of what comes before my desk is either obnoxiously prejudiced toward the new contemporary music or hopelessly chained to the past. These articles I found well grounded in history, balanced, full of common sense, and true to Scripture. Thank you for this issue.—John Thornbury, Pastor, Winfield, Pennsylvania.

■ I am grateful that your denomination has so kindly made these resources [*Ministry*] available to people like me, and I have to say that I am finding them to be a tremendous resource for my own ministry with the Salvation Army. In the very near future I will be speaking to a group of our new pastors, and at that particular time I will be making a number of references to *Ministry* magazine and how it has been helpful to me. I have particularly enjoyed recent articles that have been devoted to subjects such as divorce and other crisis counseling situations. The helpful insights are appreciated. The latest magazine that I received, with the different articles on music ministry within churches, was also very enlightening and beneficial to me. May God continue to bless you.—Byron Jacobs, Captain, Salvation Army, Hamilton, Ontario.

■ I read with great interest the September issue of *Ministry*, particularly the articles dealing with worship music. As a theologian and musician I appreciate the place given to church music in this issue.

Some writers seem to imply that we have to choose between old-fashioned, slow-beat hymns and the

so-called contemporary Christian music consisting of secular rock with Christian lyrics. This either/or type of reasoning fails to see that there is contemporary sacred music that incorporates elements of contemporary art and culture, while avoiding at the same time those elements that are inappropriate for a disciple of Jesus.

In my view, the defenders of contemporary Christian music are unaware that some elements of rock music have moral connotations. While it is true that a sound itself is without moral qualities, the combination of sounds, harmonies, and rhythms transmits definite emotions to the listener that in turn affect his or her thoughts, producing good or evil behavior. Professional musicians know how to induce almost any kind of feeling in the listener, independent of the lyrics that may accompany the music.

Living in a society that is “characterized by a great rift between the secular and the sacred”—as Lillian Doukhan wrote—we should be careful not to make a blind syncretism between the sacred and the secular.—Carlos A. Steger, Ph.D., Professor of Church Music, River Plate Adventist University, Argentina.

■ Thank you for the open words about music and Adventists. This crucial topic really needs a whole *Ministry* edition and is never discussed enough. I am very glad about the article by Michael Tomlinson. If we really want to reach today's young people, we have to speak their language. Christ always used the means and language of the times to communicate His love, and His preaching never lost its appealing sharpness. Today everyone who tries to communicate God's love through the language of today's societies is very easily called “worldly” and “powerless.” And before we move

into action in a thousand areas, we discuss and discuss until it is too late to act with any real effect. We should stop discussing so much and start to act. The fruits will show if it was of God or of man (Acts 5:39). So stop stealing our young people's modern Christian music before you see the fruits, and give them the freedom to live their lives as God's people as it fits them.—Karsten Stank, Hanover, Germany.

■ **Music is a part of worship!** “Singing, as a part of a religious service, is as much an act of worship as is prayer.” I appreciated very much the emphasis on music and worship.

Starting at the position that there has always been change in music, you moved through the concept that a considerable portion of current hymn sources as well as instruments has come from secular sources, concluding with the idea that contemporary “Christian” music is Christian music.

I disagree. There are two directions in which to change: improve or degenerate. Surely none would say that today's horrendous rock and rap productions are an improvement on Bach or Mozart. There's nothing wrong in change; let's just be sure it's change in the right direction.

I'm for change. The kind of change that will as nearly as possible put us in tune with the harmony, praise, and reverence of that music that is heard day and night around the throne of God.—Gordon Smedley, Pastor, Courtenay, British Columbia.

■ Your courage in dealing with the issue of Christian music is commendable. Bill O'Connor's “Ten Reasons We Need Those Great Hymns” was a beautifully concise contribution. In my view, the rest

Continued on page 28

If you're receiving *Ministry* bimonthly and have not paid for a subscription, it is not a mistake. Since 1928 *Ministry* has been published for Seventh-day Adventist ministers. We believe, however, that the time has come for clergy everywhere to experience a resurgence of faith in the authority of Scripture and in the great truths that reveal the gospel of our salvation by grace, through faith alone in Jesus Christ. We want to share our aspirations and faith in a way that we trust will provide inspiration and help as clergy. We hope you will accept this journal as our outstretched hand to you. Look over our shoulder, take what you want and find helpful, and discard what you cannot use. Bimonthly gift subscriptions are available to all licensed and/or ordained clergy. Requests should be on church letterhead and addressed to the editorial office.

"Sermonettes make Christianettes," says John Stott (referring to G. Campbell Morgan and Stuart Holden in the introduction to his 1982 book *Between Two Worlds*, originally published in London by Hodder and Stoughton). There are many levelheaded people, some highly favorable to the church, who go further in saying in one way or another that the state of preaching in the contemporary world is shallow. In moments of candor, some clergy (again, such as Stott) might use the word "deplorable" to describe today's preaching. For all of us in ministry, this is hard medicine to swallow.

Probably all of us would at least admit that great biblical preaching is uncommon.

This issue of *Ministry* is dedicated to inspiring us to take up the divine art-science of preaching with greater faith and fidelity, proficiency, and power.

We are especially thankful and proud to present an exclusive interview with John R. W. Stott by Derek Morris on the fascinating and practical process Stott uses to assure relevance in his preaching of the Bible. Another special presentation this month is the article by Charles Bradford, in which he shares with us some of his best wisdom on preaching. Fine articles by John W. Fowler and Grant Swank complete the theme articles in this issue. Insightful work following more general ministerial themes, by Len McMillan and Will McCall, also should not be missed.

This issue introduces what promises to be an outstanding 12-part continuing education series, "Pastoral pressure points." Guided by Rex Edwards, the series begins with an exceptional article by Fredrick Russell. Pastor Russell looks at the challenge of discouragement in the life of the pastor and how it may be faced.

Also activated in this new year's issue is a revitalized book review column edited by Andy McRae, associate pastor at Sligo church in Takoma Park, Maryland.



For more information on this month's cover see page 16.

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Heikki Silvet, Euro-Asia
Krasnoyarskaya St. #3, Golianovo,
107589 Moscow, Russian Federation
Jaime Castrejon, Inter-America
P.O. Box 140760
Miami, FL 33114-0760
William C. Scales, Jr., North America
12501 Old Columbia Pike
Silver Spring, MD 20904
Dae Yun Cho, Northern Asia Pacific
Seoul, South Korea
Alejandro Bullon, South America
Caixa Postal 12-2600
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Ray Zeeman, Southern Africa Union
P.O. Box 468, Bloemfontein 9300
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John Willmott, Southern Asia
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Hosur, Tamil Nadu, India 635110
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Eric Winter, South Pacific
148 Fox Valley Road
Wahroonga, N.S.W. 2076, Australia
Peter Roennfeldt, Trans-European
119 St. Peter's Street
St. Albans, Herts, AL1 3EY, U.K.

LAYOUT: Regina Hayden

ADVERTISING SALES: Melynie Tooley

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Preaching the Word to the heart

Nikolaus Satelmajer

I was struggling with a personal challenge. I was perplexed. There were very few options. What was I to do? The more I asked that question, the more discouraged I became. All my solutions seemed to take me to the end of a dead-end street.

That was my state of mind as, robot-like, after a recent move I set up my study, emptying boxes of books. Without enthusiasm I arranged the books according to subject. In spite of my lack of enthusiasm for the project, I noticed a book written by Thomas H. Troeger, a former teacher of mine. Years ago I took a graduate preaching seminar from him at Colgate Rochester Divinity School. The book was *Rage! Reflect. Rejoice!** I opened it to the chapter entitled "Trust" and began reading. It was a devotional reflection based on Psalm 131:2. "But I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a child quieted at its mother's breast; like a child that is quieted is my soul" (RSV).†

Reading Tom Troeger's sermon was helpful, but reading the passage from Psalm 131 brought me assurance as I faced my dilemma. What was it about these words from Scripture that gave me comfort and hope? What is it that makes words from an ancient book so relevant to the issues you and I face today? And how can we pastors preach from Scripture with relevance?

Preachers must realize that *they do not make* the Scriptures relevant. There is an inherent relevance to the Bible that we cannot increase or diminish. It is relevant because God takes responsibility for its message. It is relevant because it speaks to human experiences

such as love, fear, trust, uncertainty, and hope. These experiences are known to young and old, to female and male. The Bible itself reaches across the ages and speaks to us with relevance. The quieted and calmed soul to which the psalmist refers is not just a soul who lived in some past age. These words of Scripture speak to the living, disquieted souls of today. Therefore, whenever we faithfully present Scripture in our preaching, by its very nature Scripture will speak with relevance to our audience.

Inasmuch as the Scripture is relevant by itself, can the preacher do anything to increase its relevance? Yes, the preacher can provide valuable assistance. The preacher can help the hearer to enter into the experience described in Scripture. This can be done by an understanding of the biblical world, the experiences described in the passage under study, and by creating contemporary images that the hearer understands and with which he or she can identify.

My wife and I have been blessed by Clyde Newmyer's sermon "The Valley of Weeping." He preached this sermon in the 1980s while he was our pastor in central New York. The text of the sermon, Psalm 84:5-7, is a powerful passage that dramatically describes human dilemmas and offers hope. It speaks of blessings and journeys through the valley of Baca, or weeping. Newmyer brings the passage to life by sharing biblical images of those who have traveled through valleys of weeping. He then shares the story of a contemporary individual who experienced and survived firsthand a journey through unimaginable difficulties. But throughout the sermon there are signals that he himself has also traveled through

valleys of weeping, yet his faith has not been destroyed. In the midst of disaster there is hope. And that is why my wife and I have received a blessing by rereading this sermon.

Preaching meaningfully from the Bible will be enhanced if the preacher is faithful to biblical themes. Relevancy is achieved by resisting the temptation to turn our personal theological detours into main highways. How can this happen? There are those who accept the Scripture as authoritative, but who wish to go beyond that which the Scripture addresses. Some preachers attempt to force Scripture to deal with certain issues in great detail even though very little is said about these matters in the Bible. On the other hand, there are those who ignore the authority and specificity of Scripture and treat the Bible as a consultant rather than as God's Word. Faithfulness to biblical themes and emphases and adherence to the rightful role of Scripture enable us to preach from Scripture with relevance.

Did I find a solution to the challenge I was facing? No—the challenge itself is still in front of me—but since reading the Psalms I have experienced a sense of peace I did not have before. The words from the Bible brought me the assurance I needed, and the two preachers whose sermons I read enhanced the psalms for me and bathed them with a particularly helpful meaning. ■

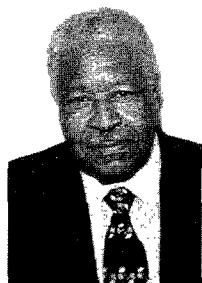
* Thomas H. Troeger, *Rage! Reflect. Rejoice! Praying With the Psalmists* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977), pp. 75ff.

† Bible texts credited to RSV are from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright © 1946, 1952, 1971, by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. Used by permission.

The imperatives of preaching

Charles Bradford

A seasoned preacher shares essential pulpit secrets.



Charles Bradford, D.D.,
former president of the
North American
Division.

The way to effective preaching follows the path to human need. It is not our knowledge of theology and homiletical skills that really matters. It is our understanding of the human heart, the deep yearnings, the real needs. This is what opens the door. People-orientation is the practical open sesame—the magic bullet—if there is such a thing.

What makes an effective preacher?

This is what made Jesus the most effective of preachers: “He knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man” (John 2:24, 25). Ezekiel talked about sitting “where they sat, and remained there astonished among them seven days. And it came to pass at the end of seven days, that the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me” (Eze. 3:15-17).

It is true that the Godward orientation—the vertical—is first, primary, but the horizontal, the turning toward people, is the ultimate outcome. It makes the vertical a reality, functional in human experience. Effective preaching therefore grows out of dynamic interaction with God and with people, both within the household of faith and in the larger community. It was Jacob’s night of wrestling with the Angel that brought him “power with God and men.” In order to communicate with people—that is, to preach effectively—the preacher must identify with them, interact with them, get to know them. This doesn’t mean that the preacher has

to be a glad-hander or a hail-fellow-well-met. But he or she cannot be a plastic person. The good preachers all “connect.” Some would like to call it chemistry. We must come to know people and come close enough to them to connect. As it is said: “Don’t shoot until you see the whites of their eyes.” To be fully human is where it’s at!

Interacting with the people

As we get into the Word and interact with the people, the Word of the Lord will come, and with it the urge—the imperative—to deliver that Word, to “give them warning” from God. “But his word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay” (Jer. 20:9). Ezekiel’s weeklong exposure to the real world where people lived was an eye-opener for him. It brought wonder, awe, and amazement, and made the prophet a compelling communicator. “Whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear, . . . yet shall [they] know that there hath been a prophet among them” (Eze. 2:5). The effective preachers are driven, constrained, as Paul says. They have genuine passion.

One cannot come by this in a classroom or seminar setting. W. E. Sangster tells about the day John Wesley took one of his young preachers on a walk through the London fish market. When the wanna-be preacher recoiled at the colorful earthy language of the women fishmongers and was preparing to flee in holy horror, Wesley said, “Stay, Sammy, and learn to preach!” Even fishmongers have to be reached. Preachers cannot be too sanctimonious

to hear people even when every expression is not sanitized. The women were not taking God's name in vain, but I can imagine them getting close to it.

So I must be thinking more about people these days—old, young, male, female, little ones; good, bad, and indifferent. Not as I want them to be, but as they are, with all their needs. As I prepare to speak to these people I must ask myself, "What kind of journey has it been for them this week?"

When these people before me become a part of me and I of them, this great imperative urge to share comes over me. As I wrestle with the Word, the text, and try to get into it (as D. T. Niles used to say, "Join the conversation" with Christ and His apostles and prophets), I will want to report it to my "significant others."

I find this comment on target: "When feasting upon God's Word, because of the precious light you gather therefrom, present it to others that they may feast with you. But let your communications be free and heartfelt. You can best meet the people where they are, rather than in seeking for lofty words which reach to the third heavens. The people are not there, but right here in this sorrowing, sinful, corrupt world, battling with the stern realities of life."¹

One of the rules (let me call it the imperative) ought to be to determine to preach nothing that has not met a need in our own lives, nothing that has not benefited and enriched our own souls. First we must taste it. The people should know, not necessarily because I keep telling them, but because it is deep reality; I have tested this on my own palate.

Communicating the joy of discovery

There are not too many people in this world who are excited about the Word of God. People still want to see and hear this rarity: a human being, not a "plaster of Paris saint," who has found what they all long

for—meaning in life, resources, guidance, and strength.

There is a lot of talk about the joy of discovery. I would like to take it a step further: what about the joy of sharing our discoveries and communicating these riches? Even better, to encourage people to find these riches for themselves so that they can say, "Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing

Some of my young preacher friends are doing this these days. They find surveys a good way to determine doctrinal needs and identify needs and weaknesses in our theological framework, both congregational and personal.

But there are some things we know without a survey: Edgar Jackson, the pastoral psychologist, estimates that "among any 100 people we might gather, 20 will be struggling with bereavement and grief, 33 with problems of marital adjustment, 50 with serious emotional turmoil, 20 with at least mild neuroses, and three to eight with loneliness based on homosexual impulses."²

Rising above performance

We need to raise this matter of preaching above the performance level. Jesus' charge to His disciples and to us is highly provocative: "Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season?

Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing" (Matt. 24:45, 46). We ministers are handling the essential nutrients that sustain all spiritual life.

If the needs of our people are met, if we connect, I can tell you it will strike fire. The most meaningful comment that could be made in response to your sermon is not the standard "Enjoyed your talk" or "Good sermon, Pastor," but "You were talking to me." Occasionally someone will say, "Who has been talking to you about me?" Then you know that the message has come home.

The role of technique

All of this does not obviate the need for technique—for attention to the rules. But if we want to reach them for all the right reasons, getting into the business of sharpening communication skills will be a breeze. My own dad, who was in ministry for more than 50 years, used to say to me, "Son, don't scatter your shot." The African preachers have a

If the needs of people are met, if we connect, I can tell you it will strike fire.

of mine heart: for I am called by thy name, O Lord God of hosts" (Jer. 15:16). "I rejoice at thy word, as one that findeth great spoil" (Ps. 119:162). Encourage people to secure these great riches for themselves.

Determining the eschatological imperative

Then there is the eschatological imperative, the reality of those things unseen and an awareness of the finiteness of life and of all things. People need to get their priorities in order—to separate wheat from tares and trivia. There is urgency because life is short, time is passing, the plans and purposes of God hasten on apace. These riches that we share are eternal; they matter.

How, then, do we know what people need? What are their spiritual and personal deficiencies? What are the things that people must know about God, His Word, and themselves in order to grow in grace? I've always thought about some kind of survey.

saying: "The sermon is a sharp stick." Preaching should be done well, skillfully, without too much rhetorical embellishment, and it must definitely be beyond mere performance.

I still use OTTO!

Observe. Look at the passage of Scripture in every possible way.

Truth. List every truth you see there. This will take some concentration.

Theme. There is a thread in this passage. Find it, trace it, name it.

Outline. If we have done thorough work in the above, an outline should begin to form.

If not, try another of those passages that has blessed your heart. By and by it will come. However, don't throw away your jottings and scribblings. All of this is still on the back burner of your mind. Nothing is really lost.

The need for clarity

We are living in the age of double-speak, technical jargon, and information overload. There are so many confusing voices. Nobody seems to understand what the other is saying. Preachers must not fall into this pattern. Clarity is imperative. We cannot afford the luxury of being obscure. We must ruthlessly discard every ounce of excess verbiage, every word that may obscure the point.

The old Scottish preachers liked to tell about the promising young Dr. Black's visit to the great Dr. Whyte of Edinburgh. Black asked, "I've been called to Queenstreet church; should I go?"

Whyte replied wryly, "Can ye clarify ye thought?"

"I think so," the young Dr. Black answered.

"Well," said the patriarch, "if ye can clarify ye thought, ye can go anywhere!"

The sermon—an integrated, growing organism

Think about the sermon as an organism, dynamic and growing, rather than a construction project. A growing plant must be tended. An old farmer once told me about growing strawberries.

"You've got to cultivate them 13 months a year," he said. It takes time and persistent effort. The message must hang together and have cohesion and consistency, and there must be linkage.

If we have brought the people along with us point by point, they will respond. If we are where the people are, if we have sat where they sit, we will understand something about their longings and deeper needs. That is why preachers must not only get the people hooked up to them—their message—they must be hooked up to the people. They should not send them away without articulating their needs.

Jesus described the people as sheep without a shepherd. When we discover something that will benefit them, we should be eager to share it with them, to invite them to enjoy it with us and be benefited by it with us. This is part of being a shepherd to them. Preachers should say to themselves before every speaking opportunity, Let me rush and get to the pulpit so I can share with the people the thrilling things that God has shown me.

What are the imperatives?

What, then, are the imperatives that seize me as I seek to meet heaven's expectations and the people's needs?

There is an imperative to empathize, to share, but only that which has blessed me.

Then I am committed to dig deeply, to sharpen my message.

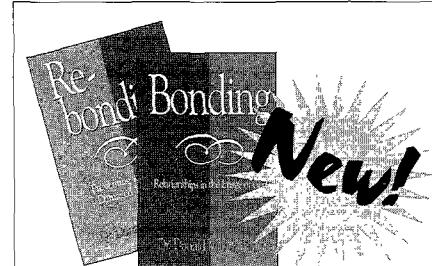
I must encourage the people to buy into the Word.

I must also make them colleagues in ministry, associates—as business organizations are calling employees to be these days.

Then there is the imperative to be clear. If the message cannot be heard and understood, it is indeed sounding brass and tinkling cymbal. ■

¹ Ellen G. White, *Counsels to Writers and Editors* (Nashville, Tenn.: Southern Pub. Assn., 1946), p. 87.

² Merrill R. Abbey, *Communication in Pulpit and Parish* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980), p. 174.



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Relevant biblical preaching: the art of double listening.

An interview with
John R. W. Stott by
Derek Morris



John Stott, D.D., is the founder, director, and honorary president of the London Institute for Contemporary Studies, and author of more than 40 books.



Derek Morris is professor of preaching and pastoral theology at Southern Adventist University, Collegedale, Tennessee.

Derek Morris: Dr. Stott, I really appreciate your willingness to share with us your thinking about relevant biblical preaching. In your book on preaching, entitled *Between Two Worlds*, there is one sentence that particularly caught my attention: "Humble listening is indispensable to relevant preaching."¹ Could we begin there?

John R. W. Stott: I'm glad you picked that out. Actually I would like to talk now about double listening.² By double listening, I mean listening, of course, to God and to the Word of God, but listening to the voices of the modern world as well. Now, I make it clear that in listening to the modern world, we are not listening with the same degree of respect as that with which we listen to the voice of God. We listen to Him in order to believe and obey what He says. We listen to the modern world, not in order to believe and obey what it says, but in order to understand its cries of pain, the sighs of the oppressed. And it seems to me that relevant communication grows out of this process of double listening.

DM: Does this double listening begin by first listening to God?

JRWS: I don't know that it must be first. I think if we are listening to the voices of the modern world, we grow in an understanding and appreciation of their pain and their misunderstanding of the gospel. The more aware we are of the context around us, the more urgent becomes our listening to God in order to hear a word from Him that is relevant to their pain. So I don't know

that it matters which comes first or whether you're listening to both simultaneously. The important thing is to listen to both and not only to one. Of course, the liberal tends to listen only to modernity, and the conservative tends to listen only to God. It is the double listening that seems to me to be most needed.

DM: Let's talk about some ways that you have sought to listen carefully to the modern world. One of the exciting concepts that you mention in your book *Between Two Worlds* is the idea of a reading group. Could you share with us about the focus of a reading group?

JRWS: Well, in this business of relevance, I felt that I myself, and probably my friends, spent enough time studying the Word and theological books that helped us to understand the Word. My major weakness was a lack of understanding of the modern mind, of what was actually going on around me. So the purpose of starting the reading group was very deliberately to oblige us to listen more attentively and intelligibly to the modern world. I invited about 15 young professional people in our congregation to join the reading group: a couple doctors, a couple lawyers, an architect, and a BBC person, etc., all of whom were committed to the gospel, the biblical gospel, and all of whom were modern young men and women eager to relate the gospel to the modern world. We used to meet every other month. And we still meet over 20 years later.³ We met only last week, when, for example, we studied a book on economics: *The*

State We're In, by Will Hutton.⁴ And the book before that was *The Selfish Gene*, by Richard Dawkins.⁵

DM: What determines the books you read?

JRWS: It is spontaneous from the group, and we try to be up-to-date. We studied a number of New Age books. These are not Christian books about the New Age, but actual New Age books. We read them in order to understand what New Age is really saying and thinking. I normally let others in the reading group choose, because they are in touch with these books much more closely than I am. At the end of each evening we debate what will be next.

DM: So what is the focus of your discussion? Let's say you read this book on economics. What do you hope to get out of the reading besides an awareness of what the book says? Is there discussion regarding how to respond to it in a Christian way?

JRWS: Yes, we tend to begin by going around the room. Everybody is given maybe 30 seconds to identify the major issue they felt the book raises for Christian people. And then at the end of the evening we ask ourselves the question "What has the gospel to say to people who think like this?" The reading group doesn't always answer this question as sharply as I think they should, but that is the purpose, the aim of doing it.

DM: If someone were to try to get a reading group started, what suggestions would you make about the formation of a group?

JRWS: When I lecture on preaching, I often mention the reading group concept. I suggest that if you haven't got enough professional people in your congregation, then share with two or

three other congregations, including two or three ministers. I think it could be done almost anywhere.

DM: In addition to your reading group, I noticed that you also utilized ad hoc resource groups from your series of sermons on issues facing Christians. This is another example of seeking to listen carefully to the modern world.

"We should be praying that God will raise up a new generation of Christian communicators who are determined to bridge the chasm; who struggle to relate God's unchanging Word to our ever-changing world; who refuse to sacrifice truth to relevance or relevance to truth."—John Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, p. 144.

Could you share with us why you formed these resource groups?

JRWS: Yes, it was the sense that in relating the Word to the world, I probably knew the Word more thoroughly and deeply than the congregation did because it was obviously my study. But I felt that the areas in which I was relating the Word to the world were in many cases areas about which I was ignorant. I recognized that there were professional members in the congregation who were much more knowledgeable than I, and that to have an ad hoc group of experts in their field would be very valuable.⁶ So usually my study assistant would gather the group together. He would gather about eight people, and very often on a Sunday afternoon we would have two to two and a half hours together. I would tend to ask them questions because I knew, roughly speaking, how I was going to handle the topic. And I would then sit back and listen to them as they debated the answer. For example, one resource group dealt with the issue of work and unemployment.

DM: Yes, and if I remember your book correctly, you had an employer, a personnel controller, and the chaplain to the Oxford Street stores as part of your resource group.

JRWS: And two people who experienced periods of unemployment and knew the trauma.⁷

DM: At this point you were not asking them how to interpret Scripture, but you were asking them to discuss an issue about which they were well informed.

JRWS: Yes, and there was a different resource group for each topic. Obviously, one couldn't do that weekly, but one could do it monthly or quarterly.⁸

DM: A third way it seems that you have sought to listen to the modern world is by soliciting feedback regarding your sermons. Where did you get the idea of asking certain people in your congregation to be "lay critics"?

JRWS: At seminary—or theological college, as we call it in Britain—there is a sermon class or homiletics group in which maybe a dozen of one's peers come and listen to one's preaching. Then on the following day they tear your sermon to pieces. So the idea of having critics is not new, but the idea of continuing the process after one graduates, I think, is fairly unusual. Most students are very glad when that time is over!

DM: But you chose medical students to serve as lay critics to give you evaluation and feedback regarding your sermons.

JRWS: Yes. I suppose a married man's wife is one of his best lay critics. But if, like me, you're a bachelor, then you badly need critics to listen. I deliberately chose the medical students.

They are trained in unbiased observation, and I thought they would be in a position to be objective and detached in their evaluation. And of course, I made sure they believed the gospel.

DM: What kind of feedback did you receive from them?

JRWS: Well, obviously the practical things were there, about one's gestures, or one's voice, or one's demeanor in the pulpit—all that kind of obvious stuff. But in addition, they were highly intelligent and evangelically well-educated young men, so I was quite happy for them to comment on how I handled the text, whether they thought my hermeneutical principles were sound and whether they agreed with the interpretation of the text.

DM: So you gave them freedom to respond in any way?

JRWS: Absolutely, to anything, and I asked them to put it in writing. The process was helpful.

DM: One fourth way that you have sought to listen carefully was in developing your preaching syllabus, or preaching calendar. How does that work?

JRWS: The staff goes away two or three times a year for a whole day—a staff quiet day. And one of the topics on the agenda for that day is our preaching for the next six months, or whatever the time period is. Very often we invite two or three leading laypeople to join us. We ask ourselves the question "Where are we as a congregation in terms of spiritual development and pilgrimage, and what is it that we need?" Out of that debate comes a decision as to what we are going to do next. Normally it would be a choice of a book to expound. And one of the staff may go away and divide the book into sections and suggest titles and how it is to be handled. Sometimes that process will be done in the group. The laypeople are very important, then, because they get feedback from the

wider laity. A box is also placed at the back of the church asking people to suggest sermons or given topics in given books. Guidance also comes through our own pastoral counseling with people, where we come to realize their misunderstandings or that there is a need for further enlightenment in some areas.

DM: This process of developing the preaching calendar seems to be sending an important message to the congregation: you want to listen to them. It could also indicate to the congregation that the church has a specific direction that it is seeking to take.

JRWS: Yes, that's right. And that we are taking the trouble to prepare and think about things, not operating in a haphazard way.

DM: What would you say to pastors who feel so overwhelmed in ministry that they believe they don't have the time for double listening or for the preparation of relevant biblical sermons?

JRWS: Well, I would say that every generation needs to relearn the lesson of Acts 6. While we are not apostles, some of the pastoral duties of the apostolate do devolve upon us, particularly in the handling of the Word of God. And it seems to me it's absolutely essential that we should concentrate on that and not allow ourselves to be distracted by administration. Preach on Acts 6 so the congregation can understand it's their responsibility to set the pastor free to preach the Word! ■

¹ John R. W. Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1982), p. 192.

² Dr. Stott amplifies this idea in a more recent publication, *The Contemporary Christian: An Urgent Plea for Double Listening* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1992); the American printing is also by IVP, 1992, and is entitled simply *The Contemporary Christian*.

³ Because of Dr. Stott's increased travel, the reading group now meets about four times per year.

⁴ Will Hutton, *The State We're In* (London: Vintage, 1996).

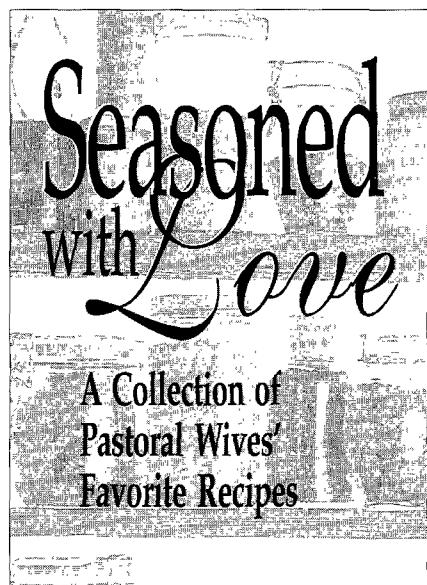
⁵ Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene* (New

York: Oxford University Press, 1989). Dawkins is an Oxford professor who espouses atheistic and Darwinian views.

⁶ Dr. Stott suggests that if sufficient or appropriate resource people are not available in a particular congregation, people in the community can be utilized.

⁷ One of these unemployed individuals had applied for 43 jobs, had been granted only six interviews, and was still without work.

⁸ This series of sermons, which utilized ad hoc resource groups, eventually appeared in print. The American version is entitled *Decisive Issues Facing Christians Today* (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1990). Prior to publishing these presentations, Dr. Stott gave them in lecture form at the Institute for Contemporary Christianity, an educational organization affiliated with the All Souls Church in London.



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Journeying through discouragement

Fredrick Russell

**A pastor looks honestly
at his times of
discouragement.**

Discouragement is an occupational hazard of ministry; it comes with the turf. Ministers skirmish on the front lines of the “battle royal,” where pointed attacks on their professional well-being and personal confidence are the name of the game. No negative emotion grips the heart of a pastor more frequently than discouragement.

What complicates the issue is that discouragement can hurt a pastor’s spiritual well-being and sensibility. Even a low-grade despondency may insinuate that all is not right with God. It can subtly infer an inner contradiction, a disguised dissonance. The eloquent and encouraging words to the congregation to “trust, hold on, and never doubt” boomerang as words of indictment in the pastor’s weary soul, questioning his or her spiritual integrity and pastoral credibility.

Some pastors have given up and left ministry, too discouraged to keep going. Most have stayed and fought what can sometimes be seen as a losing battle. I know, because I have fought the battle against discouragement for many years.

Not me!

My introduction to discouragement in ministry happened early. I began pastoring at the age of 22 and took the call very seriously. Growing up in a ministerial family, I was not overawed by it, but I did respect it deeply. I possessed a natural youthful idealism about pastoring that was tempered somewhat by exposure to some of the downsides of ministry. However, that exposure was not enough to shield me or even adequately prepare me for the stinging realities of pastoring on the front lines.

I always saw myself as being able to handle anything. I was a “never say die” type. So when I took my first church, I had a high degree of confidence in my abilities. I was going to be successful—and I knew it.

My first church was in a small college town just outside of the largest city in the state. It was a small congregation made up of several families, with two or three of those families having significant influence in the church. As a single pastor at the time (six months from being married) I had plenty of time to give to my new people. And that’s exactly what I did. I lived church, I talked church, I ate church, I breathed church, and when I did sleep, I slept church. I was living my dream.

The members were very affirming of just about everything I did. But *I had not even heard* of the “honeymoon” period in a church. I thought I was just a phenomenal pastor.

Fredrick A. Russell is pastor of the Miracle Temple church in Baltimore, Maryland.

As chairperson and the youngest member of the church board, I sensed that even the leadership group seemed excited about my ministry. They complimented me on my visitation of the members and spoke glowingly of the youth program that I was putting into place. An overall aura of enthusiasm and excitement permeated the church environment, and all of this in my first two months. Ministry was great!

I'd heard of pastors burning out—losing their passion for ministry. I was familiar with the stories of churches and pastors in conflict. And every now and then the word would spread about some pastor throwing in the towel and calling it quits. But not me! I could never see myself succumbing to that. I was an exception, and I had a theory: if I visited the people on a regular basis, handled the business of the church with relative competence, and preached decent sermons, that would cover the major bases. Problems would be minor and few. But to my surprise, it wasn't long before cracks began to appear in that theory.

After two months of pastoring one church exclusively, another congregation in the nearby city was added to my responsibilities. Whereas before I had plenty of time to give to my first charge, I now had to divide my time and passion between the two.

My second church was an inner-city congregation that rented facilities from another denomination. We worshiped in an old, Gothic-style building with a dark, dimly lit, heavy, stained-glass sanctuary. The congregation had been in existence for 16 months prior to my arrival. Its 125 members appeared to be a zealous group. Most were newly baptized, with about 25 charter members from the parent church in the city. As with my first church, I plunged in—ready to go.

The first board meeting went quite smoothly. But I did notice that one woman did most of the talking. It was remarkable how everyone seemed to defer to her. This behavior carried on into subsequent meetings. Not only did she dominate the floor, but when it came time for a vote, some board members, as if on cue, glanced her way to get their directions on how to vote.

Notwithstanding, she was appropriately friendly with me, but not overly so. I soon detected, however, that her influence went well beyond the board—it was pervasive throughout the church. For the first time in ministry a yet undefined and almost unnoticed tension began to build in me.

In an effort to draw out and engage other members of the church board in discussions, I would intentionally but diplomatically ask for their views even though the woman had spoken. At first people were reluctant to share their thinking, but on further encouragement some began to open up cautiously. Before long the lady moved from being "appropriately" friendly to being quietly hostile. At least I thought she was being quiet about it.

Introduced to discouragement

As with most two-church districts, weekly worship services had to be shared between both congregations. I preached in each church every other week—on average twice per month. On returning to my city congregation after being away a week, I noticed that many in the congregation who were usually friendly had turned somewhat cool during my absence. They spoke, but it wasn't the same. It was obvious that things had changed—something had happened.

What happened, I soon discovered, was that my "friend" was disseminating skillfully concocted tales and innuendos. She passed along such interesting tidbits as: "He's young and doesn't know what he's doing;" "He's not as nice as our former pastor;" "He seems a bit distant;" "He can't be trusted." Clearly these not-too-subtle pronouncements were hitting their intended mark. She was slowly but effectively turning the entire congregation against me—or so it seemed. And I was crushed.

I remember *that* Saturday night well. I had taken a full day of obvious hostility from those I had been called to pastor. I left the church and drove slowly through the streets of the city, attempting to make sense of it all, but failing miserably. The heaviness in my chest could be matched only by the pain in my heart. Questions swirled in my head: *What went wrong? What do I do now?*

I pulled into the parking lot of my apartment building and turned off the engine. Too burdened to get out of the car, I sat there for what seemed like hours.

I don't remember leaving the car and walking to the apartment. But I *do* recall unlocking and closing the door and immediately collapsing in the middle of the floor—in my suit—in a darkened apartment. My body instinctively folded into a fetal position. And then emotions, refusing to be held any longer, gushed forth like water plunging over Niagara Falls. "God," I wailed, "if this is what ministry is about, then I want no part of it."

That night I was introduced to discouragement—of the ministerial variety. It was almost as if God were saying, "Pastor Russell, welcome to ministry."

Thankfully, with both those congregations I ended up having some of my best days in ministry. Since that night, discouragement has brought me low many times. But those initial lessons learned about discouragement in those early churches, and the ones learned in subsequent years, have served me well ever since.

Managing discouragement

There is no one particular door through which discouragement enters to invade the life of a pastor. It can come as a result of feeling trapped in a dying church that is resistant

to change; it can descend when there are no tangible indicators of success; it can also hit in the middle of a painful ordeal in church conflict. The causes are legion. But one thing is certain—it happens. So since discouraging times will come, the question is How do we manage discouragement and ensure that we don't wallow in it, but grow through it?

My experience has given me some clues.

■ *Tell yourself the truth.* Pastors are most prone to be discouraged when they blunder. As pastors we tend to be tougher on ourselves than we need to be. In our discouragement we frequently tell ourselves untruths: "I'm so stupid," "I'm no good;" "I'm a terrible pastor." In this way serious damage can be done to our sense of competence and value.

It is essential that we replace lies about ourselves with the truth. And the truth is, *to err is human*. "I'm not the first person to make a mistake, and I will not be the last." It was when I intentionally embraced this simple truth that I began to roll out of discouragement more quickly and easily.

■ *Talk with a friend.* Friends have a way of lifting our spirits. They remind us that the sun will shine again. They help us gain needed perspective, which is often half the battle.

Occasionally we don't require any feedback, only a sounding board—someone to listen to us. Thinking out loud with a friend has value. Hearing yourself describe the reason for your discouragement can bring clarity to your thoughts. A friend is also good at providing comfort. On some occasions all we need to know is that someone cares—that we are not alone.

■ *Maintain a good attitude.* Situations arise in ministry that we are powerless to do anything about. Our attitude is not one of them. We have the power to control that.

Attitude has to do with how we think, and what we think. "As [a man] thinketh in his heart, so is he" (Prov. 23:7). If I constantly entertain negative thoughts, then my ability to process the discouraging times through to resolution is greatly affected. "My brothers, fill your minds with those things that are good and that deserve praise: things that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely, and honorable" (Phil. 4:8, TEV).

■ *Keep an affirmation folder.* Tucked safely away in the back of my file drawer is a folder labeled "Affirmations and Encouragements." These are letters and notes that members, colleagues, and mentors have written to me over the years, affirming me and my ministry. At the times I'm feeling low they serve as gentle reminders of God's anointing on my ministry.

■ *Develop and maintain a consistent devotional life.* I'm amazed at how my life is charged with joy when I take time to spend with Jesus morning by morning. My ability to handle the letdowns in ministry and other challenges of life is directly tied to the consistency of my devotional life. Daily dependence on God is a potent antidote to discouragement.

One last word

Sitting alone on the hillside, broken in spirit, Elijah was sure that his ministry was over. The events of recent days had depleted his energy and completely deflated his passion for

the cause he had defended so courageously on the top of Mount Carmel. God came to him in his stony hideaway, not to berate him, not to judge him, not to make him talk about it, not even to show him the future. Instead, God took time to meet his physical and emotional needs compassionately. And then slowly—even so slowly—God helped him pick up the pieces, renew his mind, rebuild his confidence, and renew his calling. God restored Elijah.

During that torturous moment of Elijah's discouragement God was *there* for him. He is always there for us, in our journeys through the crises of discouragement. ■

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Suggested Readings

Bratcher, Edward B. *The Walk-On Water Syndrome* (Waco, Tex.: Word Book Publishers, 1984), 225 pages. The book demands to be read in one sitting. From the first page to the last, it demystifies ministry for ministers. Having left the pastorate for a while because of burnout, the author impels clergy to face the tough realities of the "call."

Hughes, Kent and Barbara. *Liberating Ministry From the Success Syndrome* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 1987), 195 pages. Anecdotal in approach, the Hugheses describe their own journey in dealing with the pitfalls of pastoring: discouragement, success, integrity, disappointments, and a host of other challenges faced by pastors. A virtual handbook on ministry, dealing with "gut" level issues.

Powell, Colin L. *My American Journey* (New York: Random House Publishers, 1995), 617 pages. This is not a run-of-the-mill biography. It teaches leadership and the ability to go forward in the midst of heavy opposition. Colin Powell's "rules" are excellent guideposts for handling the sometimes slippery slopes of ministry.

Timberlake, Louis. *It's Always Too Soon to Quit* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1988), 187 pages. This is an upbeat book of stories about people who have triumphed through adversity and disappointments. The author is a Christian motivational speaker.

Continuing Education Exercise

Half the battle in getting through discouragement is understanding different elements. Try keeping a journal over the next 90 days recording your responses to the following questions when discouragement hits:

- A. What brought the discouragement on?
- B. What am I telling myself about it? Is it true or is it a lie?
- C. Am I being unreasonably hard on myself?
- D. Can I talk to anyone about this to gain perspective? If so, who?
- E. If the cause of the current discouragement happened again, what could I do differently to keep from getting "down" over it?

About this series

It has been said that there are three sexes—male, female, and clergy! Are pastors invulnerable to the limitations of normal humanity? Charles Spurgeon reminds us that “the strong are not always vigorous, the wise not always ready, the brave not always courageous, and the joyous not always happy.” Indeed, the pressures of ministry, the deep concerns that accompany it, and the expectations that others have may render ministers more subject to problems than others.

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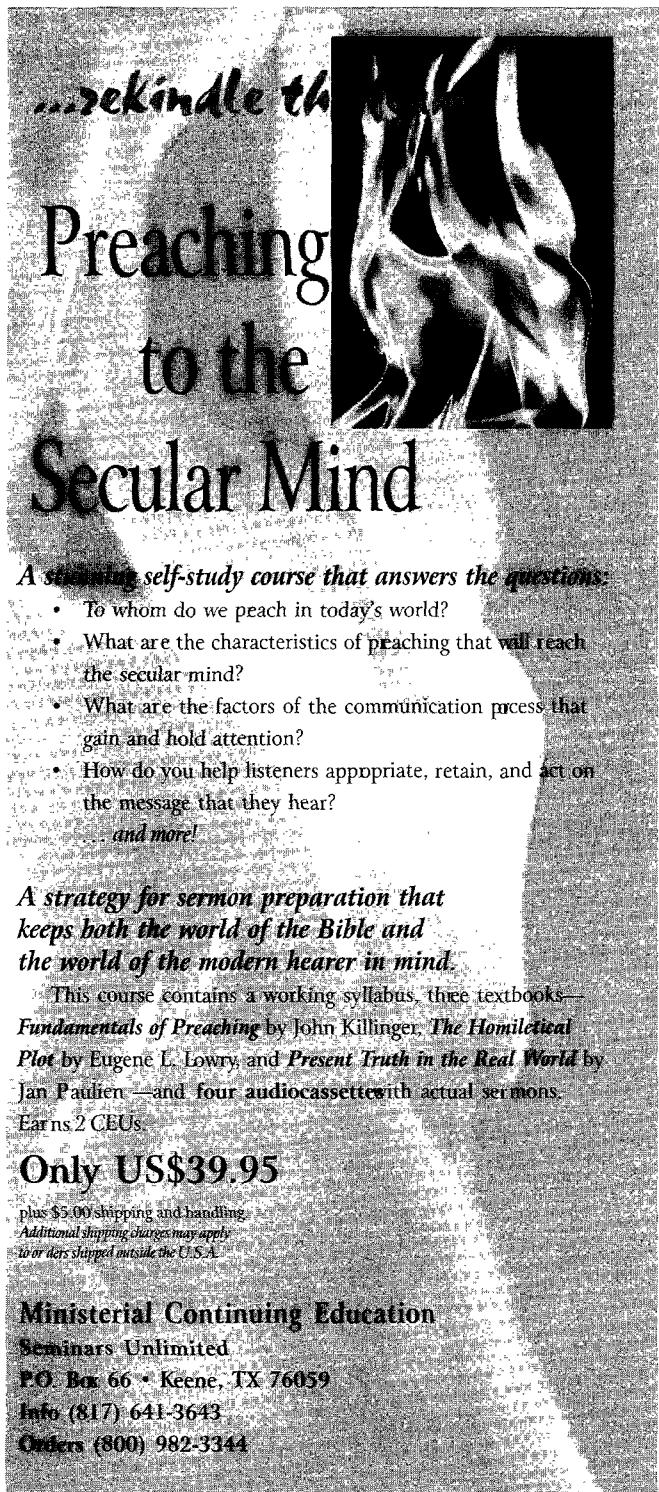
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Next month:
Pastoral pressure points:
Finding a balanced ministry



The art of the fine line

God, through His own emissary, speaks afresh in every worship. We dare not forget the fine lines.

J. Grant Swank, Jr.

While listening to a fellow preacher the other evening, I noted that just before his message he said to his parishioners, "Now, I don't plan on going more than an hour tonight."

I concluded that if his sermon was truly gripping, even an hour would go by quickly. Instead, the proceedings were rambling and disjointed; scraggly thoughts were somehow taped together. His eye contact was not all that good, although he could project his voice well. At times he lost his place in his notes or could not efficiently locate a passage of Scripture from which he sought to make a point. Thankfully, he was good-natured, genuinely loved people, and smiled a lot. This helped us get through that hour.

When I got home I remembered a clipping I had saved that spoke of George Washington and Benjamin Franklin as men of few words. After Franklin returned from France to sign the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson wrote to a friend: "I served with General Washington in the legislature of Virginia before the Revolution, and during it with Dr. Franklin in Congress. I never heard either of them speak 10 minutes at a time, nor on any but the main point which was to decide the question. They laid their shoulders to the great points, knowing that the little ones would follow of themselves."

Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg address was but 266 words, and the Declaration of Independence, which contained a new concept of freedom, was completed in 1,321 words. The evangelist Luke summarized all the circumstances connected to the birth of Christ in 284 words.

J. Grant Swank, Jr., is the pastor of the Church of the Nazarene, Windham, Maine.

Carving the fine lines

It is possible, then, to carve out the fine lines, to concentrate on the main points. The more we preachers work at perfecting that skill, the more the years will reward us. Theodore Parker Ferris was the rector of the famed Trinity church in Boston. He told his preacher-students that he spent hours lifting his weekly sermons from his own heart into the hearts of his people. No wonder the large sanctuary was filled week after week, and not only in the mornings, but evenings as well.

That man was dedicated to regarding the message as a molding of the divine truth. Worshipers around the world received the weekly mailings of those sermons delivered from that ornate pulpit in Copley Square. For years Dr. Ferris was looked upon as the high example of God's craftsman, a man of God consecrated to perfection, along with warmth and excellence, and coupled with caring.

Not given to affected or ornate language, this preacher could express the most profound postulates of Christianity in the simplest terms. However, with each sermon there was such concern that one felt as if the very song of heaven was being played for one's own spiritual deepening.

Yet how long—according to the clock—did it take for this pastor to give each message? It was said of the duration of his sermons that the time flew; they did not know how long his sermons were, though they listened to him frequently. When they could not get to his sanctuary to hear him preach, they read his sermons. One person said that when the sermons came to his mailbox, he devoured them as soon as they arrived. In point of fact, Ferris rarely went more than 25 minutes. So the people heard him gladly.

But more, he converted his work into

an art, as if it were a holy vessel from the temple laid before the throne of the Holy One Himself. One never thought of Dr. Ferris as hurrying through his sermon preparation, simply throwing together some thoughts on religion in order to get through a service. That would have been blasphemy to him.

Scotland's George H. Morrison was yet another masterful carver of godly words so that various journals of his day praised his abilities as one who understood what to say and what to leave unsaid, what to press and what to touch on lightly. Others said that few sermons made better reading than his, and that he had the gift of writing with wisdom and interest about life and its lessons, and all of this in the light of Scripture. Still others wrote of the striking originality of Morrison's sermons, which combined earnestness and fluency with a practical spirit.

Preaching with precision

It is with precision that the Lord speaks to Noah and Abraham and Moses. It is with skill that God breathes upon David in the Psalms and Solomon in the Proverbs. It is with careful deliberation that God's angel explains to Mary her gracious lot as the called-forth woman for the Messiah's destiny on earth. It is with special carvings that Christ communicates with John on the Isle of Patmos. So it is that the preacher reminds himself that he is struck from the image of God: precisioned, skilled, careful, and deliberate.

So it must be with every preacher. The man or woman of God is to step into that pulpit with caution. That is holy ground. It is from that desk that the everlasting communication is interpreted. God, through His own emissary, speaks afresh in every worship. Do we dare, then, to forget the fine lines? ■

Biblical preaching among the people: Scripture impacts Danish society

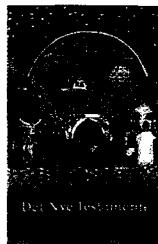
James A. Cress

More than a half million free copies of the Danish New Testaments were given away in just 10 days in a massive interfaith project timed to coincide with the celebration of Copenhagen as the 1996 European Cultural Capital.

This project is the single largest distribution of the Scriptures in the shortest amount of time in the history of the world. In fact, more than 98 percent of the homes in Copenhagen received a personal visit, and residents accepted a copy of the New Testament featuring an original cover design by Danish artist Esben Hanefeldt Kristensen.

This fascinating cover design, which features Copenhagen's notable architectural landmarks coupled with famous biblical stories, has become a collector's memento. Demand has been so great that the initial printing was exhausted during the first week of distribution, and more copies were rushed into print to meet the need.

During a visit with Morten Aagaard, general secretary of the Danish Bible Society, Borge Schantz and I were thrilled to learn how this great initiative was launched to demonstrate the relevance of the Bible in today's society. "When Copenhagen was designated as the 1996 European Cultural Capital, it seemed essential to emphasize the Bible's role in the development of



Danish culture as well as to show its current impact on the lives of individuals today when they read God's Word for themselves."

Aagaard, who is also an ordained Lutheran pastor, said the project received massive coverage in Denmark's media, and most encouraging, brought cooperation between the city's churches, all of which took part in distributing the Bibles. Aagaard said, "Every household in Copenhagen received a visit from a member of a local church, and not necessarily their own church. We discovered that only 1 or 2 percent of the households said 'No thanks' to the free Bible."

In some places Lutherans received a New Testament from a Methodist, while Catholics distributed Bibles in primarily Protestant areas. Elsewhere Baptists coordinated distribution by Lutherans and Catholics together, and Adventists covered neighborhoods in areas of the city beyond the location of their own congregations. In other cases Pentecostals and Lutherans, who have been living in the same area for 10 years, cooperated for the first time.

Now that more than 500,000 copies of this special-edition New Testament in Danish have been distributed, the Bible Society is coordinating a further distribution of the Bible in more than a dozen other languages for more than 38,000 Danish households whose residents speak a different first language. These languages include Arabic, Tagalog, Spanish, German, Polish, English, Urdu, Farsi, French, Turkish, Serbian, and Croatian.

Congregations that participated in the distribution were encouraged to host

special events in their own churches. Along with the free copy of the New Testament, each home received a letter from the Bible Society listing 600 of these follow-up events ranging from concerts to Bible study groups.



For example, Adventist pastor Thomas Mueller (above right), of Copenhagen, describes what happened in his congregation. "Our church participated in distributing the Bibles, and it was a marvelous experience. The massive media coverage meant that everyone was expecting someone to visit their home with a New Testament. We were encouraged by the positive reaction of virtually everyone we met, as well as by their obvious eagerness to read the Bible."

Mueller continues, "We also used the opportunity to host some special follow-up events at our church. We planned five evening seminars, 'An Introduction to the New Testament,' which have developed into a weekly Bible study group."

Borge Schantz, pastor of the Roskilde Adventist Church, realizing that his suburban city was outside the area covered by the distribution plan for Copenhagen, believed that many residents of Roskilde would also like a copy of



this beautiful souvenir New Testament. So his church purchased 800 copies and advertised in the local newspaper for anyone who wanted a free copy to telephone the church office. In addition to distributing all their copies of the Bible, the Roskilde church has had more than 150 individuals visit their church, with nearly half of those choosing to attend public lectures on the topic of how the Scriptures impact society. Schantz, missiologist and former director of the Adventist Church's Center for Islamic Studies, continues to present follow-up meetings on related topics. His local church leaders are amazed at the

number of individuals who have visited their church.

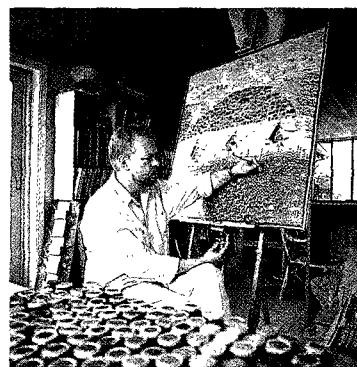
Schantz says, "Twenty years ago in Denmark people were embarrassed to talk about religion. Today there is a new openness to discussing religious issues, and many individuals are asking questions concerning the role of spirituality in their everyday lives. This Bible distribution program has heightened awareness of Scripture as it impacts society."

Aagaard says that theologians and local church pastors continue to contact the Bible Society to say thank you for what they had thought was impossible. The interest shown in this special edition of the New Testament has been so great that the Swedish Bible Society plans a similar distribution when Stockholm is the 1998 European Cultural Capital.

The total cost for the project was

the equivalent of US\$500,000. Readers who wish to make a contribution toward this project or the upcoming distribution in Stockholm can forward a donation to *Ministry* designated for "Bible Distribution."

Although Europe is often described as a post-Christian, secular society, I am encouraged by this bold initiative of the Danish Bible Society. I am inspired by the cooperative spirit of the various denominational entities in Denmark, by the openness of thousands of residents to receiving a specially prepared edition of the New Testament, and by the encouraging reports of attendance at various follow-up events. God's Word still has the power to change lives one at a time as we come in contact through the Scriptures with Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh. ■



The cover illustration of this issue features the work of Danish artist, Esben Hanefelt Kristensen, which he painted especially for the 1996 commemorative edition of the New Testament published by the Danish Bible Society. This unique painting celebrates the impact of the Bible in Danish society by combining scriptural themes with famous landmarks and public buildings in Copenhagen, Europe's Cultural Capital for 1996.

Although he was already an established artist, the Danish Bible Society's 1992 publication of a new children's Bible, with 49 illustrations by Kristensen, propelled him to world recognition as a premier illustrator of biblical themes.

Since then, this new children's Bible has been translated into a number of languages, and Kristensen has become recognized around the world as a premier illustrator of spiritual topics. He has also produced several posters and Christmas seals for the Danish Bible Society. In addition to international exhibitions in Tokyo, Minneapolis, London, and Amsterdam, Kristensen has won a number of artistic competitions.

Of his craft, Kristensen says, "A painting begins when words fail . . . I am not trying to escape from reality, rather I seek to view it from a different angle so that, perhaps, all of a sudden, it may flare to a new brilliance."

Feed my different sheep

Len McMillan

Can a pastor provide spiritual food that meets the needs of each unique sheep?



Len McMillan, Ph.D., is the family life director at the Pacific Health Education Center in Bakersfield, California.

The laws of genetics suggest 300 billion possible chromosome combinations for human beings. For all practical purposes, that means that every person is truly *one of a kind*. Identical twin studies at the University of Minnesota suggest that our behavior is influenced more by our parents' genes than by their parental guidance. Considering the impact of both our genetic inheritance and learned behavior, it never ceases to amaze me that two people can agree on anything. Yet pastors are expected not only to shepherd a flock of such unique individuals but also to feed them. How does one feed such a widely divergent flock? Can a pastor provide spiritual food that meets the needs of each unique sheep?

Spirituality or seniority?

First of all, pastors should be careful not to confuse spirituality with seniority in the flock. Even though certain members have been in the flock longer, that does not mean that their chosen diet is appropriate for all the other sheep. Living longer does not necessarily make one spiritually superior. Seniority may qualify one for retirement or even a discount on a motel room, but it does not necessarily identify a spiritually mature person. Spiritually mature individuals are controlled by the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5:18), manifest the fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22, 23), know the Word of God, and enjoy walking with God on a daily basis. Some Christians enjoy their walk with God only if it is on the same well-worn path that others refer to as a rut.

Studying different kinds of people

"We all need to study character and manner that we may know how to deal judiciously with different minds, that we may use our best endeavors to help them to a correct understanding of the Word of God and to a true Christian life. . . . The person must be shown his true character, understand his own peculiarities of disposition and temperament, and see his infirmities."¹

How do pastors apply the study of character and temperament to feeding sheep? Taking the time to become knowledgeable in the area of temperaments will appreciably increase the palatability of the "food" you are serving. Understanding how each member of your flock relates to God will determine not only the spiritual food you provide, but also the quantity and your feeding methods.

Sanguines

Sanguines, like the apostle Peter, are spontaneous, undisciplined people who really have to work at being consistent in their spiritual lives (or any other part of their lives, for that matter). Television can become a cruel slave master to sanguines, who crave external stimulation. A pastor must find ways to make spirituality fun and fulfilling. If it is immediately enjoyable, sanguines will feed often on the Word of God. However, most sanguines find feeding upon a prescribed (and often predigested) Scripture lesson boring and will soon look elsewhere for stimulation.

Sanguines typically wake up in a happy mood and usually come to church whistling and cheerful. It is important for them to leave the church at least as

joyful as when they arrived. Their favorite Bible verse is often “Pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17), which they interpret as conversing with God at random throughout the day. Consequently, their prayer lives can be rather shallow and unfulfilling. They especially do not like spending time talking to God in solitude when there are so many interesting people just waiting to be discovered elsewhere. Sanguines expect church functions to be joyful occasions when Christians come together to rejoice in the Lord.

To borrow an expression from the Gospel writer Mark, sanguines do everything *immediately*. They are the most likely to try to *walk on water* when spiritually motivated. Unfortunately, they are also the most likely to walk out the *back door* of the church when the Spirit no longer moves them. If sanguines do not find rejoicing in the church, they will find it elsewhere.

Suggestion: Challenge your sanguines to find answers to current problems in the Bible. Offer them the opportunity to share their findings with the rest of the group. Sanguines and their group will both be enriched by this experience. Encourage them to linger and visit with friends before and after church services. Teach them during the church service that Jesus is also their friend. Spend time rejoicing in worship and actually smile when you sing about salvation. Finally, involve them in soul winning to keep their spiritual lives fully charged.

Cholerics

Cholerics, like the strong-willed Paul, are self-disciplined people whose daily routine may become too full for consistent Bible study. It took a Damascus road experience to get Paul’s attention; therefore, we should not be surprised if some choleric in our churches have an agenda different from our own. They respond positively to the eyesalve of new insights developed into proven spiritual truths. For their sakes, keep the spiritual food on the church plate fresh but identifiable.

Like Martha, choleric would rather

spend time serving their Lord than talking with Him. Their spirit of self-sufficiency does not allow them to discuss *everything* with God. They can handle most of life’s problems alone—at least that is what they think! Only *big-ticket* items make it on their daily prayer lists—namely, projects or subjects they cannot figure out themselves.

Visionary choleric are project-oriented and can either build or destroy a church with their self-confidence. It is sometimes difficult to tell whether their faith is in God or in themselves. Seldom troubled by theoretical doubts, the take-charge choleric finds it easy to step out in faith (or presumption).

Suggestion: Involve the choleric in the planning and implementing of all activities in the church. If you do not plan to use them, they will use their own plan. Share with choleric the value of keeping a pad and pencil handy at all times—including prayertime—to record ideas God brings to their minds. If some business items come to mind while praying, suggest that they pause only long enough to write them down, then get back to their conversation with God. Finally, put each one of your choleric in charge of a different project and watch the activity begin!

Melancholies

Melancholies, like the great leader Moses, are the most apt to be consistent in their study, reading, and even memorization of God’s Word. They are usually interested in anything that is good for them and, once convinced that they need God, will work tirelessly to become better acquainted with His will. However, because they tend to major in minors, melancholies sometimes become spiritual stumbling blocks to others if they pause in their spiritual journey to pick at some obscure point of view.

Of all the temperaments, melancholies have the most consistent, active, and extensive prayer life. They pray about everything! They truly enjoy communion with God. Like the prophets, melancholies are most likely to schedule a specific time each day with God and

truly look forward to that appointment. Solitude and serious contemplation are natural for the inward-looking melancholies. However, such introspection can cause difficulty in their social lives and relationships within the church family. Criticism and backbiting over real or imagined hurts often become habitual for negative-thinking melancholies. Their critical attitudes sometimes impair their prayer lives, as they choose to recall past hurts rather than experiencing true communion with God. Paul’s advice “In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus” (1 Thess. 5:18) could have been written specifically for melancholies.

Spirit-filled melancholies are unstoppable, but self-conscious melancholies are unstartable. Naturally endowed with analytical skills, perfectionistic melancholies often become the depressed church members you are called upon to encourage. Not able to live up to their own expectations, melancholies find it difficult to believe that God can love them with their imperfections. Feeling unworthy, pessimistic melancholies often plead “Why me?” The optimistic cry of sanguines and choleric tends to be “Why not me?”

Suggestion: Ask each of your melancholies to keep a spiritual diary of prayers answered and victories achieved in the Lord. This diary will be a constant source of encouragement to the naturally negative melancholy. Encourage them to focus on positive prayer requests rather than attempting to use God like a magical genie to get even with their enemies. Melancholies seldom feel fully forgiven, so they often stagnate in their prayer life, asking God to forgive them for the umpteenth time. Your messages from the pulpit about the certainty of salvation in Christ are truly “meat in due season” for the melancholies. Use the vivid imagination of melancholies to visualize Jesus taking them by the hand and saying, “Well done, My good and faithful servant.”

Phlegmatics

Phlegmatics, like father Abraham,

are usually the nicest members of any flock. They make friends easily and are loved by everyone. However, they tend to procrastinate over almost everything, including Bible study and prayer. They believe it is important, but other things keep cluttering up their life until there isn't any time left for God. They would never think of attending church without their Bibles, but tend not to use them much during the week.

One enemy in the phlegmatics' prayer lives is drowsiness. Any time they strike a sedentary position sleep becomes an uninvited guest, disconnecting them from God's hot line. To counteract this tendency, some phlegmatics have learned to pray while pacing in order to stay awake.

Stepping out of the boat in order to walk on water is not expected behavior for phlegmatics. They would rather enjoy the boat ride, especially when someone else is rowing! Fear and worry are the two main destroyers of faith for phlegmatics. Consequently, when the call is made to get out of the boat, they are likely to find a myriad reasons to stay put. Phlegmatics find it convenient to point out that Peter ultimately sank during his attempt to walk on water, implying that it is safer to stay in the boat.

Suggestion: Get your phlegmatics involved with serving God and other people. They are so people-oriented that they need to teach a class, give Bible studies to new converts, or otherwise become involved in sharing themselves if their faith is to grow. Prayer lists are essential for everyone, but especially for compassionate phlegmatics. Unlike sanguines and choleric, phlegmatics thrive on routine. Bible study and prayer often become lifelong habits that began during childhood. Of all the temperament blends, phlegmatics are the most likely to become men or women of prayer. You may need to push your phlegmatics gently out of the boat, much like a mother eagle pushes her young out of the nest. Just be there to lift them up if they begin to flounder. Offer spiritual resuscitation if they take in too much water.

Specific temperament blends in the Adventist Church

In a survey of more than 9,000 temperament inventories, personally scored by my wife in hundreds of SDA churches in the U.S.A., Canada, and South Africa, it is clear that the Adventist Church tends to attract (or retain) particular temperament blends. In every church surveyed (except one that was surveyed on Visitors' Day) the numerical totals of various temperament blends were in the following order: choleric, melancholy, phlegmatic, and sanguine.

Choleric and melancholies convincingly dominated the SDA churches surveyed. Perhaps these two opposite temperaments actually attract each other in the church family, much like they would in a marriage. Outgoing, dominating choleric enjoy making rules and being in charge. Introspective, perfectionistic melancholies enjoy obeying rules and feeling guilty. Both are workaholics, but for different reasons.

Phlegmatics made a less spectacular showing in third place, while the fun-loving sanguines came in a distant fourth. Apparently there is little tolerance in our choleric-melancholy churches for the inconsistent, externally motivated, and easily distracted sanguine. Even though sanguines, like the apostle Peter, are usually the first to respond during an evangelistic call, they are often later put down or shunned by choleric and melancholies, who consider them wishy-washy, undependable, and weak.

Keeping everyone on the path

Pastors are called upon to shepherd and feed the entire flock of God with a variety of spiritual food. Keeping such a divergent flock on the upward path is not an easy task. Perhaps inspired counsel given to a biological family will encourage pastors seeking to understand and shepherd their church family: "Marked diversities of disposition and character frequently exist in the same family, for it is in the order of God that persons of varied temperament should

associate together. When this is the case, each member of the household should sacredly regard the feelings and respect the right of the others. By this means mutual consideration and forbearance will be cultivated, prejudices will be softened, and rough points of character smoothed. Harmony may be secured, and the blending of the varied temperaments may be a benefit to each."² ■

¹ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1948), vol. 4, p. 69.

² —, *Child Guidance* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1954), p. 205.

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Preaching Christ

John W. Fowler

To preach is to bring Christ to people and people to Christ.



John W. Fowler, Ph.D., is the executive secretary of the Kentucky-Tennessee Conference in Goodlettsville, Tennessee.

While endeavoring to communicate the gospel faithfully, many well-intentioned preachers fail to grasp the higher, transcendent purpose of preaching. Consequently, Christian preaching has often focused on various aspects of the Christian faith, such as morals, ethics, lifestyles, doctrines, law, and judgment. Those who hear this kind of preaching have often been converted to rational, propositional truths. Many Christian churches and members fail to experience the power of the gospel in their lives because of this hazy focus in preaching.

Propositional truth must be preached and taught, but it must be the truth as it is in Jesus. The gospel must have a rational, objective content; however, our hearers must not be led to believe that the gospel consists simply of rules, regulations, and cerebral expressions of truth that if believed and obeyed will assure them of eternal life. We must see that Christ was not just another lawgiver like Moses, albeit on another mountain, promising God's blessing if only human beings would obey.

To be Christian is to know Christ and to have an intimate and saving relationship with Him. True biblical preaching, then, whether it is done in the church's regular worship services or in a public hall, is the uplifting of Christ and inviting men and women to come to know Him as Saviour, Lord, and friend.

The testimony of Scripture

The Bible is unequivocal on this point. Luke describes the disciples "daily in the temple, and in every house, . . . [ceasing] not to teach and preach

Jesus Christ" (Acts 5:42). He underscores this foundational point when he writes that Philip went down to Samaria and "preached Christ unto them" (Acts 8:5). A few days later we find Philip in the desert witnessing to the Ethiopian official and "preaching unto him Jesus" (verse 35).

Paul, in writing to the Corinthian church, assures them that it is the preaching of Jesus Christ that will establish the Corinthian church in the Christian faith (1 Cor. 1:30). It is everywhere apparent in Paul's ministry that the teaching and preaching of Christ is the wisdom and power of God and the God-ordained means by which people are saved (verses 21-30).

Paul underscores the importance of defining the Christian ministry as the preaching of Christ by contrasting it with the so-called wisdom of this world. He argues eloquently that the light, the glory, the knowledge, and the salvation of God are to be found only in Jesus Christ. Consequently, we are not just to preach tenets or precepts that tell us about Christ, but to preach "Christ Jesus the Lord" Himself (2 Cor. 4:1-6).

Certainly this is synonymous with preaching the Word of God. But that Word at its heart is Jesus. The Bible is a revelation of Christ, and only as we understand the Scriptures in this light can the preaching of the Word of God become the "power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth" (Rom. 1:16). Our preaching must hold up Jesus Christ before the people. We must show the people who Christ is, what He has done in the past, what He is doing now, and what He will do in the future.

It is true that to be effective the preaching of Christ and His work must be set in the context of a biblical worldview, a worldview that explains the human predicament and best answers the ultimate questions of life. This enables preaching to connect with the consciousness of contemporary people, making it meaningful and relevant. And it should be obvious that this will necessitate developing and presenting propositional truths.

However, if this truth is to go beyond cognitive understanding and mental assent to become a life-giving principle, it must be the truth as it is in Jesus, truth that reveals and exalts the Lord Himself. The gospel must have an objective content; however, that content must not be simply a well-reasoned argument, but a revelation of the crucified and risen Lord.

Biblical preaching, then, is the preaching of Jesus Christ. He must be the preeminent and enduring focus in our proclamation. Yes, of course, our worship services and evangelistic meetings must include the preaching of the law and judgment, but only to reveal the character and work of Jesus Christ.

Ellen White underscores this point when she writes that the ritual of our worship services is “of no value, unless connected with Christ by living faith.”¹ She indicates that doctrines are helpful only as they enable us to understand more of Christ and His work. “Even the moral law,” she says, “fails of its purpose, unless it is understood in its relation to the Saviour.”²

God’s gift to us is Christ Himself

Only when people come to know Christ personally can they properly understand His teachings. Martin Luther saw this point clearly when he wrote: “Before you can take Christ as an example, you accept and recognize Him as a gift, as a present that God has given you and that is your own.”³

The power of Christian preaching, then, is that it ministers the very life of Christ to the people. It brings them the gift of God Himself.

Richard Lescher, in his excellent

book *A Theology of Preaching*, agrees with Luther when he writes that “a biblical sermon is an exposition of the Scripture, which is an exposition of the gospel, which is an exposition of the life of God Himself.”⁴ Again Luther underscores this foundational truth with the thought that “the preaching of the gospel is nothing else than Christ coming to us, or we being brought to Him.”⁵

Preaching Christ brings a new dynamic

When the preacher internalizes this truth, the hearers will experience a new dynamic, that dynamic being nothing less than the presence of Christ Himself in the proclamation! Preaching of this quality then becomes a means by which the life of Jesus Christ, who alone is the power of God unto salvation, is mediated to the believer. If our preaching fails to bring Christ to the people and the people to Christ, it is not Christian preaching.

However, if our hearers receive Christ as their Saviour and Lord as a gift of God, they will receive the wealth, wisdom, and power of God in Christ Jesus. They will know that they have passed from death to life. It is this fact that makes preaching the “dynamite” of God. It breaks the chains of fear, guilt, and sin that have in the past imprisoned the respondents. Christ-centered preaching sets them free to love and to serve Him with the joy of sons and daughters.

The New Testament shows that the lives of those who believed the gospel and opened themselves up to Christ experienced this dynamic change. Salvation became a present and living reality to them. These dynamic, all-encompassing changes in the daily experience of the New Testament believers opened the door for others who followed after to know similar transformations. The experience of the demoniac, the Ethiopian eunuch, Peter, Nicodemus, and others who found salvation in and through Jesus Christ became “normative” for all who in the future would accept Christ.⁶

While our embracing of Jesus brings salvation to us, we must hold before us

the reality that the way the Christian lives his or her life is the fruit of what was accomplished at the cross. Our assurance, our hope, our joy, our power, our wisdom, are to be found in the crucified and risen Saviour. Jesus is our greatest need. And that need can be exposed only by preaching that uplifts Christ.

Salvation does not come to us through human logic or reason, argument or eloquence. It comes by beholding the Lamb of God. This is why Paul said after his disappointing encounter with the Greeks on Mars’ Hill, “I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2).

Ellen White affirms the transcendent power of preaching when she urges preachers to “let all your powers be directed to pointing souls, confused, bewildered, lost, to the ‘Lamb of God.’”⁷ She assures us that Christ-centered preaching will “touch invisible chords, whose vibrations will ring to the ends of the earth, and make melody through eternal ages.”⁸ This kind of preaching will consistently win people to Christ and His church. It will rekindle the dynamics of the Protestant Reformation.

All great revivals have followed a vanguard of preaching that brings people to Christ and Christ to people. John explained the power of this kind of preaching when he wrote: “He that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life” (1 John 5:12).

John Wesley’s conversion experience illustrates beautifully the dynamic that Christ-centered preaching brings into our work. Wesley was called and trained to be a preacher, but for years he never personally experienced a complete bonding with Christ. Consequently, he had no personal assurance of acceptance or of sins forgiven or of salvation.

One evening Wesley was invited to a Christian society meeting on Aldersgate Street. “I went very unwillingly,” he later wrote, “to hear one who was reading Luther’s preface to Romans.” Wesley describes how his life was changed when Christ came to him. “About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God

Continued on page 26

Empty churches or ministering centers?

Will McCall

The case of the slow death of the neighborhood church



Will McCall is pastor of the First Seventh-day Adventist Church in New Orleans, Louisiana.

Case 1. Pastor M has a medium-sized church in a growing community. The church is in the process of constructing a new church building and a school. Associated with this church is a small church in a small town with no population growth. The small church has not grown since its inception. Members of the small church commute a half hour to the big church to take their children to school or Pathfinders. To maintain these two separate church facilities costs tens of thousands of dollars, money that could help in the building of one new church/school complex.

The Adventist Church has a mentality that is illustrated by a meeting I attended not long after entering the ministry. An official from another conference was showing a map of his state with certain counties blacked out. These represented "dark counties," and he told of an ambitious program to enter these dark counties and see the entire map filled out in white. No one really questioned the wisdom of this approach. It was simply assumed that we should have a church in every county and that we could measure progress simply by filling out pieces of a map.

Besides the fact that some of these counties had far more cattle than people, imagine a company taking this approach to its marketing. Imagine automobile executives telling their shareholders that it was their goal to have a dealership in every county in the country. They probably wouldn't even finish their speech. Common sense indicates that if you want to market cars, you place your distributors a little more scientifically than by paying attention to arbitrary

lines on a map. Population, population growth, average income—all would enter into your decision. You may have dealerships within a few miles of each other in the same county and vast stretches with none because the market is sparse and unpromising.

In some ways we are left with the vestiges of dark-county evangelism in ways that create administrative nightmares.

Case 2. I know of a three-church district with fewer than 50 members total. In the same conference there are numerous churches with more than twice as many members as this entire district, and yet they do not have a pastor of their own.

How should we design districts and appropriate staff? Many rural districts across the country are really too small to support a pastor, but the distance between churches discourages the consolidating of districts.

Case 3. A small church languishes right across a conference boundary from some relatively prosperous churches. Work in that area could easily be managed by the larger churches, but there is a disincentive to encroach on someone else's turf. There are metropolitan areas in North America that are divided into several conferences, an administrative absurdity worthy of its own study.

Case 4. Pastor V has a three-church district in a rural area with numerous small towns. The people in one small town are determined to have a church of their own. They buy a facility, and a

new church is dedicated. People consider it progress because a new church has opened. Yet several things have happened. A three-church district has become a four-church district. The new church has siphoned off members from a small church within easy commuting distance. Instead of one struggling church of 40 something, after several years there are two churches of 20 something.

A congregational mentality

Church growth theories are good. But if we go for them without careful adaptation, we will kill ourselves. Most church growth studies have been done in congregational churches because these are the most rapidly growing churches. The Adventist Church is not a congregational church, and were we to become one, it would, in my opinion, mark the end of the church as we know it. Some see congregational growth as an optimistic possibility. I see it as the splintering of the church into hundreds of different factions, the end of doctrinal unity, and the crippling of our world mission work.

Yet although we are not congregational in structure, we live in a congregational culture. Congregational churches are growing because they are full-service churches offering something for every member of the family. Since the tithe (if they pay tithe) stays in the local church, they can hire their own staff. After their primary pastor is hired, they usually hire a youth pastor and then a minister of music. As the congregation grows they will usually try to get a gymnasium for socials and for their youth.

In the Adventist Church most of the funds leave the local church. Tithe funds support our administration system and subsidize parts of teacher and literature evangelist salaries, besides supporting one of the most successful missionary programs in the world. This means of operation is changing almost on a daily basis. More and more tithe funds are being diverted. Much has been written about the diversion of tithe funds into dissident or fringe groups, but some tithe

funds are being diverted in other ways. Some feel that we are administratively top heavy. In an age of computers and rapid communication and travel there is probably much we can do to modernize, streamline, and make our administrative structures more efficient. This is a topic we need more dialogue on. A spirit of selfless godliness needs to move our leadership to do what is best for the church as a whole.

The focus of this article is the waste that occurs on the local level: the level where tithe funds are sometimes diverted to beef up local staffs or simply to keep a dying church's budget afloat. We need to start to look at the "big picture" and become more efficient locally.

Case 5. A church is built upon donated property. Not wanting to "look a gift horse in the mouth" and risk offending the donor, the church builds upon the donated land. Unfortunately, the church is miles out of town and thus hardly recognized in the community. Add the fact that the church is hard to find, and you don't exactly have a prescription for success.

Case 6: People associated with a church in a metropolitan area want to establish a church in a fairly densely populated suburb. Sounds reasonable enough. After renting for a while and being eager to get a church of their own, they purchase a house even farther out of the city. Once again, a church is removed from where most of the people live and thus is no longer identified as part of the community. Virtually all of its members initially came from other Adventist churches in the metropolitan area. They are unequipped for real evangelism because of a lack of community identification.

Divide and conquer

Small churches are not without their advantages. They provide a family-like atmosphere and an opportunity for people who might not otherwise get the opportunity to learn leadership by taking on responsibility.

On the other hand, small churches have many disadvantages. They are seldom able to support adequate youth programs, especially schools. People who are accustomed to small churches often find the larger churches to be "worldly." Meanwhile, their youth are often drawn off into the world because their churches have so little for them. Small church structure provides little opportunity for young singles to fellowship with other Adventists their own age.

Small churches can foster fanaticism. They tend to draw people who might not get an audience in a larger church and who seek out smaller churches that are desperate for teachers and guest speakers. The success of small churches is totally dependent upon the leadership of local volunteers. In the absence of reliable leadership, the "flock" may be picked apart by "wolves." Small churches often do not see a minister every week. It is just not financially possible to staff smaller congregations with their own pastor.

Case 7. An inner-city church started out as an ethnic church but has since become a generic church. Most of its members drive past a larger church to go to their old church: out of loyalty, tradition, because of old grudges, or simply preferring a small church. Meanwhile, they cannot support a school of their own, and the larger church must carry the financial burden for Christian education in the area. The small church is struggling simply to keep its doors open and can't make much of a contribution.

Churches within commuting distance often become jealous and competitive with one another. Needs are seen on a congregational basis rather than in terms of the whole area. To close down a small church and merge it with a larger one seems like death; it is the loss of identity, tradition, and familiar ritual. Yet instead of a quick death, the death is often slow and painful, as youth are lost, members go away, and the church languishes because it no longer has a viable mission.

Can we really afford a church in

every neighborhood? We could have "lights" in every neighborhood by simply fostering home churches. Home churches could operate without any budget and hold meetings during the week and even vesper services. If we gathered together in larger area churches and drew members from a reasonable commuting distance, we'd have more money to support our schools, more fellowship for our young people, and a pool of talent that would make it easier to fill offices. We could also have the benefit of more pastoral sermons, even our own pastor. Possibilities for growth would also be enhanced.

There are few truly large urban Adventist churches in North America; that is, few churches seen as unusually large by their communities. Even our large urban churches are often dwarfed by larger churches in the area. At the same time, our small, poorly equipped churches often look bizarre to urban communities. They don't look "normal."

We must not forget that the majority

of the population in North America, including middle-class Caucasians, live in densely populated urban areas. We are almost invisible to the majority of people in North America because so many of our large churches are in rural areas, and we have such a small presence in the cities, where most of the people live.

Solutions?

Coming up with solutions is not as easy as identifying the problems, because much of the problem is in our provincial mentality. However, here are some suggestions that could work, though not without some trauma.

1. *Rethink our strategies.* North America is unique. We cannot use strategies of the developing world here and expect them to work. Evangelists who can win thousands in foreign countries are dismayed that they can hardly win any in this country.

2. *Recognize the importance of the pastor.* In North America a church is identified with its pastor. We can talk

all we want about lay training, but when people think of a church they think of a pastor. With North America's relative sophistication, 50 churches to a pastor simply will not work as it does in some parts of the world. Like it or not, visitors look for the pastor.

3. *Accept Adventist uniqueness.* Adventists have a unique subculture that requires a high degree of commitment. In some ways we need to adjust to the culture we are trying to reach if we ever hope to have success. In other ways we'll always be bucking the culture, ever learning to present our uniqueness with straightforwardness and confidence.

4. *Keep in view the larger picture.* We must educate our people to see the larger perspective. Home churches existing as satellites to support a regional church/school complex must be promoted. Our churches must be handicap accessible and representative of our high standards. Antiquated, inaccessible churches are an enormous handicap to church growth. To ensure

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these high standards we must have financially sound area churches.

5. Let the conference have an overall plan for church growth and church planting. Churches within an easy commuting distance of a larger church should be closed down unless there is ample evidence that the smaller church has real growth potential. This must be done carefully with a master plan formulated by conference committees working together.

6. Careful study should precede church-building projects. Churches should not be built or started at the whim of the members. The people should understand the waste of diverting funds to support a separate facility in a slow growth area and the risk of harming other neighboring churches. Laypersons want churches located for their convenience. They are seldom, if ever, equipped to judge impartially a church's growth potential. Just because we build it doesn't mean people will come to it.

7. Focus on high population areas. Areas of high population density should be looked at closely for church planting or nurture. The apostle Paul started an evangelistic explosion largely because he focused on large urban areas. Positioning our churches should be done scientifically with demographic study, careful thought, and prayer. If "location, location, location" are the three greatest principles of real estate, location will certainly have much to do with our success in positioning churches.

8. Be a part of the community. We should discourage the building of churches that are separate from the communities they are there to serve. Christ went to minister to people where they were. We should be a part of our communities.

What is needed is nothing less than a paradigm shift among our people. We need to cast our nets where the fish are, become actively engaged in our communities, and learn to think big. ■

The stories in this article are based upon actual case studies. The names have been disguised to protect the innocent and keep old friends.

Preaching Christ

Continued from page 22

works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. . . . I felt I did trust in Christ alone for salvation."⁹

What an honor and privilege it is to preach Christ. John Wycliffe expressed this well when he said, "The highest service that men may attain to on earth is to preach the Word of God."■

¹ Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1940), p. 608.

² Ibid.

³ In Richard Lescher, *Theories of Preaching* (Durham, N.C.: Labyrinth Press, 1987), p. 97.

⁴ Richard Lescher, *A Theology of Preaching* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Preachers' Library, 1981), p. 78.

⁵ *Theories of Preaching*, p. 98.

⁶ See V. Norskov Olsen, *Man in the Image of God* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1988), p. 93.

⁷ Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1948), p. 160.

⁸ *Desire of Ages*, p. 823.

⁹ See James C. Hefley, *How Great Christians Met Christ* (Chicago: Moody Bible Institute, 1973), pp. 38, 39.

¹⁰ John Wycliffe, *Contra Fratres*, in Fant and Pinson, vol. 1, p. 234.

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Jesus is the essence of life

James A. Cress

In pastoral and evangelistic work, I was often requested to provide a summary of Adventist beliefs. A book, even one as excellent as the Ministerial Association's own *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, seemed too ponderous. I had also observed various "back of the bulletin" doctrinal summaries and thought too many provided only a proof-text database of information that missed the dynamic relational aspect of our life in Jesus.

Then I ran across an excellent little card at Hinsdale Hospital titled *Jesus, the Essence of Life*. I appreciated its Christocentric focus and freely adapted it for my own use. While this summary is not intended to replace the *Church Manual's* statement of 27 fundamental beliefs, it does provide an overview of our faith centered in the bedrock of a relationship with our Saviour. Please feel free to share it with those whose sincere queries deserve a Jesus-centered answer.

Jesus' Word is the Holy Scriptures. It was given by God to the prophets through an act of divine revelation and inspiration. The infallible revelation of Jesus' loving will for humanity is recorded in both the Old and New Testaments and contains the knowledge necessary for salvation.

Jesus' incarnation was God becoming fully human. Jesus the Son, the Father, and the Holy Spirit are a unity of three coeternal persons. Jesus, born of a virgin, is the Creator and Redeemer.

Jesus' voluntary death on the cross was a substitutionary sacrifice for our sins. According to the gospel (the good news!), when we accept by faith His perfectly obedient life and His substitutionary death, we are accounted as righteous before the Lord apart from any of our works.

Jesus' resurrection is evidence that He has conquered the power of Satan and the power of death. It is the assurance given to His people of being resurrected at His coming and of living with Him throughout eternity. At the resurrection our mortal nature will receive from God immortality or eternal life.

Jesus' mediation in the heavenly sanctuary is an intercession on behalf of the human race. Enthroned at the right hand of the Father, His work as mediator now is also one of judgment, vindicating God's righteousness and vindicating His people before the universe.

Jesus' character is a revelation of God's loving nature. The perception of His character has been distorted by Satan, resulting in a controversy that has brought into existence sin and untold suffering. A purpose of the plan of salvation is to unmask the deceiver and restore true recognition of Christ's immeasurable love and compassion.

Jesus' life is manifested today in His people through the agency of the Holy Spirit. He is Christ's representative on earth, the agent of the new birth, and the One who enables God's people to live victoriously. Through His power they order their Christian behavior on the basis of biblical principles and become stewards of God. He bestows on the church spiritual gifts, including the gift of prophecy.

Jesus' obedience to the law of God revealed a perfect life free from sin. This righteous life He offers is ours by faith. His obedience provides an example to His followers to keep God's commandments out of gratitude and love for what God has done for them.

Jesus' mission is performed today by His people. They are proclaiming the eternal gospel to the people of every

nation, inviting them to worship the Creator and calling them to ultimate loyalty to Him.

Jesus' day occurs each week on the seventh day (Saturday). Jesus called Himself Lord of this day and faithfully observed it. Instituted at Creation, it is a proper memorial of God's creative power, but also a day of delightful communion with Him and one another. Formalized in the Ten Commandments, it is a symbol of our redemption in Christ, a sign of our sanctification, a token of our allegiance, and a foretaste of our eternal rest in God's kingdom.

Jesus' church is composed of all who confess Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. Believers come together for worship, for fellowship, for instruction in the Word, for the Lord's Supper, and for the proclamation of the gospel. Entrance into the church is through baptism by immersion as a visible expression of the new birth. In the last days God has selected from within the Christian community a remnant who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus, and call all people to prepare for the second coming of the Lord.

Jesus' return is assured. The prophetic proclamation of the Bible indicates that we are living in the last days and that His coming is rapidly approaching. This coming is personal, literal, physical, and visible. It will initiate a series of events that culminates in the destruction of evil forces, including Satan himself, the renewal of this planet, and the establishment of His eternal kingdom of peace.

Jesus' invitation is for you. He wants to be your Saviour and the center of your life. He will enable you to live life abundantly now and to have the assurance of eternal life with Him in His soon-coming kingdom. ■

Letters

Continued from page 2

added little of a positive nature to the debate, arguing chiefly from cultural norms rather than from principle.

Three of your contributors referred to Luther's use of secular tunes to accompany his Christian lyrics as justification for our doing the same. That argument is shallow and can easily be laid to rest. Luther lived before there was such a thing as swing, jazz, blues, rock, ragtime, etc. The difference between sacred and secular music was essentially the words.

Today, however, the music styles mentioned above can be shown to be evil in their influence on the listener, regardless of the words. "Contemporary" in this discussion is but a nice word for worldly.

Adventist readers are sure to ask why the rich treasure of the Spirit of Prophecy is left out of the discussion. None of your writers mentions her counsel.—Lee Roy Holmes, Colville, Washington.

■ In the September issue of *Ministry* Michael Tomlinson seems to misrepresent my thoughts on music, or else he misunderstood my position on music in the church. He quotes me as having stated that no melodic line or series of chords is unacceptable. His quote is accurate but entirely out of context, and some of his conclusions are unwarranted.

Tomlinson assumes that I am inconsistent in stating that rock music (even with Christian textual references) is out of place in church. I affirm that in my view there certainly is not a succession of single musical sounds (in other words, a melody) that by itself is inherently evil. Nor is there a simultaneous sounding of several notes (a chord) that could be described as evil.

Melody and harmony represent only the horizontal and the vertical elements of music. But these elements cannot be separated from rhythm, and I have consistently emphasized that it is rock music's intense and unbalanced

emphasis on rhythm that makes it less ideal for worship services.

To support his view that popular and rock music of our day be used as a basis for a new hymnology, Tomlinson correctly writes that certain well-known and accepted Christian hymns have secular roots. Included among these are several by Protestant Reformer Martin Luther. However, since congregational singing in Luther's time was a relatively new concept, he used this means to encourage Christian congregations to sing their praises directly to the Lord, a novel experience for most of them. However, contemporary hymnists and musicologists agree that Luther, Bach, Palestrina, and others took songs of the people, folk songs, and refined them for sacred purposes through the gifts of their genius. These street songs were not transported unchanged and unsanctified into the sanctuary. Through their consummate skills these eminent composers forged and modified certain popular tunes of their era into a new hymnody, which lives to this day.

Furthermore, when Christian hymnody was being developed, one style of composition usually served both secular and sacred purposes. So in contrast with current practices, all of the music composed in Luther's time, for example, had very similar characteristics concerning melody, harmony, cadences, and chords and their resolutions, whether it was intended for church, for the stage, or for the theater.

One of my principal concerns is that only the finest, most artistic, sublime music that we are capable of presenting be a part of our worship services. Surely the quality of our musical offerings ought to match as nearly as possible the extraordinarily superb message that Jesus has asked us to share with the world: "Give of Your Best to the Master."

This letter to the editor is an attempt to clarify the issue and perhaps be helpful at the same time.

I appreciate reading *Ministry* and

trust that God will continue to guide you and your staff in the tasks that confront you.

Free reprints of my original seven-page article "The Power of Music," from the fall 1990 *Adventists Affirm*, may be obtained by writing to me at P.O. Box 184, Berrien Springs, Michigan 49103.—Paul E. Hamel, Emeritus Professor of Music, Andrews University.

■ The articles about music and worship gave me the impression that any music that is an expression of one's culture and tradition and has words about God is to be regarded as acceptable.

Why do we think that applying the phrase "It is part of our culture" makes something acceptable to Christianity and worship?

This does not harmonize with Jesus' words that true worshipers must worship the Father in spirit and in truth. To "worship in spirit" means one must become a spiritual person as a result of God's creative new birth. Such a person is no longer in love with the culture of this world. His or her concern is not to defend personal culture and traditions. The spiritual person learns from Jesus and is concerned about promoting the culture of God's kingdom.

Surely God's instruction "Be not conformed to [your culture], but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Rom. 12:2) becomes a guide for those who worship God in spirit and in truth. We cannot make a fetish of culture.

The Scriptures speak truthfully when they say there is wisdom that is "earthly, sensual, devilish" (James 3:15). There is music that is "earthly, sensual, devilish." We cannot simply embrace culture and think that we are worshiping God in truth. True worship expresses the truth about God, who He is, and the truth about His great salvation. It reflects His purity and His holiness.

In order to save some, we are to be all things to all people. We meet people in their cultural setting. At the same time, as Christ's witnesses we need to

be able to discern in music that which serves our spiritual nature and that which serves the natural earthly nature.

Christ gives us new songs to sing. The Holy Spirit makes melody in our hearts to God. There is in it no jangling discord.

Let us be guided by the Bible with its teachings about this world and its culture. Let us heed the counsels that the Lord has given through Ellen White.—David Manzano, Rockwood, Tennessee.

■ I have enjoyed *Ministry* and have been blessed and edified by many issues. I have never been as disappointed and shocked as when your lead articles defending rock music were featured. This is a frightening editorial choice, particularly considering your awesome responsibility to the pastorate of our church and consequently the members.

Our job is to find other contemporary music that our youth can responsibly contribute to and participate in during worship, along with providing them exposure to the many forms of other appropriate music for worship.

Thank you for Lillianne Doukhian's article. It offers some conclusions and challenges that should well be incorporated. Her statement "Daily life is no more permeated by the sacred; there are no more laws, no more taboos, no more direction" is such a clear reason that we must reject without discussion most of the music from the present-day world, even if it comes wrapped in some words about Jesus.—William W. Robinson, M.D., Yakima, Washington.

■ I have just finished reading the September issue of *Ministry*. Since we have been involved in a serious discussion of music in our little church, I was interested to see the varied articles in this issue on this subject. To my dismay, I found little or no help in these articles. In fact, I felt they were a little too far on the liberal side of things.—Pastor Jim Cox, Cohutta, Georgia.

■ With profound sadness I closed the September *Ministry*, having read the material on music and worship in its entirety.

The current General Conference policy on music suitable for worship includes this statement: "Certain musical forms such as jazz, rock, and their related hybrid forms are considered by the church as incompatible with these principles."

Whether or not we agree with the official church policy, one would think the official paper for Adventist ministers would uphold the policy and make every effort to show why the extensive work of the committee that brought the proposals for consideration and ultimate adoption by the world body was indeed valid, meaningful, and a wise course to steer.

It would seem that even an "equal" number of articles on each side of the question would send a mixed message in view of official policy. For such a time as this, one would expect the editors to pull out all the stops in an attempt to stem the tide. But alas, there was no voice to be heard even suggesting that rock (and related hybrid forms) is inappropriate nor any discussion even relating to official church policy. How tragic.—Jim Brackett, Auburn, Washington.

Editorial note

First, we are genuinely grateful for the above responses to our September issue on church music. As a whole, these letters give much-needed perspective to the discussion.

Second, the church has no official policy on music. The General Conference has some guidelines on music. We advocate the prayerful, careful application of the principles of Scripture in all of this and look to the inspired counsel of Ellen White and the guidelines (not policy) of the General Conference.

Third, we are confident that rereading the issue will show that we did not convey the idea that virtually any music is acceptable for worship. We consider Michael Tomlinson a valuable

contributor in the September issue, but we do ask our readers to note that we purposely published his article, "Contemporary Christian Music Is Christian Music," as a Viewpoint article. Viewpoint articles are published to air thinking that may be controversial, but that is a part of our community. Viewpoint articles are designed to stimulate thought and do not necessarily reflect the position of our editorial staff or of *Ministry*.

Fourth, our basic purpose in the September issue was to call for a significant freshness in our use of music in the worship of our Lord. We all agree that life and genuine spiritual vitality are crying needs in our worship, especially in an age of such demanding change. There are *many* forms of contemporary music, not just hard rock and its kin.

We pray that life and freshness will permeate the worship in our churches, not just to express the latest in worship style or simply to mime the surrounding culture, but because we as worshipers deeply love and serve the Lord we worship, and because His Spirit is present to inspire and lead us.

A number of the letters above reflect the thinking of our editorial staff, but we wish to point to Carlos Steger's letter as an example reflective of our basic thinking and the spirit in which we would like to interact. May we always offer our Lord worship that is simply worthy of Him whom we worship, while we live to certify that what we offer Him is truly alive with His Spirit and with a genuine praise that is able to come from deep in the hearts of all the people of our churches—Editors.

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Books in Review

This month marks the restoration of our book review column, now called Books in Review. We are fortunate to have Andy McRae, associate pastor of Sligo church in Takoma Park, Maryland, take on the editorship of this important commentary. From month to month a variety of contributors will enrich the reviews. A broad scope of subjects is anticipated. We solicit reviews from our readers of books relevant to the work of ministry. Please send these to *Ministry*, Book Review Editor, 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904. Upon acceptance of your work we will pay you \$30.00. U.S. citizens, please include Social Security number.

■ ***Emotional Intelligence***, by Daniel Goleman. Published by Bantam Books, New York, 1995. 309 pages, \$23.95. Hardcover.

Interpreting exciting, groundbreaking brain and behavior research, Daniel Goleman argues persuasively that a handful of emotional competencies is a more accurate indicator of success than intelligence by itself. It is not Goleman's purpose to expose directly the effects of personal faith in God on the character of an individual. He does, however, show the influence of self-awareness, impulse control, persistence, zeal, self-motivation, empathy, and social deftness as essential elements in forming what he calls "emotional intelligence." These seven areas turn out to be important sources of character. Here is a rich mine of information and insight for those who seek balance for

themselves and others. And Goleman has good news: these competencies can be learned, because "temperament is not destiny." The implications of his findings are dramatic for education, leadership, counseling, preaching, parenting, and personal growth.—Andy McRae, associate pastor, Sligo church, Takoma Park, Maryland.

■ ***The Drama of the Gifted Child***, by Alice Miller. Published by Basic Books, 1991. 113 pages. \$12. Softcover. Revised edition available in 1997.

In her best-seller *The Drama of the Gifted Child*, Alice Miller deals with the causes and effects of childhood trauma in a compelling and compassionate way. Her approach is congruent with the biblical doctrine of sin and opens windows to the hurt child in all of us, with profound implications for our personal healing and ministry.—Arthur R. Torres, senior pastor, Sligo church, Takoma Park, Maryland.

■ ***You're Not What I Expected: Learning to Love the Opposite Sex***, by Polly Young-Eisendrath, Ph.D. Published by William Morrow and Company, Inc., New York, 1993. 346 pages. \$23. Hardcover.

If marriage is entered into with such joy and hope, why so many failures? What goes wrong? And when? Young-Eisendrath suggests that one answer lies in our expectations of each other. These expectations arise outside our awareness and develop into a "dream lover"

we look for someone else to fulfill. The author and her husband are cotherapists who help couples dialogue their way through unhealthy expectations to an acceptance of the real other person, of one's own real self, and the possibility of a lasting, intimate relationship. Case studies of three couples provide a narrative flow for the theory explored in the book. The book is loaded with insights for our own marriages and for our role of pastoring people with troubled relationships.—Andy McRae, associate pastor, Sligo church, Takoma Park, Maryland.

■ ***Learning Styles: Reaching Everyone God Gave You to Teach***, by Marlene D. LeFever. Published by David C. Cook Publishing Co., Colorado Springs, Colorado. 251 pages. \$21.99. Hardcover.

What is the world's largest volunteer force? It is the cadre of teachers and administrators in Christian education that is estimated to be about 4.1 million in number throughout the various denominations worldwide. In my opinion, every one of these volunteers and every pastor should read this book. It is a powerful tool for Christian education ministries, especially on the local church level. The author has skillfully woven anecdotes, live cases, and practical suggestions to help us recognize how students learn in different ways, why we need multiple methods of instruction if we are to reach diverse learners, and how we can use that knowledge to build the self-esteem of learners. The book is written

in an engaging style. It is readable and inspiring. In reading the book one feels energized and eager to put some of its suggestions to use and to spread the word to other Sabbath/Sunday school teachers. It will open up a world of understanding.—Norma Osborn, associate pastor, Sligo church, Takoma Park, Maryland.

■ ***600 Minutes With God***. Compiled and edited by Dick Duerksen and Ray Dabrowski. Published by AdventTalk in Columbia, Maryland. 207 pages. \$9.95. Softcover.

Each day men experience the personal presence of God. Each of those experiences offers new insights into the God who touches our lives in such intimate and explosive ways. No, "the Lion of Judah is not a tame lion," but He stands eager to teach us to protect as He protects and love as He loves.

The idea for this book of devotions for men first began stirring in front of the platform at a Promise Keepers' rally in Boulder, Colorado. Kneeling on my right, a giant pastor from Tennessee energetically described how God's goodness was transforming his life and ministry. On my left a diminutive Navajo pastor from Albuquerque, New Mexico, softly shared awesome miracles of grace. Around us 2,000 others were sharing tales of grace, stories that were uniquely male, stories that offered new possibilities of hope to the men who listened.

That Saturday night I began collecting "pictures of grace," personal reports of how God is stirring Himself



Meet the team that serves the world. The General Conference Ministerial Association exists to serve the world constituency of ministers and their spouses and local church elders in their task of proclamation, evangelism, spiritual nurture, and care for pastoral families. The elected and appointed team of the association consists of, from left to right: Joel Sarli, associate secretary (local church elders and training for ministry); Margarida Sarli, volunteer assistant for Shepherdess International; Rex Edwards, continuing education director; Walter Pearson, associate secretary (evangelism and church growth); Will Eva, associate secretary (Ministry editor); Julia Norcott, Ministry assistant editor; Nikolaus Satelmajer, professional growth coordinator; Sharon Cress, Shepherdess International coordinator; Jim Cress, association secretary.

into the lives of individual men. Bankers, accountants, lawyers, pastors, truck drivers, army officers, missionaries, marathon runners, and others have added some of their most meaningful (and most terrifying) moments to this collection. Some of the stories are funny; others are heart-wrenching. Each is thought-provoking, challenging us to reconsider God's character.

This devotional book, *600 Minutes With God*,

includes 200 "memories of grace," each designed to give you a new focus on life. Here you will meet Marvin the marathon runner (exhausted) and his awesome support team. You will catch squealing pigs along with Grenville, take a Finnish sauna with Bill, and avoid La Dolce Vita.

Each writer uses a Bible passage and a story to describe an insight that has helped his picture of God become clearer. Some retell great stories that have

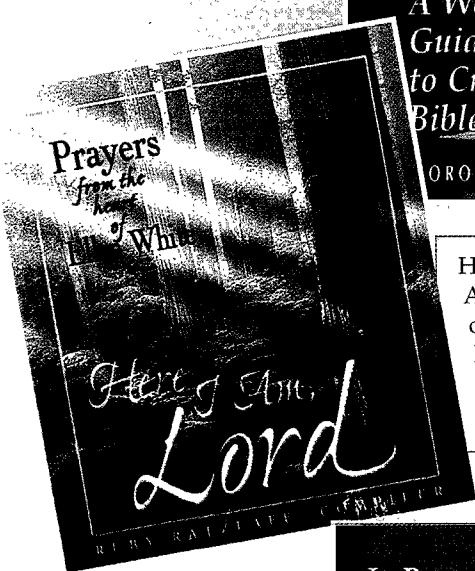
helped them understand God's character. Like what caused Edison's garden gate to squeak. Or why Admiral Phipps lost the battle of Quebec, why penguins fall on their backs in Antarctica, and where to go to "rent a family." Others share moments of deep personal trauma and insight. Dan describes how he learned that sex begins before 7:00 p.m. Bill remembers the day he dropped a *Playboy* right in front of a church member. Steve cringes at

his response when attacked by a "tonga-walla." And that's just three of the 200!

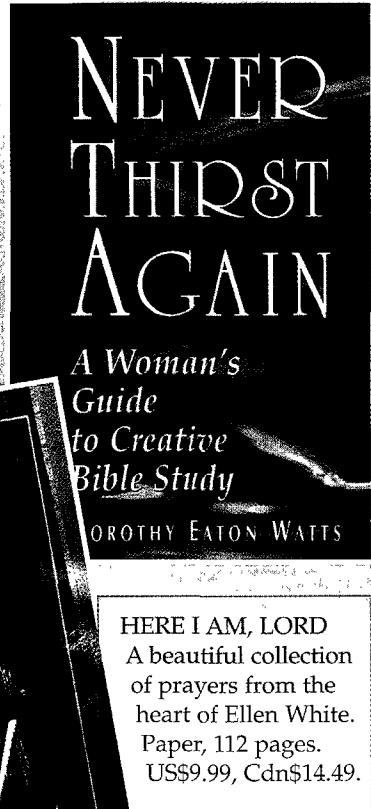
God's greatest pleasure is in sharing personal, overwhelming, transforming grace. You'll find Him here, speaking directly to you. Challenging changes in your life. Offering incredible hope. Because He loves you.—Dick Duerksen, creative ministries director, Columbia Union Conference, Columbia, Maryland.

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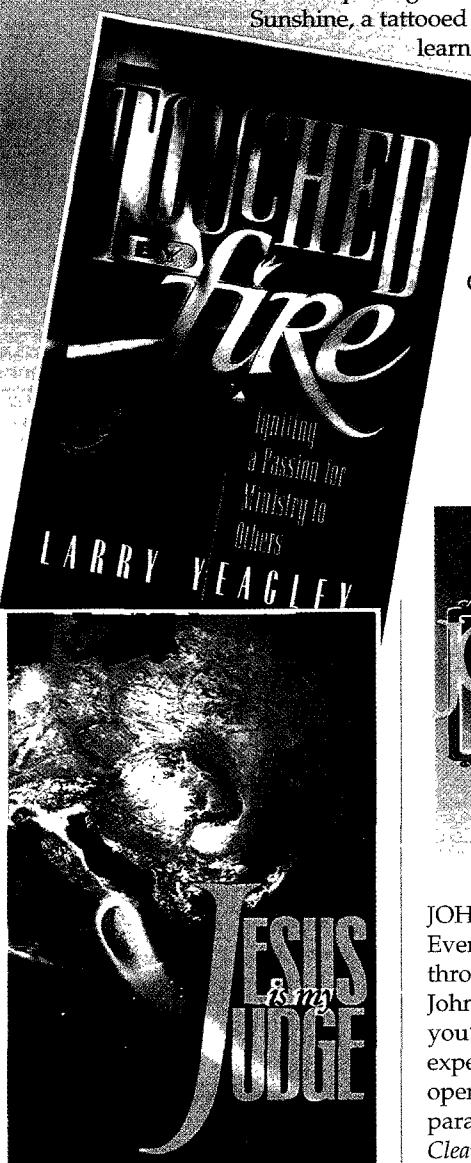
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