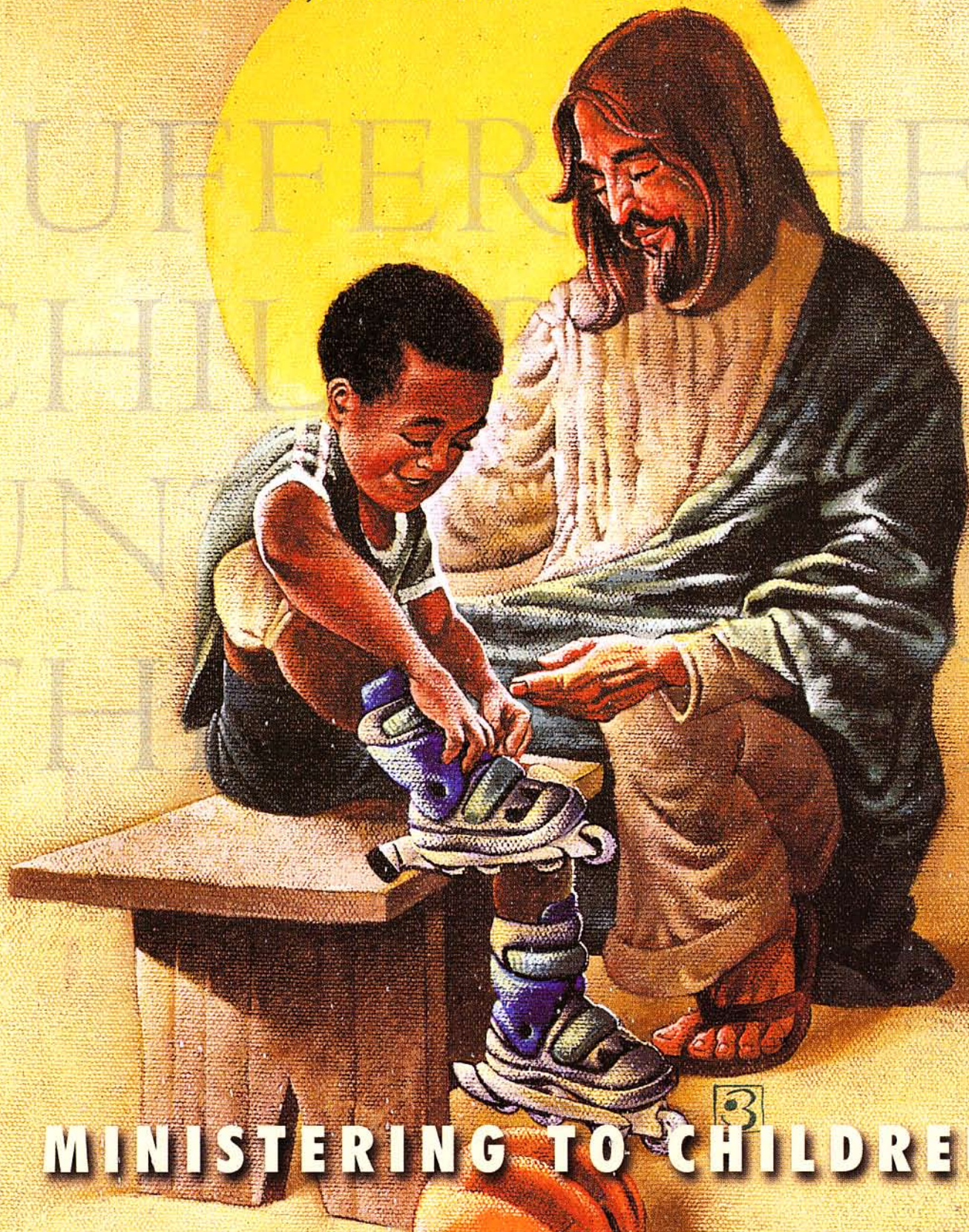


Ministry

International Journal for Pastors

March 2000



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Ministry

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Plausible cosmology

Mart de Groot's article "The Search for a Plausible Cosmology" (November 1999) fully lived up to its title. Seldom have I seen in Adventist publications a more intellectually and scientifically satisfying article. In simple and clear manner Dr. de Groot summarized complex science. The author invited the reader to consider the theories that guide the cosmologist and carefully led us to consider the implications this study presents. He wrote, not as an apologist, but as a scientist who works within a Christian framework. He demonstrated an integrity that will not allow him to deny what he sees as a scientist or what he sees through the eye of faith.

Thank you *Ministry* for publishing this article. The authors and publishers demonstrate a courage and concern that have been too often absent in other publications.

—Lawrence G. Downing, D.Min.,
Senior Pastor, White Memorial
Church of Seventh-day Adventists,
Los Angeles, California.

Preaching that turns the world upside down

Derek Morris's interview (November 1999) with William H. Willimon, Dean of the Chapel and professor of Christian ministry at Duke University was extremely interesting. When Morris asked "Where do you find the courage to continue to preach in a way that turns people upside down?" Dr. Willimon's response just leaped off the page: "I have to admit, I'm very well protected. I'm in a bishop appointed system, you know." He went on to state that "three hundred Southern Baptist pastors get fired every month."

Willimon seemed to overlook the fact that the firing of 300 SBC pastors every month or 3,600 SBC pastors a year would be less than 10 percent of the SBC pastors who serve more than 40,000 churches affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention.

If less than 10 percent of Southern Baptist pastors get fired every year, then the average SBC pastor might reasonably expect to serve a church about 10 years before the law of averages catches up. The law of averages should not be considered an accurate predictor of pastoral longevity because some SBC pastors may be fired multiple times within a ten year period. However, it is not unusual for a Southern Baptist pastor to serve a congregation for 20 to 30 years.

I served 23 years in the Seventh-day Adventist Church where pastoral appointments are very much like the "bishop appointed" Methodist system in which Willimon serves. The president of an SDA conference recommends pastoral changes to committees which usually "rubber stamp" those recommendations without change. The usual term of SDA pastoral service in a district of two or more congregations has been about three years.

I have served five years as pastor in three of the seven districts I have pastored. I know some SDA pastors who have served a congregation for more than 10 years—usually these are senior pastors of large institutional churches with several pastors on staff.

In my experience, I have never seen any significant need for caring, gospel-preaching pastors to be *protected* from the people they serve. However, I have seen a great need for

pastors to be *protected* from the political machinations of abusive denominational administrators. Such administrators prefer to staff churches with compliant "yes men" who will not "rock the boat". Most administrators would be just as uncomfortable today with Christ, the apostles, Calvin, and Luther as were the religious leaders of their time.
—Wayne Willey, pastor, Seventh-day Adventist Church, Bentonville, Arkansas.

● My sincere thanks for the interview about "Preaching that Turns the World Upside Down." I often ask myself the question: How can I preach the whole counsel of God without offending the hearers. Our aim is to draw people nearer to God, to be a real spiritual help to them. The temptation lurks always to preach smooth things only, things people like to hear. But it is no help to our audience when they get the comfortable feeling that God likes them as they are and there is no need to worry about what to do and what not to do. Christ says, when the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, begins His work on the soul, He will "reprove of sin." The conviction of one's sinfulness is the first step to salvation, and this is the requirement for the next experience, the conviction of "righteousness" in Christ. It is only then that a person's world is turned upside down.—Karl Waber (retired pastor), Titterten, Switzerland.

Appreciation

I really appreciate *Ministry*. It is inspiring to me. I especially enjoyed the "confession" (November 1999) of

continued on page 19

Free Subscription

If you're receiving *Ministry* bimonthly and haven't paid for a subscription, it's 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 will provide inspiration and help to you 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 can't 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.



These days more than ever, it seems that the problems confronting us as leaders are increasingly complex and

difficult to preside over. This is especially so when it comes to the interpersonal tensions that develop among people in general and that have their distinctive ways of playing themselves out in our churches.

Thirty-some years ago, when I entered ministry there was less intensity camping behind the inevitable squabbles that rippled through the congregations I pastored. Interpersonal stresses simply were not loaded with the exasperation that tends to overhang many of the clashes that erupt in congregations today. The differences of opinion that forecast only a brief bicker some years ago, may today portend long-term campaigns that have the potential, in some cases, of crippling the well-being and ministry of a whole congregation. Increasingly also, pastors today seem to be drawn to center stage when it comes to these escalated battles.

One of the more disturbing aspects of the deepening dissension in much of our culture and in our churches is that we seem to have fewer people among us who possess the golden qualities that are necessary to the endeavor of working and living together in productive community. It is instead socially fashionable in many of our cultures to value qualities that in the long run irritate our difficulties. We seem to lack the type of people who know how and are actually able to consistently handle disagreement and dissension constructively because they possess a certain bearing, an inner capacity or attitude that immediately makes a positive difference within a group of battling people. Such people are pure

Fearing the Pharisee more than the sinner

W I L L E V A

gold. Such pastors are pure gold. "Blessed are the peacemakers . . ."

As I think about all this it seems to me that it is imperative that we face up to the fact that we ourselves and not merely our institutions ("conditions in the church," "negative social conditioning," "the government") are the source of our predicaments and that it will only be when we have dealt with the error in ourselves that we will be able to deal effectively with what is wrong in the church or in the world.

It is terribly true that very little will change in the patterns of our congregations or our world if we only seek to change our organizational frontiers, realign our demographic compositions, or hone our political, administrative, or even our "doctrinal" expressions. Things will change when we change.

In other words, increasingly, thank God, we ministers are being brought back to the basics of our original divine call by the sheer force of negative necessity. We are being forced by the pain of our conflicts and by our anguished sense of need to seek out and effectively rediscover the authentic spiritual tangibles that cluster in the person of Christ Jesus Himself and that are so basic to the prosperity of any group of people.

Let me try to come to what I'm actually driving at by quoting one of the great thinkers of the twentieth century. In reflecting upon the horror of the war he had experienced and especially the cruelty and disdain that

had been focused upon him as a prisoner of war, Sir Laurens van der Post talked of the overpowering necessity of finding a quality of forgiveness sufficient to dissolve the destructive force accompanying the attitudes that had been unleashed against him and that had found their mark in his soul and in the souls of his fellow prisoners. With immense insight he wrote, "judgment and justice had brought us far but that *far* was not far enough. Only the exercise of the law of forgiveness, the declaration for ever of an unconditional amnesty for all in the warring spirit of men, could carry us on beyond."¹

It is astoundingly true that all of us tend constantly to seek ultimate arbitration only at the feet of "judgment and justice." It begins at the knee of our mother. We continue it later with other authority figures in our schools. Still later we make our appeals or lodge our complaints at our workplace and in our social, legal, political, and ecclesiastical institutions.

The persistent search for justice goes on unabated in the cogitations of our own thinking because in it all we have come to believe or suppose that when we finally find it (justice), or when it is finally properly dispensed, we will find satisfaction and peace. But the truth is that as essential as justice is, it can only take us so far. To stop with it, expecting it by itself to heal and restore us and our situation, casting out of us the demons of our own hurt and anger, is to ask of it too much.

Judgment and justice must by all means be called on. Forgiveness could not gain a foothold without them. But to bring about the quality of healing that is needed after all is said and done, is simply not their role.

It is the divine balm of the spirit of forgiveness that we simply must find if we are to be healed either personally or as quarreling congregations. This is a forgiveness that is not just a cognitive

continued on p. 23

THE JEWELS OF HIS KINGDOM

The survival of the church depends on our children. They may justly be recognized as our greatest resource. Yet, too often, we give them only token support. Often they seem to be at the end of our line of thinking as we think of nurturing or as we plan evangelistic outreaches, church nurture, and programming.



Sharon M. Cress is the Shepherdess Coordinator and an associate secretary for the Ministerial Association, General Conference.

Coming from the perspective of children's ministry in the local congregation, I am often grieved at our lack of passion for our youngsters. Granted, when they become teenagers we suddenly panic, throwing at them all the money, time, resources, and imagination we can muster in an urgent attempt to "hold" them as they suddenly strike puberty, fearing that during the teenage years they will exit church fellowship.

Could it be that some of the pressure we feel during the teen years and some of the tendency to exit that they show is due to the fact that less was done for them than could have been done while they were younger? What about showing the same degree of urgency when children are small as when they reach their teen years?

The church needs to be involved in actively using available resources to initiate programs that will build children's ministries into a formidable force in the local congregation. Church organization,

corporate and local, needs to provide innovative resources and ideas that can be implemented in the local congregation.

In addition to these very important resources, the most telling influence comes from the members themselves. How mature members relate to youngsters will forever imprint upon children's brains their interpretation of the character of Jesus. Their weekly or daily interaction with church members will give the children an impression of "church" that will carry into adulthood.

Receiving the right imprints

Recently, I watched a National Geographic documentary about zebras. One of the most interesting observations was about the foals. When a mare is about to give birth, she moves to the edge of the herd—not too far because there is safety in numbers—but enough distance to make sure that she is in charge of the situation. After the baby is born, it must immediately get up and

walk. Its survival depends upon this. But survival also depends upon another equally important factor. When the baby stands, the mother makes sure that it sees only her stripes for the first 15 minutes. Apparently, baby zebra brains imprint the stripes of the mother into their brain's "hard drive." Since every zebra has different stripes, it is vital that the baby have the imprint of its mother. If it looks at another zebra which is not the mother and imprints those stripe patterns, the baby could die because it will be confused as to where to look for its source of food and protection. In the first minutes of life, imprinting the correct stripes could make the difference between survival and disaster. The mother circles and shields the baby from other curious zebras who want to look over the newborn because she knows that her baby must see nothing but her stripes.

As church members we need to learn from the zebras—making sure our children receive the right imprints early so that they will remember these throughout their lives. Spiritual survival during the turmoil of the teenage years may depend upon the correct imprinting when they are young.

Spending time with the little ones may not seem to some to be as important or stimulating as the "mental exercise" of discussing great theological issues and doctrines with adults. But in many ways interacting with children can be even more rewarding. Imitation is still the greatest form of flattery. The greatest compliment I ever received was a little girl who remarked, "When I grow up I want to be a pastor just like you!" And, in the years since, her life has developed in such a way that there is a good possibility she will someday be a pastor.

As leaders in congregations, we have the burden and responsibility to place before the people the necessity of positively ministering to our children. We need to make sure the members receive proper training so they know how to relate to these precious kids so that church services and other programs leave positive lasting impressions of

Jesus, His local church, and the people who present the programs. Teachers, facilitators, and mentors stand in the place of Jesus to these little ones. Unfortunately, many members are well-meaning, but boring. Too often, others have been known to use children as a sounding board for their own agendas. Such encounters may be quickly forgotten by adults, but they tend to be remembered by children.

Last week two Junior youngsters were visiting in our home. Remarking about their Sabbath School class that morning, one boy exclaimed that it was the best class he had ever been to. I asked what made it "the best." Eyes sparkling, he replied, "Oh, we got to do things!"

Last week two Junior youngsters were visiting in our home. Remarking about their Sabbath School class that morning, one boy exclaimed that it was the best class he had ever been to. I asked what made it "the best." Eyes sparkling, he replied, "Oh, we got to do things! Not just sitting and being talked to." He then proceeded to tell me all the activities, one by one, that the children had participated in with the organizer. "She did everything we did—and it was so much fun!"

Children's Ministries can provide valuable resources and training, but the

key is to have people to implement these programs who are themselves teachable in the tender art of molding characters. Children have a "sixth sense." They can quickly cut through the phony piety. They can sense in a moment if we really love them. And, they will put that impression into their own little hard drives and retrieve it over and over in years to come.

Reaching the children at their level

A few weeks ago my husband and I listened to the narrator of the children's story during our worship service. The story was told in adult words, not children's. He played to a sense of humor that went right over the children's heads but was subtly caught by the mature members of the congregation who laughed at all the appropriate times. And, the story went on and on and on for 15 minutes! Adding to all this, I heard a comment after the service about how we take so much time out of the worship service for these kids, and they don't even appreciate it, and that's obvious because they were tickling and teasing each other, running back to their parents, and climbing up and down the platform stairs while the story was being told. It was obvious neither the storyteller nor the commentator realized where much of the fault lay. At the 14-minute mark, even I was having strong urges to pester my husband, scribble on the bulletin, run to the bathroom, or do about anything to get it over with! I was again reminded of my friend Cheryl Retzer's sage advice, "Remember that children can only listen one minute for every year of their age!" Thus, a four-year-old can only attentively listen to a four-minute story!

Children do not come to church with guarantees. Even when we do everything "right" they still have the free, God-given choice just as anyone else does. And they may choose paths that leave us grieving for them. It is important to remember that when they do "jump overboard" we can be there to help them back in.

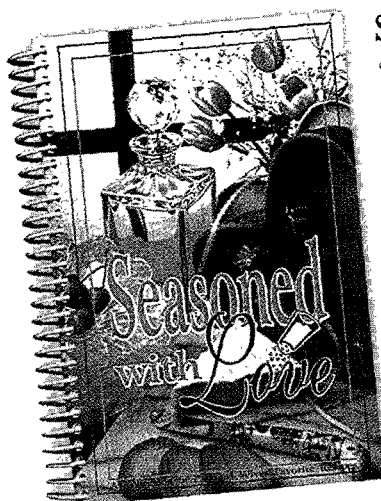
A few weeks ago, I had the privilege of snorkeling off the great Bunaken

Reef in beautiful Manado, Indonesia. We rowed out to the reef in a very narrow, small, canoe-like boat. Jumping into the ocean was really easy—I simply fell out of the canoe, put on my snorkeling tube, mask, and fins and swam away. After a glorious morning of seeing massive coral, unusual fish, and other magnificent sights, however, I was hungry and tired and wanted to climb back into the “canoe” and get back to shore. Despite the beautiful ocean, I was tired. I needed the rest and safety of the shore. However, getting back into that “boat” was another matter entirely. I pulled and climbed and attempted maneuvers that surely could have won me first prize in a “funniest videos” competition. I can’t tell you how many times I had one leg and arm almost into the boat, but the sea seemed to hold me like a magnet. The other two people in the boat did not seem at all thrilled that I was sloshing water all over them and precariously tipping the boat, jeopardizing their own safety.

Finally, it dawned on them that I might need some help getting back into what I had so eagerly and easily forsaken. With their strong arms I was instantly retrieved. Telling about it later, we relived the moments and had a good laugh. But then we sobered as we applied the incident to our church young people. It is so easy for them to jump “out” of the church, but without the strong arms of love and forgiveness reaching out to them, and hearts willing to forget their past, they might not make it back in. Their struggle may make us uncomfortable as we observe it from our secure position. Many of their antics during this time may well so unnerve us that we forget we could reach out rather than sit and watch critically as they struggle.

Jesus gave us serious encouragement and even warning when it comes to ministering to His little ones. He does not measure human value by weight, and these tiny ones are the jewels of His kingdom. Isn’t it important that our church resources, talent, and time be spent in correctly polishing them for His kingdom? ■

Resources from *Shepherdess International*



Seasoned With Love

“A collection of pastoral wives’ favorite recipes,” this wonderful cookbook is filled with recipes on everything from appetizers to breads to beverages to cookies and candies and everything else, but without meat! These recipes have come from all over the world, as ministers’ wives from every division contributed their favorite

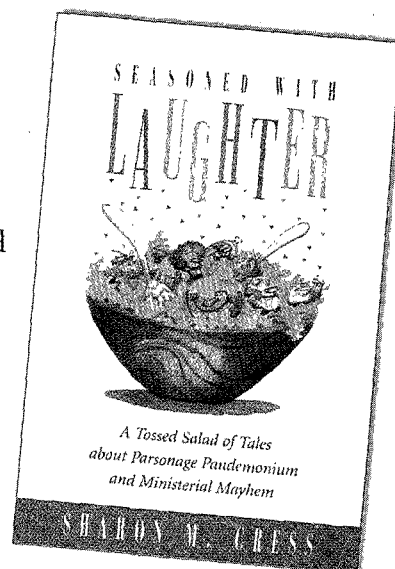
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REACHING THE SECULAR MIND

An interview with Ravi Zacharias



Ravi Zacharias is founder and president of Ravi Zacharias International Ministries, Norcross, Georgia.



Derek Morris, D.Min., is a professor in the school of religion, Southern Adventist University, Collegedale, Tennessee.

Derek Morris: In your book, *Can Man Live Without God?*, you suggest that there has been a concerted effort by some secular thinkers to prejudice the minds of this generation against a belief in God.¹ What strategies are these secular thinkers employing to promote their antitheistic views?

Ravi Zacharias: Those strategies come overtly as well as subtly. The challenge to the concept of theism can be traced through certain philosophers of the last century like Nietzsche, the Huxleys, Bertrand Russell, and then the existentialist writers like Sartre and Camus.

It can also be traced with a little more subtlety though on a widespread base in certain academic settings. I could name one of the Ivy League schools which has a promotional video right now where the closing statement is given by a student saying that one of the most fulfilling results of attending that university was to become an intellectually fulfilled atheist. That is in a promotional video! You can also go to places like Oxford where people like Peter Atkins and Richard Dawkins unapologetically state that their goal is not merely to talk about the ideas of God's non-existence but to convince even those who believe that theism is essentially irrational. Dawkins, in his Voltaire Lectures to the British Human-

ist Association a couple of years ago, talked about religious belief as being a kind of virus in the human software.

The effort to prejudice minds against a belief in God also comes through powerfully in much of the entertainment medium today. Its desacralizing of sexuality, respect for parents and family, and the sanctity of marriage, of word, of deed has a way of moving minds away from a belief in God. These sorts of notions come in rather subliminally, but people absorb them, and before you realize it, you are no longer shocked by things that ought to shock your sensitivities.

Then there are the law courts and the legal system, where there is a loss of the crucial sense of life's essential value. Here both birth and death have largely lost their moral focus, and human issues are decided largely on the basis of pragmatic legal interpretations and entangled judicatory argumentation. Here the underlying ethic is often seen in terms of money or unduly influenced by the results of a survey.

The cumulative effect of all of this has seemed to lower the moral convictions of young minds especially. Young teenagers who have hardly gained the maturity to respond to complex moral choices are now confronted by options that fell their ethical presuppositions long before they should have the possibility of having to face them.

RAVI ZACHARIAS WITH
DEREK J. MORRIS

DM: What are some of the ways that secular people have sought to make sense out of life apart from God?

RZ: Nietzsche was alert to this inevitable question. He said, in his parable called "The Madman," "Is not night and more night coming on all the time? Must not lanterns be lit in the morning?"² In other words, the dawn of this idea was going to be a kind of darkness. What is going to lighten your path along the way? Or, as Nietzsche expressed it, "What sacred games shall we have to invent?"³

Malcolm Muggeridge summarized it well when he said that it will be either megalomania or erotomania, the drive for power or the drive for pleasure. If God is dead or out of the picture, that is basically what we're left with. Politically, we see the drive for power, and culturally, we see the drive for pleasure. But people are too sophisticated to simply admit that these are their most meaningful reasons for living. They dress it up. So you tend to end up with sophisticated pragmatic philosophies which direct contemporary humanity to simply do whatever works.

In a kind of reaction to the emptiness of this kind of Godless pragmatism, we see the entry of a strain of spirituality which comes in through the back door in the form of all kinds of mysticism. Some of the Eastern forms of mysticism have come in because they facilitate a form of ethics without God. So our pragmatic bent or our mystical bent become the substitute for the theistic commitment.

DM: It seems that many Christians, including preachers, are reticent to share their faith with secular people because they believe that their non-Christian friends and neighbors are experiencing a fulfilling, contented existence. Yet, you suggest that "for many in our high-paced world, despair is not a moment; it is a way of life."⁴ Why does an antitheistic worldview so often lead to despair?

RZ: It may not be an anguished despair, but it is a surrender to a point-

lessness of existence. It is a Despair with a capital D. Existentialists admit that. Camus commented that death is philosophy's only problem. Jean-Paul Sartre said that life is an empty bubble, floating on the sea of nothingness. On his deathbed he admitted that his philosophy of atheism turned out to be unlivable. He rejected its ramifications, albeit very late in life.

The reason that an antitheistic worldview so often leads to despair lies deep within the human heart. Solomon

N*ever before
has skepticism had such a
brilliant halo around its head.
There is a glory about "not
knowing." A high premium is
placed on the absence of
conviction, and open-
mindedness has become
synonymous with intellectual
sophistication.*¹⁰

said in Ecclesiastes that God has put eternity into the heart of man. We long for such a quality of coherence that denies death the capability of swallowing up all the affections, all the loves that we have, thus rendering life pointless. So this hunger for coherence and transcendent meaning is a very real one. The moral sense within the human mind compels us to seek a basic sense of significance—not just a contrived significance but an essential, authentic significance. This has been observed and proven time and again.

I was invited by one of the ten

wealthiest men of today to speak in Hong Kong. This man is a Chinese tycoon, a multi-billionaire. He was hosting some dinners and luncheons for what they call the diamond collar group. These are the very successful business magnates, the cream of the cream as it were. As soon as I landed at the airport, I was invited to have dinner with this gentleman and I just threw the question across the table, "When did you become a Christian?"

He said, "Oh, about 18 months ago."

I said, "What prompted it?"

He replied, "I got out of my office building one day and was driving home. I thought to myself, 'My life is empty. I really don't have any purpose. I have all this money, but I don't have purpose in my life.' " He phoned his wife and they decided to go to church that evening. It was a weeknight, and they walked into the midst of a discipleship training group. After attending for a few weeks, they committed their lives to Christ!

If you go to any university campus when we hold our university forums, the place is full. It is packed. We've been to Harvard, Cornell, Princeton, Ohio State, Indiana University. Wherever we go, the place is filled with students who are ready to take on challenges and ask questions. I think this is a sign of a genuine hunger. Recently, I did a Faith and Science lecture forum on God and the problem of evil. There were nearly two thousand in attendance on a weeknight. It was transmitted to nearly one hundred universities on a big screen. Over one hundred countries logged in on the Internet. This shows that there is a moral sense within us that wants to put the puzzle of life together.

There are some, of course, who say "All these issues don't matter that much to me." But it seems to me that when the chips are down, they are not able to live by the logical implications of their presuppositions. They only hide from them.

DM: Well, that brings us to the radical claim of Jesus. People are looking for meaning in life, freedom from despair. And along comes Jesus and says

"I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life." That claim seems strangely out of place to many in our pluralistic, postmodern society. And yet you affirm that "Jesus made a most reasonable statement when He claimed exclusivity."⁵

RZ: Truth by definition is exclusive. What people often forget, even in vast audiences, is that Christianity is not the only faith that claims exclusivity. Every religion that I know claims it. Hinduism is exclusivistic in that it will not surrender the law of karma or the law of reincarnation. Buddhism was born rejecting Hinduism. Islam is obviously exclusivistic. Any time you make a truth claim, you are implying that something you have asserted conforms to reality. So truth by definition is exclusive. If a truth claim is made, the question is whether it is a valid argument or merely a whimsical assertion. When you are testing a truth claim, there needs to be logical consistency, empirical adequacy, and experiential relevance.

When Jesus made the claim to be "the Way, the Truth and the Life," He was making the claim that He, in His essential being, offered, asserted, and lived by that which conformed to ultimate reality. It is most reasonable that He made an exclusive claim. And Jesus is certainly the One who has been most tested and analyzed in history to see if His claims were true.

DM: You have asserted that "the Christian message stands or falls upon the authenticity or spuriousness of the Bible."⁶ So, as you are sharing with someone about the truth claim of Jesus, the witness of Scripture is crucial. What evidence would you share with a secular person that the Bible is indeed the authentic Word from God?

RZ: Here you've got 66 books, written by about 40 authors over 1,500 years! It would be very easy, if someone wanted to destroy this Book, to find a blatant array of contradictions. I find it fascinating that whenever these Scriptures are challenged in an open setting, and people talk about contradictions,

at most they come up with three or four, if they come up with any of any real substance. I have yet to find anyone who has made a substantial case out of the contradictions in the Bible.

Bruce Metzger, of Princeton University, one of the leading New Testament scholars of our time, made the comment that the legitimacy of the text, based on the earliest documents and what we now have, has an astonishing 99.4 percent of accuracy. In the Bible you have placed together about 5,000 pieces or docu-

*If it is true that
the foundational pursuit of life
is meaning, then that meaning
must be within the confines of
truth, and that truth cannot
be found apart from Jesus.
In searching for ourselves, we
can never know ourselves until
we know Him.¹¹*

ments. Looking at the evidence you know immediately that this is not a fabricated Book, *post facto*.

The next thing you see is that the Bible is a historic book, not just a mystical book. For a long time, scholars would talk about the character of Pontius Pilate being without substance in extra-biblical history. All of a sudden in recent times, we have discovered mention of Pontius Pilate in extra-biblical sources.

Another evidence of the authenticity of Scripture is the claims of Christ, which are so drastic. The most dramatic claim of Jesus is the Resurrection. If there were any possibility of completely devastating the Scriptures, it seems the

religious leaders and skeptics of the day could have done it on this front with a brilliant stroke of counterpoint. If the resurrection of Jesus was a myth, the disciples could have simply claimed a spiritual resurrection of Jesus, asserting that even though His body was dead, His spirit is present with us. How could you argue with that? It's a claim that has no empirical reference. But the disciples claimed a bodily resurrection, a claim that could easily have been disproved if it were not true by producing the body. The resurrection of Christ is so dramatic a claim that it made the disciples vulnerable to disproof if it were a false claim. This is not what myth is made of. Eleven out of the twelve of Jesus' followers were willing to die a martyr's death because they knew He had indeed risen from the dead, when prior to His appearance before them they had been hiding for fear.

So, in judging the validity of Scripture, you take the coherent message coming through over 1,500 years, you take the volume of documentation tracing back to the original, you take the history, the geography, the characters that are testable, and the miracles that are clearly attested to. The Scriptures are, without a doubt, a unique document.

DM: As we read the Scriptures, we discover that even the people of God are not immune to the problem of suffering. Many skeptics point to this problem of suffering as the greatest obstacle to believing in God. You address this issue in your book *Cries of the Heart* and suggest that "the answer to suffering is more relational than propositional."⁷ Could you explain what you mean by that?

RZ: The problem of suffering is a most fascinating question to raise if we see ourselves to be purely the product of the random collocation of atoms. If we believe we are here by pure chance, why do we attribute a moral context to the problem of suffering? If anything, we should accept it as one of the most concrete aspects of our evolution. The reason we assign it to a moral context is that we are unable to shake off our moral nature. There is that innate moral

frame of reference. To raise the problem of suffering is actually to establish the existence of a moral framework, and a moral framework doesn't exist unless a moral Lawgiver Himself does.

Beyond these considerations, I don't think the question will be answered by logic alone. I think that there are propositional answers, enough to dent the question and bring about a meaningful response. But when all is said and done, it is the Who of the Bible that you trust in and not just the What. It is the relationship that you lean on. There is enough in human experience to sustain that.

If you take a child into the hospital, and a big needle is about to be inserted into the arm, the child may scream and cry and grab your hand in the process, but the trust is still there. The power to keep moving on in life is born out of a relationship. Propositionally, the problem of suffering is only partially answered. The peace and the strength are found in the rational, experimental consideration of things.

DM: In your interaction with secular people, you have learned that "there is no point in arguing with a person who is determined to explain everything away. Nothing good can come if the will is wrong."⁸ How, then, should a Christian respond to such a person?

RZ: There are some people in whom skepticism is so imbedded that even when their defenses are dropped they still have a gut level feeling that their skepticism is well founded. So you have to allow for a process, a paradigm shift. That occurs in several ways. First, by asking the person the right questions which they then are forced to live with and think through. Second, by not mocking the person's positions at that point but respecting the fact that there is an honest seeking. Third—and I think this is very important—the church should always be an authentic worshipping community because it is in the context of authenticity and worship that barriers are most likely to fall. It has to season the relationship, not dominate it.

DM: Some years ago, you stated that "communicating the Christian faith has become extremely complicated in our day. There are few accepted beliefs any more."⁹ What practical counsel would you give to a person who is committed to reaching secular people with the Christian message?

RZ: Communicating the Christian faith to secular people is a genuine struggle for many in the ministry. The pastoral task today of shepherding a people is in itself a daunting process. So the most important step, before even the apologetics and outreach begins, is to be personally and consistently replenished. If you are not replenished consistently, then your ability to minister to the person without Christ is going to be sapped.

A second step is to enable the church to be connected with society. With each enabler you produce, you are multiplying yourself exponentially. If you have a church of one hundred that is expecting you to do the outreach, it is going to be a very slow process. But if you are equipping them, you are moving on several tracks. For this reason your ministry should be challenging the

church person at an intellectual and emotional level, always undergirded by the Scriptures, so that they have the confidence to reach out to others.

Third, I believe that those in ministry ought to be reading very widely. Expenditure of words without an income of ideas will lead to conceptual bankruptcy. So reading is not a luxury; it is a necessity. It needs to be a top priority for those of us who are dealing with ideas and people. ■

¹ Ravi Zacharias, *Can Man Live Without God?* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1994), xiii.

² Quoted in Ravi Zacharias, *A Shattered Visage: The Real Face of Atheism* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1990), 21.

³ Ibid.

⁴ *Can Man Live Without God?* 71.

⁵ Ibid., 130.

⁶ Ravi Zacharias, *Deliver Us From Evil: Restoring the Soul in a Disintegrating Culture* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1996), 198.

⁷ Ravi Zacharias, *Cries of the Heart: Bringing God Near When He Feels So Far* (Nashville: Word Publishing, 1998), 89.

⁸ Ibid., 9.

⁹ *A Shattered Visage: The Real Face of Atheism*, 2.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ *Can Man Live Without God?* 103.

Jewelry In The Bible

Angel Manuel Rodriguez

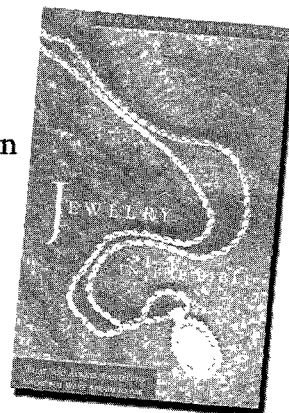
Jewelry in the Bible is a book designed to help readers cut through the questions, opinions, and even passions to arrive at biblical answers regarding jewelry. Written by Angel Manuel Rodriguez, associate director of the Biblical Research Institute of the General Conference.

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BUILDING AN IDEAL SABBATH SCHOOL

Just imagine! The children in your church are early to Sabbath School every week. They don't want to leave Sabbath School because they're having such a good time.



*Denise Pereyra, Ed.D.,
is an elementary school
teacher in La Caxada,
California.*

They are also learning important lessons of the Bible in a loving and joyous way. The classrooms are filled to capacity. Children are worried that they might be late and miss something. Parents are eager to teach and assist. Real learning is taking place in an atmosphere of love, acceptance, and happiness. When you talk with these children after Sabbath School they can actually tell you what the lesson was about and why they learned it.

Impossible? Not at all.

The ideal Sabbath School program doesn't just "happen." It is not a weekly routine, with the teacher looking through the lesson quarterly on Friday evening, hurriedly imagining how the program will work out the next morning. And what will happen if the teacher calls in sick on Sabbath morning with no one available to fill in? Can ideal Sabbath Schools be run by one teacher working in isolation from the rest of the teachers, church members, and pastors in the church? No, the ideal Sabbath School requires teamwork.

It will have programs well thought through and planned for the entire

quarter. Teachers and leaders of the Sabbath School classes will work with the pastoral staff so that the Sabbath School will reflect the mission and vision statements of the church. The classes will stress the grace of God consistently as an essential feature of the nurturing process of members, both adults and children.

In the ideal Sabbath School, teachers don't just show up Sabbath morning wondering where everything is or throwing together a few songs, a story, and a craft for the children. They have planned their program as one in a series of programs, tied together around a central theme. Teachers, assistants, pianists, storytellers, craft experts will ideally all come from the same congregation and community. All the divisions will teach the same lesson. All may not be studying the same Bible story, but the point or theme of the lesson will be the same. For example, of the four main ideas of the Value Genesis project, the Sabbath Schools would all be learning about grace, worship, community, or service that morning. Naturally, the concept of grace is the foundation of

D E N I S E P E R E Y R A

all aspects of the morning program, from beginners through Adult Sabbath Schools, regardless of the individual lesson planned for that day.

The way we teach

We can't stop here, however. The way we teach is as important as what we teach. Someone must train our Sabbath School teachers. In many churches parents are responsible for the Sabbath School programs and many of them need specific training in how to organize, plan, and deliver quality programs. Part of the problem of recruiting teachers and assistants is that many people are scared of getting up in front of a group of children. They feel confused, unprepared, worried, and helpless facing that collection of small bodies, not to mention the row of parents sitting behind their children. Or maybe worse, facing those children *without* a row of parents waiting to intervene with their children in case of a behavior problem. Pastors may sometimes forget how intimidating public speaking can be to those who don't do it regularly. To try to minimize those fears by saying that it's just a bunch of children is to minimize the fact that the lessons presented and the way they are presented may have a profound impact on how these children view God, the church, and its role in their lives. Acknowledging the anxieties of the Sabbath School teachers and leaders, confirming their vital role in the ministry of the church, providing appropriate training in educational theory and practice, allowing them to employ their own talents and interests, and demonstrating the appreciation of the pastoral staff and church body as a whole in concrete ways will help assure a steady body of volunteer teachers and assistants in the Sabbath School programs.

In the ideal Sabbath School program, the participants would have some understanding of learning styles, multiple intelligences, higher level thinking, and comprehension skills. They would know the basic dynamics of creativity and participation. They would have an acquaintance with the basic concepts of child development and would understand what children are capable of at

different age levels. They would have learned the essentials of classroom organization and would know what to do if a child behaves inappropriately. Nothing would be left to chance. Yet, they would be flexible enough to handle unexpected situations.

In addition to giving the children an opportunity to learn the Bible story, the ideal Sabbath School would show how the lesson relates to life right now.

The Sabbath

School classes are the foundation of the congregation. This is where the children learn basic concepts about God that will impact their belief system all their lives. From infancy, children should learn of God's great love and grace and its implications in life and behavior.

Rather than "spoon feeding" the lesson to the children or requiring them to memorize rote answers, teachers would interact with them in ways that provoke thoughtful, personal, and appropriate responses from the children. They would suggest ways for children to respond to the lesson in positive ways, and they would encourage the children to do something practical and helpful during the following week in response to the lesson.

Imagine the ideal

It is Sabbath morning, about 45 minutes before Sabbath School is sched-

uled to begin. All the teachers, helpers, pianists, and their families arrive at the church. One of the pastoral staff greets them in one of the classrooms where a light breakfast awaits. While munching on fresh fruit and muffins, parents, mothers, children, church staff, and teachers talk about the upcoming Sabbath School program and morning worship. They pray together and open their hearts to God's grace.

All is in readiness. Doors are opened early, and children enter the classrooms. They can feel the excitement and want to join in. The teachers have been practicing the teaching techniques for days and the children are expecting wonderful things. Teachers do not feel isolated as parents go to adult Sabbath Schools. Some parents want to stay with their children and participate in the activities that have been planned. In addition, the teachers know that they will have their turn attending an adult class because a number of church members are trained to teach. The Sabbath School teachers need to receive spiritual "food" from adult classes on a regular basis so that they can return to the children's Sabbath School rooms refreshed and invigorated with new ideas.

In all the classrooms teachers are greeting their students. As the children enter they are directed to learning centers where activities are set up to stimulate their imaginations and thinking processes in preparation for the lesson. Some are quiet activities, and some involve physical movement, but all the activities are dynamic and directly related to the point of the lesson.

In the ideal Sabbath School all of the teachers are loving and caring. Children are warmly welcomed and are given positive comments and encouragement. No child is accused of being "bad" or made to feel stupid. The morning is designed so that all the children succeed in understanding the lesson in a way that is appropriate and meaningful for their age level. The grace of God flows from heaven to the teachers and to the children. Whatever else is taught and learned, a picture of the grace of

God is uppermost in everyone's consciousness.

Songs have been carefully chosen. Bible stories and mission stories all relate to the lesson. Memory verses and the daily activities in the quarterly for the following week all point to the lesson. In addition, the sermon during the morning worship service can also reinforce the lessons learned in the Sabbath School.

"What's the point?" you might ask. "Isn't this redundant?"

That's exactly the point. How many times have you asked children what they have learned in Sabbath School and gotten the answer, "Nothing," or "I don't

remember"? Repetition is an effective teaching tool, and should be used without being tiresome. By repeating the lesson in many different ways (not in the same way many times), the children will remember it better. It won't be boring because the point has been made in many different ways: singing a song, reciting a poem, playing a game, drawing a picture, and sharing it with a friend, etc. And when the pastor mentions the point of the Sabbath School lessons in his or her sermon, children who might normally tune out may just perk up their ears because they recognize what they learned about earlier. Just for one

day, coordinate the efforts of the teachers responsible for the Sabbath Schools that day and see what happens. The results may be amazing!

Concerted curriculum planning

The entire Sabbath School team, including the pastoral staff, division leaders, teachers, and assistants, should make sure that the curriculum plan for the morning is Christ-centered, Bible-based, grace-oriented, and well balanced. Over the course of a quarter's lessons, they should pay attention to faith development, spiritual formation of the children, the fundamental beliefs of the church, and service issues such as stewardship. No one person can accomplish all of this in isolation. A Sabbath School program such as this requires ongoing discussion and learning opportunities.

These meetings have several advantages. They provide a forum in which all participants can share their expertise, feel that they are an integral part of the church's ministry, share their successes, be nurtured when they feel discouraged, and gain new ideas and approaches to use in the programs. Most of all, the team members can feel the grace of God pouring over them as they prayerfully and gratefully accept the guidance, love, and encouragement that He so freely gives.

The Sabbath School classes are the foundation of the congregation. This is where the children learn basic concepts about God that will impact their belief system all their lives. From infancy, children should learn of God's great love and grace and its implications in life and behavior. The grace of God, the idea that God is for us, can be the theme in every Sabbath School classroom, and the knowledge of God's love for us can be evident in every word and action.

The Sabbath School divisions can provide a place of spiritual learning, worship, celebration, and joy for children of all ages. Sabbath School should be a place where children feel loved, nurtured spiritually, and accepted unequivocally. When and where that happens, there is an ideal Sabbath School. ■

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THE SPIRITUAL FORMATION OF CHILDREN

They were the parents of three children. I first met them at the Sabbath fellowship lunch. After some small talk, our conversation turned serious.



Denise A. Ropka Kasischke is a children's ministry consultant in Nashville, Tennessee.

"We are searching for a place to settle and a church in which to worship," the father said. "To be honest, churchgoing wasn't always a priority for us. But after the kids came, everything changed. We need a church that has the best children's program."

One of the most significant problems facing ministers is how to foster spiritual formation in the children in their congregations. Spiritual formation is the process whereby people transform into Christlikeness. For many parents, a child-friendly church plays a significant role in their choice of where to live. They are concerned for their children's growth in faith. Often they feel they do not have sufficient skills to build faith in their children. They look to ministers and the church for assistance. They need the help of a faith community that can facilitate the spiritual formation of their children. But the question is: Are our churches equipped to assist them?

A unified curriculum

A unified church curriculum that emphasizes the infusion of religious language into the lives of those in the

congregation provides a valuable tool for spiritual formation in children and parents. The central elements of such a curriculum are religious language and Bible stories. Religious language is an important tool for building faith. By religious language I mean words and concepts that Christians throughout history have drawn from Bible stories: words such as incarnation, idolatry, salvation, grace, antichrist, commandment, redemption, etc. These words conceptualize our faith. Taken together, the words that comprise religious language create a kind of methodology of faith.

However, we do not incorporate this language into our lives as much as we should. For example, one seldom overhears people conversing in a shopping mall about the finer points of forgiveness or redemption. Our lives and those of our children are too segmented into sacred and secular categories. A unified church curriculum can, to a significant degree, remedy this problem. Its goal is to induce people to incorporate religious language into their daily lives thus furthering their spiritual formation. It can do this by constantly re-

DENISE A. ROPKA KASISCHKE

minding congregations of the meaning and purpose of religious language through Bible stories.

The content of a unified curriculum

Bible stories provide the content of a unified curriculum for the church. Since religious language derives its meaning from Bible stories, these stories are the key means of reminding people of the meaning and purpose of religious language. Moses spoke of this: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates" (Deut. 6:5-9, NRSV).

This text reveals several concerns. First, spiritual nurture can result only

when faith building touches all aspects of life. That is what a unified curriculum should do—integrate religion in the entire life. Second, children in their formative years should be the intentional target of such a curriculum. Third, the key method for accomplishing faith nurture is the repeated narration of how God has led in the past. Bible stories do this with great effect, helping the children to remember, understand, and live out the story in their lives. Here lie the advantages of a unified church curriculum.

Framing a unified curriculum

Framing a unified curriculum can be accomplished in two basic ways. The first is the use of a church calendar, the second is to follow the themes outlined in the Seventh-day Adventist children's curriculum. People usually order their lives around some sort of a calendar or schedule, such as a work, school, or sport season schedule. A unified church curriculum can provide another alternative—a calendar in which life is

ordered around biblical themes and the language of faith.

The traditional Christian calendar provides a convenient and theologically sound model: beginning with the birth of Christ, continuing through Pentecost, and concluding with the birth of the church. Using this model provides for the telling and retelling of the story of redemption over the course of each year. Pastors can integrate each theme into the broader context of their worship services and other church ministries. This plan weaves church programs, the secular calendar, and the story of redemption into a braid that extends throughout each year.

A second frame around which to build a unified curriculum is the children's Sabbath School curriculum. Although a church calendar addresses the entire congregation, the second option addresses children more specifically. Many of our Sabbath School educational curricula, such as the General Conference Children's Sabbath

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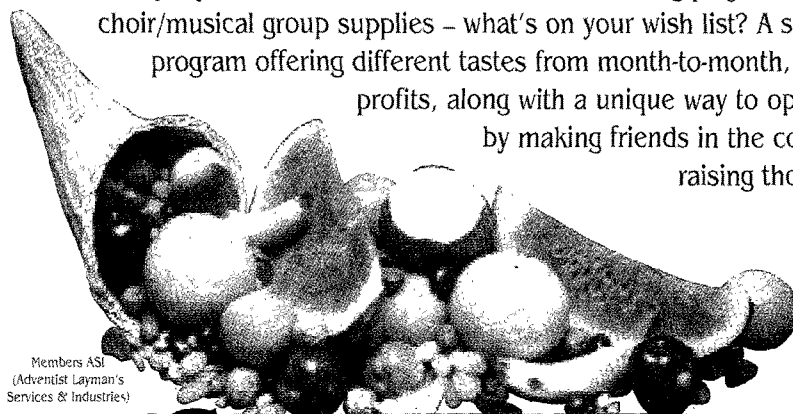
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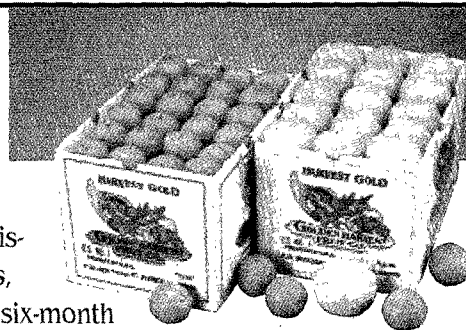
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NOTE: If you have already pre-registered for a cancelled seminar and/or want to change to a newly-added seminar, we will guarantee your choice at Toronto. If you have not already pre-registered, please keep the following information in mind as you select your choices among the seminars.

The following seminars have been cancelled:

- | | |
|---------|--|
| 283/484 | Memorizing Scripture |
| 409 | Radio/TV/Internet |
| 399 | Pastoring: Information Process (Spanish) |
| 297 | The Role of the Holy Spirit Baptism (French) |

The following seminars have been added or additional information has been provided:

- | | |
|---------|--|
| 116/316 | Literature Evangelists Generate Interests
—Ron Appenzeller
Learn how to increase baptisms in your district by utilizing Literature Evangelists. |
| 115 | Recapitulation in the Book of Revelation
—George Reid
<i>Do the trumpets follow the seals chronologically. Accepting or rejecting recapitulation dramatically affects the interpretation of the Apocalypse.</i> |
| 346/448 | Pastors Meeting the Secular Mind (English)
—Johann Gerhardt |
| 148 | Pastors Meeting the Secular Mind (German)
—Johann Gerhardt
<i>What is the secular mind and how do Adventist truths impact secular thinking. What are the challenges and opportunities and the role of the local church and pastor.</i> |
| 247/347 | The Time Before the End (English)—Udo Worschech |
| 499 | The Time Before the End (German)—Udo Worschech
<i>The first written prophetic records within an eschatological climate of wealth and self-destruction in a nation originally called by God.</i> |
| 114 | Spiritual Growth in Lordship—Ben Maxson |
| 214 | Contemporary Issues in Finance/Stewardship
—Ben Maxson |



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| 217 | Personal Money Management for Pastor's Family
—Pardon Mwansa
<i>Four basic steps to financial management and a clear system of managing personal funds plus a plan to pay off debts and remain debt-free. Ten methods of how to increase home income.</i> |
| 314 | Lordship and the Pastor's Home
—Ben and Mary Maxson |
| 414 | Real Problems, Real Lord—Fylvia Fowler Kline |
| 106/216/315/415 | A Faith that Works in Each Cycle of Life
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School Department's new Sabbath School curriculum from January 2000 provides an excellent resource. Much research and planning have gone into these programs.

The lessons are designed to teach four key Christian themes: "Grace: God loves me"; "Worship: I show love to God"; "Community: How we relate as the body of Christ"; and "Service: Reaching out to those in the greater community." Biblical texts and stories taught during each quarter relate directly to the theme of the quarter. The repetition on the theme over a period of time allows for the incorporation of various life experiences of a child through the eyes of Grace, Worship, Community, and Service.

These four themes provide a nice framework upon which to build a unified church curriculum. Build the curriculum on either the specific stories and texts used in the children's curriculum or simply focus on the themes. The themes are also helpful as they move in progression from understanding the love of God to putting love into action. Again, it is important for the themes to pervade all the church ministries.

A curriculum for the entire church life

Regardless of the framework that one chooses, a unified church curriculum requires much planning and organizing. It requires the pastor or church staff to work through what they desire the congregation to receive each week for the next year and then to incorporate the themes and texts into all the ministries of the church. These ministries include preaching, children's sermons, children's Sabbath School, some adult Sabbath Schools, children's church, midweek services, small group themes, and helps for family worship.

First, consider the pastor's role of preaching during worship. Preaching provides direction for the church. What a pastor preaches sets the tone for the church for the year. Thus it is imperative when installing a unified curriculum that sermons articulate and define the themes on which the church will focus during the year. Subsequently, the themes will per-

meate the church ministries both on and off the church campus. From the sermon children's teachers learn basics that they can pass on to children.

A *second opportunity for spiritual formation* during the worship service is the children's sermon. One must differentiate between a children's sermon and a children's story. All too often the children's section of the worship service consists of a story that has little to do with the sermon of the day or the theme of the service. While the story may have a good moral, it does little to include children in the corporate worship that takes place around them. In a children's sermon, on the other hand, one presents the sermon for the day in a language and a form that children can understand. It may take the form of a story or an exposition. The important point is that children are able to grow in faith along with their parents and within a common theme.

On-site church ministries comprise the *third* component of a unified church curriculum. One way to continue the weekly theme outside the main worship service is Children's Church, a service designed for children to understand and participate in all aspects of worship. This can be done monthly or quarterly or as frequently as your situation warrants.

The Sabbath School and midweek services are other on-site options for spiritual formation. By providing material on the theme for these groups, parents learn biblical stories in more depth. As parents study in more depth with other adults, they learn the language of faith more fluently. This helps them to teach their children and strive to incorporate the language of faith into daily experiences.

Adventurer and Pathfinder clubs are prime times to continue teaching and interacting with children. Club leaders who provide additional learning experiences on the theme help develop spiritual formation in children.

The *fourth* component is the arena outside the church. Again, we too often segment our lives into separate secular and religious categories. Indi-

vidual churches can help to remedy this problem by aiding and encouraging people to incorporate their experiences at church into the other parts of their lives. Pastors, for example, should provide people with incentives to continue contemplating the themes in their sermon after they leave the church building. A great way to encourage people to continue contemplating the sermon after they leave church is for pastors to develop discussion questions about the sermon topic. The questions should consider different age groups from small children to youth and young adults still living at home. This helps the family to talk about the particular biblical theme throughout the week. The language of the Bible continues outside of church and moves into the car, home, work, and school.

Discussion starters on the sermon are a good way to start faith talk in the home. Of course, one should not expect such discussions to take the place of family worships. This is the final area in which the church can help minister to children by providing family worship helps and resources on the topic/texts in which the church community is studying. Parents will feel more competent leading and starting family worships when they have already heard some input at church on the topic.

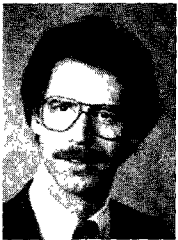
Creating a unified church curriculum takes work, and much planning. Faith building is not an easy task, but it is well worth the effort.

Letters *continued from p. 3*

the church leader who wrote about his experience with working for the church for many years before true conversion. I praise God for His testimony. It has really inspired me to strive to build my "weakening" relationship with God. Jesus is the reason for my Christian experience. Without the cross, I would be destitute not only of salvation, but of a purpose for life.—Jason P. Knarr, via <mailto:jsknarr@juno.com>.

CHILDREN ARE CHURCH MEMBERS TOO!

Every Christian tradition has a rite of passage whereby children born and raised in the church are confirmed into full church membership.



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

In my church that step is immersion baptism that generally takes place during the teen years. A child born and raised in the church family makes a decision for Christ and the church, and is formally taught, baptized, and accepted into membership, with its attendant privileges and responsibilities.

Yet even before children formally confirm their membership in the community, most Christian traditions expect that children practice the faith as though they were church members. There is no halfway covenant for the young. With few exceptions (Amish children, for example, don't have to strictly adopt the religio-cultural restrictions of the community before joining the church in their late teens or early twenties) we do not permit them to act or think like anything but church members, even if they aren't officially on the congregational roster.

The question, then, is: Since we expect our children to behave as church members, do we pastor them as church members?

This is not to imply that children are neglected in our churches. They are surrounded by adults. In their early years they have their mothers who teach and

lead them. As they get older, fathers become involved, Sabbath School teachers take time to teach, and in larger churches a youth minister takes charge of nurturing. And with that we content ourselves that we have ministered to our children.

Is the pastor accessible to the children?

But are children cared for by the senior pastor? Frequently there is one figure at the helm, and that is the figure children see most often in the pulpit. Often the pastor may seem to remain aloof. He may be reachable by adults but inaccessible to children.

I remember feeling that way in my childhood. In the little country church where I grew up, where everyone knew everyone else, most of the pastors I remember were images rather than people. They were men in dark suits, with deep voices, who said things from the pulpit I rarely understood, who shook my father's hand while exiting the sanctuary, and perhaps my mother's. If they noticed me at all, it was generally, "So how are you, young man?" Or if my name was attempted, it came out as frequently my brother's as mine. I don't remember ever seeing a pastor in the church basement where children gath-

L O R E N S E I B O L D

ered for Sabbath School classes.

Yet one of the gripping images of my childhood is a visiting speaker who actually leaned down and talked to me. He asked my name and remembered it. He let me ask him a question about his sermon and gave me every indication that it was significant to him. He looked me in the eye and did his best to answer it. It was a small thing, and yet it was one of the building blocks of my own decision to become a minister—to become like that man who just for a moment ministered to me. Another was a pastor who answered my question about archaeology by loaning me a simple book on the topic, and then discussing it briefly with me.

Neither of these men were unusually skillful with the young. They possessed only the typical gifts of the pastors of their day. Neither spent much time with me. But they did, in some small way, minister to me as if I were a real member of the church. And that made all the difference.

I am empathetic with ministers who are not very gifted with children. C. S. Lewis, a gifted writer for children, once admitted that he didn't enjoy their companionship. My storytelling skills are not well developed, and I have some of the inherent stuffiness of the middle-aged professional. I do not easily cut loose and play with childlike abandon, which is a helpful thing when relating to children.

In recent years I have discovered the value of ministering to my church's children as though they are church members. Which, in spirit, if not in formal fact, they are. Let me suggest three reasonable goals, achievable even by those who feel themselves not skilled in meeting the spiritual needs of children.

Show affection for your church's children

Address them by name. Listen to them. Ask simple questions. Add a gentle touch on the shoulder, or a quick, affectionate hug. (When it comes to any touching, use good judgment.) Don't be partial in your appreciation. Nothing causes resentment among parents as

much as the feeling that the pastor is partial to some children over theirs.

Know the names of the children in your church

Statistics say that most of us still pastor churches small enough that that's not impossible. It means a lot to be called by your own name—rather than your brother's.

Spend a little time in each children's Sabbath School every week

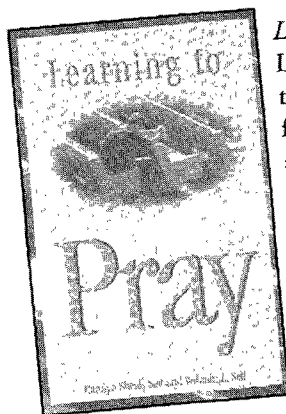
Rarely is more required than to slip in the door, smile and greet the kids. Of course, if you volunteer to tell a story,

you wouldn't be turned down. For me, visiting the kids is perhaps more important than teaching an adult class of my own, as stimulating and enjoyable as I find that. It has other added benefits: I get to see how children's divisions are functioning, and it gives me the chance to meet parents who bring their children to Sabbath School but don't stay for church.

If we pastors expect children to live the lives of church members, then we must minister to them as church members. To do otherwise is to take risks with their salvation that conflict with our goal of winning the world to Christ. ■

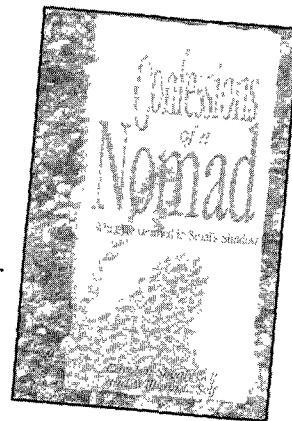
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CHILD-FRIENDLY PASTORING

Children are members of the church. They may not pay tithe, and they might have temper tantrums just when you are making the altar call. But children are the church's future. They are unique, and they need the Savior and His love.



Chantal J. Klingbeil is a full-time homemaker in Lima, Peru.

Jesus had a soft spot for children in His ministry. He risked confrontation to let it be known that His ministry was also for children. When the disciples tried to prevent the children from coming to Him, Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them" (Matt. 19:14, NIV). Children were comfortable around Jesus, and He seems to have found in them comfort and inspiration. Once "He called a little child and had him stand among them. And he said: 'I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven'" (Matt. 18:2, 3, NIV).

A good point of contact between the pastor and the children is the sermon time. However, children generally view sermon time as adult time. We need to help children feel that it is also their time or run the risk of their growing into adolescence and retaining the idea that sermon time is exclusively for adults and time for them to laugh with their peers in the church foyer.

Some churches have tried to involve

the children through a special children's story time during worship service. While the church must be lauded for this, the children's time may actually serve to reinforce the idea that the sermon which follows is a strictly adult affair. If your church has a story time, perhaps you should tell the story yourself as often as possible, rather than inviting someone else to tell it. Coming down from the pulpit to sit with the children on the floor as you tell the story is a good way of telling the kids that they are important to you. They may forget the story, but in years to come they won't forget that "Pastor Thomas always came and sat with us and told us a story."

While one would not wish to water down the message of the Word, it may be a good idea to prepare your sermons with a younger audience in mind. The very best university professors are often ex-schoolteachers. They seem to have brought with them the ability to speak simply in cliché-free language. Rephrasing theological language and ecclesiastical dialect with plain English

CHANTAL J. KLINGBEIL

will breathe new life into your preaching and make it easy for both children and adults.

Many of Jesus' sermons began with simple stories. Jesus spoke about seeds and yeast and pearls and pigs and losing things. People listened to Him. No one can resist listening to well-placed, well-told illustrations. If our sermons are too dry and dusty to keep the ten- to twelve-year-olds' attention, chances are much of the rest of the congregation has also been lost.

Listening aids

Listening is an art that needs developing. In the fast pace of modern communications, kids are bombarded with light, action, and color and don't have too much practice in listening skills. Here are some ideas to help children learn to listen to the sermon while also entertaining them and keeping them quiet during the sermon time.

The picture method. Just before beginning the sermon, announce that the children will be asked to be involved in the sermon. Have deacons distribute sheets of paper and pencils to each child. Then ask the children to draw the key Bible text, or their favorite illustration from the sermon. Announce that all drawings will be collected at the door and will be on display in the church foyer the following week. Children, parents, and others will be eager to see the art display the following week. If a particular picture is good and impressive, it may be worth mentioning up front.

Tracking Bible verses. This method is particularly good in a Bible study type sermon. Ask the children to keep track of all Bible verses mentioned in the sermon. Parents and older siblings may help. At the end of the sermon, collect the papers. Next worship service, thank the children who participated, and give each one of them a bookmark or some small token of appreciation.

Probably one of the most important ways to gain the younger audience's attention is to involve them in the service itself. Some churches have a special children's offering. Children collect the offerings in their hands and bring them

to the front. This lets the children know that they are an important part of the church family.

In some churches a child or young person could also be asked to lead out in the Scripture reading or song service. In these situations make sure the child is prepared to do this and knows that he or she is doing it as part of the experience of worship leadership. Such opportunities assigned during the week or even earlier develop in children a sense of responsibility toward both the church and themselves. They will grow into trustworthy teenagers and adults in the congregation.

After hours

Contact with the children should not be confined to church service time

alone. Giving the children small attentions forms lasting impressions: like shaking each child's hand as he or she leaves the sanctuary, learning and using their names, affirming them for their contribution to the church, calling them at home to offer birthday wishes, and praying for them by name when you visit their homes. Small things go a long way in forming positive attitudes.

Growing up in today's climate isn't easy. Many children, even in our churches, come from broken homes and bear some significant scars. We need to pray that God will help our ministries to become child-friendly, our churches secure, warm, and loving places, that our children may grow "in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men" (Luke 2:52, NIV). ■

Fearing the Pharisee . . .

continued from p. 4

doctrine producing a benevolent action when necessary. Instead it is an all-pervading attitude or worldview that will inevitably by its nature have a far-reaching, positive influence wherever it is lived out. We need to look deep into the heart of this truth and so do our congregations. We tend to be shallow in it. Thus we are predisposed to depreciate and neglect it, turning away from it, trying to accomplish still more by means of judgment and justice alone.

It is by no means strange that God has so much to say about the vast, immeasurable ocean of active forgiveness that is out there, and that it stands at the front gate of rebirth and cleansing and is poured out from there by God Himself. It is preeminently true that the only place where this spirit of forgiveness can be seen in all its glory, along with judgment and justice, is in the magnificent person of Jesus Christ, whom it is our vast privilege to know, to proclaim, and to follow.

Reflecting further on his war experience, Sir Laurens said something else: "I had learnt to fear the Pharisee more than the sinner."² It is the Pharisee, strong in us and strong

in much of our religious heritage, that causes us to oppose or neglect the wonder of true forgiveness in favor of the limited role of mere reason and justice. There is perhaps no other point at which the contrast between Jesus' truth and that of the Pharisees may be drawn more clearly than on the matter of how forgiveness is to be administered among us. It was, after all, the Pharisee who not only rejected the way of forgiveness but placed its truest Source on the cross, thus giving us perhaps the clearest and most fundamental contrast between true and false religion.

We must see clearly that we are not here promoting that old thing called "cheap grace," nor the easy-does-it, peaches and cream gospel, but something transcendent, high and holy, yet at the same time terribly real and down-to-earth. The summons of forgiveness insists, by its nature that we do one of the most difficult things there is for a human being to do. Let's embrace, proclaim, and live in the spirit of forgiveness as it was manifested in Him who is altogether lovely. ■

¹ Laurens van der Post, *Feather Fall* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1994), 68.

² Ibid.



When was the last time you noticed the children—those little beings with wiggling arms, spindly legs, and chatterbox

mouths? Did you notice their eyes, their hair, their soft skin, or the uniqueness of each small face? Did you notice their concerns? Perhaps you pondered their energy and where it comes from. Or perhaps you weren't really seeing much at all . . . being one of those rare folks who can effectively tune out the incessant encroachments into your space that children inevitably bring.

Children are God's beautiful gift to us—and our responsibility to Him. We can learn as much from them as they can from us.

Recently, I spent a week as a spiritual advisor for young children at a summer camp. I had a block of time each morning and evening to encourage these amazing little people to get better acquainted with Jesus. My great, vexing question was, What wisdom could I share that would make a difference in their lives? How could I convey Jesus' love to today's media-entrenched children? Not being a magician, gymnast, ventriloquist, or puppet (and

Taking time to shape the gems

FERYL HARRIS

basically, Nintendo and Sega Genesis ignorant by choice), did I really have what it takes to pull off this assignment?

What do we have to offer our children?

As the week unfolded and I interacted with the children, I realized I do have something worthwhile to offer the children. No, it wasn't wonderful stories, superb object lessons, or charades that made me qualified, though all that helps to get their attention. Nor was it my position as Children's Ministries Director in a local conference office. Instead, I realized I had something special to offer when little Albert came for a hug and the chance to show me the little creature he discovered under the deck. Or when freckle-faced Heather asked if I'd tell a story while the kids were hiding under the gym trying to escape the hot sun. I realized that I had

something when a small boy asked if I would pray that his daddy and mommy would get along better, and when Kris's sticky, Jello-crust hand slipped into mine as we trudged up to a campfire. I had what it took—because what it took was something so simple: a little time.

What I learned from my week at camp was along the lines of what Jesus tried to get through to the adults nearest Him when He said, "Let the little children come to me." In the midst of all He encompassed in that statement, wasn't He also simply saying, "It's all right, they just want some time"?

Talking and listening to children

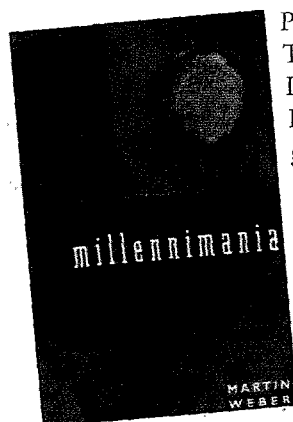
Ask children what worries them. They won't mention anything about electronic games or a lack of toys. Their deeper concerns involve parental problems, feeling unhappy, doing poorly in school, issues that have real meaning to them. They only want the reassurance of a loving parent, a concerned church member, or a friend. They want people who care enough to spend a little undivided time with them. Time! It can make all the difference in the world with children. There are kids everywhere, and we have what it takes to make a difference in their lives: undivided, listening, attentive time, so they can see us as people who care about them and the things that they care about.

We may find it hard to communicate with children. If so, we can start by asking a few simple questions like, "What do you enjoy doing?" or "Why do you enjoy that?" or "Are you good at putting things together?" or "Have you ever seen . . . ?" By simply taking some time and showing some care and interest, we may become a telling influence in the life of a child.

Children are everywhere. Many are hurting and fearful, in need of a loving, caring adult who will actually show them the love of God. But this takes time—just a little that you as an adult, and especially as a pastor can indeed give. ■

Feryl Harris is Children's Ministries Director for the Mountain View Conference in West Virginia.

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CONTEXTUAL HERMENEUTICS

I am always hesitant when asked to define my hermeneutics. If I say “historical-grammatical” I will immediately be grouped with the fundamentalists. If I say “historical-critical” I will be labeled liberal.



Keith Burton, Ph.D., is an associate professor in the department of religion, Oakwood College, Huntsville, Alabama.

These labels are so loaded that none of them takes into account the complexity of the interpretive process.

My approach to hermeneutics seeks solutions by utilizing one or a combination of several methods. In that way I am not limited to any one stricture. It is presumptuous to claim that any one interpretive method is the only valid method to be used when deciphering the meaning of Scripture. It is also inadvisable to reject certain approaches simply because they may have been abused by those who have a low view of inspiration. My hermeneutical approach adapts the necessary tools needed to analyze the various contexts that comprise the interpretive process. With all this in mind, if I were to label my method, I would term it “contextual.”

The contextual approach tries to recognize the Bible’s multifaceted scope. It takes into account that while the Bible is a historical record of God’s interactions and revelations to humankind, it is also relevant for both the present and

the future. Contextual hermeneutics therefore acknowledges that in order to determine the precise relevance of a part of the Bible to a specific present situation it is necessary for the interpreter to evaluate the historical and textual context of the biblical passage. Although this may appear obvious, witness the Waco debacle as an example of ignoring such realities in the text.

In applying the contextual approach, I find it helpful to use four primary contexts: faith, history, literary data, and the contemporary situation.

The faith context

Responsible interpreters have long recognized that no one approaches the Bible without a presupposition of some kind. Whether we approach the Bible from a confessional-experiential or an objective-scientific stance, we all have different encounters with the text as it either informs, encourages, or repulses. The truth is that we approach the text from all kinds of differing perspectives: as men, women, Adventists, Methodists,

racists, ethnic minorities, etc. While various presuppositions will affect the way in which the text is read, it is essential for the interpreter to try to be as neutral as possible so that the text can speak unimpeded.

However, there is one presupposition that is absolutely necessary to the nature and understanding of Scripture and for the Christian interpreter: faith. For the Christian, the Bible is not just another book to be added to the library. The Bible is God's story of His interaction with humanity. The Christian's presupposition is that this Bible is God's Word and its accounts are authentic and reliable.

For me, the Bible is the written revelation of God to humanity. While the complex and diverse nature of the Bible text does not permit me to accept the idea of literary inerrancy, I nevertheless believe strongly that the Bible is a supernaturally based and completely reliable record of God's reality and His interaction with the human race.

Confidence in the reliability of the biblical record is often based on experiences. This has led many Bible readers to reason that since the Bible contains actual accounts of God's supernatural interactions in history, it can also be trusted as a guide for everyday living, and as an accurate predictor of the future. Because the Bible reflects the will of God, the faithful interpreter sees it as a sourcebook of divine guidance in every area of life, whether it be political, social, ecclesiastical, spiritual, or personal.

The historical context

Since the Bible is a historical document, before its teachings can be applied to the Christian's contemporary situation, its writings must first be understood in their original setting or context. For the Old Testament, the historical context is primarily that of the societies and cultures that are associated with the ancient Near East. In terms of salvation history, the historical context

also involves the calling of Israel as Yahweh's special people who were to act as His agents among the nations. This context must inform our reading of the Mosaic civil laws, and our reaction to the seemingly heartless commands from God as He sends the chosen people to conquer and plunder.

The historical context of the New Testament is chiefly the Greco-Roman world, which includes the expressions and traditions of post-Hasmonean Judaism. From the standpoint of salvation history, the New Testament reflects a period where God's special people are comprised of those who view the death of Jesus on Calvary as an indication of the inauguration of the New Age. This context allows us to understand the anticipatory setting of many of the New Testament writings. For example, with reference to the parousia, the authors themselves expected to witness and experience the glory of the second coming of Jesus.

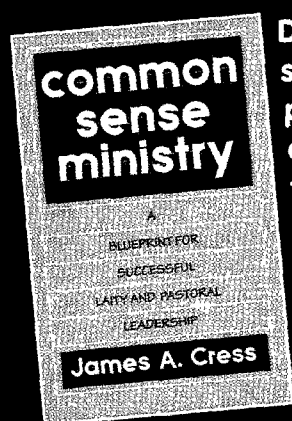
In addition to establishing the religious and socio-political context of the original writings, it is also necessary for the interpreter to reconstruct the original audience situation. This is particularly true for the prophecies of the Old Testament and the letters of the New Testament. An understanding of the situation surrounding the biblical time and circumstances of writing greatly enhances the interpreter's ability to exegete the text.

The literary context

A third context that is essential in the interpretive process is the literary framework. The language of the Bible is an expression of the literary culture surrounding the then contemporary scene in which the biblical writing was done. If one is going to take the interpretation of the biblical text beyond the average, it is necessary to have an understanding of the biblical languages (Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic), and to be prepared to evaluate them in the light of reliable linguistic methodology.

It is also essential to analyze the literary genre of the document under investigation. For biblical literature, the

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macro-structure includes such categories as history, prophecy, poetry, apocalyptic, rhetoric, and epistolary, exemplified by the Pauline letters. The majority of Paul's letters, for instance, are best understood via the lenses of classical rhetoric, since that was the major mode of interpersonal communication in the first century. Similarly, the Gospels, Acts, and Exodus, are best understood as history.

While evaluating the text in its literary context, one also takes into account the micro-units that may include maxims, analogies, parallelism, and other identifiable categories. Only with an understanding of the workings of these micro-units can the meaning of the text in its literary context be more fully derived.

On a more basic level, the semantic, grammatical, and syntactical components of the literature need to be assessed. This process takes into account the regular rules of grammar and the ways in which words function in the sentence. When investigating the text on this level, special attention should be paid to those details because they are indispensable in finding fuller meaning. An example of the value of this level of hermeneutics is seen in Ephesians 2:8 where Paul uses the perfect passive participle to express the fact that we have *already been* saved by grace.

Contemporary context

Fourth, hermeneutical method needs to be informed by the contemporary context. Since the Bible is the Living Word of God, it can and will speak to those who listen. However, before the application of any biblical principle can be made to the contemporary situation, it must first be determined if and how the textual context is analogous to the present situation.

When seeking contemporary meaning for the text, we must seek the historical and literary contexts before we can declare "thus saith the Lord" in a specific contemporary situation. It is not enough merely to scratch the surface of the text or blindly accept another's interpretation. Only when we

have carefully done our spiritual and interpretive homework can the will of the Lord be reliably determined.

Having said this, I must affirm that I recognize that at some point every honest interpreter is forced to face the chilling reality that there is no clear "thus saith the Lord" for every current situation. Another reality that has to be accepted is that just because the Lord has said something in a specific historical context, does not mean that an apparently similar contemporary context will demand the same divine communication. Nonetheless, I believe that the voice of God can be heard if we try our best to shed our presuppositions and political agendas.

Conclusion

To conclude: one must ever remember the complexity of the hermeneutical process and the inadequacy of any one "pet" method. Those of us who have tenaciously clung to an exclusive, particular method and heralded it as sacrosanct ought to acknowledge the limitedness and thus the danger of our presuppositions and allow the text to provide its own parameters. Having said this, some explicit things can be learned

from the contextual principles presented here.

Firstly, since we belong to a church that claims to be built on and directed by the leadings of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God contained in the 66 books of the Bible, we all need to approach the Bible in a context of faith. If we don't believe that the Bible is divinely—as opposed to merely ethically—authoritative, then it loses its ultimate thrust and usefulness among us.

Secondly, we need to understand the historical nature of the Bible and skillfully discern between those biblical mandates that are culturally and historically bound, and others that convey a universal relevance.

Thirdly, we need to remember that the Bible is written in languages and literary genres that were once used in social intercourse. Consequently, the words therein are not from a cryptic lexicon, but can be understood after responsible exegesis.

Finally, when applying our findings to the contemporary context, we need to be willing to accept the results of our search for meaning, even if they go against our most cherished personal opinions. ■

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*Lois H. Dick is a
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In 1900, the average U.S. life expectancy was 47; today it is 75. In ten years it may be 80. Are we heading for 100?

People are not only living longer but are more influential than any other senior generation of the past. Their needs are different; their thought processes tackle different problems. Therefore, the Sabbath School adult class that lumps together everyone over the age of 18 will not minister effectively to retired people.

Senior citizens are not raising families. More than 85 percent of them over age 65 are no longer employed. This presents a vast untapped source of energy and expertise. Many seniors who appear unresponsive are bored. Not everyone looks upon a cruise around the world as the ultimate goal of retirement. The continual menu of never-ending recreation offered seniors soon palls.

Retired people love to learn. Witness the night courses, studies through the mail, and college credits available to older people. In the church, seniors relate more readily to a teacher their age, or near their age, than to a young per-

son. In view of these varied needs, how can we make communication attractive to the seniors?

Here are some suggestions that helped me in my ministry to seniors.

Take the Bible where they are

Study of the Bible need not be restricted to Sabbath School alone within the confines of a church structure. The class may be in a housing project, an apartment development, a retirement home, or a nursing home—anywhere in a neighborhood where seniors are found. Many elderly people who do not drive have to use public transportation. They have no driver to take them to you, and so if you go where they are, they'll appreciate your ministry even more.

Let the Bible address their needs

Seniors have some special needs. Some of them suffer from persistent, troublesome fears. Others may have physical and emotional feelings that they do not know how to cope with. In the case of others, failures and regrets from the past return suddenly to haunt

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them. Seniors often tend to hide great physical suffering with a smile and a gentle manner. When is the last time you saw an elderly person cry or give vent to their emotions? Many have lost that power of expression, and that is in itself something difficult for them. If the study of the Scriptures can focus on these and other special needs, seniors will find a new joy in life, a new sense of meaning in the church.

Stimulate them to learn and find for themselves the feeling of satisfaction that follows. Encourage them to memorize Bible passages. Such memorizing is not just for kids; seniors can get emotional satisfaction from the fact that their minds are alert when they find they can in fact memorize a biblical gem.

Bring fresh motivation for Bible study

Seniors should have more and fresher motivation to attend a Bible class than just "loyalty to the church." A skilled teacher and well-planned lessons can provide such motivation. Some years ago, I taught a class of ladies in their '80s and '90s in a retirement home. About half of them were able to attend their own churches, so I chose lessons that would not sound like a sermon or duplicate what they would study in the church. I visualized lives of famous Christians, using both flannelgraphs and flash cards.

Visual aids for grownups? Why not? "The eyes are 1,000 times more effective than the ears in sweeping up learning," according to one educator. Yet some teachers use talk as their only tool with adults.

We also put memory to good use, often memorizing as many as six verses at a time. Since seniors may have difficulty in retrieving stored information, we also did a lot of reviewing of what we had studied. Not to review is to leave the work half done. I made 8" x 11" flash cards with the Bible reference and the first word printed in large letters. We learned at least a verse a week and reviewed continually. The ladies already knew familiar passages of Scripture that

are often read at memorial services, Communion services, and on holidays, so we added them to our repertoire.

Since seniors have short attention spans, lessons and stories should be short and to the point. Avoid serial stories that continue from week to week. Classes should be limited to 30-40 minutes.

Establish a common language

A common language between teacher and class is a must. With seniors, today's slang would not be appropriate or understandable. Seniors have lovely old-fashioned values and ethics. The era in which they grew up is of great interest to them, the years when memory was strongest. Seniors with a church background may, for example, remember the pioneer missionaries and love to hear stories retold in a modern way with pictures. In one of my classes, no one was blind, but all had hearing impairments of varying degrees. Deafness is even more isolating than blindness. A teacher of seniors must speak loudly, slowly, and clearly without using amplification. Amplification often magnifies noises for those with hearing aids.

Provide something for them to do at home

Each week that I met with one of the groups, I photocopied a mystery question as homework and gave it out at the close of our time together. For example, one question I gave them was: "Was Abraham a Jew?" I listed references in the Bible to look up. We were all amused to discover he was not.

Mystery questions had nothing to do with the lesson; they were chosen to arouse curiosity and encourage the learners to open their Bibles and search. You can make up your own questions, but keep them simple, stimulating, and interesting. One person joined our class each week mainly because she looked forward to this homework.

Keep controversies out of the class

Most of the ladies in my groups come from Christian backgrounds. I keep my teaching nonsectarian and avoid controversy. Old age brings so

many fears and ailments, that I want to be sure, that they know God's grace is more than a theological concept accompanied by an array of debatable fine points. In my group we talked about "grace to help in time of need," and grace to which we may "come boldly."

Make the seniors feel useful

One of the worst fears or feelings of old age is feeling useless. This often leads to depression. Many seniors are lost without work of some kind. The suicide rate for American men is four times higher after retirement than at any other age of their lives. Encourage the seniors in your church to be involved in volunteer work. As of 1999, the American Association for Retired Persons, for example, has 47,000 registered volunteers and 110,000 supported volunteers.

Seniors may share their experience and skills with small children in nurseries or meet other such needs. A letter-writing ministry may be staffed completely by senior volunteers. They may work in the needle arts for missions, cook for church suppers, baby-sit, prepare crafts for busy teachers, be a prayer partner to a new Christian, give financial advice to young married couples, tend a church bookstore, send weekly cards to the absent.

Seniors in a church will feel they "belong" if someone phones them once a week whether they need it or not! Be sure each senior has a listing of phone numbers of all the others, and a preferred time each person would enjoy a phone call from friends.

My ladies still read widely, so we started a library of Christian books, specializing in editions with larger print. We have tried to obtain these volumes from inexpensive sources. In our meetings we work on building our library. Candy, bookmarks, decorated felt cut-outs, pens, pencils, or postcards to write to a friend are all a part of what I bring to such meetings.

What are the rewards for ministering to the elderly? Just being a friend, or being there to listen to them, or to assure them that God cares. ■



Your congregation needs some big deals—events that highlight the presence and ministry of your church.

This concept may offend some individuals who see no justification for the church to use marketing principles. Because some people equate marketing with manipulation, you even might find members who suspect any interaction with unchurched society beyond responding to direct inquiries from potentially-interested individuals.

However, just because marketing strategies have sometimes employed questionable tactics or crass commercialization, the church should not unilaterally reject good opportunities to impact its surrounding society.

For example, the gospels record times when Jesus utilized grand-scale events (big deals) that arrested mass attention. When Jesus fed five thousand, fellowshiped with foreigners, filled fishing boats until they sank, healed helpless cripples on the Sabbath, feasted with Pharisees, or overturned tables in the temple courtyard, He did not shy away from making a big deal out of an event that could have been conducted quietly. In fact, Jesus utilized the very public nature of these occasions to stimulate discussions about his activities and to focus attention on His central mission to seek and to save that which was lost.

Recently, I had the privilege of listening to the young pastoral team in Newfoundland describe their conference-wide emphasis on raising awareness and increasing public participation in the activities of their congregations.

Since the church has long existed in Newfoundland's relatively isolated, island-bound society, you might wonder why heightening community awareness would receive priority. After

Big deals

JAMES A. CRESS

all, logic would conclude that any long-time resident would be aware of the church's location and probably would know someone who is a member.

However, these pastors are excited about the enhanced community interaction, cross-denominational fellowship, and increased attendance which has resulted from their intentional and strategic planning.

What are the "big deals" which they have conducted? Special days to honor police officers or fire fighters in their communities. Cultural events such as concerts, lectures, etc. Inter-denominational thanksgiving services. Their enthusiastic description of their activities gave the following ideas practical life.

Every church can improve its image in the community. Churches in smaller communities can have greater impact on an established society by honoring others in the community who are known by all residents. Special events in larger, urban areas can attract newcomers who otherwise might not choose to attend any church function.

Advance planning is essential. To the extent that you want to include a broad base of community participation, coordinated scheduling and wide discussions provide buy-in. Remember, big-deal events better emphasize joint, interactive participation more than a singular presentation by one group.

Excellence in production. Although available musical or speaking talent may widely vary from community to community, issues of precise timing, smooth transitions, strategic planning, and clear conclusions impact excellence more than any individual superstar performer. Simple programming well executed is far better than complex presentations that stumble along for lack of rehearsal.

Strategic goals are essential. Determine the purpose of your big deal event and stick to that focus. Do not attempt to sneak a different agenda into a program that has been advertised as a community event. Of course you want to evangelize, but it is unfair to announce one thing and present another.

Results are more often long-term than immediate. Enhanced community appreciation for the church's role in society is a more likely goal of big-deal events than immediately accessioning new members. However, remember that inactive members are often revitalized and unchurched individuals first recruited by public events.

Honor local heroes. Everyone enjoys seeing an individual honored for their contribution to local society. A plaque or gift book presented to a community leader makes a greater impact than importing a special guest from afar. Weeks after the event, people will recall and appreciate your congregation for having honored one of their own.

Advertising is a joint venture. If you're inviting the whole community, then solicit participation and sponsorship from local radio stations, newspapers, television channels, and community calendars to tell of the event. Advertise events that other churches are conducting and ask them to feature your events in their bulletins and announcements.

Appropriate follow-through includes providing opportunity for guests to register their attendance and being placed on a mailing list for future community events. However, do not presume that guests who register their attendance at your event are prepared for church recruitment unless they specifically request additional information.

I encourage you to try some of these ideas for your own church and share your results through ShopTalk. ■

BOOK REVIEW

The Compact Guide to the Christian Faith by John Schwarz. Published by BethanyHouse Publishers, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55438 (1998, 1999). (Originally published under the title *Word Alive!*) Paperback. U.S.\$10.99.

The Compact Guide to the Christian Faith discusses a broad reach of topics related to Christian faith: the inspiration and authority of the Bible; the world, life, and ministry of Jesus. Other topics are the Old and New Testaments, the church through history, and a comparison of Christianity and other world religions. The book is for initiated readers attempting to better understand their own faith, as well as the history and meaning behind it. It is also helpful to pastors who are looking for a brief informative reference to topics that are of general interest in contemporary Christian churches. Dr. James W. Sire, senior editor and campus lecturer, InterVarsity Press, says, "Anyone searching for meaning in our confused world will find in this book an excellent introduction to the Bible, to Jesus, and his teachings, to the history of the church, and the relationship of Christianity to other world faiths."

S H O P T A L K

Having retired pastors care for your ministry

The retired pastors in my congregation are helpful to my ministry. Involving them has made my work easier. Their ministry has been beneficial when, as students of the Bible, they have brought church members to understand the Bible more fully. They have encouraged me in aspects of my ministry in which I was not doing well. They have helped me in conducting seminars wherein the ideas they presented were valid and readily accepted by the church.

Help from these pastors in baptismal services has brought revival to old and new members. As we listen to them, they strengthen our faith in the face of the challenges of daily ministry. They may also be a source of vision and inspiration. Their questions may also cause us to keep up with current theological trends. —Douglas Mutanga, dmutanga@stu.hbc.ac.za, via e-mail.

Bringing All the Tithes (a silent, wordless skit)

Here's a simple skit that may be used to encourage conscientious stewardship in the congregation:

The basic scene: An adult (playing the part of a father or mother) sitting at a desk piled high with papers, paying the monthly bills.

Actors: The person at the desk and a variety of small boys and girls with placards hung around their necks with the following expense categories: car payment; house mortgage; utilities; food; gas; tuition; vacation; entertainment; clothes; school supplies; and sports.

Action: One by one the children parade in front of the person at the desk with their hands out for money. Each is given a stash of cash until the placard carrier called "tithes and offerings" comes up. This sign bearer may pop up several times, but each time the person at the desk throws up his or her hands and shrugs indicating that there is nothing left!

The skit ends with two children carrying the banner: "Bring Ye All the Tithes into the Storehouse, that my house may be full"! This may be a good sermon-starter for stewardship month. —Douglas R. Rose, Grand Prairie, Texas.

Church members share their faith from the pulpit

Some years ago I was called to pastor a church that had experienced distressing circumstances surrounding

the sudden departure of two staff who preceded me. This was a challenging opportunity, and I struggled to find ways of reaching beyond these concerns into the personal faith experience of the members of the congregation.

I decided to invite different church members to share their personal faith with the congregation for three to five minutes during the worship service.

I called this portion of the service "Sharing the Faith," making a place for it fairly early in the worship service. What we experienced was nothing short of wonderful.

A man in his '70s shared examples of his life-long involvement in church, including painting the ceiling and doing many odd jobs around the church. He told of the great strength and encouragement he had received from the congregation at the time of his wife's death several years before.

A young woman who had recently moved to our town spoke of her delight in finding such a warm and caring group as our congregation. Our older members were blessed to hear a newcomer speak in glowing terms of her positive experience with us.

These sharing moments were the basis for the recovery of a renewed sense of identity and vision for us as a caring community in Christ. We learned that in spite of ourselves, we had continued to be open to the ministry of the Holy Spirit even during the storms and high seas we had experienced.

Since those early experiences, I have made it a priority to create a "Sharing the Faith" moment in the worship services in which I lead out. This has created many encouraging, humbling, grace-filled, humorous, and poignant moments of sharing that have blessed me and all who have been present.—Rev. Eric Stephanson, Vancouver, Chown Memorial and Chinese United Church, British Columbia, Canada. ■

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A teacher, ministry director, and college president, **Dr. Andrea Luxton** is admired by colleagues and students for her deep understanding of personal spirituality.



A vice-admiral in the U.S. Navy and holding a Ph.D. in Psychology, **Dr. Barry Black** is best known as a chaplain who ministers God's compassion to both midshipmen and the famous.



One of the trusted authorities on pastoral preaching, **Dr. Paul Scott Wilson** is professor of homiletics at Emmanuel College in Toronto and chair of the Pastoral Theology Department at Toronto School of Theology.

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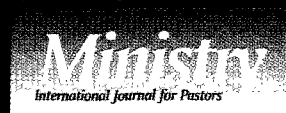
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