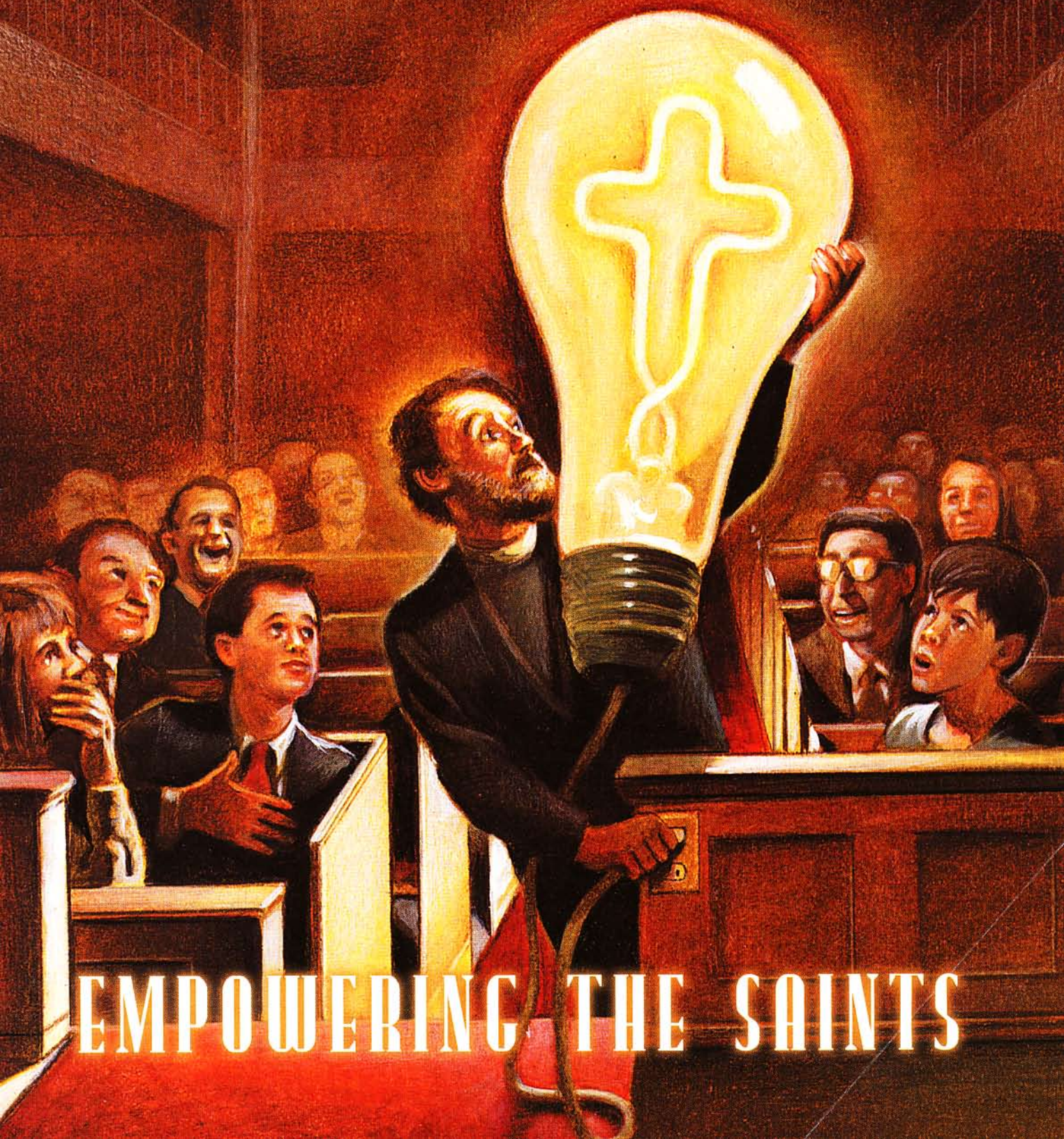


Ministry

International Journal for Pastors

April 2000



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Ministry is the international journal of the Seventh-day Adventist Ministerial Association and has been published since 1928.

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December 1999

Your editorial ("Things that matter," December 1999) mentions a chaplain who wrote to you saying that he is "fed up" with certain aspects of his church. I wish he could join my church. In my church, a ten-year old girl is associate pastor, preaches from the pulpit once a month and down-town on other Sabbaths. Forty-two have been baptized through her ministry. In my church, one member comes to church in jeans and a T-shirt because he has to leave a few minutes early to go to his prison ministry (he even skips lunch). In my church, a 17-year old young man is first elder. In my church, a 15-year-old girl has memorized 90 percent of the Bible already. In my church the Pathfinder Club started a new church in another neighborhood, and a young lady studying medicine uses her "free time" to have evangelistic meetings and start up a new congregation in another neighborhood.

My church hasn't institutionalized anything. In my church, the only thing we're fed up about is still being here. We discuss a lot of things including those things others are fed up about but we've managed to keep our focus on what counts and thrill at every indication of God's use of our meager talents to His glory. My church has to divide its membership and begin new congregations because we don't all fit in the sanctuary on Sabbath mornings and we're not about to build larger or better or fancier.

Is this "church" just a fairytale? Too perfect? Hardly. It's real. It's now on several continents. And my church is a very old church too. Some of its "charter members" once stuck their toes into the Jordan River and saw a miracle. We have fun doing the same,

each in our own way.—Robert Holbrook, World Pathfinder Director, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Silver Spring, Maryland.

● I finished reading the article "Are We Afraid of the Gospel?" with mixed feelings. All Adventists (with rare exceptions, some of which the author apparently managed to locate) wholeheartedly agree that we are saved by grace alone, with no contribution by our obedience, our love, or our works. However, the author clearly overstated his case. Salvation involves a transaction. But the author would apparently exclude from this transaction "my genuine sorrow for personal failures, my repentance, even my growing faith in God's uncompromising grace." Granted, my sorrow, my repentance, my faith are not the means of my salvation. However, the Bible is clear that my sorrow for sin, my repentance, and my faith in God's grace, are preconditions for God forgiving my sins on the basis of His grace!

Further, the author did not balance his emphasis on grace with some word on the importance of obedience, a balance never lacking in Paul. True, obedience contributes nothing to my justification, but it is not irrelevant to my salvation.—Lewis O. Andersen, Th.D., Pastor, Grand Haven and Wright Churches, Michigan Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

● My eyes nearly popped out and my heart skipped a beat when I read Will Eva's refreshing editorial "Things that matter" and then immediately following, Stuart Tyner's challenging and brave article, "Are We Afraid of the Gospel?" Could we as a Church really be beginning to *major in majors*

instead of so often *majoring in minors*? These two contributions were to my mind heaven-sent and in so being, brought together two badly-neglected aspects of genuine Christianity and my beloved Adventist Church. Thank you for being brave enough to confront the reality of the gospel and its genuine fruitage.

As a pastor and professional counselor, I often see and document the baleful effects of a gospel-less or grace-less religion in the lives of our own members—fear and anxiety, no assurance, mere performance orientation—leading to emotional trauma which impacts sadly, not only on the individuals themselves, but on all those connected with them. Such "religion" progressively destroys the soul! But oh the healing that takes place when they begin to understand the wonderful grace of Jesus that Tyner so beautifully highlights in his article. This gospel really is "wonderfully simple" and simply wonderful! How come it ever got so complicated?

Eva's cogitations on the social impact of this gospel are nothing if not radical for us as Adventists. Yet Scripture clearly tells us that we have social obligations, which as Eva well points out will be, according to Jesus, the basis of judgment! (Matt. 25:31-46). Generally speaking, we seem to have done little on a local and individual basis to endeavor to fulfil this injunction. It seems paradoxical then that funding for this ministry is such low priority in most local churches. Sending donations to ADRA is, of course, necessary and commendable, but it is not really what the above texts (and similar ones) are all about. We can give to these more institutional ministries, using such contributions to

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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.



M*inistry* is not just a journal; it's a continual proclamation of who we are, what we believe, and what we ought to

do as we follow the footsteps of Him who "came preaching the kingdom of God" and "who came not to be ministered unto, but to minister." But the power and effectiveness of that proclamation can be maintained only by periodic self-assessment and dynamic planning to meet the needs of a constituency that circles the globe and crosses every cultural frontier.

An opportunity for such assessment and planning presented itself soon after the 1995 General Conference session, when *Ministry* entered a new era. With a reduced staff, with electronic technology staring at our novice faces, and with production targets competing with budgetary constraints, our staff was challenged to keep the journal rolling at its optimum quality as a professional tool for the clergy.

No easy task. But early in the process, we had the guidance of James Cress, the Ministerial Association secretary of the General Conference. Where others could see stones, Jim could envision a cathedral. A visionary by nature, Jim motivated the *Ministry* staff that they can dare the new situation and enlarge the journal's ministry without sacrificing quality or straining the budget.

I want to share with you three such enlargements, each showing how a spirit of teachableness and team work can accomplish what seems difficult.

The Preach project

One day Jim came into my office and gently asked if, in addition to my editorial assignments, I could manage a PREACH (Project Reaching Every

Teachable spirit, teamwork, and Ministry

JULIA NORCOTT

Active Clergy Home) project. The project involved mailing 35,000 letters, each one addressed by hand. With no budget, but with much prayer, we started recruiting volunteers. One of the first volunteers was Christy, a third-year college student. She was taking a semester off to decide on her career options. When Christy Medvee Meier first came to *Ministry*, she had no work experience, except for an occasional baby-sitting job. Though she could type and knew a bit about the word processing program *Ministry* used, office work and deadlines were new to her. But she had what really counts in life: a teachable spirit, a willingness to learn, and team work. Armed with such assets, Christy took in everything around her; she listened, observed, and soon became extremely competent in using the computer and doing her job well. After a few weeks, she joined *Ministry* as a full-time editorial assistant, and stayed with us for the next ten months until school started. Christy was teachable, and she was a blessing to our ministry.

In-house management

Then came a second challenge. Up until that time *Ministry* had outsourced many of its functions—circulation and subscription management, invoicing, layout completion, marketing process to our advertisers, etc. Why not absorb all these in the editorial office and save, suggested Jim Cress. He was con-

vinced it was possible. With his encouragement we began the process. At first I was scared. I had nightmares of having one huge unmanageable mess. But I was willing to learn, to study the techniques needed for the new challenge, to be teachable. I scheduled many conferences with the General Conference computer specialists. I jotted down the work involved, the data needed, and the outputs desired. The specialists showed how it could be done. A teachable spirit and team work can help solve most problems.

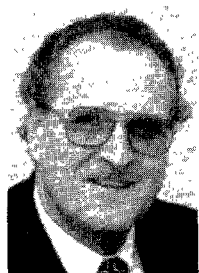
As we began plans for these new developments, Jeannette Calbi agreed to work with us as an office assistant, and be responsible for circulation, subscriptions, billing, and numerous other responsibilities. Jeanette had prior experience in accounting, but no experience of the kind the new position demanded. However, Jeannette had a mind to learn, a willingness to cross new frontiers, a spirit to work with the team. She began cleaning lists and making hundreds of address corrections. On one list alone, Jeannette updated more than 4,000 incorrect names and addresses. Not exactly a picnic of a job, but she saved *Ministry* thousands of dollars in printing, mailing, and return fees—not to mention the good will of honoring the requests of subscribers.

A third challenge was the creation of an efficient system to keep track of manuscripts. To do this, we decided to use Access as a database. Today, our manuscript tracking system has all of the articles printed in *Ministry* beginning with the first issue in 1928. The articles can be retrieved by author, title, subject, and date printed. Right now we are in the process of fine tuning this database. We plan to have this program available in the next few months so that our readers can access it through printed form, or

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EMPOWERING THE SAINTS FOR SERVICE AND MINISTRY

Empowerment is a popular buzzword used in business and management circles these days.



*Loren L. Fenton,
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Adventist churches.*

Business leaders face the ever-daunting challenge of inspiring their employees to maximize production and enhance the company's bottom line. Many wise managers have discovered that their success is dramatically increased when they empower the people closest to a task with (1) broad, autonomous decision-making authority, (2) sufficient resources, and (3) all the appropriate training needed to do the work. Business firms founded and operated on these kinds of principles are creating shockwaves of productive change in the world of commerce.¹

Although the church is by no means a business per se, church leaders can learn much from the experience of successful business operations. The single most difficult task confronting a local church pastor is to put the members to work in an effective, meaningful ministry. The purpose of this article is to explore how that can be done in such a way that members are inspired and empowered for a lifetime of service and ministry.

All believers are priests

Historically, evangelism, witnessing, and giving Bible studies have been the focus of "putting the members to work." In recent decades, a spiritual gifts-based ministry has become popular. NET events and witnessing by videotape are currently in vogue, allowing skilled professional evangelists to do the preaching via projector and VCR. But in spite of promotions *ad infinitum*, worldwide satellite seminars, "how to" clinics, classes, and impassioned calls for commitment, the laity has yet to take up the gospel torch *en masse* for a last-day Pentecost. The question must be asked, Why are we still languishing in the doldrums of lukewarm Laodicea? Could it be that we preach but not really practice the doctrine that all believers are the priests of God? Are we perhaps unwittingly obstructing the work that God would do through His church by actually disempowering members instead of empowering them for service? What would happen if we could find a way to release

the power of the laity, the true priests of the New Testament of grace, instead of trying to control it? To accomplish this it is necessary for us to radically change our way of thinking about ministry in general, and church life in particular. In this article I am writing specifically about the internal relationships within a local congregation, and our need to release the necessary components of empowerment back to the people.

As Protestants, we believe that every member is a priest of God, a dispenser of grace to a world filled with ungrace and towering need. This is a key biblical concept. At Mt. Sinai God declares to Moses and the nation of Israel, “ ‘Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation’ ” (Exod. 19:5b-6a, NIV). In the New Testament, John proclaims that Jesus “has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father” (Rev. 1:6, NIV), and the apostle Peter, writing to God’s elect scattered throughout the world, says, “You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood . . .” (1 Peter 2:9, NIV).

The “priesthood of all believers” doctrine taught by Martin Luther and other founders of Protestantism focused primarily on the right of every individual to confidently approach God’s throne of grace “so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need” (Heb. 4:16, NIV). This Reformation doctrine was indispensable to the success of the movement. Sweeping away the medieval system of lay bondage to professional priests and prelates, the message of individual spiritual freedom fueled a gospel fire that could not be quenched. Through the centuries since the beginning of the Reformation, the “priesthood of all believers” has remained a cornerstone in the belief structure of all Protestant churches, and continues as such today.

The neglected side of the priestly function

Little emphasis, however, has been given to the other side of priestly function. A priest also dispenses God’s gifts to the people. The New Testament priest-

hood makes every believer everywhere into a primary delivery conduit, anointed by the Holy Spirit to dispel the darkness of the world through living God’s love in service to others and in ministry to their needs. A church is composed of two or more believers (New Testament priests) who assemble themselves into a unified body for worship, fellowship, ministry, evangelism, and discipleship.²

In the early 1960s, a Quaker named Elton Trueblood described the church as “the company of the committed” in a

In this model,
the entire church membership
is made up of ministers whose
primary focus in life is service
to the needs of others out on
the front lines of daily living.
The pastor’s role is to be a
coach or team leader and a
minister for the ministers.

book published under that title.³ In this landmark book, Trueblood developed the concept that every Christian is called to a vocation of witnessing for Christ. The believer’s primary calling is to ministry and service in behalf of the waiting world, for the purpose of bearing witness to the saving power and grace of God. The church, Trueblood contended, is thus a gathering, or fellowship, of ministers. In a later book, *The Incendiary Fellowship*, Trueblood develops the idea further.⁴ Trueblood’s view of the church is that it is a society of ministers working from a base, going out into the world to serve the needs they find there, and

returning periodically to the base for renewal and rest.

The elements of the church’s power

The question we are faced with is how to create and nurture an empowering church environment where members are energized for ministry and pastors can fulfill their biblically mandated role as equippers and coaches, as Ephesians 4:12 describes. Before this question can be answered, however, we first need to understand the nature of power itself, and what constitutes true empowerment.

Ultimately, all power comes from God, the Creator. In the creation of the universe, and more specifically our planet, God imbued the elements with power to function according to His design. “He spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm” (Ps. 33:9, NIV). By the same creative power He filled the earth with life in all its many forms. He defined each “kind” by placing unique powers within them to act in distinct, definable, and predictable ways. In His crowning act of Creation, to a limited degree, God gave human beings the Godlike power to give other people power. He empowered us to empower others.

Three dimensions of empowerment can be identified: (1) the granting of authority; (2) providing resources and raw materials; and (3) giving the education and training necessary to use the authority and resources properly and effectively.

First, to “empower” means to grant decision-making, problem-solving authority to the holders (stewards) of responsibility. Jesus spoke of this kind of empowerment when He said to His disciples, “All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth” (Matt. 28:18). The NIV translates the word “power” in this text as “authority.” It is the Greek word *exousia*. People placed in positions of responsibility, but who have no authority to make decisions or execute plans are powerless puppets, only acting out someone else’s agenda. Nothing is more pitiful, or more frustrating, than to have straw men and women filling church of-

fices but afraid to move without first getting permission from some authoritarian person or board who holds the reins of power. Effective, empowered ministry requires the freedom and authority to make major decisions relative to the conduct and success of the ministry. True empowerment grants authority equal to the responsibility.

Second, to "empower" also means to provide adequate resources for the work. Raw materials are essential to empowerment and success. Workers who run out of spare parts on an assembly line are forced to shut down production. They have to have the right supplies or they simply cannot do the job expected of them.

The story of the Israelites enslaved by the Egyptians is an example of this. An irritated Pharaoh instructed his foremen, "You are no longer to supply the people with straw for making bricks; let them go and gather their own straw. But require them to make the same number of bricks as before; don't reduce the quota" (Exod. 5:7, 8, NIV). The heart-

less demands of Pharaoh created an intolerable condition for the Israelite slaves, calculated to distract them from their desire to worship their God. The effect, however, was not what Pharaoh expected or wanted. His rash requirement stirred up even greater resistance and rebellion against his rule in the hearts of all the Israelites. The result was the greatest mass labor walkout in history.

In stark contrast to Pharaoh's treatment of the Israelites, the empowerment received by the disciples of Jesus on the Day of Pentecost was full and complete. On the Mount of Ascension, Jesus told the disciples, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8, NIV). The word *dunamis* is used here to convey the meaning of dynamic, explosive, earth-moving power. The implication in this promise is that the Holy Spirit will supply whatever it takes to accomplish the goal of carrying the gospel message to all the world. The second chapter of Acts

describes the fulfillment of this promise. The disciples were given all the resources necessary to accomplish that purpose. They were empowered by the Holy Spirit.

A third aspect of "empowerment" is the provision of education and training for a task at hand. Popular wisdom accepts the maxim that "knowledge is power." Authority in control of resources but devoid of knowledge is either totally powerless or totally dangerous. God says through the prophet Hosea, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge; because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee" (Hosea 4:6).

On the other hand, authority supplied with resources and endowed with knowledge can accomplish anything. King Solomon declared, "By wisdom the Lord laid the earth's foundations, by understanding he set the heavens in place; by his knowledge the deeps were divided, and the clouds let drop the dew" (Prov. 3:19, 20, NIV). It was God's knowledge that enabled Him to create the earth. In human endeavors, it is the presence of knowledge that enables people with au-

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thority to make effective use of whatever resources are at their disposal.

Thus, true empowerment for church members means giving them whatever Authority, Resources, and Knowledge (the ARK of empowerment) is needed for the job they are asked to perform. If there is not enough money in the budget to cover the costs of a project, give them permission to raise it. To empower the saints for service and ministry means to support them in every way possible, including staying out of their way so they can work effectively without interference or micro-management from above. A good leader-coach doesn't play the game for the team on the field. Instead the players are invested with whatever they need to reach the goal. A good pastor-coach must be a person of integrity, vision, and personal spirituality, someone who lives by the deep values of a character ethic. Living and working from a principle-based philosophy creates authenticity and fosters trust.

The crucial role of trust

The simple truth is that trust is the single most important element affecting the entire process of empowerment for every-member ministry. When doubt and distrust prevail through domineering attitudes, then discouragement, discord and entrenchment soon follow. The weeds of fear and protectionism choke out the Christian graces of love, acceptance, and forgiveness. As trust dies the church dies. If the church is to revive and survive, trust must be revived and restored. Trust is an absolute necessity for organizational life and health.

Trust cannot be created, it can only be cultivated. Trust flows from trustworthiness and reliability. An atmosphere of trust within a church will thrive as pastors and other church leaders cultivate the principles of empowering ministry, and also show themselves to be trustworthy and reliable. Trust is multiplied by trust. Within a networking, member-empowering church, all information related to whatever ministry of the moment must be shared with everyone involved in that ministry. The empowerment process moves forward driven by

the engine of trust, fueled by openness. It allows unrestricted access by all to all information relevant to the mission.

Many church members truly want to make a difference. God has inspired them with genuinely worthwhile ideas, and has given them wisdom to make right decisions. When church members see that they can actually contribute to deciding the focus of ministry they respond with enthusiasm. The people who are actually doing the work usually have the most direct knowledge of the needs and challenges they face. They must be given the freedom to meet those needs with their own vision. When teamed up with other member-ministers who have similar interests and passions, the common church members work tirelessly for the cause.

The visionary, empowering pastor

There is need, however, to bind the church members together in a common vision of purpose. Michael C. Armour and Don Browning, in a book written to address the problem of unifying congregations filled with people who all have different ways of thinking, put it this way:

"Because an empowerment model, by its very nature, disperses decision making, the absence of a uniting vision invites every ministry to go its own way. Like Israel in the days of the judges, everyone does what is right in his or her own sight (Judges 21:25). The result was chaos and anarchy in Israel. The same thing will happen in the church."⁵

Here is where a praying, visionary pastor, or other local church leader, becomes indispensable in the empowerment process. It is their calling to lead the congregation, perhaps steeped in local as well as denominational tradition, through the process of change so that the church becomes a robust, permission-giving body. This ministry calls for dedication, vision, patience, understanding, love, and abundant grace. The pastor must first clearly understand the path the church needs to follow, and then present a clarion call, a blinding vision of what can be. Inspiration gained through personal Bible study, prayer, and wide reading must fire the soul of the church

leader, who then can touch the lives of the people in the congregation.

True empowerment comes from God. Nevertheless, even as the life force God gave to Adam continues to flow through generation after generation of human beings, so the ability to empower other people with authority, resources, and knowledge also flows through generation after generation of believers. The challenge of leading congregations to become centers of empowerment for individual members and ministry teams is a calling worthy of a lifetime. To reach this divine purpose, God empowers pastors to release the energy He has given to the saints for ministry and service. ■

¹ For example, see Peter M. Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art & Practice of The Learning Organization* (New York: Doubleday Publishers, 1990); and James A. Belasco and Ralph C. Stayer, *Flight of the Buffalo: Soaring to Excellence, Learning to Let Employees Lead* (New York: Warner Books, Inc., Publishers, 1993).

² These five arenas of church life are explored in depth by Rick Warren in *The Purpose Driven Church: Growth Without Compromising Your Message and Mission* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995).

³ Elton Trueblood, *The Company of the Committed: A Manual of Action for Every Christian* (San Francisco, Calif.: Harper & Row Publishers, 1961; Harper's Paperback, 1980).

⁴ Trueblood, *The Incendiary Fellowship: How the Church Can Be Set Aflame Today as It Was in the First Century of Christianity* (San Francisco, Calif.: Harper & Row Publishers, 1967; Harper's Paperback, 1978), 39.

⁵ Armour, Michael C., and Don Browning, *Systems-Sensitive Leadership: Empowering Diversity Without Polarizing the Church* (Joplin, Mo.: College Press Publishing Company, 1995).

Letters

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escape our individual responsibility and salve our troubled consciences. Dr. Carrol Osburn zeroed in on the real issue, I think, when he stated that "the message of Jesus was given to teach us how to walk the cobblestone streets, not the streets of gold."

I am simple enough to believe that when the energy of the gospel of God's love and grace is effectively shared in our churches, it will produce genuine care for our fellow humans, whatever their needs may be. In some such situations we may not be able to stem the power-surge! And isn't that what is missing in our Western church life?—Pastor Peter Raymer, Brisbane, Australia. ■

Ministers • Spouses • Local Church Elders PKs • Clergy of All Denominations

Orchestra Update

The World Ministers' Council Orchestra will be an important part of each of the four evening meetings in Toronto, Canada, Sunday, June 25 through Wednesday, June 28. There are still vacancies in the orchestra.

To be part of the orchestra:

1. Play one of the following instruments competently, with a good capacity to sight-read music graded between easy and moderately difficult (violin, viola, cello, bass, clarinet, flute, oboe, alto sax, tenor sax, trumpet, trombone, French horn, percussion).
2. Make a commitment to attend rehearsals, which are scheduled in between council seminars and the evening program. Musicians will have supper provided.
3. Contact one of the following people with details on your e-mail, postal address, and phone and fax numbers. Mention the instrument you play and your level of experience.



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INTEGRITY ON TRIAL:

A case study of Job

Job's suffering is no figment or fantasy. It is brutal reality. Yet when such suffering visits him, Job humbly submits to God and acknowledges Him to be supreme (1:20-22).



Lael Caesar, Ph.D., is associate professor of religion, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.

But Job was by no means an unemotional pawn in the altercation between God and Satan. He rips his clothing. He scrapes his scalp. He sits in dust. His is the story of misery and shame.

Job's friends come to commiserate with him. The verbal battle between these friends and Job rages through 28 chapters of claim and contradiction, logic and invective, appeal and insult. The friends contend, among other things, for the following seven inter-related convictions: (1) that sin brings proportionate suffering in this life (4:7, 8); (2) that suffering is a proof of guilt (8:4; 18:7, 8); (3) that Job, as a sufferer, must be guilty of wrongdoing (22:5-10); (4) that the good prosper in this life (8:20-22); (5) that prosperity proves goodness and consequent divine approval (22:21, 30); (6) that God is both just and supreme, and, as such, not to be questioned (11:7-9); and (7) that rather than resist God and aggravate his already lamentable situation, Job should repent of his sin and seek God's grace and mercy (11:13-16; 22:21-30).

Job, a theodicy?

Scholars have generally employed these arguments to argue that the book

of Job is a form of theodicy—vindication of the justice and goodness of God in spite of the presence of evil. But is the book a theodicy?

Job finds the arguments of his friends repugnant chiefly because of their implications for him as an individual. For if they are true, then he, a sufferer, must be wicked. He responds by accusing his friends of betrayal and treachery (6:15-20, 27), by hurling scandalous charges in the face of God (9:22-24; 16:11ff; 19:6ff), by insisting upon an audience with Him (13:3), and scoffing at the notion of the wicked being deprived (16:7-15).

With Job's protracted oath (chapter 31) the fierce storm of words dies away to silence. Job is entrenched in self-righteousness (32:1) and his friends are enveloped in righteous indignation. They think they have spoken for God and have striven to make Him look good. Job cries out: "God knows that I am righteous. Let Him damn me if I am not." Will God speak once and for all, and settle this matter?

Elihu will not let us find out. He must speak for God. He makes an articulate contribution to the theological debate, though most of his arguments

are quite common: God chastens men. His supremacy is unquestionable (34:10-30, 33); repentance brings restoration, otherwise damnation follows (36:7-12).

It is not clear whether Elihu completes his speech, or whether God interrupts him. But God's entry is sudden, stormy, aggressive, insurgent, and is directed exclusively at Job: "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Now gird up your loins like a man, and I will ask you, and you instruct me!" (38:2, 3, NAS). God then leads Job on a slow tour of darkness and light, morning and night, birds and beasts, ice and rain, till Job forgets his pain and humbly confesses that he has found consolation in this revelation of Deity (42:2-6).

This done, God turns from Job to his friends. He is angry. Why should God be so angry? How can He feel driven to a threat that reduces its objects to such disgrace? After all Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar are on God's side. They have fought for Him against the hot language

of their intemperate friend. They have plead with Job to return to God (5:8; 11:13-16; 22:21-30). What kind of theodicy is this where God is angry at those who defend His good name?

Understanding God's anger provides an explanation for the book of Job which has been largely overlooked. For the value of the book resides in more than its celebrated literary mastery. In it God speaks. His interests are beyond those of mere story, poetry, rhetoric, and psychology. His affirmation of Job is ultimately an affirmation of something else.

That something else, I suggest, is integrity, not theodicy.

Integrity, the book's major theme

Behind the theodicy of the quality of divine justice—the contribution most often attributed to the story of Job—is actually the question of divine integrity. And the book of Job shows its concern with integrity. But though divine integrity is the primary focus, it is not unfair to see Job as an individual

who offers the most powerful representation of this virtue.

We meet him, in 1:1, as blameless and upright, God-fearing and standing clear of evil. Because of his integrity, he becomes the subject of a trial (1:13). The entire book deals with a test of Job's integrity. In 1:8 God launches His challenge to Satan. The challenge issues in the test of Job's character. Not until 42:10 does the test end, whereupon God restores his fortunes. It thus appears that the book is designed to address the issue of Job's integrity.

The Hebrew adjective translated "perfect" in 1:1, derives from *tamam*, used in more than two hundred forms in the Old Testament. It speaks of "that which is complete, blameless, just, honest, perfect, peaceful, etc.; hence an attribute or an attitude that reflects genuineness and reliability."¹ The adjective *tam*, often understood as describing Job's perfection, is limited in its biblical usage but has an ample range and meaning. Seven of its fifteen biblical occurrences appear in Job.² The word

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means blameless, innocent, sincere, quiet, peaceful, pious, pure, or healthy.³ Accompanying applications include the “perfect” lover in Song of Solomon (5:2, and 6:9) and Jacob, “a plain man, dwelling in tents” (Gen. 25:27).

Two aspects of general usage help us better understand *tam*. One is an idealistic portrait of a woman whom Solomon contemplates through the eyes of love and declares perfect (Song of Solomon 4:1-5, 12-15, and 7:1-9). Second, there is the frequent combination of *tam* with *yashar*.

Five of the fifteen uses of *tam* are accompanied by *yashar* (Job 1:1; 1:8; 2:3; Ps. 37:37; Prov. 29:10). *Yashar* means “straight, level, right, just, righteous.”⁴ God created man “*yashar*” (Eccl. 7:29). He Himself is “*yashar*,” since “there is no unrighteousness in Him” (Ps. 92:15). Because *tam* is not used of God, this usage in parallelism with *yashar*, assumes greater interpretive significance.

Three of the combinations of *tam* and *yashar* describe Job (1:1, 8; 2:3). And two of these flow from God’s own pride in His servant (1:8; 2:3).

Tam, then, is virtue such as God treasures—virtue so dear, that its possession makes the possessor God’s exhibit to the universe. If Job is *tam*, it is not because he is sinless. For in the end he repents of his intemperate spirit (Job 42:6).

To be *tam*, as Job is described, is to commit singlemindedly to godliness and godlikeness. In the book of Job, *tam* is never applied to anyone except Job because no one else exhibits such pure and simple commitment to God. An examination of the friends’ behavior bears out this point.

Eliphaz: Compromised by a spectre

Eliphaz’s first speech is one of the most mystical of the entire book. In it he reports a visit from a spirit which informs him that God ““puts no trust even in His servants; and against His angels He charges error. How much more those who dwell in houses of clay . . . !”” (4:18, 19, NAS). Coming as it does at the very beginning of the friends’ response to Job’s plight, and set in context of the dia-

logue between God and Satan, this description of Eliphaz’s alleged night visitor cannot be taken without question. In view of God’s expressed confidence in Job (1:8; 2:3), Eliphaz’s position is unacceptable. Eliphaz repeats the same theory in his second speech: “Behold, He [God] puts no trust in His holy ones, and the heavens are not pure in His sight; How much less one who is detestable and corrupt . . . !” (15:15, 16, NAS).

Some commentators sidestep the issue of the truthfulness or falsehood of Eliphaz’s claim to a supernatural encounter. Edouard Dhorme, following Thomas Aquinas, finds it “needless to ask whether

Though divine integrity is the primary focus, it is not unfair to see Job as an individual who offers the most powerful representation of this virtue.

he [Eliphaz] really experienced this vision or whether he imagines it for the purposes of his argument.”⁵ Accepting arguments based on falsehood on the same level as those based on fact reduces the book’s raw realities of physical and mental anguish to an inconsequential game of philosophy.

But the book of Job is not a game. It is an intense struggle between God and Satan, between good and evil. And Eliphaz cannot be dismissed lightly. Whether or not he has been visited at night, the gist of his argument is wrong. When Eliphaz speaks, and when Bildad and Zophar echo him, they are under the influence of the one who brought the charges against Job’s integrity to begin with. When men pay heed to spirits that glide past their faces (Job 4:15,

RSV) and attribute the message to God we should not wonder that God is angry. When Eliphaz questions the man of integrity, the man of God’s confidence, then God does well to be angry.

Job’s integrity and his friends

Bildad’s final speech insists on the same position taught to Eliphaz by the night visitor: “‘If even the moon has no brightness and the stars are not pure in His sight, How much less man, *that* maggot, and the son of man, *that* worm!’” (25:5, 6, NAS). Thus Job’s friends significantly ground their opposition to him in a claim that is untrue. They cannot trust him because God does not trust any of His creatures. He puts no confidence in them.

But God does. He has let the council of heaven and the forces of evil publicly know that His confidence is in Job. It is this declaration that gives rise to the drama of the book. The story evolves from a confrontation between God and Satan. Satan seeks to prove God wrong by launching vicious attacks against an innocent man. Now, through the agency of friends, Satan continues his assault on Job, attempting to destroy him and his integrity, thus proving his original argument against God. This adversary will stop at nothing.

When decimating loss, poverty, the demise of his family, broken health, and the exasperation of a frustrated spouse all fail to accomplish his nefarious purposes, the adversary resorts to revelation. Whether actual or fabricated by Eliphaz, his is a “revelation” bolstering Satan’s stance. It teaches a lie about God even while it comes as revelation. Eliphaz experiences it, and recounts it to all. Zophar and Bildad hear it and accept it. And when men invoke the supernatural to prove that God is cynical as well as vicious, anxious to dispense punishment and destruction; when human beings take the name of God, who is love, in order to justify the callous destruction of those God deems faithful, then we should not be surprised that God is angry.

Only Job does not accept Eliphaz’s revelation: “‘Oh that I knew where I might find Him, that I might come to His

seat! I would present *my* case before Him and fill my mouth with arguments. I would learn the words *which* He would answer, and perceive what He would say to me. Would He contend with me by the greatness of *His* power? No, surely He would pay attention to me. There the upright would reason with Him; and I would be delivered forever from my Judge” (23:3-7, NAS).

Job’s is an astonishing faith. Doubts assail, and he seems to waver: “[God] is not a man as I am that I may answer Him; that we may go to court together” (9:32, NAS). And Zophar responds: “‘Would that God might speak, and open His lips against you,’ ” (11:5, NAS), then you would know how much more punishment you actually deserve (verse 6). It does not matter much that this violates the precise formulas of punishment in proportion to transgression. Zophar wants Job to understand and concede how wicked he is. But Job will not concede: “‘And as for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last He will take His stand on the earth. Even after my skin is destroyed, yet from my flesh I shall see God; Whom I myself shall behold, and whom my eyes shall see and not another’ ” (19:25-27, NAS).

It is an awful journey. One Job must take absolutely alone.

Integrity and Jesus

No human experience so nearly parallels the passage of the son of God into the chasm of eternal separation from God as does the story of Job. Ellen White’s explanation of the purpose of the book of Job offers an astonishing insight. “It was generally believed by the Jews that sin is punished in this life. . . . Satan, the author of sin and all its results, had led men to look upon disease and death as proceeding from God, as punishment arbitrarily inflicted on account of sin. . . . Thus the way was prepared for the Jews to reject Jesus. He who ‘hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows’ was looked upon by the Jews as ‘stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted;’ and they hid their faces from Him. Isa. 53:4, 3. God had given a lesson designed to prevent this. The history

of Job had shown that suffering is inflicted by Satan, and is overruled by God for purposes of mercy. But Israel did not understand the lesson. The same error for which God had reproved the friends of Job was repeated by the Jews in their rejection of Christ.”⁶

What Israel did not understand is that there are people of integrity who suffer innocently. In Job’s case, as later with Jesus, they become, for the sake of their goodness, the special object of Satan’s hatred and abuse. But, in the end, the mercy of God delivers them from the obliteration to which Satan wills them, so that they may shine as His stars for ever.

We see another comparison between Job and Jesus in that cry of anguish from the cross: “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Matt. 27:46, NAS). Job’s anguished pleas and Christ’s desperate cry affirm trembling but unshakeable faith. Job’s search for his God and the cry from the cross both say the same thing. Job and Jesus know, by faith alone, that at the bottomless depths of their pit of dark despair, there is God and He is still their God.

Integrity and me: the final crisis

Soon the mystifying combination of false opinion, of convincing yet dis-

torted pictures of God, combined with fervent action in His name, will produce the “‘time of trouble’ such as never has been” (Daniel 12:1, RSV). This will recreate the scenario of the book of Job. The Bible alerts us that, just as with Eliphaz, there will be those who will once again find their support in the activities of the spirits (Rev. 13:13, 14). When that time comes, those of unswerving integrity will hear again the taunts of Job’s friends: “‘Is there any pleasure to the Almighty if you are righteous, or profit if you make your ways perfect?’ ” (Job 22:3, NAS). Above the jibes of cynics, God calls out: “Yes, there is!” But for now He looks for people who will exhibit the effects of His power and grace to the whole onlooking universe. God looks for people who display integrity like that of Job. ■

¹ J. P. J. Olivier, in Willem A. VanGemeren, ed., *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 4:306-308, 9:462, 306.

² Gen. 25:27; Ex. 26:24, 29; Job 1:1, 8; 2:3; 8:20; 9:20, 21, 22; Song of Solomon 5:2; 6:9. Ps. 37:37; 64:4; Prov. 29:10.

³ Olivier, *ibid.*

⁴ Hannes Olivier, in Willem A. VanGemeren, ed., *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 2:563-568, #3837; 563.

⁵ Edouard Dhorme, *A Commentary on the Book of Job*, trans. H. H. Rowley, with a preface by Francis I. Andersen, (Nashville, Tenn.: Nelson, 1984), 49, citing Aquinas who states this view in St. Thomas Aquinas, *The Literal Exposition on Job*, trans. Anthony Damico, with an interpretive essay and notes by Martin D. Yaffe, *Classics in Religious Studies*, 7, (Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1989), 118.

⁶ Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1940), 471.

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NURTURING AND PRESERVING NEW CONVERTS

Child abuse! Child neglect! Just the mention of this type of abuse makes us cringe! But what about the neglect and abuse of newborn babes in Christ?



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North Pacific Union.*

That is, those who have come into the church through evangelistic meetings or personal Bible Studies. It is tragic to bring new converts into the church only to see them “die” shortly thereafter because we have neglected them. God has called these new members to His family, and as a spiritual family we need to welcome, nurture, and support them.

I’ve been privileged to do evangelism as a church pastor and as a full-time evangelist. Looking from both vantage points I’ve noticed over and over again that if time, planning, and money are put into the follow-up as well as the evangelistic meetings, many more new converts in Christ would be preserved to become strong Christians and productive disciples of Christ.

So much of our time, energy, and money is needed for the pre-work and the evangelistic series itself that the matter of putting in place resources for follow-up and nurture is usually sadly neglected. For this and other reasons,

when designing an effective follow-up plan, it is vital that the church understand that this work is largely the responsibility of each individual member. It is not just the work of the evangelist and the pastor.

The pastor and evangelist are the “obstetricians.” They help in the “delivery” process. The church members are the “pediatricians,” and the church is the “nursery” where the new babes are to receive all the tender, loving care possible!

Here are seven keys to a successful follow-up program:

Set up small group ministries

Start small groups within the church at least six months before evangelistic meetings begin. Groups meet preferably in members’ homes once a week. Choose a night of the week which doesn’t conflict with other church programs. Divide the small groups so they meet in various geographical locations around the city. The more convenient the location the easier to place the new

RICHARD L. HALVERSEN

converts in the groups.

During the evangelistic meetings, the small groups will not meet. It is vital that the small group members attend the evangelistic meetings. This is where they will begin to get acquainted with the new converts. But as soon as the meetings are over, the small groups begin meeting again, as they initiate the real reason for their existence.

After the evangelistic meetings have ended, place all new converts in a small group. Great care should be taken in placing these new converts. Try to match the individual with the right group.

Develop and present a short series of sermons on how to relate to new converts

This series should be presented just before the evangelistic meetings begin. The sermons (3-5 of them) should be preached at worship services on Sabbath mornings, so that a majority of church members are reached.

Each sermon must help the church members to realize they have a vital part in the holding and nurturing of the new converts.

Conduct a special class on relating to new converts

Make a strong appeal for members to join a special class on human relations and consciousness raising when it comes to new members. These classes may be held on the Sabbath afternoons following the 3-5 sermons that are preached on the Sabbath mornings. Have a sign-up sheet to be distributed to the congregation with dates and times that the classes will meet.

Each session should meet for one hour—members only. Select the best night and time for the best attendance, if not meeting on Sabbath afternoon. If meeting on Sabbath afternoon, plan a light soup and sandwich meal after church and before the class. In the class urge members to:

- ♦ Be encouragers and not discouragers of new converts.
- ♦ Focus on the inner adornment of their heart and not their outer adornment.

- ♦ Be positive about the church and the pastor.
- ♦ Make a special effort to greet new converts at church and at special events.

Hand out printed material to those who attend the class on being a spiritual friend to the new convert. Obtain a commitment from each person who attends that they will be spiritual friends with or to the new converts.

Conduct a Daniel Seminar class

As a follow-up to the evangelistic series, conduct a Daniel Seminar class for the new converts. Daniel is an excellent

P *people come
into the church family because
of the beautiful truths they
have learned from God's Book
and their love for Christ, but
they stay in a church family
because of the love, concern,
and fellowship they find there.*

book to study; it is both practical and prophetic. New believers love prophecy! Prophecy is probably the reason many came to the evangelistic meetings to begin with.

This class works best if it begins two weeks before the evangelistic meetings are over. It may be held on Saturday mornings during regular Sabbath-School class time. All visitors to the evangelistic meetings are invited to attend. The class may meet twice a week, once during the Sabbath class study, as suggested (this will help them with their church attendance) and one other night

during the closing two weeks of the evangelistic series.

Be enthusiastic, using visual aids to help make this class exciting. Have study guides available to help with the study.

"Welcome To The Family" banquet

This banquet needs to be planned for the first week after the evangelistic meetings. (I've found the best time, if possible, is the next Saturday night after the meetings end.)

Send out special invitations to all the new converts and spiritual friends that have been selected. Also invitations should be extended to all those who lead out in the various committees during the evangelistic meetings. Invite the church board members to attend.

Though the banquet menu does not need to be lavish, plan a sit-down dinner. Place new converts and their spiritual friends next to one another. If necessary, everyone should wear a name tag. Get the youth involved. Have them serve the meal.

Plan a short orientation program for after dinner. Give a *brief* history of the beginning of the church and its organization, from the local church to the conference, union and General Conference. Show a mission spotlight video sharing the worldwide mission of the church. Talk about such things as the tithe envelope, church expense, and mission offerings. Use as many visual aids as possible.

Present those who led out in the various committees for the evangelistic meetings a special certificate of appreciation.

Give to each family that has become a part of the church a special book such as, *Welcome! Your Church Family Album*.¹ Along with this, give each new convert a special packet containing items such as the church directory, information about the church school and ministries offered by the church such as Pathfinders, community services, small group ministries and the church newsletter.

Have all the new converts fill out a special form entitled "My Service for Christ." Listed on this form are areas in

continued on p. 28

THE AUTHORITY PARADOX

The most misunderstood idea in America” says the provocative phrase on the paper jacket of a book titled *Authority*.¹ The misunderstanding isn’t just limited to America, however.



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In both secular and ecclesiastical life, misconceptions about authority continue to challenge organizational life everywhere, including our church.

For example, when I first began to teach a course on spiritual gifts in the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary more than two decades ago, all my D.Min. students accepted the following paradigm regarding the prophetic gift. I discussed with them *the normative* expression of that gift exercised by the writers of the Scripture, *the formative* expression seen in the ministry of Ellen White (and others such as Reformation leaders that continue to influence thought throughout the Christian world), and a simple *informative* expression exercised by inspired individuals in every local congregation. In addition, I emphasized that according to scriptural definition, the compound prophetic gift has only three elements: instruction, exhortation, and comfort (1 Cor. 14:3).

Inevitably, however, discussion developed over the issue of authority. If, some asked, the manifestation of the prophetic gift were to be recognized in lay members of local congregations, the balance of power would be upset. The leadership of pastors, elders, and conference personnel would be challenged;

they would be placed on the defensive in some elusive, undefined way. How would a local congregation sort out the authority hierarchy between several individuals? Perhaps most significantly, where would the authority of God and the church fit in? In a hierarchical way of thinking, there has to be a clearly defined descending order of authority. Who is at the apex of this structure in the local congregation: the *church-elected* elders, the *conference-appointed* pastor/s, or the *God-selected* lay members with the prophetic gift?

These questions can be broken down into simpler ones: what is true biblical authority, and how should it be exercised in the church?

The question of authority

On virtually all occasions where the words “authority” and “power” are used in the KJV New Testament, the translation is from *exousia*. The Greek *exousia* with these twin translations is used in the New Testament some one hundred times. Matthew uses the word with the meaning of “rights,” as in, “The Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins” (Matt. 9:6); and with the meaning of “jurisdiction” as in, “I am a man under *authority* having soldiers

under me . . ." (Matt. 8:9). John uses the word with the meaning of "liberty" as in, "I have *power* to lay it down [my life], and I have power to take it again" (John 10:8, emphasis added); and with the meaning of "prerogative" as in, "But as many as received him to them gave he *power* to become the sons of God" (1:12, emphasis added). Luke uses the word with the meaning of "energy" as in, "They were astonished at his doctrine for his word was with *power*" (Luke 4:32, emphasis added). Paul uses the word with the meaning of "the exercise of control" as in, "The husband hath not *power* of his own body" (1 Cor. 7:4, emphasis added); and with the meaning of "under another's control" as in, "All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the *power* of any" (6:12, emphasis added).

The New Testament usage of *exousia* suggests that "authority" may find expression in both disabling and enabling ways, in both crippling and in freeing ways. This reality introduces a discussion of the complexities and paradoxes often associated with "authority" in the church.

The historical roots of hierarchy

Kennedy and Charles posit that the notion of hierarchy can be traced back to the birthplace of Abraham—Mesopotamia.² The priests of this city-state developed a sophisticated knowledge of the heavens and were deeply impressed by the mathematical precision of the heavenly bodies. Over time, the Sumerian priests made an impressive deduction: the order that the gods had established in the heavens was to be the model for society. Just as the earth lay unchallenged at the center of the universe, so the king should reign unchallenged at the center of society. That is, both the hierarchy in the heavens, seen in the planets and stars orbiting around the earth, and the hierarchy of members of society orbiting in their appointed paths around the king, were divinely ordained. Those deductions of 3,500 years ago continued essentially unchallenged for nearly three millennia; they constituted the corner-

stone of the long-accepted view of "the divine right of kings." Subsequent hierarchical arrangements in both church and society were the direct descendants of this thinking.

But hierarchy has fallen on hard times. Although it has taken time to slay the dragon that has abused so many, change is evident. The birth of this change can be traced to Copernicus, the first to prove that the earth did not oc-

Biblical

authority is moral. It is rooted in love. It does not force, does not operate from top to bottom, and does not seek to be exclusive. Rather it is intrinsic, based on relationships, reaching out to facilitate inclusiveness.

cupy a privileged place at the center of the cosmos. He perceived that our part of the universe is "other" centered; we orbit the sun—not the sun us.

So just as a pre-Copernican way of thinking found expression in hierarchy, a post-Copernican way of thought led society gradually to accept an integrated, democratic, and interdependent conceptualization. The change led to the rejection of monarchy in secular society as it had existed for centuries, and a challenge in ecclesiastical life in England (with the actions of the much-married

Henry VIII and the establishment of the Episcopal church), and in France with the rejection of Catholic leadership during the revolution. But these happenings were just beginnings.

The Roman Catholic authors of *Authority* note the influence of this changed way of thinking in their church. "The Roman Catholic Church grasped the problem of the age early in the century, perhaps in reaction to Pope Pius X's (1901–1909) excessively authoritarian rejection of the modern world through encyclicals and other measures he initiated to suppress the influence of 'Modernism' on church life. In Vatican Council II (1962–65), the Church responded by reorganizing itself, restoring the fundamentally non hierarchical collegial pattern established by Jesus Christ in his relationship with his apostles. . . ."³

But then, as David Remnick is quoted as saying, Pope John Paul II (1978–) has been "determined to reverse what he sees as the multiple crises of the Church—principally, an erosion of moral purpose and obedience to hierarchical authority"⁴

The unending debate over the issue of authority illustrates how both secular and ecclesiastical society have wrestled with the new paradigm, sometimes unaware that this is in its essence a biblical issue. Indeed, we are beckoned to Scripture for understanding and resolution.

The biblical norm

Hierarchy has been inextricably intertwined with the abuse of power, of force, of the denial of freedom for the many and the control of a few. This abusive form of hierarchy is essentially immoral. By contrast, biblical authority is moral. It is rooted in love. It does not force, does not operate from top to bottom, and does not seek to be exclusive. Rather it is intrinsic, based on relationships, reaching out to facilitate inclusiveness.

Biblical authority is God-given. It enables people and frees them to grow and fulfill God's loving destiny for each individual, which in turn promotes the expansion of the kingdom of God. "Au-

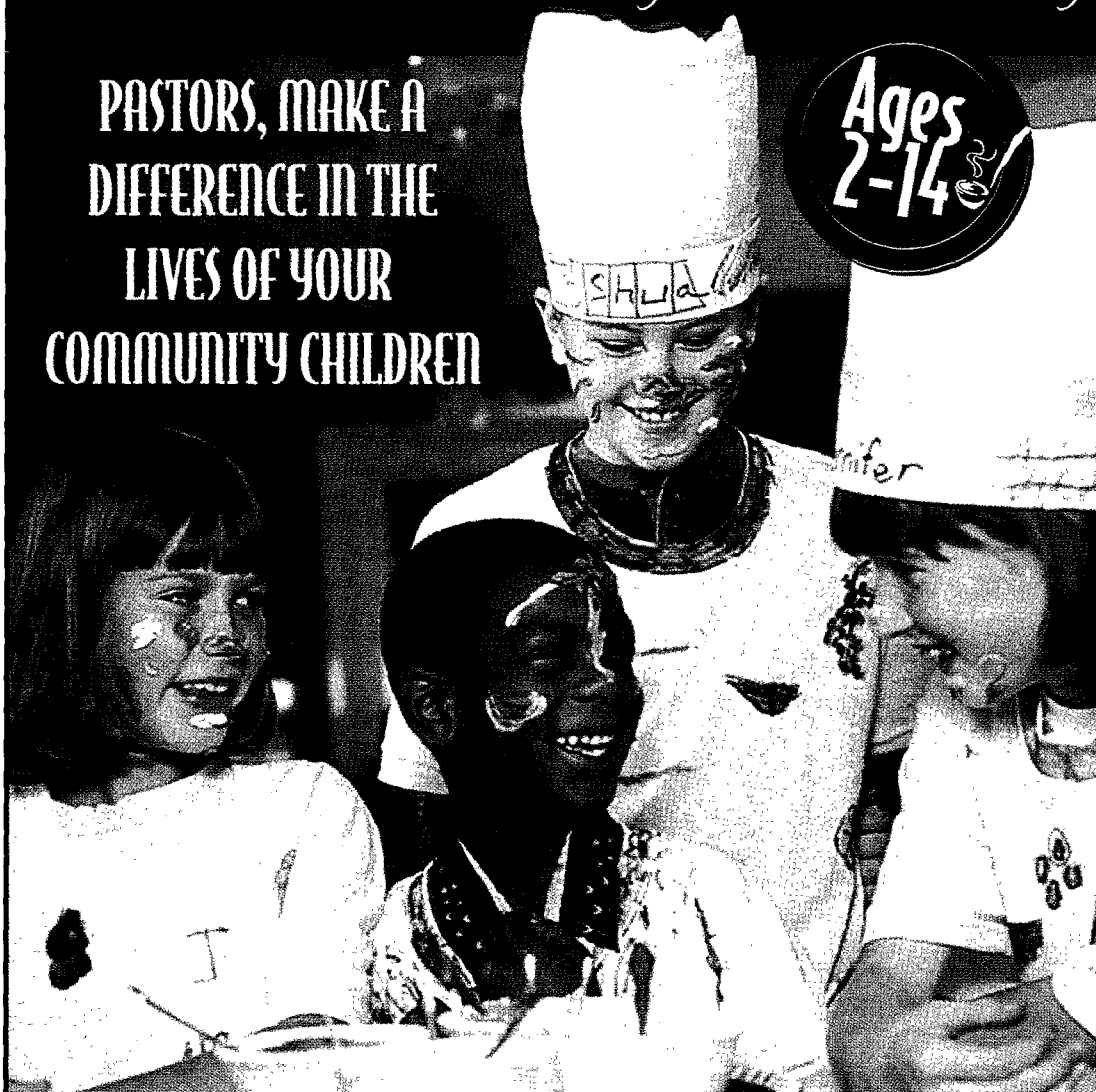


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thority is not larger than life. It fits any really human life exactly. This kingdom of God lies within all healthy persons. Their lack of fame may be more an asset than a hindrance to their exercise of sensible authority. Such persons may seem outnumbered and beleaguered in a nondiscriminating popular culture where good and bad, right and wrong, sense and nonsense, have been granted equal citizenship rights. Even so, the natural authority of ordinary people generates an effective, if not culturally celebrated, set of sensible standards.”⁵

Such a vision of authority within each of us, bestowed by God, revealed in His Word, and quickened by His Spirit is the only organizational model that can carry out God’s will. This view of authority can be found in the words of Jesus.

The servant/leader

One of the truly challenging constructs in the New Testament is Jesus’ admonition to leaders that they be servants. From at least the time of Abraham, the hierarchical model of leadership had prevailed. Even in the Jewish community, the High Priest came to assume a highly political role worlds apart from the spiritual leadership initiated for this role at Sinai. Seeking to invert so many of the distorted views of God’s will for individuals and communities, Jesus asserted that what had been taught and followed had to be superseded by a new paradigm.⁶ And considering the work of the yet-to-be-born Christian church, Jesus sought to establish a pyramid of leadership style, the opposite of the inverted pyramid style formulated in patriarch Abraham’s homeland. Jesus said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority [*katexousia*] over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:25-28, NIV).

“Servant/leader” is a widely recognized expression in church and industry

today. The modern coining of this nomenclature came from Robert Greenleaf in 1970. Greenleaf spent 40 years as an administrator at AT&T and then began another 25-year career as the head of the *Greenleaf Center for Servant-Leadership*. Today some of the best-known names in writing and consulting lend their support to this concept, including Stephen Covey of *The Seven Habits of Highly Successful People*, John Blanchard of *The One Minute Manager*, Peter Block of *The Empowered Manager*, and scores of others, the titans of consulting among the Fortune 500 companies.

An understanding of the servant-leader model is vitally important for vibrant church life. But be warned: it is antithetical to traditional hierarchical ways of thinking! Greenleaf summed up his understanding of how each of us can measure whether or not we are working within the paradigm: “Do those served grow as persons? Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants?”⁷ Those words are arresting enough when posed to a CEO, but they are even more arresting when applied to the leader of any segment of the church.

A commitment to hearing

Servant-leaders hear people’s thoughts, including their dreams and fears. This is vastly different from being a good listener. Most leaders understand the importance of giving people the opportunity to speak. But that is not the same as being heard. To be heard in this sense means to be understood. It means especially an understanding of the most important thoughts in a person’s heart—which are often unspoken. It takes time, discipline, an accepting demeanor, and a perceptive ear to “hear” this way, to feel the hurt, to sense the pain, and to understand anger at a perceived or actual injustice.

Leaders with servant hearts are also keenly tuned to their own hearts. Do we “hear” ourselves talking? Are we aware of what our bodies are saying? *The Body Speaks*⁸ asserts that our bodies often offer us symptoms as expressions of the

dilemmas in our lives. Our bodies have their own way of keeping score, of sending messages of hurt and the need for healing. But we have to “hear” the messages in order to act. And the longer we delay, the more serious the situation, until finally the unhearing often find themselves prostate and staring death in the face.

Burnout in clergy is all too common.⁹ But those who have learned to listen to their own hearts don’t burn out. They hear themselves just as they hear others. They become masters of meditation. They have made a commitment to hearing. And as they hear their own spirits speak, they hear the voice of God. They accept the importance of the message and respond before irreparable damage is done. Self hearing and “other” hearing are two sides of the same precious coin.

A commitment to grow trust in the congregation

Another aspect of the servant-leader approach that facilitates biblical authority in church life is the vital process of developing an environment of trust. If there are low levels of trust in your church, how do things get done? The leadership tends to become autocratic. They give up asking questions; instead, they resort to giving directives. They cease to be collaborative, and soon distrust, and its progeny, diminished motivation, spread their ugliness like algae on a shallow, stagnating pond.

Covey asks what an organization looks like when there are low levels of trust, and he answers, in a word, “rigid.”¹⁰ When people in church settings don’t feel free to act, to utilize their gifts based on opportunities that the Holy Spirit places in their personal way, the church begins to shrink and die. *No church-planned program can be as successful as when all members are taking every opportunity to use their gifts to meet human need.* Too many church-planned programs are desperate substitutes organized by church leaders because the members have not felt empowered to act and use their God-given gifts.

Trust is the foundation of a believ-

ing community which cares so much about souls that need to know Jesus as Savior that they create a light to guide the lost home. As Covey says: "I don't care how much you know until I know how much you care."¹¹ The servant-leader's creation of caring, trusting relationships facilitates the operation of biblical authority.

A less-anxious presence

A third issue in the development of biblical authority based on the servant-leader model is the invitation for a leader to be a less-anxious presence. The description "less-anxious" is in comparison with the anxiety level of the group the pastor is leading. The metaphor of a crucible is instructive. The crucible must have a greater tolerance to heat than the contents, otherwise, the contents will all be lost. Thus, being a less-anxious presence means being able to be calm in the presence of anxiety rather than being driven to fix things or to do something. The less-anxious presence remains fully connected with people in helpful ways in the midst of their anxiety. In this situation, people are freed to think more clearly and to act more responsibly as the whole system calms down.

In this process, servant-leaders model the life of faith for their members, not by telling them what to do but by showing the reality of the struggle for growth in the Christian life. They don't try to model perfection, they model process. The former is illustrated in the image of a minister with a smiling face seeking to hide an aching heart that struggles to give the appearance of unending success and continuous victory while hiding the realities of daily struggles and failures. The latter is enshrined in the minister who is willing to be vulnerable and authentic. This person is full of hope and wisdom and rooted in a trusting relationship with the Lord. This is a mode with which the members can identify and which they understand. This is the minister who knows from rich experience how to be calm and to exercise trust when faced with overwhelming burdens like conflict, divorce, disease,

despair, and death. No broad smile can mask such experiences. The servant-leader knows it and doesn't try.

When the invulnerable pastor becomes anxious (which is frequently), it breeds anxiety and conflict. In contrast, when the leader is a less-anxious presence, anxiety is manageable. Defensive, perfectionistic, invulnerable people are invariably anxious people. They have much to be anxious about! But the struggle shows through the chinks in their armor. Few people are fooled as new waves of anxiety wash over the congregation. Only a less-anxious presence can create the setting for the free operation of biblical authority, which leads to a vibrant trusting congregation, and Kingdom growth.

As Richardson has written: "The leader's main job, through his or her way of being in the congregation, is to create an emotional atmosphere in which greater calmness exists—to be a less-anxious presence. 'Knowing everything' is not necessary to be a healthy, competent leader. When you can be a less-anxious presence, there is often enough experience and wisdom in the group for the group to figure out its own solutions to the challenges it faces."¹²

These three elements are crucial for the implementation of the servant-leader model described by Jesus: leaders that truly hear their people; leaders that develop deep trust relationships with their people; and leaders that pursue being a less-anxious presence, modeling process (not perfection!) for their people.

Conclusion

What can we conclude about that "most misunderstood idea in America"?

First, a core of selfishness and self interest will always be enshrined in the hearts of each of us as long as we await the *eschaton* so biblical authority will always be implemented imperfectly. However, this is not a good reason to delay its implementation, for the alternative is as anti-Christian as anything could be—authoritarianism, power play, and self-seeking.

Second, biblical authority must never be confused with hierarchy-based

authoritarianism. They are at opposite ends of a continuum, two vastly contrasting styles of organizational life.

Third, to "use" power is an intrinsic attribute of authoritarianism and is always self-promoting. In contrast, love is the intrinsic attribute of biblical authority which seeks the interests, growth, and freedom of others—not their control.

Fourth, if biblical authority is experienced in a local congregation by individuals with a variety of spiritual gifts such as leadership, pastoring, and *prophecy*, there is no need to fear conflict; this is the biblical model designed by God for organization in His body. According to His plan, the members will work collaboratively as fellow servants.

In the church setting, the member's "authority to act" is based on God's "commission to act." It is intrinsic with one's spiritual gifts. It does not lead to conflict but to harmony. Paul's metaphor in Romans, Corinthians, and Ephesians, where he elaborates the joyous operation of all God-given nurturing and outreach abilities, is that all gifts with their intrinsic authority to act come together in the church and form one truly integrated, collaborative, functioning body—the indivisible body of our Lord Jesus Christ. ■

¹ Eugene Kennedy and Sara Charles, *Authority* (New York: The Free Press, 1997).

² *Ibid.*, 7.

³ *Ibid.*, 198.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 199.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 205.

⁶ See Matt. 5, 6.

⁷ Robert Greenleaf, in *Insights on Leadership*, Larry Spears, ed. (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1997), 19.

⁸ James Griffith and Melissa Elliott Griffith, *The Body Speaks* (New York: BasicBooks, HarperCollins Publishers, Inc. 1994).

⁹ Jan Smuts van Rooyen (1997). "Discontinuation from the Ministry by Seventh-day Adventist Ministers: A Qualitative Study." Andrews University, unpublished doctoral dissertation.

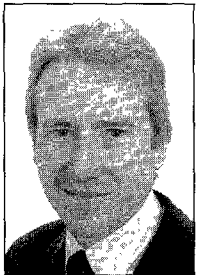
¹⁰ Steven Covey in *Insights on Leadership*, xvi.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Richardson, R. W. *Creating a Healthier Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 173.

THE REVELATION, INSPIRATION, AND AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE

This article presents some alternative approaches to those presented in Richard Coffen's articles, "A Fresh Look at the Dynamics of Inspiration," in the December 1999 and February 2000 issues of *Ministry*.



Ekkehardt Mueller, Th.D., D.Min., is associate director of the Biblical Research Institute, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

An elderly woman was feeling ill. Before going to bed, she prayed: "Dear Lord, You have said in Your divine Word that You would fulfill whatever we ask in Your name. Now I ask You to make me well if it is Your will. Thank You, Lord." The next morning she awoke whole and healthy, said Thank You to her Lord, and went shopping. On her way she met her pastor, who was talking to a colleague. The lady was so happy about the answer to her prayer that she had to share her experience. However, instead of joining the woman in her joy, the pastor responded: "Dear lady, don't you know that the text in Mark upon which you based your prayer is not genuine?"

The Bible, revelation, inspiration, and Scripture's reliability and authority are issues hotly debated today in many Christian circles. In some cases the possibility of divine revelation as well as inspiration is totally rejected. In others revelation and inspiration are reinterpreted.¹ All of this has had repercussions in Adventist circles.

The discussion of these issues create heat because they have far-reaching implications in fundamentally important arenas of theology. They also have a strong impact on the beliefs and the everyday lives of Christians. Although Jesus and salvation through Him form the heart of our theology and experience, it is ultimately only through Scripture that

we receive necessary information about Jesus and the redemption He brought. Through the Bible we get to know Jesus in His multifaceted ministry on our behalf. Our understanding of the nature and content of Scripture shapes our perception of our Lord and the grasp we have of discipleship.

Besides these implications, our view of the nature of Scripture will influence our selection of a hermeneutical method as well as the exegetical procedures we employ as we come to the Bible.

In addition, the mission of the church is dependent on the message of the church, which again is dependent on how one perceives the nature and authority of Scripture. Social action and involvement may become meaningless and may even cease without a proper biblical foundation.

This article focuses primarily on the methodological approach to the study of revelation, inspiration, and the authority of Scripture. It will not discuss these as biblical doctrines per se but, due to the limitations of space, will only supply some short definitions. The article does, however attempt to open a way by which these things can be productively studied.

1. Definitions

According to the biblical testimony, special revelation² is an act of God in which He reveals to specific human beings (1) Himself, (2) truths of various nature, and/or (3) His will. Because of God's initiative and action, these humans, called prophets, have access to an experience which otherwise is not open to humans, and they receive knowledge which otherwise is unavailable.

According to Scripture, inspiration is God's act in which He enables the prophet to faithfully pass on the received message. By this process the proclaimed message becomes a word from God and is not merely a human word. In order to communicate revelation reliably, inspiration is needed. Yet, revelation and inspiration cannot be sharply separated or easily distinguished from one another.

In talking about the authority of

Scripture we believe that it is "the infallible revelation of His will"³ and that it is the standard for everyday living. Everything has to be tested by it. Each doctrine must be founded in it. Scripture has priority and authority over all human thought, research, and emotion.

2. Methodology

First of all, we need to be aware of the fact that no scholar and no scientist will work without certain presuppositions. Regarding our topic, some will outrightly deny that there are such things

Our view of the nature of Scripture will influence our selection of a hermeneutical method as well as the exegetical procedures we employ as we come to the Bible.

as divine revelation and inspiration. Others will claim the opposite. Some hold that there *may* be divine inspiration. Related to these presuppositions are the ones that consider the Bible merely a human book, merely a divine book, a mixture of both, or a book with both characteristics at the same time. The respective presuppositions will influence the research and the conclusions that grow out of it.

Second, there are a number of approaches to the Bible, some of which will be presented and discussed. They are not mutually exclusive but can be combined with one another. One option is to proceed inductively. Another

is to work deductively. Furthermore, the researcher can choose to study inspiration by means of extrabiblical sources and draw conclusions which he or she applies to the Bible. Another possibility is to create analogies in order to demonstrate how inspiration works and to make deductions. Again the respective approach will shape the outcome.

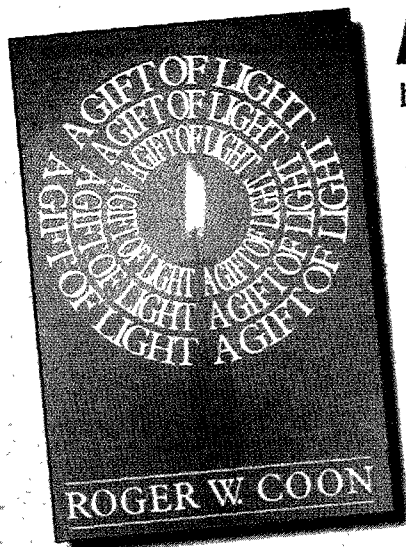
a. Inductive versus deductive

The major question is whether to proceed inductively or deductively. Normally, an inductive approach stands for the investigation of biblical phenomena. One reads, for instance, through the Gospels, compares them with each other, and detects differences and so-called discrepancies. One studies Chronicles and Kings and notices gaps and divergence. A comparison of Paul's experience as reported in Acts and in Galatians seems to reveal differences. Supposedly, even the conversion accounts in Acts do not correspond. An inductive approach looks for discrepancies and takes notice of these phenomena. Oftentimes, it does not allow for harmonization even where it seems to be possible and advisable. It is preoccupied with finding differences rather than agreement and unity. And it always has only parts of the entire puzzle. Nevertheless, based on the collected and interpreted data, a doctrine of inspiration is formulated. The problem with this approach is that it often largely disregards the self-testimony of Scripture. The starting point is not with what Scripture claims to be, but with the phenomena of the biblical texts as seen and interpreted by a rational human being of the twentieth or the twenty-first century.

The deductive approach starts with the self-testimony of Scripture, that is, the texts which directly or indirectly refer to revelation, inspiration, and the authority of Scripture. A doctrine of inspiration, for example, is formulated based on the claims of Scripture and its numerous references to this topic.

Probably, the issue of inductive versus deductive is not simply a matter of either/or. Both approaches are needed. In formulating a doctrine of inspiration, one cannot disregard the textual phe-

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nomena, and one should not discard the self-testimony of Scripture. The Bible must be allowed to speak for itself.

Thus, the question is How do we start? or Which approach comes first? In a trial, it is only fair to listen to a witness first and to take him or her seriously before one questions his or her statements. To a certain degree, Heinrich Schliemann even took Homer's writings at face value and excavated Troy, a city previously believed to be fictional.⁴ Because the Bible claims revelation and inspiration, it is fair to start from there and to ask oneself how the phenomena can be reconciled with this assertion.⁵

b. Use of Extrabiblical Sources

Among others the "history of religions" school has used extrabiblical sources to interpret Scripture; sources such as Babylonian myths, Hellenistic mystery cults, and ideas of the Roman Emperor cult.⁶ Their views have been read back into the Bible. Adventists are very hesitant to use this procedure because we accept the principle of Scripture being its own interpreter. However, we must go a step further.

To study inspiration in an inspired, noncanonical prophet, for instance in E. G. White, and read back into the Bible the data that have been gathered, is, on the basis of the *sola scriptura* principle, not acceptable. The Bible can stand on its own, and a biblical doctrine of inspiration must be derived from the Bible and the Bible alone. Genuine noncanonical prophets may provide helpful information, but to view the Bible through the processes involved in the inspiration of a noncanonical prophet is circular reasoning.⁷

Although the Bible does not provide evidence for stages of inspiration, that is, one prophet being more inspired than another, the question remains whether or not inspiration really worked the same way in all prophets. The outcome is equal in so far that revelation, God's message, is passed on faithfully, but the processes are not necessarily identical. Jeremiah's experience in dictating God's message to Baruch while being inspired (Jer. 36) is obviously different from Luke's experi-

ence in gathering information, and under inspiration putting his Gospel together.

c. Use of analogies

Analogies can be extremely helpful. They are like pictures that bring home a point to the audience. But analogies, like parables, have limitations. They should not be overextended. To create an analogy and make deductions from the analogy may not any longer correspond with the reality.⁸ Therefore, we need to exercise caution.

One of the most common analogies is the so-called incarnational model. In this case, Scripture is paralleled with Jesus Christ. There are theologians who deny the divine character of Scripture. There are others who omit or underestimate the human factor. The incarnational model stresses both the human and the divine. However, even after having accepted the last option, a question remains. Are the human and divine sides complementary, yet separable? Or is there an inseparable unity between the human and the divine?

In the case of Jesus, Christians claim that He was truly God and became also truly man. Human and divine cannot be split apart in Jesus. This seems also to be true for Scripture. Second Peter 1:21 points to a cooperation between the Holy Spirit and human agents, acknowledging the divine and the human. Yet, Scripture was not created by humans. Inspired by God, prophets talked about God. God is the origin and final Author of Scripture.

Gerhard Maier summarizes this in three points: "#1) 'Men spoke'; that is, representatives of 'normal' persons at a particular place and time, not 'instruments,' 'writing implements,' or the like; and they used a 'normal' human language. . . . #2) None of them, curiously enough, spoke from the standpoint of men, but 'from God'; that is sent from him, empowered, proceeding from his vantage point and bringing across a message from him that is no less than a 'divine' message. #3) The one who brought about this peculiar state of affairs is the 'Holy Spirit.'"⁹ Prophetic

messages and prophetic writings are the words of the Lord and are accepted by God as such.¹⁰ Biblical books are the word of the Lord.¹¹

Thus, the human and the divine in Scripture are not complementary. They are integrated. Consequently, different sets of tools in order to study the human side and the divine side of the Bible cannot do justice to the unified nature, the truly incarnational character of Scripture. And by the way, many tools of scholarship are not just neutral. They are linked to presuppositions to such an extent that when these presuppositions are eliminated the tools themselves also evaporate.¹²

Jesus' position on Scripture

In all these questions, Christians are always referred back to Jesus Christ, their Lord and Savior. He is their great exemplar. How did Jesus come to grips with Scripture in His time? How did He deal with issues such as revelation, inspiration, and authority? Jesus made statements about Scripture, and He used Scripture profusely. Certainly, He was not naive or ignorant with regard to the issues we raise here and elsewhere. Here is Jesus' position on Scripture:

♦ Jesus trusted Scripture. For Him the Old Testament, His Bible, was God's Word. Through human agents God has spoken.

♦ Jesus regarded the prophets as reliable communicators of God's words and accepted inspiration in the writers of the Old Testament. For example, He recognized the validity of the predictive prophecies of the Old Testament (see Luke 24:17-27). Many of these prophecies He regarded to be fulfilled in Himself.

♦ Jesus accepted the historical reliability of Scripture, including all the important events in Israel's history as well as Creation and the Flood.

♦ Jesus embraced as the author of a biblical book the person identified as such in the writing.

♦ Divine interventions in history such as miracles posed no problem for Jesus.

♦ Jesus interpreted Scripture liter-

ally and typologically. Critical methods in expounding the Bible were foreign to Him. Although He must have known so-called discrepancies in Scripture, He did not focus on them, not even mentioning them.

♦ Jesus considered Scripture as addressed not only to the original readers and hearers but also to His generation. Thus He assumed the fact that Scripture transcends culture.

♦ Jesus believed that an understanding of God's will and His actions in history are founded on Scripture. His doctrinal outlook was derived from the Old Testament.

♦ Thus for Jesus the man, the same Old Testament was the standard for His life as well as the ground of His behavior.

♦ Jesus openly recognized the practical value of Scripture; that it fosters faith and can be used as the authority and weapon against temptation.

♦ Jesus expected His contemporaries to know Scripture.¹³

A practical conclusion

How then can we as pastors handle these issues of revelation, inspiration, and the authority of Scripture? Here are some suggestions:

♦ Start with an attitude of trust instead of a position of doubt. This does not exclude openness.

♦ Take seriously Scripture's self-testimony.

♦ Do not deny or underestimate problems in the biblical text, but avoid overstating them.

♦ Be careful of extreme positions on personal inspiration as well as mechanical inspiration.

♦ Look for solutions with regard to the biblical phenomena without trying to make them fit artificially.

♦ Be able to suspend judgment. If you cannot find a solution, it does not mean that there is none.¹⁴

♦ Use an appropriate hermeneutical method and suitable exegetical tools that fit the character of God's Word.

♦ Live the Word of God.

♦ Proclaim it, empowered by the Holy Spirit. ■

¹ Cf. Wolfhart Pannenberg, "The Revelation of God in Jesus of Nazareth," J. M. Robinson and J. B. Cobb, Jr., Hrsg., in *Theology as History, New Frontiers in Theology*, Bd. 3 (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), 101-133; Gabriel Moran, *The Present Revelation: The Search for Religious Foundations* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), 38-40, 130, 227, 299, 341; Gerhard Maier, *Biblical Hermeneutics* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1994), 97.

² Theologians distinguish between general revelation, that is, what is found for instance in nature, and what we call special revelation.

³ See the Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists, no. 1, in *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1995), 7.

⁴ Cf. *Encyclopaedia Britannica: Micropaedia* (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1981), VIII: 965.

⁵ Cf. Peter M. van Bemmelen, *Issues in Biblical Inspiration: Sanday and Warfield* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 1987), 377-378.

⁶ These were proposed by Gunkel, Reitzenstein, and Bousset.

⁷ By means of Biblical criteria a prophet is declared genuine and inspired. Then this very prophet is used to formulate a doctrine of inspiration of the Bible.

⁸ It may be useful to compare the nature of Scripture with the nature of light. However, to conclude that for these different aspects of light different tools must be used and to apply this to Scripture seems to go too far. Scripture may be similar to light, but it is not light in the literal sense. Cf. Richard W. Coffen, "A Fresh Look at the Dynamics of Inspiration: Part 2," *Ministry* February 2000, 21-22.

⁹ Maier, 102.

¹⁰ See Jer. 36:1-6 and Jer. 25:2-8.

¹¹ See Micah 1:1; Hos. 1:1; Zeph. 1:1.

¹² See, e.g., form criticism, which investigates the oral stage of material, small units that were, for instance, created at a campfire or a funeral procession. No revelation took place. Texts developed along evolutionary lines.

¹³ References can be found in Ekkehardt Mueller, "Jesus and Scripture in the Gospels," unpublished manuscript, March 1999.

¹⁴ See Edwin R. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1951).

Teachable spirit

continued from p. 4

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New printing process

A further aspect of change based on budget evaluation was the decision to change to a newer printing process: a disk-to-plate method rather than the previous process of disk-to-negative-to-plate. This meant that we would be electronically current in our desktop process and that every aspect of each issue of *Ministry* could be saved on a disk ready to output to the printing plate.

Enter Sheila Draper, our editorial assistant since 1996. In addition to her other editorial responsibilities, Sheila was willing to learn to scan pictures, import advertisements from promotional disks, and to place these advertisements in our journal.

Ministry hired designer Harry Knox to redesign *Ministry*, and Sheila learned new desktop skills. Our printers sent their desktop specialist to our office to give Sheila several days of one-on-one training in graphics and their printing

process. She willingly acquired the new skills. A good team player, Sheila is another example of the teachable.

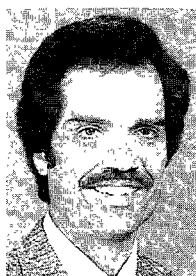
A team spirit. A willingness to learn. An ethic of service. That's what enabled *Ministry* to meet the enormous challenges it faced, without sacrificing quality, without minimizing its service to its readers, and without straining its cost efficiency. The challenge placed before us five years ago forced us to find new ways to produce *Ministry*, so that today the entire journal except for printing and mailing is managed right in our office.

But the purpose of *Ministry* remains unchanged: to be an effective tool in the hands of the pastors so that their proclamation of the gospel, their nurture of the community of faith, their awareness with what's new in their profession, and their own spiritual development will go on empowered by the Spirit and unhindered by any mundane distractions.

Is *Ministry* helpful in your ministry? How can we serve you better? Let us know. You are the reason for *Ministry's* existence. We want to have a teachable spirit. We want you to be part of our team. ■

CHURCH DISCIPLINE AND CHURCH GROWTH

From 1986 to 1996 the Seventh-day Adventist Church increased in worldwide membership by 83 percent. The North American Division registered a 22 percent growth, and the Pennsylvania Conference in North America increased by 12 percent.



*Wesley McDonald is
a pastor in
Smithsport,
Pennsylvania.*

But in the Pennsylvania Conference, three churches were an exception, growing at an astounding rate.

These three churches account for 35 percent of the total growth of the Pennsylvania Conference from 1984 to 1997. During that period they averaged better than a 300 percent increase in membership! One church grew by 469 percent, another by 400 percent, and a third by 181 percent. They increased in number by 136, 128, and 105 respectively.

A comparison of the statistics of these churches with the rest of the churches in the conference revealed other interesting differences. Not only were their increases due to baptism, profession of faith, and letter of transfer higher than the average church in the conference but their losses due to apostasy, missing, and letter of transfer also *appear* to be higher in the statistics.

Armed with this data, I visited the pastors of these churches to see what these findings really meant. Why did their churches grow so much when the rest of the conference churches grew by an average of just seven members per church or 8.5 percent during the same 13-year period? Why were the apostasy

and missing rates in the three churches so high, at 4.5 times that of the average church in Pennsylvania? Was there a relationship between their high growth and their apostasy rate? What did all this mean?

Soul stewardship

The factors involved with growth and retention of church members are many. Some of them are hard to duplicate or accurately quantify for every church in every area. Some factors are not easy to identify. Only a few factors are addressed in this report, and they are those which the statistics most clearly illustrate.

The visits with the pastors revealed that the three churches had proactive, Biblical "soul stewardship" plans which had been in place for a number of years. It showed that the plans were working. It also suggested that these plans could be implemented in principle by any church of any size.

"Did you know that your churches are at the top of the growth statistics for the entire conference for the last 13 years?" I asked the two pastors of the districts being studied. Both pastors re-

W E S L E Y M C D O N A L D

sponded that they had no idea that their churches were anything other than just your regular church. Neither pastor was aware that the growth rates in their churches were so high.

Both pastors indicated that they conducted evangelistic series every year. The head elder of the fastest growing church indicated that this year his church would be conducting two or three series of meetings. I learned from his pastor that most of the members of his churches had lower than average incomes and most of the money for evangelism came from the conference. The dollar amounts he quoted me for the crusades would in no way be considered high, especially when considering the yield in souls. Yet their soul-winning efforts were 17.6 times higher than the average church in the Pennsylvania Conference.

Dealing with apostasy

"What about membership loss?" I asked. "Not only were the baptisms and growth rates higher, but the number of persons disfellowshipped for reasons of apostasy was about 4.5 times higher than other churches. Can you tell me about this?" I asked the pastor. I wanted to know exactly how their churches dealt with members who were found to be in apostasy. The answers to that one question revealed a successful stewardship plan for souls that produced positive results for the kingdom.

All three pastors told me that just as soon as it was discovered that anyone in a church might be in some form of apostasy, the pastor and elders *immediately* went to the person involved to discern the circumstances. If the allegations were true, they would right then begin to work carefully with the individual. They would attempt to help the person see the importance of looking at and changing their life and again begin to live in harmony with biblical principles. About 30 percent of those visited would not have to be disfellowshipped. This process continued for an average of 6 to 12 months before a person would be dropped from the church's rolls, depending, of course, upon the particular situation. This meant that 70 percent of all found in apostasy

ended up being disfellowshipped from the church after about 6 to 12 months.

"Then what happens to those who are dropped?" I asked. "Do they ever return to the church?" The response was, "The following 6 to 12 months are very important." During that time, the churches would respond in love to the dropped person. One of the pastors stated that every time someone was dropped from his church, he would urge

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his church to follow the instructions that Paul gave to the Galatians: "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:1, 2). The person would be targeted for repeated visits by the leaders and members. They would especially be targeted for visits and invitations during the annual evangelistic meetings. I

learned that anywhere from 50 to 70 percent of the 70 percent who were disfellowshipped were reclaimed during the first 6 to 12 months after being dropped from membership. Only a few could be reclaimed during the second year after being dropped. This means that *up to 79 out of every 100 persons were restored into harmony with the church two years or less from the time of their apostasy.*

Early intervention

As may readily be seen, early intervention by the church is critical to the reclaiming process. A church with an attitude of indifference toward those who are troubled will permit them to proceed without intervention of any kind. Indifference toward such people in the church is seriously wrong. Proper church discipline is an act of love. "Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him" (Lev. 19:17). "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten" (Rev. 3:19). The top three churches with the highest growth in the conference were very proactive in their love for one another. They would not allow someone to continue in sin without putting up a fight for the lives of the members they loved.

Churches indifferent toward wrongdoing in their midst will neither be effective in reclaiming erring members nor will they grow at a significant rate. Explaining why churches do not grow, Ellen White says: "The Lord does not now work to bring many souls into the truth, because of the church members who have never been converted and those who were once converted but who have backslidden. What influence would these unconsecrated members have on new converts? Would they not make of no effect the God-given message which His people are to bear?"¹

When churches are faithful in cultivating and preserving the spiritual integrity of the members whom God has already entrusted to them, they can expect that God will bless them with significant growth. Even more important is the fact that "soul stewardship"

is commanded by God. "Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me. When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Yet if thou warn the wicked, and he turn not from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul" (Eze. 3:17-19). It has also been said: "If wrongs are apparent among His people, and if the servants of God pass on indifferent to them, they virtually sustain and justify the sinner, and are alike guilty and will just as surely receive the displeasure of God; for they will be made responsible for the sins of the guilty."²

Soul stewardship is not "book cleaning"

When a church gets involved in spiritual soul stewardship, including church discipline, the members and leaders need to know the difference between "soul stewardship" and "book cleaning." "Soul stewardship" involves a long-term commitment to careful, skillful, spiritual reclaiming of those slipping away, so that ideally disfellowshipping will not be necessary; but when necessary, it will be carried out consciously and conscientiously in a spirit of proactive love. "But he [the person who is moving away from God and the church] is not to be regarded as cut off from the mercy of God. Let him not be despised or neglected by his former brethren, but be treated with tenderness and compassion, as one of the lost sheep that Christ is still seeking to bring to His fold."³

"Book cleaning" is the lazy person's way out and involves nothing more than removing from membership those in error without an all-out effort to reclaim them either before or after removal. "Book cleaning" makes the church books look good but makes the church look bad where it really matters—in the estimation of God. "Soul stewardship" actually

seeks to restore people and thereby makes the church look good to God and to the world. Proper church discipline and "soul stewardship" are the same thing and differ greatly from simply "cleaning up the books."

The gospel commission calls for us to "teach them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:18-20). To simply teach all things would involve only instruction prior to baptism. "Teaching them to observe all things" involves a loving, lifelong commitment to caring that includes correction and discipline in many cases. Can a church really fulfill the gospel commission if it is not proactive in continuous, long-term, "soul stewardship"? Can a church really be the church if it has no active, ongoing, plan for reclaiming people who are in some way in the process of estranging themselves from God

and His church? Why should God give us great numbers of new members if we have been unfaithful stewards with the members we already have?

It is not really possible to show God's love for struggling people without demonstrating God's abhorrence for sin. I believe that the three Pennsylvania churches illustrate, among other things, that God will bless those churches that show the full dimensions of His love. True love involves correction and discipline when necessary. When a church actually becomes God's light, then the Holy Spirit can be poured out, and many can be won. ■

¹ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Pub. Assn., 1900), 6:371.

² *Ibid.*, 3:265, 266.

³ ———, *The Desire of Ages* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Pub. Assn., 1898), 441.

New converts

continued from p. 15

which they would like to be involved. Discipleship class, repairs at church, greeting, music, youth, teaching, community service, etc.

This special banquet will have a highly positive impact on the new converts and the leadership of the church.

Communication

A lack of communication will kill any relationship! Especially that of those who have just become a part of the church. All during the meetings these individuals may have been receiving letters from the evangelist. Letters to remind them of the upcoming lectures and letters of encouragement. How much more will they need to receive these encouraging letters when the meetings have ended. Send a letter or a postcard at least once a week for the first month after their baptism.

Have their spiritual friend give a short, friendly call at least once a week. Make sure the new converts have a church calendar of events. Encourage them to attend the social functions of the church.

Be positive in all the communications!

Visitation

In all this it is vital for the pastor, Bible worker, and/or an elder to visit the new members the week after their baptism. Every new member needs at least one pastoral visit every other week for the first month after their baptism and then once a month for the next six months. All visits should be brief yet sensitive to the new member. As individuals make these visits it is good to give them a little book such as *Steps to Christ* or *2000 and Beyond* by Mark Finley. As the pastor, make sure you know what literature is being shared with the new convert.

Remember, people come into the church family because of the beautiful truths they have learned from God's Book and their love for Christ, but they stay in a church family because of the love, concern, and fellowship they find there. ■

¹ Ken McFarland, *Welcome! Your Church Family Album* (College Place, Wash.: Color Press, 1997).



Throughout my entire Christian walk, I have been personally blessed by the prophetic gift to the Seventh-day Adventist

church in the ministry and writings of Ellen White. For nearly three decades, it has been my privilege to introduce thousands of individuals attending our evangelistic series to this unique ministry that has so encouraged me.

Many years ago, I joined several leaders in requesting the production of a book especially designed to introduce Ellen White's ministry to new and potential members. In our meetings, we have distributed thousands of copies of the book *Gift of Light*, authored by my colleague, Roger Coon.

Far from being an issue that we ought to downplay or ignore in public evangelistic preaching, I have discovered that an open presentation of spiritual gifts along with the specifics of how Ellen White's ministry has blessed our denomination, is welcomed by those who hear me preach.

While firmly holding to *sola scriptura* as the only basis of doctrine, I can readily affirm the biblical benefits promised through spiritual gifts to the church. Furthermore, in an age in which almost any charlatan can claim a prophetic voice and be readily heard, it is both enlightening and encouraging to new and potential members that the same Scriptures which warn of the last-days proliferation of false prophets also promise the prophetic gift's presence in the remnant people.

Also, as a pastor-evangelist, I have both the privilege and the responsibility to introduce and instruct my members and potential converts in all the blessings available to God's people. In presenting this subject, several principles readily awaken the attention as well as build confidence in the validity of this genuine spiritual gift:

The gift that keeps giving

JAMES A. CRESS

Emphasize Biblical authority. The Scriptures provide humanity with the knowledge necessary for salvation through faith in Jesus and they are the infallible revelation of His will, the standard of character, the test of experience, the authoritative revealer of doctrines, and the trustworthy record of God's acts in history.

Teach your personal experience. You can never credibly teach something you do not experience. If you have not bathed your mind in such classics as *Desire of Ages*, *Steps to Christ*, *Acts of the Apostles*, or *The Great Controversy*, you likely will fail to convince others of their validity or benefit.

Preach a benefit not a feature. The gift of prophecy is far more than just a doctrinal feature to be found in our fundamental beliefs. The leadership ministry and writing heritage of Ellen White have benefitted and blessed this movement much more strongly than just a proof-text answer for our claims to be the remnant movement.

Advocate experimentation rather than compliance. The Bible says, "Taste of the Lord and see that He is good." Ellen White, herself stated, "Some are unacquainted with me and my labors, and they are very skeptical of anything bearing the name of visions. This is all natural, and can be overcome only by experience. If persons are not settled in regard to the visions, they should not be crowded off."¹ My personal recommendation to "taste and see" has awakened the interest of many to experience the blessings I have enjoyed.

Show the Bible tests of genuine gifts. Just as the Scriptures warn of false prophets and false gifts, so tests of genuine prophetic claims are given. The Bible states that the gift of

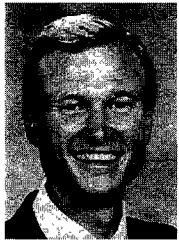
prophecy will be present in the church of the last days, it warns that while multiplicities of counterfeits will arise, the genuine will shine through, and it affirms various evidences that can be evaluated by investigation and experiential seeking for God's will. "Don't turn away God's Spirit or ignore prophecies. Put everything to the test. Accept what is good, and don't have anything to do with evil," (1 Thess. 5:19-22, CEV).

Prove the gift by its fruit. For my personal life, this gift of prophetic guidance has grown to an authoritative role, not because I advocate that something beyond Scripture is needed or even because I am convinced that Ellen White's ministry meets the criteria of a genuine prophet. She herself said, "God's Word is the unerring standard. The Testimonies are not to take the place of the Word. . . . Let all prove their positions from the Scriptures and substantiate every point they claim as truth from the revealed Word of God."² However, when I read her works, I want to know more about Jesus. I hunger to know more of the Bible. I revel in magnificent promises of God's providence and increasing confidence in God's leading for the future. The fruits prove the genuine far better than any argument or debate.

Uplift the certainty of Jesus' triumph. As you lift up Jesus before your hearers through the great themes of God's saving grace through Jesus' atonement, His victory over death, His continuing ministry on our behalf, His love for and spiritual gifts to His church, and the ultimate triumph of God's love when Jesus returns to restore all things, you will see the fruit of the Holy Spirit at work in your own life, your congregation, and in the lives of your members. ■

¹ Ellen G. White, *Evangelism* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1946), 259.

² *Ibid.*, 256.



The other night I was putting my son to bed. A mundane moment suddenly blossomed into a memorable one, rich with the whimsical wisdom of a 12-year-old boy. The conversation, as best I can remember, went something like this:

"How many appointments will you have this week, Dad?" (He'd seen his pastor-dad on the phone that Sunday evening lining up visits for the week.)

"About twenty, I think."

"Doesn't it get kind of old just visiting folk all week then preaching at them on Sabbath?"

"Yeah, I guess it would if that's all I saw in what I was doing. But there's really more adventure to it than that."

"Like what?"

"Well, my goal is to reach this community for Christ through these church members."

"It's going kind of slow isn't it? Do they know that's what you're trying to do?"

"Yeah, in one way it is going slow. But just think of the people from the community who have come to Christ and begun attending church recently." (We ticked off the names of several families.)

"I see what you mean. But do you think the members really get it? Do they know what you are trying to do? I didn't know. Why don't you just tell them, like you just told me?"

"I guess I thought I had."

"No, I don't mean with lots of flowery words or complicated explanations. Just tell them: 'My goal is to reach this community for Christ through you church members.'"

"I guess I could do that."

"Maybe you could just record yourself telling me so it would come out right. (Slight animation flickering

Conversation at bedtime

DOUG TILSTRA

through an impish smile.) Then next Sabbath I could stand up and say, 'Everybody, my dad has something to tell you, but it's easier to understand it the way he told me. Listen while I play it for you.' Then I'd just push the button. Think that would do it?"

"Maybe it would. (Bit of chagrin on my face.) You know there's another goal I'm working for in this church."

"What's that?"

"I'm trying to build leaders. I want the church, eventually, to take responsibility for its own care and building itself up. I want to equip leaders for that. That's why, for example, I always try to take an elder or someone else along on visits."

"That's going even slower, isn't it? Why can't you just tell them once to go do it?"

"It's a process, kind of like parenting. How long has it taken me to teach you to roll up the hose after you play with the sprinkler or to wipe the stove after your noodles boil over?"

"Yeah (sheepish grin) but that's not because I don't know how. Its because I really don't like to do those things. I guess I need to learn to want to."

"It's exactly the same with people at the church. My goal is to introduce and connect people to God and let Him motivate them."

"It still seems to be going kind of slow. It seems you ought to be able to do it with a simple, 'Mr. Church Member, this is God. God, this is Mr. Church Member. Take it away, God.'"

"I wish it were that quick and easy! I wish instilling values in you were that quick and easy. It would have been nice if Mom and I could have just tattooed our values on your

chest when you were a baby."

"You would've needed to do them upside down so I could read them!" (grin).

"I suppose you're right. But it still probably wouldn't cut it. Values like honesty, purity, the worth of people, hard work, responsibility, and the others we've been trying to build into you take time. Ultimately, they have to be something you choose for yourself and know how to apply in real life. That's the real reason tattooing them on your chest wouldn't work."

"If it's taken you twelve years to get as far as you have with me, shouldn't that tell you something about the church?"

(Sigh).

"Maybe you should discipline them. It works with me (another grin). You know, like my \$1.00 fines for sassing you or Mom. Or maybe telling them they couldn't come to church or something." (My imagination began ridiculously freewheeling to pictures of consigning church members to chairs in corners or assigning them time outs!)

"Son, there are some differences between parenting and pastoring."

"I guess so."

"The church is a voluntary organization. People don't have to be there. They choose to belong. My goal is to cooperate with God, to draw them to Christ, build them up, teach and lead them, and pray they will internalize Christ's value. And now, you'd better go to sleep! Come on, let's pray."

"Father, it might be nice if You could just tattoo onto our brains the things You want us to think and be. But You don't work that way. You want us to choose freely the things You value. Help us to see that. Help us to admire and choose Your ways. Help our church. Thank You for being so patient with us. In Jesus' name, Amen." ■

Doug Tilstra is ministerial secretary, British Columbia Conference, Burnaby, British Columbia, Canada.

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