

Ministry

International Journal for Pastors September 2000



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Ministry

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January 2000 issue

You have been sending me *Ministry* for some time now. This is to let you know first time writing to you that I do read every article—every time you send me the journal.

Many times I use some of your ideas in my teaching/preaching ministry (with credit given to the source). Your articles are down to earth everyday experiences, which I can relate to my experiences, like being healthy and pastoral stress, balance in the budget, simplicity, for the better (better for me), scholarship and the call to ministry, seminary education and its limits (January 2000).

I want to say thank you for your free subscription to me as a pastor in India. I appreciate it because somebody sacrifices their subscription for me. I have many SDA friends in my city. I have an SDA medical doctor in my own hospital in Bheemunipatnam, a rural charity medical center. God bless your literature ministry.

Please include us in your Call to Prayer 2000 list. We do appreciate the SDA contribution in India's development.—P. J. Titus, Bheemunipatnam, Visakhapatnam, India.

● The article entitled "Can These Bones Live Again?" by Stephen Grunlan started out with some valuable advice. As I read the first eight of his ten points, I could identify his points with examples from my own experience. I began thinking that this was a truly valuable contribution to the store of literature on turning churches from stagnation to growth.

I was horrified, however, when I read his point nine, "Move, 'church fathers' in or out." As a pastor, I do

not think that I ever could sit down with a member and tell him to get along with my new program or leave the church. I do not think that God, who allowed both Saul and David to continue serving as King of Israel, would tell any of us to get with His program or get out. I do not think that Jesus, who kept Judas as treasurer even though he was a thief, would tell any of us to get with the program or get out. Jesus did not give that ultimatum to Peter, even though he opposed Jesus when he went to Jerusalem to die. God calls us to serve our churches, not boss them.

I had one pastor who told me and my wife the same message. He advised us to "Get on the train, or the train will run over you." He initiated the decline of church attendance from 200 to 40. His flourishing church has split into three churches whose combined attendance after ten years was below 200.

I was disappointed to read this in your magazine.—Richard Helzerman, pastor, Seventh-day Adventist Church, Newburgh, Indiana.

March 2000 cover

Thank you for some excellent material on ministering to children in the March 2000 issue. The one distracting feature was the front cover. Was the disheveled, middle-aged man supposed to represent Jesus? If so, the artist must have been trying to illustrate Isaiah 53:2: "There is no beauty that we should desire him." It certainly justifies the divine command "Thou shalt not make until thee any . . . likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath" (Exod. 20:40). Rather than finding a

place on the front of *Ministry*, this piece of "art" could be used as a poster warning children to beware of strange predatory men.—Ron Taylor, retired church administrator.

June-July 2000 issue

Thank you for printing George Knight's "Adventist Approaches to the Second Coming." I too have had a difficult time reconciling the 6,000-year/seventh millennium theory (which I encounter regularly) with the Bible and Ellen White. However, as a 20-something, I have had to endure older folks (God bless their motives, surely) quenching my youthful expectancy and fervor with "Yeah, when I was young, I thought the Lord was going to come in my lifetime, too." This destroys in young people that "sense of immediacy" which, according to Knight, the Whites kept, even while living responsibly. Fresh, youthful anticipation—there's nothing like it!—Bill Krick, Clovis, California.

● May I take this opportunity to thank you for James Cress's excellent "Thirty Roses" column of *Ministry*. It was right on target, as my wife and I have also been ministry partners in marriage for over 30 years. We really identified with each point made. So often opposites do attract but then spend their next years in competition and approval. How wonderful to realize that God puts us together to supplement and complete the team He has chosen for their lifework for Him. That way everything you do works out best. Roses to you for the great job your are doing. Thanks again!—Douglas R. Rose, Grand Prairie, Texas. ■

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.



It was a stimulating privilege to sit with colleagues in Toronto working through proposed changes to the *Church Manual*

when it comes to how members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church should be cared for when they divorce and remarry. Though many would disagree, I believe progress was made in that the issues were clearly identified and discussed more candidly and completely than I have heard it done in a venue such as the floor of a General Conference session. Here are a few reflections:

1. Although the theological foundations for the sanctity and perpetuity of marriage are admirably laid out in the necessarily brief statement introducing the divorce-remarriage section of the *Church Manual*, I believe the cryptic theological or biblical reflections on divorce and remarriage that follow were not covered quite as well. While the issues of grace and forgiveness, so foundational to the Bible, are mentioned, such biblical principles are not in reality brought into the *Manual* so that they are actually allowed to make proportional impressions on the necessary disciplinary policies recommended in the *Manual* for divorcing and remarrying couples. Partly because of this, the divorce and remarriage policies expressed in the *Manual* are not as consistent as they could be with the realities covered in the Bible and confronted in everyday life.

2. It seems to me that the struggles experienced in the discussion of these things on the floor in Toronto were due to a tendency among us to place the prescribed discipline advocated in the *Manual* almost on a par with Jesus' statements about adultery being the only just reason for divorce and thus remar-

Toronto's burning issue

W I L L E V A

riage. In other words, I do not know of anyone who would gainsay Jesus' declaration that ultimately the only legitimate cause for divorcing your spouse is adultery, but I do know those who would question that it follows that the only way for the church to properly treat such people is to remove them from church membership.

To embrace the
Lord of the church is to embrace
the reality that the highest
expressions of true obedience are
those thoughts and actions . . .
that emanate from a mature
and far-reaching realization of
who Jesus was and is and what
His will ultimately is for
His church and His people.

To state this concern in yet another way: it seems that the *Church Manual's* policy of removing illegitimately divorced and remarried members from church fellowship has tended to be placed on a par with the authoritative words of Jesus decrying the common divorce procedures He observed. Thus it must be said that the illegitimacy of divorce except when adultery is present is a divine reality, articulated by Jesus Himself, but the act of disfellowshipping someone in

the face of such a divorce and remarriage is a human policy. This distinction must be drawn clearly so that the Church can, if it is led to do so, find other ways of caring for divorcing members who agonize in their sense of failure and loss.

It is true that administering discipline is a difficult and unpleasant thing, from which we naturally tend to shy away. The point here is clearly not to avoid necessary church discipline, but simply to suggest that formal removal from the church community is not the only effective action a church may take in the case of its divorcing and remarrying members, and the church would not be denying the authority of Scripture, if it took another approach.

I am grateful and proud to be part of a church that is passionately concerned with protecting and defending the lives of people from unjust and callous behavior. Knowing Jesus and looking carefully and contextually at His statements about divorce (particularly in Matthew 19), reveals this to be His primary concern. The kind of community which, for example, allows men to divorce their wives for very little reason and thus potentially consigns their former wives to an almost intolerable existence, sounds in principle at least, remarkably like much of what occurs in the wake of current divorce and remarriage, even in contemporary Christian societies. The Church must stand against this kind of injustice as Jesus did. The awfully casual view of marriage against which Jesus made His definitive statements had long since lost the essence of its divine source and focus: that of a true covenant-commitment grounded in agape love.

3. Finally, while there is the immense and growing need to maintain the unity of a world Church, we must acknowledge that regardless of what the corporate church decides

continued on p. 21

BLACK SDA PREACHING

*Balanced and binding
or betwixt and between?*

Black American preaching is an identifiable reality. Its energy and imagery make it unique to gospel proclamation. It's an art form born of faith, rooted in love, driven by hope, shaped in trial, nurtured by pain, mentored in suffering, and authenticated by time.



Calvin B. Rock, D.Min., Ph. D., is a general vice-president of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Silver Spring, Maryland.

While Black preaching deserves our in-depth investigation, we shall concentrate here on Black "Adventist" preaching. The critical questions that arise are: (1) Is it really possible to do truly Black preaching when we are structurally removed from all the rest of Black Christianity and bred almost exclusively on Anglo emphasis of Scripture? (2) If so, how has our social separation from Black believers in society and our cultural distance from Anglo believers impacted our preaching personality? (3) Are African-American preachers preachers with an Adventist doctrine? or are they Adventist preachers with an African-American emphasis? Or a hybrid of sorts—betwixt and between—too theologically Anglicized for authentic Black preaching and too authentically ethnic to fit the Adventist prototype?

Not just style, but content

Black preaching is more than a

form of rhetorical style; it is a function of content with its fervent embrace of the justice aspects of Scripture.¹ Black preaching values the social elements of salvation. It affirms the political dimensions of the gospel. It exalts the last six commandments as faithfully as it does the first four. It leads the people not only to the patching of wounds caused by injustice but also to oppose oppressive laws and systems. It is concerned more with the plight of the slaves than with the might of their masters. Therefore, it is possible to say not only that Black preaching is substance as well as style, but that its substance determines its style. Indeed, its distinctive concerns are parent to its unique expression.

Proclamation that simulates the sounds of Black preaching (that is, preaching that utilizes its imagery and cadence but without its substance) is not the genuine article. No matter how popular the preacher may be, it is a dis-

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tortion of the true enterprise, a false manifestation, and a betrayal of our worthy predecessors in this noble endeavor.

Adventist preaching is even more "content-focused" than Black preaching. Its essence is clearly one of reform—Sabbath reform, health reform, dress reform, education reform, family reform, stewardship reform, etc. Preaching that does not ring with the certainties of Daniel and Revelation; that is not flavored with the symbols of the sanctuary; that does not uphold the law of God; that does not honor the prophetic gift of Ellen White; that does not extol justification by faith is not Adventist preaching.² It may be truth, but it is not Present Truth; it may constitute an engaging performance, but it does not constitute the remnant proclamation.

On one occasion, when Napoleon's soldiers, trapped and tired, shouted with joy at the sound of French pipes approaching in the distance, he commanded them to silence and placed his ear to the ground. When he arose, he quickly ordered his troops to cover. When his officers asked why, since help was obviously on the way, he pointed in the direction of the sounds and tersely replied, "French music, but English marching!"

That verdict aptly describes the polar pitfalls of claiming Blackness but failing to articulate its justice concerns and professing Adventism but preaching without its prophetic essence. We need to do Black preaching because it resonates with our cultural past and present in ways that maximize the impact of truth. We *must* do Adventist preaching because that is our unique commission. Anything less is a denial of one's oath, a tragedy for the people and a disappointment to God.

But is it really possible to accomplish this harmony of heritages, both grounded in Scripture, one shaped very pervasively by centuries of trial and trust in the God of deliverance, and the other influenced by the Puritan ethic and the imminence of Millerism; one known for echoing the justice sighs of

Amos and Micah, the other echoing the antiphonal scenes of Ezekiel and Zechariah; one responding to a people's need to defend their dignity everyday, the other the Church's need to defend the 2300 days?

The answer is yes, but the effort must begin with the realization that both processes have weaknesses created by their human proprietors. A primary problem with traditional Adventist preaching is its socially conservative interpretation of Scripture, and that of Black preaching is its acceptance of raw excitement as the definition of success and the use of arbitrary stimulation as a means of attaining that acclaim.

The conservative stance

There are several reasons why doctrinally conservative churches such as ours spawn socially conservative preachers and people. One is the minimalist view of New Testament sociality provided by most Anglo theologians. They read, in Jesus' refusal to strike out against Rome and Paul's insistence that Onesimus go back and be a good slave, a divine directive to passive acceptance of injustice. In reality, however, given what Yoder terms "the absence of alternatives," both Jesus and Paul should be seen as pushing the cause of justice as far as their times would permit.³ This included Christ's calling Herod "that fox" (Luke 13:32) and Paul's imploring Philemon to receive Onesimus, not simply as a slave, but as a brother. These acts, along with Christ's many social "sit-ins" (e.g. the woman at the well, John 4:6, 7) and the equalitarian content of Paul's message (Gal. 3:28), give their ministries a decidedly radical flavor. Ellen White's instruction, 2000 years later, that Christians disobey the Fugitive Slave Law is far different from what either could then say.⁴ But, given the circumstances (the *increase* of alternatives), her category of "civil disobedience" is no more brave or socially advanced a posture than was theirs.

Another highly effective variable is what is known as the "miracle motif" or the view of those who say that since

the only hope of overcoming societal evil is the conversion of the populace and since that prospect, by orders of magnitude, is a mission impossible, all attempts at social change are futile; it is enough to hope and pray for the coming of the Lord and the eradication of injustice. This is what Gilbert Murray calls "the sad philosophy of those who, knowing how short time is, do not undertake to build that which they cannot finish or to employ materials fit for use in a structure expected to stand the test of time."⁵

Yet another effective determinative is the penchant of religious conservatives to interpret wrongfully the Scriptures' insistence upon choosing the spiritual above the physical as justification for privatism in response to social evil. For them it is not a matter of valuing Jericho by Jerusalem, or the secular by the sacred, it is the mandate to regard social issues as the province of Caesar not the purview of the Church; to address them individually, perhaps, but not as a part of what we call "finishing of the work."⁶

Since all of the above is denied by the ethos of Black preaching, proclamation that accommodates these and kindred slants on Scripture is not true to its ideal. It may utilize Black sound effects (employ African-American music),

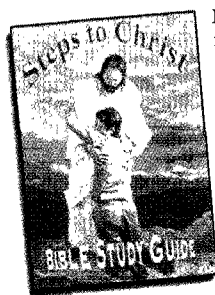
but it is in fact Anglo conservative marching, not the call to social as well as spiritual freedom Black preaching entails.

But then the greater fault for us is not preaching Adventist without preaching Black, but preaching Black and not Adventist, especially when that preaching is given to rhetorical absurdities. While the bane of standard Adventist proclamation is social insensitivity, the weakness of much Black Adventist preaching is doctrinal neutrality camouflaged in verbal vehemence. What should we do to resolve this tension?

Arouse social conscience

Doctrinal neutrality is often the consequence of disenchantment with the Church's underdeveloped social conscience. "Hanging in there" and collecting a paycheck is one thing but being an enthusiastic apologist for a system viewed as weak, or at times even negative to one's socio-political interests, requires an unusual measure of optimism and patience. If, of course, one buys into the concept of a desocialized gospel, such tensions do not exist, but if one does, in fact, link righteousness with justice, the loyalty struggle is very real. The tragedy for those who do not find resolution to this dilemma (who do not discover that "social" reform is also a scriptural man-

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date) is loss of enthusiasm for remnant proclamation and capitulation to nominal Protestant preaching.

Similarly, rhetorical vehemence often occurs when one concludes that since standard Caucasian delivery does not fit, “anything goes”—that shrillness is Blackness, that loudness is laudable, and that emotionalism is more important than intellectualism. In other words, while God is not dead, He is somewhat deaf and the people intellectual dwarfs who come each Sabbath for another dose of “feel good” religion. Such preaching is neither African-American music nor Anglo marching; it is a retreat to mediocrity accomplished to the beat of lesser drummers; it is resignation in the face of frustration.⁷

Embrace categories of freedom

But the realization that both processes suffer from weaknesses derived from their proprietors is not the only key to holding these two enterprises in dynamic tension. Another is the recognition that African-Americans are virtually “nonplayers” in the theological processing of Church doctrine. It is not disloyal for us to admit that the Scriptural emphasis resulting from revelation that funnels through the sociological grid of the advantaged is very different from that which processes through that of the disadvantaged.⁸ And we need not call that racism. It is simply the way it is. While it is clear that racism is largely responsible for the demographics that produce differing cultural grids, it is not so clear that it is racist to know God sincerely, if incompletely, through one’s cultural apparatus. Understanding that reality not only frees us from animosity toward those whose theology lacks social sensitivity but also allows us to appropriate conscientiously categories of liberation not usually heard in Adventist preaching.

Apply Present Truth

A third means of mating the two processes is being intentional and determined about applying Present Truth to our everyday situation. In other words, to establish, not just the furniture, but the freedoms of the sanctuary above. The

Commandments, the state of the dead, the Second Coming and all of the other 27 Fundamentals can and should be related to the Black experience. It requires creativity and persistence, but it is most rewarding to show Africa’s descendants of the global diaspora as the “people” John saw hearing the angels of Revelation 14; to market the material benefits of keeping the Sabbath and returning tithe; and to remind one and all that before Isaiah saw a “remnant repairing the

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breach and restoring the paths to dwell in,” he declared the real fast of God as loosening the bands of wickedness, undoing the heavy burdens, freeing the oppressed, breaking every yoke, dealing our bread to the hungry, bringing the poor and cast out into our homes, covering the naked, and satisfying the afflicted soul (Isa. 58:5-10). By such emphasis we can, and must, make the case that justice is not, at best, a companion element of righteousness and, at worst, an alien category but that it is in fact its defining core.

Refuse to be entertainers

Fourth, we are aided in this endeavor by refusing to accede to the people’s predisposition for show and entertainment. That, of course, is not a Black phenomenon. But since nobody can do it better than we can, it is a peculiar temptation and distortion of our task. “Somebody ought to say Amen,” “Let me hear you say Amen,” “Come on, say Amen,” “Walls, lights, pews—say Amen!”—discretely used are legitimate pulpit devices. But dependence upon these to gain attention and applause is a cheap, crippling substitute for eye-opening exegesis of the Word. True Black preaching does not have to beg for “Amens” and is not dependent upon theatrical devices. It utilizes imaginative language and vocal inflection to tell the story, but always in ways that make the text, not the mechanics and charisma of the speaker, the center of attention.⁹ Black preaching is instructive, not exhibitionist; celebratory, not carnivalistic; animated, not theatrical; vibrant, not vehement. It is socially conscious, but not a social gospel; it is concerned with the proximate, but rooted in the ultimate.

Interpret the remnant categories

Fifth, we must produce as rapidly as possible, theologians who can interpret through the axiological grid of African-Americans the remnant categories of the Word of God. While leading the nation in evangelism, we have fallen behind in scholarship. We need and must have content theologians, systematic, New Testament, Old Testament scholars—the Ph.D. and Th.D. kind—people who can read the Word in its original languages and tell us in our categories of thought and experience what “saith the Lord!” Only then will we be freed from the bondage of alien theological concerns and provided the most accurate insights for preaching and praxis.

Rally around the cross

Sixth, we must make the cross of Christ our rallying point. The Cross is the nexus where Black suffering and Apocalyptic expectation meet in dy-

namic tension; where "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" jibes with "Lift Up Your Heads, O Ye Gates," and "Order My Steps" mates with "I Will Follow Thee My Savior"; where the courage of Richard Allen fuses with the faith of William Miller; where the determined conviction of Sojourner Truth complements the delicate candor of Rachel Oates; where the mission of the underground railroad mirrors the mandate of the orbiting angels; where the bruised hands of those hanged because of their skin grasp the nailed palms of Him crucified because of our sins; where the blood of the "many thousands gone" cry out "How long, O Lord, how long," and the exuberance of our four million ancestors released from the most binding slavery of modern history anticipates the shout of the finally redeemed—"Free at last, free at last, thank God Almighty we're free at last!"¹⁰

The new millennium

How does our grade card read as we begin this new millennium? We have survived and done well largely because of Oakwood College and the Moseley, Richards, Rogers, Warren, Reaves, Allen Religion Department leadership; a department that had a major hand in

shaping the ministries of C. E. Bradford and E. E. Cleveland.

An unsung achievement of these two men requiring special notice is their contribution to Church unity. They stand in the distinguished tradition of G. E. Peters, F. L. Peterson, W. W. Fordham, and other notables whose preaching, in the middle third of the last century, proved a major deterrent to schisms like those led by L. C. Sheaf, the Manns brothers (John and Charles), and J. K. Humphrey in the first several decades.

These celebrated defections, sparked by institutional racism, might well have multiplied and eventuated in irreconcilable division had it not been for the balanced and binding preaching of our honorees and their courageous colleagues during the last decades of the twentieth century. They have, by both pen and voice, been used by God as special heralds of doctrine and loyalty.

But past is not always prologue! The new and additional challenges now facing us are as rife with danger as was the overt racism of yesteryear. Primary among these challenges are the destructive forces of Pentecostalism, secularism, congregationalism, and, more recently, an assimilationist appeal to "color blindness" that, taken to fruition, would ren-

der to archival status this present dialogue and any other attempt at enhancement of our socio-religious heritage.

If we are to maintain our position as a vibrant wheel within the larger wheel of the Church; if, given the lengthening of our earthly pilgrimage, we will deliver to our successors Black Seventh-day "Adventism" as opposed to Black Seventh-day "congregationalism" or Black Seventh-day "Pentecostalism," we must, with determined vigilance, address these issues with resolve.

I challenge African-American preachers to this high resolve. I urge that we proceed with the premise that Black preaching and Adventist preaching are indeed complementary events and not mutually exclusive; that we can enjoy the best of both worlds; that we can avoid both the Charybdis of uninformed conservatism and the Scylla of virtual capitulation; that we can with informed awareness, stern discipline, broad charity, and relentless devotion provide for our membership and the society beyond a product more relevant and exciting than either by itself; that we can employ music that is consistent with our marching—which is to say, preaching that is faithful to both the "cultural heritage" we did not choose and cannot escape and the "remnant heritage" we have solemnly chosen and must never deny. ■

¹ Cain Felder, *Stony the Road We Trod*, "The Hermeneutical Dilemma of the African American Biblical Student" William H. Myers (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 40-56.

² Daniels, 64.

³ John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1972), 178.

⁴ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 1., (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Pub. Assn., 1944), 201, 202.

⁵ H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self* (New York: Harper and Rowe, 1963), 90.

⁶ E. E. Cleveland, *The Middle Wall* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1969), 55, 56.

⁷ Calvin B. Rock, *Institutional Loyalty vs. Racial Freedom: The Dilemma of Black Seventh-day Adventist Leadership* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University, 1984), 159, 160.

⁸ James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1975), 92.

⁹ Charles E. Bradford, *Preaching to the Times* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1975), 109-113.

¹⁰ Coretta Scott King, *The Words of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, "I Have A Dream," excerpts from the speech given at Washington, D.C., August 28, 1963 (New York: Newmarket Press, 1987), 97.

Igniting
a *passion*
for *living*
God's
love...
never losing
focus of
the **cross.**



Women's
MINISTRIES

NORTH AMERICAN DIVISION
of SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS

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When I turned 50 this year, I underwent a complete physical checkup. Doctors poked, prodded, x-rayed, and even cut open parts of my body to assess and repair the damage I had done in half a century. As the new millennium rolled around, I scheduled a spiritual checkup as well. I went on a silent retreat led by a wise spiritual director.

In those days of silence and solitude, I paid attention to what might need to change in order to keep my soul in shape. The more I listened, the longer grew the list. Here is a mere sampling, a portion of a spiritual action plan for my next 50 years.

Come to God with your own troubles, as well as the world's. I need to find a better balance between the need for personal serenity and a proper concern about global hunger, injustice, and environmental issues. I look at the example of Jesus, who surely cared about similar matters while on earth. As he said to the anxiety-prone, "Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."

Question your doubts as much as your faith. By personality, or perhaps as a reaction to a fundamentalist past, I brood on doubts and experience faith in occasional flashes. Isn't it about time for me to reverse the pattern?

Do not attempt this journey alone. Find companions who see you as a pilgrim, even a straggler, and not as a guide. Like many Protestants, I easily assume the posture of one person alone with God, a stance that more and more I see as unbiblical. The Old Testament tells the story of the people of God; Jesus' parables unveil the kingdom; the epistles went primarily to communities of faith. We have little guidance on how to live as a follower alone because God never intended it.

My to-be list: What I learned from a 50-year spiritual check-up

PHILIP YANCEY

Allow the good—natural beauty, your health, encouraging words—to penetrate as deeply as the bad. Why does it take about 17 encouraging letters from readers to overcome the effect of one that is caustic and critical? If I awoke every morning, and fell asleep each night, bathed in a sense of gratitude and not self-doubt, the in-between hours would doubtless take on a different cast.

For your own sake, simplify. Eliminate whatever distracts you from God. Among other things, that means a ruthless winnowing of mail, and giving catalogs, junk mail, and book club notices no more time than it takes to toss them in the trash. If I ever get the nerve, my television set should probably land there as well.

Find what Eric Liddel found: something that allows you to feel God's pleasure. When the sprinter's sister worried that his participation in the Olympics might derail his missionary career, Eric responded, "God made me fast; when I run, I feel His pleasure." What makes me feel God's pleasure? I must identify it, and then run.

Always "err," as God does, on the side of freedom, mercy, and compassion. I continue to marvel at the humility of a sovereign God who descends to live inside us, his flawed creatures. "Quench not the Spirit,"

Paul says in one place, and in another "Grieve not the holy Spirit of God." In so many words, the God of all power asks us not to hurt him. Do I show that same humble, noncoercive attitude toward people of whom I disapprove?

Don't be ashamed. "I am not ashamed of the gospel," Paul told the Romans. Why do I speak in generalities when strangers ask me what I do for a living and then try to pin down what kind of books I write? Why do I mention the secular schools I attended before the Christian ones?

Remember, those Christians who peeve you so much; God chose them too. For some reason, I find it much easier to show grace and acceptance toward immoral unbelievers than toward uptight, judgmental Christians. Which, of course, turns me into a different kind of uptight, judgmental Christian.

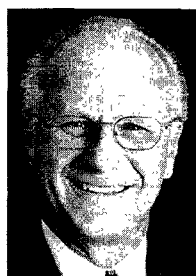
Forgive, daily, those who caused the wounds that keep you from wholeness. Increasingly, I find that our wounds are the very things God uses in his service. By harboring blame for those who caused them, I slow the act of redemption that can give the wounds worth and value, and that can be ultimately healing.

My spiritual checkup offers one clear advantage over my physical checkup. From my doctor, I learned that no matter what I do, my body will continue to deteriorate. At best, a good diet and exercise routine will slow that deterioration. Spiritually, however, I can look forward to growth, renewed vigor, and improved health—as long as I listen to, and then act on, what I hear God say. ■

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IF I WERE THE DEVIL!

Seventh-day Adventism at the edge of the twenty-first century is somewhere it never expected to be—on earth. Beyond that, it has expanded beyond the wildest dreams of its founders and continues to expand.



George R. Knight, Ph.D., is professor of church history at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.

This article is an abbreviated version of a paper that was presented verbally to the General Conference session in Toronto, Canada, on July 2, 2000. The purpose of the paper was to stimulate discussion by delegates from around the world on significant topics facing the Church.

When I joined the Church in 1961 there were somewhat over 1 million Adventists worldwide. That figure had expanded to over 2 million in 1970, 3.5 million in 1980, nearly 7 million in 1990, and roughly 11 million in 2000. At the present rate of growth we might expect to find 20 million Adventists in 2013 and 40 million sometime between 2025 and 2030, if time should last.

What a change from 1848 when there were about 100 believers. To them Ellen White's publishing vision that Adventism would someday be like streams of light extending clear round the earth must have seemed like the wildest nonsense. If one of them had predicted 11 million Adventists, the others, like Sarah of old, probably would have laughed out loud.

Those early believers were few, poor, and weak. The Church today is many, with the most widespread unified worldwide presence of any Protestant church in history, and with billions of dollars of assets and means.

Yet growth brought about its own complications and challenges. Things were simple in the early days of the Church. They all spoke the same language, belonged to the same race, lived in the northeastern United States, and

had been reared in a culture that provided them with a shared value system and set of expectations.

In the year 2000, Adventism is far from simple. We hail from over two hundred nations, speak over seven hundred languages, and vary widely in our cultural backgrounds and expectations.

Adventism today has unparalleled finances and reservoirs of skilled workers, yet it faces unprecedented challenges. *If it has already accomplished the impossible in its past history, it still faces the challenge of again accomplishing the impossible in its future. Fortunately, our God is an expert at the impossible.* For better or worse, however, He has chosen to use fallible human instruments to finish His work.

Now, if I were the devil I would pit all of my energies against the human element in God's plan as His church seeks to move from the present into the future. In fact, if I were the devil I would carefully plan my strategy for frustrating the Church in its mission.

1. Frustrate the young of the Church.

The first thing on my agenda would be the upcoming generation of Adventists. *If I were the devil I would put*

GEORGE R. KNIGHT

my best energies into getting the Church to reject the ideas and plans of the coming generation. That shouldn't be too difficult, since in many parts of the world they don't dress like their elders, sing like them, or even think like them. I would also help the Adventist Church forget that their movement was largely begun by young people whose ideas were innovative and creative.

Our devil knows that if he can discourage the best of the young from taking over the Church, it will end up dead or dying. To reach the new generation, we must learn to communicate in the language of their day, just as Jesus used the language and idioms of His, and James White did in his.

The Church needs to recognize that the upcoming generations don't think like those of us born in the 1940s and earlier. Brand loyalty is gone. The post-Watergate, post-Vietnam, post-modern world tends to be post-denominational. The Church can no longer expect mindless or guilt-ridden loyalty just because people were born Adventist or because they think Adventism has the truth. On the contrary, to retain their loyalty the Church will need to demonstrate that it truly is what it claims to be and that it is using its funds and resources faithfully.

The youth are Adventism's greatest opportunity and its most serious challenge. The Church must formulate plans to reach their minds and enlist their support.

2. Think negatively.

If I were the devil I would get the Church to think small. This tactic is closely related to that of frustrating the young people, because the young have not yet discovered that everything is impossible. I know Adventists who can give 110 reasons why almost anything that is suggested can't be done. And they usually buttress their argument with Bible verses and Ellen White quotations taken out of their historical context.

Such apostles of negativism have apparently never read the following: *"New methods and new plans will spring from new circumstances.* New thoughts will come with new workers who give

themselves to the work . . . *They will receive plans devised by the Lord Himself.*"²¹ (New workers, of course, are often young workers.)

The apostles of negativism need to learn the lesson of the bumblebee. It is aerodynamically impossible for bumblebees to fly, but they don't know it, so they do it anyway.

Thinking small in Adventism means church "X" baptizing 50 in 2001 rather than 25; it means topping the 20 million mark by 2004 instead of 2013. With small thinking the Church will be on the planet for a long time to come.

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on my agenda would be the
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the coming generation.

The Church needs to reach the entire world for Christ. While that may seem like an impossibility, we must never forget the impossible task of the early Christian church or of our Adventist forebears. What, we need to ask, is the magnitude of latter-rain faith? How can we *think big* and best utilize our funds and working force to make our God-given dreams come true?

3. Limit the Church's vision.

If I were the devil I would get people to believe that there is only one way to do something and that everybody has to do it that one way. Take worship, for example. A few years ago the North Ameri-

can Division had some tension over what was called "celebration worship." I don't know that much about celebration worship, but I do know that in the average Adventist service I can fall asleep during the invocation, wake up at the benediction, and still confidently tell you everything that happened in between.

The Church needs to realize, as Ellen White puts it, that "not all minds are to be reached by the same methods." Worship styles, for example, are related to socio-economic class. What may reach an upper-middle class community may not appeal to other groups. Adventism doesn't need one or two ways of worshiping. It needs 50 or more if it is to reach all the people.

The same can be said for evangelism. Our God has created variety everywhere. We need to consciously develop methods and procedures that are quite unlike our traditional ones if we are going to reach those most *unlike* us.

4. Downplay promising technology.

If I were the devil I would downplay the importance of new technologies in finishing the Church's work. New technology has tremendous power for both good and evil. H. M. S. Richards once told me that he had to fight the Church leaders at every step. Radio was too new in 1930, too radical, too innovative, too untried, a waste of the Lord's money.

Today we stand at the frontier of technologies that possess immense potential for spreading the three angels' messages that Richards couldn't even dream of. Today as never before we need a generation with the H. M. S. Richards spirit but with twenty-first century imaginations.

5. Make corporate Church leadership central.

If I were the devil I would make pastors and administrators the center of the work of the Church. It must have been the devil who gave us the idea that the pastor should do all the preaching, give all the Bible studies, be a church's primary soul winner, and the one to make and carry out all business decisions for the church.

We need to move beyond the place where we see churches as entertainment centers for the saints. Adventism needs to get more priests into the priesthood of the believers. If we wait for the clergy to finish the work, Adventism will be on planet Earth for a little longer than eternity.

The challenge is to create a generation of Adventist pastors and administrators who become *equippers*, who are skilled at helping people use their talents in the work of reaching the world.

6. Undermine the local congregation.

If I were the devil I would undermine the importance of the local congregation. One of the great needs of Adventism is the creation and maintenance of vibrant local congregations. A healthy congre-

gation is not a group of independent individuals but a unit of believers reaching out to the community around them.

The task of the world Church in its General Conference organization is to coordinate funds and personnel in order to send Christ's message to the far corners of the earth. Thus, congregationalism as a form of organization is not sufficient in itself. On the other hand, in the long run the denomination will only be as healthy as its congregations. What can be done to create healthier local congregations?

7. Make the Church top-heavy.

If I were the devil I would create more administrative levels and generate more administrators. In fact, if I were the devil I would get as many successful

Church employees as far from the scene of action as possible. I would put them behind desks, cover them with paper, and inundate them with committees. If that wasn't enough, I would remove them to so-called "higher" and "higher" levels until they had little direct and sustained contact with the people who make up the Church.

Now don't get me wrong. I believe in church organization. But I also believe in food, and I know that too much of a good thing has less than healthy results.

More and more Adventists are realizing that there are other ways to structure the Church in the post-modern world that would free up both workers and money for finishing God's work on earth. This task may be one of the greatest challenges of our day.

8. Fear the Holy Spirit.

If I were the devil I would make Adventists afraid of the Holy Spirit. Too many of us fear Pentecostalism when we think of the topic of the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, we need to remember the Bible teaching about the necessity of the Spirit in Christian work, and Ellen White's thought that the reception of the Holy Spirit brings all other blessings in its train.

How much do we think about the Holy Spirit and the outpouring of the latter rain? Are we so focused on goals, structures, and human endeavor that we have forgotten the essential power behind each of them? What steps can be taken to allow the Spirit His proper place in Adventism? Or do we hope to finish our work without His presence?

9. Promote the numbers game.

If I were the devil I would encourage the denomination to keep playing the numbers game. The worst thing that ever happened to Adventism is when it learned to count. We count members, churches, institutions, money, and everything else. While numbers have their proper place, they may have very little to do with the reality of a finished work.

One result of the numbers game is that we tend to put our money where

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Web site: www.ministerialassociation.com

we can get the most baptisms for the least money. That means that we have not put the effort needed into those parts of the world that are the most difficult. The numbers problem takes on different configurations in various parts of the world, but we need to consistently face it in our planning if we ever hope to reach all God's children.

10. Downplay the apocalyptic heritage.

If I were the devil I would get Seventh-day Adventists to forget or at least downplay their apocalyptic heritage. Adventism has never seen itself as just another denomination, but rather as a movement of prophecy with its roots in Revelation 10-14. It is that belief in Adventism as a special, called-out people with an urgent message that has driven the Church to the ends of the earth.

When that vision is gone, Adventism will become just another toothless religious group that just happens to be a little more peculiar in some of its beliefs than some of the others.

Adventism's approach to apocalyptic in the future will determine whether it will continue to be a movement or will be transmuted into a monument of the movement and eventually into a museum commemorating the movement.

While we are on the topic of apocalypse, it is important that we speak to the people of our day. It just doesn't get people excited about the nearness of the Advent to tell them that there was a great earthquake in Lisbon in 1755 and that the stars fell in 1833. I have no problem with those events in terms of their historicity and their power on people in the nineteenth century, but we need to help people see the ongoing apocalyptic events in the framework of our day.

11. Major on minors.

If I were the devil I would get Adventists to hold that all of their beliefs are of equal importance. On the contrary, the plain fact is that having a saving relationship with Jesus is at the very center of Adventism. That relationship is not at the same level as eating a pork chop. I have known Sabbath keepers who are

meaner than the devil. I have even known vegetarians who are meaner than the devil. The Church needs to think of its beliefs in terms of what is central and what is peripheral.

The Bible picture is clear that all genuine Christianity flows out of a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. It is all too easy to be an Adventist without being a Christian. In our evangelism and in Adventism's entire outreach program, the centrality of Christ needs to be made crystal clear.

I*f I were the devil I would get as many Adventists as possible to think tribally, nationally, and racially. I would make the Church one big power struggle without regard to mission or efficiency.*

12. Encourage contention.

If I were the devil I would get Adventists fighting with each other. In this, any old topic will do—worship styles, theology, dress standards. After all, if Adventists are busy shooting all their bullets at each other, they won't have many left for me. The devil has been quite successful in this strategy. What can be done to help us find and defeat the real enemy?

13. Champion only the cause of one's own kind.

If I were the devil I would get as many Adventists as possible to think tribally, nationally, and racially. I would make the

Church one big power struggle without regard to mission or efficiency.

Having made that statement, I hasten to add that there are injustices that need to be rectified and complex situations that can never be made completely straight. My plea is that even in the most difficult and unjust situations we need to behave as born-again sisters and brothers who are able to discuss these things without losing sight of the mission of the Church that makes the issues meaningful in the first place. Along this line, Adventism needs to develop mechanisms to enrich and enlighten its multiculturalism and internationalism.

14. Look miserable.

Finally, if I were the devil I would get Adventists to look miserable on Sabbath. When do Adventists rejoice—sundown Friday or sundown Saturday? Too many of us act as if Sabbath was a penalty for being an Adventist instead of a sign of our salvation and the greatest blessing of the week. This unfortunate attitude shows up in too many of our churches. I have been to Adventist churches where no one even greeted me.

It takes more than correct doctrine to fill a church. We need not only doctrinal truth but the *truth* as it is in Jesus (John 13:35).

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

I'm tired of playing the role of the devil. Where does God come into all of this? If I were God I would encourage the Seventh-day Adventist Church to start thinking, planning, and acting in a manner that will defeat the devil's game plan. I would encourage Adventism to multiply the power of its blessings; treat its challenges in an open, honest, and Christian manner; and put all its energies into maximizing its missiological opportunities.

Success will not come about by accident, but will be the product of deliberate thought, planning, and action done under the leadership of the Holy Spirit. ■

¹ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1948), 6:476, italics supplied.

2000 World Ministers Council focuses on “The Way of the Cross Leads Home”

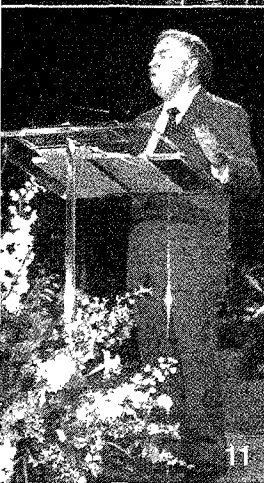
The Way of the Cross Leads Home. With this theme, the Seventh-day Adventist World Ministers Council convened in Toronto, Canada, on June 25-29, 2000, with more than 6,000 pastors and spouses in attendance. The international council, preceding the church's 57th General Conference session, provided the Adventist global pastoral family with an opportunity to assess their lives and ministry against the focal point of their history and destiny: the Cross that was and the Home that is soon to come.

The Council was not merely a summit of intellectual discourses; rather, it was a celebration of pastoral life. Preaching—lively, inspiring, biblical, and Christ-centered—formed the central thrust of the gathering. Adventist ministers from around the world preached to the preachers and connected the Cross to vital aspects of pastoral life—professional, personal, family interests. Each day's sermons illustrated how an event that occurred over 2,000 years ago can be relevant for pulpits and pews of the twenty-first century.

Every morning and afternoon, pastors and their spouses could attend one of over 150 seminars addressing a wide range of pastoral concerns. Seminar topics included preaching, theology, stewardship, family life, parenting, social work, community, and handling abuse.

Ministerial families received strong affirmation in Toronto. The Ministerial Association sent the message that pastors and their families are very important to the church. This emphasis was visible through the worldwide talent search involving pastors' kids.





1. Planning with a smile. While the Ministerial Association planned and carried out the World Council, the individual touch of Sharon Cress in Shepherdess International meetings and of Jim Cress in bringing cohesion and unity to the Council as a whole was evident in the smooth flow of the session.

2. "Suffer them not." The Council cared for pastors' children by providing special programs to challenge their spiritual lives and care for their social needs.

3. Singspiration during the Council gave expression to varied talents, from both individuals and groups. Musicians from Australia led the music throughout the council.

4. Continuing education for pastors and spouses was provided through 150 seminars, ranging from theology to preaching to personal and professional life. Presenters came from every division of the world field.

5. A future Shepherdess? A pastors spouse looks admiringly at her daughter—a future shepherdess? The Shepherdess International plenary sessions promoted an increasing awareness of pastor-spouse team ministry.

6. A global ministry. Recently 60 non-Adventist pastors from Southern Asia accepted the Adventist message. Neal C. Wilson, former General Conference president, invited Council attendees to help fund a five-year program of education and pastoral employment for these ministers in their new walk of proclamation.

7. Shepherdess has truly become international. Division Shepherdess coordinators met with General Conference coordinator Sharon Cress in planning for the future.

8. The Ministerial Resource Center was a favorite stopping and shopping point for the attendees. Over the past five years, the Ministerial Association has published 75 books and 37 videos to help pastors increase the efficiency of their professional lives.

9. The Oakwood College Choir held the audience spellbound with their unique renditions of spirituals and favorite hymns.

10. Drama and the message. Dramatic portrayals underscored that God's Word is personal and meets basic human needs. Here Pastor Alicia Peterson portrays Mary Magdalene, conveying the message that Jesus is the friend of the friendless and the Lord who ever forgives.

11. Healing the person of the pastor. Archibald Hart's three-part series on dealing with stress and anxiety in pastoral life and family was a favorite of the delegates at the plenary sessions.

12. A place for PKs. The Council, emphasizing ministry to the entire pastoral family, invited pastors' kids from around the world to illustrate what the "Way of the Cross" meant to them through essays, art, cartoons, and other communication media. Jim Cress, Don Platt, and Gary Patterson presented awards to the winners.

13. Prayer before preaching. Kneeling and praying with the preacher before he or she stood before the congregation emphasized that no minister's preaching can be effective without the power of prayer.

14. The victory finale. James A. Cress, world Ministerial Association Secretary, ended the Council on a dramatic note, emphasizing that the "Way of the Cross" is the way of victory.

Among the hundreds of children invited to participate by focusing on the Council theme through art, cartoons, banners and flags, stitchery, Scripture recitation, and written essays. The eight winning PKs and their parents were brought to attend the conference. Special kids' programs, using plays, games, and creative Bible presentations, emphasized that a Christian life can also be a fun life.

One aspect of the Council was the focus on the pastor's personal life in the midst of the stresses of daily ministry. How do pastors, who minister to oth-

ers in pressure situations, face such situations in their own lives? Why do pastors experience stress? How can they maintain balance in their lives? Each morning, Dr. Archibald Hart, dean emeritus of Fuller Theological Seminary's School of Psychology, presented a Christian answer to these issues. His presentations showed how the Man who endured the most on the Cross can help pastors on the how-to of dealing with dysfunctional factors that affect family life today.

The Shepherdess International plenary sessions demonstrated how clergy

spouses have been empowered to share Jesus in their communities. Each afternoon, speakers addressed the special challenges of the pastoral spouse.

"Praise God for this Council," remarked one pastor from Romania. "It sets the tone for the General Conference Session and its theme: Almost Home." It did more than set the tone. It inspired and empowered hundreds of pastoral families to return to their congregations, taking afresh the way of the Cross to its final destination of being at home with the Father.—*John M. Fowler, Associate Secretary, GC Education Department.* ■



All I wanted at the time was a simple answer to a humble question. Maybe the question wasn't exactly humble, but I wanted a simple answer nevertheless. The question was, How many really great preachers are there in the world?

After all, as preachers, preaching is our business, so to speak; and we, like everyone else, are susceptible to such flights of vanity that perhaps include the thought that we might be one of the great preachers. . . .

For example, in my first church there was an old elder named Elmer. As a young minister, I looked up to him. As I greeted the people after the service, Elmer shook my hand warmly and said, "Pastor, that was a great sermon. The best I ever heard."

Imagine how that affected me. I thought I had arrived, preaching great sermons so early in my career. An elder had complimented me—me, on my preaching! I reasoned that he, of all people, knew great preaching when he heard it.

Then about the middle of that week, it hit me. I had preached a great sermon (Brother Elmer, God bless him, had said so), so I knew I had to repeat the feat in my upcoming sermon. I can tell you now, I was nervous. Anyone, I supposed, can preach one great sermon. But two in a row?

The fateful day arrived. I was feeling the pressure. I preached the sermon and following the service, as I greeted the people, I kept an eye out for Brother Elmer. Sure enough, he came and shook my hand warmly and said, "Pastor, that was a great sermon. The best I ever heard." Wow! To preach two great sermons in a row was next to impossible, but I had done it.

This went on for some weeks. Then we had a Bible college musical

How many really great preachers are there?

JAMES L. SNYDER

team that came to our church. We gave the entire service to the young people for a splendid concert. As I greeted the people leaving church that morning, old Brother Elmer grabbed me and like an old friend said, just as if I had preached the sermon, "Pastor, that was a great sermon. The best I ever heard."

I discovered what everyone in the congregation knew, that old Brother Elmer was full of raspberries. At any rate, my stock in his compliments fell so low I was forced to sell them.

Several years later, at a different church, I again stood in line greeting the people leaving the church. In line was six-year old Billy. As I reached out to shake his hand, Billy looked up into my face and said, "Preacher, when I grow up I want to be rich so I can give lots of money to the church."

"Well, Billy," I said patronizingly, "That is wonderful. I'll pray for you."

Now, I could have left it right there and all would have been well with the world. But I had to take it one step further, which was one step too many.

"Billy," I said with a St. Francis of Assisi smile beaming down on him, "Why do you want to give money to our church?"

"Because my daddy says, you're the poorest preacher our church has ever had."

Who said honesty is the best policy?

You would think I might have learned my lesson, but No.

Just a few weeks ago, my wife and

I were driving home from the worship service, and I was feeling my homiletical oats. The service had been wonderful. But that was not what was making me feel so good. If I say so myself, and I guess I will, the sermon had gone wonderfully. It was one of those times when everything flowed just as you want it. I was impressed with my delivery! I went from point to point with the greatest of ease. I was, I believe, in rare form. A preacher knows when things are falling into place. I felt good about that sermon and I thought I would explode in the car. The problem was, my wife did not even mention the sermon.

"It was a nice service, wasn't it?" I plied.

"Yes, I guess it was a nice service," she replied coolly as she looked out of her window.

Then she was silent. She did not catch my cue. I could have left it there. But did I? No. I had to ask a question. "Honey," I queried, "how many really great preachers do you think there are in the world?"

Let me point out right here that wives (at least the one I married) have not quite mastered the art of dodging difficult questions in the expert way some of their male counterparts have. If a wife asks her husband questions such as, "Honey, how old do I look?" Or, "Am I getting fat?" every husband knows that this is the time to play expert "dodge ball."

But the silence in the car only prompted me to put the question to her again. "How many really great preachers are there in the world?"

Without even looking at me she said, "Honey, one less than you're thinking of right now."

I got, I guess, the simple answer to my question. ■

James L. Snyder is pastor of the Christian and Missionary Alliance Church in Ocala, Florida.

MEETING THE CHALLENGE OF DIVERSITY

The challenge for ministry in the twenty-first century is to think globally and to become multicultural in the way ministers view things.



Richard A. Marker, J.D., Ph.D., is the executive secretary of the Southern New England Conference.

No longer can successful ministers live in their own restricted world and expect to be relevant. The world is being restructured.

The world is growing smaller. The contemporary communication and transportation networks bring us together as never before. Massive global migration, especially to urban areas has brought almost every culture into intimate contact with others in almost every location on earth. This provides immense opportunity for the fulfillment of the mission of the church, which is to preach the gospel "to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people" (Rev. 14:6).*

The corporate community is recognizing the need to understand the principles of working cross-culturally. A survey of college recruiters reveals that graduates with advanced degrees in anthropology are in as much demand today as was the traditional M.B.A. some years ago. Companies like Citicorp, Hallmark, and Motorola have created vice-presidencies for anthropologists.¹

Leading cross-cultural diversity

Leading a complex organization such as today's church can appear to be

overwhelming. Most people have neither the training nor the experience for such a challenge. People can spend years in a foreign mission field and still not know the rudiments of how to relate cross-culturally! After a lifetime in diverse or cross-cultural situations, some may continue to make the most elementary relational mistakes as they interact with persons ethnically different from themselves. This is too often the case with those who have not been exposed to diversity from their earliest childhood.

Diversity among people has always existed. Differences are observable when it comes to age, gender, personality, life processing styles, or assertiveness levels. Yet even in close-knit families conflicts arise due to these and other differences. How much more does background, memory, vocabulary, race, culture, and language complicate our desire to understand each other! The confusion of tongues at the Tower of Babel seems to have been only the beginning of the differences that are a part of our contemporary world.

Some people fear what they do not understand. Others react or attempt to accommodate in the context of their

RICHARD A. MARKER

own cultural understandings. Still, others think that they understand others' motives while such understandings may well be based on stereotyping, ethnocentrism, or unintentional parochial attitudes that are the heritage of a colonial world view. Often each of those attempting to relate constructively to one another distrust the motives of the other. Yet each may well believe that he or she is a sincere Christian. The challenge is to put the gospel and practical Christianity into informed action.

Thus, one of the greatest needs of the twenty-first-century church is the need for cross-cultural leadership—ministers who can build diverse relationships founded on trust and confidence; ministers who can model and train their people in cross-cultural relationship and leadership. Again, the ability to function in a diverse cultural environment will be a vital key to successful ministry in the future.

The body of Christ, the church, has been designed and brought into being to be a unit that thrives in or despite diversity (1 Cor. 12:12, 13). There is power in diversity when genuine unity is present. All views and perspectives can be brought together in strategic planning for the finishing of the gospel commission.

"We cannot all have the same minds or cherish the same ideas; but one is to be a benefit and blessing to the other, that where one lacks, another may supply what is requisite. You have certain deficiencies of character and natural biases that render it profitable for you to be brought in contact with a mind differently organized, in order to properly balance your own."²

Barriers to unity

When Adam sinned "selfishness took the place of love."³ The sin problem is rooted in selfishness. In our fallen nature, it is natural for one to consider oneself above others. Where self reigns supreme, several attitudes may result.

1. *Ethnocentrism* is the outgrowth of egocentrism. It is believing that one's culture or people are superior to others. Egocentrism was near the heart of what motivated much of the colonial era. Even

missionaries built discrete mission compounds partly because they felt insecure about mixing entirely with the ones to whom they came to minister.

Christ, on the other hand, became one with humanity. "From the endless variety of plants and flowers, we may learn an important lesson. All blossoms are not the same in form or color. . . . There are professing Christians who think it their duty to make every other Christian like themselves. This is man's plan, not the plan of God. In the church of God there is room for characters as

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varied as are the flowers in a garden. In His spiritual garden there are many varieties of flowers."⁴

2. *Prejudice*—the well-known act of pre-judging other people or groups based on our ill-conceived expectations of them and our dearth of meaningful interaction with them.

3. *Stereotyping*—a generalization of habits or traits of all members of a certain group of people, based on scanty experience.

4. *Friendly fire*—unintentional dis-

crimination through habit, unconscious behavior, or insensitivity in cross-cultural relationships. Often things learned as children may innocently cause pain to others of another culture.

5. *Biased language*—referring to groups of people in a limiting manner, using inappropriate labels, terms, or names to refer to a culture or people group. This mistake is as often one of ignorance as it is one of insensitivity.

6. *Nonverbal communication*—gestures, body language, eye contact (or the lack of it), or touching that makes reducing statements about another group.

Resolving the cultural tensions will be the goal of every mature Christian. "Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:4, 5 NIV).

Changes in etiquette are very important in adapting to cultural differences. Giving and receiving compliments, recognizing personal achievements, encouraging inclusive styles of decision making, negotiating, or problem solving (which may vary with different cultural backgrounds).

"The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence."⁵ Often applied to evangelism, Christ's method is a necessary principle for building good relationships *within* the church. There are too many hurting and misunderstood souls in our congregations. The church may not be able to make a significant impact in the community until this principle is much more operative within the church. Practical Christianity must begin *within* the church family.

Dealing with differences

Working in an increasingly diverse climate cries out for a humble attitude that includes a genuinely open and honest way of communicating. Others will never consistently see things the way we do. The more diverse our backgrounds are, the more true this will prove to be. Yet we should all feel comfortable be-

ing ourselves while at the same time treating others with respect. We should be able to tell one another when something they have done or said has hurt us. Relationships, especially in the church, grow stronger with discussion and a willingness to place ourselves in the other person's shoes.

The authenticity and extent of one's growth in Christ is seen most graphically in how we treat others (Matt. 25:34-40). The arena of intercultural relationship is the one in which, perhaps above all others, the "Golden Rule" applies (Matt. 7:12). Here we are to treat others in the way we would like to be treated.

As God took the initiative in Christ when He reconciled the world unto Himself, He asks us to do the same, giving us the "message of reconciliation," making "his appeal through us" (2 Cor. 5:20). It is important to apply the powerful reality of this principle in our intercultural and interracial relating. We can literally learn how others want us to treat them. If we do not understand something, we can ask in a respectful manner. Such questions, awkward as they may feel to begin with, can become a way of avoiding misunderstandings and conflict.

When conflicts do come up, we can take up the well-known though infrequently practiced principle of Matthew 18:15. The process Jesus provided us here is a redemptive process designed to restore misunderstandings and mend strained or broken relationships. Much suffering and hurt can be avoided by communication between the parties involved as soon as a problem is discovered. We can let people know how we want to be treated. Sometimes a person may offend another and not realize it. A simple discussion with genuine sensitivity will help the other understand without becoming defensive. "You who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness" and "bear one another's burdens" (Gal. 6:1, 2).

Reaching basic needs

People of all groups need to care for one another. Every culture group

functions with different frames of reference and traditions. Different world views will frame reality and solve problems differently. Dynamic Christian leadership involves open collaboration seeking to learn from one another.

Successful missionaries recognize the principle of identification—even in such ordinary things as food, clothes, language, music, and lifestyle. The sooner a missionary truly identifies with the people he or she serves, the sooner he or she will be trusted and taken seriously. Identification means eating their food with them, talking their language, and respecting them for who they are.

Missiologists speak of contextualization as essential for success in ministry. Contextualization is simply the attempt to think and live within the context, language, and symbols familiar to a given culture. It calls for discernment and common sense. It is this that Paul had in mind when he said that he had, "become all things to all men . . . for the gospel's sake" (1 Cor. 9:22, 23). These principles certainly apply, and perhaps especially apply in our basic attempts to relate with each other interculturally.

Toronto's burning issue

continued from p. 4

upon when it comes to the *Manual's* guiding policies for managing divorcing and remarrying couples, that same corporate body, as an integral part of its policy structure, is itself asking the local congregation to make the final, critical decisions about the future of those among them who are divorcing and remarrying.

The local congregation knows and probably loves the couples and the children who may be involved. Everyone knows how different the making of a decision can be when those about whom the decision is being made are looking us in the eyes as we make it. Thank God, the local congregation, with all its prides and prejudices is commissioned by the

Our ministry is one of reconciliation. Just as Jesus' crowning act of reconciliation was the act of dying, we cannot be reconcilers unless we die to that in which we have illegitimate pride—to that which therefore divides us from other human beings. Our petty, egocentric and ethnocentric attitudes must die! They must be "crucified with Christ!" This is the love of self which spoon-feeds the idea that my way of thinking, my culture, my people are superior to yours. Ethnocentrism must be crucified with Christ for the heart to be truly converted! ■

*Unless otherwise stated, all Scripture passages in this article are from the New King James Version Bible.

¹ Del Jones, "Hot asset in corporate: Anthropology degrees," *USA Today*, February 18, 1999.

² Ellen G. White, *Mind, Character, and Personality* (Nashville, Tenn.: Southern Pub. Assn., 1977), 377.

³ ———, *Steps to Christ* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Pub. Assn.), 17.

⁴ ———, *Mind, Character, and Personality*, 54.

⁵ ———, *The Ministry of Healing* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Pub. Assn., 1942), 143.

Manual to make these decisions. Local congregations and their pastors need to be affirmed and trusted as they do it. Above all they need to be granted sufficient initiative and leeway to carry out this most sensitive and important aspect of the *Manual's* policies.

Let us press on toward the day when more than ever we will believe unequivocally that the highest standards of Christian behavior are those that spring from an in-depth knowledge of Him Who has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light. And that to embrace the Lord of the church is to embrace the reality that the highest expressions of true obedience are those thoughts and actions, including policy actions, that emanate from a mature and far-reaching realization of who Jesus was and is and what His will ultimately is for His church and His people. ■

BULLETS OR BUCKSHOT?

An interview with Haddon Robinson



Haddon Robinson, Ph.D., is the Harold John Ockenga Distinguished Professor of Preaching at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary.



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

Derek Morris: In *Biblical Preaching*, you emphasize that “a sermon should be a bullet and not buckshot.” In other words, a sermon should present a single dominant idea rather than a collection of numerous unrelated ideas. In my preaching workshops, many pastors express the desire to understand the process of crafting a homiletical bullet. So perhaps we could explore that process together. Let’s start with a working definition of biblical preaching.

Haddon Robinson: Biblical/expository preaching is the communication of a biblical concept and that concept is derived from the historical, grammatical, literary study of a scriptural passage in its context. The Spirit of God takes that concept and makes it alive in the experience of the preacher and through the preacher applies it to the people in the congregation. In other words, biblical preaching is the proclamation of a concept derived from the scripture.

DM: With that as a definition, how does the preacher go about discovering the biblical concept in a passage?

HR: A preacher has to understand that the Bible is a book of ideas. In order to discover the main idea of a passage, you need to ask two questions.

“What is the writer talking about?” That’s the *subject*, and it always answers a question—who, what, where, when, why, how. When you’ve answered that question and determined the subject of the passage, you ask, “What is the author saying about the subject?” That’s the *complement*.

DM: So subject plus complement equals the biblical concept, the exegetical idea. Let’s take Psalm 117 as an example and see how the process works: “Praise the Lord, all you nations; extol him, all you peoples. For great is his love toward us, and the faithfulness of the Lord endures forever. Praise the Lord” (verses 1, 2).^{*} First, we ask what the psalmist is talking about. If one says the psalmist is talking about “praise,” or about “the Lord,” how would you respond?

HR: Yes, the psalmist is talking about praise, but the passage is not telling you everything about praise. It’s not telling *where* or *when* you should praise the Lord. What it is talking about is *why* you should praise the Lord.

DM: So the subject would be: *why everyone should praise the Lord*.

HR: That’s right. The psalmist says,

"Praise the Lord, all you nations; extol him, all you peoples. *For great is his love toward us, and the faithfulness of the Lord endures forever.*" The complement, therefore, is *because His love and faithfulness endure forever.*

DM: Discovering the exegetical idea in that short passage of Scripture is perhaps simple because we've basically restated the text. But it becomes a little more complicated when you move into a larger passage of Scripture. Let's consider Luke 15. That's a familiar preaching passage. I suppose a preacher would have to determine whether to look at all three parables as a trilogy or just focus on one. What would you say?

HR: Whether you preach the whole passage or not, that's not your question when you first study. The first question is, "What is it that Luke is trying to get at?" The opening verses of the chapter give you the subject. "Now the tax collectors and 'sinners' were all gathering around to hear him. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, 'This man welcomes sinners and eats with them'" (verses 1, 2). The subject of the passage is the complete answer to the question, "What is the author talking about?" That is, *How can Jesus welcome tax collectors and sinners?*

DM: The rest of the passage completes that idea?

HR: Yes, the rest of the passage would be the complement. Verse 3 says, "Then Jesus told them this parable." That's a singular. He tells them three stories: one about a lost sheep, another about a lost coin, and then one about two lost boys. One parable, but three stories. Each of those stories is getting at a similar truth: God loves people, God seeks for people, God is merciful to people. In the last part of the parable, we have the elder brother, the key to the story in a sense. There are two audiences being addressed: the publicans and the sinners, and the Pharisees and the teachers of the law. And in the part that deals with the el-

der brother, Jesus is obviously speaking about the Pharisees and the teachers of the law. The elder brother is as lost as the younger brother because you can be lost out in a foreign country or you can be lost in the father's house if you're out of sympathy with the father's heart. You're as lost as the boy who's gone off and wasted a fortune. But in each case, it really isn't the story about the lost sheep, the lost silver, or the lost sons.

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The story is about the seeking shepherd, the seeking woman, and the seeking and waiting father. And in each of these stories, God is concerned about lost people because He loves them, values them, pities them. So that would be the complement to the passage and the answer to the subject question: *Because God is concerned about lost people.*

DM: Let me summarize what you've said. The subject of the passage

is "How can Jesus welcome tax collectors and sinners?" And the complement is "because God is concerned about lost people." So the exegetical idea of the passage would be a combination of subject + complement: Jesus welcomes tax collectors and sinners because God is concerned about lost people." Once we have discovered that biblical concept, a combination of the subject and complement, does that become the bullet?

HR: Sometimes, but often it has to be restated. Some ideas, when you state them, are as applicable to people today as they would have been 2,000 years ago.¹ Other ideas are directed at the people of the first century because the biblical writer was talking about people in that age. Then you have to work with the exegetical idea and ask, "What does this mean to people today? How would I state it in terms that would be meaningful to the folks sitting in the pews? And that's where your homiletical idea, or bullet, comes in.

DM: Let's look at another example. In Colossians 4:1 we read, "Masters, provide your slaves with what is right and fair, because you know that you also have a Master in heaven." Now if we're working the process that you just described, we might suggest that the subject of the text is, "Why masters should provide their slaves with what is right and fair," and the complement would be "because they know that they also have a Master in heaven." But I'm not going to be able to preach that as it stands to a 21st-century congregation. I can't just stand up and say, "Masters treat your slaves fairly because you know that you also have a Master in heaven." In itself that's irrelevant in a culture in which there are no slaves!

HR: Right, because the difference between the first century and the 21st century is that we're not dealing with masters and servants. You could say that masters could be employers and slaves could be employees. That isn't quite bringing it into the 21st century, but what is there in this text that would ap-

ply to those who work with people under them and what motivation do they have to be just and right and fair with people? The answer is that if you're an employer, just as the people in the first century were masters who had slaves, it's important to remember that God is your Master and that therefore you should treat your employees as God treats you. So you might say, "You ought to deal with people around you, that work for you, in a way that is right and just and fair, because you don't work for yourself, you work for the Boss in heaven and you have to serve Him."

DM: So in crafting the homiletical idea, you are staying as close to the exegetical idea as you can, but still wanting to make it relevant. Let's look at another passage to illustrate the process of restating the exegetical idea as a contemporary homiletical idea. 1 Corinthians 8 is a well-known passage about meat offered to idols. How would the exegetical idea of this passage be relevant to people in the 21st century?

HR: This passage speaks to a problem that some people still face, because they still have to deal with the issue of food offered to idols. But it's not an issue in many countries of the world. So at first glance it would seem that the passage would not have anything to do with us today because we don't have to deal with food offered to idols.

DM: So, I suppose we have two options at this point: One would be to just delete the passage from our preaching calendar and choose another preaching passage; or to work the process and ask, What is the subject? What is the complement? What is the biblical concept here and how can I state that exegetical idea in a contemporary way? Let's take the second option. Let's work the process. What do you see as the subject of this passage?

HR: Paul states the subject in his opening comment: "Now about food sacrificed to idols." Of course, he's not telling us everything about food sacrificed to

idols. I think what he's telling us or the question he's answering is, How do you deal with the problem of whether or not to eat food sacrificed to idols? And he is saying in the passage that there are two ways of coming at this: one is by knowledge, and knowledge would tell you that you could eat anything that's offered to an idol, because an idol is nothing. But secondly, I think, he says that love for those who are weaker brothers and sisters is an important consideration. So if

The homiletical idea should be clearly in my mind when I preach the sermon. I would try to state that idea as succinctly as possible and I would probably repeat it eight or ten times in the sermon. And when I come to the conclusion of the message, I want to leave them with that single focus.

I were going to put it into a subject and complement, the subject is "How Christians should deal with food offered to idols," and the complement is "with knowledge, limited by love." I think, that's what Paul is saying in 1 Corinthians 8.

DM: So the exegetical idea would be "Christians should deal with food offered to idols with knowledge, limited by love." But let's say we're going to share this sermon in a setting where meat offered to idols is not an issue. What might we do with that exegetical idea,

which seems locked in the first century, as we craft it into a homiletical bullet that will make an impact in the 21st century?

HR: I have to work with the exegetical idea and ask, "What is Paul dealing with when he talks about meat offered to idols?" You have to understand what this meant to people in Corinth 2,000 years ago. It was a problem, a social problem. At the center of the town there was the temple to the goddess Aphrodite. People who went to worship Aphrodite brought a sacrifice. A part of the sacrifice was put on the altar, another part was given to the priest as an honorarium, and another part was given back to the worshipers so they would have a splendid meal as a result of the worship. So the question being asked was, "Could Christians eat the meat that had been offered to an idol?" Sometimes that was the only meat available in town. Or if an unbeliever invited them over to a feast on the day of worship, could they go and eat the food given to them? Would there be a social problem? There's also a psychological problem, because some of these Christians were tied into idolatry, and all of this was part of the worship of idols and thus it became a spiritual problem for some people to eat that meat offered to an idol.

But I'm also aware that when Paul was dealing with this issue, he was dealing with the questionable. He was not dealing with adultery or stealing or coveting or bearing false witness. There's no question about these issues. In this passage, Paul was dealing with an issue that upset people. Thus the matter had spiritual overtones but it was not directly prohibited in the Scriptures. And so, in crafting the homiletical idea, I would have to ask, "Where do my people come up against similar questionable issues, issues that they have to wrestle with?"

For example, a businessman said to me, "I work at a business and we have conventions. Is it all right for me as a Christian to go to a party where they have an open bar and serve alcohol?" I can't answer that question as such from

Scripture. So I would say to him, on one level, "Yes, there is nothing wrong in going to that party." But if he says to me, "I've got a fellow that's rooming with me who's a new Christian and an alcoholic, and this really bothers him. Now is it all right for me to go?" That's a whole different question, because now you brought in a new believer who could be affected by your going.

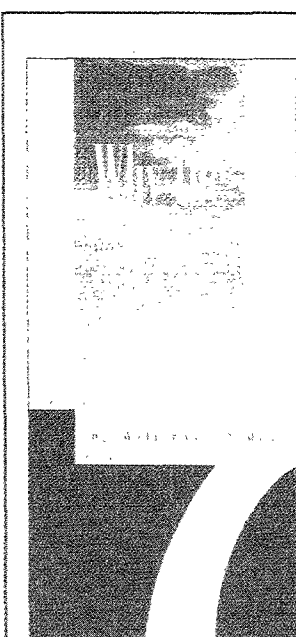
Paul tells us that first of all, you have to act according to knowledge. And by knowledge he means having a doctrinal understanding of why you are or are not doing something. And most of the time, if you really understand the Scriptures, you have a great deal of freedom. But then Paul says that freedom must be limited by love. Because, he says, if a weaker brother sees you, then even though you know you can do it, and you feel perfectly free to do it, you don't do it out of love and consideration for that brother.

DM: What principles do we use to shrink that fairly lengthy discussion into a single dominant thought, a concise memorable bullet?

HR: I would say, "Whenever you deal with issues that are questionable, you need to be sure you're operating on the basis of biblical knowledge but that knowledge has to be limited or conditioned by love." That's probably what I would use in my sermon.

DM: When the congregation leaves at the end of the sermon, we know that the listeners will not remember everything. But we're hoping that at least they will remember the biblical concept, the single dominant thought. What are some of the ways that we can drive home that homiletical idea?

HR: The homiletical idea should be clearly in my mind when I preach the sermon. I would try to state that idea as succinctly as possible and I would probably repeat it eight or ten times in the sermon. And when I come to the conclusion of the message, I want to leave them with that single focus. I want to



Why the Seventh Day?

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conclude in such a way that people think about the homiletical idea.

DM: In a written document, you can use a colored marker to highlight a key idea. But colored markers don't work in oral presentations. What are some other ways to highlight that key idea besides making it as succinct as possible and repeating it?

HR: Well sometimes, I will actually flag it. I will say to people, "Now listen to the principle."

DM: You actually give your hearers an indication that this is the key issue.

HR: That's right. I could say, "Get hold of this, because this is the way you have to think if you're a Christian. Here's the principle." And then I would give it to them. And I would come back to it again, so they see the principle and see how it works. If my congregation left and they said, "I wonder what in the

world he was talking about this morning," I'd feel like I had failed. They may not remember the outline, but they ought to remember the bullet. What you're really doing is trying to discover great biblical truths and drive them home into peoples' lives.

DM: Thank you for challenging us to preach sermons that are bullets rather than buckshot. ■

*Scripture passages quoted in this article are from the New International Version.

¹ Robinson notes that when the biblical concept found in the text is a universal principle, the wording of the homiletical idea may be identical to that of the exegetical idea. (Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages* [Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980], 97). For example, "pray without ceasing"—the exegetical idea of 1 Thessalonians 5:17—could also be used as a homiletical bullet. It is just as relevant to Christians in the 21st century as it was to the Thessalonian believers in the first century.

MAKING EXPOSITORY PREACHING RELEVANT AND INTERESTING

Preaching today is probably more difficult than during any other period in history. Today's preacher is under constant competition from mass media, television, and the Internet.



Graeme Bradford, D.Min., is ministerial director for the Trans-Tasman Union, New South Wales, Australia.

People who sit staring at the computer screen or the television for hours on end find it boring to listen to the preaching of the Word for a few minutes. Sermons acceptable 10 or 15 years ago fall flat on many modern audiences.

A recent survey on preaching revealed that one thing listeners want the most is that sermons be kept short, interesting, and relevant. Because of this there is the danger that preachers, while seeking to be interesting and relevant, will abandon biblical preaching. The challenge for preachers, therefore, is to be able to preach the Word in such a way that people will find it interesting and relevant. Can expository preaching do the job? It should and will, if we understand what expository preaching is all about and if we actually preach expository sermons.

What it is not and what it is

Expository preaching is not reading

Scripture to begin the sermon. Scripture is not a national anthem "sung" to start an event and then quickly forgotten. Expository preaching is not reading a passage and providing a running commentary verse by verse. Expository preaching is not allegorizing or spiritualizing a passage. It is not taking a passage like the parable of the good Samaritan, and claiming that the man who went down to Jericho represents Adam, the Levite is the law, and the Samaritan is Christ, etc. Though some of these claims may have some truth in them, the problem is that what is preached is not what was intended by the biblical writer.

True expository preaching is biblical preaching. It selects a passage of Scripture that is a natural thought unit. It finds out what the author is trying to say to the original listeners. It makes the main idea of the passage the main idea of the sermon, and the sub-ideas of the passage the sub-ideas of the sermon. It

GRAEME BRADFORD

allows the preacher to blend his or her ideas into the mold set by the scriptural passage. It demands that the authority for preaching comes from the authority of the Word of God. It applies the message of the passage to current problems inhabiting the lives of people in the congregation.

In other words, expository preaching goes through three stages. It (1) discovers the actual intent of the biblical writer; (2) finds the timeless truth that is taught; and (3) applies that truth to the contemporary hearers in their cultural context.

Stage 1: Discover the original intent

To discover the original intent of a passage, it is good to begin with its natural setting. Modern translations provide paragraphs with a natural thought unit. Having chosen a passage, you may seek the help of a small group of three or four people from your congregation. Read the passage with them and ask how they perceive its message. The exercise will be a blessing to you as well as to the group. They will feel a sense of ownership and identify themselves with your sermon, and you will benefit by their insights and ideas. Above all, they will help you to bring the passage to the actual life of the congregation.

As an illustration, consider Mark 4:35-41. Study the passage to be sure you understand it correctly. Read it in the translation you are going to preach from. Read it in different translations. Study it with a group of your helpers. Refer to commentaries to find the original context and intent. Outline the passage and state what the Bible writer is saying to the original readers.

Here is what I have come up with:

1. Jesus and His disciples are in a storm at sea. They find themselves in a life-threatening situation (verses 35-37).
2. The disciples respond with fear and despair (verse 38).
3. Jesus worked a miracle and demonstrated His power to help them in difficult situations (verses 39-41).

Stage 2: Find the timeless truth

The next step is to find out what

timeless truth is being taught in this passage. Here is what I found:

1. God's people sometimes find themselves in difficult situations.
2. Our tendency is to respond with fear and despair.
3. But God has the power and authority to care for us and bring us through our most hopeless times.

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Having done this, we are going to tell the story as it really is in the Bible. We are going to take the story's timeless ideas and bring them over into the life of our congregation. To do this we must keep some questions in mind: Where does this timeless truth show up in real life? Do my people really believe

this? If they don't, what will I have to explain in order to persuade them to accept it? How will I get them to see the connection between this passage and how they lead their lives?

People do not lie awake at night wondering whether it was possible to have a life-threatening episode on Lake Galilee or why Jesus was able to sleep through such a storm. Instead, they worry over why their children have not yet come home for the night; how they are going to make the next mortgage payment now that they have lost their job. They are worried about growing old and facing death. They are wondering how to make their way through the drought or flood that has wiped out their crops, or the report from the doctor telling they have cancer.

The expository preacher must relate the biblical passage to these needs in order to be relevant. Thus, the relevant preacher exegetes not only the Scripture but also the congregation in order to bring the biblical message home to where the people are. The question is Where does my congregation meet with the original audience to whom the passage was written? Have they experienced David's guilt? Have they been accosted by the doubts of Thomas? Have they denied their Lord as Peter did? Are they being tempted to fall away as Demas did? Have they ever been betrayed by a Judas?

People need to know that, despite their failings, they are still loved by God. They need the assurance that they have worth in God's sight because of Christ and that through His merits they can be forgiven and accepted and realize their full potential.

The road to a sermon's relevancy passes through people—their interests and their needs. When using illustrations, it is good to remember that few in a given audience will be or have been missionaries in Africa. So your story of the missionary in Africa may not come close to their lives at all. Nor is it likely that any of them will ever finish up in a lions' den as did Daniel. Nor is it likely that they will be sold to camel drivers, as was Joseph. Biblical stories only serve

to help us learn timeless principles, which can then be brought into the full light of the contemporary human scene.

You may, for example, create a scene in which you say: "Here is a young woman who has just found out she has a lump on her breast. She awaits the diagnosis. Is God still with her? That's her concern. It weighs on her mind. She can't sleep at night. She wonders where God is in all this. Has He deserted her?"

A relevant biblical preacher is able to include people in such a manner that, at the end of the sermon, a variety of people will say that the sermon addressed issues that really mattered in life.

Stage 3: Applying the truth to your audience

The final stage of a relevant expository sermon is developing an approach that connects the story and the timeless truths into the everyday lives of the listeners. A good outline will help in this. Begin the outline by stating your sermon idea in the most exact sentence you can find.

Here is how I would state the idea of Mark 4:35-41. "God's people often find themselves in difficult and discouraging situations; but God is able to help them." This sentence now becomes the dominating idea for the listeners to receive. Too many unrelated ideas and scattered comments mean that the listeners will leave with a basketful of fragments but not one single truth to challenge or affirm them in their everyday life. Discover that single truth, and repeat it many times in different ways throughout the sermon.

Our next task is to address the question, How are we to structure the sermon so that its thrust consistently speaks to an audience or congregation? Sermons have two basic structures: deductive and

inductive. In a deductive sermon we may introduce the main idea at the outset and then list the supporting points. Remember the approach is to explain an idea or prove a proposition. When the idea is introduced to start the sermon, the audience is likely to react with "Is that true?" or "Why should I believe that?" The

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stance of the preacher resembles that of a debater; the points in the sermon become reasons or proofs of the essential idea or thought of the sermon. Here is a suggested outline:

Introduction

God is able to help us through the most difficult situations.

Body

1. Jesus and His disciples were in a boat on the sea when a storm hit them (Mark 4:35-37).

We also face storms in our lives. Some people find a storm comes to them when they . . .

2. The disciples panicked (verse 38).

Often we react as did the disciples when we face difficult situations. I remember once when I . . .

3. Jesus awoke and calmed the storm and rebuked them for failing to trust God (verses 39-41).

We also find it difficult to trust God in stormy situations. We have potent promises in the Bible that He will never forsake us. He will care for us in times of great need. Times when . . .

4. He has not promised to always calm the storm as He did on this occasion. Often His care for us involves giving us strength to cope.

He promises strength to the mother when . . .

To the young person when . . .

To the single person when . . .

To the child at school when . . .

Conclusion

Life is full of storms. They are normal, even in the lives of believers. When they come we must never lose heart, thinking that God has forsaken us, whatever the situation.

Let us now see how we would handle the passage inductively. The inductive approach is helpful when the audience is perceived as being hostile to the idea you want to present and to younger generations who often resist traditional, more deductive preaching. All of Christ's parables except one were inductive. This approach basically says to the listener: "Here's a problem. Let's



explore God's Word together and see if we can find the answer." The inductive approach leads the listener through the thrill of discovery. Here is a suggested inductive outline:

Introduction

1. We often find ourselves in difficult situations. Example . . .
2. We wonder, "Why has God allowed this to happen to me?"
3. Mark 4:35-41 tells us of a difficult situation.

Body

1. God sometimes allows people to come into difficult situations.
 - a. Jesus suggested they get in the boat (Mark 4:35).
 - b. When they did, they got into trouble (verses 36, 37).
 - c. Examples of other people who got into trouble when they followed God faithfully . . .
2. The situation was so serious that the disciples despaired thinking they might drown (verse 38).
 - a. Our response to trouble is despair, thinking we may perish. Examples and illustrations . . .
 - b. But Jesus used this occasion to show them His power to deliver them (verses 39-41).

Examples of how God has used difficult situations to show His power in the lives of many people.

Conclusion

When we follow God we may find ourselves in difficult situations. However, He has promised never to forsake us. He may not work a spectacular miracle to help us. He may choose to give us strength to cope with the situation.

Making dry bones come alive

Outlines serve only as skeletons of thought. The preacher needs to make the dry bones come alive. The skeleton needs to be covered with flesh. That's what supporting ideas do. Of first importance among supporting ideas are illustrations. Good illustrations are vital if we are going to hold the attention of our audience.

Remember we are fighting a battle for attention. It is easy to put people to sleep. A preacher asked a lady sitting next to a person who had just gone to sleep, "Would you please wake him up?" The lady smiled and replied, "You wake him up yourself. You put him to sleep."

The media-saturated audiences of today want to watch the preacher instead of just listen, feel the message rather than just think about it, and remain passive rather than respond. Recognizing this, the best contemporary preachers are able to find imaginative illustrations to help hold peoples' interest. Preachers who know how to illustrate are like the poets. They are great observers of life. They can see illustrations in the simple things that occur each day. Others will pass over these experiences without seeing the possibilities.

For instance, Phillip Yancey writes about looking at his fish tank: "I am as God to them. They rely on me to give them food and oxygen. I mean them no harm; yet when I go near the tank they get frightened. How can I communicate to them and let them know that they need not be afraid of me? I guess the

only way would be if I were to become one of them."¹

People absorb ideas not through abstract thought, but through concrete pictures. The more concrete you are, the more effective you will be. Paint pictures for them. Use plenty of metaphors. The Bible is rich in metaphors. When Paul wrote "who shall deliver me from this body of death," his hearers would think in terms of the practice of chaining a dead body to a living prisoner. The books of Job or Hosea, for example, amaze us with the richness of their metaphors and the power they possess to convey ideas because of this.

Conclusion

To be an effective contemporary biblical preacher, be sure to discover: what the passage meant to the original listeners; the timeless truths in the passage; and how those truths can be applied today in the lives of your listeners. If this is done, you will preach the Word with interest and relevance. ■

¹ Phillip Yancey, *I Was Just Wondering*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 5-8.

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Jesus' generosity toward sinners outraged the establishment of His day just as quickly as this column will

aggravate some religious practitioners today.

In fact, Jesus' grace was so extravagant that He expressed full love and forgiveness to some individuals even before they repented—the woman taken in adultery, for example.

Scripture declares that she was apprehended “in the very act” and hauled before Jesus as a test of His orthodoxy. In their haste to accuse the woman, her accusers gave neither time nor opportunity for her remorse, much less her confession and repentance. She was about to face the death penalty, which her behavior demanded. “Moses says we should stone this adulterer, but what do you say?”

Jesus did not verbally answer His accusers. And note, these evil churchmen were His accusers more than they were her accusers. They had arranged to entrap her. The man with whom she had sinned was excused; the woman was accused; but Jesus was their ultimate target.

Christ's enemies were vastly more interested in His entrapment than they were concerned for her need. She was fodder for their determination to destroy Jesus; she was a pawn to manipulate for their own purposes.

Rather than retort, Jesus chose confrontation. Not a confrontation of minds to debate the fine points of law. Not a confrontation between holy God in the flesh and morally bankrupt religiose. Not even a confrontation of legal defense aimed at freeing the guilty from prosecution and punishment. Jesus confronted each of those accusers with their own sin.

Outrageous grace

JAMES A. CRESS

First He knelt on the floor with the accused and began to write in the dust. When they continued to barrage Jesus with demands for judgment, Jesus finally spoke a judgment upon them far more serious than anything for which they were accusing the woman. “Moses said stone her. Go ahead. If you are without sin, cast the first stone.”

Then, as Jesus again knelt and continued writing on the floor, the gospel says the crowd dispersed one by one, from the oldest to the youngest. Perhaps they convened a committee to make certain the floors were more thoroughly cleaned next time.

Then Jesus queried the woman, “Who condemns you?” When she saw that all her accusers have departed and that she might face reprieve from the death penalty, she responded, “No one, sir.” “Neither do I condemn you. Go and sin no more.”

Beautiful! Profound!

The desired outcome becomes the means to accomplish the objective. Jesus sought a forgiven sinner freed from Satan's grasp and He used the most liberating method possible to obtain His goal. He forgave her!

Forgiveness obligates. Now note that this extravagance is no cheap grace which Jesus extends. Forgiveness obligates the recipient to live “as if” they deserved it.

Forgiveness is not just a concept, it is a reality. Forgiven people live in the freedom of forgiveness. They behave as those who have been forgiven should behave.

Furthermore, Jesus does not just extend His personal forgiveness. He

commands His followers to follow His example. “Turn the other cheek; love those who hate you; pray for those who persecute you.”

Forgiveness liberates. Jesus understands why forgiveness is so important. He knows it will liberate the forgiver as much as the person who forgives. Jesus declares we will not be forgiven ourselves if we do not forgive those who have wronged us. In fact, from Jesus' perspective, forgiveness does not even depend upon the wrongdoer's apology.

If you have wronged me and I await your apology, my ongoing grudge controls me more than it reforms you. My resentment allows you to occupy my mind without paying rent. You may never apologize or you may never even know that I have been offended and that you need to apologize. But notice who pays the perpetual high toll of grudge-bearing.

If, on the other hand, I forgive you, even if you have not repented or asked forgiveness, then I am liberated from the controlling load of unresolved wrongs. By forgiving you, I am free to live joyfully in Christ; liberated to service for the Savior, liberated to proclaim the good news of His outrageous grace.

And Jesus demonstrated this liberation again and again. He took the Samaritan woman from the well of repetitious works of dipping and made her an evangelist who dispensed the water of life. He turned Peter's cursing tongue to a soul-winner's proclamation. His forgiveness made Mary Magdalene the first preacher of the resurrection as she pronounced God's victory over the very demons that had once possessed her. And His merciful, extravagant grace turned Saul from murderous mercenary and chief of sinners, to the privilege of ministry.

Now here's the real miracle of Jesus' outrageous grace. He will do the same for you and me! ■

S H O P T A L K

WorshipWell.org

After months of planning and behind-the-scenes work, a new Web site for Seventh-day Adventist worship is now online. Sponsored by the North American Division Ministerial Association, the site features worship resources, ideas, and 14 Bulletin Board forums for networking. WorshipWell is dedicated to providing Adventist pastors and worship leaders with opportunities for dialogue and resource awareness, specifically as it relates to Sabbath worship. Our Web site address is <http://www.worshipwell.org>—Rich DuBose, California.

Preaching with graphics

Today's worshippers are more visually oriented than any previous generation. Unfortunately, most worship experiences cater to the ears, not the eyes. However, with today's computer and projection technology, most churches can afford to enhance their worship services with graphics.

Where can you go to find help in choosing graphics, software, and design tips and tricks for computer-generated graphics?

"Preaching With Graphics," a seminar now available on CD-ROM, gives tips on topics such as architectural considerations, compelling graphics design, equipment and projectors, powerful sermon delivery,

graceful slide transitions, writing pictorial sermons, putting text on top of pictures, software plug-ins, and making video inserts.

Extensive digital video instruction is included, as well as an audio track that coaches you through learning. You can go at your own pace and review anytime. This Windows software is available for US\$50.00 from Dave Gemmell, Mountain View Church, 6001 West Oakey Boulevard, Las Vegas, Nevada 89146. Phone: 702.871.0814. Web: www.eyepreach.com

The harvester Bible study program

Have you dreamed of your laymen giving Bible Studies with baptisms resulting? Now there is the "Harvester" Bible Study Program—a 30-minute Bible Study on video. The laymen love using these studies and ask for more studies.

To train the layperson, the "Harvester," is very easy. And a training video comes with each set. The first program, "Preparing for the Harvest" is 28 minutes. It teaches how to gather names and prepare interest cards. It also teaches how to take packets of "Amazing Facts" to all interests to get them started. The second program "Bringing in the Harvest" is 40 minutes. It teaches how to follow up the Amazing Facts by lining up Bible Studies on video. It teaches how to get people to come to church and how to prepare them for baptism. There is also a 30 page

"Success Secrets" manual with full details about all of the videos.

It is exciting to see new people come to church from this program. The first year I used it the Lord blessed with 22 baptisms. Another year He blessed with 40.

There are ten videos with three programs per tape, making a total of 30 Bible Studies. These cover the prophecies and the essential doctrines. People who go through this program usually attend church regularly as they have a good grasp of the doctrines.

The entire program is available for only US\$99.95, including shipping. Credit cards are welcome. To order, call (618) 997-9282 or write to Harvester Bible Studies, c/o Earl L. Simmons, 3305 Sunset Terrace, Marion, Illinois 62959.

Adopt-a-block

Here's a way of reaching the area around your church. Groups in the church sign up to "adopt a block," with the ultimate goal of meeting physical and spiritual needs present there.

The groups survey the neighborhood blocks looking for families and individuals who need help—in cleaning, painting, clothing, feeding, and befriending. Next, they schedule to do the work with nothing more in mind than showing the genuine caring attitude of Christ. Why not "adopt a block" this week?—Douglas R. Rose, pastor, Grand Prairie, Texas. ■

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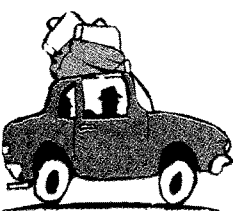
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