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Is your church a politics-free zone?

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Ministerial Resource Center Cathy Payne 888-771-0738, 301-680-6508

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OUR READERS RESPOND...

Preaching that heals

Thanks for including the article by Larry Yeagley on therapeutic preaching (“Therapeutic Healing,” September 2007). I was intrigued by his suggestion to have a mental health professional read sermons in advance. Even if a specialist is not available, a supportive and insightful critic could provide valuable pre-sermon feedback. It is always better to get an evaluation before you preach rather than after. Then there is still time to do something about it! I would also recommend that preachers review their annual preaching calendar to ensure that therapeutic themes are addressed as part of the sermon selection for the year. What made this article especially refreshing is the fact that Larry Yeagley practices what he preaches.

—Derek Morris, senior pastor, Forest Lake Seventh-day Adventist Church, Apopka, Florida, United States.

I want to express my deep appreciation for that beautiful and profound article on therapeutic preaching. Over the years, Pastor Yeagley’s gracefulness and wisdom have spoken to my heart many times. From my experience, the percentage of pastors that effectively take this approach to preaching is very small, and the results are predictably sad. Thanks, pastor, for being a voice of healing in this wilderness of pain and turmoil.

—Forrest Kinzli, email.

Thank you so much for publishing Larry Yeagley’s article on therapeutic preaching. He is so right in what he is saying in the article. I have always gained much comfort and encouragement

whenever I have read anything written by him. I attended a seminar on grief conducted by him in Indianapolis, Indiana. It really helped me understand the process of grief. I am a pastor’s wife, and my husband, Dan, and I always meet people in stages of grief.

—Christa White Schiffbauer, email.

Biblical typology

It was like looking forward to a holiday that couldn’t come soon enough—waiting for the second part of Dr. LaRondelle’s “Surprises in Biblical Typology” (September 2007). We don’t often confess it because of our pride, but it gave me enough material to build on for at least two sermons.

Thank you for placing these articles in *Ministry*. These types of articles help us to grow, adding a spring in our step.

—Bertie de Nysschen, pastor, Exeter and Torquay districts, South England Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

Jesus in Paul’s writings

François Bovon’s article, “Jesus Christ in the Apostle Paul’s Epistles” (July 2007), was of great edification to me.

Bovon so clearly presented the significance of Jesus Christ in Paul’s life—and by extension in the life of every Christian. Jesus Christ must be the element of rupture, creating the distinction between the past and the present. A meeting with Jesus Christ must result in drastic change in an individual’s life, just as it happened to Paul after his meeting with Christ on the Damascus road.

This article made the point clear to me that without a rupture experience

with Jesus Christ that leads to growth into Christlikeness, it is possible to claim to be a Christian, yet fail to grow into Christlikeness. And Christianity that does not lead to growth into Christlikeness would be both a comedy and a tragedy.

—Tom Ogal, executive secretary, Kenya Lake Field, Kendu Bay, Kenya.

Adopting a new hermeneutic?

Just a thought. Judging from the book reviews in the July issue of *Ministry* (“Understanding Genesis: Contemporary Adventist Perspectives”), one is of the opinion that the contributors to the book were wanting to serve their readers with a helping of process theology and Bultmannian existentialism not compatible with Seventh-day Adventist beliefs—unless we are in the process of changing.

—René Vissie, email.

Web church

As I reflect on the July 2007 article titled “Preaching to the World: How Web Church Can Extend the Impact of Your Preaching Ministry,” I realize how the concept captivates my attention and causes me to focus on how to develop a deeper interest in the spiritual side of life. Without a doubt, we have to press forward more and more as we wait for Jesus to return.

Attractions to worldly joys are increasing. So let’s be bold each day and fill our thoughts with things from above, so that we will not be shaken.

—Estrella A. Jordan, Prilly, Switzerland.

continued on page 27

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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 clergy of other denominations. To receive your complimentary subscription, please write to us at our Editorial Office, visit us at www.ministrymagazine.org, or email us at ministrymagazine@gc.adventist.org.

Colliding spheres of church and state

NIKOLAUS SATELMAJER



She was an enthusiastic third-grader attending the school in her village. She liked school and excelled in it. Each day was a day of excitement, learning, and joy—at least that's the way it should have been. Unfortunately, reality was different. Not every day was a day of excitement, learning, and joy. Some days the young girl dreaded going to school because she knew she would be punished. On those days, all students in this government-operated school were expected to go to the church across the street and perform religious rites—some that were against the beliefs and practices of her family. Even though her family was not a member of this state-sanctioned church, the school officials would not excuse her from actively participating in the religious rites.

On the days the students went over to the church, the young girl was physically punished. She had to hold her hands in front of her, palms up, and receive blows given by the teacher. On one such day the blows were so severe that the girl went home with broken and bleeding palms. She was devastated, her parents were upset, but there wasn't much they could do. She had to drop out of school. And that's why my mother never completed even three years of formal schooling.

The relationship between church and state has always been a complicated issue. In order to attain their goals, governments have, at times, turned to the church for assistance. On other occasions, the church has readily used the state for its purposes. But what happens when the goals of the state and the church are not compatible? Who then has the upper hand? Who gets the blows—the church or the state? More importantly, what about the individual? What about personal freedoms? The articles by Bill Self and Todd McFarland address these complex—yet very current—issues. Both

of these authors write from the United States and thus naturally provide that perspective, but the issues they tackle are worldwide. I suggest that there are some basic issues clergy and religious leaders must face.

Spiritual authority

The church has spiritual authority from God, but when it depends on government authority to fulfill its mission, God is ignored. If the church and state do not function in their proper spheres they can easily develop an ongoing dependence on the other. In a major study of politics and religion during the time of Constantine, H. A. Drake writes, "Constantine needed the bishops, but the bishops also needed Constantine."¹ Spiritual leaders may accept or even crave government approval, but the outcome could have long-term implications for the church.²

Individual choice

In this equation of need, the individual is usually left out and then often labeled as belonging to a sect and restrictions often follow. Not too long after Constantine, ". . . the emperors placed restrictions on the gatherings of sects deemed heretical."³ The very word *sect* usually has a connotation of judgment and condemnation. It seems to me that the word has been hijacked by individuals or groups who do not wish to give others the opportunity to make choices—yes, even bad choices. The sad fact results, all too often, in name-calling followed by persecution. History is replete with such examples.

Mutual respect

Government has a legitimate function to perform. As the apostle Paul writes (Rom. 13:1–7), governments should not terrorize their citizens; rather, they should fulfill their legitimate roles while providing a safe environment for their people. The church also has a legitimate function to perform. While the church needs to have the freedom to fulfill its mission, it should not depend on government to do this. When the church depends on the government to accomplish its mission, the function of the church becomes compromised. If the church is faithful to God, the mission will be fulfilled.

My mother never did receive any additional formal education, but she remained faithful to her Lord until she fell asleep in Jesus at almost the age of 92. The lack of formal education could not and did not prevent the development of her inquisitive and creative mind. God seems to have His own ways of overruling evil human actions—not necessarily by force, but by invitation (Matt. 11:28), and God does not need us to force people to go to Him. We are given the opportunity to invite people to God. That is the spiritual authority given to us by God. **M**

1 H. A. Drake, *Constantine and the Bishops: The Politics of Intolerance* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 351.

2 "At the same time, Constantine endowed the bishops with unprecedented legal and juridical privileges. By one simple act—ordering that Sunday be observed as a day of rest and prayer—he gave a new rhythm and feel to the pace of ancient life." *Ibid.*, 11.

3 *Ibid.*, 403.

Tell us what you think about this editorial. Email us at MinistryMagazine@gc.adventist.org or write to us at 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904.

A politics-free zone

William L. Self

Editor's note: Religious freedom and the relationship of church and government has been discussed and debated for many years. This article is an adaptation of a sermon preached to a Baptist congregation in the United States. It is our belief that religious leaders throughout the world of all faiths will benefit from this message.

Jesus said,
" 'The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to preach good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the
prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to release the oppressed,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor' "
(Luke 4:18, 19, NIV).

"Remove not the ancient landmark, which
thy fathers have set" (Prov. 22:28, KJV).

When you get up and go to church, you do so knowing that you were not compelled because of any government decree. You go, knowing that the liturgy, the sermon, the theology, and the music were not dictated by any governmental authority. Religious freedom includes much of this description.

Because many Christians don't remember, this freedom lies in danger as a result. We have forgotten our history. We have listened to the media. We have paid attention to the loudest

voices and, because of that, we have removed the ancient landmarks. Every time I preach on the separation of church and state and religious liberty, I find people getting upset. There are two things people shouldn't deal with if they want to be liked: religion and politics.

I deal with both of them here.

The "milk" of the Word

Perhaps, because we are so used to having it here in America, many Christians are forgetting *religious liberty*. Yet of all things for which we need to be reminded, religious liberty stands uppermost. Evangelicals, who traditionally have prospered from the separation of church and state, now call for the abolition of church and state. Secularists (those who have no religious background at all and take their cues from the culture) are defending religious liberty and the separation of church and state most vigorously.

George Truett, a Baptist statesman, in 1920, speaking on the Capitol steps of the meeting of the Baptist World Alliance, said that religious liberty is one of the great contributions that the New World made. We live in a day when many Christians no longer understand that.

One preacher tells of a time when he was a small boy, going with his grandfather to the funeral of an old and battered pioneer preacher in the mountains of Virginia. As the boy stood there, looking into the casket, he saw a gnarled, battered old man whose hands were filled with scars. After the funeral, he tugged at the coat of his grandfather and said, "Explain to me about the scars on the preacher's hands." The grandfather responded, "Son, those scars are there because that man stood up for religious liberty when the rest of those around him wouldn't. He was jailed for preaching the gospel without a license from the state. When they put him in jail, he would not shut up. So he stuck his arms through the bars of the prison and preached to those on the outside. The guards, trying to shut him up, stood underneath those windows with knives, trying to cut his hands so he would pull his hands back inside the windows of the jail. He bore those scars all his life as a badge of courage for religious liberty."

In 1614 Thomas Helwys in England organized a little Baptist church on the principle of freely proclaiming the gospel without government interference. He was jailed for that. Later in 1617 John Merton was jailed for the same thing—for preaching the gospel. When he was put in jail, they took away his writing paper. Every day when his food was delivered, he received a small



William L. Self, DST,
is senior pastor of the
Johns Creek Baptist
Church, Alpharetta,
Georgia, United
States.

JESUS MAKES IT CLEAR IN THE GOSPEL, PARTICULARLY IN HIS TEMPTATIONS, THAT HE WOULD NOT USE SECULAR MEANS OR POWER POLITICS TO GAIN A FOLLOWING.

container of milk covered with paper to keep it from spilling. He saved the paper, took an old pen that he had smuggled into the prison, and began to write with the milk on that paper. The paper was taken out of the prison because no one knew anything was written on it, but his friends knew something had to be there. So they held the paper over a candle and the milk ink turned brown, and they read the writings of this great Baptist preacher about religious liberty. In 1686 the Religious Toleration Act was passed in England, primarily because of the work of English Baptists who had held up the principle of religious liberty.

We are told that in 1789 John Leland was a crusty Baptist preacher and leader in Virginia. Baptists were not very well liked in Virginia; they were the underclass, the back culture, the backwoods uneducated people. But they knew that they had the right under God to speak out for their convictions. And they had a lot of them, too. That's why James Madison, a delegate to the Constitutional Convention, came to John Leland and said, "We have created a Constitution for the colonies, but we know it must be ratified by Virginia, and it will not be ratified in this state unless the Baptists support it."

John Leland read it and said, "We neither guarantee in this Constitution the freedom of religion nor the freedom of speech."

James Madison replied, "If you support it, we'll give you the First Amendment." The Bill of Rights, then, came about because of John Leland. James Madison honored his word and the First Amendment, the guarantee of freedom of religion, was created. The Baptist contribution to the American culture includes this First Amendment.

Years later as Chief Justice Hughes was laying the cornerstone of the Religious Liberty Memorial in Washington, D.C., he said, "All faiths and sects are debtors to Baptists for religious liberty."

Historical lessons

The church-state struggle is nothing new. The three Hebrew lads were thrown in the fiery furnace over a religious freedom issue. Daniel was placed in the lions' den over a religious liberty issue. In 2 Chronicles, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and all through the Minor Prophets, we read strong words from these writers: "Do not make alliances with evil government." In the New Testament we have some interesting things that many Christians have a tendency, in recent times, to fluff over—a coalition of church and state that crucified Jesus Christ. Rome and the Christian faith had always been at odds. John was there on the Isle of Patmos because the Roman government couldn't control what he was saying.

Between A.D. 313 and 335, Constantine, the emperor of the Roman Empire, was having trouble with the Christians for they were not established, and they were meeting secretly. They couldn't advertise their meetings so they made the sign of the fish, identifying each other as Christian, so that other Christians would know where the meetings would be held. When the Christians became strong, however, Constantine needed them, and eventually he said that the religion of Rome would be Christian.

One would think this would have been a great victory for the church, but it wasn't. When the church was adopted by the government, it lost its prophetic voice. The church became wealthy, secularized, powerful, and formally bound

in the state and eventually achieving dominance over it, too.

The results have been tragic. For example, the dominance of the church over the state happened between the years of 1077 and 1213. In 1077 Pope Gregory VII was expanding the reach of his papal empire. King Henry IV of France was not cooperating with him. King Henry IV of France needed the support of Rome, and Rome wanted to bring Henry IV to his knees. The pope was at his palace in Canossa in the Alps of northern Italy. The pope required Henry IV to grovel in the snow for three days in sackcloth and ashes while he repented of his attitude toward the pope. After three days the pope granted him an audience, and Henry IV pledged allegiance to the pope.

In 1213, John I of England was in the same situation with Innocent III and could not get the approval of Rome until he declared that England was a fiefdom of the pope in Rome. One struggles to find the gospel message in these incidents.

What about the dominance of the state over the church? A recent example is Nazi Germany. Sermons, Scripture, lessons, biblical interpretation, liturgy were created and given to the German church by the government—the Hitler government. Strangely enough, many in the German churches supported Adolph Hitler because he neither smoked nor drank.

The shift

After the election of John Kennedy in the United States, we didn't hear much about church-state separation. Oh, but when that talk reappeared! There seemed to be a coalition of angry white, middle-class people, frightened

young adults who had momentum and organizational skills. It has not been uncommon in the last 20 years to hear celebrated, noisy preachers say that the doctrine of the separation of church and state is a fallacy and call for its abolition.

And, unfortunately, many people who signed on to that attitude did so simply because they were frustrated with the cultural shifts in the 1960s and 1970s. No longer were we in an America with Norman Rockwell in the *Saturday Evening Post*, apple pie and Chevrolet, sidewalks and shade trees, John Wayne, Bing Crosby, Clark Gable, and Robert Young. Andy of Mayberry wasn't around anymore, nor *The Partridge Family*. We now lived in an America that belonged to *Saturday Night Live*, *People* magazine, Jay Leno, and *Will & Grace*, not to mention *The Simpsons*.

Something had gone wrong. We "opened the closet" in America, and it seems that *everyone* came out. Liberated and favored, they wanted to catch up and get even. They wanted to be compensated and supported and affirmed. America had become a living *Jerry Springer Show*.

I once admired the people who wanted to clamp down on everything and hold it in line. I have felt that way. I was upset when organized prayer was taken out of the public schools and when people pushed for laws that I found repugnant. But then I had to take a second look, step back, and reformulate some of my positions, which weren't always popular.

Some parishioners have accosted me in the hall and said, "I believe in prayer in the public schools." I do too—and I don't think it will ever go away, either. As long as they give math tests, there will be prayer in public schools. But let me ask, Whose prayer do you want? If you live in Salt Lake City, or Miami, or Boston, or Atlanta, whose prayer will it be? We are an international community now. You most likely won't get a Baptist evangelical prayer in your public schools, at least in many parts of the country.

Before we talk about prayer in public schools, let me ask, What about prayer in the home? Have your children heard

you pray? Have they heard you read the Bible? Don't expect the teachers to do it when you don't. I don't like some of the laws being passed, but I know one thing: Jesus makes it clear in the Gospels, particularly in His temptations, that He would not use secular means or power politics to gain a following.

In some countries, revolutions came about because of rising secularism. There was a backlash and they threw out the secular rulers—they said they didn't want to be that modern. And don't think it couldn't happen here. I fear the danger of us turning into such a country more than I fear the problems with rank secularism. I fear that many Christians are being seduced by the idea that the state can do for us what we should be doing for ourselves.

A politics-free zone

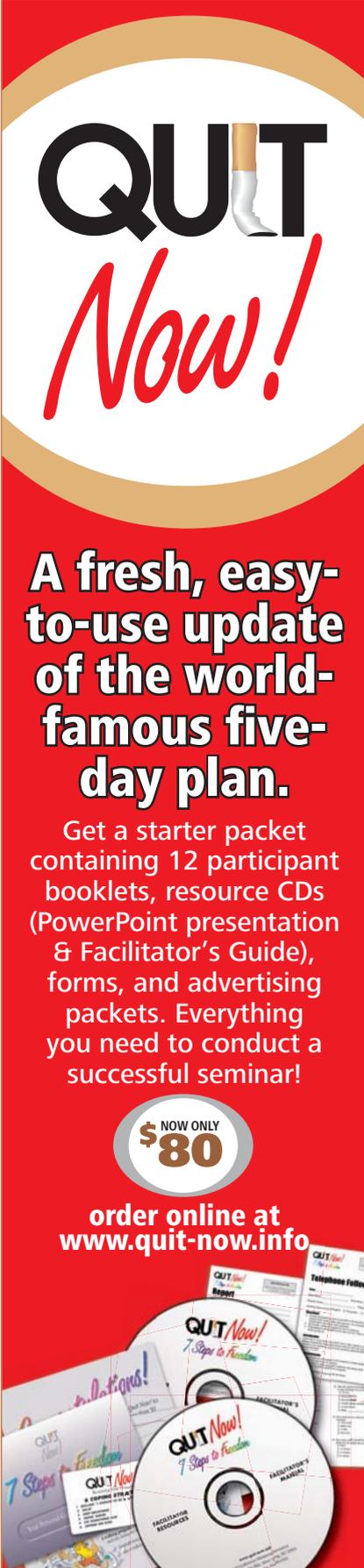
We cannot call my church a political recruiting station, but we can call it a *politics-free zone*. When someone visits my church they do not enter a political rally for right or left or for any political party. Baptists have always believed that we have a right to function in the political arena as individuals, but not to be politicized in our church. I have strong political opinions but, while these opinions come and go, the gospel stands forever.

I recall reading in Billy Graham's biography that the biggest mistake he ever made was when he publicly supported one candidate for the presidency of the United States. He said he would not do it again.

What, then, shall we do? You may be in the political process, and that's fine. But understand that His kingdom will last forever; the political process, in contrast, will not. We need good people in politics, but don't try to turn your church into a political voting precinct.

We are not here for that reason. Unfortunately, many folks, the very ones who have benefited the most from religious freedom, forget that important fact. ■

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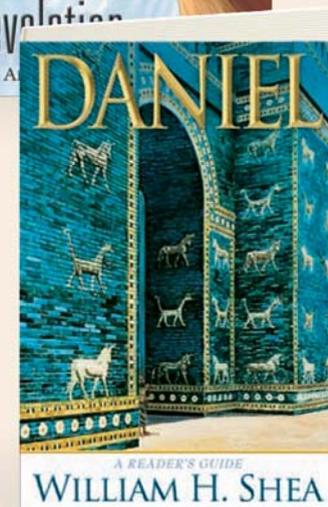
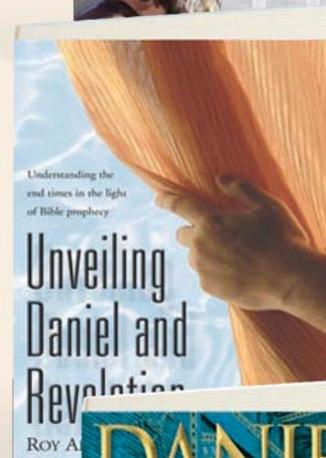
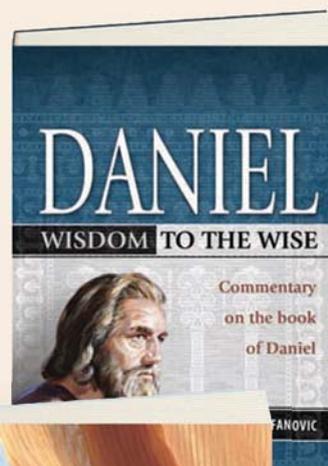
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Churches and political endorsements

Todd R. McFarland



Todd R. McFarland, JD, is an associate general counsel for the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States.

It starts out innocently enough. A pastor is sitting in his office when a parishioner phones him. It turns out that he knows the campaign manager who works on behalf of a woman campaigning for a county board seat. This next weekend the politician will be visiting various groups before the election on the following Tuesday. Could she possibly come by the church and say a couple of words? No talk about politics; just a story about her religious upbringing, how she has fond memories of going to church, and the importance of faith in today's society.

The pastor knows the candidate by reputation as a good person, although not necessarily his choice for the county board, but he honestly hasn't given that particular race for office much thought. He thinks to himself, *If she does win, knowing her could be useful.* The pastor well remembers the fight he had at a prior church, trying to get a permit for a new parking lot. Having someone who knows his church can't hurt if something like that happens here.

So the pastor invites her to come. At the appointed time the candidate stands up and talks for only two or three minutes. She tells a story about an aunt who used to go to the church and gave her a Bible that she carries to this day, and then she waves it from the pulpit for extra effect. Except for the introduction of the candidate—containing the mention that the speaker was running for county board—no one would know she was running for anything. No one even said, "Remember to vote next Tuesday."

The next Monday the pastor is in his office when he receives an e-mail from a parishioner. The candidate's visit was reported in the local paper because it so happens that a reporter was following the candidate that day and wrote about the visit to the church. She interviewed one of his deacons, the one who knew the candidate. When asked why the candidate was invited, he said, "She was the common sense candidate."

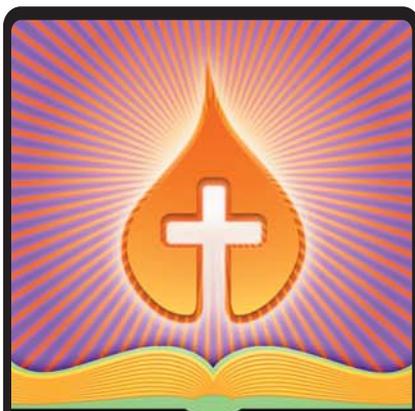
Four weeks later, after the candidate who visited his church lost the election, the pastor sees an envelope with the United States' tax agency, the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), logo in the upper left-hand corner.¹ Opening it, the pastor immediately becomes confused and concerned because the document contains a lot of language about candidates, endorsement, tax-exempt status, and investigation. The IRS also wants documents, including recordings of the service, the bulletin, and any newsletters sent out in the last year.

Being concerned, the pastor calls one of his church members, an attorney who functions as a corporate lawyer, but may know something about tax law. The lawyer says he is familiar with what the IRS has asked about. He informs the pastor that under the Internal Revenue Code, for a church to maintain its tax-exempt status, it cannot endorse any candidates for office. Someone from the IRS probably saw the article in the paper, had some questions and now plans to investigate. His parishioner does not practice in this area but informs the pastor that in the worst-case scenario the church could lose its tax-exempt status.

The pastor may not be a lawyer, but he knows the importance of that exemption. If his church loses its tax-exempt status, it will have to pay taxes on all of its revenue, it will have to start paying property taxes, and most importantly, donations to the church will no longer be tax-deductible. Losing that exemption cannot be considered an option—and even the risk of that loss, no matter how remote, has to be taken seriously. By this point the pastor realizes that this matter has implications for more than his congregation, and he contacts the conference office.

The pastor and a conference representative call a tax lawyer (who was referred by his parishioner) with an office located two hours away in the closest major metropolitan city. It turns out there are not many tax lawyers in the church's mid-size community who specialize in tax issues for exempt organizations.

The lawyer informs the pastor and the conference representative that this matter should be considered as serious as he thought. He tries to be reassuring, telling them that the IRS is unlikely to



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- 65% Volunteer to help others
- 63% Spend time with close friends
- 62% Become encouraged and inspired
- 55% Learn more about prayer
- 54% Listen to religious teaching
- 53% Discover the traditions of my religious faith
- 51% Participate in discussions regarding religion and faith
- 49% Be mentored or coached in my spiritual development
- 46% Participate in a study class about faith matters
- 36% Participate in a study of sacred Scripture

—*Ministry Today* (May/June 2007): 16.

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revoke the church's exemption over such a minor infraction; but the matter has to be taken seriously. The lawyer can help the church—he has handled other cases like this. The pastor also finds out that the costs would be very significant.

Could this really happen?

This nightmare scenario can become all too real for churches nowadays. Since 1954, in the United States, the Internal Revenue Code has banned churches from endorsing candidates, but it has enforced this only sporadically until recently. However, since the last election cycle the IRS has streamlined how it handles these investigations.

No one besides the IRS really knows how often investigations are launched, and unless an investigation gets to a certain point, it is not publicly disclosed. However, reports both in the news media and from the IRS indicate that these investigations are increasing.

This increase has occurred for several reasons, including the increase in churches' involvements in the political process. Another contributing factor includes interest groups monitoring the political activity of organizations. Such organizations as Americans United for the Separation of Church and State and the American Civil Liberties Union—which in the best of circumstances are less than friendly to organized religion—are particularly keen on finding and reporting violations. Church leaders should be aware that entities exist that would love nothing more than to see the IRS launch an investigation of a church.

One high profile investigation occurred as the result of a sermon given by the Rev. George Regas of the All Saints Episcopal Church in Pasadena, California, United States, the Sunday before the 2004 general election. The sermon was titled, "If Jesus Debated President Bush and Senator Kerry." The sermon focused on the Iraq war and what Jesus would say to Bush and Kerry, both of whom supported the war. In the first 30 seconds of the sermon, Regas stated he did not intend to tell people how to vote, though in fairness his sermon was tougher on Bush than Kerry.

The IRS launched an investigation, asking 11 different questions, including

what the content of the sermon was and the names and addresses of all of its board members. All Saints continues to resist the IRS investigation, but in doing so hired one of the biggest guns in exempt organizations tax law. All Saints has not disclosed what the legal fees total to date for the case.

What was disturbing to many about the All Saints case was that the pastor did not endorse either candidate, and in fact, criticized both candidates. And he launched his criticisms regarding an issue central to that church—the issue of peace and war. If a church does not have the freedom to speak out against war, what can it speak out on?

The IRS rules, at face value, do allow churches to speak out on issues that are important to churches. Theoretically, at least in the United States, churches may speak out on issues—but not on candidates. Thus, a church remains free to oppose or support the Iraq war all it wants. The church cannot say, vote for person X because the church endorses this candidate, or this person seems to be the right candidate on a given issue. But what happens, such as in a presidential election, when you have two candidates diametrically opposed on a single issue of central importance to a church? This was the dilemma facing many Catholic churches in 2004 on the abortion issue. The archbishop of the St. Louis diocese, Raymond Burke, went so far as to say it would be a sin for a Catholic to support Kerry because of his stance on abortion (which is ironic given Kerry's status as a Catholic himself). Archbishop Burke eventually backtracked to say it would only be a sin if a Catholic voted for Kerry because of his stance on abortion but could support the candidate if it were for other reasons.

So what are churches allowed to do and prohibited from doing? The easiest part of this question to answer is, What is prohibited? A church cannot "participate or intervene" on behalf of or against any candidate for office whether for federal, state, or local office. Endorsing a candidate, making contributions to a political campaign, placing yard signs on church property, or bumper stickers on church vehicles are all prohibited.

But what about inviting a candidate to speak at church—a practice common in many churches? The easiest and best advice would be to simply not do it during election season. However, if a church does care to venture into these treacherous waters, there are rules to be followed. The church has to be careful to provide equal access. If one candidate receives an invitation, then the other must be invited to a similar program. Letting one candidate address the church at the eleven o'clock service and inviting their opponent to talk before the Wednesday night prayer meeting attended by about 15 faithful souls cannot be considered equal access. Furthermore, it is important to invite both and not simply say that the other candidate never contacted you. They may not even know that the other side appeared at your church.

The rules become more relaxed when dealing with issues rather than candidates. Lobbying or speaking out on ballot initiatives or legislation is only limited and not prohibited like it is for candidates. The rules on the amount of lobbying allowed are rather complicated; but in short, it has to be a small part of the church's activities and needs to be tied to some mission of the church.

These rules are complicated and the above examples only raise some of the issues. If a church wants to become involved in politics it needs to familiarize itself with the rules of the local taxing organization. In the United States that is, of course, the IRS. Consulting a lawyer that specializes in tax law for exempt organizations is always a good idea. For U.S. tax law, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has a good resource available at <http://www.usccb.org/ogc/>. Another good resource is the IRS's own Web site, which can be found at <http://www.irs.gov/charities/churches/> and click on the resource titled "Churches, Charities, and Educational Organizations—Political Campaign Intervention."

What the pastor needs to know

Knowing and following the rules will keep a pastor and church out of trouble, but what about the larger principles involved? At first blush, these rules can

seem intrusive to a local congregation and pastor. After all, there is nothing more sacrosanct to pastors than the topics presented from their pulpits. Feeling called by God to minister to a flock, it goes against a lot of training and instinct for a pastor to be told by some bureaucrat in Washington, D.C., what can be preached during the service. Elections do matter and can have an impact on parishioners and society. If a church is dedicated to a particular cause, say poverty and the plight of the poor, why can't a pastor stand up and endorse the candidate who has made this issue a central theme of their campaign for the United States presidency?

There are several reasons for this restriction, both from the government and the church's perspective. Allowing exempt organizations such as churches to endorse candidates and otherwise "electioneer" (lawyers' fancy term for trying to get someone elected) threatens to overwhelm the election process. With hundreds of millions of dollars being raised for national campaigns, the temptation to raise some of that money in a tax-deductible fashion and outside the normal limits on campaign contributions would be unbelievable. If pastors believe that the IRS rule intrudes now, imagine if it had to try and distinguish between "legitimate" churches and nonprofits and those set up as a front for a campaign. Unless all campaign contributions are made as tax-deductible, the IRS would be forced into the role of super-cop over every church and nonprofit organization during elections.

Protecting the election process is not the only rationale for this rule. For a church taking a stance in an election, it works out great if its "side" wins, but in the hypothetical situation mentioned earlier, what would happen if the church went to the winning county board member for help with getting a permit for its new parking lot—having previously supported his opponent? The risk of supporting one party or candidate over another is that when "your people" are out of power, then so are you. Secular business entities understand this and that is why they rarely, if ever, publicly endorse one candidate over another

but rather support individuals in both parties. By having this rule, churches are insulated from politicians who would otherwise seek the support or an endorsement of a church.

Another way the electioneering prohibition benefits churches is that it provides some protection from the inherently messy political process. It is one thing for a church to take a stance on an issue that deals closely with its core mission, such as poverty. However, it is quite a different thing to say which fallible human being would be best suited to further that goal. Even on issues with a united congregation, the endorsement of a particular candidate will almost certainly ruffle the feathers of some congregants and can easily come back to haunt pastors who pick a candidate that they later regret. If a pastor's job includes spiritually leading and nurturing their congregation, taking sides in a partisan political debate will rarely further that goal.

Conclusion

There is no question that restrictions on enforcing or supporting candidates in the United States and other countries limit what can be said from the pulpit about political issues and candidates. However, many pastors recognize this as a reasonable restriction in exchange for the significant benefit tax-exempt status confers. These pastors also recognize that restriction can also be a blessing, protecting them from becoming embroiled in a partisan political process that rarely leaves the participants looking better. ■

- 1 This article analyzes this issue in the context of U.S. law. However, other countries, such as Canada, have similar restrictions. Pastors should seek specific guidance about their country's rules. Pastors have many responsibilities and it would do well to seek counsel from conference personnel on such issues.
- 2 Pastors who may think that at least in the United States the First Amendment will provide freedom of speech should be aware that while the constitutionality of the law has not been ruled on by the Supreme Court, few legal scholars believe that the Supreme Court would strike the law down in its entirety.

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Letters to the seven churches: historical or prophetic?

Clinton Wahlen



Clinton Wahlen, PhD, is professor of New Testament Literature and Interpretation, and chair of the Biblical Studies department, Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies, Silang, Cavite, Philippines.

Does the historicist interpretation that the seven churches of Revelation represent the entire sweep of church history over seven historic periods really make sense? That these letters are ultimately addressed to everyone becomes clear from the admonition at the end of each letter: “Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.”² If these letters are for everyone, why does it matter whether or not the seven churches represent seven prophetic periods? More perplexing still, why would Jesus seem to give every indication that He wrote these letters to real Christian congregations in Asia Minor if He really intended them to be understood quite differently, as prophetic depictions of the church throughout history?

From the historicist point of view, these letters could not really be understood until hundreds of years later rather than during the historical times they describe. But wouldn't such a position be reading history back into the Bible rather than accepting what appears to be the obvious meaning of the text? This objection needs to be taken seriously since it suggests, as preferable, a preterist interpretation that the first few chapters of Revelation, if not the whole book, apply to the first-century churches.

First, we will look at whether or not these letters were meant to be read like other letters found in the New Testament. Next, we will look at some textual clues which seem to suggest that the letters should be read prophetically. Finally,

we will discuss whether or not these letters should be read *primarily* as a prophetic portrayal of the church rather than as ordinary letters to churches in the Asia Minor of John's day.

Like other New Testament letters?

The opening chapter of Revelation describes Jesus appearing in vision to John on the island of Patmos and commanding him to write what he was about to see to the seven churches of Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea (Rev. 1:11). Even though the letters to these churches take up just two chapters (Rev. 2 and 3), Jesus actually addresses the whole book to them (Rev. 1:4; 22:16). So, if we restrict the application of these letters to the local churches of Asia Minor, why not the whole book? A failure to recognize this connection of Revelation as a whole with the seven churches is one obvious problem with a strictly local application of Revelation 2 and 3.

A careful study of the text shows that these are no ordinary letters, and they cannot even compare with the other inspired letters of the New Testament. First, unlike the New Testament epistles that were written by the apostles, the letters in Revelation do not come from John but from Jesus Himself as the opening lines of each letter make clear. In harmony with ancient practice, each letter begins by identifying the author of the letter but, unlike the epistles, Jesus identifies Himself as the Author using the apocalyptic language employed in John's earlier description of Him while closely connecting the letters with the book's opening vision (Rev. 2:1, 8, 18; 3:1, 7, 14; cf. 1:9–20). Second, Jesus *dictates* them to John, telling him at the beginning of each letter to “write” and using phraseology in Greek that emphasizes their divine origin and authority.³ Some even refer to these letters as “prophetic oracles” in order to distinguish them from the epistles.⁴

Scholars from different denominational backgrounds have long recognized that the letters to the seven churches pertain to more than just local issues. As one commentator observes, the fixed structure and symmetry of the letters “betray a purpose that goes beyond ethical instruction to seven particular churches in the Roman province of Asia.”⁵ Also, the content shows that the letters concern more than just the given congregation as they share in common several themes.

Jesus' desire for a close relationship with His church expresses one of these themes. The church of Ephesus has left its first love (Rev. 2:4), reminiscent of how the classical prophets describe Israel's departure from God (e.g., Jer. 2:2; 3:1;

Hos. 2:12–15). Jesus assures the church in Smyrna that He knows their suffering and poverty and encourages them to be faithful until death (Rev. 2:9, 10; cf. 1:5). Those in Pergamum are commended for “holding fast” to the name of Christ and not denying their faith in Him (Rev. 2:13). Jesus commends Thyatira for its love, faith, and service to Him and reproves them for tolerating Jezebel, who always leads many away from Him and into idolatrous practices (Rev. 2:19, 20). Those in Sardis who do not defile their garments can look forward to walking with Christ in white (Rev. 3:4). The church in Philadelphia has a special bond with Jesus because they have not denied His name and have kept the word of His patience. Jesus also says of those who do not have such a relationship with Him, “‘they will learn that I have loved you’ ” (Rev. 3:8, 9). By contrast, the church of Laodicea continues in their lukewarm attitude to Jesus (Rev. 3:16). Nevertheless, He knocks and waits, longing for a deeper, closer relationship with His people (Rev. 3:20).

Another important theme is the genuineness of one’s profession. Several letters refer to false claims of being apostles or Jews (Rev. 2:2, 9; 3:9). The Jezebel in Thyatira calls herself a prophetess but leads the church astray. And then comes a more general warning: “‘all the churches will know that I am the one who searches minds and hearts, and I will give to each of you as your works deserve’ ” (Rev. 2:23). As for Sardis, it has a name of being alive but is in fact dead (Rev. 3:1). Worst of all, Laodicea, as self-deceived, thinking itself rich and in need of nothing, does not recognize itself as actually poor and in need of everything, even clothing (Rev. 3:17). Related to the need for genuineness is the concern over false teachers, including Balaam, the Nicolaitans, Jezebel, and those who focus on the “deep things” of Satan (Rev. 2:14, 15, 20, 24). By contrast, Christ’s followers should be like Him—faithful witnesses (Rev. 2:13; 3:14).

These themes of relationship, genuineness of profession, and giving a faithful witness can be seen as applicable in every place and at all times, not just for a particular first-century church. At the same time, of course, these letters

also held historical significance for the local churches in these locations, since they so clearly display a knowledge of the history, topography, and economics of these cities and utilize this information to address the needs of Christians there. But might not these cities and their characteristics be also intended symbolically like much of the rest of the book?

Only historical or also prophetic?

A careful reading of Revelation suggests that the seven churches have a significance beyond a local application to congregations that have long since perished. In Revelation 1:19 Jesus commands John to write down what he saw (a clear reference to John’s vision of Jesus in vv. 11–16), as well as “‘what is, and what is to take place after this.’ ” Ostensibly this would suggest that these letters deal with the condition of the churches *both* in John’s day and in the future. Confirmation of this may be seen from the explicit indication of sequence in chapter 4. Jesus, having just finished dictating the letters to the churches, carries John in vision from earth to heaven and begins revealing to him “‘what must take place after this’ ” (Rev. 4:1). At this point in the book, attention shifts away from the present and future toward a more exclusive focus on the future only.

As the sidebar diagram (p. 15) illustrates, the book of Revelation can be read as comprising two principal visions, each of which contains prophetic messages from Jesus.⁶ The first vision, set on earth, shows Jesus walking among seven lampstands, symbolizing the seven churches (Rev. 1:12, 13, 20) and dictating to John messages for these churches (Rev. 2:1–3:22). The second vision, set in heaven, seems to show heaven’s involvement in events on earth that affect the church: the Lamb opening seven seals, angels who stand before God blowing seven trumpets, and angels coming out from the heavenly temple and pouring out seven bowls of God’s wrath on the earth. The climax of the book pictures the physical reunion of God and His people. Marking the end of the separation between heaven and earth that was caused by sin is the solemn pronouncement by the Alpha and the

Omega: “It is accomplished.”⁷ With this as the only time in the visionary portion of Revelation when the Alpha and Omega speaks, highlighting the importance of the verse for the narrative’s development becomes apparent. The goal to which the entire book presses is here finally achieved.

Viewing the book as two principal visions, which depict the divine work of reuniting heaven and earth, underscores the claim made from the beginning, that the book is a revelation from Jesus Christ (Rev. 1:1). It also helps us recognize that the letters to the seven churches, with their repeated call to hear and understand, intend not only to encourage readers to pay attention to the message of a given letter but also to prepare readers for comprehending chapters 4–22.⁸

Apocalyptic character of the letters

The prominence given to these letters, in terms of the overall structure of the book, as well as the fact that they constitute the first of Revelation’s four series of sevens, suggests that they may also have a *prophetic* significance. As with the seals, trumpets, and bowls, the number seven points to comprehensiveness in the case of the churches not only geographically but also temporally.⁹ There were other churches and more prominent ones in the Asia Minor of John’s time, such as Troas, Miletus, Colossae, and Hierapolis, to name a few (Acts 20:6, 17; Col. 1:2; 2:1; 4:13). Yet, considering the seven churches mentioned in Revelation 2 and 3, it is striking that arguably the *least significant* among them, namely Thyatira, has a letter far longer than any of the others. Also, the chiasmic arrangement of the seven letters lends further credence to the notion that they are intended for a broader application.¹⁰

Most significantly, the fact that apocalyptic imagery and ideas permeate each letter leads the reader to suspect that the churches themselves are meant to be understood symbolically as well and that the letters, like the rest of the book, should be interpreted as apocalyptic prophecy. Each letter begins with language from the initial vision of Jesus in chapter 1, which itself recalls the

apocalyptic language of Daniel (7:9, 13; 10:5–12). Imagery in the body of the letters, such as the lampstand being removed, the sword coming out of Jesus' mouth, hidden manna, new names, Jezebel, the rod of iron, the morning star, white garments, gold, eye salve, open and closed doors are all clearly symbolic. Closer study of these symbols reveals an intimate connection with (and prepares readers to understand) the later chapters widely accepted as apocalyptic.

A prophetic portrayal of the church

Viewing the letters to the seven churches as apocalyptic and applicable until the end opens the possibility of their being treated not only as historical but also as *prophetic*. This means that their message, with the primary purpose of predictive prophecy to strengthen faith, becomes especially relevant for the end time (John 13:19). Many Christian interpreters through the centuries have understood these letters as prophetic of the condition of the church in successive ages from the first century to the end, and some today continue to do so.¹¹ Within the limited confines of this article it is possible only to sketch in broad strokes certain features of these letters to illustrate the appropriateness of applying them prophetically. These chapters deserve further study along these lines.

The letters begin with the description of a "first love" experience, fitting of the apostolic age but already waning by the time John wrote. And they conclude with a view of materialistic abundance so characteristic of the church in the modern age. Interestingly, only in the letter to Ephesus that heads the list do we find the mention of people claiming to be apostles (Rev. 2:2), a problem of the first-century church evident from references elsewhere in the New Testament.¹² The persecution described in connection with Smyrna fits well with Rome's persecution of Christians in the early centuries¹³ that was followed by the assimilation of the pagan Roman culture into Christianity,¹⁴ evidently reflected in the syncretistic tendencies plaguing Pergamum and Thyatira. The letter to Thyatira, notable for its length, fits well the long period of church dominance

during the Middle Ages. As a counterpoint to this dominance, the victor in Thyatira is specifically promised *rule over the nations*. Significantly, in this letter we first hear of "faith" and "love" and that Thyatira's last works exceed the first ones—a description that fits well the onset of the Reformation (Rev. 2:19). Also at this point in the series of letters, we see a "remnant" beginning to form (Rev. 2:24). By the time of Sardis, however, reforms have stalled and appear near death.¹⁵

Finally, the appellations with which Jesus describes Himself to the Philadelphia and Laodicean churches, rather than pointing backward to chapter 1, point forward to judgment and the Second Advent. In connection with the letter to Philadelphia, the description of Jesus as "holy" and "true" compares closely to that of the One to whom the martyrs under the altar cry out under the fifth seal for vindication (Rev. 6:10). The "key" and "open door," alluding to Isaiah 22:22, are apparent references to the intercessory ministry of Jesus,¹⁶ suggested already by the description of Jesus in priestly attire walking among the sanctuary lampstands (Rev. 1:13; cf. Exod. 25:31–35; Lev. 24:4; 1 Kings 7:49; Heb. 9:2). To Laodicea, Jesus stands at the door, "which means in the language of the New Testament that the end is near (Matt. 24:33; Mark 13:29),"¹⁷ and the fellowship meal points to the marriage supper of the Lamb (Rev. 19:7–9). The description of Jesus as "faithful and true" (both of which are connoted by the Hebrew word "*Amen*") compares similarly to the description of the One coming on a white horse to judge righteously and make war (Rev. 19:11). Many examples, such as these mentioned in connection with Laodicea, demonstrate the close connection between the apocalyptic imagery of the letters and later chapters of Revelation. Sometimes the connection appears by way of contrast: The period of the Laodicean church corresponds to that of the "remnant" of Revelation 12:17. Understanding Revelation 2 and 3 as a prophetic portrayal of God's visible church throughout history provides interpretative help for the later chapters. The final image of the faithful remnant

must be balanced by the humbling image of blind and naked Laodicea.

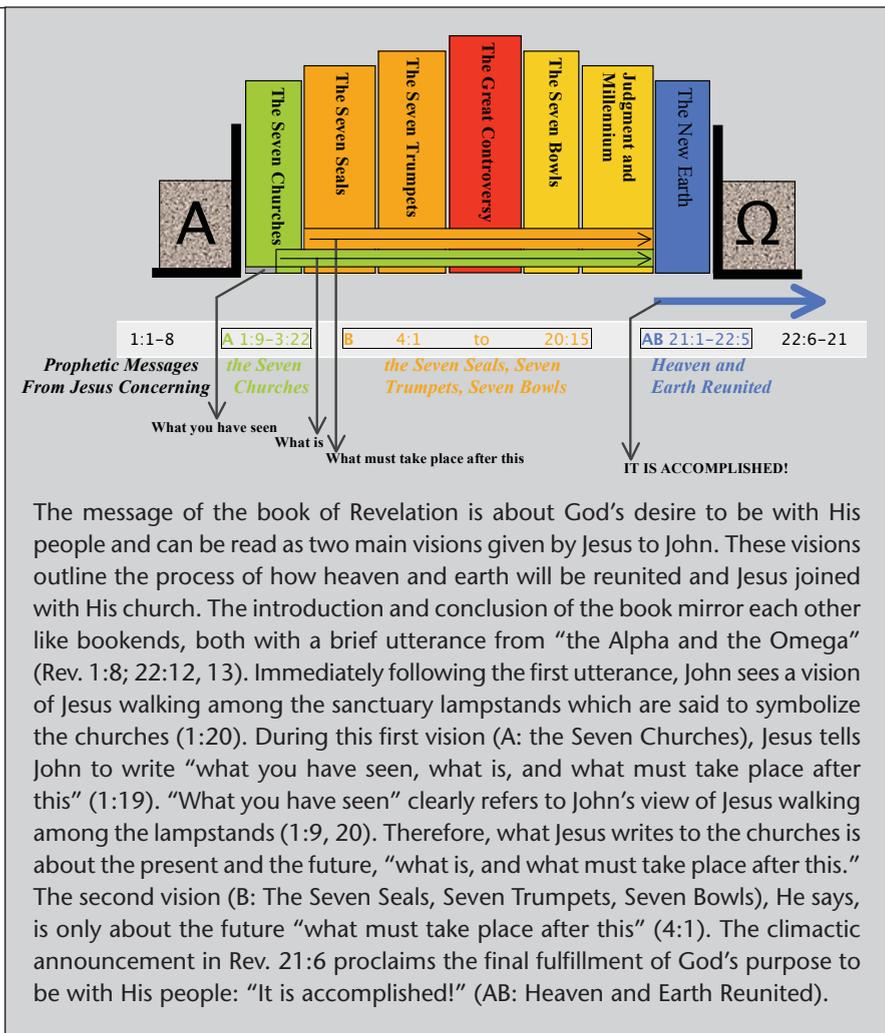
Despite this perceptible progression in the seven letters toward an increasing focus on the end time, the first-century perspective of the imminent return of Jesus continues to figure throughout them in some way. Already the emphasis on the nearness of the Second Advent is prepared for in the inaugural vision. In Revelation 1:17 Jesus says, "I am the first and last." And likewise in Revelation 22:12, 13, "See, I am coming soon;... I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end."

The letters themselves refer several times to the "coming" of Christ and yet give no clue as to *when* that coming might be or even *how soon* it might be (Rev. 2:5, 16, 22, 23; 3:3, 11). The book of Revelation quite definitely maintains that it is in a little while (1:1; 22:6), near (1:3; 22:10), and soon (2:16; 3:11; 22:7, 12, 20). At the same time, the end is only contemplated in connection with Christ's return, not before.

Conclusion

The letters to the seven churches are distinctly different from the New Testament epistles in that they come from Jesus Himself and, when viewed together as a group, display a stylized structure, chiasmic symmetry, and universally applicable themes. These features suggest that the letters are concerned with more than matters of merely local interest to a few particular churches. The number seven also suggests comprehensiveness in terms of their scope and application. When compared with the subsequent series of sevens in the first half of the book, i.e., the seals and the trumpets both of which culminate with the end of the world, there exists every reason to understand the seven churches in a similar way. Furthermore, the fact that the letters are permeated with apocalyptic symbols and ideas gives us reason to conclude that, like the rest of Revelation, these chapters may be intended as prophetic. Jesus Himself seems to suggest a future, as well as a present, application for them (1:19). A brief comparison of the letters with church history confirms this suggestion. ■

- Jon Paulien, "The End of Historicism? Reflections on the Adventist Approach to Biblical Apocalyptic—Part One," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 14 (2003): 15–43, speaks of a "developing consensus" at one of the Daniel and Revelation Committee meetings that Rev. 2 and 3 "reads most naturally along the lines of the New Testament epistles" (39 n. 123). Ranko Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ: Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2002), 117, 121, nods to the historicist tradition in his interpretation of Rev. 2 and 3 but uses noncommittal language (e.g., "Those seeking to apply . . ." "One might see . . ."). For a more in-depth study of this topic, see Clinton Wahlen, "Heaven's View of the Church in Revelation 2 and 3," *Journal of Asia Adventist Seminary* 9/2 (2006): 145–56.
- Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22. Unless otherwise indicated, all Bible quotations are taken from the New Revised Standard Version.
- Septuagint uses the striking wording *tade legei* (Rev. 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14; cf. Acts 21:11) to announce prophetic oracles with the words, "Thus says the Lord."
- A. Feuillet, *The Apocalypse*, trans. Thomas E. Crane (Staten Island, NY: Alba House, 1965), 48, 49; J. Ramsey Michaels, *Interpretation of the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 35, cf. 52; G. K. Beale, *John's Use of the Old Testament in Revelation*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement series 166 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 303, 304.
- Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, New International Commentary on the New Testament 17 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 84; cf. the recognition by Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 16, 17, that the letters address representative contexts which Christians in later periods have found applicable also to the church of their time.
- No agreement exists as to the overall structure of the book (Stefanovic, *Revelation*, 25). For details on the outline proposed here, see Wahlen, 147–49; Richard Sabuin, "Repentance in the Book of Revelation" (PhD diss., Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies, Silang, The Philippines, 2006), 54–61.
- Translation by the author. The Alpha and Omega also speaks once in the introduction (Rev. 1:8) and once in the conclusion (Rev. 22:13).
- So W. Popkes, "Die Funktion der Sendschreiben in der Johannes-Apokalypse. Zugleich ein Beitrag zur Spätgeschichte der neuteamentlichen Gleichnisse," *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche* 74 (1983): 90–107; cf. Beale, *John's Use*, 312, linking the hearing formula with the "visionary parables" of chaps. 4–21.
- E.g. Beale, *John's Use*, 302. The trumpets are throughout history what the bowl judgments are at the end time; the trumpets are a foretaste and forewarning of the seven last plagues (Stefanovic, *Revelation*, 39).
- Various studies have identified themes spread across the letters in a chiastic pattern. E.g., Robert



- Muse "Revelation 2–3: A Critical Analysis of Seven Prophetic Messages" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 29 (1986): 147–61, finds a pattern that we could summarize as *a b a a b a* (*a* for a "warning of judgment") and *b* for a "promise of salvation"), Beale, *John's Use*, 303, sees the condition of the churches described in an *a b c c b a* pattern. Sabuin, *Repentance*, 112, notes that the call to repentance in the letters conforms to a chiasm ($r - r^3 r - r$).
- E.g., Jacques B. Doukhan, *Secrets of Revelation: The Apocalypse Through Hebrew Eyes* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2002), 29–48; James L. Boyer, "Are the Seven Letters of Revelation 2–3 Prophetic?" *Grace Theological Journal* 6 (1985): 267–73.
- See 2 Cor. 11:5, 13; 12:11, 12; cf. Matt. 7:15; Gal. 2:4; 2 Pet. 2:1; 1 John 4:1.
- Though having periods of greater and lesser intensity, persecution was persistent in the second and third centuries, culminating in the "severest of persecutions under Diocletian, from 303 for a decade." See Henry Chadwick, "The Early Christian Community," in *The Oxford History of Christianity*, ed. John McManners (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 21–69, esp. 47, 48.
- Robert A. Markus, "From Rome to the Barbarian Kingdoms," in *The Oxford History of Christianity*, 70–100, esp. 73, 74; cf. 79: "The fourth and

- fifth centuries saw the wholesale Romanization of Christianity and Christianization of Roman society."
- The period surrounding the Reformation is extremely complicated, as Patrick Collinson's carefully nuanced treatment makes clear (see "The Late Medieval Church and Its Reformation" in *The Oxford History of Christianity*, 243–76). Protestantism quickly established its own confessions which served to bring coherence and consensus out of confusion and to crush theological deviance and dissent. *Ibid.*, 273.
- The ancient Aramaic translation of Isaiah, known as the Isaiah Targum, makes this explicit in its "interpretative translation" of Isa. 22:22: "And I will place the key of the sanctuary and the authority of the House of David in his hand; and he will open, and none shall shut; and he will shut, and none shall open" (Bruce D. Chilton, *The Isaiah Targum: Introduction, Translation, Apparatus and Notes*, The Aramaic Bible 11 [Wilmington, DE: Glazier, 1987], 44).
- Doukhan, *Secrets*, 44.

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God and nature: a biblical approach to origins

L. James Gibson



L. James Gibson, PhD, is the director of the Geoscience Research Institute, Loma Linda, California, United States.

Does God have any relation to nature? If so, how? One must have a foundational understanding of this relationship in order to develop an approach to origins. The way one views oneself and one's relationship to the cosmos becomes strongly influenced by one's view of the relationship of God and nature and its implications for the origin and nature of humans.

Different worldviews offer different takes on the relationship of God and nature, each carrying its own set of implications for the study of origins. The atheistic worldview sees no relevance for the idea of God and hence views nature as autonomous. Chance and natural causes are the only processes available to explain origins; hence, the crucial question whether they have the power needed to produce the cosmos.

The pantheistic worldview, common to Eastern religions, sees God and nature as being identical. With nature as autonomous or having its own "mind," the idea of a separate deity is meaningless. In pantheism, nature possesses divine power. Therefore, in nature an inherent tendency toward self-organization leading to the emergence of life and its complexity exists.

In the theistic worldview,¹ God and nature are separate but nature is not independent of God; God acts continuously to maintain nature and occasionally acts in special ways to accomplish His will in specific instances. Nature is totally dependent on God, for both its origin and its

continuing existence, with this view shared by Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. The crucial question here is not about the properties of nature, but about the plausibility of the existence of a God with sufficient power to create nature.

This article will explore briefly the question of whether nature has necessary powers to explain origins. After concluding that it does not, I will show that theism provides the basis for the most plausible story of origins.

Using observations to understand the relationship of God and nature

The probability of theism versus atheism or pantheism can be investigated by looking at the question of whether nature possesses the properties needed to generate life and complex organisms. If it does, all three worldviews are open for consideration; if it does not, atheism and pantheism are falsified, and theism remains the most likely to be true.

Let's focus on two questions. First, does chance indicate a sufficient causal explanation for the origin of the universe and life? The alternatives: The causative explanation must be either natural law or intelligent design. I will conclude that chance is not a sufficient explanation. Next, I will consider whether natural law seems a sufficient causal explanation. I will conclude it is not. Finally, I will consider whether intelligent design appears a probable and sufficient cause. In this case, the answer is affirmative.

Question 1: Is chance a sufficient causal explanation for life and the universe?

Two lines of evidence strongly point to the insufficiency of chance in causing the origin of nature. First, the universe has a specific set of properties without which life would be impossible.² The relative strengths of the fundamental forces, such as gravity and the forces of the atomic nucleus, along with the values of the physical constants, such as the speed of light, are finely tuned in a way that makes life possible. Slight changes in these factors could make it impossible for atoms and molecules to exist. Other slight changes could make it impossible for hydrogen or water to exist. The probability is vanishingly small that all these factors would be so finely tuned by chance. The highly specific features of the universe rule out chance as a sufficient causal explanation for its origin.

Second, living organisms are made of cells composed of highly specific biomolecules, including proteins made of amino acids and nucleotides. The potential number of different

ways in which amino acids and nucleotides can be combined into proteins and nucleic acids, respectively, is far greater than the number of electrons in the known universe. Only a relatively small proportion of proteins and nucleic acids are suitable for sustaining life. Proteins and nucleic acids interact in a number of different ways, and slight changes in the sequences of even a single protein or nucleic acid can sometimes cause death. The probability that amino acids would arrange themselves by chance into sequences appropriate for life is so remote as to be unthinkable.³

Question 2: Is natural law a sufficient causal explanation for origins?

Natural law does not seem adequate to explain the origin of the universe. No natural law specifies that the properties of our universe should be suitable for life. As far as we can tell, the universe could just as well have had other properties that would have made life impossible. Neither chance nor natural law, nor any conceivable combination of the two, is a sufficient causal explanation for the origin of the universe.

The origin of life is not explained by natural law. Life depends on a number of components, including proteins with specific shapes which are the result of specific amino acid sequences. In the origin of life, the first proteins and nucleic acids would have to be produced abiotically through natural law. No abiotic process is known for making proteins or nucleic acids. Natural law is sufficient to drive the disintegration of proteins and nucleic acids, but as far as we can tell, is not sufficient to cause their production under abiotic conditions. Our present knowledge may be incomplete, but there is no reason to suspect that there is some undiscovered "law of abiotic protein construction." The abiotic origin of nucleic acids faces the same problems, natural law is sufficient to destroy them but not to produce them abiotically. Generally, natural processes are commonly observed to cause death of living organisms, but have never been observed to cause life to arise abiotically. These facts rule out natural law as a sufficient causal explanation for origins.

Question 3: Is design a sufficient causal explanation for origins?

Design implies purpose, which implies an intelligent mind. To claim that the universe and life are designed is to claim that they are the result of a decision made by an intelligent mind for a purpose. The design explanation is favored by most Christians, including many scientists and philosophers.

A case for origin by design can be made in two ways. First, the only kinds of causal explanations known are chance, natural law, and design.⁴ Since both chance and natural law have been shown to be inadequate as explanations for the origin of the universe and of life, design is the only viable causal explanation available. With this as a weak argument, we would like to have positive evidence for design.

Some critics have claimed that design is an unreliable inference because there are no objective criteria for identifying design. But this criticism is not valid. A number of criteria are commonly used to identify design.⁵ For example, consider how an archaeologist might identify a stone ax as designed. First, a stone ax has an unusual shape not normally found among stones in natural settings. Second, the ax has fracture marks on it suggesting its shape has been modified by nonrandom processes such as being struck against another rock. Third, this unusual shape fits the object for a recognizable function associated with human activity. Fourth, the ax shows evidence of having been used in a manner associated with human activity. Thus, it appears that the stone ax was intentionally altered for a purpose. In short, it was designed.

More recently, two more sophisticated identifying marks of design have been proposed—irreducible complexity and specified complexity. These features are thought to be reliable indicators of design, although they are not necessarily present in every object that has been designed. Irreducible complexity⁶ refers to a system composed of a number of parts in which removal of any single part leaves the system without any function. Such a system is said to be "irreducible" in terms of its functionality and complex

because of several interacting parts, with the ordinary mousetrap as the classical example of irreducible complexity.

Specified complexity⁷ refers to a phenomenon with multiple interacting parts that form or produce a recognizable pattern. In this case, the term "specified" means that the pattern in question carries some information or meaning to the observer. For example, a pattern of marks on a beach would be "specified" if it was in the form of a written message but not if it were merely a series of ripples produced by wave action. Implicit in this idea lies the notion that information is both created and recognized by intelligent minds, not by mindless physical processes.

When we examine living organisms, do we see "marks" that we might reasonably interpret as the result of design? Yes, we do. Many examples have been proposed, although not all are equally persuasive. Some examples that seem persuasive include the information content of DNA, the cilium, the blood-clotting mechanism, the living cell, the mechanism for protein synthesis, sexual reproduction, and others.

In conclusion, design seems a compelling explanation for the origins of the universe and life. This conclusion is strengthened by the fact that chance and natural law seem insufficient causes. The evidence for design implies that God acted with purpose to create both the universe and life.

God's actions in nature and a proposed classification

God may act directly in nature through primary causation or indirectly through secondary causation. In primary causation, God acts directly on matter and energy to cause a desired effect. In secondary causation, God causes an event indirectly, such as by allowing natural processes to proceed toward some predetermined end. Thomas Aquinas noted the distinction between primary and secondary causes,⁸ although the application here is my own.

The distinction between direct action and acting through secondary processes can be illustrated by comparing a painting with a photograph taken by remote

sensing. The picture is accomplished through the direct agency of a painter who directly applies the paint to the canvas. In the case of the photograph, the picture is produced through secondary processes in which the photographer uses a remote sensing device to trigger the camera. The photograph was produced through the intentions of the photographer so it was not the result of chance (although certain details might be due to chance, such as which direction an animal was looking when the camera was triggered), but the image was produced indirectly rather than being directly applied by the person.

God might also act in nature continuously or intermittently. For example, God acts continuously to

sustain the existence of the universe. At certain times, God acts in special ways as a voluntary agent, much as a human being may act as a voluntary agent. Thus, God acts both continuously and discontinuously.

Questions of whether God's actions are continuous or discontinuous and whether they are the result of primary or secondary causation may be used to classify God's activity in nature into four categories. These categories are illustrated in Table 1 with examples of each type of action described below. Not intended to be taken as new, these points are part of the traditional Christian view of God and nature.

Continuous, direct activity

In the ordinary operations of nature, God continuously acts by, "upholding the universe by his word of power" (Heb. 1:3, RSV). God's actions are so consistent and reliable that we recognize the patterns as "laws of nature." We often are able to use these "natural laws" to predict what will happen in a given set of circumstances. If God were to stop acting in this way, the universe would cease to exist.

God's continuous, consistent direct action is the cause of the general "laws of nature."⁹ These general laws maintain the existence of the universe. By "general laws" I mean observed regularities that seem to be in effect throughout the observable universe. The general laws of nature include the fundamental forces

do not know of any laws that would apply to the process. On the other hand, no reason exists to suppose that God had to break the laws of the fundamental forces or change the physical constants in order to create wine from water, or to raise the dead to life, or to calm the stormy sea. These were miracles indeed, but there

was no need to break the general laws of nature. Anyone could probably do the same thing, without breaking general natural law if he or she were omnipotent, omniscient, and able to manipulate matter and energy by fiat.

Science may have a very difficult time analyzing supernatural events, since one cannot observe what God is doing. This does not necessarily mean that a scientist

should not attempt to study supernatural events, but it does mean that scientists cannot rely on explanations with which they are already familiar. In such cases, the probability of successful analysis would likely be rather low.

Continuous indirect activity

God also continues to be active through secondary mechanisms. For example, the weather system stays continuously maintained through the general laws of nature. However, the specific state of weather itself is probably not directly manipulated by God, except for special ("supernatural") events. He ordinarily "causes" the weather through secondary, rather than direct means. The weather system can be compared to a machine that operates on consistent principles without continuous external guidance. The consistency of weather processes may lead us to consider weather patterns to be laws of nature, but they really are only localized effects of general laws.

Human development is another example of continuous activity through secondary processes with each of us

GOD ACTS CONTINUOUSLY TO MAINTAIN NATURE AND OCCASIONALLY ACTS IN SPECIAL WAYS TO ACCOMPLISH HIS WILL IN SPECIFIC INSTANCES.

(gravity, strong and weak nuclear forces, and the electromagnetic force) and the values of the physical constants (e.g., the masses of the elementary particles, the speed of light, Planck's constant, etc.). The number of known general laws of nature may be surprisingly small.

The practice of science is based on the consistency of God's continuous direct action. One of the aims of science is to identify these consistencies.

Discontinuous direct activity

God also acts discontinuously. God's discontinuous direct action may be the cause of events perceived as supernatural events or miracles.¹⁰ By *supernatural event* I mean an event that could not have been predicted from the preceding state of matter and that would not have occurred except for the action of an intelligent agent. Supernatural events would include "miracles" and perhaps many activities of human beings. Supernatural events normally are consistent with the general laws of nature, although in theory exceptions could occur. For example, if God created through a process like the big bang, we

developed from a single living cell into a multicellular individual. Although this appears to be a purely physical process, yet we speak of ourselves as having been created. In doing so, we acknowledge that God may “create” through secondary processes, such as in the continuity of human life.

Science is especially well suited to studying events that result from God’s continuous activity, whether direct or indirect. Events caused through secondary mechanisms are a major subject matter of science, with explanations sought, ultimately, in terms of general laws.

Discontinuous secondary activity

God may also act intermittently through secondary causation.¹¹ Answers to prayer are often a result of God’s special actions using secondary causes. For example, the needy family who

prays for help may find a package on their doorstep. The package may have been put there by an individual who was impressed to do so. In this case, God may have acted directly on one person, using that person as a secondary cause in answering another person’s prayer. Certain biblical miracles seem to have involved God’s action through secondary mechanisms. Examples include the use of wind to bring “quails” to the Hebrews in the wilderness, the use of hornets to drive away Israel’s enemies, the payment of the tax for Peter and Jesus by the coin in the fish. However, in each case, the secondary process was probably initiated by direct divine activity. Hence, a miracle may involve both secondary activity and direct activity.

Science may have some success in analyzing events involving discontinuous secondary causation, but failure to recognize divine activity will likely cause

difficulties in reaching conclusions in harmony with Scripture.

Distinguishing origins and operations

In studying God’s activities in nature, we should distinguish between questions of origins and questions of operations. Origins are singularities while operations occur continuously. Having a good understanding of operations does not necessarily imply a good understanding of origins.

For example, consider the operations of an automobile. Fuel is burned in an internal combustion engine, releasing energy that drives the pistons. This movement is transferred to the wheels through a series of mechanical linkages, with the result that the wheels are turned, propelling the car forward. Several control mechanisms guide the direction of the car’s movement and

Table 1. Four categories of divine activity and their proposed relationship to science and Scripture

God’s actions:	Direct/Primary Action	Indirect/Secondary Action
Continuous Action	<p>Sustaining the existence of the universe.</p> <p>General “laws of nature.” Examples: gravity, electromagnetic force, physical constants.</p> <p>Science seeks to identify the regularities. Primarily theoretical physics. Scripture identifies origin. The fundamental forces are probably God’s direct activity.</p> <p>Only metaphysical conflict between science and Scripture.</p>	<p>Sustaining physical processes/mechanisms that result from direct agency in the physical constants and fundamental forces.</p> <p>“Local” events or processes. Examples: weather, sunrise, metabolism; sometimes thought of as “laws of nature” but only localized effects of such laws.</p> <p>The main activity of experimental science. Science seeks to explain in terms of general laws. Scripture identifies God as primary cause, but does not explain mechanism.</p> <p>Little or no conflict between science and Scripture.</p>
Discontinuous Action	<p>Miracles (some)</p> <p>Direct, supernatural, singular acts on matter and energy. Examples: Creation, initiating secondary processes at special times.</p> <p>Science defers to religion or denies supernatural. Scripture identifies unseen cause.</p> <p>Conflict if science fails to accept supernatural cause.</p>	<p>Miracles (some)</p> <p>Providential events resulting through secondary mechanisms. Examples: providence, events timed for a purpose; Flood, Jordan crossing, quails.</p> <p>Science struggles to explain, or fails to see significance. Scripture identifies supernatural cause.</p> <p>Conflict if science fails to accept supernatural cause.</p>

cause it to move or stop at the will of the operator.

A good mechanic understands the “automobile laws” that govern the operations of the automobile and takes appropriate action to maintain the machinery in good order or to make repairs when needed. It might seem that the mechanic knows everything there is to know about an automobile.

Does a mechanic’s thorough understanding of the operations of an automobile also give him the ability to explain how automobiles are made? Of course not. The mechanic has probably never visited a manufacturing plant to see how an automobile is made. We would be skeptical of any mechanic who claims that the manufacturing of an automobile does not require any processes they have not observed nor use any principles unknown to them.

As scholars, we are a little bit like the mechanic. Although able to observe many physical processes operating in the universe, we have never seen the origin of a universe. Likewise, we understand a great deal about physicochemical processes in living cells, but we have never seen life originate abiotically. The origins of life and the universe involve processes that are not involved in their day-to-day operations. Thus, we find it useful to consider questions about origins as a separate category from questions about operations in nature.

Miracles and natural law

I have stressed that miracles do not necessarily require violations of “natural laws.” I do this because many scholars seem to feel that miracles are, by definition, violations of natural laws, and thus a threat to the practice of science.¹² This is not necessarily the case. Science may not be able to explain miracles, but the cause of this failure often may be because we cannot see what God is doing rather than because we are incapable of understanding the physical mechanism. Thus, it is not fatal to the practice of science to admit that miracles may occur, unless one adopts the philosophical position that all events must be explained by science, appealing only to natural processes.

What about the ability of scientists to study supernatural events? For example, is it justifiable for a scientist to study Creation if it was a supernatural event? Does the biblical story of origins render science irrelevant?

The answer to this question depends on what the scientist is trying to discover. For example, suppose a scientist wishes to study the origin of life. The Bible states that God made the atmosphere (heaven) and the dry land (earth) and the living organisms in six days. To the creationist, it becomes pointless to attempt to test whether God created in six days, since the process clearly was unique and miraculous, and therefore, outside the realm of science. But there are plenty of other questions a creationist scientist may pursue. For example, a creationist might wish to study the relationships among organisms to determine to what extent they have diversified since Creation. Or one may wish to investigate some aspect of cell and molecular biology. They might even wish to examine whether the Creation account applies to the entire world or to a localized region, although this will not be a strictly scientific study, since they must take into account the biblical text as well as a study of the physical world.

Conclusions

Origins may sometimes be a contentious issue in science and faith because of differing presuppositions about God’s relationship to nature. An argument has been presented here that the evidence points to divine activity in nature, expressed in both direct and indirect causation. God’s actions in nature may be described in four categories: continuous and direct, continuous and secondary, discontinuous and direct, and discontinuous and secondary.

With science well-equipped to study God’s continuous activities, Scripture emphasizes God’s discontinuous activities. Scientific methodology restricted to observable physical mechanisms is inadequate to discover and explain our origins. Certain aspects of reality seem to be best explained by design and direct personal causation. The biblical description of God provides essential

information in our quest to understand the relationship of God, nature, and humans. ❏

- 1 Deism is the notion that God started the universe, but it continues without further interaction with God. It shares with mainstream theism the recognition of a Creator in the beginning, but from that point on, it is similar to both atheism and pantheism in that it requires that nature itself possess all the properties needed for further development. I do not address deism separately, but the problems of atheism in explaining any phenomenon after the origin of the universe also apply to deism.
- 2 Fine-tuning of the universe is discussed in J. D. Barrow and F. J. Tipler, *The Anthropic Cosmological Principle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986); Hugh Ross, *The Creator and the Cosmos*. rev. ed. (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1995).
- 3 Problems in the origin of life are discussed in numerous publications, such as: C. B. Thaxton, et al., *The Mystery of Life’s Origin: Reassessing Current Theories* (NY: Philosophical Library, 1984); L. M. Spetner, *Not by Chance!* (Brooklyn: Judaica Press, 1996).
- 4 W. A. Dembski, “Redesigning science,” in W. A. Dembski, ed. *Mere Creation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 93–112.
- 5 See W. A. Dembski, *The Design Inference* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
- 6 M. J. Behe, *Darwin’s Black Box* (NY: Free Press, 1996).
- 7 W. A. Dembski, *The Design Inference* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); *Intelligent Design* (Downer’s Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999).
- 8 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologia* Part 1, Articles 19, 22; <http://newadvent.org/summa>.
- 9 See M. A. Jeeves and R. J. Barry, *Science, Life, and Christian Belief* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 40; John Polkinghorne, *Belief in God in An Age of Science* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 54; V. S. Poythress, *Response to Robert C. Newman* in J. P. Moreland and J. M. Reynolds, eds., *Three Views on Creation and Evolution* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan), 148–152; Percy and Thaxton, 80, 90; C. B. Kaiser, *Creation and the History of Science* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1991), 30.
- 10 E.g., see J. P. Moreland, “Science, miracles, agency theory and the god-of-the-gaps,” in R. D. Geivett and G. R. Habermas, eds., *In Defense of Miracles* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 142, 143; R. L. Purtill, “Defining miracles,” in Geivett, et al., 61–72.; and C. S. Lewis, *Miracles* (NY: Collier Books, 1960), 47, 59, 60.
- 11 Jeeves and Barry, 42.
- 12 David Hume, “Of miracles,” in Geivett and Habermas, 33.

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The pastor and power

Steve Walikonis



Steve Walikonis, DMin, is associate pastor, College Place Village Seventh-day Adventist Church, College Place, Washington, United States.

An intangible phenomenon permeates the atmosphere of this world. It is called “power.” As individuals and nations, the quest for power characterizes our culture, and the desire for power, as a general rule, dominates the masses whether economic, political, social, or technological. Familiar phrases attest to the many ramifications of power in daily life and experience: power politics, balance of power, power of the media, or people power. In the church, phrases such as “the power of the laity” or “the power of prayer” suggest a concern about power. Each of these phrases would indicate powerlessness as undesirable. As Robert Greene observes, “the feeling of having no power over people and events is generally unbearable to us—when we feel helpless we feel miserable. No one wants less power; everyone wants more.”¹

How should we as pastors relate to this phenomenon?

Five kinds of power

Whenever a group of people organizes to accomplish a given objective, the phenomenon of power is at work. A whole organization becomes affected by how its leader relates to power, along with a range of options for applying it. At one extreme, church leaders may impose power forcefully and autocratically, resulting in power struggles, rivalry, even rebellion. On the other end of the spectrum, leaders may not apply power at all to address needed change,

thus accomplishing nothing. As a contestant, every leader plays in the game of power—no one can opt out.

Almost any church member can relate stories of congregations wounded by a pastor or leading church member who misused power resulting in discontent and lowered morale. Either leaders feel dejected because few wish to follow their lead, or the members in the pew feel unproductive and discouraged. In one seminary class the teacher, Dr. Arnold Kurtz²—commenting that low morale in the congregation is often attributed to the so-called Laodicean condition—said that the real cause may be how the pastor leads the congregation. Indeed, the pastor’s use of power may be creating the very condition they lament.

How should a church leader relate to the phenomenon of power? J. R. P. French and B. Raven³ identified five kinds of power:

1. Expert power: based on B’s perception of A’s competence.
2. Referent power: based on B’s identification with or liking for A.
3. Reward power: based on A’s ability to provide rewards for B.
4. Coercive power: based on B’s perception that A can provide penalties for failure to comply with A.
5. Legitimate power: based on the internalization of common norms or values.

Expert power

In our age of specialized knowledge, we have come to rely on experts in every field with the increase of knowledge skyrocketing in every branch of learning. Because expert power lies behind effective leadership, the leader may be renowned for good decisions, sound judgment, or accurate perceptions of reality. These are qualities that seem to cause an individual to rise in power naturally.

Followers are persuaded that the reformer is right, and a reform movement is born. This scenario is regularly played out in the political world as well as the religious world. When one observes the power of revolutionaries or reformers, it appears that their power begins with the perception of their expertise. They use their knowledge or insight to define the prevailing problems and propose solutions. The ministry of Jesus offers an example of expert power for “He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes” (Matt. 7:29, NKJV). In His words there was a credibility that impressed His listeners with the fact that He knew what He was talking about.

MINISTERS TODAY SHOULD EXAMINE THEIR OWN LIVES AND MINISTRIES TO DETERMINE WHETHER OR NOT THEY ATTRACT OR REPEL PEOPLE, SINCE WORKING WITH PEOPLE CAN BE CLASSED AS A DAILY DUTY OF MINISTRY.

In this day of technological revolution, the spread of knowledge and the ease with which individuals share information quickly determines who has a position of influence. With regard to the church, many members have knowledge about theology and administration at a level that may surpass the minister. Leadership seeks to fill a vacuum. Where the minister may be deficient, others may be regarded as more informed or experienced, thus shifting power away from the church leader. Applied to ministers, this form of power demonstrates the reason why a seminary education is considered so important. The extra equipping one receives through continuing education allows students to capitalize on the abundance of information available to effectively do the work of ministry.

Referent power

Based on the desire of followers to identify with their leaders and to be accepted by them, referent power serves as a model and an agent of influence by which the targets evaluate their behavior and beliefs. Within an organization referent power can be profound, for in every congregation names, whether pastors' or church members', will certainly be heard and remembered with great fondness and respect. One might ask, What was so notable about those people? Why is their memory so revered? Why do people hold them in such high regard? Why were they so powerful? With the answer comes the attraction of referent power. The leader, known for the charisma of a loving and kind manner, manifests this power. Within most organizations some individuals seem to motivate others merely from the respect they possess for they are well-

liked and others wish to be identified with them.

Servant-leaders tend to grow in referent power. In Richard J. Foster's view, "Leadership is an office of servanthood. Those who take up the mantle of leadership do so for the sake of others, not for their own sake. Their concern is to meet the needs of people, not to advance their own reputations."⁴ Note, therefore, how referent power creates loyalty and teamwork in an organization.

Two main streams of power seem to exist. With multitudes of books and articles that focus on achievement, status, how to "make it to the top," and success, many examples exist of this type of power. We can name political, business, and military leaders who climbed the ranks and rose in prominence.

Other literature highlights those who have impacted the world in another way. Their power was not due to their strength, position, or outward advantage but rather to their character, service, integrity, humility, and concern for others. This brings to view the paradox of power that has been modeled at various times throughout history. Pat Williams refers to Mahatma Gandhi who influenced his entire nation even though he had no position of authority. He says,

One of the great keys to the transforming power of the leadership of Gandhi was his humility, rooted in a desire to be completely identified and one with the poor and oppressed people he served. When he traveled, he traveled by third-class passage on trains. Third class was roughly equivalent of being treated as human freight. Third-class passengers were crammed together with farm animals

in miserable conditions of heat, filth, and stench. Asked why he traveled third class, Gandhi replied, "Because there is no fourth class."⁵

The optimal example of referent power would be the ministry of Christ. Scripture tells us that the multitudes crowded about Him and followed Him. Public attraction and demand were so great that He could hardly find reprieve. Ministers today should examine their own lives and ministries to determine whether or not they attract or repel people, since working with people can be classed as a daily duty of ministry.

Reward power

Control of valued resources determines the base of reward power. For example, church leaders possess a great deal of reward power since they determine whether or not or how much their employees are paid. In an attempt to motivate, leaders may also reward workers who perform well and withhold rewards from those who don't.

In most congregations, the actual power to give raises and bonuses comes through the church board. However, the only way the board knows what goes on in the office from day to day comes through the pastor making himself a key link to the source of rewards. Often only the pastor's recommendation provides any rewards or financial benefits for meritorious service.

Another example of reward power is the minister's use of public recognition. Many individuals who serve the church are volunteers, and the ability to reward their dedication and service before the entire church body can be a tremendous boost to morale and the quality of the services that the church provides.

Reward power has its dangers, however. Alfie Kohn⁶ concludes that reward power has motivational effects but that over the long term it leads to a mind-set that actually prevents performance from individuals unless they are rewarded. He suggests several reasons why reward power may lead to problems: Rewards actually punish, rewards rupture relationships, rewards ignore reasons, rewards discourage risk taking, rewards reduce intrinsic motivation, and rewards in the form of praise are controlling and ultimately ineffective. Reward power in the hands of the leader must be used with great caution and with awareness of its potential drawbacks.

Coercive power

The leader who uses coercive power controls the granting or denying of valued rewards or feared penalties. As a form of power, coercion is apparent in government, business, family, and church life. Blaine Lee describes its nature:

Coercive power relies on the premise of control and uses fear as its instrument. When we use coercive power, we do it not to influence others, but to force them to obey. We achieve compliance through threats, cajolery, bullying, or physical force—whatever is necessary to cause fear in those we are seeking to control.⁷

When one considers how effectively fear has held much of the world's population under suppression and harsh rule, one does not wonder why coercion has become regarded as "the kind of power that most people understand best."⁸ As Celia Hahn observes, "The Control culture provides a comfortable haven for the Authoritarian Personality. In a world structured by control and ranking, the Authoritarian Personality feels secure. Within the hierarchy of power, he has his own niche. While he must submit to those above him, he can tell those below him what to do."⁹

Research reveals that coercive power has an obvious impact, for it affects the morale of a congregation in a way exactly opposite to the expert, referent, and reward power bases. Responses to

a research survey reflect the anguish of church members who have pastors high in coercive power.¹⁰ One respondent said, "Things go his way or else. We have lost several members. I'm trying to hang in there." Another said, "Our local church has become his 'kingdom.' We are being directed rather than allowed to have a democracy." One respondent commented sadly, "Due to 'pastoral power,' there are 'body bags.'" Comments such as these were never made when the pastor was rated high in expert or referent power.

Legitimate power

Legitimate power is based on norms and expectations that members of a group hold regarding behaviors appropriate in a given role or position. In other words, members will more likely accept leaders and their influence when the leaders hold attitudes that conform to the norms of the group or organization.

One example of legitimate power is the United States presidential election. E. P. Hollander¹¹ has pointed out that winning an election establishes a much higher degree of legitimate acceptance of the elected president—as leader of the nation, head of the political party, and commander-in-chief of the military—than would be expected from the president's initial support from the voters. Only about half of the registered electorate actually casts a vote, yet presidents benefit from the belief that once legitimized, by even a slim victory, each then holds the highest place in the nation.

Try as we might to avoid it, the church can be compared to a political organization. Leaders receive legitimization through a process of search committees, votes, and installation into office. Efforts harmonize the needs of the organization with the skills of the leader, and screening determines qualifications. Often, some kind of official ceremony takes place when the new leader assumes the position. In the minds of the members, this process gives legitimacy to the one who leads. If it turns out that the leader's skills are insufficient, or if the process for selection is suspect, or if the leader's values

vary from the organization's, gaining legitimate power becomes evident and difficult.

Conclusion

Jesus' ministry was a harmonious blend of all five power bases. He gave leadership with the credibility and legitimacy of One sent by God. He confronted error and proclaimed truth in love with the authority of Divinity. Through His power, brokenness was transformed to wholeness.

God has given leaders today the privilege of using His power to improve our world as well. We see brokenness, fracture, and disarray all around us. Wise leaders will be aware of the power in their hands that is useful to restore and renew those things that have become ruined. In this way, power can be described as a phenomenon that glorifies God. ■

- 1 Robert Greene, *The 48 Laws of Power* (NY: Viking, 1998), xvii.
- 2 Retired professor, Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, United States.
- 3 J. R. P. French and B. Raven, "The Bases of Social Power," in *Studies in Social Power*, ed. Dorwin Cartwright (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, Institute for Social Research, 1959), 150–167.
- 4 Richard J. Foster, *Money, Sex, and Power* (San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row, 1985), 235.
- 5 Pat Williams, *The Paradox of Power* (NY: Warner Books, 2002), 207.
- 6 Alfie Kohn, *Punished by Rewards: The Trouble with Gold Stars, Incentive Plans, A's, Praise and Other Bribes* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1993), 49–116.
- 7 Blaine Lee, *The Power Principle* (NY: Simon and Schuster, 1997), 52.
- 8 Michael Korda, *Power! How to Get It, How to Use It* (NY: Random House, 1975), 34.
- 9 Celia Allison Hahn, *Growing in Authority, Relinquishing Control: A New Approach to Faithful Leadership* (Bethesda, MD: The Alban Institute, 1994), 23.
- 10 Steven R. Walikonis, "The Phenomenon of Power in the Church: An Investigation and Analysis of the Relational Dynamics Experienced in the Context of the Assertion of Authority" (DMin diss., Andrews University, 2004).
- 11 E. P. Hollander, "Leadership and Power," in *The Handbook of Social Psychology*, ed. Gardner Lindzey and Elliot Aronson (NY: Random House, 1985), 2:509–511.

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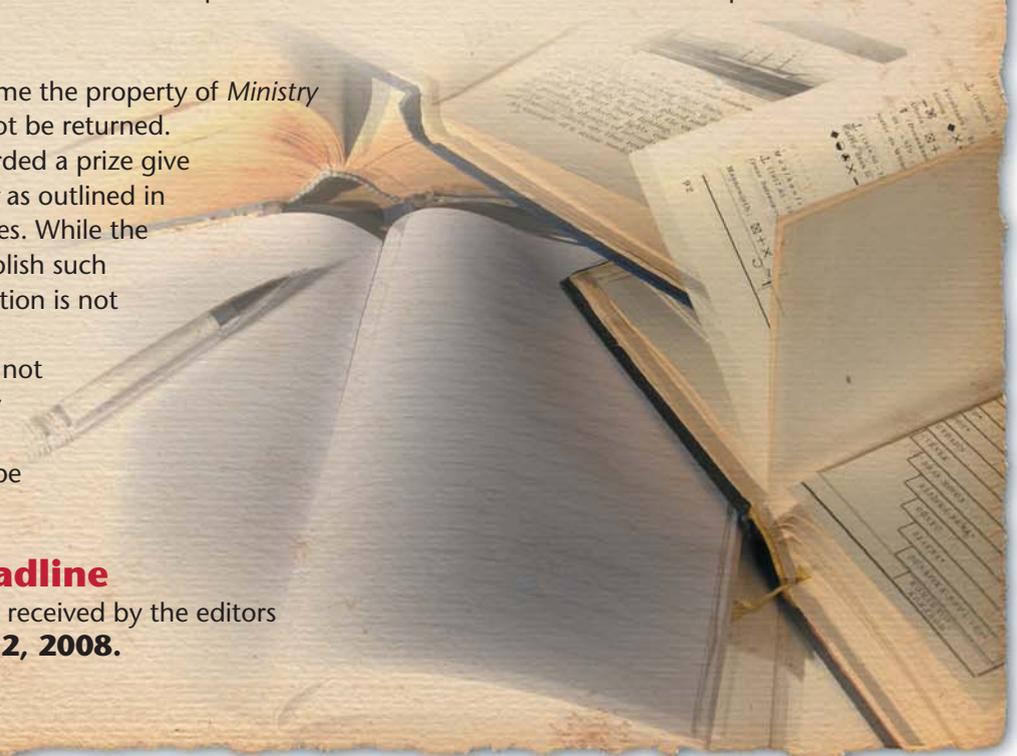
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Submission deadline

All submissions must be received by the editors no later than **January 2, 2008**.



Leadership principles from Proverbs

Stephen Grunlan



Stephen Grunlan, DMin, is senior pastor of Grace Fellowship, Overland Park, Kansas, United States.

I heard a well-known pastor describe the church as the most leadership-intensive organization in the world. Church leaders do not have the authority of military leaders or the financial incentives of the corporate world; they only have leadership skills on which to rely. Where do they find the leadership principles needed to lead? While excellent books, seminars, and classes on leadership are available, church leaders, first of all, need to look in God's Word.

While the Bible primarily centers around the story of God's love for us and His plan of redemption, it also provides us with insight into spiritual leadership. From Abraham to Moses to the judges to David to the kings to Peter and Paul, and ultimately Jesus Christ, God has used spiritual leaders to accomplish His purposes. The Bible gives us not only examples of spiritual leadership but also leadership principles with a number of these principles in the book of Proverbs.

Leadership is influence

"The mark of a good leader is loyal followers; / leadership is nothing without a following" (Prov. 14:28).^{*} Leadership is not so much about position as influence. When Paul was transported to Rome as a prisoner (Acts 27), his ship was caught in a storm and about to sink. At that critical moment, the apostle took charge, and his leadership saved everyone. We may hold an office in a church, but our influence makes us leaders. The true test of leadership: Check to see whether or not anyone follows you.

Good leaders seek wise counsel

"Refuse good advice and watch your plans fail; / take good counsel and watch them succeed" (Prov. 15:22). Absalom refused to listen to Ahithopel's wise counsel, and it cost him his life (2 Sam. 17). Rehoboam refused to listen to his father's advisers, and it cost him half his kingdom (1 Kings 12). On the other hand, Moses listened to his father-in-law, and it saved his leadership (Exod. 18).

Being a leader does not mean we have all the answers; we have the option of seeking help from others with more experience. I have had a couple of district superintendents whom I counted on when I needed godly counsel. Even after they retired I still sought their help—each of us needs to find individuals to whom we can turn when we are in need.

Good leaders motivate; they do not manipulate

"A good leader motivates, / doesn't mislead, doesn't exploit" (Prov. 16:10). Nehemiah fearlessly motivated the people to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem (Neh. 2:17–20). He laid out a vision, he shared a plan, and he reassured God's people that God was with them. When we are moving people for our benefit, we manipulate and exploit them. But when we call people to a higher purpose, we motivate them.

As leaders we need to be careful that we do not use people to build our own kingdom, to advance our own careers. To be *doing* the right thing for the wrong reason can be described as *easy*, with motivation and manipulation so similar that we can slip across the line almost without realizing it. We need to remember it is not our church that we lead but Christ's church, His bride, and we need to respect her.

Good leaders do not tolerate wrongdoing by others or themselves

Good leaders operate by the highest ethical standards. "Good leaders abhor wrongdoing of all kinds; / sound leadership has a moral foundation" (Prov. 16:12). Good leaders must confront wrongdoing and deal with it without fear or favor, as Paul did with Peter on the issue of Jew-Gentile equality (Gal. 2:11–14). Over the years I have had to confront staff and lay leaders engaged in wrongdoing. While this was not easy, it was a necessary part of effective leadership.

Effective leaders must not only confront wrongdoing but also maintain the highest ethical standards, particularly in two areas: money and sex. We need to build safeguards and accountability

CHURCH LEADERS DO NOT HAVE THE AUTHORITY OF MILITARY LEADERS OR THE FINANCIAL INCENTIVES OF THE CORPORATE WORLD; THEY ONLY HAVE LEADERSHIP SKILLS ON WHICH TO RELY.

systems in both areas so as to protect and keep us above reproach.

Good leaders have integrity

“Good leaders cultivate honest speech; / they love advisors who tell them the truth” (Prov. 16:13). Honesty can be classed as the foundation of leadership. Not only are good leaders honest, but they want honest people around them. Just about every book on leadership lists *character* as one of the top characteristics of effective leaders. People don’t follow leaders who lack integrity.

Integrity involves actions as well as words. Now, I am not so much referring to things like *not stealing* as I am to *hypocrisy*. Integrity involves practicing what we preach, being consistent and dependable, doing what we say we will do, and living in such a way that others will trust us.

Good leaders keep their emotions under control

“An intemperate leader wreaks havoc in lives; . . . Good-tempered leaders invigorate lives” (Prov. 16:14, 15). King Saul was an intemperate leader by letting his emotions get out of control, resulting in the ultimate loss of his kingdom. On the other hand, when the apostle Paul was slandered by false teachers, he responded calmly and rationally. While effective leaders are passionate, their passion must remain under control.

Leaders are often attacked and are the victims of false accusations. People misunderstand leaders, misquote them, are suspicious of them, and attribute negative motives to them. All of these things along with the responsibility and pressure of leadership can cause us to let our emotions get out of control. As leaders we need to be especially on guard and carefully inhibit our emotions.

We also need to pray for ourselves and have others pray for us.

Good leaders strive for excellence

“Leaders who know their business and care / keep a sharp eye out for the shoddy and the cheap” (Prov. 20:8). Not only should leaders give their best, they also need to expect the best from their followers while helping them to do their best as they train and equip them.

Good leaders deal with troublemakers

“After careful scrutiny, a wise leader / makes a clean sweep of rebels and dolts” (Prov. 20:26). While our goal in dealing with dysfunctional people and troublemakers includes healing and restoration, we must not tolerate dysfunctional people and troublemakers who do not respond to loving correction. The biblical counsel makes it clear that if troublemakers do not respond to loving correction, we must have nothing to do with them (Titus 3:10, 11).

Moses had to constantly deal with rebels and troublemakers as he led Israel to the Promised Land. To allow persons to continue to cause trouble does not show mercy and grace to either the troublemaker or to others in the organization being affected by them. If we truly care for the good of the church and not our own comfort, we will deal with people who are harming Jesus’ Body.

Good leaders balance truth and love

“Love and truth form a good leader; / sound leadership is founded on loving integrity” (Prov. 20:28). Love without truth is a directionless emotion while truth without love is a cold reality. However, truth and love together have the

power to transform, for loving integrity confronts and corrects effectively.

The Bible describes love not as an emotion but as an action, with 1 Corinthians 13 describing love as a series of actions. When Jesus wanted to illustrate love for our neighbors, He told the action parable of the good Samaritan. To love others we must act on their behalf for their benefit. Good leaders care for and look out for their followers.

Good leaders submit to God

“Good leadership is a channel of water controlled by God; / he directs it to whatever ends he chooses” (Prov. 21:1). The key to godly leadership is submission, for leadership under God’s control will accomplish God’s work. The kings of Israel are an instructive example of this principle. Those kings who submitted to God and followed His ways experienced success while those who went their own way met with disaster. A good leader must also be a good follower.

Good leaders are always learning

“Like the horizons for breadth and the ocean for depth, / the understanding of a good leader is broad and deep” (Prov. 25:3). An organization can only grow as its leaders grow, as effective leaders constantly develop and sharpen their leadership skills. The apostle Paul encouraged Timothy to keep growing in his leadership skills. That’s good counsel for all of us.

Good leaders deal with problems

When the [church] is in chaos,
everybody has a plan to fix it—
But it takes a leader of real
understanding
to straighten things out
(Prov. 28:2).

Most problems do not solve themselves; they usually get worse, for where you have people you have problems. The sooner you deal with a problem the easier it is to fix it. From its very inception the church had problems, and the apostles had to deal with them decisively. Ananias and Sapphira, the widows who were neglected, factionalism in Corinth, and other such problems had to be dealt with in order to ensure that the church was growing on the right track. As long as there are people in the church there will be problems. Effective leaders deal with such problems for the good of the people and the organization.

Good leaders do not react; they act

“When a leader listens to malicious gossip, / all the workers get infected with evil” (Prov. 29:12). Good leaders must not act on hearsay; they must get all the

facts first and must follow the process of Matthew 18:15–17. First, go to the person involved. If that does not work, take another person along and speak to the person concerned. If that, too, does not work, then take the matter to the church. Not only do we as leaders need to follow the Matthean process, we need to make sure our people also follow it.

Following these principles from Proverbs will not guarantee success, but they do guarantee that God’s work will move forward. We are not called to succeed but to be faithful. When we are faithful to God’s principles of leadership, God will ensure the forward movement of His kingdom. ❏

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Letters continued from page 3

The challenges of postmodernism

I want to thank Dr. Santrac for introducing some of the challenges of postmodernism (“Reaching the Postmodern Mind,” September 2007). This is a most relevant issue that the church cannot ignore anymore.

What he discusses is not about how to reach postmodernists, but rather how not to compromise to postmodernists. Using binary oppositions like, “We have objective truths, but they are subjective,” or “we are rational but they are irrational,” will not serve the church well neither in reaching postmodernists, nor in establishing its methodological honesty. This kind of reasoning may reveal more about my own undifferentiated modernistic position, with its rationalism, reductionism, and atomism, rather than the real challenges of postmodernism.

Santrac has correctly stated that “One never knows, finally, what is postmodernism,” but then he discusses “hard postmodernism” as if this is postmodernism per se. There are also postmodern positions like “affirmative

postmodernism” that we should consider seriously when meeting postmodernists, particularly in regard to communicative methods and theories. This may not only warn us not to compromise, but also challenge us to accommodate others for the sake of the kingdom of God.

Affirmative postmodernism will not so much argue against the fact that the Bible is God’s objective truth, but against our human constructions and what we let the Bible say. When interpreting the Scriptures by weaving our own theological constructions into the text of the Bible, we should be careful to designate it as “objective” truth. We may not only be cheating ourselves but reducing God’s Word to one-sided human notions and beliefs.

It is also important for the church to address the problems of modernism and its reductionistic influence on its theology if we want to appreciate the real questions of postmodernism.

—A. Gerhard van Wyk, Fresno, California, United States. ❏

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Dateline

Family Celebration Sabbath

Berrien Springs, Michigan, United States—Family Celebration Sabbath (FCS) took place at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary on the campus of Andrews University on July 20 and 21.

The thrust of FCS was best summarized by **Bernie Holford**, South England Conference Family Ministry director, who stated, “Family Celebration Sabbath was a tremendous inspiration for me to make a positive, practical difference in my home. I loved the ideas for Friday night worships and learned how Sabbath and the family were always intended to be celebrated together every week!”

The weekend schedule included presentations by **Dr. David Taylor**, from the School of Religion at Loma Linda University, and **Drs. Dick and Jo Ann Davidson** who are professors at the Andrews University Seminary. **Dr. A. Allan Martin**, associate professor of discipleship and family ministry at the Seminary, gave leadership to this new event.

“Family Celebration Sabbath was truly a celebration of God’s goodness in putting us all into one big, loving family and providing one day a week for building relationships with our heavenly Father and our family in Christ!” shared **Karen Flowers**, Family Ministry associate director, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

During closing ceremonies two prestigious awards were given to **Dr. Jane Thayer**, retiring director of Religious Education at the Seminary, in honor of her many years of service to Family Ministries.

FCS is the successor of Adventist Family Conference. It was developed to strengthen the networking opportunities between Family Ministries and the Doctor of Ministry in Family Ministry cohort, as well as individuals pursuing the graduate certificate in Family Life Education. *[Alexis A. Goring]*

European Pastors’ Council

Dalfsen, the Netherlands—The De Bron Christian Conference Center was the venue for the European Pastors’ Council (EPC), held September 11–15. Months of planning by a team led by **Daniel Duda**, Trans-European Division (TED) ministerial secretary, went into the preparation of this major event which attracted 821 participants, including ministers from 28 countries, and 38 invited speakers from 14 different nations.

Each day of the conference had a different theme, centered on Micah 6:8—acting justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God. These three were linked together under the main theme, “Growing together.”

Each day began with a profound devotional message, followed by plenary sessions, workshops, a mission festival with reports from the fields on successful new methods of outreach, and evening worship. Among the visiting speakers were **Erich Baumgartner, Jon Dybdahl, Dick Duerksen, Roscoe Howard III, Willie and Elaine Oliver, Ed Reid, and Don MacLafferty**. The afternoons offered attendees 56 different workshops from which to choose—offered by facilitators such as **James Cress, Sharon Cress, Nikolaus Satelmajer, Willie E. Hucks II, Bertil Wiklander**, and a number of professors from Newbold College.

Perhaps the high point of the week was on Friday evening—the Communion service for the hundreds who were

gathered. Bertil Wiklander and **Karen Holford** reminded all who were present of the great sacrifice that was made for humanity through Jesus Christ. **Lowell Cooper**, a general vice president of the world church, presented the Sabbath morning sermon on the Body of Christ, challenging his listeners to a greater commitment to God. *[TED News Staff/Adapted from TED News]*

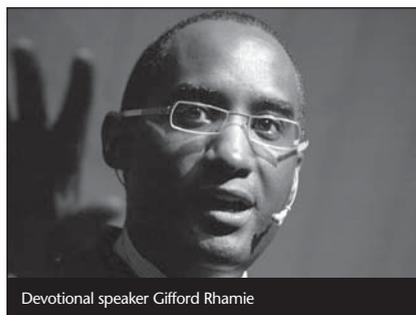
Motorbikes for Pakistan’s ministers

St. Albans, England—Following a visit by **Don McFarlane**, at that time field secretary of the Trans-European Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the church initiated a plan to raise funds to provide a motorbike to every Adventist minister in Pakistan. This project was taken up by his successor, **Raafat Kamal**.

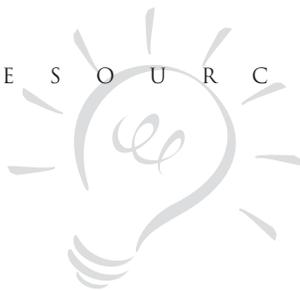
This goal was made possible by participation from various church organizational units. It means that all 38 ministers employed in Pakistan will be supplied with brand-new 70cc motorbikes and safety helmets.

McFarlane commented, “When three of my colleagues and I went to Pakistan last year and learned about the large areas that pastors there had to cover on foot or on bicycles, I came away determined that something needed to be done to make traveling less of a burden for them.”

Most pastors in Pakistan are caring for several groups that are scattered over a large territory. Many travel by foot, or wait for overcrowded busses; some have bicycles, and a few fortunate ones have mostly unreliable motorbikes. McFarlane says, “The 38 new bikes should raise the morale of pastors in Pakistan and result in the expansion of our church there, as pastors find it easier to move from one place to another.” *[Adapted from TED News]*



Devotional speaker Gifford Rhamie



BOOK REVIEW



Salvation 101: Christianity

Made Simple by E. Lonnie Melashenko, Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2006.

The speaker and director for the *Voice of Prophecy* radio ministry has produced another book about the basics of Christianity that focuses on the relationship between law and grace. This useful book helps us to find the balance between God's grace active in our lives and our need to keep God's law.

Melashenko approaches the topic from a dozen different directions in the 20 chapters—and each approach adds a new perspective on the requirements of God's law and the lavishness of God's grace.

Filled with anecdotes and illustrations, the book has 95 pages. For example, chapter 8, "Necessary, but Not Sufficient," has only four pages, but has six illustrations to help the reader understand faith: the father of a man who rebuilt World War II airplanes, Melashenko flying on a plane, marriage vows, a driving lesson, the planet Pluto, and Mary Crosby (the woman who shot J. R. Ewing on the popular 1980s U.S. television program *Dallas*). It's a crazy conglomerate, but it focuses on the topic of faith beautifully.

The illustrations combine with many brief sayings to make the book an easy read. For example, when Melashenko says, "Yes, love needs rules, but rules also need love," there's a strong urge to grab a pen and underline the quote because it will fit in some sermon soon.

The oral tradition of Melashenko's radio preaching rings throughout the

book. Sentences are short. Paragraphs are breezy. He asks questions then answers them. The entire book takes only a couple of hours to read. His writing has an easy to read tone, as if the *Voice of Prophecy* were playing on the radio. I almost expected to hear "Lift Up the Trumpet" sung at the close of some of the chapters.

The oral tradition is the book's great strength—and its great limitation. While not a theological treatise, the book, rather, expresses a popular treatment of a topic that vexes many Christians. Don't expect to exegete the Greek in Galatians. Expect, instead, several anecdotes that make Galatians easy to grasp.

The book depends on proof texts, and you'll find it not unusual for a chapter to have as many proof texts—all from different books of Scripture—as it has anecdotes and illustrations. Make no mistake, this demonstrates proof texting done well, but it still

is disconcerting to read texts from Romans, Hebrews, Matthew, and 1 John strung together in the same chapter without context or rationale.

A great little book, you'll want to share *Salvation 101* with people who are struggling with the twin ditches on the Christian road of life: the legalism ditch filled with people who can't trust God fully, and the cheap grace ditch whose people don't understand that grace comes, as always, free but never cheap. Melashenko's balanced writing and multiple approaches to the topic will help everyone get a firmer grip on God and on this important topic. ■

—Reviewed by Kermit Netteburg, senior pastor of the Beltsville Seventh-day Adventist Church, Beltsville, Maryland, United States.

HISTORICISM



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Teaching that takes hold

Our Adventist sense of mission and our self-image as the *faithful remnant* drive us to evangelize the world with a last-day message aimed at “preparing a people ready to meet the Lord.” Therefore, accurate understanding of prophecy, careful delineation of doctrine, and specific application of standards have been essential in our process of instructing new believers.

While we desire great numbers of new believers who become truly grounded disciples, a *quantity versus quality* debate sometimes has been fueled by those who believe insufficient preparation has preceded baptism. Those concerned that numbers have become the primary objective stress the need for less quantity and more quality. Miscomprehension of a remnant concept has contributed to this debate. While there is clear biblical basis for remnant theology—God’s faithful followers in an age of overwhelming secularism and evil—this must never be used to justify lack of growth.

Here’s the danger: If such a remnant view becomes directed toward justifying lack of growth, not only might we excuse little growth, we actually might glorify declining numbers as *quality over quantity*. Donald McGavran says, “Remnant theology proves attractive. A glorification of littleness prevails, in which to be small is to be holy. Slow growth is adjudged good growth.” He points out various slogans which give false support to this type of remnant theology:

“The tiny minority suffering for its belief is the true church.”

“To create this minority is the highest success known to missions.”

“The persecuted church—the church under the Cross—is the true church.”

“The power of a small group of individuals, with God, must never be underestimated.”

“The creative minority is what the church must ever strive to be.”¹

In general, Adventists today would reject a view which stresses smallness in favor of a *triumphant remnant* concept. However, we might embrace an equally

JAMES A. CRESS



dangerous “remnant” theology of exclusivity or superiority based on a knowledge of “truth” because we want our new members to be on the inside of this *truth track*. Typically, we expect new believers to have been instructed thoroughly in all points of doctrine—28 fundamental points, to be exact. Furthermore, we expect not only that the information has been conveyed and comprehended, we also want it to be operative within the behavior of the individual at the occasion of baptism.

Of course, there is nothing wrong with adequate instruction or thorough preparation of candidates for church membership. The perils of a casual acknowledgment of the gospel without a corresponding impact on the life of the believer are so abundantly visible in our denomination, and others as well, that no serious challenge could be sustained which calls for less thorough biblical instruction of new believers. In fact, just the opposite is needed—more thorough and in-depth teaching. Teaching that takes hold!

Jo Lewis and Gordon Palmer demonstrate that “core” spiritual knowledge is lacking in the American society that prides itself on being *Christian*. They cite a 20-year-old Gallup poll that found many professing believers woefully ignorant about basic facts of Christianity. For example, 85 percent of Americans assent to the validity of the Ten Commandments and believe that someday everyone will answer to God for how they have obeyed or disobeyed them. Unbelievably, however, these same people don’t know what the Ten Commandments state. Only a few can name as many as five and, of course, even fewer obey them.²

Worst of all, Gallup found that evangelical Christians are little better than the general populace. “Young people today know Genesis as the name of a rock band or a planetary project in a *Star Trek* film, but not as the first book of the Bible. They know Pepsi and the new generation, but not heaven and the everlasting generation; *L. A. Law*, but not God’s law. They know who makes *180 Z’s* but not the Alpha and Omega who made them. They know Nike and the winning team, but not victory in Jesus. They know how to look at *Days of Our Lives*, but not how to look into the days of their lives.”³

Two decades later, the situation is no better. Timothy Renick’s recent review of current literature, “Dumbed Down,” demonstrates the relentless decline of basic biblical understanding among even professing believers. He says, “America has become a nation that is at once deeply religious and profoundly ignorant about religion.”⁴

Real church growth refers not merely to an outer measurable expansion, but also to an inner experience within the body of Christ. “But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 3:18, NIV). We must move beyond information to lifestyle.

Additional information alone is not the key. We need instruction, but we need more instruction in righteousness. We need more thorough spiritual and practical application as well as intellectual indoctrination for new believers. This is one of the ingredients of discipleship—perhaps the most basic. ■

1 Donald A. McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980), 168.

2 Jo H. Lewis and Gordon A. Palmer, *What Every Christian Should Know* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1989), 15.

3 *Ibid.*, 74.

4 Timothy Renick, “Dumbed Down,” *Christian Century*, September 4, 2007, 26.

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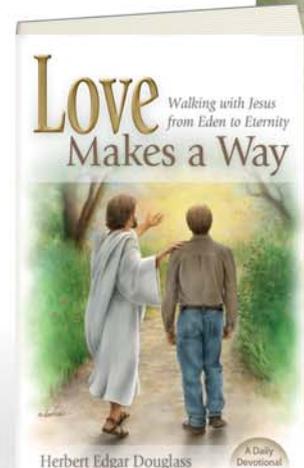
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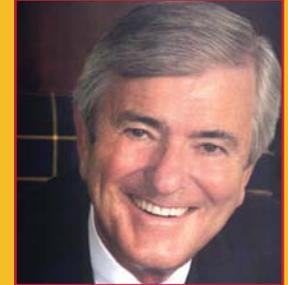
James Earl Massey is the son and grandson of ministers. For 22 years Dr. Massey was the senior and founding minister of the Metropolitan Church of God, a large multicultural, mission-oriented congregation in Detroit, Michigan, U.S.A. He was also elected for a five-year period to be the speaker on the "Christian Brotherhood Hour"—a weekly international program which broadcasted on more than 140 radio stations. More than 140 colleges, universities, and seminaries have invited him to preach or lecture. James Earl Massey has authored 25 published books and in 2006 *Christianity Today* named him one of the "25 Most Influential Preachers of the Past 50 Years."



Laurence Turner is Principal Lecturer in Old Testament Studies and Director of Research Degrees at Newbold College, Bracknell, England. Dr. Turner's main area of research and publishing has been the book of Genesis, on which he has published three books and contributed to major reference works and journal articles. He is very highly regarded as an expository preacher and enjoys expounding the Old Testament in a contemporary Christian context. In addition to Old Testament, Dr. Turner teaches homiletics at undergraduate and postgraduate levels and is regularly invited to preach internationally.



Jo Ann Davidson lectures at the Andrews University Theological Seminary. She has the distinction of being the first woman lecturer in the Theology Department. Articles she has written have appeared in the *Adventist Review*, *Signs of the Times*®, and the *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*. Her column, "Let's Face It," which has a woman's slant on theology, appears regularly in the journal *Perspective Digest*. She has also authored the published book *Jonah: The Inside Story*. Dr. Davidson is a highly sought-after speaker for large national and international Christian conventions and continues to find great fulfillment in her various roles as wife, mother, daughter, sister, auntie, teacher, musician, student, and active Christian.



Lloyd John Ogilvie has long been recognized as having a remarkably distinguished ministry. He was the 61st chaplain of the United States Senate in Washington, D.C. Dr. Ogilvie has authored more than 55 books and has been the recipient of many prestigious awards including being named in the 1996 Baylor University's worldwide survey as one of the 12 most effective preachers in the English-speaking world. Recently, Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California, established the Lloyd John Ogilvie Preaching Institute and the Lloyd John Ogilvie Chair of Preaching.

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