

MINISTRY

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9/11/2002

PREACHING TO ANXIOUS TIMES

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WE DO NOT NEED A CHURCH HISTORIAN
TO REMIND US OF OUR TASK. WE NEED
A PSYCHIATRIST TO DISCOVER HOW TO
PUT THIS TASK INTO PERSPECTIVE.

April 2002 issue

As often happens in *Ministry*, the article entitled "Another Look at Babylon" by George R. Knight ends where the real questions begin.

Every minister knows Ellen G. White's counsel on this topic. The problems, however, start with the practical application.

One of my friends, a Roman Catholic priest, once asked me when he read about our future expectations in *The Great Controversy*, "Do you really believe that in the future, I am going to persecute you, or even going to kill you?"

To answer this direct question, I could only say, "I do not believe that you will do this, but I am expected to believe and proclaim this."

This dualism was incomprehensible for him. "Whoever is expected to build friendships in this manner has to be schizophrenic or will be soon in the near future," my friend said. Of course, he was totally right.

During many conversations with many of my colleagues, it became clear that they would rather not start relationships with other ministers, because of the above-mentioned embarrassment.

George Knight wrote an excellent article. However, we do not need a church historian to remind us of our task. We need a psychiatrist to discover how to put this task into perspective.

—Abraham J. van der Kamp, Amersfoort, The Netherlands.

I agree fully with Russell Burrill's assessment that the best way for us to reach the unchurched and the church is by

combining our sowing and cultivating methods with our reaping meetings. One of the problems is that we have virtually given up our two best sowing methods, which we were divinely instructed to use.

One is the work of the literature evangelists, which is basically gone in most conferences of the NAD. One of the reasons Jehovah's Witnesses are doing so well is because they are using this type of door-to-door sowing.

The other sowing method we could utilize more than we do is the health ministry. Veganism is on the rise. The regular grocery stores carry soy milk, etc., as regular items. Yet veganism does not seem to be dramatically rising among SDAs. If SDAs aren't drinking up all these soy beans, who is?

When we sow seeds of good books, by the time the meetings come they are halfway in the water. If we sow seeds of good health, their minds are clear to hear and accept the message. How can we reap and cultivate if we don't sow? And why aren't we sowing with the sowing methods and seeds that God specifically told us to use? I speak as a whole and individually. We can be utilizing these methods even more to reach the unchurched. There are areas and whole conferences that are using the literature and health work combined with evangelism very effectively.

—Jeff Zaremsky, New Port Richey, Florida.

Gary Tolbert's article on Christian drama poorly represents White's view of the topic. It is ironic that in an article about drama in ministry, Tolbert

would quote uniquely from her several statements on drama in the entertainment industry. In reading "over 100 references," he could not have missed her statements about his topic, the use of theater in ministry. Did he really find "in one place" "instruction to those who were learning to be actors"? I think he might have included the reference if the context had not been detrimental to his cause. One attempt at an exhaustive study on this topic turned up nothing of the sort in White's writing, and did turn up a great deal of material of another sort. See www.canvassing.org/studies. And how did Tolbert conclude that the Christmas music program was entitled "The Lighthouse"? The readers might want to read the reference themselves to see if White's reference to the "lighthouse" that "pleased her" was the alleged play or the prop. There is really no evidence that it was more than a backdrop with singing children dressed up. The letter may be found in the study mentioned earlier.

—Eugene Prewitt, via email.

Since I have been receiving *Ministry* magazine, I have learned so much about the pastor's work. It has really enlightened me. If my ministry is successful, it will be because of this precious magazine. Thank you for making this arrangement that this magazine has reached to me. I thank Pastor C. Pherim also for recommending that it be sent to me. ❏

Once again, thank you so much.
—Edwin Ramrar, literature evangelist, Dimapur, Nagaland, India.

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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 licensed and/or ordained clergy. Requests should be on church letterhead and addressed to the editorial office.

Conscience

It's out of fashion these days to talk about "conscience," at least in its traditional role as an authoritative inner moral voice. At one time, the voice of conscience was virtually equated with the voice of God. It was seen as a positive and almost unerring point of reference for moral decisions.

We pictured the conscience as located somewhere within us, occupying a strategic and penetrating perspective into our soul. Because it knew us better than anyone, conscience was viewed as more authoritative than any other human intelligence. It was something worth respecting, a guide to be, more or less, unquestioningly obeyed.

Today, however, we question the validity of its conclusions. This almost irrepensible and still highly active part of our inner being has been demoted to just another voice among the many. Under a kind of inner postmodern assault, conscience seems to have lost its nerve. Even among Christians, it is often viewed as an entity that has little to do with the voice of God in the human soul.

Yet such a strategically placed alter ego has the capacity to speak powerfully in us, even though in the contemporary world we're consistently being reminded of its capacity to impose upon us guilt-producing neuroses or maddening psychoses. Conscience, after all, is subject to unhealthy manipulation and exploitation.

The truth is that while the conscience is not perfect (because we are not) we nevertheless intuitively know its indispensable value. Conscience not only has the capacity, but the God-given assignment to tell us what we are and what we are not. It deals with our past rights and wrongs and with our present integrity quotient. Often the conscience is

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encouraging and sometimes it is confrontative.

Despite the profound discomfort it often produces, conscience is crucial to the life of everyone, especially those who have been called to the ministry. The conscience is the minister's consummate moral compass as long as it is possessed by the Holy Spirit Himself and properly informed by the living oracles of God. This partnership between the Bible and the Spirit is critical to the accuracy, authority, and healthiness with which the conscience speaks.

All of us know the intense guilt that sometimes takes over our soul as we stand up to preach, or how it feels to be repeatedly stormed by the reminder of something wrong that we have done or something right we have not done. We also know what it's like to be haunted by an inner sensation of duplicity, insincerity and double-heartedness, which cuts us off from others and from God. These feelings and thoughts are woven into consciousness through the voice of our conscience. Most importantly we know that these inner conscience storms strike because we are in need of finding wholeness and healing.

Just as physical discomfort, illness, or pain alerts us that something is wrong with our body, the pain of guilt engen-

dered in the conscience tells us that something is wrong in our soul. And just as it would be foolish to deny or ignore pain in our body, it is as wrong to deny the spiritual and psychological pain to which our conscience draws our attention.

When we are confident that the Spirit of God does indeed speak through conscience, we can begin to relate to its voice more sensibly and maturely, and by the Holy Spirit it can then exercise the power it was meant to possess through "the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God [cleansing] our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!" (Heb. 9:14, NIV).

Painful as that voice sometimes is, it is so because it is honest and courageous and Spirit filled. This presence within is at least the partial fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy, the one quoted in Hebrews 8:8-12, which talks about a time, now here, when the Lord will make a new covenant with Israel which involves putting "my laws in their minds and [writing] them on their hearts" (Heb. 8:10-12, NIV).

We ministers must recognize and embrace anew this magnificent inner role of the Holy Spirit. It is His work to take His place in the conscience. When we recognize God in the voice of conscience we are far more likely to follow the bidding or believe the encouragement than we are if we reduce such a voice to something merely human.

It's a privilege of magnificent proportions to fully identify and recognize the underlying source of such a voice, one that "is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart" (Rom. 10:8, NIV); one that is there to "guide into all truth" (John 16:13, NIV). ■

9/11/2002: Preaching to anxious times

Loren G. Seibold

In the 12 months past, we (you and I, preachers of the gospel) have addressed the events of 9/11/2001 in our sermons. We have preached, as we must, to the times.

While the horror of September 11, now dubbed "9-11," have been the particular stuff of the American scene, people around the world have been shocked by the force of its implications. Now that a year has passed, we need to take a moment to reexamine four of our most frequently-preached related themes, and consider whether or not we have addressed them well and accurately.

The nature of our enemy

I have felt less fondness for New York City than any other place in America—a city rude, crude, dangerous, expensive, and seemingly inaccessible to those of us who operate by the rules that work in much of the rest of America and the world. Yet on the evening of September 11, 2001, New York almost seemed like my hometown; its people, my people. I and many others—true blue, honest, upstanding citizens of the U.S.A. and the world—suddenly found ourselves bonded to New Yorkers because they had been attacked by a strange and frightening enemy.

It turned out that the attackers were part of a group whose reputation had preceded them. Most of us didn't know any Moslems. What Americans saw on the 6:30 p.m. TV news

were strangely-dressed people who seemed to live in a state of anger against one another and the rest of the world. After 9/11, we actually found it a bit of a relief that our enemy was someone whose alienness, whose sheer *otherness*, saved us the trouble of having to understand them.

Yet remembering that as a Christian I am to love my enemy (instruction I suspect we all felt unusually challenging) I became more attentive to what I heard of Moslems in the weeks following 9/11. In television interviews Moslem experts disclaimed Moslem militancy, declaring it incompatible with their faith. Moslems in America suggested they were the real victims—and in some instances they were right.

Some Christian leaders rushed to Islam's defense. Yet I also received an email written by a clergyman, that was just short of Hitlerian in its bigotry and willful misinterpretation of the theology and social system of Islam. It advised us not to believe a word we heard from moderate Islamic leaders or their Christian defenders. In this man's assessment, Islam was fundamentally hateful, its whole agenda the destruction of Western civilization.

Let us admit it is probably impossible for us to understand the Islamic faith from the outside with much accuracy. I can make a few assumptions, though, based on what I know about human beings. I can assume that some Moslems are liars, others honest. Some are angry, some peace-loving. Some bigoted, some thoughtful. Some sincerely wrong, others angrily right. In short, they are quite like us.

I also know from looking at my own faith tradition that it is possible for insecure people to edit their faith to justify hatred, vengeance, and domination. (A historical event called the Inquisition is something in our own history that we who follow gentle Jesus, meek and mild, would prefer not to be reminded of.)

Yet it is not our task to either defend or damn the Moslem faith, but to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. And that gospel identifies all sin as the work of an enemy, one who is not Moslem, nor even human. And though human beings may act as agents of that enemy, we are all victims of sin.

Following 9/11, commentators observed that normally brusque New Yorkers had briefly begun behaving toward one another with some courtesy. Sharing a common enemy was a bonding experience. Yet sinful-



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ness is our real enemy, and we hold that enemy in common with thoughtful people of all faiths, including Islam and Christianity. Rather than trying to analyze Islam, we might do well to show how all human beings are victimized by sin, and so make the end of violence and bigotry our common cause.

Actively loving Osama bin Laden is, I suspect, still some spiritual growth beyond us. Yet we must love our human enemies at least enough that we do not let hatred swell. Of vengeance there is no natural end; someone must choose to end it. And He whom we follow has asked us to be those who do so.

Understanding war

I confess I am puzzled, particularly in the light of what happened to America on 9/11, by those Christian pastors who use pulpits, (either parish or electronic) to glorify war. That countries may have to fight to prevent terrorism is clear. That we ought to honor and encourage soldiers who risk their lives in such a cause is also clear.

Yet it is equally clear that we should find the entire enterprise of war thoroughly regrettable.

Judeo-Christian theology has long wrestled with the question of war. Under theocratic government, God occasionally appeared to be a merciless commander (Deut. 20:10-20). But today's Christian attitudes toward war come primarily from Jesus' teaching that we should be, as far as possible, nonaggressive, preferring peaceful to violent means.

Knowing, however, that there are times when truth must be fought for, Augustine and others have proposed the theology of "just war": War should only be fought to preserve peace or to ensure justice. Yet scholars say Augustine's writings on the topic are gloomy and resigned, for in his heart he knew war to be irreducibly evil.

Let us be painfully, startlingly aware of one thing: *War will always*

result in someone's suffering. When faced with war, the best we can do is to choose the slightly better of bad options, which will result in nothing more than the slightly better of bad outcomes. So let us be sure that we do not spend a moment engaging in a sentimental glorification of war or of our fighting capabilities.

Let us not fly the flag at the pulpit or in it, spouting self-justifying clichés that imply God has confined His interests to our side. Let Christians not use words like "revenge," for even when fighting is necessary, vengeance is precisely what Jesus intended us not to seek. Let us never gloat over our victories or our enemies' losses, nor take joy in making war, because there is nothing even remotely joyful about it.

The only thing that makes it possible for a fully-aware Christian to fight in a war is the hope that the sum total of tears that will be shed because of fighting the war will be fewer than the sum total of tears that would have been shed had we not fought. And those are sums that, short of heaven, we shall never possess the ability to calculate accurately.

Calming fears

Even on 9/11, the average American was not in immediate danger from terrorism. Even on 9/11, the terrorist threat to our lives diminished beside the overall statistical threat of death in an auto accident.

Yet there need be no *actual* danger in order for us to feel afraid. *Supposing* ourselves in danger will suffice.

One of the fascinating reactions after 9/11 was the increase in the sale of guns in America. And these sales took place despite the fact that there was nothing whatsoever in the entire 9/11 episode that could have been addressed by the average person carrying a gun. Did people suppose a recognizable terrorist would knock on the front door during dinner some evening? Given the prevalence of gun-related accidents and heat-of-the-moment gun use, it's more likely that the arming of America against terror-

ism, though it nabbed not a single terrorist, led to more ordinary people dying of gunshots than would have otherwise.

The firearming of America has always been one of the nation's most counterproductive reactions to social stress. Yet in this case, it had one "redeeming" value: guns apparently comforted not a few anxious hearts!

The proper pastoral response to such widespread anxiety, it seems to me, is to offer our people not external, but internal comfort. Not comfort they must purchase, or manage by their own judgment, strength and reflexes, but comfort that comes from gaining a deeply spiritual perspective on how one handles the matter of living on a troubled earth resting in the hand of God Himself.

Let us begin with the proposition that God still answers prayers that plead for His comforting presence. "Let not your hearts be troubled" still applies. As does the rest of the passage: "Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matt. 11:28-30).

Note that the burden Jesus has been carrying (and that He offers to us) is a light burden! Clearly, Jesus is not as worried about the future (or, for that matter, war, the stock market, or the time of the end) as we are! That is because Jesus knows that by the mercy of His Father all things will ultimately redound to the good of those who love God. After all, Jesus Himself lived with the knowledge that He was going to die a violent death and trusted His Father to carry Him through.

An old gospel song says, "This world is not my home, I'm just a-passing through." Jesus prayed that His disciples, though they were "in the world" would not be "of the world"; they would be, in a manner of speaking, resident aliens.

It is extraordinarily difficult to live in the world, but not be attached to it or adopt its ideas of what makes for ultimate safety and security. So much

of us is invested here! Yet this very real though transcendent perspective is the one that we must offer in our sermons and our ministry as a whole. In the end it is this that brings us and our people real comfort and security. We can never be entirely at home with things as they presently are on our planet.

The joys here never totally delight us, nor do the tragedies take us entirely by surprise, for we live in expectation of something better. And all of this applies not only to 9/11 but to any and every aspect of the struggle we and our people face as a part of living where and when we do.

A truthful eschatology

Following 9/11, the need for pastors to address the world situation eschatologically was clear. Yes, I need God personally, and so do you. But these dramatic events reminded us that not just individuals, but all human institutions, all societies, all governments, all families, need God's intervention. In Paul's words, the whole creation is groaning as it awaits deliverance (Rom. 8:22).

Shortly after last September I heard a radio preacher explain a passage in Revelation that he supposed specifically fitted the World Trade Center disaster into Bible prophecy. He spoke with great assurance, and I suspect some listeners found immediate comfort in his words. Whether or not he is right is something we'll only be able to evaluate in the future (though it is unlikely that we will, for by then we'll all have moved on to a new crisis and 9/11 will dull into history).

Yet I was concerned about his presentation. He was interpreting complex Bible passages in order to predict the details of world events and politics. By extending himself so far from the text and being so specific, he was indulging in the kind of imaginative speculation with God's Word that others do with Nostradamus or tarot cards.

Second, he was making judgments about others that he was unqualified to make. Like the now-infamous

Falwell/Robertson interview, he pretended to know which sinners God was punishing on 9/11, and why. This is biblically unsupportable on several counts, not the least of which is that God reserves the right of judgment for Himself and punishes sinners in His own time and way, all without consulting us.

Third, beyond knowing the preacher's thoughts on the matter, what could listeners do with the information? Like having a gun under the mattress, did they suppose that specific knowledge of world affairs would give them a measure of personal control? And what if his predictions turn out to be inaccurate, as they no doubt will? Would he damage more faith than he could build?

Lost in the details was the foundational message of all eschatology: that God is in charge of the ultimate fate of this earth. An honest eschatology assures of God's jurisdiction over earthly and political affairs, without taking liberties with God's Word.

Eschatology succeeds if it teaches people to trust our Lord to keep His eyes on world events, while we "fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith" (Heb. 12:2) There is little in this broken world, and even

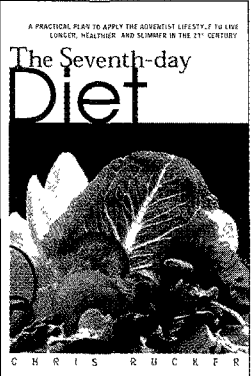
less in its political and social structures, that we can repair ourselves.

The most helpful principle I have found for interpreting prophecy is derived from the words of Jesus in John 16:4 when He warned His disciples about the future troubles they could expect to come to them: "I have told you this, so that when the time comes you will remember that I warned you" (NIV).

This passage reminds me that eschatology was meant not to provide us with a means of predicting the future and managing world events, but as a means of confirming our faith in God's management when we most need to have it confirmed. We are not in control. But we must assure our parishioners that God is in control, whether or not we understand His methods or his Chronology.

Our preaching to anxious times is hardly over. Terrorism (which is nothing more than another of Satan's ways to distribute pain) will be with us as long as war is—until Jesus makes all things new. Let us, until then, trust in Him thoughtfully and implicitly, who no terror can threaten. ■

Loren Seibold's new book, *A God We Can Trust* addresses theological questions that Christians have asked in the wake of 9/11. To order, visit <adventistbookcenter.com>




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Using decision cards effectively in worship services

Glenn Holland

During my 19 years of pastoral ministry, I have noticed that countless guests come for the weekly worship services. Until last year, though, I did not consciously realize that it is during the weekly service that they are most likely to make decisions for membership or active involvement in local church life.

The church I currently serve is in Norfolk, Virginia. Many guests come each week for numerous reasons. Virginia Beach is nearby, so vacationers come from all over the world. Norfolk is home of the world's largest naval base, so military personnel are constantly coming and going.

With people perpetually moving in and out of the area, it has been quite frustrating to try to keep up with the ever-changing sea of faces in the congregation. In the face of this challenge the idea of thoughtfully-designed decision cards struck me. The use of these cards has helped me tremendously in reaching people for Christ.

In our weekly worship service, we routinely use three different types of decision-oriented cards, each with a specific purpose. By careful follow-up, we have found each type of card to be a potential source of new members for our congregation. In the past year, we have added 47 new members by baptism or profession of faith; we have also had eight rebaptisms. In the evangelistic meetings we held last October,

a large percentage of those who were baptized first made their decision on a card during a Sabbath morning worship service.

The Norfolk Seventh-day Adventist Church has traditional envelope/card holders attached to the backs of the pews. Each week we place in these card holders three tithe envelopes, three guest registration cards, three prayer request cards, and three decision cards to be used at the end of the sermon.

Guest registration cards

Guest cards are generally far more effective for recording guest attendance than the traditional guest book in the church lobby. A major advantage of the in-pew card system over the book in the lobby is the opportunity to put much more information on a card, not the least of which is a legible address and phone number. In the past, we have tried to get greeters in the lobby to see that guests receive a guest card to fill out, but all too often people are missed.

We have finally determined that the most effective way to get the guest cards filled out is to hold up the card during the welcome time at the beginning of the worship service. We invite the guests to fill out this card and hand it to my wife or me at the door after the service. Those who turn in the card receive a special gift as a token of our appreciation.

When greeting people after the service, my wife and I hold an attractive basket between us with these gifts. The gifts include items like *Steps to Christ*, an attractive summary booklet about Adventist beliefs, *Bible Answers*, or other such books that are relatively inexpensive but practical for guests. We allow guests to look through the basket and pick out something that would be of interest to them.

The guest card does more than simply let us know who came to church. It includes age categories, children's names and ages, phone numbers, and—most importantly—follow-up information requests. Translated into the language of pastors, this means decisions! On this portion of the card, people fill in options such as, "I would like to know more about this local congregation" or "I would like to know more about Seventh-day Adventists."

If either of these boxes is checked, I try to pick up the phone and call the visitor within 48 hours to find out how we can be of more specific service. After the call, I may need to mail a booklet, but quite often (and better



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yet), I have an appointment to visit with the guest. These appointments frequently become Bible studies and eventually, baptisms.

For example, a lady recently filled out a guest card at our worship service. She had checked "I would like to know more about this local congregation." After I inquired if this was a good time to talk, I said, "I was following up on your guest registration card requesting more information about our local congregation, and was wondering how I might be able to help you." She replied, "Thank you for calling. I was just wondering what I would have to do to become a member of this church." Now we have an appointment to visit.

With each of the cards we use, the goal is to find an opportunity to talk to the person who filled out the card.

Prayer request cards

Prayer is a major focus in our wor-

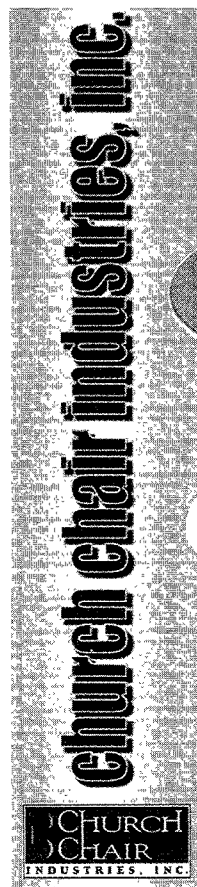
ship service. During announcements at the beginning of our service, we call attention to the prayer request cards in the pew racks, and encourage everyone to fill one out. We say something like this: "You will notice in the rack in front of you, a blue prayer request card. Please take it out at this time. If you have a special burden for prayer, jot it down, and the elder who collects the cards later in the service has committed to have daily prayer for your specific requests throughout the coming week. If you have a praise report to share—such as an answer to prayer—write that on the back of the card. If you also wish to have your request shared with our intercessory prayer group which meets weekly, please check the box on the lower left hand corner of the card."

Often when guests come to a church, especially if they don't know someone in the congregation, they come with incredible pain or

heartache. They may wish to remain anonymous and choose not to fill out a guest card. However, when it comes to having someone simply pray for their requests, they may be more willing to communicate and sometimes every box on the prayer request card is checked, along with complete contact information. If the contact information is there, this is often the beginning of a trusting and valuable relationship with that person.

The elder on duty for this purpose on a given Sabbath collects these cards by standing on the floor level with the people and inviting everyone to bring or send their requests to the front. We do not read the cards until after the service, but we lift them collectively to ask God's special blessing.

Immediately after the service, the elder goes to the copy machine and makes a copy of all the cards for the pastor, seals the copies in an envelope



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Sample decisions for concluding sermons

The following are a few actual calls for decisions that I have recently used at the conclusion of sermons. I explain each of the decisions, but these simple statements are projected on a screen during the appeal:

-
1. I want to be more like Jesus.
 2. I have not been baptized, but would like to be soon.
 3. I would like to transfer my membership to this church.
-

1. I want God to have first place in my life.
 2. I desire to follow God, no matter what.
 3. I am interested in church membership.
-

1. I want to commit my life to God.
 2. I wish to be baptized soon.
 3. Please call me.
 4. I wish to transfer my membership to this church.
-

1. I want to be a Christian.
 2. I want stronger faith.
 3. I want to serve God more.
 4. I want to be a Seventh-day Adventist.
-

1. I understand that God loves me, and wants to save me.
 2. I want to dedicate my life to God and live for Him.
 3. I would like to be baptized soon.
 4. Please call me.
-

1. I want to come home to God today.
 2. I want to live a Christian life.
 3. I want to know how to live for Christ.
 4. I want to become a Seventh-day Adventist.
-

Most of these decisions are the type that demand follow-up. I believe it is imperative that the one who calls for these decisions needs to make the initial contact within a few days of receiving the card. This is a matter of integrity and prompt follow-up makes it easier for the person who made the decision to follow it through.

The pastor certainly does not and should not do all the follow-up.

for confidentiality, then slides them under the pastor's office door. The elder also goes through the cards that are marked, "Please share with Intercessory Prayer Group," and makes a copy of only those cards for the prayer group leader.

Confidentiality is important. When people know their privacy will be respected, it's amazing how people open up even on these cards. Our elders have spent a great deal of time at elders' meetings just discussing how to react to different kinds of issues that come up on prayer request cards. The elders who receive these cards are seen as "First responders," meaning that if something needs to be done for follow-up, they need to initiate the process.

For example, if someone has a marriage that's about to fall apart, the elder calls the person who filled out the card and offers to have prayer on the phone with that person, then discusses possible options for counseling, etc. If elders are not sure how to follow up, they are encouraged to call the pastor for input.

Our elders have concluded that the way prayer cards are used in the service has been one of the most effective features of our worship experience.

My decision for Christ

The most significant change in my entire ministry has been the regular use of decision cards after nearly every sermon. I have been absolutely amazed by the many responses received over the past seven months!

I preach Bible-based sermons that are oriented to living as a Christian in the everyday world. I conclude by inviting people to take the green card from the pew that says, "My Decision for Christ."

The first blank box on the card has a corresponding decision that most everyone can respond to, such as "For 10 days I will pray daily for God to bless this church in 2002." And, "I have questions about this church. Please call me."

Another option on the card is, "I would like to become a Seventh-day Adventist." For the past six months, I have had at least one decision for church membership or baptism almost every Sabbath, and most of the decisions have been unexpected. Often they have been from people I didn't even know.

Just yesterday, for the first time, we visited with a man who began attending our church a couple of months ago. A couple of weeks ago, he had filled out a decision card. He checked that he wanted to become a Seventh-day Adventist. Upon visiting, we discovered he left the church 25 years ago, and now has decided he needs to come back.

In one session we were able to review the teachings of the Church to refresh his memory, and he plans to be baptized in a couple of weeks. Because this person is quiet and not

very outspoken, I can only guess how long he might have attended church, never communicating his feelings and, of course, never joining the church, because no one gave the invitation!

"Prompt, energetic, and earnest action may save an undecided soul. No one can tell how much is lost by attempting to preach without the unction of the Holy Spirit. There are souls in every congregation who are hesitating, almost persuaded to be wholly for God. The decision is being made for time and for eternity; but it is too often the case that the minister has not the spirit and power of the message of truth in his own heart, hence no direct appeals are made to those souls that are trembling in the balance. The result is that impressions are not deepened upon the hearts of the convicted ones; and they leave the meeting feeling less

inclined to accept the service of Christ than when they came. They decide to wait for a more favorable opportunity; but it never comes. That godless discourse, like Cain's offering, lacked the Savior. The golden opportunity is lost, and the cases of these souls are decided. Is not too much at stake to preach in an indifferent manner, and without feeling the burden of souls?"¹

I have determined that if I can't conclude every sermon with a very specific appeal, then I really need to reevaluate my own soul and the message I am presenting. One of our greatest needs is to have the wisdom and unction to lead His people to make decisions to follow Him. God give us that blessing! ❏

¹ Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1892), 138, 139.

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Seminary and local church

Building a viable relationship?

Carlos C. Camarena



Carlos C. Camarena is a graduate student at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.

The Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University has embarked upon a major overhaul of its M.Div. curriculum in an effort to better equip ministerial candidates for their ministry. This effort, if followed through with close supervision and monitoring, will improve the training pastors receive and fulfill the expectations of a successful pastoral ministry. I felt optimistic when I first heard of this initiative. While 1980s revisions improved ministerial training, there has still been room for improvement.

Recently I completed the requirements for a Ph.D. candidacy in New Testament studies. Working to earn this degree, along with serving in the seminary as an occasional instructor, has given me the opportunity to discuss with fellow seminarians the strengths and weaknesses of the present program and what could be incorporated into the program in the future. The most striking innovation in the new curriculum envisions seminarians remaining “in-house” for one year and spending the remaining time in the field working alongside experienced pastors.

The reason for this revision is that the present M.Div. curriculum does not allow for adequate practical ministerial training. “Hands-on” pastoral education cannot be fully accomplished in the classroom or in the geographical area surrounding the Seminary.¹

Much of the ministry that must be done in today’s urban areas is complicated by decaying, crime-ridden neighborhoods. Yet, the urban scene also reflects a new and almost opposite trend: newly-renovated, upwardly-mobile, postmodern, post-Christian, condodwelling neighborhoods are flourishing throughout the country.²

The extremes in our culture and even the nature of many kinds of ministry in between make an effective training experience difficult to achieve at or near the Seminary. Thus the idea of sending the “seminary” where the people are is an effort that should be applauded!

The small southwest Michigan English-speaking church to which I was assigned during my M.Div. sojourn at the seminary was a valiant attempt to provide me with “hands-on” experience. However, this exposure was incapable of providing me with the more complete “real world” ministerial experiences I needed as I later entered ministry in the Hispanic communities. These and other reasons led me to be supportive of the seminary’s new efforts that attempt to prepare ministers in the context of “doing” actual ministry in “original” or “native” settings.

The new program could generate some further dissatisfaction if some basic concerns are not attended to. For example, even though the new program points to practical theological training, it seems that we are moving into that focus without sufficient dialogue between the local church and the Seminary. This lack of dialogue may be exacerbated by the following (exceptions admitted):

(1) Pastors who mentor interns may not possess all the necessary skills to guide interns;

(2) Interns may feel dissatisfaction because local church leadership often misunderstands a young pastor’s need to “learn the ropes” of ministry;

(3) Local church people may become dissatisfied because the intern is not performing the functions traditionally expected;

(4) From the seminarians’ viewpoint, it is yet to be determined how seminary administration will be able to follow the quality and level of learning of each intern while the student is away from the seminary. Meaningful cooperation between the seminary and the field is imperative to the success of the new emphasis.

Further, when seminarians, in their formal classroom training and/or seminars, are

expected to recognize and become engaged in new ministry opportunities, such "new" ministries are often viewed with suspicion by many in the local church. This means that smooth local church-seminary relationships may not come easily. Local churches who have seminarians in training will need some meaningful orientation to the new training process.

Thus it seems there could be a certain level of incompatibility in this "marriage." Yet, given mutual consultation, the relationship certainly could be productive. Some seminary professors, for example, recognize that changing times require different approaches to ministry. These professors try to steer their courses to meet new ministerial challenges. The local church may need to be made aware that some of these new approaches should not be perceived as "liberal," but rather as new ways to reach groups that would otherwise be unreachable.

Although there are some challenges to the newly proposed M.Div. program, the seminary and Church administrative leadership is to be commended for their courage in steering the ship into uncharted waters and for looking for alternative ways to train future pastors. If the seminary and church leadership decide to ignore the need for change, we could later discover with profound sadness that we have been servicing an obsolete machinery. Although the road ahead may be "rough" (for a while), I believe that this new local church-seminary relationship will turn out to be a truly productive one.

With this end in mind, we should establish multiple models of contact and interaction between the local churches and the proposed programs of the seminary and regularly adjust and develop all seminary programs in light of local church-seminary contacts.

The implications of making the local church the focus of practical ministerial training are deep and affect almost every other area of Seminary training. The following practical suggestions are given to strengthen the cooperative efforts of the local church and the seminary in pastoral training.

Selecting the "trainees"

Ministers are recognized in the community for their character and commitment. Ideally, no seminarian should be accepted into the M.Div. program unless he or she is endorsed and highly recommended by his or her local church. The local church has a unique perspective of the minister's spiritual and leadership abilities.

A form letter, signed by a prospective minister's pastor, merely stating that the candidate is a "member in good standing" is a poor substitute for having a more in-depth knowledge of the shepherding and evangelistic

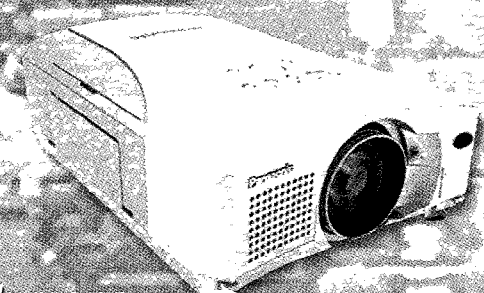
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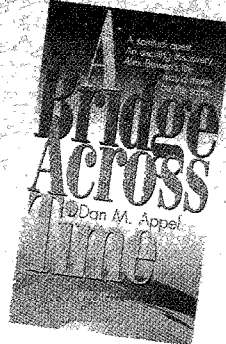
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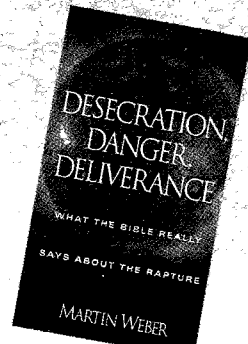
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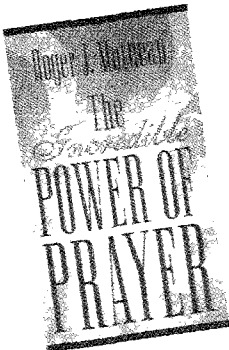
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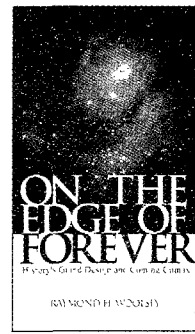
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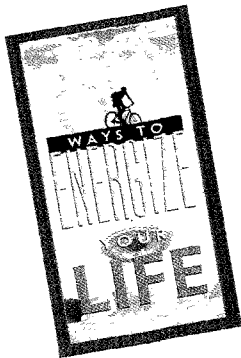
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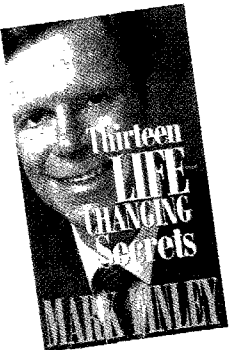
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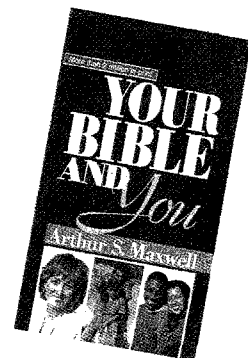
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qualities of an applicant. Perhaps the Seminary should require an interview with the candidate's pastor.

Perhaps we should interview local church elders and even the spouse of the candidate? It may be argued that this approach would be somewhat impractical or would greatly reduce the number of candidates. Yet a forceful counterargument could be that taking the above approach seriously would send a message that we are serious about our convictions about the quality of our ministers and the importance of effective ministry in the local church.

Having pastor-professors

Historically, seminaries have been accused of forming theologians—not pastors. A way of rectifying the implied wrongs would be to have pastor-professors and/or professor-pastors in our ministerial training.

(1) Seminary teachers would be pastor-professors, exposed to actual pastoral ministry. This seems to be the intended purpose of the new M.Div. curriculum.

(2) Seminary teachers should also be professor-pastors. This does not mean that professors be assigned to pastor local churches, but that in their teaching, they make their material applicable to local church ministry.

The great majority of students enrolled on the Andrews Seminary campus are preparing for pastoral ministry. Seminary professors whose lectures demonstrate the realities of pastoral ministry are generally seen by Seminary students to be more relevant to the students' future.

Developing a relevant curriculum

No other single element is more basic, practically speaking, to a philosophy of ministerial training than the curriculum. Almost all our present seminary curricula reflect a "compartmentalized" approach to the content. Information is absorbed in blocks, and professional skills and functions are all divided into cognitive cate-

gories. The inference behind such an approach is that the students will know how to apply all that they have learned to any situation they may encounter. But, to our frustration, this does not happen.

Knowledge that has been absorbed by compartments does not flow or interact between compartments quite as readily as one might hope, once the student gets into the real world of ministerial work. This is made particularly evident in biblical or theological courses where it is traditional to leave the coursework essentially unrelated to the ministerial student's later ministry and where no intentional or focused attempt is made to relate the coursework directly to the future work of the student.

Few pastors are able to connect the "compartments" of knowledge in their preaching, teaching, leadership, or administration. Studies demonstrate that there is a need to restructure the cognitive content, a content which still seems to rely on the antiquated model of brain compartmentalization. It is not enough to create new disciplines or courses to fit new realities. There is a need to look at our curricula as a whole. We hope that the new M.Div. program will give consideration to the wider picture and in a more integrative way.

Graduation requirements

How do we know that a seminarian is ready to graduate? A seminary that is geared to simply train theologians or biblical exegetes does not need to worry about anything beyond the "technical" abilities of their graduates. But a seminary that feels the burden to prepare ministers for their actual work needs to stop and ponder the requirements for graduation.

How do we know that a seminarian is ready to graduate? If the Seminary really wants to assume a commitment to educate ministers by using the local-church setting, one of the other agencies that may be able to evaluate the final product is the local church. That a student is ready to

graduate³ should not be decided simply because a seminary-required curriculum has been completed, or because the student has completed the required period of "testing" without committing major blunders. The local church should also cast the first vote. This proposal may not be popular, but if our goal is to produce ministers, it would be illogical to exclude the local church from the process of evaluation.

Completion of a core curriculum and approval by the union/conference officers should be only two parts of the equation. Recognition by the community should tell us that the seminarian is ready to be given the title of "pastor" and the M.Div. degree. Yet, we must recognize that further evaluation may be needed as to what would be required to "mint" a new pastor. Such evaluation should be done by more than one committee or board.

The complexity of pastoral ministry makes it obvious that these suggestions are only a beginning. Yet the time to implement changes is now, when we still have our present aims in mind. We need to establish ongoing consultations at all levels: union/conference and seminary administration, and local church leadership. ■

1 See the interview with Seminary Dean, Dr. John McVay, in *Adventist Review*, June 28, 2001. Or at <www.Andrews.edu/SEM/news.htm>, issue no. 19, September 14, 2001

2 A few unions/conferences have seen the need to attend to this kind of ministry. See "The Light Is On in Seattle," *Adventist Review*, July 26, 2001, 9-13

3 Most Protestant denominations ordain their seminary students upon graduation. This is generally a time when the student has "proved" his ministerial calling by being involved in actual ministry alongside seasoned pastors and whose calling has been recognized by administrative bodies, the local church, and the seminary. The conferring of M.Div. degree is not in isolation from the recognition that the seminarian has been called by God to be a minister of the gospel.

Delivering the message

Growing up during the Great Depression, I worked for most of my teen years as a messenger for a telegraph company. My job was to deliver telegrams. Good news, bad news, deaths, births, a planned arrival, sickness—it didn't matter. If I knew the content of the message, I had no authority to change it. My duty was to deliver it as it had been given to me. Looking back, I realize that the work I did then and what I've done as a minister since is not all that different.

One of my sons-in-law, a Seventh-day Adventist pastor, was invited to preach at the community Christmas celebration in town. Afterwards, a woman approached him and said a significant thing: "You preached as though you really believe the Bible. We don't hear that kind of preaching much anymore."

Scripture's primacy and power

Recently I read an old article written by Billy Graham in which he discussed his struggle some years before surrounding the place of the Bible in his preaching. He had struggled with many doubts and questions about the Bible. He told of walking alone down a trail as he wrestled with his doubts. "Finally," he wrote, "in desperation, I surrendered my will to the living God revealed in Scripture. I knelt before the open Bible and said: 'Lord, many things in the Book I do not understand. But Thou hast said, "The just shall live by faith." All I have received from Thee I have taken by faith. Here and now, by faith, I accept the Bible as Thy Word. I take it all. I take it without reservations. Where there are things I cannot understand, I will reserve judgment until I receive more light. If this pleases Thee, give me authority as I proclaim Thy Word, and through that authority convict me of sin and turn sinners to the Savior.'"

THOMAS A. DAVIS



This was early in his ministry. He wrote that, afterward, over and over again while preaching he heard himself say, "The Bible says." He felt that he had a rapier in his hands which, through its power, slashed deeply into men's consciences, leading them to surrender to God. For him, the Bible became a flame in his hands, melting away unbelief.

He saw the Bible as a hammer which we must keep on using, even though it may be disagreeable to those listening; it is bread for the hungry that we must keep on offering, even though some refuse it. "We Christian ministers have the Word of God," he wrote. "Our Commander said, 'Go, take this message to a dying world!' Some messengers today neglect it, some tear up the message and substitute one of their own. Some delete part of it. Some tell the people that the Lord does not mean what He says. Others say that He really did not give the message, but that it was written by ordinary men who were all too prone to make mistakes."

Unfortunately, some of us do fall into one or another of these categories. Recently I heard of a Seventh-day Adventist congregation that wanted to get rid of its pastor because he seldom if ever preached from the Bible. This from a congregation in a denomination that used to call itself "the people of the Book"? Seventh-day Adventists have a simple commission: to deliver the mes-

sage of the Book, in the power of the Spirit. "The firmness with which Luther relied on the Holy Scriptures imparted great authority to his teaching," wrote the Reformation historian, Merle D'Aubigne. That firmness of conviction, that assurance, especially at a time when the whole idea of having solid convictions is suspect, must be ours today.

The whole message

Being "wise as serpents and harmless as doves," we, as messengers, must deliver the message entrusted to us fully, faithfully, impartially, even if in fear and trembling. We must deliver it promptly, like a telegram, regardless of its content. And we must deliver the whole message—leaving nothing out—even for the sake of proclaiming some favorite doctrine or topic.

I once heard a conference president say of a preacher, "He has only one sermon." He did not mean that literally, but we knew what he meant. Like Paul, the preacher must be able to affirm, "I have not shunned to declare unto you the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27, NKJV, emphasis supplied).

Declaring the whole counsel is hard. It means we sometimes have to reprove, rebuke, and have patience at all times. "Proclaim the message and, welcome or unwelcome, insist on it. Refute falsehood, correct error, call to obedience—but do all with patience and with the intention of teaching" (2 Tim. 4:2, Jerusalem Bible).

The seventeenth-century Puritan, Richard Baxter, put preaching in a context every preacher should remember: "I preach as never sure to preach again, and as a dying man to dying men."

Deliver the message. The content will take enough of itself. ■

Thomas A. Davis is a former editor of the Adventist Review. He writes from Armstrong, British Columbia, Canada.

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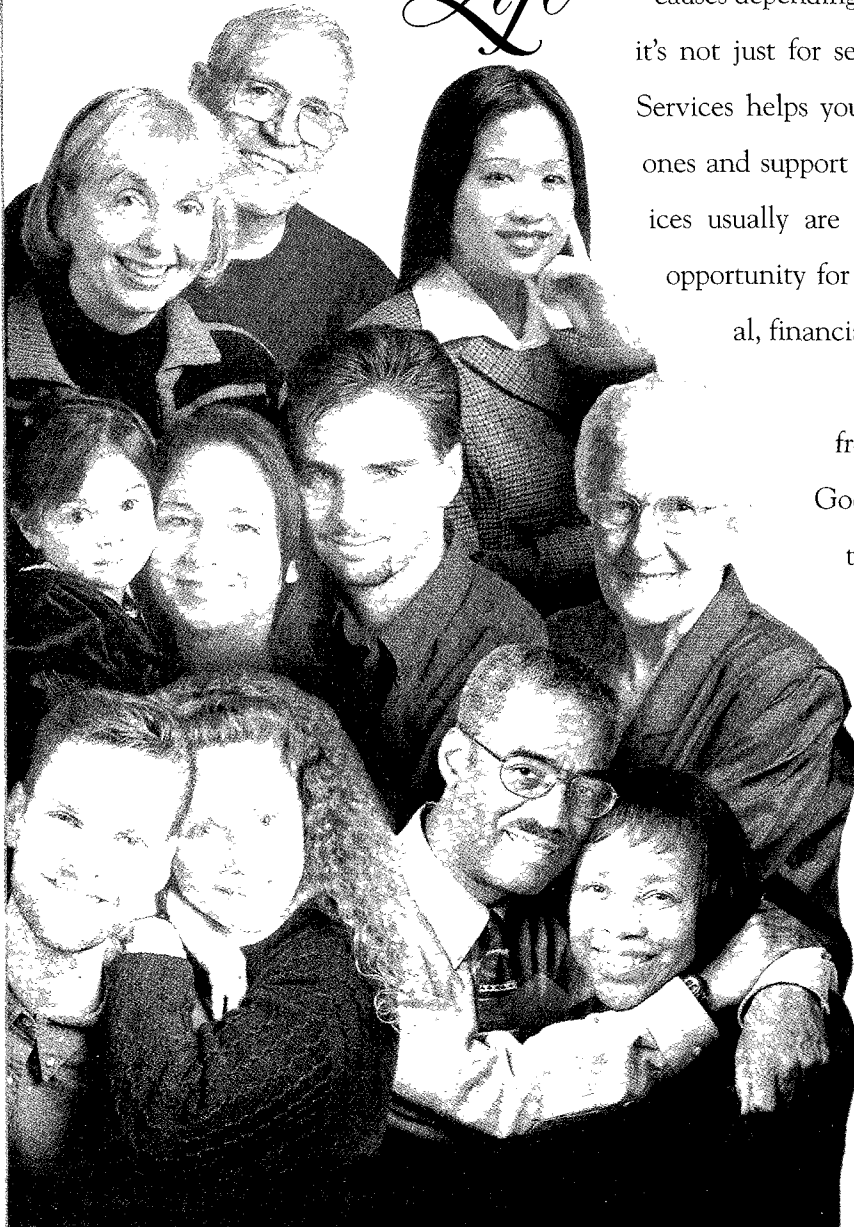
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A dispensationalist calculation error

Edwin de Kock



Edwin de Kock, an English and Bible teacher, lives in Edinburg, Texas.

An arithmetic error in Dispensationalist prophetic calculation seriously challenges Dispensationalists' position on the interpretation of biblical prophecy.

The prophetic core of the Futurist School, to which Dispensationalists belong, is the 70 weeks prophecy of Daniel 9:24-27. Into the last of these weeks of this period they fit the three-and-a-half years referred to in Daniel 7:25 and other scriptures. They believe this three-and-a-half-year period to be literal, calendar time—1,260 nonsymbolic days or 42 actual months that make up the first half of a seven-year period of tribulation. Then, they aver, a personal, future antichrist will dominate the world.

It is argued further that this period will begin with the rapture and end with Christ's return in glory. However, a serious calculation error undermines this scenario.

But first a little background.

Origins of Dispensationalist and secret rapture teaching

The rapture has been depicted spectacularly by Charles C. Ryrie, Hal Lindsey, and lately Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins. Lindsey's *The Late Great Planet Earth* (1970) became a worldwide bestseller, a success repeated 30 years later by the *Left Behind*[™] series. A dust-cover advertisement hails the series as "the fastest-selling fiction . . . ever."

Dispensationalists interpret the full 70 weeks period symbolically, maintaining it is a period of 490 years. This they do either according to the year-day principle (Num. 14:34; Ezek. 4:6) or because of the Hebrew word *shabua* in the original text that may be translated as "sevens."¹

The first 69 of the 70 weeks are therefore 483 years. Up to this point, they reason much like theologians of the Historical School, including Seventh-day Adventists. But then they introduce a long gap by moving the seventieth week into the distant future just before the Second Coming. Even more startlingly, they believe the happenings of the seventieth week do not have to do with Jesus the Messiah, but with the antichrist.

Again, much in Dispensationalist interpretation depends on the 1,260 days/42 months/three-and-a-half years being literal time so that the combined numbers total precisely 50 percent of the last prophetic week of Daniel 9:24-27. If this is correct, it discredits the Historical School to which Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Knox, and many other Reformers belonged.

The original essentials of Dispensationalist thinking did not, as is often believed, originate with John N. Darby and the Plymouth Brethren, but rather with writers like Francisco Ribera (1537-1591), a Jesuit scholar at the Spanish University of Salamanca, more than 400 years ago.

Known as Futurism, his approach to prophecy was intended to refute the teachings of the sixteenth-century reformers and their antecedents, including medieval Catholics like Joachim of Floris (c. 1135-1201), "the first to apply the year-day principle to the 1260 years."²

Ribera reached back to the early church fathers, such as Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons (c. 130-c. 200), who also located the antichrist in a temple and believed that the three-and-a-half years were literal time.³ With this view, Irenaeus differed from Tertullian (c. 160-c. 240), his North African contemporary, who maintained that the entire 70 weeks were fulfilled by the First Advent.⁴

Though sometimes at loggerheads with the pope, Irenaeus also furthered the Latin interpretation by teaching that the church should rely more heavily on tradition and that all Christians should be guided in their thinking by the bishops.⁵

At first, for two centuries, Protestants dismissed or ignored Ribera's Futurism. Later it began to appear in their theology in the works of Anglican scholars such as Samuel R. Maitland (1792-1866), his disciple James H. Todd (1805-1869), and others who followed.

Todd emphatically denied that the papacy was the antichrist or that Catholicism was a flawed religion. He (and through him both Maitland and Ribera) had a substantial influence, not only on Dispensationalists but also on the thinking of John Henry Newman (1801-1890) and Henry Edward Manning (1808-1892). These were prominent members of the Oxford Movement who, shortly after the mid-1840s, along with other Anglican priests, converted to the Roman Catholic Church.

Newman and Manning, who eventually became Cardinals, saw Protestantism to be a fulfillment of Daniel's prophecies. That is, they saw Protestant faith to be an installment or forerunner of the abomination that makes the Catholic sanctuary service desolate.

To them, the continual sacrifice taken away was the sacrifice of the Mass, which Protestants reject. Manning, who headed the Catholic Church in England, was particularly emphatic on this point.⁶

Again, it was the influence of Futurist presuppositions that played a major part in convincing these and others of the truth of the Catholic position.

The intellectual basis for these developments began with Samuel R. Maitland early in the nineteenth century. His first and key publication on prophecy was a 72-page pamphlet: *An Enquiry into the Grounds on which the Prophetic Period of Daniel and St. John Has been Supposed to Consist of 1260 Years* (1826).

Its mainstay was a major denial, on page 2, of the year-day principle. This is what he wrote: "After much consideration, I feel convinced that, 'the time, times, and dividing of time;' Dan.

vii.25: 'Time, times, and a half;' Dan. xii.7: 'Time, times, and half a time;' Rev. xii.14: 'Forty and two months;' Rev. xi. ii [sic] Bxiii.5: 'the thousand two hundred and threescore days;' Rev. xi.3: are not mystical phrases relating to a period of 1260 years; but, according to their plain meaning, denote a period of 1260 natural [literal] days."⁷ We will see, however, that this is impossible.

Maitland refers to six of the seven scriptural passages that mention this period, omitting only Revelation 12:6. In chapter 23 of my book, *Christ and Antichrist in Prophecy and History*,⁸ I deal with them synoptically as "the Sevenfold Prophecy and the Year-Day Principle." How readers understand the three-and-a-half years/42 months/1,260 days is crucial to prophetic interpretation. This is true for adherents of the Historical School, Dispensationalists, and the Roman Church.

In equating the antichrist's 42 months referred to in Revelation 13:5 with the three-and-a-half years that

make up half of the week described in Daniel 7:25, Dispensationalists rely on the literalized calculations made by Maitland.

The entire Dispensationalist end-time scenario depends heavily on these calculations: the idea that the Tribulation will last for seven years (from the rapture to Christ's return in glory), the denial that the papacy is the antichrist, and the notorious Gap theory. This interpretation has far-reaching implications. Millions could be confused and even lost as they await the rapture thinking, "When my Christian friends disappear, I will have a second chance of seven more years to prepare before the end!"

Futurism

Futurism also blinds the world to the perils posed by the real antichrist, who is not a bogeyman of the future but an entity that is already active in the world.

But, alas, there will be no rapture, only a single Second Advent, to burst



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upon a startled planet, like lightning that illuminates the sky (Matt. 24:27). Jesus and countless radiant angels will descend with a shout and trumpet blasts to announce the day of salvation and doom, invading the atmosphere with unimaginable splendor (Matt. 16:27; Luke 21:27; 1 Thess. 4:16-18). Every eye will see Him, and the nations of the lost will wail because of Him (Matt. 24:30; Rev. 1:7); for it is suddenly too late to accept Him as their Savior. They call to the rocks and mountains to fall upon them and hide them from His face (Rev. 6:14-17).

The Gap theory

The Gap theory is inherently and deeply flawed, for it defies all known laws of arithmetic and common sense, as well as what the Bible teaches.

Miles Beardsley Johnson says: "As a result of the rejection of Christ and His crucifixion, Israel's clock stopped and the Mystery of Grace, the church, was introduced. Israel, like a train, was taken off the main line and shunted into a sidetrack where she has remained for 1900 years. Her steam is up again; her bell is ringing; she is poised, ready to complete her run. Since the period of the church is signless and timeless, these past 1900 years are a 'time-out' period as in football and basketball."⁹

Such language is certainly picturesque and, for certain minds, beguiling. The Lord's great time prophecies are not really a train or a football game. There is nothing in any of them, and especially not in Daniel 9:24-27, to suggest the kind of gap proposed in this theory. God thinks and expresses Himself clearly, coherently, without theological double talk.

Suppose a friend invites our family to visit him for a week. We go to his house, but then at the breakfast table on the sixth day we announce that the seventh day of our visit will occur a year into the future. For this reason, we shall in the meantime just linger around in his home and on his property. That would be foolish.

No, when the Lord's messenger said to Daniel, "Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city" (Dan. 9:24), he had been sent specifically to explain, not obscure, the prophecy. Obviously he meant exactly 490 consecutive years, not 2,490 years or more.

If God had wished to put the Jewish nation on hold for two millennia, he would have said so quite clearly, for "the Lord God does nothing, without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets" (Amos 3:7, RSV). But the fact is that after A.D. 34 He would no longer work in the same way through the His people Israel as in ages past, but through the Christian church consisting of converted Jews as well as Gentiles.

The period of the church, moreover, is not—as Miles B. Johnson puts it—"signless and timeless"; for the Bible does mention specific signs, as in Matthew 24:30 and Luke 21:25. It also deals with many time periods of varying length, including the 1,260, 1,290, 1,335, and 2,300 years.

Why the Gap theory is embraced

If the Gap theory is so seriously flawed, why would thinking people insist on it?

It rationalizes the ancient error of Irenaeus and others like him, who believed that the Second Advent would take place in what was, for him, the near future. But Christ did not return within that period. So by the sixteenth century, when Ribera was pondering these matters, 1,400 years had passed—and now almost 1,900 years have elapsed.

How should this be dealt with? The correct approach is simply to admit that early Catholics like Irenaeus were wrong, and that the root of their error was the failure to apply the year-day principle. To deny this fact, however, is to be stuck in a mental time warp, the viewpoint of about A.D. 200, creating a need for Jesuitical ingenuity—which really seeks to explain away that vast

expanse of centuries.

The Gap theory, then, is closely bound up with the idea that the three-and-a-half years/42 months/1,260 days are literal, calendar time. So for Dispensationalists much depends on Ribera's ideas and particularly Maitland's explicit denial of the year-day principle. Thus, if the argument that the 1,260 years are literal time that can be disposed of, the 1,260 prophetic days must be symbolic, representing as many years.

The eighteen-day discrepancy

Simply stated, the heart of the error—the Dispensationalist error—is that the three-and-a-half years/42 months/1,260 days must be prophetic and not literal time, because they are shorter than three-and-a-half years on the calendar.

How many days are there in a year? According to the calendar, it is 365 days, except in the case of leap years. The actual number is 365.2422 days. Calculating on this basis we have the following: $365.2422 \times 3.5 = 1,278$ days; not 1,260 days. There is an 18-day discrepancy!

This being true, the Dispensationalist computation also does not constitute 42 months of literal time but somewhat less than 41-and-a-half months. Therefore the 1,260 days cannot be part of the seven-year tribulation that Dispensationalist theology insists on. Further, they therefore can have nothing to do with the 70 weeks of Daniel 9:24-27.

Interpreters of the Historical School do not run into this problem; their calculation is different: 360×3.5 (or 42×30) = 1,260. These, however, can obviously not be natural time units. An ordinary year does not contain 360 days, nor are all months made up of 30 days—not even in the lunar calendar used by ancient Israel. If such a year is arithmetically impossible in a literal sense, it must be a symbolic entity. It can therefore be reasonably based on the year-day equivalence explained in Numbers 14:34 and Ezekiel 4:6.

The literalism of Ribera (together with Irenaeus), Maitland, and the Dispensationalists is also discredited by the fact that the medieval papacy has already to an astonishing extent fulfilled the 1,260 prophetic days as years in real time—between 538 and 1798. But for many adherents of Futurism and Dispensationalism, such argumentation is too indirect. Laying bare their fuzzy math with its faulty arithmetic is quicker and more to the point. It is an axe that cuts such an eschatology off at its roots.

The importance and precision of the 1,260-day period

The 1,260-day time period seems to be particularly important because the Bible mentions it seven times and in different ways. We may have wondered why the Lord did not, to keep it simple, refer in every case to three-and-a-half years. Why did He in some verses also speak of days or months?

He may have first equated 1,260 days with 42 months and three-and-a-half years (as in Rev. 11: 2, 3 and Rev. 12:6, 14) to ensure that we would understand this to be an exact, specific period—not the approximation that the seventeenth-century Jesuit tried to pass off to his readers.

Second, God may also have wanted us to compare these figures and notice that they cannot be literal time, as some expositors would one day assert. The biblical 1,260-day period makes prophetic sense only on the basis of the year-day principle.

Dr. Ribera, more than 400 years ago, had been more clever—though more devious—than his Anglican and other Protestant disciples. He realized quite well that from the very beginning (even in the time of Irenaeus) there had been a problem with his reckoning, so he slipped in an unobtrusive gloss: “Note that these days do not completely make up three years and a half, just as Christ did not complete a half year [sic] of preaching.”¹⁰

The implications of the error

One purpose for this article is to

claim priority in exposing this error. More important are its implications.

The seven-years’ tribulation, supposedly beginning with the three-and-a-half years referred to, becomes an unnecessary hypothesis, together with that of the peculiar Gap mentioned above. So does the rapture (allegedly separated by seven years from the Lord’s return in glory). Furthermore, the discovery of this error undermines the idea that Israel and the Christian church are separate, discontinuous entities.

This Dispensationalist doctrine teaches that the Jews, and even the modern Israeli state, are still the favorite people of God. All this can now be discarded.

Furthermore, for Seventh-day Adventists the interpretation of the 70 weeks is crucially important as the first part of the 2,300 days in Daniel 8:14. This is essential for the integrity of the Seventh-day Adventist sanctuary doctrine. Making the 70 weeks coincide with the end of human his-

tory, as Futurism does, dissociates them from the 2,300 days. But exposing Maitland’s and Ribera’s error vindicates the year-day principle and indicates that the 2,300 prophetic days should be calculated as years.

The time has come to discard emphatically Ribera’s Futurism and Dispensationalism, its offspring, by insisting with greater vigor on the Historical School of prophetic interpretation. It is the only one that actually fits the facts of the Bible’s predictions and their fulfillment in history. ■

- 1 D. Guthrie, et al., eds., third ed., *The New Bible Commentary Revised* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Publishing, 1975), 698.
- 2 LeRoy Edwin Froom, *Finding the Lost Prophetic Witnesses* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1946), 31.
- 3 Quoted in LeRoy Edwin Froom, *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers: The Historical Development of Prophetic Interpretation* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1948), 1:247-249.
- 4 Tertullian, quoted in Froom, *Prophetic Faith*, 1:260.
- 5 Irenaeus quoted in Willis Lindquist, *Christianity and Byzantium*, vol. 4 of *The Universal History of the World*, ed. Irwin Shapiro, et al. (New York: Golden Press, 1966), 304.
- 6 Henry Edward Manning, *The Temporal Power of the Vicar of Jesus Christ* (2nd ed.), 159, 160, quoted in Froom, *Prophetic Faith*, 3:736.
- 7 Samuel R. Maitland, “An Enquiry into the Grounds on Which the Prophetic Period of Daniel and St. John Has Been Supposed to Consist of 1260 Years (1826),” quoted in Froom, *Prophetic Faith*, 3:542.
- 8 Available for \$23.95 (postage and handling included) from the author, edwdecock@aol.com, P.O. Box 2325, Edinburg, TX 78540-2325. See book review on page 31.
- 9 Miles Beardsley Johnson, quoted in Sakae Kubo, *The Open Rapture* (Nashville, Tenn.: Southern Pub. Assn., 1978), 15.
- 10 Francisco Ribera, quoted in Froom, *Prophetic Faith*, 2:492.

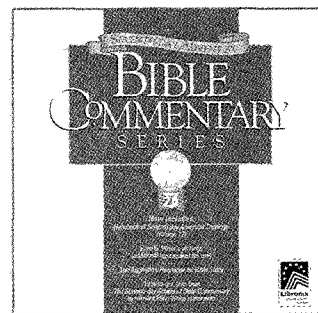
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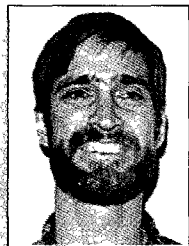
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Lifestyle standards: A middle approach

Rob Wilcox



Rob Wilcox works with Adventist Frontier Missions as a church planter in Albania.

What is the actual relationship between the practice of lifestyle standards and belief in the Christian gospel? Discussions over this issue cover a broad spectrum of approach and opinion, all the way from total indifference to an obsessive preoccupation with every behavioral detail. To resolve the dilemma, we need to take a look at the whole issue of standard formation. We need to expose the underlying principles and ultimate implications of such standards and their relationship to true spirituality.

Perhaps we should begin with two basic principles. First, standards are not the heart of the gospel. Second, the gospel impacts the whole of human life and behavior.

Standards not the heart of the gospel

Paul's primary mission was the proclamation of the saving grace of Jesus Christ, not vegetarianism, a specific dress code, or any particular form of behavior. Christ was the great and consuming focus of all that the apostle did, and for a very good reason.

Paul had grasped clearly that the mere adoption of certain behaviors never creates new life. One may do everything that might be expected and still miss the essential element. Laws, prohibitions, rules, and self-discipline simply cannot accomplish what Christ

has accomplished and they mustn't be put in where they don't belong—the place that belongs to Christ alone.

I could eat only vegetables, walk three miles every morning, and listen to nothing but Gregorian chant and still be as cold as a bucket of ice. But if I knew Christ truly, I would begin to thaw.

Yet the assertion that standards are not the heart of the gospel often leads to the extreme opposite of saying that standards are inconsequential and should be left to personal preference. This is a wrong conclusion. It ignores the whole essence of what a standard actually is.

The definition of a standard

A lifestyle standard is a choice made in the light of our primary interest and commitments in life. In a nonspiritual context we see many who make choices because of a chosen goal. Athletes may choose a particular diet and exercise to be in shape for an upcoming race. Musicians may organize their schedule around their practice hours, carefully keeping away disrupting influences. Thought leaders develop a lifestyle that allows them time for quiet reflection. The point is simple: Lifestyle, both in a Christian and a secular context, is shaped and affected by primary chosen commitments.

Of course, we must recognize that Christians will find that their faith commitments and values will often run counter to their surrounding culture. Where that occurs, the struggle between faith and culture is inescapable. We cannot simply go with the flow of our culture, especially when to do so is inconsistent with the claims of our faith. Hence Christians need a lifestyle standard that is distinctly Christian, that is genuinely responsive to the way of Christ.

The middle way

As alluded to above, our need for and emphasis on standards at once produces two competing positions. On the one hand, standards can become so central that they can turn into a form of destructive legalism. We can enforce standards to define a particular life, in which standards are desperately clung to as the ticket into the good graces of God or even one's fellow church members. Standards are thus insinuated into the heart of faith, and the gospel is all but crowded out. That

extreme is, of course, unacceptable.

On the other hand, in a system of belief where standards are minimized, we tend to forget that the gospel by its very nature must impact the whole life. No single lifestyle choice can escape the probe and judgment of the gospel. When the gospel's judgment and influence are so pervasive, it necessitates the rejection of certain aspects of the culture in which the believer lives.

The gospel also calls us to die to the outlooks, activities, and attitudes that characterize the heart of "the world," thus holding up highly the need for Christian standards (1 John 2:15-17).

As opposed to the two positions, I suggest a middle way. This is found where the heart is learning to truly care about bringing glory to God. Preoccupation with and fear concerning one's own destiny, either in the eyes of God or of certain other people, are no longer the motive as it often is in the legalistic mind set. Neither does this middle way allow the easygoing attitude of many who have "embraced" the gospel but forgotten that, by its nature, it calls for a thorough transformation of the whole life.

For example, this middle way demands rigorous and careful thinking about how we spend our time, resources, and money. This way challenges us to consider what we really value and where our heart truly is. It invites us to search and root out those choices and lifestyle patterns that reflect the passions and lusts of the fallen nature. This middle way does not trumpet an easy, relaxing ride into the kingdom, but neither does it call for an austere, hard, and cramped outlook that receives its life breath from the fear of stepping outside a boundary.

A standard lived out in terms of this middle way should invigorate both the life of the individual Christian and the church at large. A standard that is truly an expression of my commitment to God's free grace should lead me to love actively and

serve others. Standards, when operating in their true role, are the servants of the deeply held goals and aspirations at the very heart of one's life. Their foundation and the power to live according to them is truly found in the life of the Spirit.

Walking in this middle way, however, raises several issues to which we must give special attention. If we fail to deal with them, they will hinder us in our aim to "prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect" (Rom. 12:2, NASB).

Issues in the middle way

One issue is the context in which we discuss, apply, and live out standards. The only proper context for lifestyle change is that of the converted heart. The transformed heart alone can produce a behavior that is pleasing to the Lord.

This means that if we are to uphold high standards as a church, we must look carefully at our theology of conversion. We must learn to intentionally cultivate in our teaching and preaching those attitudes of the heart that allow the Spirit to lay down in us the foundation for a new life.

We cannot bullishly approach standards head on in our dealings

with each other within the church. Such an approach may produce a certain conformity and uniformity, but it will never bring us to a powerful expression of the life that is in our Lord. We must aim at helping each other wrestle honestly with what it means to be deeply challenged and loved by the living God. Such wrestling will inevitably lead to that wonderfully painful mix of broken helplessness in the light of our own sins, and a hungry passion to be continuously transformed. This alone will provide a solid foundation for the formation of a truly Christian lifestyle. Embraced by God's grace and empowered by His Spirit, we will have a keen sense of sin and the need for radical change in our patterns of living.

The greatest impetus to change is a vision of what we are intended to be as children of God. My lifestyle will only change positively when the change has come out of a realization of my failure in some particular area of life to image the living Christ. When I seek the empowering of God's grace working to effect that change, then I can truly embrace the gift of a new lifestyle pattern with gratitude.

Change coming from any other direction may look good, especially

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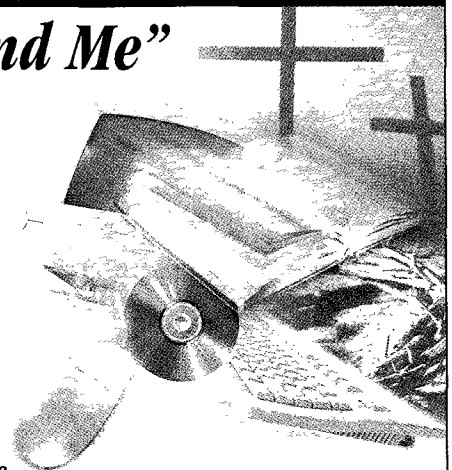
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in the immediate moment, but in the end it will not prove to be something of depth and permanence. It will not remain afloat in rough waters. When lifestyle change comes as a result of a deep heart hunger to please God in all areas of life within the context of a salvation experience, only then is it meaningful.

Have standards hardened into a wall?

Members of a church with high standards must ask themselves, "How do I feel around people who do not share my standards? What are my attitudes toward them? Am I critical? Do I feel superior? Am I threatened? Do I befriend people not meeting my standards? Am I able to see their good qualities? How do I feel and react when the expression of their lifestyle standards cuts across my own?"

As stated above, standards are inevitably related to culture. As Christians we form a culture which is different from the unbelieving world around us. Our new culture, if formulated in a healthy way, expresses the deepest spiritual commitments of our lives and serves those commitments.

We must be careful, however. It is easy for the cultural molds we develop to harden into a thick wall which shuts everyone else out. When this happens we lose our influence in the wider world. We become isolationistic and cannot fulfill our calling. Such a condition can lead to pride and a sense of exclusiveness.

The answer, of course, is not to throw away our standards so that we can relate better to the world around us, but to make sure that our standards have the proper foundation. If we are adhering to standards out of legalistic fear or legalistic superiority, then we are erecting a wall between us and others.

In this case, our standards have become the source of our identity, instead of reflecting our status as children of God who have been freed from sin in order to love people truly and powerfully. When standards are

truly servant to our relationship with God, they will not encumber our relationship with unbelievers who do not adhere to those same standards.

If questions arise concerning our behaviors, they will be explained in terms of how they serve the central goals of our life, rather than being set forth as ends in themselves. It is these central goals of life that have the greater power to bring conviction into the life of the unbeliever.

Standards in house

Perhaps the greatest challenge to the question of the place of standards in our lives comes within our own fellowships. All of us are extremely sensitive to having another tell us how we should live. Here there are no easy answers, but there are far-reaching principles to understand and implement.

To begin with, we must accept that standard formation takes place continually; it is a task that is never completed. One reason for this is that young people are continually being raised within the church.

We cannot automatically assume that these young people are converted. It may be that they are asked in certain contexts to abide by certain standards, but if we stop here, we fail them. We must aim at bringing them to genuine conversion. Then we can help them learn how to meet the hard questions that arise where faith commitments meet culture.

Our upcoming generations must learn to make choices based on their deep heart commitments and know the reasons why they have made these choices. Lifestyles formulated in this way will be held to with firmness and resiliency because they will flow out of heart commitments and clear understanding.

On another front, those who come in as new believers must also be helped to grapple with the meaning of their Christian faith within their cultural context. All too often we assume that these new Christians will naturally know how to relate to the

thorny issues of lifestyle choices. This is by no means a given.

The local church should assume responsibility to help new members understand the fundamentals of Christian lifestyle. When congregations regularly pursue such a course, they will see the development of a mature understanding of lifestyle standards. The whole congregation needs to be involved so that we avoid the twin dangers of falling into legalism or the trap of cheap grace and watered-down faith.

This process demands patience, remembering the long, twisted path which we ourselves may have trod in our search for an authentic conversion and in the development of our own convictions in regard to lifestyle.

We also must be discerning with those who might advocate a different set of standards from our own. In situations that do not involve theology but only standards, our greatest concern should be on the spiritual dynamics operating in our lives. We need to trust one another and examine whether lifestyle choices flow from a desire to honor God.

The individual's process of wrestling with choices and the spiritual issues beneath such wrestling must never be shortchanged. When spiritual transformation is in process then we can be confident that we will be moving toward the unity promised the church.

In essence: The church must learn to grapple with the middle way, not only as individual members but also as a body. In fact the more solidly this middle way is pursued, the less the church will be plagued with the divisive forces that gather among us.

Where past meets future

One more crucial area remains to be considered: the meeting of the past and the future in the formulation of standards. We cannot fully depend upon the decisions and outlooks of those who have gone before us as if they were infallible. Yet neither can we casually write them off as

if our ecclesiastical ancestors were out-of-touch ignoramuses.

To relate to our forebears as if they were infallible in every aspect of their lifestyle development is to forget that they too had their dilemmas. Something is not sacred just because it has been held and practiced. Yet we should not scoff too quickly at what might seem stuffy and narrow to us. The people who upheld and established lifestyle standards were seeking to wrestle with a crucial issue: How does one arrive at maturity in Christian living?

The point is that they were grappling as we must grapple, and it is arrogant of us to write off their experience as if we are on a higher plane than they. It may well be that they were on a higher plane spiritually than the one on which we stand at present. Thus, the voices of the past can be immensely helpful to us in our attempts to work out what is pleasing to the Lord and genuinely helpful to

the community of faith.

While our spiritual ancestors may have had their blind spots, we too have ours. Interacting with ideas and solutions from an age other than our own helps us to see where our own cultural milieu may have pulled the wool over our own eyes.

It is a delicate dance, this dance with the past. As we look back into the past, there is a great temptation to simply freeze the specific cultural and lifestyle patterns of a previous period, adopting them lock, stock, and barrel. This appears to make it much easier to work out answers to lifestyle issues. Anything that does not fit the pattern previously lived out by our forefathers is rejected.

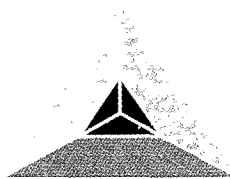
It may be easier, but it is irresponsible. It sidesteps the challenge of the middle way, circumvents the process of learning to think and choose in the presence of God, and fails to perceive and then live out the perfect will of God for us here and now.

Conclusion

I have attempted to set forth a constructive approach for working out the implications of the gospel in regard to lifestyle standards within the fellowship of our churches. I have also sought to point out some of the pitfalls that exist along the way.

It would be very naive of me to believe that the effort to walk the middle way would free us completely from the sometimes twisted labyrinth of standard formulation. Difficulties will remain. However, if we can truly strengthen the spiritual core, we might revolutionize the whole. We would do well to remind ourselves that the tone of the church is not often set by those who are just beginning to enter the roaring maelstrom of life where all the crucial issues are met with and decided. Rather, it is set by leadership and the more mature members who have either wrestled well or poorly with the crucial issues of life. ▀

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Jesus' subversive sayings

Paul Fisher

The more intensely I study the Gospels, the less Jesus looks like a Norman Rockwell production. The Jesus portrayed in these accounts can be an incredibly challenging, even disturbing figure. For instance, in the context of the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11, some of His words appear almost subversive.

Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7) is sometimes viewed as the most influential religious discourse in history. Its message is so penetrating and challenging that some have wondered if it doesn't actually contain an "unattainable ideal." Is it possible to live by the precepts articulated by Jesus on that Galilean hillside almost 2,000 years ago?

Moses and Jesus

The background of Jesus' sayings in Matthew 5:38-42 (particularly Luke 6:27-31) is the Mosaic legislation enshrined in Exodus 21:23-25 and Leviticus 24:20. In these Old Testament passages Moses, the Israelite legislator, clearly articulates the concept of justice in terms of retribution; eye for eye, tooth for tooth, life for life. This great principal of retributive justice is known as the *lex talionis*.

In Matthew 5-7 Jesus juxtaposes His own teachings with the Mosaic legislation using the formula, "You have heard . . . but I tell you." This emphasis of Jesus' teachings fits in nicely with what Bible scholars have come to

know as Matthew's Moses typology.

For example, the five discourses of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew parallel the five books of Moses in the Old Testament. As Moses was delivered from Pharaoh's campaign against Jewish male firstborns, so Jesus was rescued from Herod's awful slaughter of the innocents in Bethlehem. And just as Moses gave the divine legislation from Mount Sinai, so Jesus delivers His sermon from the mount.

Jesus refers to Himself as "one greater than Jonas," "greater than Solomon" and most shockingly of all, as "one greater than the temple" (Matt. 12:41, 42, 46). The reality for Christians is that the authority of Jesus is at least on a par with the Mosaic legislation.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus (like Moses before Him) is giving out divine legislation to His followers. It is clear that His purpose was not to "abolish" the Mosaic law but to intensify and apply it in a new context.

Some of Jesus' statements seem like fairly straightforward intensifications of the law of Moses. For example, Jesus extends the prohibition against the act of adultery to cover even the sexual thoughts that would precede the act. However, not all of Jesus' statements are so easily explained as amplifications of the divine principles of the Mosaic law.

The words of Jesus in Matthew 5:39-41 seem to actually fly in the face of the Mosaic law of retributive justice, the *lex talionis*. In this passage Jesus reverses the expectations of His listeners. In the context of an "eye for an eye" legal principle, the last thing Jesus' listeners would have expected to hear was, "Do not resist an evil person."

It is important to realize that the principle of retributive justice requires an exact correlation between the crime and the punishment. The exact injury caused is to be visited upon the one who caused it. And the closer the punishment fits the crime, the greater the sense that justice has been served.

For example, the enemies of Daniel who conspired to feed him to the lions become dinner for the lions in the end. Then there is Haman, who, in the story of Esther, ends up swinging from the very gallows he had constructed for Mordecai the Jew. Justice prevails, and we rejoice in its victory!

A "revised" Script

In the teachings of Jesus encoded in Matthew 5:38-42, the Master reverses the



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expected narrative ending. Jesus envisions a new ending to the proverbial human saga involving hostilities, atrocities, injuries, and insults.

In this new telling of the story, the bad guy doesn't get what he gives to others. The script is written without reference *lex talionis*. And in the narrative space created by the absence of the law of retributive justice—grace appears. Jesus skillfully inserts grace where justice was expected.

What does it look like when grace is inserted into the story of human hostilities and atrocities? In the words of Jesus, it looks like a turning of the other cheek, a giving of the cloak, and a walking of the extra mile. These are certainly extraordinary responses to the provocative and insulting behaviors that precede them.

Right at the moment Jesus seems to call for grace, there is a part of us that wants to cry out, "It just doesn't seem fair." But as Philip Yancey says in *What's So Amazing About Grace?*

"Grace . . . is not about fairness."¹ As Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Lutheran martyr of injustice, once said: "Nothing that we despise in the other man is entirely absent from ourselves."²

For Jesus the enemy is not a target to be eliminated so much as a human being to be redeemed. How else can we understand those incredible words from the cross, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do"? There were no harsh polemics or strong denunciations of the perpetrators but rather an expression of divine grace and forbearance toward His enemies.

Inserting grace into the story of human hostilities is an amazing and exceptional thing, a principle that can disrupt the established pattern of strike and counterstrike and open the door for peace and reconciliation.

Strike and counterstrike

The Bible is full of the pattern of strike and counterstrike, the principle

of the *lex talionis*. The relation between God and the human family is portrayed in just these terms.

Adam and Eve reject God's authority and in turn God expels them from the Garden of Eden. The people in the time of Noah pollute the world with wickedness and in return God cleanses the earth with a flood. The Babel-builders collectively defy heaven and in return the Lord confuses and disperses the people. The children of Israel dishonor God in the promised land of freedom and in response God sends them into exile and captivity in Babylon. The reason, however, for the weakness of the law of retributive justice is given in the statement of the principle in Deuteronomy 19:21. The law of the *lex talionis* inspires fear, which is why it is not an adequate basis for either divine or human government. God is not ultimately satisfied with a service rendered out of fear of retribution. The Creator longs for the allegiance and loyalty of love.

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atrocities, injuries and insults. As a result, a great power—the greatest power in all the universe—has entered into history, and that is the power of noncoercive, sacrificial love.

It is not a demanding, threatening, stick-waving, gun-toting power; rather, it is the power of turning the other cheek, a giving away of one's cloak, a going the extra mile. Martin Luther King called it "soul force," and many believe that Gandhi, who liberated India from British rule, effectively demonstrated the very real power of this kind of nonviolence.

But it is primarily at Calvary that the power of grace is most fully illustrated. There we perceive that God's awesome power resides in His willingness to take a beating rather than in His ability to inflict one. At Calvary we sense that grace has been inserted into a story that would otherwise have no redemptive ending.

At Calvary we sense that God is dealing with His enemies, not according to the law of the *lex talionis* but with a grace that can surprise and transform even the hardest hearts. At Calvary we witness the display of an awesome power, not exercised to eliminate enemies but to turn enemies into friends!

The Jesus that we hear in the Sermon on the Mount, if we are willing to listen closely, is a Jesus that can surprise, disturb, and challenge us. In His words we hear the echo of One who is often drowned out by the raucous voices clamoring for retribution against their enemies.

Albert Schweitzer, Christian scholar and missionary to Africa, said this about Jesus: "He comes to us as one unknown, without a name, as of old, by the lakeside, he came to those men who did not know who he was. He says the same words, 'Follow me!' and sets us to those tasks which he must to fulfil in our time."⁴ ■

Not mere retributive justice

Beneath and paralleling the Bible's narrative of retributive justice is another narrative, an even more amazing story. In this story, God's grace surprises both His enemies and His friends and actually draws His enemies into friendship with Himself.

The thread of this story begins when God, in the face of Adam and Eve's sin, gives them coats of skin to cover their nakedness before He sends them out of the Garden. It continues when this pure and holy God chooses to live in the midst of an unclean and impure people on the way to the Promised Land. The saga advances when God chooses not to depose King David although his transgressions were capital offenses.

There are indeed many marvelous biblical stories in which the law of the *lex talionis* is left out of the script! Jacob the conniver becomes Israel the conqueror. Samson the hedonist is entrusted with the gift of divine strength. Solomon, the fruit of an adulterous relationship, receives the divine gift of wisdom and builds the holiest of all religious temples.

Philip Yancey remarks that "in each of these Old Testament stories the scandal of grace rumbles under

the surface."³ And when we come to the New Testament, the rumble becomes a roar and the quivers of grace become an earthquake. In Jesus Christ the dams of grace gush out into the world. In this narrative, the narrative of divine grace, even prostitutes, tax collectors, and sinners find a chair at the table.

Grace, the controversial contradiction

Of course, like the older brother in the parable of the prodigal son, not everyone is happy with this arrangement. Not everyone likes this new grace-concluded story. Such grace reeks of scandal and irresponsibility.

For those who have worked hard and paid their dues, the story shouldn't end with a celebration for a filthy philanderer. For such cold and pious souls the story that ends in turning the other cheek and going the extra mile is nothing but a dangerous fairy tale. The story line they prefer is one in which those who kill are killed, those who maim are maimed, those who waste are wasted, and those who think otherwise share the same fate.

In His parables and teachings, His life and His death, Jesus inserted grace into the narrative of hostilities and

1 Philip Yancey, *What's So Amazing About Grace* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Pub. House, 1997), 81.

2 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Witness to Jesus Christ*, John W. De Grunchy, ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 262.

3 Yancey, 61.

4 Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, John Bowden, ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 403.

Wanna kill your church?

Recently we attended a meeting that refused to end. The sermon had concluded. Choirs had sung. Prayers, praise, and promotions were exhausted and two offerings had been taken. Yet the platform activities dragged on. Sharon whispered her diagnosis, "They are experiencing separation anxiety."

She started me thinking. So with acknowledgment to Peter Wagner's classic, *Your Church Can Be Healthy*, I offer this glossary of deadly diseases.

Afford avoidance. Mechanism by which boards declare every new venture to be financially unfeasible.

Antecreativity. Repetitious humdrum in place of (ante) new and innovative experimentation, particularly evidenced in worship services.

Anticreativity. Rejection of everything except humdrum.

Appealectomy. Removal of ability to extend gospel invitations at the conclusion of sermons.

Audioterrorism. Mechanical misbehavior of sound systems which predictably malfunction during special events.

Audioterrorists. Manipulative sound system operators—all first cousins to the sound man from hell who pulls the plug if he dislikes a presentation.

Boreality. Consequences of assigning the hymns and scripture in the final six minutes before entering the platform. Also describes sermons produced during these same six minutes.

Bullexpandia. Relentless repetition of already printed announcements.

Canon Fire. Attempting to win debates with proof texts.

Clock Delaysion. Inability to start or end a service on schedule.

Conflictiolious. Deadly infection that destroys church boards and, on occasion, entire congregations.

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Costapaedia. Unwillingness to fund children's ministries.

Enthusilactia. Absence of joyous expression. More visible at worship services than at football matches.

Evangelactia. Absence of outreach.

Evangelitus. Compulsion to wash hands immediately after greeting parishioners. Aggravated by those who sneeze and wipe their noses as they approach the pastor to shake hands.

Evangelosis. Fear that new members will disrupt the status quo.

Gossipeah. Abuses "speaking the truth" as excuse to "tell all." Often exhibited with fervent prayer requests, by name, for the erring sinner.

Humerology. Reliance on humor to carry message. Afflicts those who must produce a monthly column as well as those who preach shallow sermons.

Hyperventilation. Telling everything you know about a guest preacher. Beware any introduction which begins, "I first met our speaker in 1964." cf. "Oral diarrhea."

Hypoventilation. Refusal of deacons to open the windows because Sister Jones cannot stand the draft.

Immersion Aversion. Avoiding inconvenient sacraments. "Do you realize the cost of water these days?" Over protest of the deacons: "I once had to excavate a large tree to fill the baptismal pool." Another deacon wondered if we could

"dry-clean" feet before communion.

Infecteria. Site of potlucks featuring mystery loaf and jello mould.

Longevity Intolerance. Belief that pastors should transfer as soon as they exhaust their supply of sermons from the last location. Relocation is vital if members concur with diagnosis.

Microphoneolia. Energized by sound amplification to make long speeches.

Pastward Vision. Wistful nostalgia for the "good old days" combined with assertion that all would be well if the church could only return to 1952.

Preventadentia. Ability to delay any proposal by extended speechifying. Usually causes audience to "gnash teeth."

Qualitosis. Willingness to settle for less than the best. As offensive as bad breath.

Schedulectomy. Removal of meeting effectiveness caused by awaiting the arrival of tardy members before starting.

Self Disclosia. Over sharing personal details. Beware any story which begins, "on my first day at the boarding school."

Separationism. Attempting to achieve sanctification through avoiding society. Advocates of "flee to the mountains" often offer property for sale at premium prices.

Substance Abuse. Sermons which are long on poetry and short on content. Particularly abusive if sermon is being translated into another language.

ThermNObureaucrats. Groups adept at impeding movement on any issue.

Visioimpedia. Refusal to look beyond next week. Although deadly, many eagerly embrace this disease. cf. with "Pastward Vision."

Zecclesiological Exhaustion. Of the making of A to Z lists, there is no end! Send in your contributions and we'll share. ■

BOOK REVIEW

Christ and Antichrist in Prophecy and History, by Edwin de Kock. Second printing. Revised edition, 2001. Pp. V + 340 + appendices, endnotes, and bibliography. Diadone Enterprises, Box 2325, Edinburg, Texas.

In spite of the rather sensationalistic cover and the obscure location of printing, the contents of this book represent a sound, solid, and detailed interpretation of the prophecies of Daniel written from an historicist perspective.

This is not a verse-by-verse exegesis of those prophecies. Rather, it is a review of the fulfillment of those prophecies with strong attention to historical detail.

Part 1 deals with Daniel 2; Part 2 with Daniel 7; Part 3 treats Daniel 9 and Parts 4 and 5 review church history as seen through the eyes of the latter parts of Daniel 7 and 8. The book concludes with three brief but related appendices.

The first chapter of the introduction plays off a sound historicist interpretation against the presently very popular futurist-dispensationalist interpretation.

Daniel 2 is covered in the four chapters of Part 1.

Two long and historically detailed chapters cover Daniel 7 in Part 2. The fourth beast of Daniel 7 is often referred to as "nondescript." The composite character of this fourth beast is borne out by the further description of it as the sea beast of Revelation 13. Since part of that composite character shows Greek elements in Rome, a separate chapter (chapter 8) is dedicated to demonstrating this close correspondence in history.

The five chapters of Part 3 discuss various aspects and relations of the Messianic prophecy of Daniel 9.

Chapter 10 provides abundant textual evidence from various Old Testament prophecies that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah of those prophecies. Chapter 11 deals more directly with the Messianic prophecy of Daniel 9:24-27. He dates the 70 weeks (of years) from 457 B.C. to 34 A.D. and utilizes an extensive quote from Sir Isaac Newton to support that starting date. Twentieth-century studies have borne out the accuracy of Newton in that regard. The crucifixion of Jesus in the midst of the seventieth week is dated to 31 A.D. The balance of this chapter is dedicated to refuting the dispensationalist idea that the seventieth week should be cut off from the other 69 and transferred down to the end of time.

Part 4 deals with the course of church history as it relates to the latter portions of Daniel 7 and 8. The more specific issue of the shift from Sabbath to Sunday is treated in the final chapter of this section.

The final major section of this book deals with the rise of the barbarian triekingdoms out of the collapse of the empire in fulfillment of the symbol of the ten horns on the head of the Roman beast in Daniel 7. This section includes a rebuttal to the preterist and futurist interpretations of these same features.

Appendix 1 supports the application of the year-day principle to symbolic time in apocalyptic. Appendix 2 deals with the ideology behind the persecution of Christians. Appendix 3 briefly covers the subject of literary criticism and conversely literary appreciation of the Bible.

This book is very well documented in the endnotes and the bibliography demonstrates a wide range of materials consulted in the writing of it. The book represents a well-reasoned and well researched study of the historical applications of the prophecies of Daniel. It is

strongly recommended to readers interested in that subject.

—William H. Shea, Red Bluff, California.

The Essential Jesus: The Man, His Message, His Mission, edited by Bryan W. Ball and William G. Johnsson. (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Pub. Assn., 2002). 299 pages. US\$14.99.

What if the biblical records of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection were merely the "wishful thinking of the early church"? What if Jesus wasn't the divine-human Savior of sinful humanity, but instead a Jewish sage, a religious genius, a misguided visionary, or some kind of magician? What if people the world over are praying to a Jesus who isn't there; believing in a sentimental myth?

The thoughts expressed in these "what if" questions are real and they are being promoted by some of today's most educated and persuasive scholars. Plainly stated, Jesus is under attack.

The Essential Jesus is a thoughtful look at the relevancy of the Savior for today—and a defense of the biblical, historical viewpoint. The editors have assembled the writings of ten scholars, besides themselves, who are passionate believers in Jesus. The work of these scholars has been composed into this one powerful volume on the man, the message, and the mission of Christ.

Who was Jesus? Are the Gospel accounts of His birth, life, teachings, and death reliable? Why did He die? Did He really rise from the dead? Does He have a future? Will He come again? Does He still call men, women, and young people to discipleship, and if so, what does He expect of those who respond? These and other crucial questions are addressed and answered in this book.

"I am convinced the time is right for this book" (Dr. Jan Paulsen, president, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists). ■

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