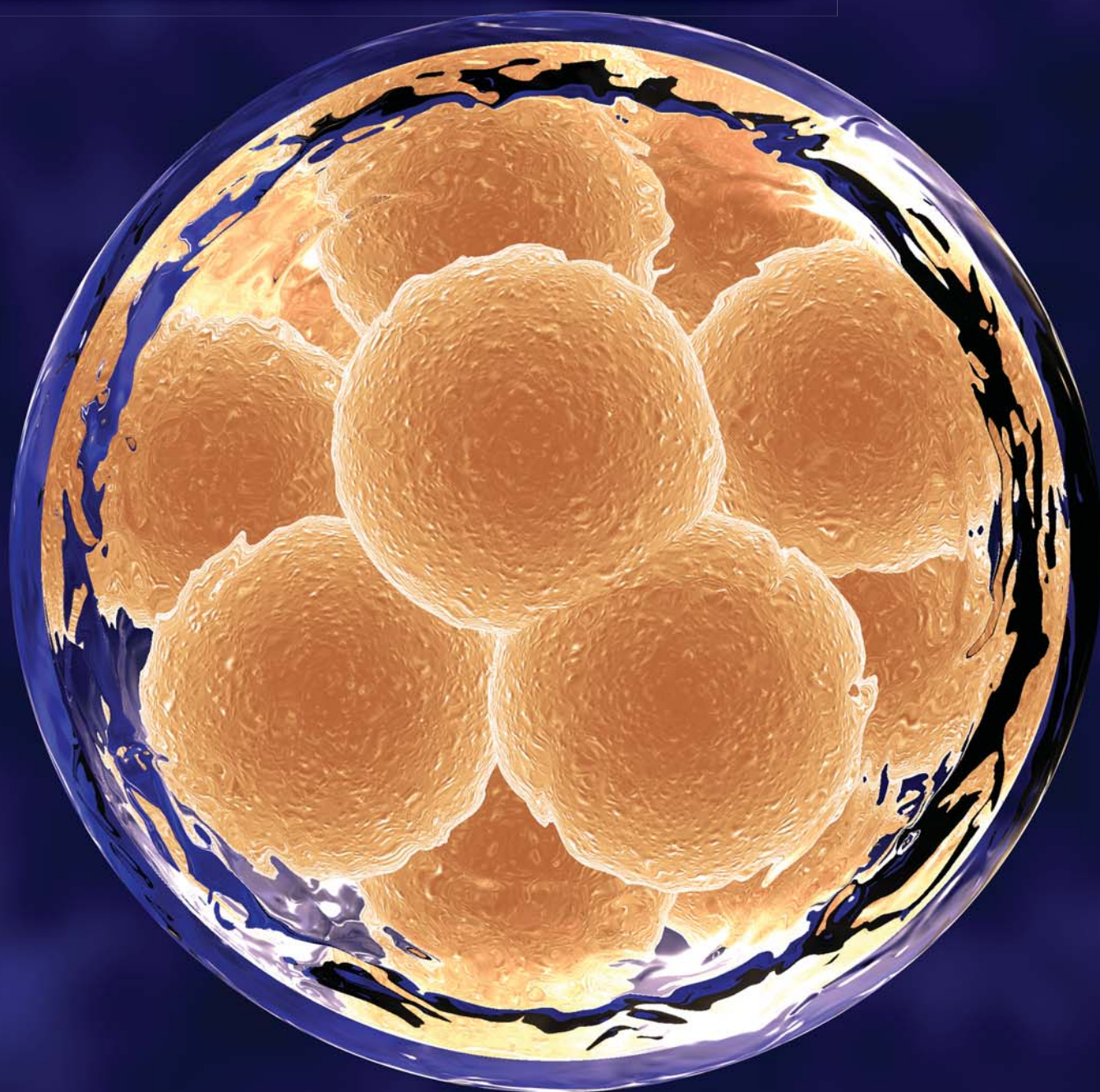


MINISTRY[®]

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STEM CELL RESEARCH

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OUR READERS RESPOND...

Hospitality, equality, and mutual submission

Igor Lorencin's article on hospitality, equality, and mutual submission ("Hospitality and not Patronage: Lessons in Relationships From 3 John," February 2008)—the gracious and humbly serving spirit of Jesus—offers potent medicine for many church ills. It would make an excellent sermon or church board meeting handout.

A word or two, though: yes, as generally used, a person who is "patronizing" has a superior attitude and treats others as inferiors—a plague in any church. However, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, most "patrons" are not "patronizing": "a chief sense" of the word *patron*, as generally used, is one who "takes under his favour and protection"; "lends his influential support to advance the interests of some person, cause, institution, [or] art [as in 'patron of the arts']; . . . or is an 'advocate and defender.'" And *patronage* generally means "to give patronage to; to uphold, protect, defend." Still, the author was clear and consistent in deriving *patron* and *patronage* in their (rarely used) negative sense from the (usually negative) word *patronizing*.

—Bonnie Johnson, Loma Linda, California,
United States

New Testament house churches

Kwabena Donkor has written an interesting article ("New Testament House Churches: A Model for Today's Complex World?" April 2008). But I must urge several cautions. First, there seems to be an assumption that the house church was the standard model for early Christian worship and that any mention of a house indicates a house

church. The article thus overlooks the references to the temple as the place of worship for the early church and makes too readily a connection between any mention of a house, or part thereof, and a house church.

Acts 1:12, 13 does indeed mention the disciples as entering a house (actually the text says "upper room"), but the text explicitly states that these were their living quarters while in Jerusalem. The gathering in the next verse may very well have taken place in that upper room. But does the mention of prayer equate the room with a church? Do believers only pray in churches?

Acts 12:10–17 does mention a gathering in a house. Again, Donkor takes the mention of prayer as indication that this is a "house-worship" setting. That seems a bit odd, as the passage indicates that this takes place in the middle of the night (note that Peter and the guards are sleeping and all the doors, including the entrance, are locked). The setting also indicates that this was no regular prayer service, but a prayer session for a specific purpose—Peter's imprisonment.

But that Donkor's reading of these passages as references to worship services in homes is not the plain sense of the passages is reinforced to the references to temple worship in Acts. Acts clearly indicates that the temple is the place where believers gather for worship. Donkor refers to Acts 2:42 for the agenda of Christian worship and applies that to the references to meetings in houses elsewhere. But 2:42 does not indicate that this worship took place in a home. We must look to 2:46 for the worship location—the temple. This is skipped over to the mention of houses in the next clause. The activity in the

houses is that of breaking bread—not a worship activity, but the sharing of a meal, a fellowship dinner.

All of this means that the early church in Jerusalem did not meet for worship in homes. That does not mean that activity associated with worship did not take place in homes. Certainly we today do not only pray at church; we pray in our homes far more than we do at church (at least we should). Just like we might meet for a special prayer service in someone's home, so did the early church. The prayer meeting in Acts 12 is one such service. But it must be remembered that it took place late at night when the temple would not be available. Nowhere in Acts is teaching described as taking place in a house until 5:42 and this only after the death threats (5:33) of the Sanhedrin.

This does not mean that there are no house churches in the New Testament. Paul clearly mentions one in his letters (Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:19; Philem. 2). But the references Donkor puts forth must be reduced. For Philippi, there is no mention of a house in Acts 16:11–15, and 25–34 describe Paul and Silas in *jail*—not in a house church; they are only brought to the jailer's house for a meal, not a worship service. Jason's house is not a house church but where Paul and Silas are staying in Thessalonica. Acts 18:7, 8 *may* well indicate that a meeting takes place in the house of Titus Justus, but interestingly, this is only after meeting in the synagogue becomes untenable. So this leaves us with three clear passages that mention house churches, none of them in Acts. In Acts the meeting place of believers is established as the temple and then the synagogue. Only when

Continued on page 27

Difficult decisions

NIKOLAUS SATELMAJER



What difficult decisions have you had to make in your life? Some of them are private and others public, but each of us faces decisions that we wish we did not have to make. Perhaps it's a decision about a move or health care for parents. *Do I move or do I stay? What do I do if someone in my family doesn't want to move? Where can I get the best care for my parents? Who will provide it?*

We as ministers not only have to make difficult decisions, but often we're asked to help others with theirs. Church members face issues of marriage, finance, education, health care, jobs—and often these members, as well as people in the community, will come asking for input. Whenever individuals come, we recognize that ministry involves a lot of trust. But what do we say to people? What questions do we ask? While we cannot always give them the answers they would like to hear, there are, I believe, at least three principles that we can use to help provide counsel that will be valuable.

Trust God

While we do not possess unusual wisdom or knowledge, our personal dependence on God enables us to provide meaningful input to those who come to us. We live in a world in which the very technologies that are supposed to help us often separate people from others and at times distance them from God. We serve a personal God who has an interest in each one.

While tempted to trust in the latest experts in whatever field, to forget God, and trust in idols, Isaiah 42:17* tells us not to trust in them. Instead, we should remind ourselves of Psalm 56:11: "In God I trust; I will not be afraid." When we trust in God, and when we tell others

to trust in God, this does not mean that the problems disappear or that the consequences will always be what we want. But the fear factor disappears.

Trust God's Word

I, like many ministers, enjoy reading and visiting libraries and bookstores. Although my schedule does not allow too many opportunities, when I do go to bookstores, I notice sections on advice in every imaginable field: finance, diet, personal happiness, marriage, children—the list is endless. Some are helpful; but we, as ministers, need to go beyond those books for ourselves and for the people to whom we minister. Ultimately, we need to place trust in God's Word. The Word of God records what God said many years ago, but it also gives God's message to us today. Hebrews 4:12 reminds us, "For the Word of God is living and active." Whenever we try to help people understand that God's Word is living and active, we must assure them that the presence of God's Word in their lives will give them direction to face the challenges and make the right decisions.

Trust in the people you serve

Healthy relationships are built on trust between human beings and between God and human beings. Just as God trusts us, we likewise need to trust the individuals whom we serve. And, just as God's Word transforms our lives

and guides us in the difficult decisions we have to make, we have to believe that God will also guide them in their difficult decisions. The decisions they make may not be the ones we'd make; in fact, they may be opposite from what we recommend, but we cannot pretend that God only guides us.

Jesus exhibited great trust in His followers. John 17 gives a good example of how Jesus trusted His followers and those who would become His followers. In part it says, "'Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am . . .'" (John 17:24). Even after He spoke those words, the betrayal, the Crucifixion, and the dispersal of the disciples was yet to come.

Those words of trust reach into our own age and lives. Jesus wants us to be with Him. If Jesus can trust us to be His followers, surely, as ministers of the gospel, we need to trust the people who come to us.

Our lead article by Allan Handysides deals with complex issues of modern health technologies—an example of some of the difficult choices that our members face and for which they seek our input.

What input will you give to them in these very complex issues of life and death? The three principles to which I refer in this editorial do not always give an immediate answer. But I believe they will help the people travel in the right direction as they make the decisions they ultimately have to make. ■

* All Bible verses are from the New International Version.

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

Stem cell research:

What is a Christian to do?

Allan Handysides



Allan Handysides, MB, ChB, is director of the Health Ministries Department, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States.

Sitting in his study, the pastor welcomed two faithful and wonderful church members, Rod and Betty.* They had requested a private meeting. Don, the pastor, noticed they were a little more flushed than usual. After the initial greetings, Rod looked at Betty. She responded, "You start, Rod."

Over the next few minutes, they poured their hearts out over their inability to have children. Soon, they began to focus on their main concern: what did the pastor think about in vitro fertilization (IVF)?

Their doctor proposed that Betty should undergo hormonal stimulation to produce a cluster of eggs that would be harvested through a special irrigating syringe. These eggs would be exposed to Rod's sperm in a special chamber, and then the best candidates for implantation in Betty's uterus would be selected after about 48 hours. The hope, of course, was that this would result in pregnancy.

Pastor Don, looking at Rod and Betty, inquired of their concerns.

"Well," replied Betty, "they may get more eggs than they can put in my uterus. If they do, they propose to freeze any extra eggs, and we could possibly use them later."

Don looked at this couple. They were about 35 years old, and would make wonderful parents. It would be terrific for them to have children. "Betty," said the pastor, "since the doctors say your fallopian tubes are blocked, I think this would be a wonderful thing for you to do."

A few months later, a beaming Rod and Betty whispered to the pastor as they left the church after the service, "We're pregnant!"

About three months later, Rod and Betty met him again after the service. Rod was still beaming; Betty a little less so.

"Guess what, pastor," he said. "We're having triplets."

And they did—a little girl and two identical boys. Betty looked a little less manicured at times and Rod a little more rumpled than before, but they were a happy growing family, a real asset to the church.

Don left and eventually became a conference president. One day, during camp meeting, Rod and Betty, flanked by three beautiful children, greeted him. They looked fabulous—Rod had gained a little paunch, but Betty was still beautiful and the children so well behaved. Later, at Betty and Rod's request, the three had a chance to visit.

"Pastor," said Betty, "when we underwent IVF, they harvested seven eggs. They implanted three, but there are four still frozen. They charge us two hundred dollars a year for storage, but last month we were approached to offer them for research. They want to make the eggs into stem cells."

Rod cut in, "They say there are great possibilities that stem cells will be used for treatment of diseases like cancer, degenerative diseases, heart failure, even common problems like diabetes. Do you think it's right for us to give the eggs for research?"

Don's mind began to race. He hadn't really kept up with the news. What was it he had read about embryonic and adult cells?

What should he say? The issue was complex, difficult. It impacts areas of theology, ethics, and choice.

Getting some facts

Asking for a little time to think, the pastor went to his computer and did some research. He found that stem cells possess the ability to multiply into lines with specific functions. He found that a blood stem cell can differentiate its "offspring" into multiple types of blood cells, and that from these cells all the two hundred or so specialized cells found in the human body are derived. Stem cells themselves become somewhat specialized too. In other words, a careful search in tissues may find stem cells within them, but these stem cells are sparse in number, difficult to harvest, and often will only develop into the tissue from which they were derived. So, whatever potential these "adult"

cells have, it's nowhere near as good as that found in the fertilized egg itself. Scientists have found that cells in the egg are potent stem cells that can be directed to grow, we believe, into *any* kind of human organ. The promise of an embryonic stem cell lies in this great capacity to become any kind of tissue. If a kidney or lung, heart muscle or brain cell were to be developed from such stem cells, the possibilities for replacing degenerated or ailing tissues in living patients seem enormous. Such tissues would, however, be derived at the expense of the "potential" development of a whole baby.

A fertilized egg, or one cell, will rapidly produce dozens of cells—any one of which, at this early stage, is capable of being removed and of functioning as the fertilized egg it came from. This has led to geneticists removing a single cell from an embryo and testing that cell for genetic disease.

With such a cell found to be healthy, the embryo from which it was taken has the capability of being implanted where it may continue to grow and produce a normal baby. In fact, any cell taken from the embryo possesses such potential that an individual could, if implanted in a uterus under favorable conditions, become an identical twin to the embryo from which it was derived. This potency is being sought by research scientists. Seeking this potency, scientists have looked at taking an unfertilized ovum and placing a nucleus from a regular cell within it called the *process of cloning*, but its purpose would be to develop stem cells.

What to do?

Rod and Betty had been asked to give their fertilized eggs or embryos for research. They were too old to parent these embryos; they could offer them for adoption in someone else's womb, but hundreds of thousands of such embryos are available. The question facing them, in reality, was *what to do with these fertilized eggs?*

Don scratched his head in bewilderment. Does the pastor have to be the final arbiter of ethics in these complex questions?

The next day, Don met with Rod and Betty.

"Well," he said, "I have really learned a lot, but I had to navigate past all the sites that are committed to promoting or condemning the whole idea! The Internet includes just a babble of confusion, but I actually found the National Research Council and Institute of Medicine of the National Academies the most helpful. They have printed *Guidelines for Human Embryonic Stem Cell Research*."

"But the scientific stuff doesn't help us with the ethical dilemma, pastor," interjected Betty.

"What does the Bible say about stem cell research? That is really our question," said Rod.

"We were told," added Betty, "when we had the diagnosis of the triplets, that the doctors were willing to *ablate* one of them to help the other two survive, and I'm really glad we decided to keep all three—but I don't know what we would have done if there had been six!" said Betty.

"Sometimes it's hard to know what is the greater good," said Don.

"We're sure, at our age, we don't want more children," said Rod. "And we don't know anyone that wants the eggs."

"What happens if they are not used for fertility purposes?" asked Don.

"They eventually die off or will be thrown out," said Betty, "and that's the whole problem. What a dreadful waste to let them just die off."

Don's mind went back to the advice he had given to go ahead with the in vitro fertilization. Things are never easy! As he thought about it, he remembered the sign he had seen the pro-life paraders waving, "If it's not a baby, you're not pregnant." He wondered, *If you're not pregnant, is it a baby?*

"I feel the crux of this matter," he said, "revolves around when an individual life begins. When a cell is taken to test that the fertilized egg is genetically normal, and indeed found to be normal, then the egg is implanted. Should a normal baby develop, then no one questions that its life was taken to guarantee its health, do they?"

"No," replied Betty. "But if it were an abnormal fertilized cell, carrying a dreadful disease like Tay-Sachs—which means certain death by the age of three—there are still folk who would say it should be implanted."

"That's OK for them to say, but what if it were you?" interjected Rod. "I don't see this as an abortion, because there is no pregnancy. I don't think life exists before a pregnancy starts."

"It's not about what we think," Betty said, looking at the pastor. "The question is, What does the Bible say?"

"The difficulty is that these questions are quite out of the context of Bible times," said Don. "Really, we can look for principles only. In Genesis, it says God formed Adam when He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and he became a living soul, but, of course, this 'breath of life' was not the same as a baby's first breath. It had the life force of the Creator in it."

"So, if life begins before the breath, does it start with conception, implantation, when there is blood, or *when?*" asked Rod.

"Again, the Bible is not direct in answering this question," answered Don. "We look at texts such as Psalm 139, where David talks of being known of God when he was 'curiously wrought,' as the King James Version puts it, signifying embryonic formation. But then, again, the Old Testament punishment for causing a miscarriage was not the same as for killing a person, suggesting a sliding scale of value."

Rod interjected, "But what about those texts that say 'the life is in the blood'? Does that mean that life begins when blood forms, which would only occur after some six weeks of gestational age?"

"We just don't know for sure, Rod," Don answered, "though most Christians want to avoid ever willingly destroying a pregnancy at any stage."

Betty looked imploringly at Don. "But I'm not pregnant, pastor. These are microscopic cells in a petri dish."

Just then, old man Hetherington was wheeled past in his wheelchair. His face was blank, his hands trembled. Suffering with Parkinson's disease, he

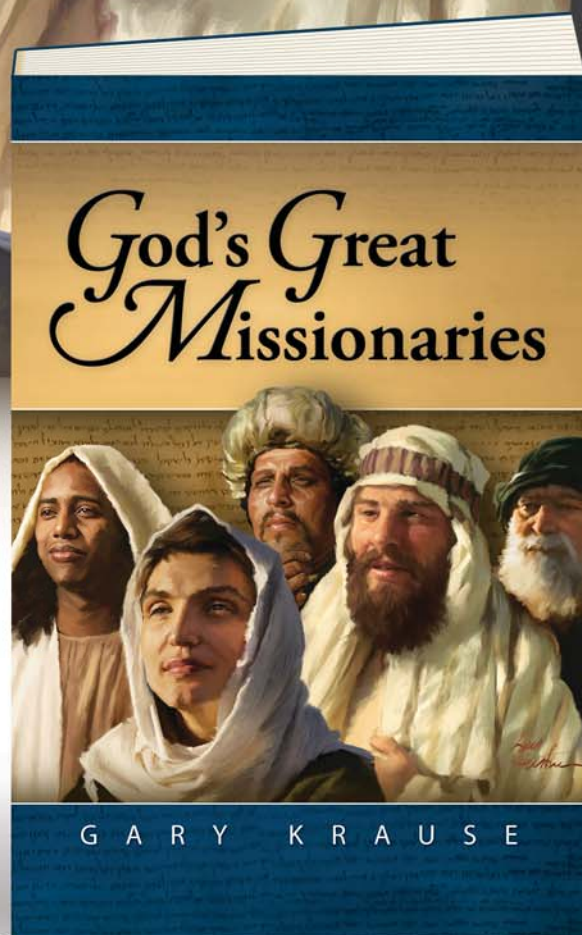


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looked pathetic. They all thought, *Could stem cell research one day reverse his condition and give him back his strength and vigor?*

Pastor Don was reflective. "I would say there is so much debate on the actual point in time that life begins that we may never be able to answer the question. However, surely, as Christians, we need to have certain principles in mind when considering such issues.

"I would list them as, first, a deep respect for human life, recognizing it as mysterious, magnificent, and God-given. I believe we have to respect human dignity, yet we do have a responsibility to advance human health. We also, as Christians, are committed to the alleviation of human suffering. Truthfulness, personal autonomy, and justice are so important to the Christian. Yet, I also feel embryos should never be created for the sole purpose of research or advancement of knowledge."

Betty interrupted, "But we *didn't* create these embryos for research!"

"I'm not saying you did," replied Don, "and in this circumstance, I'm unsure what to advise—but do feel that, even if you were to agree to research, there should be the strictest ethical handling of the tissues, with special committees overseeing the research."

Rod nodded his head. "They have those committees at the university, pastor, and they have a good representation of theologians on the committee. And, you know, pastor, it is also a Christian imperative to be involved in helping others. Christ spent a lot of His time healing the sick."

"I personally would feel better if they only took a cell or two off the embryo, and I could then consider the original embryo as a kind of 'tissue donor,'" said Betty, "and in that way, we could always bequeath the embryo to a couple later if they wanted to try and have a baby."

"Yes," said the pastor, "it would go a long way to relieving some anxieties about the whole process."

Rod and Betty looked at each other. "So, the church doesn't have rules on this, pastor?" asked Rod.

"Not our church," said Don. "After all, we are the church, and we haven't been able to come to an easy 'Thus saith the Lord.' And neither have our theologians reached a clear consensus. Perhaps this is one of those areas where we each, individually, have to come to a conclusion that we consider comfortable for us, because the church cannot be our conscience. When we do this—prayerfully and intelligently—then we permit the Spirit to guide." ■

* Rod and Betty are pseudonyms.

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Ethical considerations regarding human embryonic stem cell research

To grasp the significance of these concerns, one must appreciate the potential that is offered by embryonic stem cells and how they differ from most body cells as well as from adult stem cells. Our bodies are almost entirely made up of cells that perform highly specialized functions. Biologists have identified about 200 different cell types, such as muscle cells, nerve cells, and skin cells. Each type has a strictly defined range of activities. Working together, these specialized cells make human life possible.

Adult stem cells

The medical appeal of adult stem cells is based on their two defining characteristics: versatility and self-renewal. Once isolated and allowed to grow in the laboratory, adult stem cells could, in principle, be used to replenish certain

human tissues depleted by age or disease. However, obstacles hinder such practical applications. First, adult stem cells are scarce. They usually represent a tiny fraction of the cells in a tissue, and separating them from the other body cells is difficult. Another constraint is that their versatility is limited.

Embryonic stem cells have attracted enormous attention because they have unique capabilities. In contrast to adult stem cells, embryonic stem cells have amazing flexibility; they can become almost any cell type, a capacity called *pluripotency*. They are also self-renewing, replicating indefinitely to make more embryonic stem cells when conditions are appropriate.

Ethical concerns

Current discussion about embryonic stem cells focuses on a fundamental

question: when does human life begin?

Some Christians, basing their views on the Creation story (Gen. 2:7), believe that a human life begins with the first breath after birth. On this view, a new human life begins at the time of birth. Research with embryonic stem cells can obviously be accommodated within this position.

Other Christians believe that a new and unique person comes into existence at conception. They point to biblical evidence that prenatal life is real and valued (Ps. 139:13). This view often leads to the conclusion that, from the moment of conception, an embryo deserves the protection accorded to any other human being. From this perspective, no potential benefit to other humans could justify the destruction of a human embryo.

Still other Christians hold that the moral status of prenatal life develops gradually through many important stages, in a crescendo building to birth. Scripture speaks, for example, of having been “knit together” in the womb (Ps. 139:13), thus indicating an awareness of a developmental process. The legal status assigned to prenatal life differed from that given to an established personal life (Exod. 21:22–25). According to the developmental view, implantation is of crucial importance because further progress is impossible if an embryo does not become implanted in a uterus. Another important time is the onset of organized neurological activity. Viability, when the fetus is capable of sustained life outside the womb, is another significant step in prenatal development. While the developmental view may include the belief that early embryos have human potential and possess symbolic moral value that is worthy of respect, this view may also allow embryo research after taking into account both the stage of embryo development and the purpose of the research.

Principles

1. Respect for the gift of human life. Our Creator is the Giver and Sustainer of human life (Gen. 1:30; 2:7; Ps. 36:9; Acts 17:24–28). The Bible prescribes protection of human beings, and God holds them accountable for taking the life of another (Gen. 9:5, 6; Exod. 20:13; Deut. 24:16; Prov. 6:16, 17; Rom. 13:8–10). Scripture portrays the Creator as involved in the development of human life during pregnancy (Ps. 139:13) and stipulates penalties for those who would negligently injure a developing fetus (Exod. 21:22–25).

2. Protection of human dignity. Human beings were created in God’s own image (Gen. 1:26, 27) and thus were given personal dignity. Care must be exercised to avoid actions that would threaten or diminish the personal dignity of human beings. With reference to embryonic stem cell research, this means that embryos should not be created for purposes of research or merely for commercial gain.

3. Advancing human health. Humans can become host to the indwelling Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19; 2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 3:14–19; 5:30–32), which permits them to become reflections of God’s character while remaining mortal. This indwelling follows the awareness of God and a conscious desire to yield to His influence.

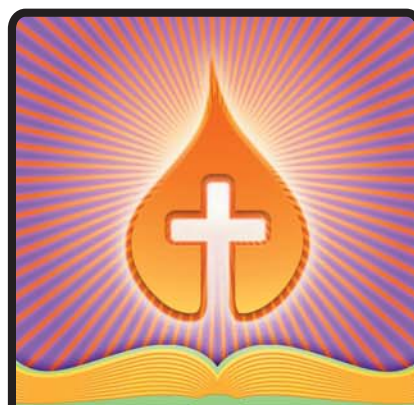
Independent life reaches the highest degree of wholeness when the Holy Spirit indwells the life. In light of this belief, Adventists promote the health of all with the objective of obtaining the highest degree of wholeness possible.

4. Alleviating human suffering. God’s plan for human beings includes a growing understanding and appreciation of the wonders of His creation (Ps. 8:3–9; 139:1–6, 13–16; Matt. 6:26–29). Efforts to understand the basic structures of life through careful research should be encouraged, especially when such investigation holds the promise of serving human health. Christians accept the responsibility to prevent suffering and preserve or restore human health whenever feasible (Luke 9:1, 2; Acts 10:38).

5. Truthfulness. Christians favor truthfulness and openness (Prov. 12:22; Eph. 4:15). Thus, research with embryonic stem cells should be governed by clear presentations of the truth about the proposed research, without exaggeration of the potential benefits or the research’s success.

6. Personal autonomy. God has given human beings freedom to think and to act, and the Creator calls on each person to make principled decisions (Gen. 3; Deut. 30:19; Gal. 5:13; 1 Pet. 2:24). Decisions about research with stored embryos should be made by those who have legitimate authority to give their consent.

7. Justice. Scripture teaches that people should be treated fairly (Deut. 10:17–20; Amos; Mic. 6:8; Matt. 5:43–48). If benefits result from stem cell research, these should be made available on the basis of medical needs and not on the basis of perceptions of social worth or wealth. ■



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- Supports prayer warriors who could commit to prayer “shifts” to maintain continuous prayer or be available as prayer partners.
- Presents a place to bring individuals into relationship with Jesus who might not feel comfortable at first in a large group setting.
- Supports the mission of the church—a place to release stress, cool off emotionally, share testimony, experience anointing services, or rest from the pressures of over-extended schedules.
- Encourages busy professionals to stop by the church during a busy week to seek God’s guidance.
- Develops a habit of prayer.
- Maintains focus on seeking the Holy Spirit’s power for evangelism.
- Avails a quiet space to listen to God.
- Gives the surrounding community a safe place to learn more about God’s love and the church’s message.

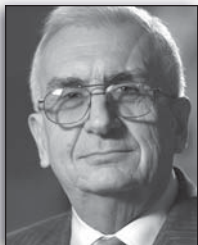
—South Pacific Division Record, March 29, 2008

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Evangelism— The heartbeat of the church: An interview with Mark Finley

**Nikolaus Satelmajer
and Willie E. Hucks II**



*Nikolaus Satelmajer,
DMin, is editor
of Ministry.*



*Willie E. Hucks II,
DMin, is associate
editor of Ministry.*

*Photos by:
Anthony Kent*

In a continuing quest to uplift the primacy of sharing the gospel worldwide, Ministry editors Nikolaus Satelmajer and Willie E. Hucks II interviewed Mark Finley, a general vice president of the world church of Seventh-day Adventists and an evangelist who has preached around the world for more than 35 years.

Nikolaus Satelmajer (NS): *The first time I saw you in action as an evangelist on television (TV) was in Mostar, Bosnia. The war had just slowed down. I was walking down the street among the rubble, and I saw a TV inside a little store. A few people were watching the program. What was your feeling as you were broadcasting worldwide for the first time?*

Mark Finley (MF): In 1995 I distinctly remember walking onto the stage in Chattanooga, Tennessee, knowing that we had six hundred and seventy-six churches tuned in to this first NET event at the same time. For some, satellite evangelism may have seemed a little impersonal, but it really was not. People identified with the messages being preached. We received faxes from all over the country like the one from a couple who said, “Our marriage is falling apart, but we came to your meetings, and Jesus has come into our lives. We’re going to give it a second chance.” When we got a message from Florida about a young drug addict who came to Christ, it wasn’t impersonal anymore. I recognized that there were tens of thousands hearing the Word.

NS: *How do you communicate to such varied audiences in different parts of the world, speaking different languages, embracing various cultures and patterns of thinking? Do you prepare differently for such an event?*

MF: I’ve conducted eighteen satellite events. This year I will conduct three more: in São Paulo, Brazil; Johannesburg, South Africa; and Orlando, Florida. When I began satellite preaching back in 1995, I tried to preach in forty languages to forty different cultures at once through forty different translators. The same sermon, translated by that many persons to that many audiences. Soon we discovered that it was not the most efficient way to evangelize. We then went to ten major locations in the world and did satellite events attempting to tailor the message to the culture. The secret is contextualization. For example, African illustrations are different than Asian stories. Each culture has its own uniqueness. I spend a lot of time trying to understand the city I am preaching in, the customs of the people and their historical background.



Graphics also help in contextualization. Preaching the resurrection in the Philippines and describing blue-eyed, blond people coming out of the grave doesn’t make sense. You’ve got to have Asian features. Likewise, storytelling must also be culturally sensitive. If I’m preaching in Africa, I’ll use a lot more village stories and tell village-based parables as the African mind-set is

much more story oriented. If I'm in Asia, I recognize the influence of the family and extended family. The biblical truth is the same, but how we adapt that truth is different. I ask my host to send me stories and illustrations in advance. There have been times I have had fifteen translators, and for two hours before the meeting I reviewed the sermon with them and asked them what illustrations they would use if they were preaching. I listened to them and contextualized my preaching.

Willie Hucks (WH): *How do you prepare pastors and churches for a NET series?*

MF: I use what I call five eternal verities of evangelism. First, churches grow when there's spiritual renewal. So we begin by making pastors aware of the necessity for spiritual renewal in the local church. That means prayer bands and praying for individual people. Second, churches grow when members are equipped and trained to serve. We develop a countdown schedule on equipping and training members, helping them to discover their gifts. My wife, Ernestine, often conducts extensive seminars on soul winning and evangelism for local churches preparing for our evangelistic series. Third, churches grow when there is multifaceted community outreach. We begin to look at different kinds of community outreach—small groups, Bible study ministry, seminar ministry, health ministry, family life ministry—events that make an impact on the community. Fourth, churches grow when there's a reaping event. We encourage churches to focus on some reaping evangelistic event each year. Every outreach program of the church must ultimately lead to and culminate in a reaping event. Finally, churches grow when there is nurture.

One sure way to fail in evangelism is to do no preparation. If you think that a NET evangelistic event is a panacea for soul winning and all you have to do is turn on the projector, you will fail. Six months before the series you'll need to organize prayer events, look at the names of every former Adventist

in the community, pray for them and visit them, look for the names of every non-Adventist spouse, look for young people who are not in the Adventist Church any more and plan to visit each of them. Organize visitation teams, hold multifaceted seminars in the church, and be involved in intense prayer sessions. With such preparation, the meetings will be a success. It's the old biblical principle—whatever you sow, you reap.

WH: *You mentioned six months as a time frame. Do you generally need that much lead time before a meeting starts?*

MF: I like at least six months; that would be a minimum. Typically, I take twelve to eighteen months to prepare. Right now we are getting ready for a campaign to be held in Forest Lake Church in Apopka, Florida, five months from now. We have just concluded a series on "Empowered by the Spirit" for all churches in the area. These are studies on the ministry of the Holy Spirit—the outpouring of the Spirit, the reception of the Spirit, the true and false counterfeit gifts of the Spirit, Pentecost repeated, end-time symbols of the Spirit—a five-part series on spiritual renewal that will lead to a deeper prayer ministry. My wife is training seventy to eighty lay people as lay Bible workers for Orlando. Bible instructors and a significant number of young people will be involved in a multifaceted approach to reach the city of Orlando for Christ. The master plan to prepare that city for the final campaign will take nine months.

NS: *What got you started in satellite evangelism?*

MF: The history of NET evangelism is an interesting one. Back in 1995 the Adventist Church in North America was looking at their growth patterns. Evangelism was losing its effectiveness in certain population segments. In strategic planning sessions, the questions came up: "What can we do to lift the vision of our pastors, inspire them with possibilities for outreach and evangelism? What can we do that will make a major impact in North America?" We began to explore

the possibilities of technology. At that time, no other denomination had used satellite evangelism in any significant way in a series of evangelistic meetings. A few years earlier, George Vandeman conducted a seminar in eight locations via satellite. In Southern California, Warren Judd, Dan Houghton, and I and a number of others uplinked a lay training seminar to about ten churches, and we sensed satellite evangelism had real possibilities. It was electrifying for Adventists to see these messages come into their churches. In 1996 our evangelistic meetings via satellite were uplinked to forty countries in multiple languages.

NS: *I was one of the pastors that participated in Canada and I recall the enthusiasm of our congregation and active participation in that event.*

MF: It was exciting to see church members enthused about evangelism again. The Adventist Church has now conducted two hundred satellite events in almost every continent and baptized almost one and a half million people. We just had our first satellite event in the Swahili language called Safari Africa from Nairobi, Kenya.

NS: *A pastor who may have a number of churches, inundated with all kinds of programs, may be told that NET evangelism is needed to be successful. What would you say to such a pastor?*

MF: As you look at your district of three or four churches with less than one hundred members each, think of it this way: "When can you get some of these evangelists to come and preach in your churches?" It's unlikely they will come. But you can bring them in via satellite. You can also enjoy top quality music. Begin planning strategically. Motivate your members. Get them involved, and have them invite their friends. Even if you don't have a large advertising budget, a motivated church is a great asset. At the end, if you baptize even a few people in that small church, that's going to make a difference. You will have high-impact, low-cost evangelism.

NS: So this is a resource rather than another program to do in your church.

MF: Very much so.

NS: Every age labels itself and labels the past. Our time is known as the postmodern era. One characteristic of postmodernism is a lack of interest or ability to hear the message of the Bible. What is your perspective on that? Are people listening?

MF: Essentially, postmodernism is the absence of God in life. Compare our times with that of Paul. Today we have a movie called *Gladiator*. We look at the screen, and we see people killing one another. Ancient Rome invented *Gladiator*; only you went to the colosseum to see the real gladiator. A lot of the drama we see on the screen today is an imitation of the first century. Or take luxury. The Romans had feasts that lasted for months. Theirs was a morally twisted, godless society. Or take sports and entertainment. The Romans built great amphitheatres and stadiums in every city—just for the purpose of pleasure through sports, dramas, and plays.

But Rome was not all pleasure. The city had a scholarly, intellectual side. The Romans had a philosophical bent that went back to Socrates and Plato. The only formal religion of the time—Judaism—made little impact on the daily life of the average person. Against that background of pleasure, entertainment, culture, philosophy, military might, denial of the true God resulting in the meaninglessness of life, Paul talked about the foolishness of preaching and how the gospel must break through and meet the needs of human hearts in a confused and meaningless world.

Now, turn to our times. The command of Jesus for His church to preach the gospel has not become less important because of postmodern society. There is no place in the Bible that urges the evangelist to use the sociological approach or a psychological agenda. I don't read in the Bible anywhere, "Go you therefore and philosophize"; the risen Christ says, "Go ye therefore and preach the gospel." To be faithful to the biblical

command, the church must be faithful to Christ's commission. Should we preach God's message in language that people understand? Certainly. Should we speak to the contemporary needs of society from a biblical base? Of course. Should the church continually try new ways to reach contemporary society? Definitely. Should we adjust the biblical demands and message to accommodate a secular lifestyle. Never!

WH: How have you seen evangelism and evangelistic methods change over the years? Where do you see evangelism going?

MF: I've been in the Adventist ministry for forty years now. Back in the early 1970s when I went into evangelism, our major thrust was propositional truth. If I preached, for example, on the state of the dead, my concern was to prove clearly and powerfully that death is but a rest until the resurrection. So I took every text to prove the biblical truth about death and challenge all the erroneous interpretations. How did I prove to a largely Sunday-keeping audience that Saturday is the seventh day of the week? Again, through propositional truth.

Over the years, the primary question has shifted. Society no longer necessarily asks, *What is truth?* Its current concern—is truth relevant? In spite of this change, I still make clear and plain the essence of biblical teaching, but I spend less time trying to prove the nature of death and more time trying to provide the assurance of God's hope and resurrection for those who are facing death. I still powerfully proclaim the truth of the Sabbath, but I also include the significance of rest in Christ. So we blend the propositional with the relational.

I see another change in evangelism today. Revelation 14:6, 7 speaks of the everlasting gospel to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. Evangelism today must be multicultural. The world has become smaller. The evangelist must understand diversity and be sensitive to people from different backgrounds.

I believe that our world is headed for stupendous crisis, and when that occurs, there will be a readiness, an openness,

and a receptivity to the gospel, such as we have not experienced before. Societies in transition are much more open to the gospel. However, if our skills and gifts for evangelism are atrophied because we do not take the opportunity now to preach, we will not be prepared for the doors God is going to open in the near future. The central point is keep preaching the gospel, keep preaching, keep preaching, and let God move through your life with the Holy Spirit. Some day soon He's going to open up hundreds of hearts and minds, maybe tens of thousands, for you to preach to.

No longer does the evangelist preach and people listen. Now evangelism emphasizes interactivity and connectivity between the evangelist and the audience. In our Discoveries '08 satellite series from October twenty-four through November twenty-nine in Orlando, we will attempt to make our meetings more interactive. We will also develop an interactive Web page with YouTube opportunities for questions, and we will make it possible both personally and electronically for people to connect and interact. They'll be able to see themselves on the screen live and ask questions during our satellite series. I'll have a live chat room after the meeting, and anybody can log on a computer, and we'll interact with them. We will have outlines that we will review with people and lessons that they participate in.

WH: What impact has the act of preaching, the act of evangelizing, had on your own spiritual growth?

MF: For me, evangelism is life transforming. It drives me to my knees in prayer, as well as to the Word of God. Preaching each evening in an evangelistic meeting is spiritually exhilarating. Let's suppose the evangelistic meeting starts at seven in the evening. I'm in the auditorium between five-thirty and six. I sit in a chair on the stage and look at each of the seats before me. I imagine here's where Mr. Brown who's sixty-eight years old is going to sit. Here's where that young single mother with two children sit. Here's where that lovely

young couple in their early twenties sit. I visualize the audience entering the hall and pray for each of them. I sit there and meditate on the power of God's Word and seek God for them. It's a spiritually revolutionary time for

aisle. There was something about seeing them come to Christ and become part of the Adventist message. Within the last few months, I was engaged in a major campaign in Africa, and what a joy it was to see that some of the young people we baptized in 1971, over

a psychological phenomenon called "programmed nonresponse"—a loss of ability to respond. If your intellect is informed and your emotions are aroused and you are not given an opportunity to respond, you may gradually lose your ability to respond. The more you deny the reality of what's going on in your life and fail to respond



me. I get up and go over my sermon again and again and again. Every time I preach it, it's like it's burning in my own soul and I can't wait to tell the story of Jesus. Any pastor who is simply involved in church board meetings and in church finances, but not in outreach, is stunting their own spiritual growth. Any pastor who is not involved in Bible studies, small groups, or some form of evangelistic outreach can easily become overburdened and burned out in ministry. Soul winning is the lifeblood of ministry. I've been doing evangelism for forty years and I can't wait until the next campaign comes.

NS: *You and evangelism just go together. When you look back, who are some of the people who have inspired you?*

MF: My first evangelistic meeting was in Trenton, Georgia, at the bottom of a hill in a tent during the rainy season. There were nights when the tent had a few inches of water covering the floor. I preached to about one hundred and fifty people and do not remember baptizing a person. But I sensed that I received a deeper infilling of the Holy Spirit in that series. God did something in my own life. Later during my first major evangelistic series, I remember making a call and seeing people come down the

thirty-five years ago, are now in Africa as missionaries. People ask why am I an evangelist? Because Jesus was. God had only one Son, and He was an evangelist!

You asked about people who influenced me in evangelism. The early pastors that you intern with help to set the tone for your whole ministry. I pastored with Pastor O. J. Mills in Hartford, Connecticut. Pastor Mills had a passion for souls. I thank God for him. In my first district he said to me, "Mark, I want you to concentrate on giving Bible studies." So, I spent fifteen to twenty hours a week giving Bible studies. That made a significant difference in my life. I also worked with Elder W. D. Frazee. He taught me how to make altar calls. I remember he said to me, "Mark, I'm going to make an altar call tonight, can you go down and greet the people?" I said, "I'm uncomfortable with that, and don't think I can do it." And he worked with me kindly to help me understand how to make an appeal and minister to those who came forward. I long to see the power of God come down in my evangelistic meetings.

In some sectors of the church, we have moved away from the whole idea of appeals. This reminds me of



emotionally, the more you lose the ability to respond. If a person comes to church week after week and there is no opportunity to respond in any way—no hand raising, no card to fill out, no standing, no coming forward, a spiritual inertia is created and apathy fostered. Impression without expression leads to depression. An evangelist must aim not simply to inform, but to transform. Transformation begins with that first step of responding to Christ.

WH: *Why do you think preachers today don't make appeals like they used to?*

MF: Some preachers feel that appeals are too emotional. Spurgeon said it well: a sinner has a heart as well as a head. I understand Billy Graham has a number of letters in his files from psychologists—letters that affirm his making appeals. They may not agree with the content of his preaching, but they do agree with the importance of giving people an opportunity to respond simply from the aspect of inner healing. They believe it is cathartic for people to come forward. Quite fascinating. So preachers must not forget that people are physical, mental,

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spiritual beings. They have emotions as well as an intellect, and the gospel must appeal to every aspect of life. Another reason why some preachers hesitate to make appeals is their failure to understand the role of appeals. Why make an appeal if God already knows? Proverbs 16 tells us that when we have certain thoughts and act on them, our thoughts are strengthened. Thoughts lead to actions, and actions lead to further thoughts. So when we make appeals, we cooperate with the Holy Spirit to strengthen and intensify the thought patterns so that the individual will be solidly committed to Christ. Our responsibility as preachers is to give our audiences the opportunity to respond to the gospel and not worry how many will respond. We need to leave that with God.

NS: *Let's talk a little bit about your upcoming series in Florida. What are your dreams for it and what counsel would you give to congregations in anticipation of the series?*

MF: The series is called Discoveries '08. It will be held in Orlando, Florida, and broadcast via Hope Channel throughout North America in English, French, Spanish, and Portuguese, and rebroadcast to the whole world. We want to encourage every single church

to participate. We'll use new graphics and will have new sermon content. Discoveries '08 will take the viewer on a journey. The ancient past casts light on the present and provides principles to change our lives today. So, for example, we'll travel to ancient Egypt, examine the pyramids, review the great desire of the ancients to have eternal life, and we'll talk about Jesus. We'll travel to Petra, see human sacrifice, and talk about the sacrifice of Christ. We'll travel to Pompeii, see people living in luxury, visit their homes, see how in an instant that city was wiped out, and we'll talk about the coming of Christ and how to develop a greater value system than the things of this world. We will travel to the caves of the Waldenses and see the need to have a basis for our faith in Scripture. We will go to the island of Patmos and discover a message for our time in the book of Revelation. We will travel to Rome and look at how church and state united in the Middle Ages and learn end-time lessons. So, we'll preach every doctrine of Scripture, but base it in the ancient past. One thing about the contemporary world, with the postmodern mind-set, there's a sense of mystery—a desire to understand how the future will be impacted by the past. Many people today are not religious, but they are spiritual, and they look to the ancient past and want to find

answers to solve the riddle of life. It'll be fresh, new, and relevant.

WH: *Is this going to be podcast also?*

MF: Yes, we'll be podcasting, webcasting streaming video. Every bit of technology that we can use, we're going to use.

NS: *I have one more question. If Jesus comes in your lifetime, what would you like to be doing when He returns?*

MF: There are two dreams I have when Jesus comes. One is to be preaching and making an appeal, seeing Jesus come, and ascending to meet Him. But there is another dream that I want more. I'd like to be having family worship with my wife, my three children, and their spouses and see every single one of them saved when He comes. That would be the greatest joy of my life.

NS: *Looking back historically, our early pioneers didn't go to places because there was an assurance of success, but because that's what needed to be done.*

MF: Exactly. If evangelism becomes a numbers game, it makes a real mockery of God's calling. Many young thinking pastors have tuned out evangelism because they see it only as how many people can be manipulated into baptism. But evangelism is the proclamation of the gospel and the truth of God's Word—to present the indictment of the Holy Spirit, allowing God to move hearts and transform lives. It's the essence of God's highest calling. God doesn't call me to success; He calls me to faithfulness. And if I am faithful, He takes upon Himself the responsibility for the success of the meetings. If young preachers keep that in mind, they will not weary themselves or become anxious about success. Preach God's Word and He'll take care of the rest.

WH: *Thank you so much for blessing our readers with your insight and experiences.*

M

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"Comfort, comfort
my people, says your
God." Isaiah. 40:1

"When this
gospel
shall be
presented
in its
fullness
to the
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will accept
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The biblical canon: Do we have the right Bible?

John C. Peckham



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Dan Brown's novel *The Da Vinci Code* became famous or infamous for suggesting a romantic relationship between Mary Magdalene and Jesus. A lesser known charge of this work however, is its frequent assertion that the biblical canon was arbitrarily imposed by church authorities in the fourth century A.D. and has little or no inherent authority. Brown also suggests that there were other sacred books with equal, or even greater, validity than the Bible. It is widely recognized that Brown's fictional retelling of history includes glaring inaccuracies at nearly every turn. Even though a brief survey of history would easily discredit Brown's fanciful and fictional hypotheses, the question of canonicity deserves a careful study. In fact, the essential root of the question is even now under heavy discussion in scholarship. This central issue pertaining to biblical canon may be summarized in two closely related questions: Is the origin of the canon divine or human? What or who determined the contents and authority of the canon? The answers to these questions ground the conception of the nature and authority of the Bible.

Presuppositions and definitions

Diverse and competing definitions and interpretations regarding the canon exist in scholarship. What is the reason for such diverse interpretation? Presuppositions may be identified as major factors. In matters of history, it is important to recognize that statements presented as

fact contain not only the transmission of objective data, but also the interpretation of that data. Indeed, it is impossible to communicate history without the inclusion of interpretation. Such interpretations, however, may or may not be accurate. This becomes a special problem when the conclusions communicated by the historian or scholar are uncritically received as correct, without recognition that the presentation includes interpretation impacted by presuppositions of the author.

Thus, definitions of canonicity are greatly impacted at the level of presuppositions, whether these presuppositions are expressed or implied. The crucial presupposition regards the *origin* of the biblical books. In particular, a major driving force of the diversity of canon definitions is the preconception regarding the possibility or impossibility of divine revelation. Is the canon determined by humans or by God? If one rules out the possibility that God has communicated about Himself to humans, one will also rule out the divine appointment of the canon. On the other hand, faith in divine self-revelation would permit a definition which views the canon as a divinely appointed standard.

Two major definitions of canon

For the sake of this discussion, let us consider two main definitions of canonicity which flow from these positions. The first, *community canon*, views the canon as "something officially or authoritatively imposed upon certain literature."¹ Here the canon is defined as a set of writings selected by the community as a standard. Accordingly, canonicity is viewed as imposed upon the writings that do not necessarily merit canonicity. Thus, the contents of that canon may be flexible, and the authority resides in the community to select the writings in the canon used for theology.

The second definition, *intrinsic canon*, holds that the canon was *determined* by God, and *recognized* (not *determined*) by humans.² Here, the books of Scripture are intrinsically canonical due to their divine origin. This inherent canonical authority is bestowed by divine authority, independent of human recognition for its inherent authority. Only the divine origin gives the books their authority; the recognition of that divine origin leads to the proper function of the canon in the lives of individuals and believers.

Thus, the formative factor of the possibility of divine revelation often leads to the difference between the position that the community *determines* the canon and the position that God

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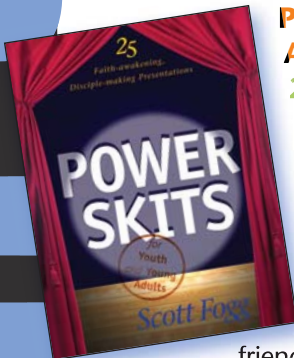
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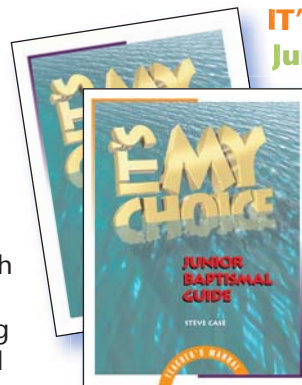
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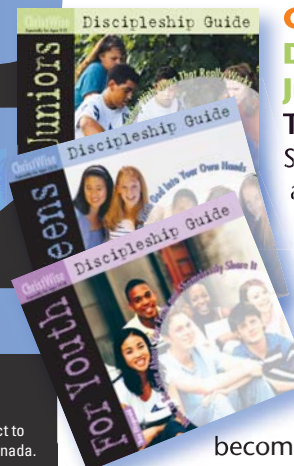
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determines the canon, with the community recognizing the canon. In the former, the books are granted their place in the canon by humans, while in the latter, God grants the placement in the canon. This difference is crucial to the nature of the canon. If one states that the community makes such determination, then the focus will be placed on the history of that determination and the possibility of contemporary changes in the scope of that canon. If one, on the other hand, believes that God determines the canon, the central question is how the community should recognize the scope of that canon.

Implications of the definitions

According to the community-canon definition, any data that does not include specified lists of canonical books is dismissed as lacking relevance. Notably, in this view the quotations and usage of the canonical books in early church ages, the first to fourth century, are not evidence of an authoritative canon since they are not canon lists, and thus do not meet the requirements of this definition. Rather, the data deemed conclusive for the history of the formation of the canon is restricted to the sample of extant lists of books that have come down to us through history. This will then lead to a fourth century A.D. dating, based on the Council of Carthage in A.D. 397, or later, for the formation of the canon since lists from before this time are few and deemed inconclusive.³ Admittedly, this is an argument from silence, since we only have what has come down to us through history.

However, if the canon is approached from a different definition, the history then is interpreted much differently. The history of canon lists is a valid endeavor of study in its own right. However, if one applies the intrinsic-canon definition, then such history should not be taken to provide conclusive answers regarding the rightful scope or authority of the canon. It may provide information about the books accepted by the author of a given document and perhaps to a specific community, but it does not provide much information beyond that which reaches to the level of the merits of the

canonical books, or intrinsic canonicity. Thus, the intrinsic-canon approach will apply criteria to identify the books that God determined and intended to be a part of the canon.

Furthermore, this intrinsic-canon approach values the internal data of Scripture that supports the crucial need to correctly identify the divinely intended canon. The Old Testament (OT) explicitly mentions divine revelation and the intentional preservation of that revelation as an authority for the community.⁴ The New Testament (NT) records abundant evidence that supports the existence of an OT canon and its acceptance by Jesus who passed it on to His followers.⁵ The NT is also clear about its own authority as the Word of God.⁶ Thus, it seems that internally, the biblical writers suppose an authoritative collection of OT and NT books, in other words, a canon. Also of interest, although not conclusive, is the early record of the usage by the church documented in the writings of the early church fathers.⁷ I suggest that if we accept the reality of divine revelation to humans, then we should adopt the intrinsic-canon definition and focus on the correct identification of the books themselves based on criteria that identify the books as sound, reliable conduits of divine revelation.

Suggested criteria for the recognition of the divinely determined canon

The main criteria that aid in the recognition of the divinely appointed canon include: (1) divinely commissioned authorship, (2) consistency with other revelation, and (3) self-authentication of divine purpose. Divinely commissioned authorship simply means that the author has divine authority to transmit revelation with such divine commission seen in the work of prophets throughout the OT. In the NT, this commission is seen in the work of apostles and first generation Christians who were directly connected to the apostles and thus had apostolic guidance available.⁸ This, of course, requires that the books be written during the time of the prophets and apostles, respectively. The second criterion, consistency with other

revelation, requires that the contents of the books must not contradict, but be in accord with all past revelation (Deut. 13:1–3; Mal. 3:6; Isa. 8:20; Matt. 5:17, 18; Matt. 24:35).⁹ The last criterion, self-authentication of divine purpose, is perhaps the most important but also the most difficult to identify objectively. It means that true canonical merit lies in the action of God in the revelation, inspiration, and preservation of the books and may be recognized in the contents of the books.¹⁰

It should be noted, however, that this presentation of the criteria and application is necessarily oversimplified. I am not suggesting that the mere presentation of these criteria lays to rest the questions about canonicity. However, it does move the question from the history of canon lists to the question of the rightful, intrinsic place in the canon of the books themselves. It would be naïve to believe that the debate would be quieted based on this perspective. However, it seems quite valid to move from this definition of canon to an investigation of the books themselves to a decision based on their merits as canonical. I have personally conducted just such an investigation and am satisfied that the 39 books of the OT and the 27 books of the NT do in fact meet all criteria of canonicity and are thus worthy of acceptance as the divinely commissioned word of God, authoritative for all faith and practice.¹¹ Moreover, I have found no other books that can meet these criteria.¹² Therefore, I have concluded that the 66-book canon is the correctly recognized revelation of God.

At this point, the issue of the closing of the canon must be briefly addressed. Because the revelations contained in the OT and NT contain all the necessary revelations of God's activity in the history of salvation, the canon is fittingly closed by the NT writings. The canonical books contain purposely selected information that make up the full revelation of God in Jesus Christ. The NT teaches that Christ fulfilled the entire OT as the complete revelation of God (Matt. 5:17). Moreover, Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would guide the apostles into "all truth" (John 16:13). If we have the authentic, divinely commissioned apostolic writings

along with the OT, we have all canonical revelation and no need exists for further covenant revelation. This, however, does not mean that the Holy Spirit no longer bestows the prophetic gift; but, it does mean that no postapostolic prophet will be canonical.

Summary and conclusions

It is no coincidence that these criteria lead to the recognition of the 66-book canon. These books were providentially preserved through the agency of the church, and further proof that God has aided in the recognition of these books. However, without supposing this as fact, one may still come to recognize this same collection of books through the application of criteria such as those suggested in this article. One who does not already believe that God has communicated revelation to humanity may suspend judgment and proceed to engage the Bible on its own terms. The awareness of such presuppositions, then, may allow movement past the a priori dismissal of revelation to the matter of how one might recognize such revelation if it existed.

The church, on the other hand, operates in the arena of faith and cannot operate within the framework of secular presuppositions. To be sure, there is room for patient dialogue, but the pressure to adopt common presuppositions would drastically impact the church. Frankly, the believer has the same right to their presuppositions or worldview as any others. The believer who affirms faith in the possibility or actuality of divine revelation will be able to employ these standards in recognizing the divine merits of the canon without accepting that the canon is determined by a community or tradition. Such an approach may aid believers to further ground their faith in the Bible and may also facilitate an unbeliever's ability to honestly engage the issue of the scope of the canonical books, sift through interpretations, and potentially come to faith in the Bible as the recognized revelation of God. Concurrently, the church can continue to testify of the life-changing power of the Bible through the Holy Spirit and

confidently utilize it as the authoritative rule of faith and practice.

In summary, then, the canon of Scripture consists of books of divine revelation appointed by God to serve as an authoritative rule of faith and practice. These books are, afterward, recognized by the community to be divinely commissioned, whether prophetic or apostolic, of proper antiquity, consistent with previous revelation, and self-authenticating. On the basis of its intrinsic canonicity, Scripture is accepted and used as the revelation of God. I propose that all 66 books of the Protestant canon belong to the divinely inspired, preserved, and intended canon of Scripture, to which no books may be removed or added. As such, the canon of Scripture is the only authoritative and trustworthy foundation for theology and practice. ■

- 1 James A. Sanders, "The Issue of Closure in the Canonical Process," in *The Canon Debate*, eds. Lee Martin McDonald and James A. Sanders (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), 252.
- 2 "By virtue of their inspiration, and its resultant internal self-authentication and self-validation, biblical books were 'recognized' as canonical." Gerhard F. Hasel, "Divine Inspiration and the Canon of the Bible," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 5/1 (1994): 69.
- 3 It should be noted that there is an abundance of data open to interpretation. Much of the interpretation, as noted previously, is directly tied to the pre-existent definition of what constitutes canonicity.
- 4 God commanded Moses that His revelation be written, preserved, and passed on (Exod. 17:14; 24:4; 31:18; 34:27; Deut. 10:5; 31:9, 25, 26). After Moses, other inspired writers such as Joshua, Samuel, Isaiah, Jeremiah, just to name a few, carried on the recording of revelation (Josh. 24:26; 1 Sam. 10:25; Isa. 30:8; Jer. 30:2). Later writers referred to and revered earlier Scriptures (1 Kings 2:3; Ezra 3:2; Jer. 26:18; Ezek. 14:14, 20; Dan. 9:2; Mic. 4:1–3, etc.).
- 5 Jesus is clear about the authority of the OT (Matt. 21:42; 22:29; 26:54, 56; Luke 24:44, 45; John 2:22; 5:39; 10:35; 17:12). The rest of the NT testifies to the OT writings as authoritative Scripture (Acts 17:2; 18:28; Rom. 1:2; 4:3; 9:17; 10:11; 11:2; 1 Cor. 15:3, 4; Gal. 3:8; 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:20, 21).
- 6 1 Tim. 5:18 quotes directly from Luke 10:7. Peter declares the writings of Paul to be Scripture along with the OT and collects them (2 Pet. 3:15, 16). Moreover, the gospel is regarded as the very word of God (Acts 8:14; 11:1; 12:24; 13:46; 17:13; 18:11; 19:20). Paul is clear that he does not speak on his own authority but by that of God (Rom. 15:15; 1 Cor. 2:13; Gal. 1:12; Eph. 3:5; 1 Thess. 2:13) and commands his letters to be read (Col. 4:16; 1 Thess. 5:27). Finally, Revelation testifies of itself as direct revelation from God and adds that no one should change its words (Rev. 1:1; 22:18, 19).

- 7 For instance, the NT canonical books were so widely used that the entire NT except 11 verses could be reconstructed from the church fathers of the second to fourth centuries. For a full tabulation see Norman L. Geisler and William E. Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible: Revised and Expanded* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 419–433.
- 8 In *Against Apion* 1.8, Josephus points out a clear succession from Moses to the prophets who testified with "an exact succession of prophets." He also suggests a closed OT canon at his time (ca. A.D. 70) since he states "no one has been so bold as either to add anything to them [the OT], to take anything from them, or to make any change in them." An example of the importance of authorship in the NT is Paul's emphasis of his handwriting that marked the letter as truly from him (1 Cor. 16:21; Gal. 6:11; Col. 4:18; 2 Thess. 3:17; Philem. 19).
- 9 An important historical example of this criterion was the case of Serapion at Rhossus, who originally allowed usage of the so-called *Gospel of Peter* but later rejected it altogether because it implied docetism. Eusebius, 216. *H.E.* 6.12.3.
- 10 It should be noted that inspiration alone does not equal canonicity. It is true that in numerous places the Bible records prophetic books that are not part of the canon. Other books, such as *Shepherd of Hermas*, were considered by some to be inspired but were not recognized as canonical because they did not meet the other criteria, such as apostolicity. Inspiration is thus required, but is not the only indication of a canonical book.
- 11 Of course, the primary objection that might be leveled against this claim is the questions of dating and authorship that are popular in historical critical approaches to the Bible. I would contend that the conclusions that contradict the internal testimony of the books are speculative, inconclusive, and contested. There is a great deal of data that may support the prophetic and apostolic authorship of the OT and NT respectively. Some data that supports such a position is laid out in studies such as Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1998), and D. A. Carson, Douglas J. Moo, and Leon Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992). For an investigation of the history, consult F. F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), and Lee Martin McDonald, *The Formation of the Christian Biblical Canon* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995).
- 12 The OT Apocrypha are ruled out by the Jews' self-testimony regarding the cessation of prophecy after the time of Artaxerxes (ca. 450 B.C.). Josephus, *Against Apion* 1.8, clearly specifies that the authoritative prophets were only "till the reign of Artaxerxes" (Cf. 1 Macc. 9:27). Regarding the NT, the *Shepherd of Hermas* might be the closest book but was ruled out because, according to the Muratorian Fragment, it was written in the mid-second century and thus not by an apostle. Recently touted, so-called gnostic books, such as the *Gospel of Thomas*, fail all the criteria with pseudonymous authorship, contradiction to previous revelation, and a total lack of evidence of divine origin or appointment.

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Down from the pulpit

Clifford Owusu-Gyamfi



Clifford Owusu-Gyamfi is the district pastor for Yeji in the Central Ghana Conference, Kumasi, Ashanti, Ghana.

After I had finished preaching, a woman of about 35 approached me and confessed, with tears, that she had been committing sexual sin. After all these years, after all the sermons that she had heard me preach, she continued in this practice. She had felt bad but couldn't let go. Then she met me *away from the pulpit*, we spoke one-on-one, and through the grace of God she was made whole.

Many have wanted just this: to meet the pastor one-on-one and talk about their anxious lives. Some have had their difficult questions answered, many have been blessed by a word of prayer, and all have been glad to have the hearing, sympathetic ear from their shepherd.

Some preachers disappear after coming down from the pulpit. Many congregations have admired preachers whose hands they never had the chance to even shake.

I myself always disappeared after the pulpit discourse, but recently I discovered how wrong that was. I now know that, in fact, I can have a more powerful ministry away from the pulpit—yet still near the pulpit—than I can *in* the pulpit.

The ministering minister

I had just preached a sermon, and afterward a woman came and said, "Pastor, the Lord has inspired hope into my life through your sermon. Thank you."

"Why?" I asked. "Have you been going through hopeless circumstances?"

She sighed and began her sad story, and afterward we prayed together. Later I found that our discussion brought some big changes in her life. Through the mercy of God, I was able to help her away from the pulpit in ways that, in the pulpit, I never could.

Sermons fall into ears like the sower's seeds do in the soil. At the end of each sermon some will cry out saying, " 'What shall we do?' " (Acts 2:37, NIV). Such a question can be asked only away from the pulpit. These are precious moments to give help, guidance, and encouragement to your members as they struggle with life's questions and challenges. These are, in fact, precious moments to minister to souls the way Jesus did.

Christ's example

Jesus preached for a long time on the mountain. Thousands heard Him. He taught them principles of the kingdom of heaven, and they marveled at His gracious and powerful message. Ellen White says, "The Saviour's divine love and tenderness drew the hearts of men to Him." "When he came down from the mountainside, large crowds followed him" (Matt. 8:1, NIV), and Jesus had time for all of them.

Thus it must be with ministers who dedicate time to individual members, one-on-one. Our ministry does not end with the spoken Word, for there are other things we can do and must do after coming down from the pulpit.

The list

1. *Take time to shake hands.* Some congregations have a tradition of the pastor shaking hands after every worship service. Extending a handshake is an expression of friendship, but don't always have them come to you. Take the time to walk over to a member, shake their hand, and say, "God bless you," or "God loves you." Maybe that simple gesture will help heal a broken heart or put a spark of encouragement into a discouraged soul.

2. *Take time to hear them.* A preacher must never be separated from people and must love them. At times you may be in a rush, but you shouldn't avoid your members, for they want somebody to listen to them. If you don't have time to hear the people, then don't steal their time by having them listen to you. The disciples had wanted Jesus to send the people away (Mark 6:36), but Jesus stopped them. After receiving attention from the congregation, Jesus gave attention to those individuals in it. After preaching Christ's love, you must lovingly

minister one-on-one. Nothing more than just taking a few minutes to listen to someone can make all the difference in their world.

3. *Take time for visitors.* All churches, at some time or another, have visitors with their names listed in the visitors' record book. They might have been invited by family members or friends or perhaps they came on their own. They're there, and visitors need to be recognized and made to feel as if they belong. We are good at recognizing them, but poor at making them feel as though they are part of us. As a preacher, before leaving the pulpit, make the visitors understand the joy that they've brought to your church congregation by coming, and give them a special welcome. Then meet them after the service has ended, and you could, in a few minutes, do more good than your discourse from the pulpit ever could.

4. *Call them by their names.* One major trait of successful pastors is that they know their church members by name. If you can't recognize the names of some members, this would suggest

that you've forgotten them. I once embarrassed myself when a church member came to me, and I could not recall her name. In John 10:14, Jesus demonstrated a striking ministerial ethic, "I know my sheep" (NIV). Do you know your sheep? Can you call them by name? After preaching about the ancient saints, mingle with the living ones. Call on them by name and say to one, "Sister Janet, happy Sabbath. How is your husband's condition?" Or say to another, "Brother Antwi, how are you? I didn't see you at the midweek prayer meeting. Is everything alright?" Jesus will one day call you by your name. Why not do likewise to your members?

5. *Don't be too busy.* You say, "I'm not able to meet people after coming down from the pulpit because I'm so busy with other pressing issues." I say, let these other issues sit by the wayside. Give of yourself, one-on-one, to your members. Little else in your ministry can be that important. And, as you help others with their burdens, you will be relieved from your own. By hearing their joy, your joy will increase. By praying for them, you

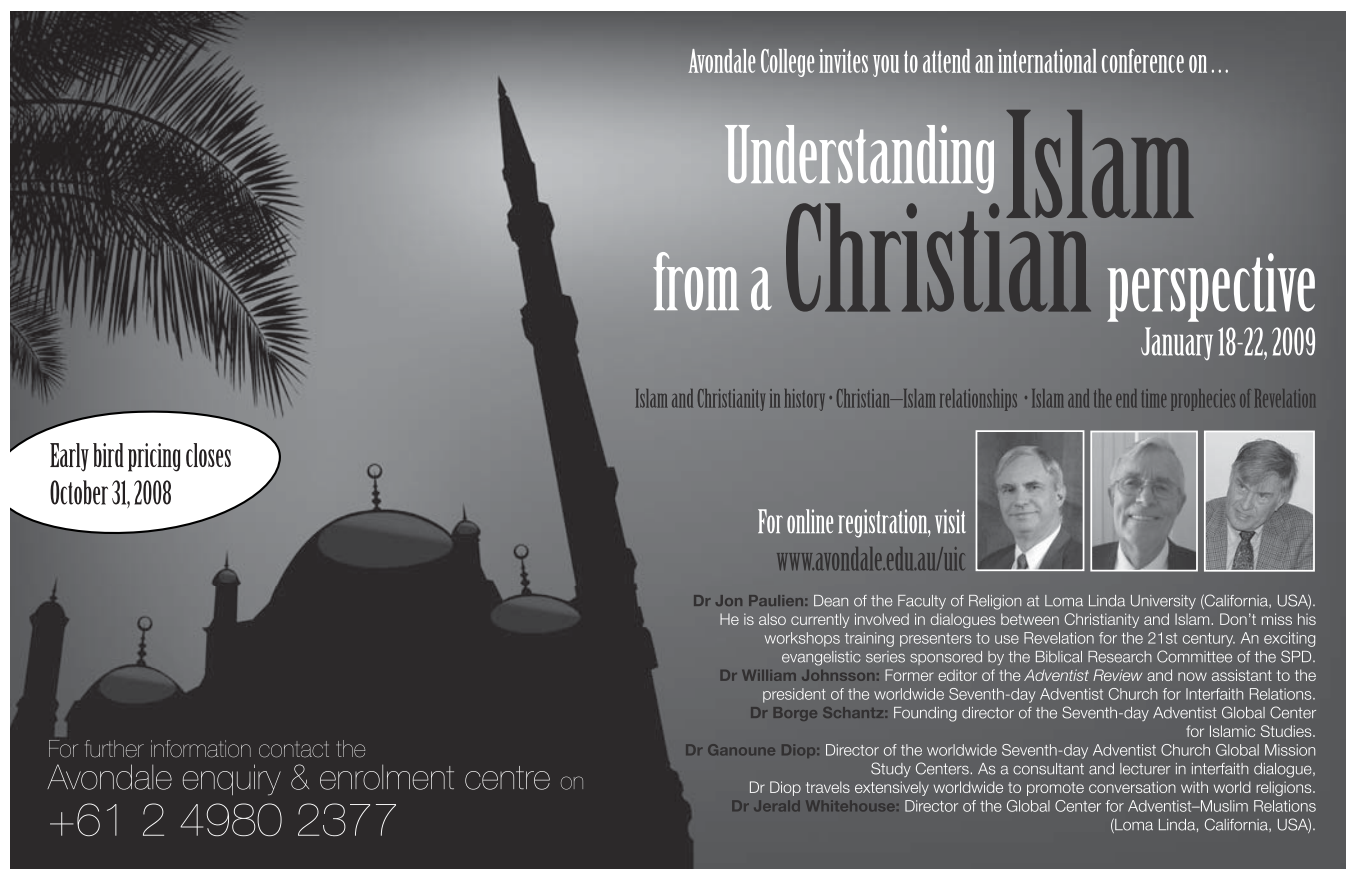
build your own faith. The people are good for you because they are your field of labor. If you tend to it well, you'll enjoy the fruits. If you are too busy to take time with your members, then you are too busy to be an effective minister.

Conclusion

Ministry includes more than eloquence at the pulpit. The TV newsroom brings to the public a small facet of a larger job done outside its walls. Broadcasters, in a few minutes, give a summary of what might have taken hours, days, or even weeks to amass. It's the same with the minister: much of what you do is away from the pulpit. Sure, you might give great homilies to packed churches every Sabbath. But you must never forget that your most important sermons could be given after you're done preaching. ■

* Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1956), 47.

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Understanding and relating to the new worldview

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In his work *City as Landscape: A Post-Postmodern View of Design and Planning*,¹ Tom Turner stresses that “The modernist age, of ‘one way, one truth, one city’ is dead and gone. The postmodernist age of ‘anything goes’ is on the way out. Reason can take us a long way, but it has limits. Let us embrace post-postmodernism—and pray for a better name.” Modernism roughly covers the period from the emergence of philosophical rationalism of the seventeenth century through the end of the twentieth century. Many believe that the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989 symbolically represents the starting point for a new era of postmodernity, although French philosophical postmodernism came on the world scene in the seventies. Logically, every system of thought and every cultural phenomenon has its limits, as Turner argues. It seems that today the postmodernist emphasis on pluralism, perspectivism, subjectivism, and antirationalism does not satisfy intellectuals who always search for a new criticism.

Much has been said about postmodernism. My purpose here does not include the discussion of the features of this widely accepted contemporary worldview—or mix of many worldviews.² I would like to address the question of the nature of the trend that ideologically and historically³ comes after postmodernism and its implications on the life and mission of the church. In this succession of cultural periods, what really comes after postmodernism? There are no books explicitly written about post-postmodernism (PPM). It would be difficult

to summarize the characteristics of the new “movement.” However, there are some basic noticeable changes in society that might be described as the emergence of PPM.

Very often the relationship between PPM and postmodernism is analogous to that between postmodernism and modernism. It reacts to and is critical of features of postmodernism. Speaking about the ideological content of these philosophical and cultural trends, one could affirm the following sequence of thought. While modernism ruled with an iron fist of reason and objective truth and postmodernism with a hard-core critique of rational capacities, subjective perspectivism, and total relativism where anything goes, it seems that PPM rules and will rule with *performatism*, *new transcendency*, and *new utopia*. Let me tentatively explain these three as the most important tenets of PPM.

Tenets of post-postmodernism

First, *performatism*. Performatism is a kind of demonstration of the *effect*. We all know that performance is something that needs to attract attention. The movie industry plays with the application of this principle. While postmodernism denies the possibility of objective truth and affirms destruction of truth, PPM plays with the remaining pieces of truth as effects without any meaning. Through a critique of the concept of truth and final purpose of reality, the interplay between signs and symbols becomes very important in this performative perspective. In this context, the success of *The Da Vinci Code* was expected.

Secondly, *new transcendency* is, in a sense, a continuation of the postmodern “open door” for the irrational and the supernatural. Where postmodernism with its total critique of *ratio* just opened the door for the supernatural, PPM entered with powerful and deep interest for the mythical and mystical. Today, people are not interested in rational presentations of reality. Recent novels and movies like *The Lord of the Rings* and the Harry Potter series demonstrate an interest for a new perspective on reality that could be called religious fiction.⁴ While the science fiction of postmodernism criticized the rational approach to science and its limits, religious fiction in PPM tries to criticize official forms of religion and lead people to a new transcendency of myth and religious mystical and mythical stories.⁵ Stories and heroes that resemble the myths of the Middle Ages have returned to the contemporary scene. While postmodernism rejected religion and affirmed total immanence (from the perspective of this world only), PPM offers the possibility

of a transcended world of religious fiction in which humanity has lost the real present or future perspective. It is quite certain that PPM restores the concept of objective truth, but, unlike classical and modern philosophy, can neither validate nor invalidate religion.⁶ Since some objective truth exists—but there is no trust in official forms of religion—myths logically fill the gap of people's interest for something stable, or just seemingly steady. Myths of the past in the new clothes of fictional religion become the imaginary world of comfort and escape for disillusioned humanity. It seems that PPM could be labeled as Neoromanticism, Neoimpressionism, and Neoclassicism⁷ with the strong emphasis on feelings caused by the emergence of a new and mythical approach to religion.

Finally, *new utopia* has become closely connected to the idea of new transcendency. Postmodernism had a strong anti-utopian perspective. Postmodernists did not believe in a realized ultimate world. They did not support the idea of progress towards utopian society of total tranquility and peace. This is why postmodernism criticized communism and Christianity. PPM, however, with a new transcendency offers a new challenge of a desire for the utopian world.⁸ With all the problems that planet Earth has, this is not strange at all. Religious scientists convince us that science and technology failed in the realization of this utopia, and they affirm that “religious consciousnesses” of humanity would lead us to the point of ultimate eternal peace. Not to mention that this seems like a New Age perspective that unfortunately has become compatible with the perspective of a substantial part of the Christian world.

Speaking about political changes, there are some indications that PPM transforms society into a multicultural phenomenon ruled by the Neotalitarian ideologies.⁹ It seems that after tolerance of postmodernism, the “ghost of the past,” totalitarian spirit appears again in many forms on the world stage.

How should Christians view, respond to, and evaluate PPM?

PPM and Christian faith

Since we already live in the PPM era, it seems crucial to affirm some basic points of dialogue between biblical Christianity and PPM.

Unlike PPM that only partially reacts to the postmodern subjective approach to the truth, the Scriptures affirm *objective revealed* truth and not just performative or subjective value of facts. God is real and actively involved in the world and not just a necessary effect or imaginary figure. Christ never acted with performance for its own sake in order to astonish and shock His followers. His miracles were signs of spiritual truths. He spoke truth and acted in truth, and truth was the appealing force (see John 7:16, 17; 8:31, 32). Nowadays, in the PPM culture of performance, it is not hard to imagine the powerful delusion of the antichrist's miracles.

In contrast to PPM, the Bible does not speak about transcended myth as the invention of the human mind (writers of the Scriptures). Stories of the Bible are based on God's genuine and true perspective of the inspiration process that is always truthful and reliable (see 2 Pet. 1:19–21).

Finally, unlike PPM, Christianity affirms the coming of the future world realized, not by historical development of human religious consciousness, but through divine supernatural action in human history, namely the second coming of Christ (see Rev. 19:11–16).

Thus, PPM and the Christian faith are basically incompatible worldviews. However, in our evangelistic efforts we might recognize points of PPM as a new possibility for mission in the twenty-first century.

Evangelism in the age of PPM

Evangelism in the twenty-first century needs to be performative with an emphasis on transcendency and utopia. What does this mean in view of the fact that biblical Christianity could not and must not sacrifice its content and power in Christ? How could we be relevant today in the context of the PPM culture?

In the modern world, Christ was presented as the Word. In the postmodern world, He was to be presented as an “Image.” In the PPM world, however, Christ as the cosmic Ruler and Savior who is coming again needs to be presented as performative power. The PPM period, in the perspective of Adventist prophetic revelation, accords with the rise of spiritualism. Spiritualism has to do with the controversy between two conflicting powers—that of Christ and Satan. Truth in Christ is successful as much as it demonstrates its power against the power of satanic lies and deceptions. This does not diminish rational adherence to the truth. On the contrary, it affirms a biblical-rational concept of the spiritual war between the powers of good and the powers of evil (see Eph. 6:10–18). Final evangelism, as we know, is possible only through power of the Spirit of the apostolic age. Affirming the biblical content of the preaching of Christ, Paul develops this idea in 1 Corinthians 2:4, 5, “My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power” (NIV). This power transforms, heals, regenerates, and creates a new being.

Christ is not myth, of course, but in the dialogue and encounter with the new transcendency of religious fiction we need to affirm biblical religious “fiction.” The power of the biblical story of Christ would be stronger than the powers of mythical stories invented by human minds. Since people are more and more interested in religion, very often counterparts of biblical Christianity and the church as an institution, we do not need always to present rational arguments about the truthfulness of biblical faith. We need to be a living performance of Christ. We need to live and die for the true story of the Scriptures. This authenticity of faith might offer the new power of biblical fiction.

Finally, Christ has promised a much more attractive and powerful world of realization than religious scientists who promise new utopias. The power of

the true world is much more effective than the power of utopia. The second coming of Christ is plausible because people realize that this planet is rushing into self-destruction. They see the rise of neo-Marxist or religio-political powers that promise a new utopia, but they also see or will see that these promises stir vain hope, especially when the different tragedies of the planet will have multiplied. Next time you pray for the ultimate peace of this world, be aware of the issues at hand. There are two powers in the great conflict for the realization of the ultimate world.

Therefore, what comes beyond postmodernism might create an environment that could serve to advance the gospel. This is possible only if the disciples of Christ recognize the final wake-up call and receive the power that is beyond any power, whether in this world or in the world to come. ■

- 1 Tom Turner, *City as Landscape: A Post-Postmodern View of Design and Planning* (London: E & F Spon., 1996), 10.
- 2 The most comprehensive overview of the basic features of postmodernism from an evangelical perspective is still Stanley Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1996). For a more concise overview of philosophical postmodernism, see Aleksandar S. Santrac, *Deconstruction of Baudrillard* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 2005), 7–19. The results of this study might be considered as a post-postmodern (PPM) reaction to Jean Baudrillard's postmodernism. This reaction includes an evaluation of postmodern ideas and "turning these ideas against themselves" (deconstruction idea).
- 3 I propose September 11, 2001, as a symbolic date of the commencement of PPM, although some argue that Turner's book in 1996 deserves such a role. September 11 became the first *shocking performative action* (simulation within reality) and the beginning of unpredictable and uncertain history (maybe *the end of history*). After September 11, everything becomes possible, and humanity has no ground of hope or "anchor" of historical certainty. PPM basically affirms this uncertainty and performance as key postulates.
- 4 Religious fiction emerged out of the *spiritual science fiction* of the 1960s and 1970s. Good examples of this fiction were Isaac Asimov and Arthur C. Clarke.
- 5 It is interesting that in one of the *Post-postmodern manifestos*, a belief in ghosts and miracles is explicitly mentioned (<http://www.adamgottschalk.net/words/popomo.html>, point 14 and 15).
- 6 See Morton A. Kaplan, "Post-postmodern Science and Religion," *International Journal on World Peace*, 18, no. 1, (March 2001).
- 7 As Turner argues in *City as Landscape: A Post-Postmodern View of Design and Planning*, 8.
- 8 There are some new movements that want, for example, to restore communist and Marxist views (as a new utopia) against the postmodernistic perspective; see Antonio Callari, Stephen Cullenberg, and Carole Biewener, *Marxism in the Postmodern Age: Confronting the New World Order* (New York: Guilford Press, 1995).
- 9 <http://anagennesis.townhall.com/g/bcdebe9-fafb-47d8-8f63-78383b38a7d1?comments=true>.

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The first question our financial advisor asked us about retirement was: Do you have a will and other estate planning documents? We didn't. Within weeks, two tragedies in our church showed us how important estate planning can be. A beloved deacon suffered a serious stroke. Machines kept him alive, but he could no longer communicate. Loving relatives found themselves in a painful conflict that could have been avoided, if only our church member had signed an advance medical directive. Then, a young couple related to a church member died in a car accident,

leaving two small children. With no will or guardianship directions, the children's future was left to the courts. The custody

dispute, together with probate costs, significantly reduced the children's inheritance. When we thought about our own family, we knew we couldn't live with uncertainty. We had to fulfill our obligations as parents, as pastors of the flock and as responsible stewards of God's goods. Now that we have wills, we are so relieved. We know that if anything happens to us, our sons will be raised in an Adventist home.

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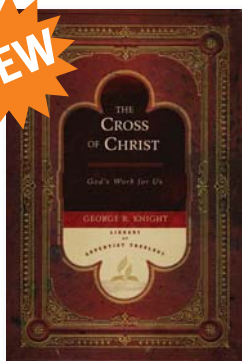


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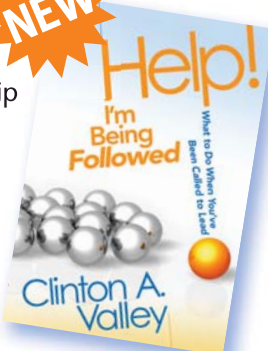
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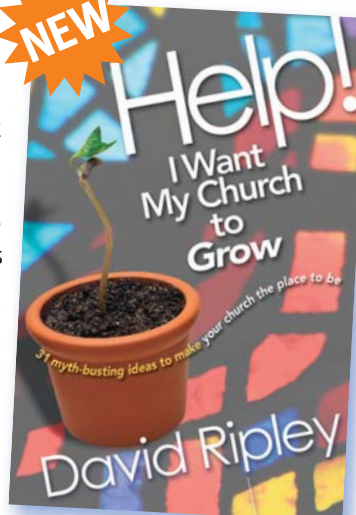
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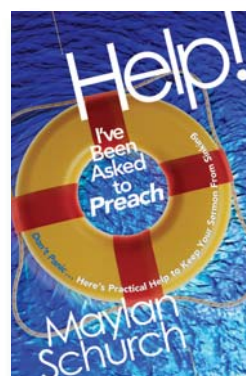


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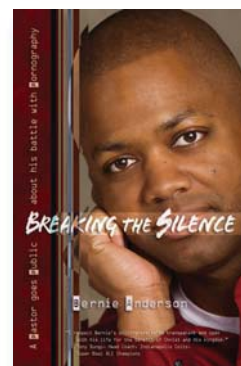
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meeting in the synagogue becomes untenable is there a possible reference in Acts to meeting in a house.

Early Christians did indeed meet in homes. But that does not seem to be the preferred place of worship. The earliest believers preferred to meet in the temple. Outside of Jerusalem they preferred to meet in the synagogue. House churches were a sociological (persecution from the Jews) and economical (unable to afford their own buildings) phenomenon. We should be very careful in understanding all the patterns of early Christian worship and the reasons for the rise of house churches before we take them over as a model for today. They met a practical need, and we have to ask whether the same practical need exists today. In places where persecution or economics precludes owning buildings for regular worship, the house church model may indeed be a blessing to God's church today.

—Matthew Kent, Berrien Springs, Michigan, United States

Kwabena Donkor responds

Matthew Kent's comments are well taken, although I would like to make a few general observations without dealing specifically with pointed questions raised about the use of particular texts. To begin, the article did not intend to leave the impression that there is unassailable evidence for the existence of house churches as the *modus operandi* of the early church. Therefore, some textual references that are brought into the discussion are there only as circumstantial evidence and not as directly pointing to house churches. Kent, therefore, appears to stretch the point a little too far when he characterizes the article as arguing that the "house church" was the *preferred* place of worship for the early Christians. Indeed, there is no direct evidence either way on a *preferred* place of worship, house churches or temple. The article is only arguing tentatively for the

possibility of house churches in the early church. Thus, it speaks rather cautiously of "practical reasons to *suggest* that in Jerusalem there were *probably* a plurality of house churches" (p. 6); that Acts 2:42 provides a list that "*seems* to indicate an agenda for early Christian worship" (p. 6). Neither is the argument being made for house churches intended to deny other possible group settings, including the temple. The point is made deliberately and minimally that the "house," in a real sense, "became a unit or group in the structure of the early Christian community" (p. 5). Indeed, it is explicitly acknowledged that "the first Christians taught in the temple court and took part in the prayer services there," although it is also suggested that this "did not prevent them from engaging in their own teaching activities in the houses" (p. 6).

Kent's point about Acts 1:12, 13 as referring to the dwelling quarters of the disciples may not be disputed. However, the possible implication that for that reason it could not have functioned as a house church raises an issue about our understanding of the nature of house churches. Significant scholarly opinion suggests that these properties that were purportedly used for religious gatherings served at the same time as living quarters. Perhaps it needs to be pointed out that the term "house church" in the article is used specifically in the sense of "groups of believers meeting regularly in the intimacy of a home . . ." (p. 5). It may be that by applying our conventional understanding of church to these early Christian fellowship groups, they may not qualify as churches at all. Whether in doing so we may be involved in anachronisms remains an open question.

The lady in the aisle

Don Jacobsen's article ("The Little Lady in the Aisle," April 2008) brought tears to my eyes because I recall a very recent (too recent!) incident that happened to a good friend of mine who

leads a Pathfinder Club full of older boys who are not Adventists. Out of the blue one meeting night, they asked to go to church that Sabbath. So my friend, a bit apprehensive, took them. They behaved well for a change but were quietly "loitering" in the foyer between Sabbath School and church when a member approached them and sternly told them they were not to be there. My friend showed up moments later and they all said "OK, we're done, ready to go home now!" That was it, end of story. That small group had doubled the attendance at church that Sabbath for an hour—no wonder some of our churches are SMALL! Will those boys want to go back some day? Only God knows.

—Robert Holbrook, email

A contradiction?

Thank you for recommending the Ellen G. White Complete 2007 CD. You say "Every pastor should own this important study tool that brings all of Ellen G. White's published writings within instant reach" (Resources, *Ministry*, February 2008).

In the same issue, I read an article titled, "The Missing Men," where the author says, "Take every opportunity to arrange excursions to soccer, baseball, football, hockey, and basketball games."

Isn't it time for *Ministry* to promote only activities that hold to the highest ideals? During my ministry, I've made it a practice to stay away from all worldly sports and I've led many hikes and backpack trips encouraging men and women to find recreation in outdoor activities. During just one five-year period, three men decided to become ministers and two more chose to become teachers. All are active in pastoral and teaching ministry today, and I could tell you about many others. Yes, God wants real men!

—Wellesley Muir, Oakhurst, California, United States

Making a Difference

St. Albans, England—The **Adventist Volunteer Service (AVS)** is growing, in both numbers and effectiveness. At the moment, 23 people from the Trans-European Division (TED) of the Seventh-day Adventist Church are providing services in schools, orphanages, hospitals, churches, and other institutions in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, China, Japan, Kenya, Korea, Mexico, New Zealand, Palau, Thailand, United Kingdom, and the United States.

In addition, 46 volunteers from other parts of the world are working in TED territory. This makes a great deal of difference to both them and the communities they serve. TED Executive Secretary **Harald Wollan**, commented, "The AVS program gives individuals the opportunity to serve in a different mission field ... thus giving invaluable service abroad and at the same time providing a link between the home church and the mission field, whether far or near. Not only will the recipient field receive a blessing, but the volunteers themselves will be blessed through the service rendered."

Manny Nelson is currently serving in New Zealand as an assistant youth pastor. When asked why he was an Adventist Volunteer, his response was, "To simply do something that makes a positive impact on someone else's life. Doing it within the Adventist framework is important to me as I want my efforts to be connected to the work of Jesus whether subtly or overtly."

Leana Edwards is serving in Burkina Faso. She is seeing her dream of making a difference come true. She says, "I know my dream is being realized each day because I am placing my life in the hands of God. I think being a volunteer is an amazing opportunity to go on an adventure with God."

If you would like more information about the AVS program, visit www.adventistvolunteers.org. [Karen Plaatjes/TED News].

Is Your Health "In Step"?

Orlando, Florida, United States—A nationwide health movement is sweeping across the United States. The Seventh-day Adventist Church has whole person health imbedded within its core principles. In fact, according to the Adventist Health Study-1, Adventists live on average ten years longer than the average American because of the Adventist lifestyle of faith and healthy choices.

Today, those statistics may be changing. The challenges of the sedentary American lifestyle and the struggle to implement exercise on a regular basis may also be affecting Adventists.

With that in mind, the Adventist Church in North America is sponsoring "In Step" beginning in July 2008. This will be a nationwide endeavor to encourage all Adventists to engage in regular exercise. Walking is a type of exercise that most can engage in, even if one has never exercised and needs to begin to get in shape—or if one already has a disease or a chronic condition.

Although there are additional articles on the "In Step" Web site, those who wish to start now can begin to consider how their exercise needs will impact their daily or weekly schedules.

Here are some tips for motivation:

Exercise improves your outlook. A 30-minute walk can reduce stress, as chemicals secreted during exercise leave you feeling happier and more relaxed.

Exercise helps you manage your weight. Exercise helps you burn calories—making weight management

easier. The greater the intensity of exercise, the greater the weight loss.

Exercise combats chronic disease. Exercising regularly helps prevent or manage high blood pressure. Cholesterol levels also are benefited. Exercise gives "good" cholesterol (HDL) a boost and lowers "bad" cholesterol (LDL).

Exercise strengthens your heart and lungs. Exercise keeps your entire cardiovascular tree working better, providing the energy you need to accomplish the things you enjoy doing.

Exercise improves sleep. Statistics reveal that 60 percent of the country suffers from sleep deprivation.

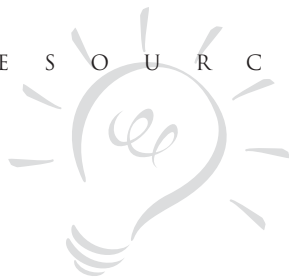
For more information, visit our Web site at www.instepforlife.com. [Candace Huber/Florida Hospital]

"Pentecost and More"

Kingston, Jamaica—March 15 saw the culmination of yearlong efforts of personal and community outreach throughout the Inter-American Division (IAD) of the Seventh-day Adventist Church with the "Pentecost and More" worship services.

Several thousand worshipers gathered in downtown Kingston, Jamaica, where **Israel Leito**, president of the IAD, delivered the sermon. The highlight of the worship event was the baptism of hundreds of people throughout Jamaica.

The worship service, broadcast live by the Hope Channel, featured baptismal services that were also being conducted in Mexico, Colombia, Venezuela, and throughout the Caribbean. In all, more than 30,000 people were baptized as a result of the faithful ministries of pastors and other believers. [Willie E. Hucks II] ■



BOOK REVIEW

Dramatic Prophecies of Ellen White: Stories of World Events Divinely Foretold, by Herbert

Edgar Douglass, Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2007.

In eight captivating chapters, Herbert Douglass, also author of the college textbook *Messenger of the Lord* on Ellen White's life and ministry, presents some of Ellen White's most dramatic prophecies of end-time events placed in the context of our current national and world events. What makes this book of special value is the author's skillful compilation of a variety of examples of messages that were largely ridiculed at the time they were spoken but have proven to be true in retrospect.

The eight chapters cover Ellen White's predictions of the American Civil War and the rise of spiritualism in the nineteenth century, her counsels on race relations and health reform, the rise of the influence of the modern papacy and the dominance of the United States in world politics, her vision of the great controversy between good and evil, and, finally, the overpowering appeal of non-Christian spirituality within modern Christianity.

In my opinion, four of the chapters stand out and make a good contribution to the Adventist understanding of end-time events. In the 1840s and 1850s, Ellen White predicted that there would be a resurgence of spiritualism in the United States. Being predominantly a Protestant and Christian nation then, spiritualism was not a dominant trend or a significant religious influence. When making her prediction, it was doubtful that spiritualism would ever become as

dominant as she predicted. However, Douglass gives evidence that today spiritualism in its various forms is a dominant religious influence in society. Astrology, witchcraft, and many neo-pagan activities have become a part of our social religious fabric.

In the 1880s, Ellen White's prediction of a resurgence of the influence of the modern papacy and the dominance of the United States in world politics were predictions no one took seriously outside of Adventism. Yet, today, as Douglass points out, the bishop of Rome has an unprecedented world influence and the same can be said of the United States. Who could have predicted, even a few decades ago, that the two dominant world powers at the beginning of the twenty-first century would be the papacy and the United States? Douglass believes Ellen White accurately predicted these future developments and gives numerous examples of how her predictions have been fulfilled in the last 30 years.

In the last chapter of the book, the author describes how Ellen White predicted in the 1880s that the future would see numerous religious revivals within Christianity, many of them influenced by non-Christian spiritual practices. Douglass argues that the eclectic nature of modern Christian spirituality, which combines Eastern, New Age, and Christian practices to satisfy the spiritual hunger of a biblically illiterate Christian population, is a fulfillment of Ellen White's prediction. Personal feelings and a subjective approach to spirituality have facilitated a counterfeit spiritual experience.

This book will appeal to those who wish to know more about these predictions of Ellen White and how they are being fulfilled in our day. Although through the years some people have doubted her basic outline of end-time

events and wondered whether Adventist eschatology would really happen the way it has been presented, Douglass shares evidence on these issues that builds a good case for the relevance of her prophetic gift.

—Reviewed by Denis Fortin, dean and professor of theology, Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, United States.

RESOURCES

Silver Spring, Maryland, United States—The Ellen G. White Estate now publishes a quarterly electronic magazine for children ages 9–14 titled: *Ellen White—Visionary for Kids*. The e-zine is both in Web and PDF formats and is available online at: www.whiteestate.org/vez.

The magazine features kid-friendly Adventist heritage stories, a question-and-answer corner, pictures of the pioneers, Ellen White citations (language-adapted for children), as well as puzzles, mazes, and other interactive learning tools. Children will receive \$25 for their published articles, stories, and drawings. Guidelines available at the Web site. Links to the Portuguese and Korean editions of *Visionary* are available at: www.WhiteEstate.org.

Check it out today, and pass on the good news to teachers, parents, Pathfinder and Sabbath School leaders, and most of all—kids! [Darryl Thompson].



How to guarantee a crowd

A small framed illustration hanging in my office depicts delivery men unloading mannequins from a delivery van. The lettering on the van says "Rent a Crowd."

As thousands of congregations prepare to conduct public evangelistic meetings in 2008 and 2009, we need

better methods for bringing people into our venues. I have found the following methods help guarantee an audience:

Pray. Nothing is more successful in arresting the attention of potential converts than enlisting the power of God upon your venture. Form your church's prayer warriors into groups and set them loose to support every aspect of evangelism with earnest prayer for the Holy Spirit's outpouring.

Relevant topics. We live in prophetically momentous times. Don't be content to rehash old sermons or repeat illustrations from the past. Even the mighty evangelistic heroes of bygone eras will not sound as fresh as the topics you develop to address current issues. Read your newspaper along with your Bible and make the messages you preach significant for today.

Share your personal experience. Sharon and I discovered that we can significantly increase attendance by advertising an upcoming sermon in which we share our personal story. To those who attend your series, you become a personality in whom they are interested. We show our baby pictures, photos of our wedding, our pets, our ministry adventures, and tell the story of God's leading in our personal lives. Then, after a dozen or so slides *about us*, we transition into the call of God into ministry and the amazing gift of His grace for our lives, which easily introduces the concept of personal salvation.

Offer a valuable service. Whether a simple blood pressure check and glaucoma screening or a more complex



JAMES A. CRESS



battery of health options, a practical service provided as a component of public proclamation demonstrates interest in the welfare of your attendees and makes a fine introduction to a regular "healthful living" feature.

Valuable gift. Avoid prize drawings or lotteries, but do encourage attendance by providing everyone a gift of spiritual value if they are present for a compelling sermon series. I always present the Lord's Day as a two-part sermon and provide each attendee with a complimentary copy of *Your Bible & You* or *Bible Readings for the Home*. Such books may seem ordinary to you but are compelling to those seeking truth. Remember, the content of the gift is more important than the monetary value. Again, when I present the spiritual gift of prophetic guidance, I give each attendee a copy of *Steps to Christ*.

Film series. I've discovered the power of a continuing series, such as the film *JESUS*, especially in areas of the world where the basic gospel story may be unknown. People will arrive early to witness these compelling scenes from our Savior's ministry.

Arresting titles. The purpose of titles is to catch the attention of potential attendees. Sermon titles may range from the ridiculous to the sublime depending on the culture in which you preach. I once heard a very successful preacher advertise his topic on man's condition in death as "Is There Sex After Death?" Attendance grew mightily when he approached a basic Bible message with such verve. Personally, I prefer "Real Hope for Your Lonely Life: If

You Have Ever Lost a Loved One, Here's Hope for You."

Visuals. Your preaching will make a greater impact if you utilize visuals to convey the message. Adventists have historically used prophecy charts and other visuals to illustrate great Bible themes. Fresh, innovative illustrations allow you to cover more information because your audience sees the texts onscreen as they hear you preach.

Cash. Have you ever been paid to attend church? When I approach the topic of stewardship, I announce in advance, "I intend to talk about money, but not your money. And to illustrate this concept, I will pay you my own money to hear this sermon." Then, I give each attendee a ten-cent coin that quickly and disarmingly demonstrates the relatively small 10 percent tithe that God asks us to return in comparison to the abundant blessings He guarantees for faithfulness. This light-hearted, chuckle-producing illustration disarms as it instructs.

Bible marking. We give each individual a personal Bible and open each topic with a class highlighting essential texts on the sermon theme. As everyone underlines and make notes in the margin, Scripture comes alive.

Open agendas. Announce your intentions clearly and avoid disguising your identity or purpose. How much better to clearly advertise that you are inviting the public to explore Bible truths? Personally, I've found that conducting my evangelistic activities in Adventist facilities reassures the public that an established church is sponsoring this special event.

A subsequent article will discuss more attendance-increasing methods. Even now as you plan strong evangelistic initiatives, build some of these concepts into your preparation. You'll experience greater results and your own preaching will be encouraged as "your crowd" is guaranteed! ■

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