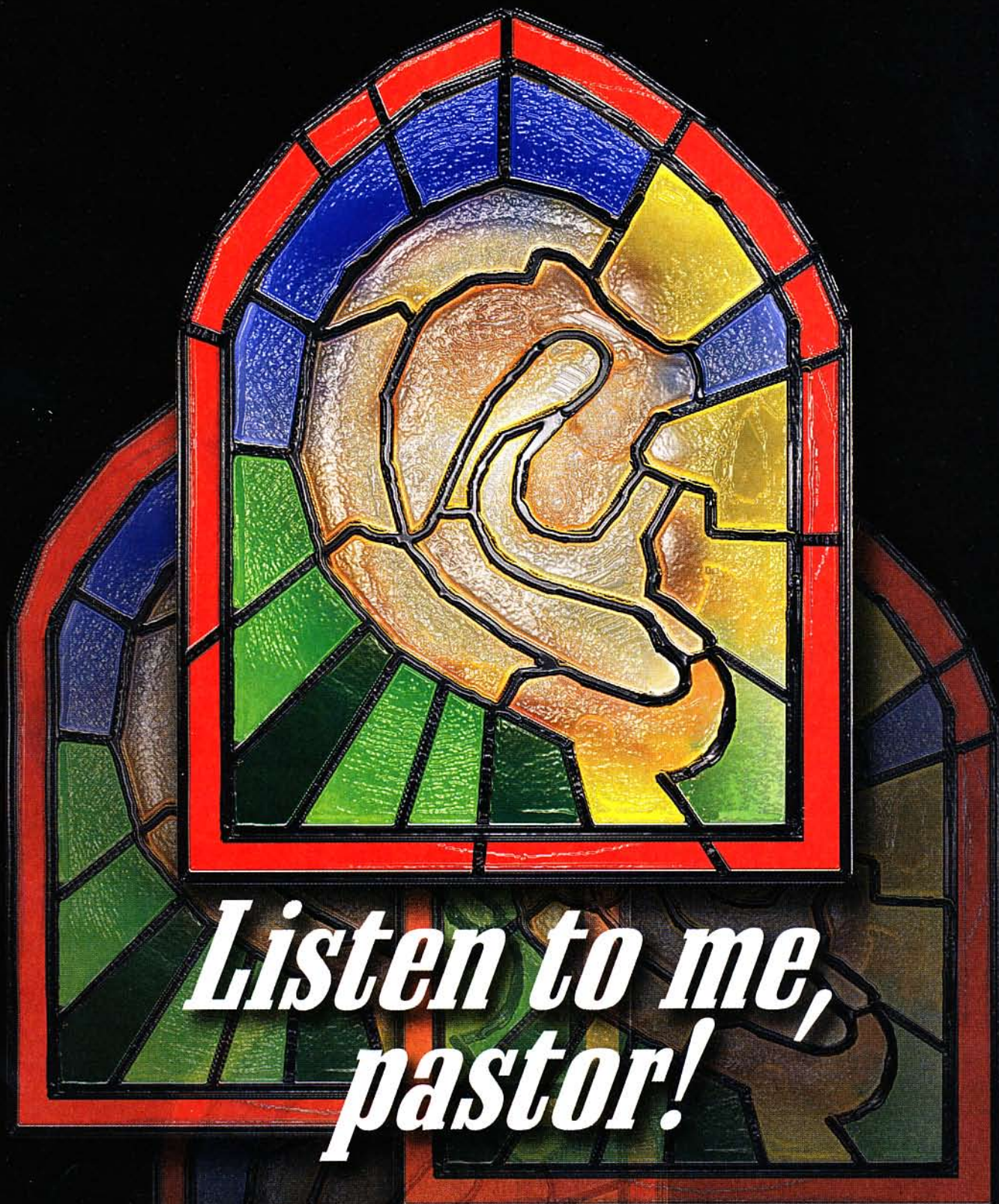


MINISTRY

International Journal for Pastors

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*Listen to me,
pastor!*

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WE CAN ONLY PLEAD THAT IN
THE INTERESTS OF THAT IDEAL
HE WILL ALLOW LUTHER
TO SPEAK FOR HIMSELF.

We are indebted to you for publishing Hans K. LaRondelle's article "Luther and the Gospel" in the November 2000 issue. So much of what he writes is standard Protestant interpretation of both Luther and Paul. On the other hand, I would point out that the article demonstrates just once more that Luther's views were somewhat in tension with those of his subsequent interpreters.

For example, Dr. LaRondelle writes of Luther's earlier theology: "At this point, for Luther justification was seen to be made inwardly righteous." By contrast, LaRondelle directs our attention to Luther's mature theology contained in his 1535 commentary on Galatians: "Later, in his commentary on Galatians (1535) Luther reached his mature concept of justification: it is the forensic or legal imputation of Christ's righteousness to the repentant believer."

Significantly in his comments on Galatians 2:16 in that 1535 commentary, Luther emphasized again and again his concept of justification as the gift of inward righteousness. For example: "Therefore the Christ who is grasped by faith and who lives in the heart is the true Christian righteousness, on account of which God counts us righteous and grants us eternal life" ("Lecture on Galatians, 1535," *LW*, 26:130). The following pages emphasize the point repeatedly.

Dr. LaRondelle tells us that "good words of the Spirit are not a component of justification itself." But Luther wrote that the proclamation of the faith "brings the Holy Spirit who justifies."

("Lectures on Galatians, 1535," *LW*, 26:208).

We can have no doubt that Dr. LaRondelle is committed to biblical and historical truth. We can only plead that in the interests of that ideal he will allow Luther to speak for himself. Carl B. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson in their recent book, *Union with Christ: the New Finnish Interpretation of Luther* (Eerdmans, 1998), have made a genuine attempt to allow Luther to explicate his own theology.

—Erwin R. Gane, Angwin, California

As a church administrator, I have traditionally looked to my monthly perusal of *Ministry* as a way to maintain an awareness of current trends in the pastoral ministry and issues of concern to the church's pastoral ranks. And then came the November issue! I couldn't put it down. While the analysis of the Lutheran World Federation/Vatican "Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification" provided by Drs. LaRondelle, Dederen, Heinz, and Evans was what initially caught my interest, in the end it was the power of their constant and consistent affirmation of the wonders of the truth of justification that moved me from interest to inspiration. Many thanks for a fine series of articles.

—Byron L. Scheuneman, senior vice president, ADRA International, Silver Spring, Maryland.

Responding to James Cress' contribution in the November issue, I agreed with most everything he suggested, though I do have one observation. In

his comments about insurance, he said that "insurance is not the risky, unregulated business that it previously was when wise counsel directed the avoidance of it." That's an interesting historical note, but not very helpful in my opinion.

Cress could have suggested that term insurance is available at a cost that is within the reach of many. If a parent loses his or her mate, especially the breadwinner, then clearly the need is to provide for the family remaining. Term insurance provides far greater benefits in the case of early death. It is not an investment, of course, but I have grave questions about thinking about insurance as an investment in any case.

There are also policies that would provide considerable help in case a breadwinner is unable to work following an accident or serious illness.

I am not sure I agree with Pastor Cress in his general statement about the pure motives of insurance companies.

I do appreciate *Ministry* and have done so for many years.

—T. C. Whitehouse, via e-mail.

A short response to the article published in the January issue of *Ministry* from Claude Lombart. Pastor Claude eloquently reflects the isolation, loneliness, and pain of those whose marriages have broken down.

While calling for a response on the part of the world church to create a position where spouses who are "innocent" can remarry, I would suggest that the letter also calls for an appropriate

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Free Subscription

If you're receiving *Ministry* bimonthly and haven't paid for a subscription, it's not a mistake. Since 1928 *Ministry* has been published for Seventh-day Adventist ministers. We believe, however, that the time has come for clergy everywhere to experience a resurgence of faith in the authority of Scripture and in the great truths that reveal the gospel of our salvation by grace, through faith alone in Jesus Christ. We want to share our aspirations and faith in a way that will provide inspiration and help to you as clergy. We hope you will accept this journal as our outstretched hand to you. Look over our shoulder, take what you want and find helpful, and discard what you can't use. Bimonthly gift subscriptions are available to all licensed and/or ordained clergy. Requests should be on church letterhead and addressed to the editorial office.

The call in the calling

Calling or career? Prophet or professional? Priest or pundit? Conviction or compliance? Bottom line, why are we ministers? Why are you and I doing what we're doing? What actually got us doing it in the first place? What keeps us going? Perhaps most challenging of all, what in fact have we come to consider ministry to be at its heart?

"What I object to most is the appalling and systematic trivializing of the pastoral office. It is part of a larger trivialization, that of the culture itself, a trivialization so vast and epidemic that there are days when its ruin seems assured. There are other days, though, when we catch a glimpse of glory—a man here, a woman there determined to live nobly."¹

With these words, Eugene Peterson reintroduces the idea of "vocational holiness." In that context he speaks of seeing "all around men and women, pastors, hammering together a vocational identity from models given to them from the 'principalities and powers'" that surround them. "The models," he continues, so persuasive in the surrounding culture, "were all strong on power (making things happen) and image (appearing important). But none of them seemed congruent with the calling I sensed forming within myself."² That calling is, in short, based upon the fact that it itself, even more than the minister himself or herself, is holy. That's no new thought, but one that, given the neglect of it during the last thirty years or so is quite a shattering concept! Ours is a genuinely holy calling because it is one given to us or made for us by God Himself.

We must recognize again that the call to ministry, our calling, is a holy one; one that has its origin in the heart of God. Yet, bit by bit, running beside the

WILL EVA



regular rhythms of immediate sight and consciousness, a pastor becomes subject to what easily develops into a ministry of minutiae and trivialities, a mere professionalism, simply a job, at best another service profession. I definitely do not wish to rob ministry of its relevancy (God knows, how often in the name of a heavenly calling we have pompously destroyed, as we say, anything of any earthly good). But I want my own heart always to beat with the conviction that, bottom line, God Himself has in fact called me to do what I am presently doing in my ministry.

A few weeks ago I talked to one of my fellow ministers—a colleague I admire and respect. My moments with him were inspiring. He simply talked of the deeply conscious sense that he has come to possess that when he stands up to preach, whether here or there, it is God who has inspired his soul with a particular content for this particular congregation or audience at this particular time; that God has sent him to these people at this time. There is something magnificent and true about the convictions he shared with me.

Ezekiel had these convictions. He would not be caught merely doing his ordinary thing. His work was the work of the Holy Spirit. "The Spirit entered me when

he spoke to me . . . and I heard him who spoke to me. . . . As for them, [Ezekiel's "congregation"] whether they hear or whether they refuse . . . yet they will know that a prophet has been among them. Do not be afraid of them nor be afraid of their words, though briars and thorns are with you and you dwell among scorpions; do not be afraid of their words or dismayed by their looks. . . . Behold I have made your face strong against their faces, and your forehead strong against their foreheads. Like adamant stone, harder than flint, I have made your forehead; do not be afraid of them" (Ezek. 2:2-9).

Hard as it may be to admit it in writing, especially in a magazine like this one, there is a question mark of progressing size that presents itself squarely on the foreheads of we who are today called "clergy." It has to do with our believability, our credibility. The reason for its scarlet presence lies, I believe close to the matter of our sense of the holiness of our calling. People are starving for the real thing. We are starving for the real thing.

Eugene Peterson, once again: "But here I was on a religious ship on which God was peripheral to the bottom line, in the background of an enterprise that was mostly informed by psychology, sociology, and management-by-objective."³ Let me commit myself under God either to plunge into the ocean and out of such a ship, or to turn such a ship into a more worthy course. We may not be able to turn the whole fleet, but we can, by God's grace, turn our ship about. ■

1 Eugene Peterson, *Under the Unpredictable Plant* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1992), 37.
2 *Ibid.*, 50, 51.
3 *Ibid.*, 45.

Listen to me, Pastor!

Misheck Kirimi



Misheck Kirimi is a local church elder in Nairobi, Kenya.

When Deborah, a middle-aged, divorced woman was found dead in her room with a lethal syringe still dangling on her thigh, the local counselor recalled two significant facts he had observed about her. First, although Deborah was affiliated with a nearby church, she had no close friends. Second, she had a distressing tale that she had to share with someone who would listen. She found nobody responsive enough with whom to share her story, and in a way that is what killed her. Probably the only ears that ever listened to her were those of Sly, her tomcat.

Our churches, homes, and workplaces are full of Deborahs—people in dire need of being listened to. “It is impossible,” said renowned Christian psychiatrist Paul Tournier, “to overemphasize the immense need humans have to be really listened to, to be taken seriously, to be understood.”¹ The world is thirsty for quality listeners. Teenagers talk to the wrong people because adults have no time or will to listen. Spouses confide in the wrong ears because they don’t find patience or grace in the ears of their life partner. Nowhere do we see more clearly the don’t-care attitude that has permeated our culture than in our low tolerance to the “tales” of others.

This is why, at least in part, effective listening is a minister’s premium skill. Good

listening adds quality to pastoral services because people perceive it as ultimate proof of love and care for them. Unlike talking, listening is “selfish-proof.” It is not “I” centered but “other” oriented. By listening actively the minister tells the talker, “what concerns you is important to me also . . . because you matter. I want to share your pain and happiness.”

The ministry of listening

People come to church to listen. They also come with a big desire to be heard. In a sizeable number, that desire and need is the main reason for coming to a church. People have a tale, and it must be told. People simply need to feel the sense of significance that is offered them by a listening, caring ear. If the church has no provision for this, they will tell it elsewhere. Some people may be ultimately lost, not because no one talked to them, but because no one actually listened.

Recognizing these realities elevates “listening” into a ministry—a service of love that the church exists to offer. Unfortunately, the “talking ministries” have increased tremendously at the expense of the listening ministry. It’s time we readjusted the scale.

One practical way to overcome this limitation is to begin to create a culture of attentive listening in the congregation. A minister can turn the church into a listening community. Parents can learn to listen to their children, children to their parents, spouses to each other. Everyone can learn to listen. The result will be improved relationships.

In *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, Stephen Covey writes that “to relate effectively . . . we must learn to listen. And this requires emotional strength. Listening involves patience, openness and a desire to understand—highly developed qualities of character.”²

Listening to heal

When it comes to mind-healing listening, we don’t merely listen to what is said; we listen to the person who is saying it. Here the “messenger” is more important than the “message.” We must be genuinely sensitive because talking is often so personal that inattention equals disrespect or disregard for the talker.

Although many people hear when we speak, only a caring person listens. The difference is that hearing is done with the ear while

listening is done with the mind and heart. Pharaoh Ptahhotep instructed his officials to listen to pleas of clients patiently and without rancor, because a petitioner actually wants respect and attention to what he says more than the accomplishing of that for which he came.

Listening with this kind of concern heals emotional wounds. Not doing so can in fact create wounds. We talk our problems away when we know someone who cares is listening. Naturally, knowing that another human being is aware of how we hurt makes the hurt endurable. Similarly, knowing that someone is aware of our joy makes that joy more intense. Either way, a "listening someone" makes life better.

Qualities of a good listener

For someone to actually disclose themselves, the listener must demonstrate four qualities.

1. *Confidentiality.* The speaker needs assurance that he or she is confiding in the right person, someone who can be trusted with the deepest secrets without the risk of leakage. The majority of Seventh-day Adventists rate their pastors high with regard to confidentiality. Listening pastors gather vast amounts of information concerning the day-to-day problems of their flock. This increases their efficiency in ministering to those needs, not to mention the trust that is built on the basis of which all sorts of further doors of ministry may be opened.

Some of what the pastor hears brings him or her personal trial. Being privy to some classified information can be overwhelming, creating in pastors the pressure to share it in turn. As persons of integrity, they resist the temptation to do that. They can safely vent the pressure by recycling the story at its source.

2. *Patience.* A speaker/parishioner might not go to the root of his or her problem during the first or second counseling session. Early sessions are usually spent quietly, even uncon-

sciously, assessing the credibility of pastors—testing the water before stepping in. Can the pastor be trusted? Is he or she "safe" and actually interested in me? Does the pastor care? How much can I disclose to him or her? Only when these questions are answered can the listener start to disclose useful information. In the presence of this kind of caution it is common for listeners to jump to conclusions before the tale has been fully told. "I know what she's going to say" is an attitude that portrays the typical lack of patience. James W. Gibson and Michael Hanna write, "You can deal with this problem if you learn to be patient. . . . Wait until you hear what others have to say, then make a critical judgment. . . . Being patient may mean biting your tongue in order to keep yourself from interrupting."³

3. *Attention.* Many listeners let their thoughts wander or descend into lethargy when another person is talking. Unless the speaker is exceptionally gifted or the subject acutely important to the listener, 80 percent of what is said goes to waste. Most of us are awake only when we're talking. As soon as it's our turn to listen, we tend to slide into indifference. Real listening is a highly active skill.

The very name "shepherd" carries with it a connotation of patience. Some sheep are slow, clumsy, thankful, and always getting lost. A pastor may have to listen to speakers who are slow, boring, unintelligent, unintelligible, or in error. When pastors patiently listen to such people, they live up to their title. Writes John Powell, "If you raise your eyebrows or narrow your eyes, if you yawn or look at your watch, I will probably retreat to safer ground. I will run for cover of silence. . . ."⁴

4. *Involvement.* Gibson and Hanna say that emphatic listening allows us to identify, to understand, and to reflect the feelings, needs and intentions of another person. This kind of listening equips listeners with information that gives them a feel for what it is like to be in the shoes of

the speaker. Only then can they assist the speaker to explore and pick the best solutions to the presenting problem.

Learn to listen

Pastors need to deliberately hone their listening skills. J. Michael Bennett, an expert in listening, writes, "No one could count the tales of woe that have as their central point 'I thought you said. . . .' No one could tally the jobs ruined, the classes failed, the battles lost, the hearts broken, the money wasted, the lives damaged as a direct result of poor listening skills."⁵ Listening experts compare good listening skills to good reading skills. If reading is listening with the eye, listening is reading with the ear. Like reading, listening can be difficult. By far the greatest hindrance to skillful listening is a false belief that we are already good at it. What we forget is that listening is quite different from hearing. It requires active discipline.

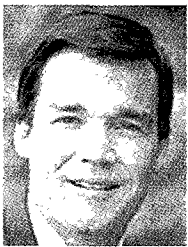
A study by Gary T. Hunt and Louis P. Cusella found that many corporate employees did not seek to improve their listening abilities because they mistakenly believed that they listened well.⁶ The first step in learning effective listening might be the admission—or suspicion—that one is not such a good listener.

Active acquisition of information from speakers—be they be boring or entertaining—greatly improves our professional and personal decision-making processes. Moreover, listening makes our services more responsive to the personal needs of those we serve. ■

1. J. Michael Bennett, *Four Powers of Communication: Skills for Effective Learning* (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1991), 51.
2. John Powell, S.J., *Why Am I Afraid to Tell You Who I Am?* (Niles, Ill.: Argus Communications, 1969), 5.
3. Stephen R. Covey, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), 37.
4. James W. Gibson and Michael S. Hanna, *Introduction to Human Communication* (Wm. C. Brown Publishers, 1992), 66.
5. Powell, 56.
6. Bennett, 47.

The theological value of the Creation account

Greg A. King



Greg A. King, Ph.D., is chair of the Department of Religion, Pacific Union College, Angwin, California.

Much of the time that Bible students have devoted to the first two chapters of Genesis has been directed toward matters other than understanding the theological thrust of this critical passage. For example, Christians have tried to understand the relationship of the Creation account to the scientific record and have tried to harmonize the two. They have spent time and energy contending that Genesis 1 and 2 preserves a factual, authentic account of the origins of this earth and its life forms. Their efforts have sometimes led them to clashes with the scientific community and even to vigorous debates within the Christian community.¹

While this kind of debate may be necessary, if it is made the sole focus, it can cause us to overlook other important components in the Creation account, such as its theological message. The theology of Genesis 1 and 2 is neither peripheral to the purpose of the account nor is it irrelevant to contemporary Christians. The fact is that the first two chapters of Genesis are theological in nature.² And that theology, far from being abstract and unrelated to life, is as practical and relevant as when it was first written.

I will attempt to touch on the main theological messages while encouraging a lifelong study of these crucial chapters. My approach will be comparative, inductive, exegetical,

and theological. I intend to compare the Genesis account with the extra-biblical creation account related below. Some scholars contend that this is the best way to understand the theological distinctives of the Creation account.³

By inductive I mean that some of the themes and messages discussed are intrinsic to the Creation account itself, so that as one thoughtfully reads and reflects on these two biblical chapters, the key theological messages identified in this article are readily discernible. The fact that this study is exegetical in nature is closely related to the previous characteristic and means that it is based on a responsible interpretation of the actual content of the first two chapters of Genesis. Finally, in taking a theological approach, the article will raise the questions: What does the Creation account teach about God, His relationship to the world, and His plans and purposes for human beings? What does the account indicate about salvation and eschatology?

An extra-biblical creation account

With these points in mind, let us review a creation account drawn from the literature of ancient Mesopotamia.⁴ Though it is a composite account, I will refer to it as *The Enuma Elish*, which is the major source from which it is taken.

"In the beginning, neither heaven nor earth had names. Apsu, the god of fresh waters, and Tiamat, the goddess of the salt oceans, and Mummu, the god of the mist that rises from both of them, were still mingled as one. There were no mountains, there was no pasture land, and not even a reed-marsh could be found to break the surface of the waters.

"It was then that Apsu and Tiamat parented two gods, and then two more who outgrew the first pair. These further parented gods, until Ea, who was the god of rivers and was Tiamat and Apsu's great-grandson, was born. Ea was the cleverest of the gods, and with his magic Ea became the most powerful of the gods, ruling even his forebears.

"Apsu and Tiamat's descendants became an unruly crowd. Eventually Apsu, in his frustration and inability to sleep with the clamor, went to Tiamat, and he proposed to her that he slay their noisy offspring. Tiamat was furious at his suggestion to kill their clan, but after leaving her Apsu resolved to proceed with his murderous plan. When the young

WHAT DOES THE CREATION ACCOUNT TEACH ABOUT GOD, HIS RELATIONSHIP TO THE WORLD, AND HIS PLANS AND PURPOSES FOR HUMAN BEINGS?

gods heard of his plot against them, they were silent and fearful, but soon Ea was hatching a scheme. He cast a spell on Apsu, pulled Apsu's crown from his head, and slew him. Ea then built his palace on Apsu's waters, and it was there that, with the goddess Damkina, he fathered Marduk, the four-eared, four-eyed giant who was god of the rains and storms.

"The other gods, however, went to Tiamat and complained of how Ea had slain her husband. Aroused, she collected an army of dragons and monsters, and at its head she placed the god Kingu, whom she gave magical powers as well. Even Ea was at a loss how to combat such a host, until he finally called on his son Marduk. Marduk gladly agreed to take on his father's battle, on the condition that he, Marduk, would rule the gods after achieving this victory. The other gods agreed, and at a banquet they gave him his royal robes and scepter.

"Marduk armed himself with a bow and arrows, a club, and lightning, and he went in search of Tiamat's monstrous army. Rolling his thunder and storms in front of him, he attacked, and Kingu's battle plan soon disintegrated. Tiamat was left alone to fight Marduk, and she howled as they closed for battle. They struggled as Marduk caught her in his nets. When she opened her mouth to devour him, he filled it with the evil wind that served him. She could not close her mouth with his gale blasting in it, and he shot an arrow down her throat. It split her heart and she was slain.

"After subduing the rest of her host, he took his club and split Tiamat's water-laden body in half like a clam shell. Half he put in the sky and made the heavens, and he posted guards there to make sure Tiamat's salt waters could not escape. Across the

heavens he made stations in the stars for the gods, and he made the moon and set it forth on its schedule across the heavens. From the other half of Tiamat's body he made the land, which he placed over Apsu's fresh waters, which now arise in wells and springs. From her eyes he made flow the Tigris and Euphrates. Across this land he made the grains and herbs, the pastures and fields, the rains and the seeds, the cows and ewes, and the forests and the orchards.

"Marduk set the vanquished gods who had supported Tiamat to a variety of tasks, including work in the fields and canals. Soon they complained of their work, however, and rebelled by burning their spades and baskets. Marduk saw a solution to their labors, though, and proposed it to Ea. He had Kingu, Tiamat's general, brought forward from the ranks of the defeated gods, and Kingu was slain. With Kingu's blood, clay from the earth, and spittle from the other gods, Ea and the birth-goddess Nintu created humans. On them Ea imposed the labor previously assigned to the gods. Thus humans were set to maintain the canals and boundary ditches, to hoe and carry, to irrigate the land and raise crops, to raise animals and fill the granaries, and to worship the gods at their regular festivals."⁵

With this story in mind, let's explore the leading theological messages expressed in the biblical Creation account, some of which emerge as we contrast the *Enuma Elish* account with Genesis 1 and 2 and some of which are inherent in the biblical text itself.⁶

The nature of God revealed in Genesis

One of the foremost theological messages of the biblical Creation

account, which stands out when compared with extra-biblical creation stories, is the nature of God. The first words of the Bible, "In the beginning God" express a profound truth. There is no pantheon of gods, no potential for rivalry among various divine potentates. The Creator God of Genesis 1 has no spouse or consort as was common among the pagan gods. He is One. Thus, Genesis presents a striking contrast with *Enuma Elish* which commences with both Apsu and Tiamat and is polytheistic in nature. Furthermore, Marduk, the god who creates, is a sixth-generation god.⁷

What are the practical implications of this? Is the Bible indicating that God needs nothing beyond Himself to bring fulfillment? Is there a suggestion that everything else in the created order is lacking fulfillment and needs to look to God to find it?⁸ Possibly. In any case, the benefits of having a single deity to serve as opposed to the capricious gods of *Enuma Elish* seems obvious. Should the bickering and feuding that existed among the gods in *Enuma Elish* be reality in the divine world, there would be cause to worry about our ultimate safety and to wonder if there was a unified purpose and destiny to life on Earth.⁹ Knowing the one true Creator God provides confidence in these and other areas.

Another obvious theological message is that God is a Creator God. While this may seem axiomatic to most Christians today, it was not necessarily so for individuals living in the ancient world. There was a tendency on the part of the various religions to identify each god with a certain part of the natural world. For example, there would be a god of the fresh waters, a god of the salt waters, a god of storms (the name "Baal" was sometimes used for this god) and a sun god, to name a few. However, the Genesis account declares something startlingly different: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" as a unified, interactive whole.

Thus, God is not part of nature (as pantheists would maintain) and is not to be identified with some natural force such as the winds or the storms. Rather, He is the Creator of it all.¹⁰ He is sovereign over the world and in complete charge of everything on it, including human beings and their destiny.

This theological message speaks volumes to our age. One of the hallmarks of modernity is a desire for personal autonomy. We wish to have no obligation to anyone except self. We may not discern it, but we want to be our own god. The theology of Genesis 1 and 2 dismisses any such possibility. There is room for only one God and one throne. The Creator God "is the transcendent, sovereign ruler of the creation. He is in complete control."¹¹

Another theological message highlighted by comparing the biblical account with *Enuma Elish* is the innate moral and holy nature of God.

The biblical creator God has no character flaws. He wants to develop this moral perfection in His innocent creatures (see Gen. 2:17). He wishes to maintain the innocent nature in which He brought forth His creation. This stands in dramatic contrast with the gods of *Enuma Elish*. In that account, killing and war and deceit are the order of the day. In a sense, the gods in this account behave like the worst of humans.

In all of this a significant and sobering principle emerges: "people become like the gods they worship. Their gods are their models."¹² One can only wonder about conditions in the world should humans, ancient or modern, try to further emulate heroes or conceptions such as those of *Enuma Elish*. Pondering this type of world gives one a profound gratefulness for the moral and holy God of the Bible who invites His children to follow Him in His holiness (see Lev. 11:44, 45; 1 Pet. 1:16).

The biblical Creation account and relationships

There are far-reaching theological messages resident in the kind of relationship that is described as existing between God and his human creation, as one reads the biblical Creation account. The Bible presents humans as the crowning achievement of God's creative work. He made Adam and Eve in His image and after His likeness (Gen. 1:26, 27).

By contrast, in the *Enuma Elish* account, humans are created as something of an afterthought. They are made for the purpose of relieving the gods of manual labor. They are formed from blood and spittle, along with clay from the earth. This account of human origins deals a death blow to the worth of human beings. If we were not divinely intended, if we simply came into existence to do grunt work for the gods, then we can make no real case for human dignity.

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Albert Baylis underscores the difference between the two views: "And so, here is our first answer to 'Who am I?' The Babylonian myth would answer, 'You are a product of the gods to make their life easier.' Modern myth would assert, 'You are a product of random chance in a purposeless universe.' The Bible says, 'You are a personal creation of Yahweh, who cares for you, has created you male and female, and has placed you in an orderly and good creation as his representative ruler.' This knowledge of God's order and created relationships is considered obsolete by many today. As a result, our age suffers the anxiety of enjoying no secure place or significance in the world."¹³

Another theological message emerges from reflection on the special divine-human relationship that the first humans enjoyed. Instead of being created to perform tedious labor, they were created as regents of God to enjoy a special relationship with their Maker. Even as human parents enhance and deepen their love by procreating a child who becomes a recipient of their love, so God created intelligent beings with whom He could share things of importance to Him. Before the Fall, Adam and Eve enjoyed God's direct presence in the Garden of Eden. God will restore this direct relationship in the earth made new (see Rev. 22:4).

The message regarding the divine-human relationship is closely connected with another significant theological message of the Creation account: the Sabbath. After six days of creative work, God rested on the seventh day. Why did God rest? Is this an example of the divine otiosis expressed in extra-biblical accounts, the gods needing a nap? Far from it! In fact, the biblical Creation story seems purposely written to counter that idea. Far from being tired—remember His creation was spoken into existence with a few words—God chose to rest as a model for His children. To provide a special occasion for worship, to give time for fellow-

ship with Himself, God blessed a specific twenty-four hour period during the first week of earth's history and set it aside for human benefit.

Yet another theological message focuses on the nature of the male-female relationship in general and marriage in particular. Genesis affirms that both man and woman are created in the image of God, and both are given the right to rule over the rest of creation (Gen. 1:28). If these features of the story had impacted humanity over the years, women would not have been downtrodden as has all too often been the case.

As to marriage, Genesis 2:24, 25 lays down the basics of a marriage covenant, subordinating all other attachments, even those most dear, to one's spouse as the two become one flesh. As Hamilton notes, "The marriage relationship is then an oath, a covenant, never an arbitrary relationship of convenience."¹⁴

The promise of restoration

Finally, Genesis 1 and 2 prefigures and anticipates the new creation of the book of Revelation. In fact, this ties well with the message of the Sabbath, because the rest of the Sabbath and the communion with God it engenders is a prototypical foretaste of the rest in God's new kingdom and the closeness humans will have with Him there (see Heb. 4:9).

Revelation's portrayal of the new earth contains strong similarities to the Creation account. As with the Garden of Eden, the new earth has no need for a temple (Rev. 21:22). Also, God is directly present (verse 3), and both a river and the Tree of Life are there (22:1, 2).

This, indeed, is the ultimate value of the biblical Creation account. Even while it reminds us of God's perfect creation of long ago, it holds out the hope of a new creation, a world restored to its original perfection and beauty and harmony. ■

fine volume by a Seventh-day Adventist scientist which addresses many of the scientific issues in relationship to the Genesis Creation account; Ronald F. Youngblood, ed., *The Genesis Debate* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), presents—from a professedly Christian perspective—both sides of some of the issues debated within the Christian community in connection with the early chapters of Genesis.

- 2 The observation of John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1-39*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 31, about Isaiah is just as true of the biblical Creation story. He states, "Unless the book of Isaiah is a great theological document, it is nothing. Whatever may be its strengths as a piece of literature, they pale by comparison to the breadth and sweep of the book's theological insights."
- 3 Victor Hamilton, *Handbook on the Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982), 35, states, "I am persuaded that the implications of the creation story of Genesis emerge most dramatically when it is compared with the creation literature of, for example, Mesopotamia (be that literature Sumerian, Assyrian, or Babylonian). For it is in the comparison of literature of identical general theme that the distinctiveness of biblical faith and message appears."
- 4 This story is quoted (though I have corrected his spelling!) from Bruce Railsback, "Creation Stories From Around the World," 2nd ed. (Unpublished manuscript, University of Georgia, 1997), 21, 22, who notes, "This Babylonian story of creation comes largely from the *Enuma Elish* and the *Astrahasis*, which appear to have been written between 1900 and 1500 BC, perhaps during the time of the Babylonian King Hammurabi. The tablets of both are broken and incomplete. At the end of the story here, the details of the creation of humans are supplemented with material from fragments of later writings. The latter may date as late as the 500s BC, but their consistency with the earlier *Enuma Elish* suggests that they tell the same story. The main actor in these tablets is Marduk, the most powerful of the Babylonian gods. Like most Babylonian gods, he has many names, and elsewhere he is sometimes known as Bel."
- 5 The observation of Hamilton, 35, is apropos here. He states, "A study of mythology helps the believer to see how ancient man tried to answer ultimate questions about life and reality when the light of revelation had not dawned upon him. Interestingly, the answers provided to those questions by ancient man are not all that different from the answers provided by modern but unredeemed man." Reading *Enuma Elish* certainly makes me grateful for the biblical account. One shudders to think about what our self-esteem would be if *Enuma Elish* provided the true account of how human life originated on this planet!
- 6 Presenting the biblical theology of Creation by contrasting it with an extra-biblical creation account is especially appropriate, if, as Albert H. Baylis, *From Creation to the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 30, 31, maintains, "The wording of the (creation) passage leaves no doubt that it intends to snub them [the false gods]. Words and phrases are chosen that intentionally belittle claims existing at Moses' time."
- 7 Hamilton, 40.
- 8 See *ibid.*, 22.
- 9 Baylis, 30, remarks, "For the pagan, the world was a fearsome place." I was reminded of how true this is recently when reading Eric B. Hare's *Dr. Rabbit* to my children. It described some very superstitious people and their fear of and efforts to appease the spirits.
- 10 See Baylis, 28: "Nothing could be clearer than this. God created it all."
- 11 *Ibid.*, 30.
- 12 *Ibid.*, 26.
- 13 *Ibid.*, 42.
- 14 Hamilton, 29.

1 See Colin Mitchell, *The Case for Creation* (Grantham, England: Autumn House, 1994), for a

Growing a healthy church (part 2)

John Grys and
Greg Schaller



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Editorial note: Understanding this second of a three-part series requires reading the first, which appeared in our January issue. The final part will be published in the May issue of *Ministry*.

Life and ministry have something in common. There is the frustration at times that what I am doing doesn't seem to make a difference. I seem to cast seeds only to watch them die. In the state of anxiety that this causes, it is easy for me to listen to the sweet whispers of another church hawker, promising the holy grail of church growth programs. An amazing array of "models" are out there for me to choose from—a smorgasbord of holy programs that can lead me on in my conquest. But can I measure the spirituality of an individual? Of a congregation of individuals? What can I be certain of in a ministry that has much uncertainty?

This brings me to Christian Schwarz's findings in the Natural Church Development retooling. His findings—eight characteristics that cause churches to grow—are quality-driven. These characteristics are remarkably biblical, relevant, and comprehensive.

While a weather vane can tell me the wind's direction and an anemometer can tell me the speed of the wind, neither can produce the wind. They are merely instruments informing me of the movement of a wind

that already exists. Schwarz's eight characteristics as a unit are an instrument detecting the winds of the Spirit's work in the life of the congregation. These eight provide a greater understanding of the "atmospheric" conditions of the congregation I serve. They provide direction for my prayer, teaching, reflecting, serving, and shepherding life as a pastor and leader. They give my ministry and that of the congregation a framework by which God builds up His kingdom.

As a follow-up to the explanatory first article in this series ("Growing a healthy church, Part I," *Ministry*, January 2001), this article will cover the first four of Christian Schwarz's "essential eight" congregational growth characteristics. A final article (appearing in *Ministry* in May) will cover the last four. The first growth characteristic is that of empowering local leadership.

1. Empowering leadership

When our church received and evaluated our "snapshot" survey (see the January article for an explanation of this survey), we discovered God was prompting us to address the quality of our leadership. God uses a certain kind of leadership in healthy congregations, a leadership best described by the word "empower." Empowering leadership was our minimum factor, that is, our weakest link. Our church had largely sensed this. In fact, in Schwarz's findings, many of the healthiest churches with a high quality index discover that empowering leadership is their lowest quality. As churches grow rapidly, which ours had, expectations and needs for leadership escalate. Healthy churches grow leaders who grow leaders. Investment in people through discipleship, delegation, and multiplication of leaders are some of the factors that empower overall leadership quality. Our leadership (both paid and lay) had to move toward a more empowering style of leadership.

The greatest barrier to empowering leadership is myself as a pastor-leader. Am I willing to trust God through His people? Am I willing to hand the ball off or do I want to keep it and run on alone? The greatest growth barrier to my congregation is my own growth. This is why Jesus spent so much time doing what is today called self-leadership. He spent time with the Father, seeking to constantly align His heart to the heart of His Father. Like ours, His society was one of turmoil, change, and

uncertainty. To thrive in that kind of ministry environment required a heart continually aligned with His Father's heart. Empowering leadership requires my heart to be continually and fully aligned with Christ, the head of the church. This alignment is demonstrated in my desire to serve the mission of the congregation. This deep need for personal anchoring in the midst of such turnover and transition has led at least one writer to conclude that a leader must spend at least fifty percent of his or her time in the area of self-leadership.¹

The proven reality of this principle has led me to make significant changes over the course of my ministry. While it is impossible for me to personally minister to each individual in a congregation of 400, I can invest my time and energies in those who lead ministries in the congregation. I have had to shift from being only a doer of ministry to being primarily a personal coach to the ministers in the congregation. This transition has not been easy. It has raised to the surface my insecurities as pastor, my own motivations and my own values. It has challenged my relationship with Christ in a way no other ministry factor has challenged it. My desire to help everyone finally led me to a place where I was helping no one, especially my family. I found a great desire to turn over several personal ministry barriers (PMBs) identified in the Natural Church Development material, to the wisest and greatest leader ever to walk the earth.

I find these PMBs demonstrated in my life outside and inside the church. They are: (1) complacency with status quo; (2) lack of vision for the lost; (3) fear and timidity in giving leadership; (4) lack of certainty in calling; (5) poor delegation and management skills; (6) ministerial mercenary perspective; and (7) poor change skills.²

2. Gift-oriented ministry

Related closely to empowering leadership is gift-oriented ministry. This second essential, Schwarz found,

influences the contentedness of Christians more than any other factor. Believers pursuing God's call through gift utilization are generally more satisfied in their lives. "None of the eight quality characteristics showed nearly as much influence on both personal and church life as 'gift-oriented ministry.'"³

This echoes the findings of another church health student, the Apostle Paul when he wrote, "Now about spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant" (1 Cor. 12:1, NIV). Gift-oriented ministry aligns the mission of the church to the gifts of the church. It is the means by which the Spirit of God is released to do the work of God, not just in the

MY DESIRE TO
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hearts and lives of His people but also in the wider community.

This ministry of the Spirit provides a greater sense of meaning and contribution to the individuals in the body. I have seen people in the church, led by the Spirit, come alive as they have aligned not just their "ministerial" lives but their vocational lives to their gift mix. When a believer's passion, gifts, temperament, and personal style are activated by the Holy Spirit and brought out in a meaningful contribution to the body of Christ, there is an inner energy that ignites.

I know one individual who, upon discovering and utilizing his spiritual gift, awakened to a whole new awareness of what God was doing in his life. Once on the periphery of body-life, he found himself joyfully using his Spirit-given gifts to build up the body. It was a joy to see him grow—not only

in gift utilization but in grace. As Paul makes clear in Ephesians, gifts and grace are irreversibly linked. Embrace grace, empower the gift. Exercise the gift, enlarge grace. I believe our churches would experience more of grace and the Spirit of grace if we spent more time releasing the gifts. Many of us pray for the latter rain outpouring of the Spirit, never realizing that the former rain came largely in the form of particular God-given gifts which were released by the Holy Spirit in the lives of disciples passionate about their Savior.

3. Local church structures

A corollary to gift-oriented ministry is local church structures. Schwarz uses the phrase "functional structures." If you ever sat on a church board, Schwarz says, you'll find this characteristic to be the most controversial of all the characteristics. The human body has structure. Practically every organism has structure. Structure is necessary for directed movement. Yet Schwarz's question is simple: "Are our structures functional?"

Implied in this question is the issue of mission clarity and vision strength. A church with 200 attending cannot do everything. The question is, "What can you do?" The challenge of functional structures can be described by a continuum. On one side of the continuum is the fixed structure of the local congregation—the things that are non-negotiable. On the other side is the flexible—those things that can be tweaked, revised, or rejected. What do you find most in your congregation?

One exciting thing we discovered about our congregation is that we have very few on the fixed side of the continuum. The question can then be asked, "Are we structuring for growth?" Releasing gifts mobilizes a vast army, energetic and ready to move. However, do the structures in your church prevent the deployment of those gifts, or are they enhancing gift-deployment? In one church I pastored, we had a standing personnel

committee whose responsibility was to search and deploy these areas of giftedness as people in the congregation were asked to become a part of certain ministries in the congregation. We are in the process of putting that into place in my present church.

Schwarz also discovered that the alternative to functional structures can be devastating to a church: "Our research confirmed for the first time an extremely negative relationship between traditionalism and both growth and quality within the church."⁴

A core to this quality is the ability of the church to develop structures that promote an ongoing multiplication of the ministry. What this has meant for our situation is that new ministries do not begin until there is both a leader and an apprentice. Leaders over our various ministry areas are beginning to understand one of their major responsibilities is to work themselves out of a job. Our current children's ministry leader has caught this vision and at every level she has sought to bring someone in to lead with her. We have had several changes within her department over the course of the year, and the disruption from those changes has been *minimized by her enthusiasm and vision for leader multiplication*. As the sphere of ministry grows in our church, the structures of our church have to anticipate that growth and provide leadership for it.

Football teams have a defense known as the flex defense. The idea is to bend but not break. This captures the essence of functional structures. Structures must be flexible to allow the necessary growth that comes in a healthy body while still being fixed enough to move the body toward mission and vision. This is the challenge of any church of any size.

4. Inspiring worship

Of course, the issue of functional structures probably encounters no greater heat-intensive ground than at the altar of worship. The recent histo-

ry of worship wars has led many to wonder about the significance of worship. Schwarz discovered the issue of worship did not concern a specific style but whether it was "inspiring" to the participant. Thus, he termed this quality, inspiring worship.

This question of what is inspiring suggests that we are not limited to one type or style of worship. Eighty percent of those in high-quality, growing churches acknowledged that "attending our worship service is an inspiring experience for me."⁵ People coming to worship with a sense of anticipation, contributes significantly to the sense of having inspiring worship. People come to worship not only for social reasons, but to meet God. Members who come from and with a sense of duty rather than a sense of excitement may indicate a lack of God's presence in the body. Imagine Israel coming to the tent seeing and feeling the presence of God! When they came, they came with an inspiring sense of anticipation. They were going to meet God!

This issue, probably more than any other, is where many have gotten confused on the difference between a principle and practice. What is appropriate for one context may not be appropriate for another. What is appropriate for Hong Kong may not be appropriate for Hiialeah. The question may be asked, "What inspires those cultures? Do people in each place find their worship a joy, or is it a sullen duty?" A deeper question for myself has been: "Is my own internal need for something exciting a demand I place upon the congregation?" Because I like a certain style or presentation in the worship service, it may be easy for me to project and demand that of a congregation which is not where I am culturally. By attempting to force my worship world into those of my congregation, my internal demand can be a flash-point for a worship war.

Further, when worship is understood in the broader context, as a way of life rather than just an hour, inspir-

ing takes on a deeper dimension. Worship as a way of life automatically brings a sense of enthusiasm and excitement to the weekend. The God who walks with me during the week, I honor and declare in our corporate time together. Through the message being presented, the prayers prayed, the music sung, the Word expressed—the God who goes through his week with me is now placed upon the throne of the convened community. The worship hour then becomes a triumphant procession ignited by the divine reality that He has carried us through the week.

Precisely because of God's magnificence in our individual lives during the week, we can magnify Him on the weekend. Worship is a time to recount the blessings of God and to "praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost." It is by worshiping Him alone during the week, it is by doing life in Jesus' name during the week, it is by serving His redemptive community and thus the fallen community throughout the week that our corporate time together finds such power and enthusiasm. This is what makes it so inspiring!

Is there not a church that desires better leaders, a greater presence of the Holy Spirit, structures that serve mission and worship that takes people closer to their Savior? Whether in Bangkok, Boston, or Beirut, these essential four and the remaining four that make up the essential eight which will be discussed in *Ministry's* May issue, transcend time and space, culture and competency to capture the heart of God's people for Him and the heart of God for His people. They encapsulate all that He desires in a way that is measurable but not mortifying, flexible and not fixed. ■

1 Dee Hock, "The Art of Chaordic Leadership," *Leader to Leader*, No. 15, Winter 2000.

2 Adapted from *Releasing Your Church's Potential*, ChurchSmart Resources.

3 Christian A. Schwarz, *Natural Church Development: A Guide to Eight Essential Qualities of Healthy Churches* (Barcelona, Spain: ChurchSmart Resources, 1996), 24.

4 *Ibid.*, 28.

5 *Ibid.*, 31.

Celebration and experience in preaching

Henry H. Mitchell
with Derek J.
Morris



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

For over thirty years, Henry H. Mitchell has been recognized as an authority on Black preaching, and what he shares about preaching is relevant for preachers of any ethnic or cultural background. His preaching is known for its keen perception of what the Bible says here and now. His books include *Black Preaching: The Recovery of a Powerful Art* and *Celebration and Experience in Preaching*.

Derek Morris: Dr. Mitchell, you are a recognized authority on Black preaching. I'm sure that many of the readers of *Ministry* have read your book *Black Preaching: The Recovery of a Powerful Art*.¹ What are some of the characteristics of Black preaching that make it such a powerful art?

Henry H. Mitchell: Black preaching uses a medium of imagery and tonality to enhance the message. It isn't a downgrading of quality; it is an upgrading of effectiveness. Preaching has to be more than a cognitive essay, no matter how coherent, no matter how forceful the logic. People are not saved by logic; people are not saved by exciting, stimulating, intellectually impressive ideas; people are saved by faith, and faith is not an idea.

DM: Is that what you mean when you talk about needing to have an "experiential encounter" with the Word?²

HHM: That's right! Faith is resident in intuition. It is not resident in cognition. If faith were resident in cognition, the smartest people would be the most likely to be saved. Nobody seems to understand that, but that's exactly the way it is. So if you put together a very impressive essay, you have impressed people but there is no salvation in being impressed. People are ultimately saved by faith. Faith does not contradict reason in most cases. In fact, you need a certain amount of reason just to express faith. But ultimately people are prone to trust God on an intuitive basis.

DM: In *Celebration and Experience in Preaching*, you suggest that sermons should be "designed to generate experiential encounter."³ How does the preacher help people to experience an encounter with the Word?

HHM: If I want a person to experience something, I have to generate the kind of image with which they identify and therefore in which they participate vicariously. So when I paint a picture, I'm not just entertaining them. I'm providing a means whereby they can get on board this experience. And when we come out at the end, the biblical story is their personal story. Whatever happened to the prodigal son happens to them.

DM: This idea of an image helping people to make the Bible story their story reminds me of something you said in *The Recovery of Preaching*: "If you have an idea that can't be translated into a story or a picture, don't use it!"⁴ Why is a story or a picture so important?

HHM: An idea as idea is not self-evident. It's as simple as that. And that's why Matthew, Mark and Luke seem to accuse Jesus of always using parables.

DM: The art of storytelling has a long history. Today narrative preaching is back in vogue but you point out that Black preaching has used narrative for generations.

HHM: And I would hasten to suggest that the narrative preaching talked about in so many western circles is still not what I'm talking about. The narrative preaching they're talking about focuses on cognitive goals. Explanation. And while explanation is impor-

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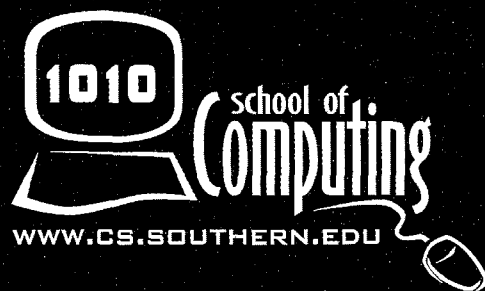
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tant, the bottom line is not how well the truth is explained but how high its impact is, and how much the Holy Spirit uses it to change people.

DM: So, the narrative is not simply a vehicle to convey information but a setting where the listeners can experience an actual encounter with the Word. That's an important distinction. Let's look at another characteristic of Black preaching: dialogue. You assert that "proclamation with power requires dialogue."⁵ Can

will participate to the extent that they are drawn irresistibly into a powerful experience of encounter.

DM: Another characteristic of Black preaching that you have identified is speaking in the mother tongue of your hearers. Can you explain what you mean by that?

HMM: Language communicates a lot more than just the words. Language establishes identity in a powerful way. For instance, a man

of the mother tongue. Their intention is to create a more intimate connection with their hearers.

HMM: Yes! You want people to identify with you. You want people to hear you. You want people to trust what you're saying. If they think of you as a stranger, they're not going to trust you. If, on the other hand, they think that you have come from them or voluntarily joined them, then you have a ready audience.

DM: So, speaking in the mother tongue is a way to establish identity, to connect with your hearers. Obviously, that same principle can be applied in a variety of ethnic and cultural settings. Let's look at one other characteristic of Black preaching which is tremendously important: celebration. You not only assert that "expressive or emotional celebration should be understood as thoroughly biblical,"⁸ you also insist that "celebration is a necessity"⁹ and that "preaching without celebration is a de facto denial of the good news, in any culture."¹⁰ What do you mean by celebration in preaching and why is it so important?

HMM: First of all, let's understand one thing: people are not going to do what the gospel says just because you have said it's right. Ninety-nine times out of a hundred they already knew it was right and they haven't done it. What makes you think that just because you've said it, however cleverly, that they're suddenly going to change? People change when intuition and emotion unite with reason to alter behavior. In other words, there has to be a holistic encounter.

Now, I'm going to involve emotion. I have to do it in a purposeful way. It isn't just excitement. A lot of people think that the celebrated end of a Black sermon is just for entertainment purposes. People aren't changed until their feelings are changed. If you can emote with focus, emote purposefully, you'll have an audience that

FIRST OF ALL, LET'S UNDERSTAND ONE THING: PEOPLE ARE NOT GOING TO DO WHAT THE GOSPEL SAYS JUST BECAUSE YOU HAVE SAID IT'S RIGHT.

you explain to us what is happening in the dialogue process?

HMM: Participation occurs not only with responses like "Amen," but it occurs in the very attitude of people. Because faith is more caught than taught. People who are deeply spiritual and deeply involved in the sermon tend to radiate a kind of influence that draws everybody else into it. It's like if you're at a funeral and see people crying; you have a hard time not crying. In a spiritually alive church, you'll hear a Black preacher say, "Somebody's not praying." Basically, what he is saying is, "I sense in this atmosphere a kind of coldness."

DM: And without congregational response, you maintain that "the sermon event would be impossible."⁶ How does the preacher encourage the congregation to become more involved in dialogue?

HMM: People need to be able to identify with what you're saying. You don't say, "Please say something" or "Please respond audibly." Quite to the contrary. It ought to be something completely spontaneous. Audiences

who is Black and speaks with a British accent will be heard and considered and received as British, no matter what his color. On the other hand, a man who is very light skinned and sounds like a brother will be perceived to be a brother. In other words, the ear image takes precedence over the eye image. No question about it. So if I'm talking to a group of young people and I speak with complete, proper, standard English, those young people will hear me as the enemy. But if I throw in a few of their words and make it plain to them that I'm hip to what's happenin', I'm in already. I don't care if I'm 90 years old. It's not a good thing to project a linguistic image that is false. But there is such a thing as becoming fluent in a variety of languages and doing what Paul recommended when he said, "I'm all things to all men." The point is, I identify with this audience by identifying with their language.

DM: So that's what you mean when you say that a preacher needs to be "linguistically flexible."⁷ You used the example of some great Black preachers who are very skilled with the language but will use some phras-

goes away wanting to do what the Word says to them because the whole person has been impacted. So I celebrate knowing that if people are impacted by my celebration they're much more likely to do what they're supposed to do.

DM: Even though you suggest that "it will not be easy to begin to design vicarious experiences and celebrations of the Word"¹¹ you obviously believe it is both possible and important for any preacher who wishes to communicate God's Word effectively.

HHM: And it's not all that hard if you follow the rules. First, in order to celebrate you move out of the cognitive mode. You don't just conclude with a cognitive summary but you find a way to be glad, a very simple way to be glad about the truth contained in the sermon. If you get glad about it, you want to do it.

Second, you can't celebrate what's wrong. You've got to have a positive text and a basically positive sermon. You celebrate because the prodigal son came home. That's what gladness is about. It's the good news. This gladness transforms people in a way that a critical comment never would. Indeed, if you actually succeeded through critical comment in giving people a bad conscience, you would only be succeeding in giving what a psychiatrist would call a guilt neurosis. People are not saved by guilt neurosis. A sermon has to start positively, and it has to end positively.

Third, don't introduce new information in the celebration. This is not because people are dumb; it's because they already have the truth, and now you're just putting that last blow of the hammer to drive it all the way in. It's the ecstatic reinforcement of the Word. Now we use heightened rhetoric and beauty of phrase to touch people, things that we would not use in the earlier more conscious moves in the sermon.

Fourth, the preacher has to be caught up in celebration. You can't

expect people to be glad about something if you're not glad. If you're so chained to a manuscript that you can't really rejoice, that you can't be transparently a part of the words that you're preaching, you've got a problem. The preacher helps the people to catch the spirit. If you have any logical reason to expect the Lord to work, you ought to be involved in it yourself. We are celebrating the behavioral purposes of the sermon. We're celebrating the truth. We're not just up there dancing around. We are giving what I call ecstatic reinforcement to the text. And until you've had that ecstatic reinforcement, the whole person has not yet met the text.

DM: As preachers lead congregations in an experience of celebration, what safeguards them against going to emotional excess?

HHM: There is no such thing as excess, if you go at it properly. In the first place, you do what you can and the Holy Spirit does the rest. In the second place, this celebration is intentional emotion, focused emotion, and if it's focused, there is no way it's going to excess. There are a lot of people who end up throwing away the baby with the bath water when they fear that almost any emotional expression is going to lead them out of control. They are so busy being proper, they forget that the Holy Ghost has got good sense. And if it's really a Holy Ghost motivated celebration, there's nothing that's going to get out of hand. If preachers go beyond the Holy Spirit, they're on their own. That's manipulation. That's not authentic celebration. ■

1 Henry H. Mitchell, *Black Preaching: The Recovery of a Powerful Art* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990).

2 ———, *Celebration and Experience in Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 25.

3 *Ibid.*, 139.

4 Mitchell, *The Recovery of Preaching* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1977), 45.

5 *Ibid.*, 115.

6 *Black Preaching: The Recovery of a Powerful Art*, 113.

7 *Ibid.*, 87.

8 *Celebration and Experience in Preaching*, 26.

9 *Black Preaching*, 131.

10 *The Recovery of Preaching*, 54.

11 *Celebration and Experience in Preaching*, 139.

Letters *continued from page 3*

pastoral response for those who do not feel called to celibacy and singleness.

Brethren and sisters whose marriages have failed do feel isolated. They have lost a partner and, in many cases, the presence of children. Their former partner may now be a different person from the one they married. Feelings of guilt add to the soup of emotions felt by divorced or separating couples.

A doctrinal "solution" that allows for remarriage is not an adequate solution to the situation Brother Lombart feels. Sensitive inclusion in the life of the church through pastoral care must be a part of the healing process that martially separated and thus bereaved members should go through.

That help cannot come through the actions of a remote committee at the General Conference but ought to be dealt with at a more local level—with friends and fellow pastors responding with love to the pain felt by their brethren.

—Peter Jaynes, pastor, North England Conference, United Kingdom

Another outstanding job on the January issue of *Ministry*. I felt every article was a winner.

One correction. In the interview with Lee Strobel ("Feedback and Evaluation"), Lee is incorrectly identified as a teaching pastor at Willow Creek Church. In fact, Lee is a teaching pastor at Saddleback Valley Community Church in Lake Forest, California, and has been so for well over a year.

God bless, and keep up the great work!

—Rick Warren, pastor, Saddleback Church, Lake Forest, California.

Editorial note: Many thanks for your correction. Apologies for our oversight.

I have read cover to cover the January 2001 issue of *Ministry*. It is one of the finest ever! ■

—Russell L. Kaufman, interim pastor, River Valley Community Church, Newaygo, Michigan.

Sexual abuse of children in the church

Peter Winter

Anne sounded concerned, even a little desperate. "Pastor, I want to talk to you," she said. I found it difficult to believe what she told me. "Martin* has sexually abused my daughter."

Martin was the leader of one of the children's ministries in our congregation. He was in his mid thirties, capable and fun-loving. He and his wife had no children. They were very popular with our young people and had a number of close friends in our small, family-oriented church.

My first reaction was to ask Anne if her daughter was sure of what she was saying. "Sandra wouldn't lie," said Anne. "What's more, there are clear indications that what she says is true. After she and her sister came back from a vacation with Martin and his wife last summer, her attitude to Martin changed drastically. She no longer wanted to go to any youth meetings. When we bought Martin a Christmas present, she didn't want to sign the accompanying card. And she refused to be alone in the same room with her male piano teacher."

"In fact," Anne continued after a pause, "right now she won't even let her father touch her. We thought she was just going through a phase associated with puberty. But now it seems there is much more to it."

I was shocked. But there was more to come. "Sandra isn't the only one Martin has

abused," Anne continued. "Sandra says that Martin has done the same to Lisa."

"Do Lisa's parents know about this?" I asked.

"Not yet," Anne replied. "I'm going to talk with them, and then we've got to do something."

The following week after the church service, Lisa's father, also a church member, spoke to me. He was calm, yet angry. He and his wife had talked with Lisa and she had confirmed Sandra's story. Both girls' parents wanted to meet with Martin.

I had serious misgivings about confronting Martin. Could a man, friendly, ever ready to laugh, really be a child abuser? How could I be sure that the girls were not exaggerating one or two harmless incidents? What would I do if Martin denied the girls' statements?

Over the next few days I prayed about the case, and then decided to visit with Martin. I came straight to the point. "Sandra has said that while she and her sister were on vacation with you, you rubbed her genitals," I said. "She also said that you did the same to Lisa. Is that true?"

Martin hesitated. Then, looking down he said "It's true." He seemed to actually be relieved that he could finally talk about it. As his pastor I felt the curious sensation of being repelled by his admission and yet relieved that he was apparently willing to discuss his behavior with me.

"I've already talked with the parents of both girls and we have decided that unless you want them to report you to the police you are going to have to meet certain conditions," I told him. "First, you have to meet with the parents of these girls, listen to what they feel about what you have done, and apologize. Then you have to pay for the therapy the girls need. You must also go to a therapist yourself. Finally, you have to resign immediately as Pathfinder leader, and for as long as it takes for the girls to get over this you must not come to church."

We talked about these conditions for an hour or so. Martin's main objection concerned the matter of therapy. "You just want to force me to see a psychiatrist as if I were some sort of a pervert," he said.

This surprised me. I felt that if his problem had been mine I'd have been eager to go to a therapist. However, Martin began to show signs of not believing that he had done any-

Peter Winter is a pseudonym.

thing abnormal. My other surprise concerned his attitude about church. He wasn't worried about not coming to church again. "I've been having doubts anyway," he said.

This interview caused me heart-ache and some trauma. Not only because Martin seemed happy to stop coming to church but also because I was painfully aware that I had no right to stop him coming. I was beginning to feel the gathering force of a painful dilemma.

My predicament was caused by two other factors of which the parents of both girls were already aware. First, we felt the girls should not have to be confronted with their abuser week after week. Second, the girls didn't want to have the feeling that our whole congregation knew what had happened to them.

Emotional trauma

One of the cruelest emotions in abused children is their sense of shame. Even though they do nothing whatever to provoke their abuser, they still feel ashamed that they have been singled out as objects of perverted desire. They try to hide their shame by keeping their abuse a secret—in many cases even from their own parents.

In order to spare the feelings of the two girls, we decided to keep Martin's abuse a secret from the church. Reading 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, I was convinced that, with some cooperation from Martin, he could be healed. The secrecy was also intended to give Martin an opportunity to get himself sorted out without suffering the enormous repercussions that a police investigation would bring.

Looking back, I can see how naïve I was. I should never have tried to stop a member from coming to church without the understanding and support of the church. That was a mistake. I now recognize also how my attempt to keep the matter confidential merely extended and even intensified the suffering of all concerned. A problem that should have

been dealt with in a matter of months took over two years to resolve. Our church suffered during this time.

Initially Martin seemed to comply with our conditions. He met with the parents. The meeting was emotionally charged, but it helped clear the air a little. Martin expressed his sorrow at his mistakes, and the parents were willing to forgive.

Emerging problems

As time went by, however, two problems emerged. First, as his initial reactions indicated, Martin was reluctant to enter therapy even though I

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referred him to a highly recommended therapist. After an initial visit, Martin told me that this therapist could only give him appointments during work hours. He said that for this reason he would be unable to undergo therapy. I believed Martin but nevertheless insisted that he undergo therapy. As a result of this pressure Martin eventually started to go to a psychologist of his choosing. This counselor had little expertise in the area of sexual abuse. I gradually began to realize that Martin was in fact avoiding our agreement and his responsibility.

The second problem was that as church members noticed his absence, they visited him and asked why he no longer came to church. Martin's replies hinted at unfair treatment at

the hands of one or two families and the pastor. "Some people just can't forgive," he would sigh with a hurt look in his eyes. His answers raised questions and doubts and soured the atmosphere in the church. Then quite suddenly, in a class conducted at the church, one of the members started to criticize the church leadership for not being able to forgive. And so as time passed the rumors and criticisms grew.

Covering up reality

Martin's abuse had never resulted in sexual intercourse with his victims. Typically he started by being harmlessly playful with a girl—setting her on his lap, tickling her tummy, or massaging her playfully on her back. Then his hand would drop below the waistline and he would touch the genitals. When this happened to Sandra, she was on the verge of puberty. Martin's fingers penetrated her vagina. Sandra realized that Martin had crossed a critical line. She suddenly stiffened and became frightened. She stopped laughing, felt nauseated, and lay limp, not knowing how to react. Martin stopped his sexual advances and tried to make light of them, as if nothing abnormal had occurred—an attitude that confused his young victim.

Later Martin adopted the same attitude when talking to his friends in the church about the incidents. "We were just being playful," he said, "and my hand accidentally dropped below the waistline, that's all. Lisa and Sandra's parents are just making a big fuss about a minor incident." Thus again the rumors spread in the congregation that Martin was being victimized by members too hard-hearted to forgive.

At the time I wasn't aware that Martin had spread these rumors. I was simply aware of a rapid deterioration in the atmosphere of our church. As I saw mistrust and recriminations grow, I realized I had to get advice. I talked to my denominational leadership who immediately assured me of

financial support to get whatever professional help I needed. I attended a one-day seminar on child abuse organized by a neighboring church. From this seminar I obtained the address of a Christian psychologist who specialized in therapy for both child abusers and their victims.

"I'm struggling to understand forgiveness," I told Thomas, the therapist. I told him I knew that it was true that Martin had abused or tried to abuse both girls on more than one occasion and that he had seemed reluctant to enter therapy—but Martin also seemed to be genuinely sorry for his actions. "Shouldn't we be more willing to forgive?" I asked.

It was this information that led me to take the matter further. In my next conversation with Martin, as I pressed him about why he felt he couldn't go to a therapist who specialized in sexual abuse cases, I realized all the more how significantly Martin had been manipulating my genuine desire to see him healed. He acted injured and grieved at my insistence, letting me know that he was hurt by the fact that I was being so hard on him.

By now more than a year had passed since Anne's initial visit. I realized that our attempts to contain the issue had failed. I talked with both sets of parents about revealing the situation to the church. They had by

him. "Martin is sorry for what he has done," they said. "You've got to forgive a repentant sinner." Others saw his sin as a mistake rather than a deliberate act. One or two thought that the victims were exaggerating the incidents. "After all," they said "Martin never actually had intercourse with the girls."

The professional counsel that Thomas gave, however, provided everyone with food for thought. "Most child abusers set their victims up," he explained. "In a process known as 'grooming,' they engineer situations in which they can be alone with the child and in which the child is dependent on them. In these situations they become sexually intimate with the child. Even if this intimacy does not come to intercourse, it can still traumatize the child." This was not what a number of church members wanted to hear, but Thomas went on. "Martin has not shown the fruits of genuine repentance. His apologies have not been attended by his willingness to undergo the kind of treatment that would help him."

WHILE NO ONE CONDONED HIS ACTIONS, A NUMBER OF CHURCH MEMBERS DEFENDED HIM. "MARTIN IS SORRY FOR WHAT HE HAS DONE," THEY SAID.

Dealing with an abuser

Looking back, I can see that Thomas must have despaired at my innocence. First, he explained the psychological profile of a typical child abuser. "They are experts in manipulation," he said. "Martin is manipulating you by making you feel sorry for him. Abusers are also very good at avoiding the consequences of their actions. What you have described shows that Martin has been doing just that." Further, Thomas told me that the chances were great that Martin had abused more than just the two victims I knew of. He advised me to encourage the families to prosecute Martin. He believed that only prosecution would bring any further victims to light. "Furthermore," he added, "if Martin has shown reluctance to enter therapy, then the chances that he will abuse others in the future—possibly in your church—are also significant."

this time become sickened by the rumors in our church and agreed as a first step to talk openly to the local leaders of our church. I also informed Martin of my step.

Although our congregational leaders reached some reasonable decisions—the major one of which was to organize a special, ad hoc meeting to discuss the matter—a number of the leaders later resigned their posts because the emotional burden was too much to bear.

We decided to inform the church in two steps. A first meeting would be purely informative. A second meeting a month or so later was set to decide whether or not to disfellowship Martin. We also decided to invite Thomas, the therapist I had consulted, to these meetings.

As we met, it quickly became apparent that the rumors that Martin had spread had done their work. While no one condoned his actions, a number of church members defended

Effects on the Church

The emotions engendered in those meetings came close to dividing our church. The parents of the abused girls in particular were devastated. They had been sure that once the church knew the facts they would receive significant support from their fellow members. Unfortunately the opposite proved to be true in many cases. Some of their friends were too embarrassed to talk about the subject and tended to avoid them. Others were hostile because they were convinced that the problem would be solved if only the parents would forgive Martin and encourage him to come back to church. In the eyes of some, the victims had virtually become the culprits. But finally, as a church we formally decided to tell Martin to accept the prescribed therapy or be disfellowshipped.

Although it was not our desire to publicize the abuse case, word spread.

As a result a third victim came forward and confirmed that she too had been abused by Martin a number of years before. It was this, together with Martin's continued reluctance to enter therapy, that finally caused the victims' parents to go to the police. A few days later the police visited Martin's home with a search warrant. What they discovered will be used as evidence in his forthcoming trial.

As a result of his prosecution, Martin wrote a letter stating his decision to leave not only our local congregation but our denomination. While accepting his decision, our church nevertheless decided to disfel-
lowship him formally. We reached this decision not merely because of his actions but also because of his lack of repentance.

Unfortunately this decision did not end the matter. Realizing that the feelings of our church were deeply divided, we organized a seminar on the subject of child abuse. The speaker, a therapist of great common sense, was able to dispel a number of misconceptions and helped some of our members realize how Martin had manipulated their feelings. We also organized a week of prayer and fasting for our church.

Yet the sense of woundedness caused by this one man's action and its fallout remain. Our congregation, which had previously been friendly, happy, and outgoing before all this came to light is still hampered by *division and mistrust*. Some people have changed their position and have apologized for siding with Martin. Others have not. One victim's family, previously very active in the church, comes to church only occasionally. Martin's wife, who supported her husband throughout, has virtually lost contact with us. The victims themselves have had significant therapy during the last three years. Only time will tell how well the emotional wounds have healed. ■

LEARNING FROM OUR SITUATION

Looking back, I have drawn a number of lessons for myself, and I share them here for any pastor who may find them useful in facing a similar situation.

1. *Never sweep allegations of child abuse under the carpet.*
Take time to get advice, and avoid rushing into decisions, but don't pretend the problem doesn't exist.
2. *Respect confidentiality, but don't try to keep the problem a secret.*
Even while you wisely and understandably try to keep a potentially volatile situation contained, attempts at secrecy will almost certainly come back to haunt you.
3. *Inform yourself of the legal situation.*
In some countries you are legally required to report child abuse to the police. Be aware of your legal standing regarding information that is disclosed to you in confidence.
4. *Get all the help you can.*
Inform appropriate members of your denominational leadership of the problem and ask for support.
5. *Get your denominational administrative leadership to help you.*
Ask a trusted, sensible, and faithful colleague to support your attempts to pastor the abuser, the victim, and, if necessary, the congregation.
6. *Be aware of the typical psychological profile of a child abuser.*
7. *If you have no experience in dealing with child abuse, then consult a professional therapist for advice.*
Attend a seminar on child abuse. Your congregation or denomination may be able to help with the cost.
8. *Don't underestimate the problem.*
It has the potential to divide families and churches. Recognize that it can take huge amounts of time and drain you of emotional energy.
9. *Advise the victims to prosecute the unrepentant abuser.*
I recognize that this advice is controversial. Yet as pastors we do not have the full resources to deal with the ramifications of this problem.
10. *Be patient.*
The subject of child abuse is so emotionally charged that your church might take a longer time than you anticipate to get over it.
11. *Take time for prayer and fasting.*
While I have purposely been quite open about the mistakes I made in this situation, I can nevertheless see the gracious hand of God leading our congregation.

* "Martin" is a pseudonym, along with every other name mentioned in this article.

God in the garden?

An Easter message

Thomas E. Schmidt



Thomas E. Schmidt,
Ph.D., writes from
Santa Barbara,
California.

The reading is taken from the New Improved Genesis, chapter 1: "In the beginning of modern times, about one hundred years ago, Man looked at his universe, and it seemed without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep, and the spirit of mankind looked over everything, and Man said, 'Let there be science.' And there was science.

And Man saw the science that he had made, that it was good, and with it he divided all things. He created a science to rule the day, all things he could see, and he called it Natural Science, even unto Physics, Chemistry, and Biology. And he made a lesser science to rule the night, all the darker things about himself, and he called it Social Science, even unto Psychology, Sociology, and Political Science. And Man saw that it was good. And there was morning and evening, and the modern day had begun.

And Man divided all the things he saw into the waters above, the land, the waters below, the grass, the fruit tree yielding fruit, the swarms of living creatures in the waters, the birds that fly above the earth, and moving creatures of every kind that are on the earth, including himself, a higher primate who can be distinguished from other creatures mainly by his ability to destroy and separate the whole creation. And Man saw that all this dividing and classifying was good. It took sev-

eral evenings and mornings, and that got him up to the fifth day.

And then Modern Man said, "Let us make God after our own image, according to our likeness." And so he did. He blessed God, and he said to him, "Be distant and keep to yourself, because we have already filled the earth and subdued it and classified it, and there really isn't much room left for you, but you certainly are a pleasant thought."

And then Modern Man planted a garden, and there he put the God he had formed. And he called the garden Safe, Respectable Religion. And out of the ground of that garden Man made to grow trees that are pleasant to the sight, and flowers, and he put a fine building in the midst of the garden, because good landscaping enhances property values. And the Lord Man took God and put him in the building in the garden. And the Lord Man commanded God, "You may freely look through the windows at all of the trees and flowers of the garden, but don't leave the building, for in the day that you leave it you shall surely die."

Then the Lord Man said, "It is not good for God to be awake; someone might wander into the building and find him and be frightened." So the Lord Man caused a deep sleep to fall upon the God he had made, and he slept. And Man laid him in a box inside the building and put a lid on the box and laid a curtain over it and placed tall candlesticks on top of it, so he could come there from time to time to remember the God he had made. The Modern Man said, "At last, I have expressed fully the mystery of life, and the depth of my mind; I shall call this God Personal, for out of my personality he was taken."

And there was evening and morning, the sixth day, and Modern Man saw that it was very good, because all this was done leaving one extra day in the weekend for recreation.

So ends our daily reading. If we had an equivalent hymn book, we could turn to #372, "How Great We Are."

God in our image

Modern culture and religion deserve such a parody. We may be willing enough to say that God created us, but we all too often live as though we create God. I don't mean in the secular materialist sense of declaring that God is a projection of wishes and superstitions. Few people can be sure of God's nonexis-

tence. We'd rather give Him the benefit of our doubt. But that is the problem. Most of our time is occupied by problems we can get our minds around: finish this project at work, prepare dinner, pay the phone bill by the fifteenth. . . .

It is natural to shelve the problems we can't get our minds around: God is present, but I don't feel anything. God answers prayer but not always with a Yes. God changes lives, but my worst habits remain. Expressions like "get our minds around" and "shelve" imply that within us there are spaces, and ways to divide those spaces, so we speak of ourselves in architectural terms: "I don't have room for this in my life right now," "You are putting up a wall," "That wasn't in her comfort zone."

Where does God fit in all this? The reality we need to get by from hour to hour, to work and eat and pay bills, is a pretty small place; the smaller and more well-defined the better. Someone as big and uncertain as God has to

be put outside, we think. But not far outside because, again, we give Him the benefit of doubt. We assign Him a place nearby, a place we can go to when the time or need arises. A place of convenience. A *nice* place, like a garden.

"I come to the garden alone, while the dew is still on the roses," we sing, "And He walks with me, and He talks with me, and He tells me I am His own." And then what? I presumably leave the garden, go back to my house, and He never follows. What is the alternative? It is terribly threatening to imagine that there really is a God who might invade our spaces, defy our categories, knock down our walls, demand more from us, do more with us, than we are willing to allow.

Admit it. How much more attractive would God be if He were the God in the garden, if we could keep Him in a place of our own imaginative creation, where He walks around quietly blessing flowers and bunny rabbits and small children. We could let Him

out, or let ourselves in, when we feel the need of a word of reassurance or a warm hug, or when we are grieved or depressed or guilty or frightened. But those aren't constant needs, of course. The real world is investment portfolios, kids who must be taken to practice, a vacation to plan. Most of this world we have created is not a place for God. Keep Him inside the garden wall, or His box.

Easter, especially the Resurrection, is about God's refusal to stay in a box.

Another garden

A long time after the story of the first garden, the one in Eden, there was the story of another garden, and Jesus, who didn't fit into the world of that time. So the people killed Him, put Him in a box in a garden, and put a lid on it; in the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. There they laid Jesus.

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that

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the stone had been removed from the opening to the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and “the other disciple” (John 20:2, 3, NIV), who came running to see for themselves.

After they left, Mary remained and stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She said to them, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him.” After saying this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Who is it you are looking for?” Supposing Him to be the gardener, she said, “Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you have laid Him, and I will take Him away.” Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to Him in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (which, translated, means teacher). Jesus said to her, “Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to My Father and your Father, to My God and your God.’” Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord”; and she told them that He had said these things to her (see John 20:11-18).

The curious and important detail in the story really is the main point: Mary didn’t expect Jesus to be where she saw Him and thus she did not recognize the risen Jesus until He called her by name. When God comes out of the box, out of the garden, when He decides to defy our expectations, to break out of the limitations we have placed on Him, He does it in the most intimate manner possible, and then He follows up with a frightening demand.

The risen, glorified Christ calls Mary by name and commissions *her*. A woman in a time when the word of a woman wasn’t worth much. A for-

mer prostitute in a culture where one’s past was unforgivable. Jesus calls this woman by name and commissions her to be the first witness of the greatest event in history, an event which, by the way, may not be that easily believed by those to whom she is sent. A God who shatters our conventional stereotyping of Him asks us to communicate a message that is everything but stereotypical.

What kind of God do we expect to find, anyway? What Jesus have you planted for yourself in the garden? And what is the nature of the message we are called upon to proclaim? Us? It couldn’t be!

WE ALL TOO
OFTEN LIVE
AS THOUGH WE
CREATE GOD.

Discovering Jesus

So imagine yourself Easter morning in a garden, like Mary, alone with your bewildering thoughts, weeping about something that you think should be there but isn’t. We all have some pain, some personal trauma. We have confusion. We may be thinking, “I thought the direction of life would be clearer by this time. I thought I’d know what I’m good at and others would appreciate me and there would be a straight path to the future. Instead, there is just this big empty road with no signs on it, and I’m still not sure where I’m heading. I’m lonely. People have let me down. People die, people change, people leave, people stay but don’t have time for me or don’t care how badly I need them. People don’t notice me, or they’ve stopped noticing me. Life has unexpectedly turned out something like a Picasso painting; the kind you walk up to and ask nervously, ‘What is it?’

“I am guilty. I’ve done things I regret, but not enough to make

amends, and I’m not even sure how to go about trying if I wanted to. I hold most of it inside myself, because I would only repulse people if they knew what I really am inside. My bad habits are ingrained, and my good ones seem too likely to dissolve into nothing. I don’t want to get used to myself being this way, but neither do I seem to have the power to change. Nothing is as it is supposed to be—as I expected it to be.”

Where is God in all of this? Where do you go to find Him? Where are the answers? Not in a garden with some sentimental stained-glass image of a God we have created for our convenience. That Jesus isn’t big enough or powerful enough to deal with our deep-felt hurt, confusion and guilt.

The glorious news and the frightening news of Easter is that *He is not here* in this garden grave. *He’s alive*. And He is standing behind us as we sit in that chair reading these words, while we sit in our office, or even in front of the television.

And He is speaking your name, calling you out by name, whispering, “You cannot find peace until you find me here behind you. You cannot rest in Me until you begin to understand what it means to follow Me. And you cannot follow Me sitting there trying to figure it all out, attempting to manage your life in your own way. Something’s got to give.”

You are about to finish this article. Then what? Most likely you will leave this quiet place of contemplation, this garden, to take up a more demanding activity. Go to work, tend the children, pay some bills. That’s life too. But in the quiet moments punctuating the hubbub, remember when you leave that you did not leave alone. Jesus will not stay buried for you here any more than He stayed buried for Mary Magdalene. You will find him unexpectedly even in the most devastating moments and places of life. It is not only true that “they follow the Lamb wherever he goes” (Rev. 14:4) but that where we are there He is also (John 14:3). ■

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Christianity and the church in the twenty-first century

Bill Jackson

I was recently asked to be the guest speaker at the annual gathering of a local chapter of a national Christian organization. I was asked to speak on *Christianity and the Church in the Twenty-First Century*, a timely topic for the end of the millennium. As I prepared my presentation, I realized that this subject was not as easy as it first sounded.

For example, it struck me early that the title assigned to me implies several assumptions that should not be taken for granted. To begin with, now that we are well into the new millennium I guess I can accept the assumption that we will have at least part of a twenty-first century!

The second and third implied assumptions, however were not as easily dismissed: that Christianity has a future and that the Church is also assured another century. It is these two assumptions that, of course, underlie the thrust of any discussion of the future of the "Christian" "Church."

So, does Christianity and the Church have a future in twenty-first century? To such a question many would ask "Aren't Christianity and the Church one and the same? For some these two entities may be interchangeable. I, however, do not believe they are.

Although both the word "Christianity" and the word "Church" have a particular history, the word Christianity as used today simply refers to a system of faith grounded among those who are adherents of Jesus

Christ.¹ The Church, on the other hand, is a word which refers to people gathered together, particularly in Jesus' name, an assembly.

Do both Christianity and the Church have a future? The answer, in both cases is "Yes," though that "Yes" must be qualified. Let me deal with Christianity first because it is, I think, the easier one. And it is easy for the believer, at least, because Jesus basically answers it for us.

Consider, for example, the parables taught by Jesus which have to do specifically with the Kingdom of God. The collection of parables that appear in Matthew 13 are typical. There is the parable of the good seed and bad seed (verses 24-30), the mustard seed (verses 31, 32), the yeast (verse 33), the treasure, once hidden but then found (44), a pearl of great value (45, 46) and of a net bringing in all kinds of fish (47-50). Then in chapter 23 there is the parable of the wedding banquet (22:2-14).

The thrust of each and all of these parables clearly suggests the conclusion that in Christianity, we have God's permanent reign breaking in and continuing to expand until one day it takes over everything. So, according to Jesus, it is certain that Christianity has a future. Of course, many dominant world powers over the centuries have done their best to disprove Jesus' words. Along with this, many of these same powers have given the persuasive appearance of outdoing and even destroying God's Kingdom. A mere 30 years after the crucifixion of Jesus, the Roman emperor Nero initiated the first intentional Christian persecution which, although limited to Rome, resulted in a vast number of Christians experiencing unspeakable cruelty and death.² In the midst of this and other persecutions it has seemed, sometimes for extended periods, that Christianity would fade away.

One hundred fifty years after this the Roman emperor Decius put to death yet more Christians; and a few decades later Diocletian initiated the most severe of persecutions with possibly thousands of believers perishing, churches being razed, Bible Scriptures being destroyed, and Christians losing all civil rights.³ Despite or perhaps because of this, Christianity continued to grow and spread.

Aside from the pressures that came from outside the Church, there were those that came from within, threatening the survival of Christianity even more seriously. The emperor



Bill Jackson, Ph.D., is principal of North Queensland College of Ministries in Queensland, Australia.

Constantine, for example, blurred whatever distinction existed between Church and State, which resulted in an arrogance not found in Christianity until that time. Both the moral and spiritual quality of the Christian community suffered. Charlemagne, the first emperor of what became known as the Holy Roman Empire actually forced people to profess Christianity or face the consequences. His motto of "converting the Saxons by the Word and the sword" is surely a corruptive blot on the history of Christianity. Serious as these blots were, we can hardly begin to enumerate all the other internally corruptive influences that Christianity has survived across the centuries of its existence. Despite this, Christianity has survived and even thrived. Thus it is by all means reasonable and persuasive to project that Christianity does have a future.

What of the future of the Church?

But what about the Church? Does what we have just seen of the survival of Christianity necessarily imply that the future of the Church itself is likewise assured? Does the survival of the teaching automatically imply the survival of the congregation of the taught? I don't believe it does, yet at the same time I believe the Church has a triumphant future, and again I believe that because I believe Jesus saw it to be true.

Jesus Himself made a stupendous claim for His Church, which was in itself a far-reaching prophecy: "On this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18).

Eugene Peterson's paraphrased translation of Jesus' proclamation says: "This is the rock on which I will put together my church, a church so expansive with energy that not even the gates of hell will be able to keep it out."⁴ Jesus described what, or upon whom the Church was built and that there was nothing that could extinguish such a light.

What forms will the Church take?

But there is an even larger question; a practical one: What will be the form or forms of the Church? In what types of ministry will it (we) be involved? What will the Church (we) look like? What will church leadership look like?

These are fascinating questions which we must, and will continually have to answer. God ensures the future but we, under Him, are called to flesh out the specific forms of His church's future. In recent years Christian denominations of all kinds have experienced numerous and far-reaching changes in form. Just the

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advent of huge population explosions around the globe has necessitated a new phenomenon that of necessity breeds all kinds of further changes in congregational form. There is such proliferation and variation that it is almost foolish to attempt to name a few by way of example.

A Christian time traveler, even from the comparatively recent 1950s, suddenly transported to the present day, would stand in mute confusion were they to suddenly walk into the usual "contemporary worship" service found in many churches today. Worship styles have changed dramatically of late and continue to be reformulated. While we may yet have a relatively consistent definition of what it means to worship God, we

still tend to radically disagree with one another as to how our definition translates into practice on a weekly worship basis. Certainly worship manifests itself in a vastly different way from what it did in my teenage years (the 1970s).

Worship is a (if not *the*) volatile issue among many Christians. Forms of worship and worship music can be seen to be representative factors as one attempts to project the future of the church. A major survey of Australian churches in 1996, conducted by the *National Church Life Survey*, found that worship, particularly worship music, is causing serious schism.⁵ Many of us don't need a survey to tell us such things. We consistently experience them firsthand. But some specifics may be useful.

The *National Church Life Survey* revealed that some 46 percent of respondents considered traditional hymns most helpful to them while 48 percent found choruses or other contemporary music most helpful.⁶ Further, if an average Australian congregation was polled, it would reveal that 24 percent of them want "church" to be more contemporary, while 15 percent want things to be kept more traditional.⁷

It is not surprising that the survey also found that musical preferences are strongly linked to age. "Generational differences are expressed in musical preferences."⁸ The survey also revealed that age 50 seems to be the crucial age in church life where musical tastes divide. This seems to imply that future generations might be more instrumental in introducing changes in significant aspects of worship.

Do denominations have a future?

Denominations, while being redefined will continue to exist and make a contribution. Princeton-based sociologist Robert Wuthnow believes strongly that denominations are not a thing of the past.⁹ They serve a purpose and will continue to serve a purpose. As an example, denomina-

tions allow us to be connected, to plug into something greater than our local congregation. It has been said that "through [denominations we] expand [our] own culturally bound concerns."¹⁰

Denominations "multiply the conversations" in which churches participate. In other words, they amplify our concerns, projecting them into venues that transcend the local church. Hence, as a leading sociologist of religion has said, "Efforts to save souls and protect the planet gain clout when supported by dozens or even thousands of congregations bound together."¹¹ Our experience confirms that. Denominations help us

A few years ago I was taken with the title of a *National Church Life Survey* publication: *Shaping a Future*.¹² This title was deliberately forged or chosen to reflect the ambiguity that is still before us. Of course, Missiologist David Barrett is even more blatant. In his book *Seven Hundred Plans to Evangelize the World* Barrett proposes numerous scenarios for church growth through to the year four billion A.D., when he postulates the ultimate size of the church of Jesus Christ to be 1 decillion believers (1 followed by 33 zeros).¹³ Barrett's plans, found on pages 789-811, suggest ways such a scenario might be achieved.¹⁴ The point is, as Barrett

speaking countries comprise 12 percent of population, but represent only 8 percent of church attendees. It appears our best efforts to provide a spiritual home for these disparate people seems to lie down the road of creating exclusively ethnic churches. Efforts at assimilating them into our own Australian congregations do not seem to be working at this time.

This is just one issue among many. What will Christian ministry look like as we wake up to the fact that AIDS, suicide, homelessness, unemployment, and the search for meaning, to name just a few, are matters that refuse to go away? What's more, other philosophies and ideologies are addressing these issues, leaving the poor old church in their wake! What will it mean as, more and more, denominations embrace interfaith dialogue?

What might Christian education look like as we continue to train our young people, and our not so young people in organizations like Campus Crusade and other organizations designed to deal specifically with the young? When might we learn that training such leaders is worthwhile not just as something to do, but because we believe a person must be equipped to minister effectively to those they encounter?

What will be the shape of theological education in the days to come? Will we continue to press on under the old overworked models, or will we be prepared to take risks, to begin to train people differently, more experientially. Will such training include areas pertaining more to what pastors and potential ministers actually need as they pastor, rather than to what some have always thought is needed? I have written elsewhere that theological education is at a crucial crossroad. It needs to be more than simply imparting and measuring knowledge. Theological education needs to prepare Christian leaders so that they become better equipped to face and cope with a plethora of needs and expectations such as those defined by

IT IS ALSO TRUE, HOWEVER, THAT THE ROLE AND FUNCTION OF DENOMINATIONS WILL CONTINUE TO CHANGE; INDEED, THEY ARE ALREADY CHANGING.

to connect, in view of the truth that there really is strength in numbers.

It is also true, however, that the role and function of denominations will continue to change; indeed, they are already changing. Traditional denominations and denominational leaders are finding that their old "tried and true" methods are not working, nor are they being readily accepted by up-and-coming pastors. At the same time mega-churches are taking over many of the traditional denominational roles and are thus becoming more like denominations themselves. This in itself is an exciting challenge to all involved in Christian ministry.

So what of the future?

The future, I believe is not predetermined. We are not God-created automatons who have been divinely programmed to act without thought. God has created within us the capacity, and the ability to "work out our own salvation" (Phil. 2:12).

himself realizes, that the possibilities are endless when it comes to how we might arrange the church and the church's mission in the days to come. The variables determining our future direction are almost infinite.

For example, what will the Church look like in the future as multiculturalism becomes more pronounced and as the church more accurately reflects this growing phenomenon? We are already facing this issue in Australia where, according to the 1996 census, only 75 percent of Australians were actually born in Australia. While 25 percent of the Australian population only translates to a mere 4.5 million, enough to warrant significant proportions of our attention. Significant parts of the world are facing similar changes and challenges.

Yet again according to the *National Church Life Survey* people with non-English speaking backgrounds are under-represented in Australian church life. People from non-English

the social changes in our congregations and societies.¹⁵

The future of Christian leadership

What will Christian leadership look like as, God willing, we eventually deliberately allow younger persons to contribute? Will we in the church catch up to what many in the secular and corporate world have known for years: that younger people have a major contribution to make to our organizations and institutions and that by keeping them on the fringes, we are all impoverished? Will we begin to change our structures to reflect how younger persons think, rather than forcing them to transform their structures into an existing mold?

Will ministers and pastors look the same, or will we break away from the well-worn standards? The average Australian pastor is probably not very different from pastors in many other countries. The average Australian pastor has the following thumbnail profile: He is 47. He may or may not have a theology degree. There is about a 50 percent chance he feels called to the church in which he is ministering. He has been there for about four years. This means this is about his fourth church. It also means he will shortly move somewhere else.¹⁶

Management guru Peter Drucker says that every time an organization doubles in size, half of the leadership becomes obsolete. As we in churches around the world pray for church growth, do we ever stop and think about what the impact that our answered prayers might look and feel like? How drastically different might the church of the future be as God chooses to answer our prayers in the affirmative and how that might affect the future of Christian leadership? If these answered prayers created our redundancy would we still pray so fervently for church growth?

An exciting, hopeful future

It is my firm conviction that we avoid these questions and other relat-

ed issues to our peril. Perhaps the question each of us must ask is: What must I do to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ? What am I actually prepared to do? What am I prepared to let go? What can I do even though I may never have done it this way before?

An exciting future lies ahead. Exciting yes, but also quite gray and cloudy. But as German theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg reminds us: "As a result of Jesus' coming, the Christian community is to be a people of hope. We live in hopeful expectation of the final consummation of God's rule over the entire world . . . [therefore] the calling of the church is to remain in the world, for this is where the struggle for truth occurs."¹⁷

People of hope. That is what we are and what we are called to be. Therefore, Pannenberg adds: "Human behavior is shaped as much by anticipation as by the weight of the past."¹⁸

I began by asking two questions: Does Christianity have a future in the twenty-first century, and Does the Church have a future in the twenty-first century? Let me simply close with two words: Yes, Yes.

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- 3 Robert C. Walton, *Chronological and Background Charts of Church History* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub. Co., 1986), chart #10.
- 4 Eugene H. Peterson, *The Message* (Colorado Springs: NavPress Pub. Group, 1994), 42.
- 5 Peter Kaldor et. al, *Initial Impressions* (Adelaide: Openbook Pub., 1997), 13ff
- 6 *Ibid.*, 15.
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- 8 Peter Kaldor et. al, *Views From the Pews* (Adelaide: Openbook Pub., 1995), 34.
- 9 Robert Wuthnow, *Christianity in the 21st Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 10.
- 10 Nancy Tatom Ammerman, *Congregation and Community* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 362.
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- 15 Bill Jackson, *Sociology: A Must in Training Tomorrow's Christian Leaders*, "On Being 23" [7] August, 1996.
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- 17 Ed. L. Miller and Stanley J. Grenz, *Fortress Introduction to Contemporary Theologies* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 130.
- 18 John B. Cobb, Jr., "Pannenberg and Process Theology" in Carl Braaten and Philip Clayton (Eds.) *The Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Pub. House, 1998), 67.

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Million-Dollar Party

Recently, Greg Nelson, pastor of the 2,000-member College View Church at Union College, surprised his congregation and shocked most of his colleagues by announcing that he was leaving the comfort zone of Lincoln, Nebraska, to venture planting a new church in Seattle.

What would motivate one of the most successful pastors to enter the apparently risky venture of planting a new church in one of the world's most secular cities? Why are so many pastors and laity becoming increasingly excited about planting new churches?

Perhaps you have wondered if new churches are really worth the effort. Maybe you have seen some new churches started by disgruntled members who swarm to form a new group which remains essentially the same size for many years. Or perhaps you have known dedicated laity who moved to a dark county in order to establish a lighthouse where no previous church presence existed after years of struggle, they seem barely to have impacted the community.

What's different about church planting today? If you were able to observe ten recently-planted congregations in the Mid-America Union (USA), you would be amazed at their vigor and the dynamic spirit that drives their success. In fact, next May the pastors of these ten new churches which will have been meeting for an average of only 24 months will celebrate a million-dollar party to commemorate returning over \$1 million dollars in tithe from these new congregations. Several factors explain why these new plants have been so successful when other past projects have languished.

Evangelism does not cost. It pays! Through many years of itinerant evangelism, I demonstrated to conference

JAMES A. CRESS



finance committees and local church boards that, beyond the joy of bringing new individuals into a relationship with Jesus, winning souls is a sound financial investment. Typically, newly-baptized members return the entire expense of an evangelistic crusade within the first 14 months of membership. Any financial gains after that is "new income" to the conference and local congregation. Likewise, new converts are an excellent network strategy for reaching even more potential members. Ron Gladden, director of church planting for the Mid-America and North Pacific Unions in the North American Division, states that the conference treasurers have studied tithe patterns for churches adjacent to the newly-planted churches and report that those already-existing churches have experienced no tithe decrease.

In other words, these new churches are not in existence only because of a shift in members away from other churches. In fact, statistics for these ten churches, demonstrate that over 440 individuals are participating who would not be attending any church if they were not involved in these new congregations. No wonder they will host a party to celebrate the million dollars net tithe increase to the conferences.

Go where the people are. God's strategy is to target people centers. The early Christians planted new churches

first in the large cities. They went to urban centers where shifting people groups and repeatedly replenishing populations offered the best potential for attracting new people. Suspicion or prejudice about new projects is much less of a factor in metropolitan areas.

New churches fund more new churches. Just as baptisms inspire others to be baptized, so new churches can actually pay for planting more new churches. Gladden says that in Mid-America Union, each conference places an equivalent of 60 percent of the tithe from their new churches into a specific-purpose fund for establishing even more churches. Thus, not only is the initial investment recouped, but future congregations are already funded by those recently planted.

Church planting must be intentional. Each of these projects is an intentional, planned outreach, funded by the union and local conferences and following established, proven methods for planting new churches. Qualified pastoral couples are designated as church planters and undergo rigorous training and establish long-range objectives with specific implementation assignments. An up-front funding investment of salaries, time, budgets, and energy helps guarantee success.

Church planting principles can be taught. Each year the North American Division sponsors a SEEDS convention on the campus of Andrews University. Russell Burrill and Marti Schneider, who coordinate these events, report that attendance grows every year. Plenary sessions and topic-specific workshops offer the best training for those who want to understand church planting. If you dream of launching a newly planted church, your first priority should be to register for the next SEEDS convention,

continued on page 31

BOOK REVIEW

Left Behind or Sincerely Taken: Exposing the Myths of the Secret Rapture, by Louis R. Torres. Remnant Publications, 2000, paperback, 127 pages, U.S.\$11.99.

At a time when the doctrine of the secret rapture is widely propagated, Christians who believe this teaching to be unbiblical are looking for a much needed corrective; the author addresses this important topic. Although the outline does not indicate it, Torres states that the book consists of two parts, the first attempts to refute "some of the non-biblical teachings regarding the secret rapture," the second, considers "what God has predicted will happen" (60) at the time of the end.

Eight of the fourteen chapters of the first part are introduced with one or more Bible passages or verses which are then discussed. In the second part the author touches on subjects such as the natural immortality of the soul, holiness, and the Sabbath while presenting the biblical doctrine of Christ's second coming. The last chapters contain a practical application and a call to be ready for that coming now. Although pointing to turbulent times lying ahead of us, at the end of his book the author points to the hope and the joy of the second coming of Jesus.

In chapters two to five, Torres studies Matthew 24:40, 41 and Luke 17:34-36. He suggests that those who are taken, are lost, whereas those who are left behind, are saved. This suggestion is interesting and deserves further study. However, the author—although referring to the Greek text—falls short of discussing all the relevant terms. In addition, his decision to rely on the KJV text leads him to quote parallels which use Greek words that are different from those being employed in the passages under discussion. In other places, the text of the KJV may also create problems (e.g. "meat" instead of "food").

The book contains some inaccuracies, e.g., with regard to spelling. Whereas in chapter three the author transliterates the Greek, in chapter 11 he uses Greek characters, yet the words are misspelled. This is also true for some names. In some cases, one feels uneasy about the author's method of interpretation, e.g., clouds are chariots, and chariots are angels (73) which sound more like proof-texting than serious exegesis. This is even more serious since the author suggests methods for "Rightly Dividing the Word" (101-106).

The book is easy to read and contains some helpful information in the present debate over the secret rapture. ❏

—Ekkehardt Mueller, Th.D., D.Min., associate, Biblical Research Institute, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Silver Spring, Maryland.

Million-Dollar Party

continued from page 30

July 18-21 (see ad at right).

Enthusiasm can be caught. Like influenza, enthusiasm for planting churches is highly contagious. As I had opportunity to hear the reports and share the experiences of church planters at SPROUTS, another convention which Ron Gladden has introduced for those who are actively engaged in specific new church plants, I was reinvigorated with the imperative of reaching the lost and building new converts into God's church.

Why a party? Jesus said "all heaven rejoices when one sinner repents." Imagine the joyous celebration when whole congregations of people are won for the kingdom! ❏

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ing in God's presence from experience as a woman, a pastor, and a teacher.



Proclaiming in the Presence of the Holy

As the pastor of large African-American congregations in Los Angeles and New York City, **Ron Smith** learned that God is both the subject and the audience of the sermon. Sermons communicate what God has said *and* what the

proclaimer and congregation have to say to Him. He now serves as editor of *Message* magazine.



Playing in the Presence of the Holy

Only those who are secure can play, for only they believe that good will triumph over evil. **Calvin Miller**, professor of preaching and pastoral studies at Beeson Divinity School is uniquely equipped to help ministry

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