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ISSUES IN THE INTERPRETATION OF THE
SEVEN TRUMPETS
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“I FOUND IT COMFORTING TO HEAR THAT I’M NOT ALONE IN MY FRUSTRATIONS.”

The fundamentals of ministry

Dr. Loren Seibold’s article, “Get Back to the Basics. Be Jesus to Someone!” (September 2011) addressed a need I believe we have had in the ministry for decades.

Having taught and counseled pastors and seminary students for ten years, I became well aware that we ministers are human too—often possessing unresolved issues from the past. Added to that is the challenge of responding to a sometimes disgruntled, divided, hurting congregation. This can be overwhelming. The pastors in many of our churches, it seems, are expected to be all things to all people—administrator, builder, counselor, fund-raiser, arbitrator, motivator, and (let’s not forget) a powerful preacher.

We are left with an important question: Who will come close to the pastor and his family? Who will mediate the presence of Jesus to them? Who will be Jesus to them? I agree with the author of this article. It certainly is a blessing to visit those in care centers, nursing homes, as well as those in grief and pain. May I suggest, though, to be most effective in one’s ministry and deal with its various aspects—including relating to others in pain—it is crucial to have someone who will be a caregiver to the pastor.

Fourteen years ago I experienced the death of my spouse from cancer. I was grateful for the ministers who

attended the funeral. But only one minister, who lived in another city, cared enough to stay in touch.

What is needed is a pastor’s pastor, a person who is skilled in listening and assisting in processing past and present issues. The individual needs to be confidential, one with whom they can share their deepest needs and challenges of ministry, one with whom they can be vulnerable, whom they can call, day or night, after a difficult day or a challenging board meeting.

I strongly believe that if you have a happy and fulfilled pastoral family, your chances of having a happy and fulfilled congregation are greatly increased. Therefore, the minister, having received the comforting presence mediated through the pastor’s pastor, will then be able to more effectively mediate the comforting presence of Jesus to his congregation.

—Alvin L. Kurtz, *email*

Just wanted to say how blessed I was by brother Seibold’s article. It was a timely reminder of what ministry is all about (at its core). Thank you again.

—Jerry Smith, *pastor, Essex, England*

Thank you to Loren Seibold for his article “Get Back to the Basics. Be Jesus to Someone!” I’ve pastored for nearly 20 years and I find it difficult to find another pastor willing to be as honest as Pastor Seibold was in his

article. I found it comforting to hear that I’m not alone in my frustrations.

It also reminded me that when I started out as a pastor, I would always go visit a shut-in when I felt frustrated—just to remind myself why I answered God’s call. It worked then and it still works now.

—Becky Gray, *pastor, Fostoria, Ohio, United States*

I just wished to express my thanks for Loren Seibold’s article, “Get Back to the Basics. Be Jesus to Someone!” While there obviously is a place for the large church ministry, as pastors who are called to be shepherds, we must never forget the often forgotten ones who no longer seem to have a voice in society and are gathered together in places where sometimes neglect by family and others is their new life.

I have no doubt that if Jesus were walking on this earth today, these ones would be a principal focus of His attention, speaking words of hope and encouragement. We as pastors and those called to minister His peace and comfort need to continue to focus upon all He died to save.

—Grant Wright, *assistant pastor, Tauranga Central Baptist Church, Tauranga, New Zealand*

Worship

Thank you for Robert Holmes’s article “The Weightiness of Worship” (September 2011). I particularly appreciated his comment that “the

Continued on page 28 ►



Seven goals for the New Year

I have an aversion to making resolutions for the New Year because, before January comes to an end, most of them end in failure. I have noble intentions; but too often the affairs of life—necessary and sensible as they are—keep interrupting my best-laid plans.

Yet, in spite of such loathing, I face 2012 with a willingness to tackle a set of goals—seven of them, in fact—that fall under one general category. My overarching aim for 2012 is to model my life according to the will of Christ as revealed through His life and teachings. Should I live to see 2013, and if Jesus has not returned by that time, the seven points that follow articulate Spirit-driven improvements in my life that I wish to realize during the next 366 days.

I want to **consistently start each day with prayer** (Mark 1:35). It remains the dirty little secret that although we, as ministers, deal with the holy on a daily basis, some of us still struggle to secure meaningful and beneficial time for prayer. We're not hypocrites—praying professionally and ignoring the power thereof when no one watches. Rather, often we become so busy attending to the needs of church members and church business that slowly and imperceptibly we neglect our own well-being.

Most mornings upon waking up, I go to my home office and after worshiping and adoring God, I pray through my ever-growing list of concerns: myself, family, colleagues near and far, pressing issues, as examples. But occasionally I skimp on the time I give to God—rushing to attend to other personal and professional issues that appear urgent. I wish to model my prayer life after that of Christ.

I want to **consistently face life's battles with the Word** (Matt. 4:4, 7, 10). My greatest victories come when I have fortified myself with quality time in personal Bible study. I can easily trace my dumbest decisions to neglect of the same.

But I have also discovered that the answers to some of my simplest predicaments come by reflecting upon the life experiences of other frail souls in Scripture. Through studying these people, I have gained wisdom that I have been able to not only appropriate to myself during my own spiritual pilgrimage, but pass along to my children and others who seek wisdom. As did Jesus in the wilderness, I want to govern my life with an "it is written."

I want to **know God for myself** (John 17:3). With each passing week, my wife and I learn things about each other that we didn't know—after almost 25 years of marriage. Such an experience deepens our love and respect for each other.

Prayer and Bible study enable me to better understand God. Especially in 2012, I want to better comprehend how incredibly loving and gracious He has been—and continues to be—toward me.

I want to **be a shining light for others** (Matt. 5:14–16). Too much light in a room blinds those who wish to see, while too little light fails to illuminate what needs to be seen. As an ambassador for Christ, I neither want to overwhelm others with God-talk nor be secretive so that no one discerns a difference between me and others. I wish to live a life that brings glory to my heavenly Father, impressing others to want to get to know Him for themselves.

I want to **honor, respect, and uplift others** (Matt. 7:12). This can

be a bigger challenge for me than I sometimes wish to acknowledge because it becomes easy to grow bitter in the face of multitudinous slights. But Jesus, who bore more unjust indignities than I could ever imagine, bids me to treat others as I wish to be treated—keeping in mind that so many others have treated me marvelously, and that He Himself has been infinitely gracious to me. I wish to model my relationships with others after how Christ relates to me.

I want to **live in the atmosphere of God's peace, regardless of my circumstances** (John 16:33). I grow weary of always having to address one issue after another: household repairs, incorrect billing from a service provider, and sometimes far more consequential matters such as ruffled interpersonal relations or physical duress.

But God promises me peace when I keep my mind focused upon Him (see Isa. 26:3). Maintaining a trustful walk with Him places life's events in perspective. I wish to model such a walk after the one Jesus had with His heavenly Father.

Finally, I want to **live in eager expectation of His return** (Matt. 24:42, 44; 25:13). As a child, I imagined Jesus walking and talking with me at all times. As an adult, I (sad to say) don't always imagine Jesus in the room with me. I want to again see myself in His presence, before His throne, for eternity. I want to experience the prayer of Jesus, *to be with Him where He is and see His glory* (see John 17:24).

What are your goals for 2012? Whatever they are, I pray that you will build them upon the foundation of God's will for your life. 📖

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Issues in the interpretation of the seven trumpets of Revelation

A visionary cycle of Revelation that has proven to be one of the most difficult to interpret is Revelation 8–11, the seven trumpets. The language and imagery are complex; and its application to specific historical events has resulted in a variety of views. This interpretational uncertainty could be confusing to church members and those interested in finding in this apocalyptic prophecy one clear and final interpretation. At the present time such a final interpretation is not available. Perhaps the question we should address is, *What can be done to avoid transforming this diversity of opinions into an internal theological struggle?* Let me suggest two things. First, we should ask the Lord to strengthen our willingness to work together in a spirit of Christian love and humility in order to build up the church. Second, we should agree on how to approach this apocalyptic prophecy—this is the question of proper hermeneutics.

Basic principles

I do not have anything particularly new to offer, but I will underline the need to remain firmly committed to our nonnegotiable hermeneutical

principles of apocalyptic interpretation. I will list some of them in the context of the study of the trumpets.

1. In the interpretation of the trumpets, Adventist theologians have almost consistently employed the historicist method of prophetic interpretation because it is grounded in Scripture itself. This method was provided to the apocalyptic visionaries by the angel interpreter. It has proven to be a valid approach to apocalyptic prophecy as illustrated in its use by Jesus, the apostles, and interpreters throughout Christian history. While in this article I will not provide all the necessary evidence to support the most important elements of the historicist method of interpretation,¹ I will suggest that the following are indispensable for a proper interpretation of the trumpets:

a. Apocalyptic prophecy covers the whole span of history from the time of the prophet to the very end of history (Dan. 7). In order to be loyal to this methodology, it is necessary to apply it to the apocalyptic visionary cycle of the seven trumpets. When we examine this prophecy from our historical moment, we must realize that some

elements of the prophecy have already been fulfilled while others are in the process of fulfillment or will soon be fulfilled.

b. Hence, the fulfillment of apocalyptic prophecy takes place within the flow of history as a whole. Consequently, it cannot and should not be interpreted along the lines of preterism or futurism or applied to conceptual abstractions disconnected from specific historical events (idealism).

c. Recapitulation is central in apocalyptic prophecies (Dan. 2; 7; 8; 11). The trumpets recapitulate history from a particular perspective and, to some extent, parallel other prophetic cycles of seven found in Revelation.² Each parallel analyzes the historical period from different and yet supplemental angles.

2. The apocalyptic nature of the vision aims at a fulfillment specific enough to be located in one historical event or process. In other words, multiple fulfillments of the trumpets should be excluded from the discussion.³ This has been considered by us and by the biblical writer to be a fundamental characteristic of apocalyptic prophecy (e.g., Daniel says to the king of Babylon, who represents

the kingdom, “You are that head of gold” [2:38, NIV]; similarly, Gabriel identifies “the kings of Media and Persia” and “the king of Greece” as represented by the ram and goat respectively [8:20,21, NIV]).

3. The trumpets are not God’s final eschatological judgments upon impenitent sinners but judgments taking place within the flow of history. Therefore, we should clearly distinguish between the purpose of the trumpets and that of the seven plagues (Rev. 16). The plagues will occur at a specific historical moment that will quickly lead to the *parousia*.

4. The mention of time periods within the trumpets should be carefully studied to determine whether we are dealing with prophetic time periods or something else. If the reference is to prophetic time periods, we should attempt to find the historical fulfillment applying the year-day principle to them.

5. We should carefully study the biblical antecedents of the language and imagery used to describe each trumpet before attempting to identify their historical fulfillment. This methodological element is based on the hermeneutical principle that Scripture interprets itself. Its application excludes the use of our imagination to determine meaning and identify fulfillment.

Using these principles will not guarantee unanimity of interpretation but will set some important parameters for the interpretation of the trumpets. Although differences of opinion cannot be ruled out completely, as Adventist interpreters we should uphold the principles discussed above. For instance, it could be that the language and imagery used in the description of a particular trumpet could be applied by different interpreters to different historical events. This is tolerable as long as a particular historical fulfillment is in view and the biblical text has been carefully analyzed in order to justify that particular possibility. This suggests that, with respect to a full or final interpretation of the

trumpets, our journey has not yet reached its intended destination.

Diversity of views

The following chart illustrates how the application of the previous principles of interpretation to the trumpets by dedicated Adventists could result in a diversity of views regarding the prophecy’s precise historical fulfillment. This chart is not comprehensive but illustrative.⁴ (See chart on page 8.)

The chart reveals a number of important points. First, it is clear that the traditional view among Adventists, represented by Uriah Smith, is not strongly supported by many interpreters. However, the fact that one scholar (Alberto Treiyer) has recently provided a valuable exposition and defense of the trumpets along the lines of Smith’s indicates that this interpretation should not be easily dismissed. Second, none of the other interpreters follow Smith in his interpretation of the first four trumpets. In fact, if this sample of expositors is of any value, one could easily conclude that a new consensus seems to be emerging in the interpretation of the first four trumpets that radically differs from the views of Smith. Third, there are some significant interpretational differences with respect to the fifth and sixth trumpets. Two interpreters sided with Uriah Smith in their interpretation of the fifth trumpet (Thiele and Maxwell) and three on the sixth trumpet (Thiele, Maxwell, and Shea). But we find among them variations in some details. This suggests that Smith’s interpretation has not been totally put to rest.

Fourth, the most important development in the interpretation of the fifth and sixth trumpets finds in them the rise of secularism and atheism in the Western world and the work of the end-time Babylon (Paulien, LaRondelle, and Stefanovic).⁵ Because this is a major departure from the traditional approach, it is necessary to make a few comments about it. The question is whether this interpretation remains compatible

with the historicist approach. In my opinion, it seems to be compatible—notice that I am not saying that this is or is not the right interpretation of these trumpets. The main reason for my opinion is that it is neither a preterist or futurist, nor an idealist approach to the trumpets. The apparent problem is that this view identifies the powers described in the trumpets with philosophical and spiritual movements rather than with particular empires or nations. But here we should be cautious. For instance, in the New Testament, Israel is not simply a geopolitical power. Through the coming of the Jewish Messiah the faith of Israel has been universalized, and now the Old Testament Israel of faith incorporates people from every tongue, tribe, and people. There are various other examples from the book of Revelation itself, but the best is probably Babylon. It is no longer a city in Mesopotamia but a symbol of global apostasy and rebellion against God. This interpretational movement from a limited geographical area to a universal phenomenon is also supported by Ellen G. White in the context of apocalyptic prophecies. She takes the apocalyptic reference to Egypt to represent the spirit of the French Revolution that has now reached global dimensions in the form of atheism.⁶ Therefore this new interpretation of the fifth and sixth trumpets does not undermine historicism. It identifies a global way of thinking that originated in a particular nation and considers it to be the historical fulfillment of the fifth and sixth trumpets. This new approach remains within the boundaries of historicism. Probably the most significant challenge that this view confronts is to provide a valid interpretation to the time elements mentioned in the two trumpets. On the other hand, those who follow Uriah Smith or are very close to his views do not only have to agree on the specific dates for the fulfillment of the prophetic periods but they also need to find a better explanation for the mention of the seal of God in the sixth trumpet (Rev. 9:4).

VIEWS ON THE TRUMPETS

Trumpet	U. Smith	E. Thiele	R. Naden	C. M. Maxwell	W. Shea	J. Paulien/ H. LaRondelle/ R. Stefanovic	A. Treiyer
First	Attack of Visigoths against Rome under Alaric.	God's judgment on Jerusalem.	God's judgment on Jerusalem.	God's judgment on Jerusalem.	Pagan Rome persecutes Christians.	God's judgment on Jerusalem.	Attack of Visigoths against Rome under Alaric.
Second	Attack of the Vandals against Rome.	God's judgment on pagan Rome.	God's judgment on pagan Rome.	God's judgment on pagan Rome.	Fall of pagan Rome.	Fall of the Roman Empire.	Attack of the Vandals against Rome.
Third	Attack of the Huns against Rome.	God's judgment against professed Christian church.	God's judgment against professed Christian church.	God's judgment against professed Christian church.	Apostasy of the Christian church.	Apostasy of the Christian church.	Attack of the Huns against Rome.
Fourth	Fall of Western Rome.	Darkness of the Middle Ages.	Darkness of the Middle Ages.	Darkness of the Middle Ages.	Darkness of the Middle Ages.	Rise of secular-atheism (Rev. 11:7).	Collapse of Western Rome and its system of worship.
Fifth	Rise of Islam. (5 months period; 1299 + 150 = 1449.)	Rise and progress of Islam. (5 months period; 1299 + 150 = 1449.)	Satan's attack on the Reformation by the Counter-Reformation. (5 months = 150 years; 1535–1685.)	Rise and progress of Islam. (5 months = 150 years; first Muslim attack on Constantinople in 674 to the last in 823 [only 149 years].)	Crusades during the Middle Ages. (5 months = 150 years; 1099–1249; from the capture of Jerusalem to the beginning of the last crusade.)	Reign of secular-atheism. (5 months = God's judgments are comprehensive but limited; cf. Gen. 7:24; 8:3.)	Rise of Islam against apostate Christianity. (5 months = 150 years; 632–782; first Islamic expansionist wave.)
Sixth	Ottoman Empire. (1 day, 1 month, 1 year = 391 years; 1449–1840.)	Ottoman Empire. (391 years; 1449–1840.)	Time of final crisis; from 18th century to close of probation.	Ottoman Empire. (391 years; 1453, fall of Byzantine Empire to 1844.)	Ottoman Empire. (391 years; 1453–1844, when the edict of toleration was issued.)	Rise of end-time Babylon. The final crisis described in 7:1–3 and Rev. 13–16. (1 hour, 1 day, 1 month, refers to a divine appointed moment of time.)	Ottoman Empire. (391 years; 1453–1844, when the edict of toleration was issued.)
Seventh	Mystery of God is finished.	Mystery of God is finished.	Consummation.	Mystery of God is finished.	Mystery of God is finished.	Sets final events in motion. (Summary of events described in Rev. 12–22.)	Time of the end when the mystery of God is accomplished.

Fifth, another item that tends to complicate the discussion of the prophetic periods and has influenced some of the expositors is that Ellen G. White seems to support the

interpretation of the Millerite preacher Josiah Litch. This is what she says, "In the year 1840 another remarkable fulfillment of prophecy excited widespread interest. Two years

before, Josiah Litch, one of the leading ministers preaching the second advent, published an exposition of Revelation 9, predicting the fall of the Ottoman Empire. According to his

calculations, this power was to be overthrown 'in A.D. 1840, sometime in the month of August;' and only a few days previous to its accomplishment he wrote: 'Allowing the first period, 150 years, to have been exactly fulfilled before Deacozes ascended the throne by permission of the Turks, and that the 391 years, fifteen days, com-

wonderful impetus was given to the advent movement. Men of learning and position united with Miller, both in preaching and in publishing his views, and from 1840 to 1844 the work rapidly extended."⁷

The context indicates that she is describing the experience of William Miller and his supporters in the

how we use this single statement. Interestingly, when one looks at the chart, it is clear that, apart from Uriah Smith, only one other writer ends the period in 1840 (Thiele). Treiyer is attracted to 1840 but seems to be more comfortable with 1844. In other words, most of them do not allow a single comment by Ellen G.



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mened at the close of the first period, it will end on the 11th of August, 1840, when the Ottoman power in Constantinople may be expected to be broken. And this, I believe, will be found to be the case.'—Josiah Litch, in *Signs of the Times, and Expositor of Prophecy*, Aug. 1, 1840.


At the very time specified, Turkey, through her ambassadors, accepted the protection of the allied powers of Europe, and thus placed herself under the control of Christian nations. The event exactly fulfilled the prediction. . . . When it became known, multitudes were convinced of the correctness of the principles of prophetic interpretation adopted by Miller and his associates, and a

early 1840s. Since, at that time, she was a Millerite, she most probably accepted Litch's interpretation of the prophecy. Her main point in the quote is that the fulfillment of his prediction added impetus to the prophetic interpretation of the 2,300 days put forth by William Miller. It has been suggested that what we seem to have here is a retelling of the experience of the Millerites, including hers, without necessarily providing a final interpretation of the prophetic period. Whether this is the case or not will continue to be a matter of debate.⁸ But the fact that she never again mentions 1840 as a year when a biblical prophecy was fulfilled should make us cautious on

White to settle the question. They would rather reexamine the issue by taking a fresh look at the biblical text and examining historical sources. In this particular case, this appears to be a good procedure.

Conclusion

The views summarized in this paper are all compatible with the historicist method of prophetic interpretation. As long as this particular methodology is not undermined, the church should allow for a diversity of interpretations.⁹ Acknowledging this should immediately rule out dogmatic interpretations and heated discussions that could easily sacrifice Christian humility and love. Every

suggested interpretation needs discussion in terms of the validity of the analysis of the biblical text and its alleged historical fulfillment. 

- 1 For example, see William Johnsson, "Biblical Apocalyptic," in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 784–814.
- 2 On the topic of recapitulation and the trumpets, see Ekkehardt Mueller, "Recapitulation in Revelation 4-11," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 9, no. 1 (1998): 260–277.
- 3 See Jon Paulien, "Seals and Trumpets: Some Current Discussions," in *Symposium on Revelation—Book I*, ed. Frank B. Holbrook (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1992), 183–198.
- 4 The information for the chart was taken from the following sources: Hans LaRondelle, *How to Understand the End-Time Prophecies of the Bible: The Biblical/Contextual Approach* (Sarasota, FL: First Impressions, 1997); C. Mervyn Maxwell, *God Cares*, vol. 2 (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1985); Roy C. Naden, *The Lamb Among the Beasts* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1996); Jon Paulien, "Interpreting the Seven Trumpets," unpublished paper prepared for the Daniel and Revelation Committee of the General Conference, 1986; William Shea, "Revelation's Trumpets," unpublished paper, 1998; Uriah Smith, *The Prophecies of Daniel and Revelation* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing Association, 1944); Ranko Stefanovic, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ: Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Berrien Spring, MI: Andrews University Press, 2002);

Edwin R. Thiele, *Outline Studies in Revelation* (Angwin, CA: Class Syllabus, Pacific Union College); Alberto Treiyer, *The Seals and the Trumpets: Biblical and Historical Studies* (self-published, 2005). I apologize to the authors if I unintentionally misrepresented their views.

- 5 Jacques Doukhan also supports this particular view (*Secrets of Revelation: The Apocalypse Through Hebrew Eyes* [Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2002], 84–91). He sees in the first four trumpets the history of the church from post-apostolic times to the great apostasy, paralleling to some extent the seals.
 - 6 She wrote, "The great city" in whose streets the witnesses are slain, and where their dead bodies lie, is 'spiritually' Egypt. Of all nations presented in Bible history, Egypt most boldly denied the existence of the living God, and resisted His commands. No monarch ever ventured upon more open and highhanded rebellion against the authority of Heaven than did the king of Egypt. When the message was brought him by Moses, in the name of the Lord, Pharaoh proudly answered, 'Who is Jehovah, that I should hearken unto His voice to let Israel go? I know not Jehovah, and moreover I will not let Israel go.' [Exodus 5:2.] This is atheism; and the nation represented by Egypt would give voice to a similar denial of the claims of the living God, and would manifest a like spirit of unbelief and defiance. The great city' is also compared, 'spiritually,' to Sodom. The corruption of Sodom in breaking the law of God was especially manifested in licentiousness. And this sin was also to be a pre-eminent characteristic of the nation that should fulfill the specifications of this scripture" (*The Great Controversy* [Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1950], 269).
- In another place, after describing the moral corruption of the world, she asks, "What is to prevent the world from becoming a second Sodom?" (*Education* [Oakland, CA:

Pacific Press, 1903], 228). Then she adds,

"At the same time anarchy is seeking to sweep away all law, not only divine, but human. The centralizing of wealth and power; the vast combinations for the enriching of the few at the expense of the many; the combinations of the poorer classes for the defense of their interests and claims; the spirit of unrest, of riot and bloodshed; the world-wide dissemination of the same teachings that led to the French Revolution—all are tending to involve the whole world in a struggle similar to that which convulsed France" (ibid., emphasis added).

She seems to consider such a mind-set as the one prevailing now in the whole world:

"Atheism and infidelity prevail in every land. Bold blasphemers stand forth in the earth, the house of God's own building, and deny the existence of the Creator, and challenge the God of heaven to strike them dead on the spot if their position is wrong. Behold the societies of infidels everywhere forming to devise means to spread their hellish poisons!" (*Review and Herald*, May 4, 1886).

It is clear that for Ellen G. White the names of the cities stand now for worldwide movements that were initiated in France during the French Revolution. This way of looking at apocalyptic prophetic fulfillment still falls within what we call the historicist method of prophetic interpretation.

- 7 Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, 334,335.
- 8 See Robert W. Olson, *101 Questions on the Sanctuary and Ellen G. White* (Washington, DC: Ellen G. White Estate, 1981), question 52.
- 9 This is illustrated by the way the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* dealt with the seven trumpets. While affirming the traditional view represented by Smith, it acknowledges other possibilities and avoids dogmatism (see F. D. Nichol, ed., *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* [Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1978], 7:778–796).

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All kinds of stuff

“Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away. This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matt. 13:47–50).¹

If Jesus were to preach the sermon in your church this Sabbath, what do you think His opening words would be?² Would He begin by saying, “My purpose this morning is to investigate the nature of the kingdom of God with particular reference to its Greco-Roman background and utilization of Jewish tradition in its explication of eschatological expectation. To achieve this end I will be using the historical-grammatical method?” If He did, then those of us who have degrees in theology might feel more at home than we do when confronted by the subversive simplicity of His parables. There’s something rather less intimidating about a complex doctrinal presentation than seeing ourselves in a transparent parable.

“Now the kingdom of God is like . . .” Like what, exactly? Well, like all kinds of things. Take Matthew 13, for example. Here Jesus tells

seven parables that explore different aspects of that kingdom. First, Jesus illustrates how the kingdom is *given* (the sower who went forth to sow); how it *operates* (the wheat and weeds growing together; the tiny mustard seed that grows into a large plant; yeast being kneaded in a batch of dough); how it is *acquired* (the treasure hidden in the field; the merchant who discovers a fabulous pearl); then finally, how it will be *consummated* at the end of the age (the fishermen pulling in their net to the shore). So, seven parables illustrating how the kingdom is *given, operates, is acquired, and will be consummated*.

A few years ago I preached a series on these seven parables of the kingdom. My sermons on the first six went reasonably well—or so I thought. But my sermon on the seventh parable, the parable of the fishing net, on how the kingdom will be consummated “at the end of the age,” seemed anticlimactic. Of all the parables in this chapter, this is the least familiar to most people. Odd, really, because this comes as the seventh of the seven parables—the climax of what Jesus had to say. Yet it seems like an anticlimax coming after the others. All the other parables end on a positive note. But the parable of the fishing net concludes with weeping and gnashing of teeth. Why such an apparent anticlimax to such an upbeat sequence of parables? It is worthwhile revisiting this parable.

Kinds of net

In Jesus’ time, fishermen used two kinds of net to do two quite different kinds of fishing. The first kind of net, a casting-net (*amphiblestron* or *diktuon*), was relatively small, roughly circular in shape, with lead weights around its edge. When a fisherman saw a shoal of fish in shallow water, he would grasp the net in the center and throw it over the surface of the water so that the net unfurled to its greatest extent. Then it would sink rapidly, drawn down by the lead weights, covering the fish. When the net was pulled up, the lead weights would draw together at the bottom, trapping the fish within. But this does not illustrate the picture Jesus has in mind.

The second kind of net, and the one specifically referred to by Jesus, was the dragnet (*sagene*). This was pulled behind a boat or spread between two boats so that it formed a cone shape and was then hauled to shore, ideally capturing a shoal of fish within. And *this* particular form of fishing, says Jesus, compares to the kingdom of God.

So what exactly does the image of fishermen using a dragnet tell us about the kingdom of God at the end of the age? Well, first of all, remember that Jesus referred specifically to a dragnet, not to a casting-net. A casting-net is targeted fishing, but a dragnet is used quite differently. It gathers up everything in its path. It does not discriminate. All kinds

of fish, the good, the bad, and the ugly, find their way into the dragnet. The Sea of Galilee, for example, has up to 36 species of fish, any one of which can end up in a dragnet.

But the dragnet is even more indiscriminate than this. It does not just catch fish. It catches anything and everything, fish or not, that is swept into it. And this is where our Bible versions might mislead us. Versions normally say that the net “‘caught all kinds of *fish*’ ” and that the fishermen “‘collected the good *fish* in baskets’ ” (Matt. 13:47, 48; emphasis added). Such a translation is partially misleading because the

on deck in a dragnet. Yes, fishermen land more than fish when they draw in their dragnets. So Jesus is saying, I think, “They caught *all kinds of stuff*.” And this, says Jesus, is just like the kingdom of heaven.

Anyone who has read the Gospel of Matthew should not be surprised by this. Right at the beginning of His ministry, Jesus said, “ ‘I will make you fishers of men’ ” (Matt. 4:19). And now, Matthew says, as Jesus tells this parable of the fishing net, crowds surround Him. As Jesus casts His eye over that crowd, He would have seen all kinds of folk. Matthew already told us the

to the kingdom, day in, day out, for the rest of their lives. There would be Matthew the tax collector and Roman sympathizer, standing next to Simon the Zealot, anti-Roman terrorist. Jesus would also see Judas who would betray Him; Peter who would deny Him. *All kinds of stuff!*

All kinds of stuff

Makes you think, doesn't it? Well, it made me think. First of all, it made me think about my ministry as a teacher of the gospel, preparing students for their ministries. What kinds of students should we expect to find in our colleges and seminar-

WHILE SOME SCHOLARS READ THIS
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WITHIN THE KINGDOM.

original Greek text does not mention fish at all, anywhere in the parable. It simply says that they caught *all sorts*. Now of course, a dragnet obviously catches fish, but more than just fish. In the last two or three years, fishermen off the coast of Great Britain have hauled in all kinds of things in their dragnets, such as a World War II torpedo warhead with 100 kilos of high explosive. And 200 kilos of cannabis worth €1.4 million. And perhaps most remarkable of all, a married couple who decided to spend the day scuba diving off the south coast of England instead found themselves being hauled up

variety of people Jesus attracts. So there are likely to be Pharisees and Sadducees (3:7); paralytics (4:24); people from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and beyond Jordan (4:25); Roman centurions (8:5); scribes (teachers of the Torah) (8:19); rulers of synagogues (9:18); ostracized women (9:20); blind men (9:27). Plus those whose interest in the kingdom is a passing fad. Others who will soon be sneering at it when their friends make fun of them. Some who will be too busy getting on in life and earning a living to make any commitment. And those who will commit their lives

ies? In my classes I have black and white, young and middle aged, intellectually brilliant and academically challenged. Ghanaian, Albanian, Swedish, Spanish, Zimbabwean, British, Korean, and others. Fundamentalists, conservatives, traditionalists, moderates, liberals, and undecided. Some students who will never ask a question. Some students who never stop asking questions. And some students I wish would not want to ask questions! “All kinds of stuff.”

And what about us, ministers of the gospel, called to teach and preach the Word? Are there any

differences among us? Any differences of opinion on what the mission of the church actually is? Differences of opinion on doctrines like revelation and inspiration? Differences of opinion on how to deal with differences of opinion? We are all slowly being pulled to the shore. All kinds of stuff.

Perhaps it is worth clarifying one point. While some scholars read this parable as describing general diversity in the world, most read it as illustrating the diversity within the kingdom. I would agree with this majority. Ellen White strengthens my hand by making the same point.³ The act of fishing with a dragnet is likened to the kingdom. The diversity within the world produces diversity within the kingdom. As in the world, so particularly within the kingdom, there are all kinds of stuff.

And there are all kinds of stuff in the kingdom because the kingdom remains indiscriminate. That is how Matthew brackets this collection of Christ's parables. In the first parable, that of the Sower, the sower sows the seed randomly, in an untargeted way. The sower is completely indiscriminate. He just scatters seed around, all over the place. He makes no distinction between footpaths, rocky soil, thorns, or fertile earth. The seed falls on *all kinds* of soil. And now, in the last parable, the fishermen are using a dragnet. They trawl through the lake and catch, indiscriminately, *all kinds* of stuff. That's what the kingdom is like. Like a sower scattering seed *everywhere*; or a dragnet capturing *everything*.

Dealing with diversity

But what do we do about that diversity? About all that stuff in the kingdom net? Well, that is where another of Christ's seven parables of the kingdom helps us. In the parable of the wheat and the weeds, just a few verses before, there is a similar

issue. Not everything growing in a field is wheat; not everything caught in a dragnet is an edible fish. The farm workers, on discovering the act of agricultural sabotage out in the field, want to rip out the weeds. The farmer says, "No, if you do that you'll do more harm than good. No, we'll separate them at the harvest." And that harvest, says Jesus, occurs "at the end of the age" (13:40). In other words, be patient. The harvest has not arrived yet. And even when it does, judging between one and the other is not your business but God's. Just like the parable of the fishing net, sorting the catch is done "at the end of the age" (13:49). And even then, the sorting stays as God's business. "'The angels will come and separate the evil from the righteous'" (13:49; emphasis added). So, in the meantime, what do we do? Keep on fishing. With a dragnet.

For the parable of the fishing net teaches that the consummation of the kingdom at the end of time, when the final judgment takes place, will reveal how indiscriminate the kingdom has been up to the end.

And, we might well ask, is that it? A parable simply to tell us that there will be all kinds of stuff in the kingdom? No wonder the parable of the net is not that well known. But I do not think Jesus wasted His time telling parables of no consequence. In fact, He wanted to make sure His audience understood them. "'Have you understood all these things?'" (13:51), He asked them.

This parable, on the one hand, speaks to those who do not want diversity. To those who believe, God is glorified by our marching in step to the gates of the kingdom, never deviating to the left or right. To those for whom entry into the kingdom, and remaining in it, rests on adherence to ever more detailed definitions of truth and

the ecclesiastical infrastructure to enforce it. "No," says Jesus, "the kingdom contains all kinds of stuff."

This same parable, on the other hand, also speaks to those who are simply satisfied with diversity. To those who believe God receives glory in the sheer variety of faith and practice. That to expect any conformity in faith or practice betrays a lack of spirituality. To those who believe that the more inclusive we are, the better. "No," says Jesus, "there will be a judgment at the end of the age. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. It actually does matter what you believe and do."

I will try to remember this parable in my ministry of teaching theology. I have students who love the Lord their God with all their hearts, souls, and minds. They will live lives as persuasive witnesses for the gospel, as diligent ambassadors for the kingdom of God. Also, there are those on the brink of making that decision—or turning away. And a few, perhaps, if my 30 years of lecturing are anything to go by, who, in the future, will be hosting vitriolic Web sites attacking my church, Christianity in general, or promoting atheist propaganda. I will consider all of *our* differences and *theirs*. I will look at my class with all of its diversity, all of its potential for glory and heartache, and all of its differences of theological opinion, spiritual maturity, and varieties of commitment. All kinds of stuff. I will remind myself that God is the Judge, at the end of the age. And I will say to myself, "This is the kingdom of heaven!"

1 All Scripture passages in this article, unless otherwise stated, are from the New International Version.

2 This article is an adaptation of a sermon delivered at the European Theology Teachers Convention, Adventist Theological Institute, Cernica, Romania, April 27–May 1, 2011.

3 "The casting of the net is the preaching of the gospel. This gathers both good and evil into the church" (Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons* [Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1900], 122.)

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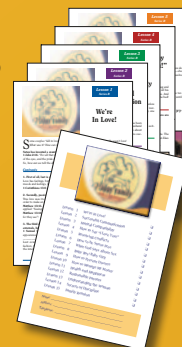
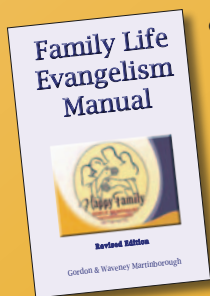


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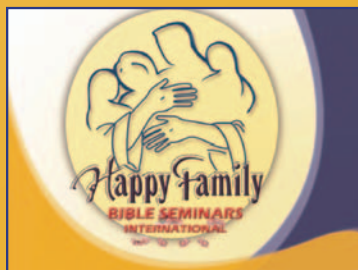


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Good stories

I love children's stories. Who doesn't enjoy a story, well told, full of meaning, in the middle of the church service? I have heard some wonderful stories in church services, some more moving and memorable than the sermons they preceded. But I have heard some poor ones too. I have heard stories that were wonderful metaphors for the sermon idea, but they passed right over the children's heads. I have heard tales of children that ended in disaster. However, these did not inspire any positive action from the listeners. There have also been long reminiscences, but sometimes these stories did not seem to come to a point.

Perhaps the most painful experience of listening to a children's story was when I, at age 18, sat on the platform and waited to deliver my first sermon in the church where I was working as a volunteer. The older gentleman made an apologetic comment to me as he titled his story, "The Greasy Preacher." He then ate up more than 15 minutes of the church service. His storytelling was good, but no one's patience lasted as long as the story. My relief at having it finished even banished my sweaty palms.

No one wants to be the perpetrator of a bad story, and this may be why the children's story slot in some churches seems so hard to fill. But for the pastor, merely avoiding the task does not provide a sufficient solution. In that audience of children

sit some of your most impressionable, most important charges, and the Christ who told Peter, "Take care of my sheep," also said, "Feed my lambs" (John 21:16, 15, NIV). The children's story is not the only opportunity to minister to the young in your congregation, but the story time becomes one of the simplest ways to build your relationship and express your caring for them.

So then, how does one tell a good children's story?

Know your audience

The first and most obvious point: it must be a *children's* story, not an adult story told to children and not the opening illustration to the sermon. Nothing is wrong with coordinating the topic for both story and sermon, but the story belongs to the children and must be chosen with them in mind. And that requires knowing how children think.

Feeling vs. thinking. The complex process of thinking—sorting, categorizing, and manipulating information—includes a skill that develops over our lifetime. We start with the simple in infancy, moving on to basic cause-and-effect in the preschool years, and then abstract thinking some time later.¹ Although your listeners are inexperienced in thinking about what they hear, the skill of feeling *what* they hear is fully functional. Young children feel emotion easily and express it just as easily. How they feel about church *is* their spiritual experience. Because of

that, the emotional content of your storytelling is vital. By your voice, expression, and the gestures you make, you can communicate that the storytelling is an enjoyable experience and you are really focused on them. Their enjoyment of the story becomes part of the message, giving substance to the idea that Jesus loves and protects them or that obedience makes them happy. Illustrate your principles with positive examples by showing happy results whenever possible. When you must use a story of mistakes and negative consequences, be sure the feelings of fear or sorrow are outmatched by the reassurance of the happy ending.

Concrete vs. abstract. Much of the language of church comes in word-pictures—light, salt, giving our hearts, following Jesus, for example. Adults perceive these images as intangible things, and this makes them visible in their minds, but this does not happen the same way for children. Before the transition to abstract thinking in later childhood, a child's mind does not translate these word-pictures into the specific actions or qualities they symbolize. If you want your audience to understand you, you must tell them exactly what you mean. If you want them to show kindness to their friends, you must tell them how. If you want them to show reverence for their Bibles, you must explain what this looks like in real life. Images of shining lights or treasure chests will not do the trick. Generalizations, likewise, will be opaque to your younger

listeners. “Be faithful” can be just as problematic as “be a shining light.” Be specific. Be concrete.

This does not, of course, mean that you cannot use any word-pictures or generalizations in your storytelling, but you must be your own interpreter. You must explain what the image means. For instance, give examples of the actions that you mean by the word *faithful*. In this way, you help them practice a new cognitive skill, and you make your message clear.

Spiritual beginners. Your adult listeners may be concerned about the meaning of Daniel’s prophecies or

average four-year-old can listen for about five minutes before even a well-told story will lose them. Resist any temptation to stretch the story-telling time beyond about five minutes.

Know your story

Have a point. Pastors have a head start when it comes to the children’s story because much of what makes a good story also makes a good sermon. Foremost among those factors includes having one central concept that governs the story. This makes it a story and not a group of random events. With all stories, but especially with those for children,

time in which to introduce an idea, illustrate this concept through a story and apply it to the listeners’ lives. Keep to the core of your material. Stick to the point.

Apply the point. Again, this is like a sermon. If you tell a story but do not apply it to the lives of your audience, you are only an entertainer. For the children’s story, this job becomes even more important. The children rely on you to take the abstract thing—the point—and translate the concept into concrete, specific examples. If you have told them that Jesus hears their prayers for help, now tell them of times and situations

EDUCATORS ESTIMATE THAT A CHILD’S
ATTENTION SPAN, IN MINUTES, CONSISTS
OF THEIR OWN AGE PLUS ONE.

the nature of God’s foreknowledge, but your children are not. As they are laying the foundations for their intellectual lives, they are also laying foundations for spiritual ones. What they need are the largest, most solid stones of truth to build their faith upon. Concepts like the love of God, the value of prayer, obedience to parents, and service to others are all vital supports for what they will learn the rest of their lives. Do not be afraid to teach such simple ideas, and do not rush your young audience. This stage of spiritual growth should be considered essential for forming their characters. Their faith is just as real and alive as their elders’, and just as valuable to God.

Finally, you must know something about a child’s attention span. Educators estimate that a child’s attention span, in minutes, consists of their own age plus one.² Thus, an

the central idea, the point, must be manifestly clear. Knowing your audience means you will state the central concept more than once, in concrete, specific terms. You will also need to weave it into the parts of the story as you show clearly how each aspect of the story relates to the main idea.

Stick to the point. This principle should be evident from the preaching of the sermon, but your audience and time limits make this doubly important. If you reminisce or provide background information for half of the time, your point may be lost. Young children do not filter what they hear; they will not sift through all that you say to determine what was important to the lesson and what was not. You must be the filter for them, cutting out material that does not strengthen the point. Furthermore, because five minutes comprises such a short

when they should pray for help. If you have a story about loving their pets, tell them how they can show that love. If you cannot think of any good examples from the children’s daily experience, then you should pass over that story.

Give yourself a head start

Plan ahead. I do not like to recall the number of times I have come to church, opened the bulletin to see my name listed beside “Children’s Story,” and felt the cold hand of panic on the back of my neck. Start planning early when you have time to ponder and even practice. Better yet, plan a few stories to have on reserve in case of emergencies.

Train your eyes. There are as many sources for stories as there are sermon illustrations—daily life, the news, childhood memories, friends,

books. You only need to open your eyes to look for simple lessons that can be applied in a child's daily life. The best stories, of course, are those closest to your audience's experience. Look first for stories of children; second best are stories of adults that teach ideas equally appropriate for children. Many Bible stories fall into this category. Also, look for stories with "motion"—events they can picture in their minds.

Once you have a story and know its main idea, look over the story again. Then ask: *What details support the main idea?* These will be the highlights of your story; and as you tell it, they will keep the audience focused on your point. Trim out the unnecessary or unhelpful. Consider how the idea impacts your

young audience's world and choose a few specific, concrete examples for application.

Practice. Your wording does not have to be perfect, and it certainly should not sound recited, but a few times through will show you the weak spots and the strong parts in the story. Plan your wording ahead of time so you can spend your storytelling time focused on the audience.³

Conclusion

Stories are powerful. They stick in our memories and hearts in a way that other kinds of instruction cannot. They live in our minds, growing our picture of the world and the God who made it. For you, the pastor, stories can be a bridge between you and the flock of young people in your

care. They can be a means of showing them their value to the church. And moreover, they are an opportunity to feed the lambs, grow God's kingdom, and bring everyone closer to the happy ending. Do not miss an opportunity like that. **M**

1 Some very useful information about children's cognitive, social, and spiritual development can be found in the volume *How to Teach Children in Sabbath School*, Donna Habenicht and Anne Bell (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1983) and the more recent *Children's Ministries: Ideas and Techniques That Work*, ed. Ann Calkins (Lincoln, NE: AdventSource, 1997).

2 Ann M. Calkins, ed., *Children's Ministries: Ideas and Techniques That Work* (Lincoln, NE: AdventSource, 1997).

3 For information on how to expand your storytelling skills, there are books such as Caroline Feller Bauer's classic *Handbook for Storytellers* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1977) or Baker and Greene's *Storytelling: Art and Technique* (New Providence, NJ: R.R. Bowker, 1987). For more condensed and easily accessed material, try Web sites such as Barry McWilliams's "Effective Storytelling: A Manual for Beginners" at <http://www.eldrbarry.net/roos/leest.htm>. This site was especially useful, as it listed both printed and Web sources for more information.

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The Heaven-ordained result of revival and reformation

Through the experience of the apostles, God has outlined what He expects from us as we anticipate the outpouring of the latter rain. The steps they followed in preparing for the early rain are the steps we need to take now to be prepared for the power that will finish the work. Understanding that they made up the corporate body of Christ, the apostles bound themselves together and, through God's power, were of one accord.

What was the result? On the Day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit was given to them. Boldly they preached Jesus as the Messiah and His resurrection. Three thousand responded to the invitation of salvation. After the healing of the crippled man at the gate of the temple and Peter's discourse to the multitude of worshipers who were eyewitnesses of the miracle, 5,000 believed (Acts 4:4). As the Holy Spirit further opened opportunities for the apostles to witness, "believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women" (Acts 5:14). So "the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem,

and a great many of the priests were obedient of the faith" (Acts 6:7).

Acts presents to us a picture of a church that was on fire for Christ. The Spirit removed all fear and replaced it with a burning desire to proclaim the risen Messiah.

Under the power of the latter rain, what can we expect? A repeat of what is recorded in Acts—God's remnant taking the initiative in tearing down the strongholds of Satan. Seventh-day Adventists call it "the great controversy." Ellen White does not hesitate to call it for what it really is. "Our work is an aggressive one, and as faithful soldiers of Jesus, we must bear the blood-stained banner into the very strongholds of the enemy. 'We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.' If we will consent to lay down our arms, to lower the blood-stained banner, to become the captives and servants of Satan, we may be released from the conflict and the suffering. But this peace will be gained only at the loss

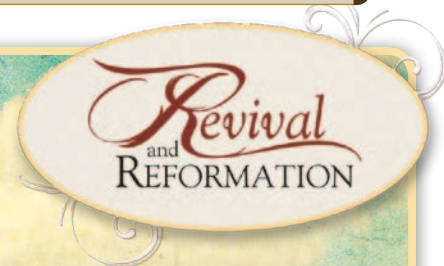
of Christ and heaven. We cannot accept peace on such conditions. Let it be war, war, to the end of earth's history, rather than peace through apostasy and sin."^{*}

We have only two choices, (1) lie low, do not disturb the devil, keep things religiously neutral or "peaceful," and lose heaven, or (2) continue to pray for the latter rain, receive the power of the Spirit, carry out the mission given to the remnant church in the great controversy, and welcome our Savior at His return. The second choice will become reality and will be the heaven-ordained result of revival and reformation through the Holy Spirit's power.

— TED N. C. WILSON SERVES AS PRESIDENT OF THE GENERAL CONFERENCE OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS, SILVER SPRING, MARYLAND, UNITED STATES.

* *Review and Herald*, May 8, 1888.

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Different from us: A pastoral reflection on cultural conflict

My wife, Joni, and I arrived in Oslo around 9:00 A.M., Friday, July 22, 2011. After several days exploring the Norwegian fjords, we looked forward to exploring City Hall, the Nobel Center, Vigeland Sculpture Park, as well as a few shops. In the mid-afternoon, we were weaving our way on foot back to the harbor area when a deafening blast rocked the city only a few blocks from us. Around us, people jumped or clutched at something, and one person hit the ground and buried his head in his hands.

Confused, none of us immediately associated the blast with the horrific attack that had just occurred. Charred debris in the air and an acrid odor affirmed that something was horribly wrong. Since the explosion was immediately behind us, only when we completed our walk to the ship a short distance farther did we learn the truth about what had happened.

Anders Behring Breivik confesses to not only constructing and detonating the powerful bomb, unleashing its destruction and killing eight outside the offices of government, but also carrying out a horrendous shooting spree nearby on Utøya Island at a youth camp tied to the Labour Party. The lives of 69 innocents—future educators,

workers, doctors, business people, and public servants—were taken, underscoring a senseless tragedy.

How do we, as ministers of the gospel, respond to the questions voiced in our society about these senseless acts? How do we resolve our own questions? Is there any meaning to help us endeavor to follow Christ in a broken and conflicted world?

My proximity to the tragic events of that day in Oslo compels me to search for answers. Sharing the space with those attacked induces identification with the conflict. My observations are not an attempt to form an exhaustive treatise on the nature of cultural conflict; rather they lead to a more humble pastoral reflection.¹ I simply wish to seek meaning from a Christian and pastoral perspective.

Five pastoral observations

A few observations about the human condition became evident. They are not, of themselves, encouraging. The first is that we are, regardless of our claims otherwise, uncomfortable, if not intolerant, of people different from ourselves. We live in a shrinking world that has drawn different worldviews, beliefs, cultures, and traditions into shared spaces. Information and

communication technology, ease of travel, and economic opportunity have transformed our world into the global village we so frequently announce.

Our discomfort does not generally manifest itself in acts of terrorism. We usually respond to multiculturalism in gentler and more subtle ways. We see our response within public discourse on the major issues of the day. Veiled forms of Islamophobia are voiced in our worry about the wearing of burkas in public or construction of mosques in our neighborhoods. We speak politely of others who are different, while at the same time emoting sarcasm about “political correctness.” Cultural conservatism conveniently masks our greater regard for those who are like us, while ultraconservative populism extends its influence into the politics of America and Europe. Regardless of our faith tradition or our national or ethnic identity, we find it challenging to live in the same space with people who are different from us.

Christians are not immune to such uneasiness. It is not simply devotion to biblical teaching that generates discomfort with certain aspects of our culture. When we are among those who worship differently, who see an issue differently, whose lifestyle is different

from our own or who simply dress differently, we feel ill at ease, maybe even defensive.

My second reflection is that fear trumps reason. People who are different from us can threaten our identity, our sense of life and stability. Our response to those different from us rarely develops into the viciousness of attacks such as those on July 22, 2011; but we do take measures to protect ourselves, even from more subtle threats.

Fear influences our worldview. For instance, the broad discussion of issues around the matter of immigration in America takes on tones

Oslo or similar other outbreaks are still the exception. But the list of narratives of human violence is far too long, and that list includes persons of all faiths, including Christian. Islamic fundamentalists do not have a monopoly on violence. Where culture is confronted with differences, violence follows in some form.

Persecution prevails as one expression of violence. Persons of faith often see themselves as persecuted, at least under certain circumstances. They do not see themselves ever engaged in persecution of others. This phenomenon occurs more often than we note and

among the most transparent governments and economies and has been remarkably crime and poverty free.

Will Norway continue in that way of life once its security is threatened? If history is any indication, the answer is *No*. Our sensitivity to differences, and our rigidity in relationship to other cultures, becomes heightened when our own security is threatened.

My final observation involves forgiveness. Forgiveness is unusual. There are rare exceptions. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission established in South Africa as that

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other than economic. We speak of "protecting the American way of life" or the need to assimilate to an American culture we experience in a particular neighborhood. We fear losing what we are familiar with, what we see as safe and secure.

We may readily identify such responses in public policy. But does fear manifest itself in the church? Do we create policies to protect the culture of our faith tradition? Do we feel threatened by others whose differing worldview leads them to worship or live out their beliefs differently? Are those differences that upset us always biblically centered?

My third observation equates with the tendency of humans toward violence. Agreed, eruptions such as

remains more nuanced. Persons who think they would never be involved in persecution mount billboards attacking the papacy along highways. They launch Internet rumors to destroy the reputation of persons different from themselves. As with those who commit acts of violence to protect the church against heresy, these nuanced acts of common Christians, like ourselves, are reasoned to protect the faith. We act against those different from us.

My fourth observation is human response when security becomes threatened. Norway's prime minister previously walked the streets among people engaged in commerce. Norway has been numbered

society dealt with the atrocities of apartheid is remarkable. Formed out of the vision of Nelson Mandela, Desmond Tutu, and many others, this restorative body of commissioners in South Africa held court proceedings in which they heard witnesses, recorded crimes of violence during the years of apartheid, and, in some cases, granted amnesty to perpetrators. They did not excuse the crimes; public record was formed and amnesty granted. The Commission freed the country from a great deal of violence by providing a spirit of forgiveness as an alternative to retribution.

More frequently, however, retribution stains our behavior. When we are attacked because

of our differences, the human response creates walls to protect ourselves and, even, to counterattack. Accordingly, many Christians consider any adherent of Islam an enemy. If attacked, we identify whatever group or idea that attacks us as a threat.

Theological interpretation

Though these observations have been, for the most part, negative ones, in Jesus we may interpret these events with hope. Jesus lived amidst cultural conflicts but valued people different from Himself. Raised in Egypt and Nazareth, He dwelt with people different from Himself. He commended the faith of a Samaritan, and a woman at that. He welcomed children. He touched lepers. He welcomed foreigners into the house of prayer.

When teaching His disciples to pray, He did not teach them to pray alone for the house of Israel, but to seek a blessing on the entire earth: "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10). Confronted by attitudes of nationalism in His own faith tradition, He affirmed, "Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold" (John 10:16). Jesus goes much further than tolerance; He calls us to value and embrace differences.

Jesus returned good for evil, calling us to replace retribution with reconciliation. "Whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also" (Matt. 5:39, NASB). "Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you" (Matt. 5:44, NKJV). When attacked, He told Peter to put up his sword. He offered no resistance or defense. His security was so sure in His heavenly Father that He had no fear.

No one forgave as did Jesus. Peter asked if we should forgive seven times, and Jesus responded

"seventy times seven" (Matt. 18:22). People overcome with their sin and guilt were deeply changed by His forgiveness. Even those who crucified Him were recipients of His forgiveness. He freely forgave.

Leading our church when cultures clash

However we understand these things theologically, what is crucial for us is the practical application of following Jesus while living with those who differ from us. The first step for church leaders includes reflecting on our own heart, on the attitudes that are seen in our words and behaviors. It means that we acquaint ourselves with the beliefs of others and listen to them, seeking to understand their worldview. It means that we refrain from generalizing the attributes of another world religion or culture. It means that we voice the same respect and rights for a Muslim or Hindu or agnostic. It means that we see ourselves as citizens of God's kingdom first and our own country second.

Beyond our own attitudes demonstrated in word and behavior, how can we offer pastoral guidance to our church? What steps can be taken to lead our churches to value differences?

This challenges religious leaders post 9/11. What if people reached out in respect and love rather than seeking retribution? Of course, forgiveness does not excuse crimes against humanity for the actual people who perpetrated them. But forgiveness suggests an open heart.


Here are a few practical steps. As I noted, the first and most powerful step is the transformation of our own attitudes. Another initiative consists of inviting people different from us to share their beliefs and worldview in presentation and dialogue with our congregations. While generally not fulfilling the experience of worship, such conversation is powerful in building

human understanding. Further, we can intentionally participate in the cultural life of those who differ.

There are many occasions when those of differing religious expression or cultural heritage will welcome us into their presence. Workshops on world religions can be held by mission specialists for our congregations. Book discussion groups can focus on literature sharing the narratives of diverse cultures. Our churches can identify projects in developing neighborhoods or countries and give to them. More powerfully, we can engage in service in those neighborhoods or countries alongside their own people.

Conclusion

Society has not matured beyond the divide of human conflict. A key reflection from Oslo is the futility of human solutions. We followers of Jesus struggle, as do others, with the human stain, experiencing conflict with people different from ourselves. It often takes on subtle shades and may even be rationalized as protecting what is good. But if we think carefully, if we consider our true hearts, we may come to recognize and confess our discomfort with those different from ourselves.

Perhaps then we will cry for the grace of Christ, cleansing us from sin. Perhaps then His love will be reflected in our living, and this dream realized: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28, NKJV). 

¹ Pastoral reflection as a professional competency is the aptitude for reading a situation theologically. I hope to illustrate by this case a biblically focused interpretation that flows from the pastors being formed from time with God and His Word. Thus the research base is not literature or data, but the experience itself, interpreted from a biblically focused starting point. For more on the competency of theological reflection see *Attentive to God: Thinking Theologically in Ministry*, by Charles M. Wood and Ellen Blue (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008).

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The joys (and challenges) of retirement

Several years ago I officially retired. In my country the rules are quite clear: Once you are 65, you are expected to quit full-time employment. This also coincides with retirement timing preferences in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. So, I dutifully retired at age 65. Retirement ages differ, however, from country to country. In some countries, the pensionable age is as low as 58 or 60; in others, 67 or 68. Other nations, such as the United States, make it (theoretically, at least) up to the individual. Whatever the case, retirement meets most of us at the end of our working life.

For more than 40 years, I worked for my church in various assignments in different countries. Therefore, what I say may be helpful to you who are about to or have already retired from denominational employment. I do not know to what extent my own experience really typifies others, but I assume there must be some similarities.

When retirement comes

For some, the idea of retirement sounds like heavenly music. Finally, the long-awaited moment has come. The golden years will begin. At last one has the time to travel and enjoy a round of golf at least twice a week. Thus begins the period of enjoyment in a new home located in an area where one always wanted to live. At

last you have ample time to enjoy the company of your partner, children, and, especially, grandchildren.

These dreams *may* come true; often, though, they remain *just* a dream for many reasons. There may be health issues. Your children may live far away. Or you cannot sell your house. You may not be as happy as you thought, for you soon actually miss your work and the social interaction. The retirement savings may not be enough for a comfortable living. Shortly after my retirement, we moved into a comfortable apartment in a pleasant small town. Although I continued to be quite active (actually, a bit more than I anticipated) I must admit that it had taken a bit of adjusting to get along with less income.

Of course, we are not all the same. I have not found it very difficult to make the switch; it was not as drastic for me as it had been for some. I am still involved with a number of church-related assignments. I preach on most Sabbaths. I do some lecturing and writing. I get invitations to present seminars and still get around. And, recently, I have even taken on a new administrative assignment on a temporary basis. I have not (yet) fallen into “a deep hole,” as many say they have after their regular work stopped.

Yet, there is no question that, during the past few years, I did miss some aspect of work. I missed the

sense of involvement in the day-to-day running of the church as I had during my assignment as the president of our union. I missed the daily camaraderie of colleagues. And, yes, I missed being up to date on the latest denominational news. (Some of that will be relieved, at least for a while, because I serve as an interim conference president.)

For some, retirement liberates them from stress. Toward the end of their working lives, some find it increasingly difficult to cope with the demands of ministry. They need the physical rest of retirement, and they need the possibility to distance themselves from a busy daily routine. Some have reached the limit of what they can give and are exhausted, and retirement does not come a day too early.

Others, however, hate the idea of retiring. They have lots of energy but no hobbies and do not know what to do with the days, weeks, months, and years ahead of them. Most of us are somewhere in between and may have mixed feelings about this drastic change.

Retirement: an entitlement

Just a generation or so ago, the status of a retiree was looked upon quite differently from how we see it today. In the past, the denomination recognized that ministers would, at

some point, have to diminish their work load and then quit altogether, and it was clear that the church needed to provide a measure of support. Church workers, therefore, received “sustentation benefits,” which could be seen as gesture of compassion, a favor rather than an entitlement. In many places, this monetary support was not only quite low but also subject to various restrictions.

Often, if one’s denominational career had lasted less than 10 or even 15 years, there would be no benefit whatsoever. And those who decided to leave church employ-

going. People may regret the fact that their pastor wants to retire, but they usually do not blame him or her.

This entitlement to retirement should be recognized as important and respected. The denomination should not put any undue pressure on people to stay on working if they want to retire. Nor should it plead with someone to come out of retirement when the person concerned has grave misgivings about such a move but may give in out of sheer loyalty. Whatever a retiree does should be a matter of his or her personal choice. If someone seems happy to carry certain church assignments, bless-

well during those years. We were a blessing to the many people to whom we ministered. And there was much joy and friendship and many good things to remember.

As we look back, we may regret some major mistakes. If so, we should take comfort: in the area of making mistakes, we are not alone. We may be always assured of God’s grace and forgiving love despite those mistakes.

Many have to come to terms with the sad reality that our own children are not following in our steps and have turned away from the church or even given up on their

RETIREMENT IS A TIME FOR LOOKING FORWARD, TOWARD A NEW FUTURE.

ment before reaching retirement age and/or at some point left the church might not get anything, *even after decades of denominational employment*. Sustentation benefits were given after what was termed “faithful” service!

Today, as a rule, almost anywhere in the world, denominational workers are entitled to retirement benefits. Elaborate policies govern these benefits, and the uncertainties of the past have disappeared.

In other important ways, the attitude of the church toward retirement has changed. Although a minister remains a minister for life, generally members and leaders recognize that a person who has served the church for a substantial period of time and has reached a certain age is entitled to a new phase of life. Saying farewell to church work when one has reached 60 years of age—perhaps older—when one is still in good shape and still has lots of energy and ambitions, may not be seen as a negative, as if a person has gradually lost the sense of calling that kept him or her

ings on them; if someone chooses not to take on any pastoral or other duties, that should be just fine also. Being retired means that you are now the full master of your time.

Looking back

Retirement is a time for looking forward, toward a new future. But, inevitably, we take our past with us because, to a large extent, we continue to get our identity from what we *were* and what we *did*. Our past is, however, usually a mixed bag. We must accept that we did not always succeed. We must not feel any bitterness about the fact that we did not always reach our goals or the position for which we may have hoped. We may sense that our gifts were not always sufficiently acknowledged by the church board or conference committee. We may think that for some reason we did not have as much “success” as many of our colleagues.

Anyway, we must be determined not to start retirement with resentment or frustration, for much went

faith; this remains one of the hardest experiences. We must leave this with our Lord. If we failed them in some respects—possibly because we were always busy doing church work and neglected our family—we must pray for forgiveness and then continue on without guilt.

Unfortunately, at times retired workers begin to feel differently about their church once they retire. They now feel free to say things that they felt they could not say when they led in an official role. Sometimes all active involvement ceases and even church attendance becomes irregular or worse. This is tragic, for it indicates that there is a definite need for pastoral support for those who have retired from the ministry. It is also tragic because this attitude will color the way in which others look at the retiree’s past, which may take away many of the potential joys of retired life. A ministry of several decades can become an experience they have *endured* rather than *enjoyed*.

And, of course, when retired ministers lose their enthusiasm for

the church, this affects many people around them in a negative way. Few things as are demotivating as when a leader loses his way.

Living with change

Our life changes as a result of retirement; hence, we need to adjust. But, as time goes on, we must deal with something else: change in the church. While workers are in active service, they are in the midst of the changes that constantly occur, and may even initiate some of them. But once persons retire, they become further removed from where the action is, from where changes are discussed and made, and are often uninformed as to why those changes were deemed necessary. I regularly meet fellow retirees who are extremely critical about certain developments. They do not understand many of the changes they see. They are adamant that the church is heading in the wrong direction, wonder about decisions made by the various committees, and openly criticize younger ministers.

Of course, not all changes are wonderful; some, I think, are not good. But, in general, retired workers must be relaxed about it. The church will continue to change whether we like it or not. The way our younger colleagues work will constantly change as they face the challenges of contemporary ministry. There will be changes in the way the church “does” theology, in the way people worship, and in the way they relate to their culture and authority. As retired workers, we may have our doubts and worries, but our basic attitude should be supportive. And we ought to resist any impulse to openly interfere or to organize any protest or lobby.

We had our time when *we* were responsible, and when *we* were looking for support and encouragement. Now *others* are at the helm. Our present role is one of counsel (when asked for), but mostly one of prayerful support and encouragement.

Active church members

One particular change may be painful but inevitable. Many of us have been rather visible in the church because of the role we had. For some time after we retire, we may still be invited to the pulpit or asked to participate in other assignments. But we must be prepared: this will not continue forever. After a while, the people who used to invite us may not be in charge and their successors no longer know us. Or we may gradually no longer be the much-sought-after speaker we once were because (perhaps imperceptibly?) we do not exude the same energy or manifest the same degree of originality as before. Let us listen to those who try to tell us that our time is up and make sure that we really stop before people start saying behind our backs that we should no longer be allowed to stand behind the pulpit.

There is, however, one important aspect we should never lose sight of. We remain ministers, even when we no longer receive invitations for public activities. As ordained ministers, we may still be asked to perform an occasional wedding ceremony, to baptize a person with whom we have had a special tie, or to officiate at the Lord’s Supper. Other than that, our public role comes to an end.

However, we are not only ministers but also church members. Every church member has a calling to be active in the church and use their talents to the best of their abilities and to the extent that they have physical strength and available time. Always a niche exists where a retired person can make a useful contribution and be an active part of the body of Christ.

Enjoy yourself

Though not all of us will have a long retirement period in good health, many will. If we are in that category, let us make the most of it and make sure that we do things we enjoy. It is all right to say “no” to certain requests and demands, even

though some of us may find that difficult. We no longer have to be busy all the time. We should enjoy the company of our loved ones as much as possible. We should enjoy our home, hobbies, and books. We should cultivate our friendships and be active in our local church. We should enter retirement as computer literates and find ways to enhance our digital skills. Email, Skype, and the Internet, in general, are wonderful tools for retired people to remain a part of the world and stay in touch with family, friends, and the church.

But above everything else: Look after the spiritual side of yourself. The best years of spiritual growth may still be ahead. You may have the opportunity to read and study as never before. At last you have time to write that book that you wanted to write for the last twenty-five years.

One more thing. Look out for each other. Count your blessings, if you still have your partner. One day, one of you will depart, leaving the other behind. Stay in touch with your friends and colleagues who have already experienced this loss. Pray for them. Do what you can to alleviate their loneliness. You can hope, too, that you will experience the loving attention of others when you come to that decisive point in your life. We all know that our lives are finite. Retirement will constantly remind us of this fact. Death will catch up with us, sooner or later. But while God gives us life and strength, let us make the most of it—especially in our retirement years.

Conclusion

No question, if we are blessed to have lived long enough to retire, we will face some new challenges and new joys. Though, as in every stage of life, we will confront in retirement things that we cannot control. The crucial question? The attitude we have toward them. Your retirement will be what you allow it to be. Allow the Lord to help you make it as fruitful and rewarding as possible. **M**

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Christians, worldviews, and wisdom

A worldview comprises a set of assumptions that influence how people view the world and how they answer the important questions of life, such as *where did we come from, how should we live, and where are we going?* Everyone has a worldview, and how people interpret life and evidence is influenced by that worldview. Two worldviews are prominent today, one based on the belief that the Bible gives trustworthy facts, even about earth history, and one that rejects any supernatural intervention in history (naturalism).¹ But those are not the only worldviews.

An increasingly popular trend in Christendom advocates the mixing of Christianity with the theory that all life has evolved. In order to blend these two worldviews, some things in each have to be surrendered. The result is theistic evolution or evolutionary creation, including a version of theistic evolution called temple theology.² According to this worldview, God created life forms through the process of evolution over millions of years.

In its attempt to meld scientific research and biblical statements about the creation of the world, theistic evolution actually establishes a dichotomy between science and religion by relegating each to

a separate sphere. While theistic evolutionists believe that religion can provide spiritual guidance, they hold that only through science can human beings produce reliable explanations of the natural world. That is, religion gives subjective, prejudiced views, while a secular approach provides theories and explanations that are unbiased and neutral, unaffected by religious assumptions—secular science has *facts* while religion has *assumptions*. This has led to a two-level understanding of “truth”:

Religion—personal, subjective values, emotions (heart)

Science—public, objective, reliable facts (mind)

But there exists no such thing as a neutral search for truth. Both secular science and religious views are based on a worldview, a set of assumptions that influences everything. A Christian worldview regards the Bible as a trustworthy basis for an integrated view of the world, a “biblically informed perspective on all reality”³ that does not divorce religion from the rest of experience and knowledge. In contrast, a naturalistic worldview requires that separation.

Secularism introduces its own biases into the search for

understanding and is no more neutral than Christianity. A worldview based on either viewpoint can form a basis for the search for truth, but they will lead in very different directions. The traditional Christian worldview starts with a belief in the truth of the central events of biblical history: Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Restoration (the great controversy between Christ and Satan). Commitment to this set of truths forms the foundation for an integration of all knowledge, not just religious knowledge.

In reality, theistic evolution has mostly abandoned any attempt to make this integration. Theistic evolution is essentially secular but interjects a few “religious” concepts into the secular view of the universe. This worldview accepts as fact the interpretation that all life resulted from evolution. But does the evidence warrant this? Have the advocates of theistic evolution carefully considered which Christian concepts must be rejected in order to accept their worldview? Do they recognize that the evolutionary theory they accept as fact is based on the *assumption* that no supernatural intervention anytime in history could ever have occurred? Is it good epistemology to try to blend two worldviews based on directly contradictory assumptions,

on incompatible epistemological principles? Is it valid hermeneutics to judge biblical concepts according to the *assumption* that there has been no divine intervention in the history of life or of the earth?

Now we can summarize three worldviews.

Christianity: the great controversy between Christ and Satan

Assumption:

- God is real and is the omnipotent Creator of the universe and life.

Resulting worldview:

- Creation of a perfect, sinless world
- Fall of humanity, bringing sin, evil, pain, and death
- Redemption through Jesus
- Future—restoration to sinless perfection at Christ's second coming

Naturalism

Assumption:

- Universe and life arose through natural law; there has never been any intelligent, supernatural intervention in the universe.

Resulting worldview:

- All plants and animals evolved from a common ancestor.
- Pain, suffering, death, and natural evil are normal, inevitable processes.
- Future—annihilation, extinction

Theistic evolution, evolutionary creation, temple theology

Assumption:

- Universe and life arose through natural law; there was no direct, intelligent, supernatural intervention in the origin of the universe. God was involved in the process but not in a way that could influence the physical evidence.

Resulting worldview:

- All plants and animals evolved from a common ancestor.

- Pain, suffering, death, and natural evil are normal, inevitable processes.
- Future—??? Does a god who doesn't know how to create as the Bible describes, know how to provide a future for us?

Advocates of theistic evolution or evolutionary creation who candidly address the topic recognize that their worldview leads to a god who created by the process of mutation, death, and survival of the fittest through ages of pain and suffering. This "creation" process requires death and natural evil (hurricanes, volcanoes, floods, earthquakes). Their deity must not interfere with all these destructive processes, so that, as they express it, the creation will not be unduly forced but will be "free."⁴ Is such a god worthy of our worship? Is this evil-ridden world really free or merely dysfunctional?

Wisdom

I recommend one more step in the search for truth, as described by King Solomon: "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding" (Prov. 9:10).⁵ Knowledge becomes important, especially when combined with wisdom. God and His Word are the ultimate source of wisdom, no matter what our field of study. In many areas of scholarly study, the Bible does not provide a lot of specific information but gives the most important basic concepts, and it is the source of wisdom.

Solomon does not write only about the wisdom of salvation. He develops the theme of wisdom throughout the first nine chapters of Proverbs, applying it to morals and ethics in real-life situations. As a paleontologist, I especially noted that it even brings in the subject of origins: "By wisdom the LORD laid the earth's foundations, by understanding he set the heavens in place; by his knowledge the deeps were divided, and the clouds let drop the dew" (Prov. 3:19, 20).

Solomon is using poetic language, but he clearly regards God as the earth's Designer and Creator.

How should we decide which worldview to adopt? There is much evidence to consider, but above all is the need for wisdom. When God responded to Job, He did not provide answers to the difficult questions. Instead, He challenged Job—and us—to remember how little human beings know in comparison to the God who created all and is Master and Redeemer of all. Were we here when the earth was created? Where were we when the rocks and fossils were formed? In the end, we should choose a worldview to evaluate purported knowledge on the basis of wisdom. "Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom. Though it cost you all you have, get understanding. Esteem her, and she will exalt you; embrace her, and she will honor you" (Prov. 4:7, 8).

Solomon has already revealed where wisdom comes from—"the fear of the LORD." Do we know the divine mind and Supreme Being behind the Bible? Does our relationship with Jesus give us assurance and confidence in His communication to us? These may seem like rather subjective questions, not relevant to a scholarly search for knowledge. To the contrary, I believe they are the most important questions.

What is the primary difference between the worldviews we have discussed? The difference lies in the nature of God and how (and if) He interfaces with us and nature. How could we, with our human limitations, know what God is like unless He tells us? Does God obey the humanly invented rule that He cannot involve Himself in the physical processes of the universe? Only a deep personal knowledge of God can give us the wisdom to make a truly informed choice of what standard we will use to recognize true and trustworthy knowledge—the Word of God or modern scientific interpretations. If the Bible is what it

claims to be, it is not just a book, but the revelation and reflection of the divine Being behind the Bible. This will give us confidence in choosing a worldview.

Biblically motivated scientific discovery

This article has discussed some factors that must be considered in seeking and evaluating knowledge. Is there a way that a biblically based worldview can directly make scholarly contributions? Many critics of the Bible claim this as not possible.

framework has implications for processes in both geology and paleontology. Based on these implications, we can propose hypotheses that can be tested with the same research procedures that any earth scientist uses.

Several factors are needed to implement such a research process. First of all, it requires independent thought, recognizing that some accepted scientific concepts must be wrong if one's biblical worldview is right. Second, it requires solid knowledge of the scientific litera-

dunes, cemented into sandstone. The only fossils are trackways of animals on the dune surfaces. These trackways are commonly cited as evidence of a desert origin of the sand deposit. I wondered if the Coconino SS could be windblown sand if it formed during the global flood. Of course, the flood was complex, and we cannot be sure there were not episodes of high winds during that event. However, it is worth suggesting the hypothesis (resulting from my *worldview*) that the trackways were made under

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In contrast, I predict that if the Bible presents a true history of the earth and of biological origins, scientists who are informed by Bible history gain an advantage in generating successful scientific hypotheses. That will sound preposterous to many, but some of us have been doing just that for many years and publishing the results in highly esteemed, peer-reviewed scientific journals.⁶ Other scholars use their worldview to suggest research ideas, and a theist can do likewise!

I do not go to a scientific conference and state that I think *such and such a scientific theory* is true because the Bible says so. However, the Bible presents the basic elements of a worldview that includes a literal creation, global flood, and short time for life on earth. That

ture on the topic and high-quality research. Third, we must avoid the danger, illustrated in the work of some believers, of thinking that because we believe the Bible, any scientific idea we come up with must be correct. It is essential to remember that the Bible does not give many details, and we may have to reject several hypotheses about details before finding one that not only fits the Bible but also explains the evidence.

A number of research projects has been done by creationists, based on a biblical worldview, and published in peer-reviewed scientific research journals. I will briefly describe just one example. The Coconino Sandstone in northern Arizona is generally believed to be an accumulation of desert sand

water. Research over a number of years (*data* and *interpretations*) has resulted in papers presented at national geology meetings and publications in quality earth science journals.⁷ There are features, not recognized by other researchers, that seem impossible to explain unless the trackways were made completely under water.

My worldview opened my eyes to see things not noticed by others. The evidence was there all the time, but worldview influences what questions are asked, and what researchers notice. A naturalistic worldview does not rule out the possibility of underwater tracks, but it also did not suggest such a hypothesis. My biblical viewpoint provided an advantage in research. This has happened in many cases,

for me and for other researchers. There is vast potential for this type of Bible-inspired advance in a variety of disciplines, as there has been for theologians who have confidence in Scripture. When we use this approach, the Bible is no longer on the defensive but a stimulus for discovery of new knowledge.

Conclusion

To understand how human beings acquire and evaluate knowledge, and how to determine what is true, involves consideration of worldviews and how they influence our interpretation of evidence. Any worldview is based on one or more assumptions that we accept on faith. A very important element in choosing a worldview is wisdom, and from the Bible it is clear that wisdom begins with the "fear of the

Lord." There will always be challenges in our search for truth, but if we keep Jesus in first place and put a biblical worldview to practical use in suggesting concepts for study and research, this may even help to advance the scholarly understanding of our disciplines. **M**

- 1 Leonard Brand, "How Do We Know What Is True?" *Journal of Adventist Education*, 73, no. 2 (December 2010/January 2011), 16–23; Leonard Brand, *Faith, Reason, and Earth History*, 2nd ed. (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2009); Leonard Brand, *Beginnings* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2006); Ariel Roth, *Origins: Linking Science and Scripture* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1998).
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In Cayman Islands, Adventist pastors offer at-risk youth alternative to drugs, gangs

Seventh-day Adventist Church pastors in the Cayman Islands trade suits and sermon helps for jeans and dominos.

They are not shirking responsibility. Ministers in the Caribbean nation are mentoring young people in the community who are vulnerable to drug abuse and gang involvement.

The Cayman Islands have seen a sharp and “unprecedented” rise in violent crime this year, said **Dannie Clarke**, president of the Adventist Church in the country. He and his pastoral team have observed more young people turning toward a life of crime, baited by the sense of belonging and quick money that gangs promise. “We want to be there to support them, to put a hand on their shoulders,” said Clarke. For some churches, that means offering young people sports and

social programs. “We want to be personally connected to these guys before they reach a place where they consider doing something that can have catastrophic consequences.”

Through a community prayer and mentorship program launched in September 2011, Adventists are offering an alternative to gang involvement. Pastors hold community meetings and prayer rallies once a week where they offer counseling and support to young people “on the fringes,” Clarke said. They pray for the community, law enforcement members, perpetrators and victims, and their respective families.


Affected young people are already opening up. One even helped solve a string of murders. Another passed a note to Clarke after a recent community meeting. It just said, “Please give me a call. They have my name on a hit list and I want to talk to somebody because I fear for my life.”

The church is working with the police department to provide a place where young people can request protection or aid cases in safety and confidence, Clarke said. Pastors will not share any information without

the young person’s expressed permission, he added.

The pastors’ efforts got a boost last week when Cayman Islands Premier **McKeeva Bush** and several members of the country’s cabinet and legislature attended the community meeting and prayer rally. Regional leaders of other Christian denominations have also shown support for the project by helping lead out in community prayer.

Ultimately, Clarke and his team of pastors hope to garner even broader community support. “We want to empower people in the community to catch the spark and put in place an infrastructure for sustainable growth and development.” Clarke is now asking community leaders to create a registry of at-risk youth who could use a big brother or sister.

“We must know our people. We must look out when one person’s child is hurting or vulnerable,” Clarke said. “Many times, it’s not that these youth don’t want to get involved in positive things. They just may not have the opportunity or the right influences.” [Elizabeth Lechleitner/ANN] 



Continued from page 4 ►

issue does not center around *when* our music was composed and by whom but *whether or not* we are singing to God in that moment.”

After 30 years of pastoral ministry, it remains a mystery to me why so many churches include songs that are difficult to sing in their worship services. The result is that the service becomes a performance, rather than

a worship experience. The reason they do this, I’ve been told, is that visitors who are not followers of Jesus prefer “contemporary” songs to “old-fashioned” hymns.

Archaic language can be updated if necessary and there are modern songs that are very *singable* and theologically sound, so it need not be a case of “old” vs. “new.” The

older hymns that are still being sung have stood the test of time, whereas many newer songs won’t. The proof of the worship is in the singing. At services I’ve attended, the singing of the hymns, whether old or new, is far more enthusiastic and, to me, worshipful, than the singing of the other songs.

—Roland Maxwell, pastor, Australia



7 Deadly Sins of Women in Leadership: Overcome Self-Defeating Behaviour in Work & Ministry

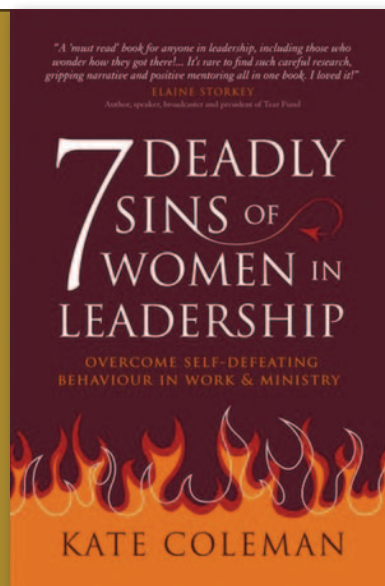
by Kate Coleman,
Birmingham, UK: Next Leadership, 2010.

Most leadership books in business and the church are written from a male perspective. Although beneficial to all, women do not always relate to male behaviors and attitudes. In this respect, Kate Coleman's book, *7 Deadly Sins of Women in Leadership*, is a refreshing antidote.

Coleman has impeccable leadership credentials. She was the first black woman Baptist pastor in the UK and a former president of the Baptist Union of Great Britain. Drawing on her own journey and that of fellow women in leadership both in and outside a church setting, she identifies seven deadly sins, or behaviors, which can be destructive in leadership and ministry. These sins may be prevalent among women, but they are not exclusively confined to them.

She identifies three major challenges facing women in leadership: education, empowerment, and encouragement. A need exists to revisit perceptions relating to women in leadership. Reeducation is necessary to empower and equip women (and men) to become the leaders God designed them to be. Encouragement is essential to enable others to grow, develop, and achieve their God-given potential.

REEDUCATION
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AND EQUIP
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LEADERS GOD DESIGNED
THEM TO BE.



Within this framework, Coleman identifies the seven deadly sins, destructive behavioral patterns, and attitudes that prevent people from developing into the leader God called them to be:


- Limiting self-perceptions
- Failure to establish appropriate boundaries
- Inadequate God-inspired personal vision
- A destructive work/life rhythm
- The desire to please everyone
- Colluding and not confronting
- Neglect in family matters

The book is best read over a period of time or selectively. Each chapter begins with a short, real-life experience illustrating negative

behavior. Coleman discusses various aspects of the behavior, using practical illustrations to highlight the nature of the challenges involved.

Following the discussion, the writer includes practical suggestions and exercises that the reader can reflect upon and apply as appropriate in their situation. The chapters close with Coaching Tips—five to seven searching questions or action points. The book includes a five-page bibliography and a list of online resources.

This practical book has the possibility of educating women and men to apply its principles in real-life roles.

—Reviewed by Audrey Andersson,
secretary, Trans-European Division, St.
Albans, Herts, United Kingdom. 

Fred Hardinge, DrPH, RD, is associate director, Health Ministries Department, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States.

Rest

Society today does not value the importance of rest and sleep, and many often consider sleep to be a waste of time. Thomas Edison reportedly believed that sleep was a waste of time and set out to invent the electric light bulb to extend daylight hours. His success has contributed to a 20 percent decrease in the average number of hours of sleep adults get compared to just 20 years ago. His attitude has infected all age groups.

In 2002, surveys revealed that more than 25 percent of Americans are so sleepy during the day that it interferes with their daily activities.¹ Just one in five adolescents gets the optimal nine hours of sleep on school nights.² Sadly, most people are totally unaware of their own reduced capabilities because they have been sleepy for so long they do not know what it is like to feel wide awake! A rested person will accomplish more in less time and do it better, more effectively, and safely.

Depriving ourselves of sleep is much like depriving ourselves of food. If we eat fewer calories than we need each day, we will slowly lose weight because the effects are cumulative. When we deprive ourselves of sleep, we accumulate the total amount of sleep loss in the same way. If you lose one hour of sleep each night over a week, you will accumulate a sleep debt of seven hours, which is nearly the same as losing a whole night's sleep.

Sleep debt directly affects our thinking ability and mental efficiency. During the past two decades scores of studies have looked at this area with a very clear pattern of findings. The bottom line is that when we allow ourselves to get tired, the



highest mental functions are compromised—blunting discernment, judgment, initiative, and creativity.

Interestingly, sleep deprivation leads to decreased performance similar to what occurs when a person is under the influence of alcohol. Studies have shown that 16 to 18 hours of wakefulness (one long day) in healthy adults results in impairments comparable to the legal intoxication level of a blood alcohol level of greater than 0.08 percent.³ We all need sleep at the end of the day if adverse effects on our performance are to be avoided.

Fatigue has a very important influence on our spiritual lives. Optimal decision-making capacity is necessary to differentiate between right and wrong. Yet, when we are tired, we have even less motivation and willpower to act on what we know is correct. Thus we succumb to temptation more easily.

As humans, we all have our limitations. We cannot work around the clock or every day and maintain a healthy, happy, and productive life. We need daily rest as much as we need weekly and annual breaks to provide mental and emotional recuperation that are necessary

for creativity and positive family relationships.

Bible study and prayer is the life-line of the Christian. The devil knows that if he can keep us tired even with good activities it will lessen our ability and interest in the study and understanding of the Bible and will weaken our commitment to communicate with God in prayer.

Most sleep researchers agree that humans can *get by* on about seven hours of sleep per night. But how many of us want to just *get by* in life? The evidence remains strong that for peak performance in all areas of our lives, we need between eight and nine hours of sleep each night. Our small children and teens need a little more to maximize their learning and memory abilities. Getting those amounts of sleep requires careful choices and self-discipline.

Remember: tonight's sleep builds tomorrow's energy. It prepares our body and mind for peak performance. Sleep is as important as diet and exercise—only easier! 📧

¹ "Sleep In America" Survey, National Sleep Foundation, 2002.

² "Sleep In America" Survey, National Sleep Foundation, 2006.

³ A. M. Williamson, et al. *Occupational and Environmental Medicine* 2000, 57:649–655.

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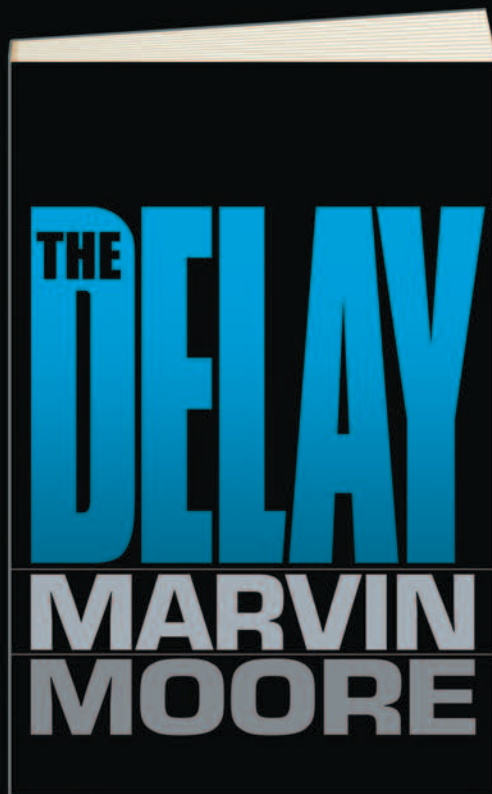
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HOW MUCH LONGER MUST WE WAIT?

FOR AS LONG AS WE CAN REMEMBER and even before, the refrain “Jesus is coming soon” has sounded in churches around the world. Its theme is central to our message as a church—embedded in our very name—Seventh-day Adventist! Yet, still we wait.

If we step back for a moment and take a panoramic view, we see Adam and Eve waiting for the Promised One. They, too, must have wondered at the delay.

Author Marvin Moore observes, “There’s a tension between the belief, on the one hand, that Jesus is coming soon and the realization, on the other hand, that He hasn’t returned as soon as we had hoped.”

How encouraging are these words: “God’s purposes know no haste and no delay” (*The Desire of Ages*, 32).

Moore concludes, “We need to apply those words to our situation. Paul said that ‘when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son’ (Galatians 4:4). We can be sure that when the time has fully come again, God will send Jesus back to take us home!”

MARVIN MOORE is the editor of *Signs of the Times*® magazine, and a prolific author with more than thirty books to his credit. Among his published works are *The Case for the Investigative Judgment*, *Challenges to the Remnant*, *How to Think About the End Time*, *How to Survive the Coming Global Crisis*, and *The Antichrist and the New World Order*. Marvin Moore’s knowledge of Bible prophecy and end-time events keeps him in constant demand as a speaker at churches and camp meetings in the U.S. and internationally.

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