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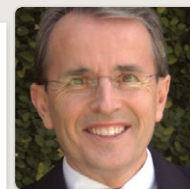
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The right side of history

Seismic cultural shifts occur in many parts of the world, and once solid ground now feels like shifting sand. As agendas are developed and battle lines are drawn, you will hear this phrase often repeated: “I want to be on the right side of history.”

What do people mean by these words? Is the right side of history based on the tide of popular opinion? Or a majority vote? By what criteria do people decide the “right side” or “wrong side” of history?

History reveals that the majority has often been mistaken. Truth is not determined by an opinion poll or popular vote. Solomon reminds us, “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death” (Prov. 16:25, NASB). As Christians, determinations regarding right and wrong should be made in the context of the clear teachings of the Bible. God’s Word must always be a lamp to our feet and a light to our path (see Ps. 119:105).

We must also show grace and respect to those whose opinions differ from our own. By claiming to be on the right side, we implicitly imply that those who hold differing positions are on the wrong side. We judge them.

The call to follow Jesus as Savior and Lord involves a willingness to surrender our agenda and let Him be the Author of our histories. We will become less and He will become more. We will ask the Holy Spirit to bring our dreams and aspirations into alignment with the will of God. We will pray, as Jesus taught us, “Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:10, NKJV).

We find a wonderful example of a life surrendered to the will of God in the person of John the Baptist. When people heard reports of his call to repentance, I’m sure there were some

who labeled him as one who lived on the wrong side of history—living out in the desert, refusing to play by the rules of his culture. Who did he think he was, asking those who had two coats to give one to a person in need, or telling soldiers not to intimidate people or accuse them falsely and to be content with their pay (see Luke 3:11–14)? Didn’t he realize that you have to work within the system? When John the Baptist confronted corruption

perspective, he was clearly on the wrong side of history. The odds were against John the Baptist as well, and when he died alone and was apparently forsaken in a stinking dungeon, evil appeared to have gained the upper hand.

But we must never forget that “ ‘the Most High rules in the kingdom of men’ ” (Dan. 4:17, NKJV). He is Lord over history and works out His will in the midst of human plans and

The call to follow Jesus as Savior and Lord involves a willingness to surrender our agenda and let Him be the Author of our histories.

and moral failure, he was thrown into prison (Mark 6:17, 18). Undoubtedly, many of the secular and religious leaders of his day judged him for being on the wrong side of history.

Jesus, on the other hand, affirmed John, announcing to the multitudes, “ ‘there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist’ ” (Matt. 11:11, NKJV). “ ‘If you are willing to receive it,’ ” Jesus said, “ ‘he is Elijah who is to come’ ” (v. 14, NKJV). If Elijah had been preoccupied with the tide of public opinion, he would never have spoken out against Baal worship. The odds were against him. With 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah, Elijah was obviously outnumbered. From a human

passions. Ultimately, aligning our lives and our wills in complete harmony with His will is all that really matters.

As we courageously follow God’s revealed will, there may be times when we are affirmed by some for being on the right side of history. We will also surely be condemned by others for being on the wrong side of history. But when the final chapter of earth’s history is written, we will see that God’s Word endures. His will has been done on earth as it is in heaven.

As cultural views and values change all around us, may the articles in this issue of our journal help you to be attentive to God’s Word and His will for your life and ministry. 🙏

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The significance of a comma:

An analysis of Luke 23:43

Jesus' promise to the "good" thief on the cross—"Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise" (NRSV)—is often taken as major proof of the immortality of the soul; that is, the belief that the spirit or soul of the faithful dead has conscious existence in heaven before the resurrection. Yet not all are convinced Jesus really told the penitent criminal they would be together in Paradise that very day.

The whole problem hangs on a single comma, most likely absent from Luke's original manuscript. With the comma placed before "today" (*sēmeron*), as most translations do, the adverb would refer to the following verb ("to be"), and the text would have the traditional meaning: "Truly I tell you, *today* you *will be* with me in Paradise."¹ But if placed after "today," then the adverb would modify the preceding verb ("to tell"), and Jesus' words would have an entirely different connotation: "Truly I *tell* you *today*, you will be with me in Paradise." Though sometimes considered pleonastic and senseless,² the alternative reading could be possible, especially if all the evidence—textual, linguistic, and scriptural—is accounted for.

What does the evidence teach us about the proper meaning of that text?

Textual evidence

In the early Christian centuries, New Testament (NT) manuscripts were

written without separation between words and sentences; little or no punctuation was used to indicate how the text should be read. The comma, for example, was introduced as late as the ninth century; before that, short pauses were sometimes indicated by means of a point on the line (.), while full stops were indicated by a high point (¸). Though no NT autograph has survived, most likely originally Luke 23:43 had no punctuation of any kind, as Papyrus Bodmer XIV-XV (or simply P⁷⁵) seems to demonstrate. Written at the beginning of the third century, P⁷⁵ is our oldest copy of Luke and it has no point either before or after *sēmeron* in our passage, though some punctuation can be found here and there.

Punctuation marks, therefore, are not an integral part of the canonical text. In fact, they reveal only how the text was read and understood by those who copied it. So, when Luke 23:43 was punctuated, the comma was placed before *sēmeron* not for grammatical reasons, but for the theological conviction prevailing at the time that the final reward of the faithful who die comes immediately after death. Sometimes the scribes also rephrased the text in order to make its meaning supposedly clearer. This is how the word *that* (*hoti*) became part of Jesus' statement. "That" was not in the original but was added before the adverb ("Truly I tell you *that* today . . .") under the assumption that this is what

Jesus meant; this addition appears in a number of medieval Greek manuscripts as well as in several ancient and modern translations.

We find it interesting, however, that the fourth-century Codex Vaticanus, "one of the most valuable of all the manuscripts of the Greek Bible"³ and a close relative of P⁷⁵ textually speaking,⁴ has a point on the line right after, not before, the adverb *sēmeron*. Because the manuscript also has some sparse accidental dots or inkblots, this could well be the case of the point in our passage; but the fact that the point is right on the line and equidistant from the two adjacent words greatly reduces the chances of an accident. Yet we find it difficult to know whether this point goes back to the original scribe or was added at a later time, which seems more probable.⁵ At any rate, Codex Vaticanus has a point after *sēmeron*, and the manuscript shows no attempt to have it removed or corrected by any of its readers.

Notwithstanding, even if this evidence is inconclusive, there is no question that important segments in the Christian church read the adverb "today" with the preceding verb ("to tell"). Another example is the Greek minuscule manuscript 339, from the thirteenth century, that not only has a point after *sēmeron* but also has left enough space before the next word so as to make the thesis of an accident

virtually impossible. In addition, there are several other medieval punctuated manuscripts that simply leave this passage as it is, without any punctuation mark,⁶ though the rule was to place a point or comma before the adverb. The alternative reading (“Truly I tell you *today* . . .”) is also found in the Curetonian Syriac, one of the earliest translations of the NT whose text goes back to the second century. Among the church writers, this reading was also attested by Ephraem the Syrian, of the fourth century,⁷ as well as Cassian and Hesychius, of the fifth century. Though Cassian and Hesychius themselves preferred to link “today” with the verb

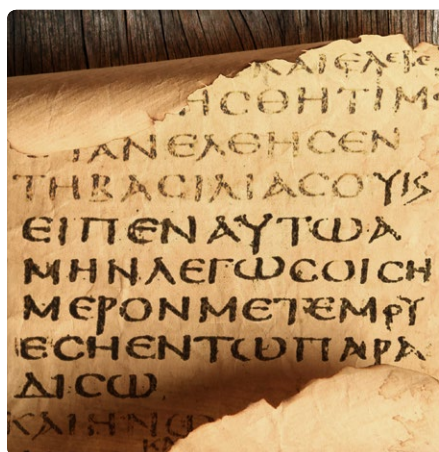
did have notable supporters in Christian history, thus allowing the possibility that this was, in fact, what Luke meant.

Linguistic evidence

In Greek, there is no specific rule concerning the position of the adverb, whether before or after the verb.¹¹ Thus, from the grammatical standpoint we find it impossible to determine if *sēmeron* in Luke 23:43 modifies the preceding verb (“to tell”) or the following one (“to be”). Luke, however, has a definite tendency of using this adverb with the preceding verb. This happens in 14 of the 20 occurrences of *sēmeron* in Luke and Acts (Luke 2:11; 5:26; 12:28;

This might be true as far as English and other modern languages are concerned, but the NT was written in Greek—not plain Greek, but sometimes a Greek stuffed with Semitic idioms. Luke’s Greek fit into this category, especially in the Gospel, despite the fact that he himself was not a Jew (see Col. 4:10–14). And it has long been demonstrated that the use of “today” with a preceding verb to introduce or close a statement is nothing but a Semitic idiom intended to intensify the significance and solemnity of the statement that either will follow or has just been made.¹⁵

In fact, this idiom is rather common in Scripture, especially in Deuteronomy,



Comfort in the face of death is always related to the resurrection, not to the idea that at death the spirit or the soul is liberated from the body to be in God’s presence.

“to be,” they explicitly refer to those who used to read the adverb with the verb “to tell” as heretics.⁸ At last, the alternative reading is also found in two independent apocryphal works, probably from the fourth century, if not earlier—the *Acts of Pilate* and *Christ’s Descent Into Hell*. These works, known in three slightly different versions, both in Greek and Latin were united about the fifth century and, from the thirteenth century onwards, have sometimes been called the *Gospel of Nicodemus*.⁹

None of this evidence establishes Luke’s original punctuation or demonstrates that the alternative reading was predominant in ancient and medieval Christianity; it was not.¹⁰ But together they do show that the attempt to link the adverb “today” with the preceding verb

13:32, 33; 22:34, 61; Acts 19:40; 20:26; 22:3; 24:21; 26:2, 29; 27:33).¹² Of the five uses of the adverb with the following verb, one is a quotation from Psalm 2:7 (Acts 13:33), and, in three cases, *sēmeron* is preceded by a conjunction (Luke 4:21; 19:5, 9),¹³ which makes such a construction inevitable. That is, there is only one example in Luke’s writings in which *sēmeron* was freely placed before the verb (Acts 4:9). The attempt to read the adverb in Luke 23:43 in connection to the preceding verb, therefore, is not only fully acceptable in terms of grammar but is also in complete agreement with Luke’s literary style.

A recurrent argument suggests that such a reading cannot be correct for it would make Jesus’s statement pleonastic or even “grammatically senseless.”¹⁴

where there are more than 40 examples of expressions such as, “I teach you *today*” (4:1), “I set before you *today*” (11:26), “I give you *today*” (28:13), “I command you *today*” (6:6; 7:11; 12:32), “I testify against you *today*” (8:19), and “I declare you *today*” (30:18; cf., 4:26; 30:19; 32:46; Acts 20:26; 26:2).¹⁶ In the case of Luke, this and other biblical idioms would have come to him through the influence of the Septuagint, a Greek translation of the Old Testament extensively used by the early Christians. We find it worth mentioning that “ninety percent of Luke’s vocabulary is found” in the Septuagint.¹⁷

Scriptural evidence

To help establish the meaning of Jesus’ statement on the cross, we

acknowledge the importance of considering the overall biblical teaching concerning the time when the saved will receive their reward in Paradise. By “Paradise,” there should be no question that Jesus meant heaven (2 Cor. 12:2–4) or the eternal habitation of the redeemed in the New Jerusalem in which the tree of life and the throne of God will be found (Rev. 2:7; 22:1–5).¹⁸ In another passage, Jesus refers to the many dwelling places in God’s house and to the time when He will come again to take His own to Himself (John 14:1–3). Only then will He invite His followers to inherit the kingdom prepared for them since the beginning of the world (Matt. 25:31–34). This event will be a glorious moment of reunion in which the final and complete celebration of deliverance from sin will take place (Luke 22:14–18).

Paul teaches that the believers who die will come forth from their graves at Jesus’ second coming (1 Cor. 15:20–23), and then the gift of immortality will be bestowed on them (vv. 51–55). He never

tries to comfort the living by saying that the deceased are already with Jesus in heaven. On the contrary, he attempts to bring peace to their hearts by reminding them of the resurrection (1 Thess. 4:13–18; cf. 2 Cor. 1:8–10; Phil. 3:8–11),¹⁹ and that only when Jesus comes again both the resurrected righteous and righteous living will be caught up together to meet Him in the air, and so they will be with Him forever (see 1 Thess. 4:17).

Besides, according to Paul, Jesus’ resurrection, not His death, gives the righteous any hope for life after death (1 Cor. 15:16–20; Rom. 10:9). How, then, does one make sense of the idea that Jesus had promised the thief that they would be together in Paradise that same day, especially because the Bible also clearly teaches that the day He died, Christ went into the grave (Luke 23:50–54; Acts 2:31, 32; 13:29–31)? To argue that only Christ’s body went into the grave while His spirit ascended to heaven²⁰ is to ignore the fact that, early on the resurrection morning, He told Mary not

to hold on to Him because He had not yet gone to the Father (John 20:17).

Conclusion

It does not seem appropriate, therefore, to conclude that Jesus promised the penitent thief that they would be together in Paradise the day they died. If the comma is placed before the adverb “today,” it becomes virtually impossible to reconcile the passage with what the Bible—and Jesus Himself—teaches concerning the time when the faithful dead get their final reward in heaven (cf. Luke 14:13, 14; 20:34–38; John 5:28, 29; 6:39, 40, 53–58). There is not a single instance in which the Bible writers try to comfort the believers by saying that the dead in Christ have already been taken to heaven. Comfort in the face of death is always related to the resurrection, not to the idea that at death the spirit or the soul is liberated from the body to be in God’s presence (cf. John 11:21–27; Rev. 20:6).

On the other hand, if we read “today” with the preceding verb, Jesus’

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statement may indeed sound somewhat pleonastic in modern, Western languages, but this pleonasm becomes fully acceptable if understood as an idiomatic way to emphasize the significance of the announcement: “Truly, I tell you today . . .” Finally, there is also enough evidence that this way of understanding the passage is neither new nor illegitimate, as this shows exactly how important segments of the church understood it, even in a time when the belief on the immortality of the soul had already become predominant in Christianity. What the thief asked Jesus was to be remembered in His kingdom (Luke 23:42), and this is exactly what Jesus promised him, thus the dying man received peace and comfort. This is the great promise of the gospel—to be with Jesus forever (John 14:1–3; 1 Thess. 4:16, 17; Rev. 21:1–4). 

1 Unless otherwise noted, all emphasis has been added in Scripture quotations.

2 E.g., Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Four Major Cults: Christian Science, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormonism, Seventh-day Adventism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1963), 353.

3 Bruce M. Metzger and Bart D. Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 67.

4 Careful textual analyses have convinced the great majority of NT scholars that, together with P⁷⁵, Codex Vaticanus represents the form of the text that was in use in Alexandria before the end of the second century (ibid., 58, 59).

5 See Bruce M. Metzger, *Manuscripts of the Greek Bible: An Introduction to Palaeography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 74.

6 Examples are MSS 57 and 713, both from the twelfth century.

7 Ephraem quotes Luke 23:43 three times, each time omitting “today,” but he also says, “Our Lord shortened His distant liberalities and gave a near promise, ‘today’ and not at the end. . . . Thus through a robber was paradise opened” (*Moes.*, 244, 245). In another passage, he refers to the thief’s story by saying that his soul could not enter Paradise without the body because the righteous cannot, in fact, enter Paradise until the final resurrection (*Hymn. Par.* 8.11).

8 Cassian, *Collat.* 1.14; Hesychius, *PG* 93:1432, 1433.

9 The reading that connects “today” with “to tell” appears in the B-Greek version of *Acts of Pilate* (chap. 10), and in the Greek version of *Christ’s Descent Into Hell* (also chap. 10).

10 It is important to highlight, however, that all apostolic fathers and most Greek fathers up to the fourth century were conditionalists, that is, they did not believe in the immortality of the soul. For details, see Leroy Edwin Froom, *The Conditionalist Faith of Our Fathers*, (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1965), 1:758, 759.

11 “Word order in Greek and so in the NT is freer by far than in modern languages.” F. Blass and A. Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, trans. and ed. Robert W. Funk (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), § 472.

12 In Luke 22:61, the position of *semeran* in relation to the verb must be settled on the basis of its unequivocal use in v. 34, and in Acts 27:33, the adverb must necessarily be read after an implicit “to be” (“Today is the fourteenth day”), as nearly all translations recognize.

13 The position of *semeran* in Luke 19:5 is explained by the fact that,

contrary to *hoti* (4:21; 19:9), *gar* is postpositive, i.e., it normally takes the second position.

14 Robert A. Morey, *Death and the Afterlife* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1984), 199–222, quoted in Erwin W. Lutzer, *One Minute After You Die* (Chicago: Moody, 1997), 51.

15 E. W. Bullinger, *How to Enjoy the Bible*, 4th ed. (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1916), 48. See also E. W. Bullinger, *The Companion Bible* (London: Oxford University Press, 1932), appendix 173.

16 To call this a “phantom idiom” just because none of the examples in Deuteronomy have the words “truly” (*amēn*) or “say” (*legō*), as Kenneth D. Boa and Robert M. Bowman Jr. do (*Sense and Nonsense About Heaven and Hell* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007], 58), is nothing but a tergiversation. What is idiomatic is the adverb “today” to enhance the solemnity of an announcement, not the other words.

17 Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke* (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 623.

18 In an attempt to reconcile the traditional interpretation of Luke 23:43 with the fact that Jesus does not ascend to heaven but only several days later, it has been argued that “Paradise” is not heaven but only the abode of the righteous as a separate compartment of hades, which would also have a compartment for the unrighteous (see Lutzer, *One Minute After You Die*, 138, 139). Some even suggest that since the resurrection and ascension of Christ, Paradise has been removed from hades to the third heaven mentioned in 2 Cor. 12:4 (H. A. Kent Jr., “Paradise,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1984], 826, 827). To hold such claims, however, is to leave the realm of Scripture and to validate similar, traditional claims on the part of those who believe, e.g., in purgatory and limbo.

19 For a discussion on 2 Cor. 5:6–8 and Phil. 1:21–23, see Samuele Bacchiocchi, *Immortality or Resurrection? A Biblical Study on Human Nature and Destiny* (Berrien Springs, MI: Biblical Perspectives, 1997), 178–186.

20 See Douglas Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics: A Comprehensive Case for Bible Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2011), 390.

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Does your life match the message?

In 1 Samuel 19:19–24, Saul received word that David could be found with the prophet Samuel in Ramah. Saul immediately sent contingent after contingent of soldiers to capture him; but as each group approached, they were overpowered by the Holy Spirit, and they began to prophesy. Finally, completely frustrated, Saul struck out on his own to capture David. He, too, was filled with the Spirit, overpowered and prostrated naked before Samuel, prophesying all day and night.

When Saul was filled with the Holy Spirit, nothing notable transpired. When Peter was filled

with the Spirit, people repented and 3,000 were converted in a day (Acts 2). What made the difference? These were not two different spirits. The Bible says Saul was filled with the Spirit of God, but nothing positive came from it.

The Holy Spirit’s power is only effective if our lives match the message. Saul’s life did not match the message he was giving while under the power of the Holy Spirit. Saul was filled with the Spirit, but he did not let the Spirit mold, shape, and change him. Temporary bursts of power, even those from Heaven, do not force us to change direction. They are only

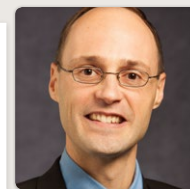
effective if the rest of the system is in proper operating order.

This tells us why we so desperately need revival and reformation. We must have the consistent working of the Holy Spirit in our lives now, not just a power surge at some point in the future.

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Preaching *from the* Old Testament Prophets

When was the last time you preached from the section of the Bible called the Prophets? I am not talking about using a verse from the Prophets in passing but rather preaching from a particular passage in the Prophets. We have likely preached from the books of Daniel and Jonah or on familiar passages, such as the fourth servant song in Isaiah 53 and the vision of the dry bones in Ezekiel 37. But when was the last time your congregation heard a sermon based on the books of Obadiah, Nahum, Micah, Haggai, or Zephaniah, or on Isaiah 19 or Jeremiah 17?

During the five years I served as a district pastor before coming to the seminary, I never preached on such books or passages, staying instead with familiar ones. Then, two years ago, it dawned on me that, as preachers or teachers, some tend to use only certain portions of the Bible—the parts that are the most comfortable to study and prepare. Could we, as leaders, have an unbalanced biblical diet? And, by using only a small portion of the Bible, do we also feed an unbalanced diet to our congregations?

Why some avoid preaching from the Prophets

There are a number of possible reasons why we avoid this area of the Bible:

1. These books seem strange in the sense that they appear to portray God as a harsh God, or at least as One that appears to conduct cruel acts. For example, Isaiah 1:24 states, “The Lord says, the LORD of hosts, the Mighty One of Israel, ‘Ah, I will rid Myself of My adversaries, and take vengeance on My enemies.’”¹ In other places, the prophets perform strange acts. For example, Isaiah walked “naked and barefoot” (Isa. 20:2);
2. Prophets are complex to understand and interpret. As preachers and teachers, we tend to prefer passages that are narrative in nature. However, most of the prophets wrote in poetry style, making it harder to understand their messages. The latter prophets wrote in a genre not at all storylike. Furthermore, the prophets do not always write in chronological order. Sometimes in the Prophets we also find apocalyptic prophecy (such as Isaiah 24–26), and this genre requires a different approach from the remainder of Isaiah.
3. Some of us assume that these books seem to talk only about judgment, and there appears to be nothing positive about their message. However, the same prophets who talk about judgment call for repentance, righteousness, social justice, moral uprightness, and salvation.
4. As pastors, we may assume that church members are not interested

in prophecy. Or we may let church members dictate what types of preaching they want—to the detriment of their spiritual growth. Richard Mayhue observes this trend: “‘What the people want, the church should provide. What the church provides, pastors should be trained to deliver.’”²

5. We assume that the prophet’s message was only for people back then and does not apply to us today. Many pastors and theologians think that the Old Testament was meant for a different culture of long ago and is not relevant for today.
6. As a society, we have become well adjusted to injustice; therefore, we cannot identify with the prophets’ outrage over injustice.³
7. Biblical readers often prefer the New Testament over the Old Testament. Bruce Moulton rightly points out: “Unfortunately, much of the Old Testament and many of the Minor Prophets are not being preached and taught. Pastors deem these books too controversial, hard to understand and irrelevant.”⁴ Walter Kaiser fittingly asks, “Why do so many pastors admit to having a mental block, feelings of inadequacy or plain guilt when it comes to preaching the Old Testament?”⁵ The preaching or teaching of the New Testament is more appealing for the simple reason that this portion of the Bible is

easier to understand and interpret. Furthermore, a perception lives on that the New Testament was written for Christians, while the Old Testament was written for Israel.⁶

8. Some pastors do not take time to explore the Prophets in great detail. We have busy schedules and often need to quickly put together a sermon or lesson. We may not have time to dig deeply into the Bible; but the busyness of life should not prevent anyone from finding new truth, including that revealed in the Prophets.

The benefits of preaching from the Prophets

There are great benefits, for a balanced spiritual diet, to preaching and teaching from the Prophets:

1. We will have a more balanced view of God's character by taking into account the prophets' perspectives.
2. We will deepen our skills of preaching and teaching by spending more rigorous time researching God's golden truth in challenging passages.
3. We will discover that the Prophets do not have a different message from the rest of the Bible; they just packaged their writing differently. While the theme of judgment practically flows throughout the Prophets, this should not stop us from exploring the reasons why God brings judgment upon His people and the nations of the world (e.g., Isa. 5; 13–23; Jer. 25; Amos 1–3). Although readers will find judgment in these books, the documents also reveal the character of God and humans.
4. We will see that the Prophets' messages not only present judgment, but they are also saturated with the love of God and His desire to redeem humanity, God's grace toward humanity, and a restless God who reaches out with incredible patience to bring back those He loves (e.g., Isa. 1:16–20; 6:1–7;

12:1–6; Jer. 3:6–25; 23:1–8; Ezek. 33:10–19; Mic. 7:1–20).

5. As we study the Prophets, we will see how Jesus is the fulfillment of their predictions and promises. The disciples came to know that Jesus was the Messiah by studying the Prophets.
6. We will discover that the Prophets' messages are as applicable to us today as they were back then. Our society has grown cold toward spiritual things, and the Prophets' messages were directed to a similarly apathetic and lawless society before the time of Christ.
7. We, and our church members, will see a bigger picture of God's working in the lives of His people.
8. Pastors who take the extra time to research and preach from the prophetic books will uncover a rich treasure of truth for their own lives and for the church.

Sample sermon based on Micah 6

In the remainder of this article, I will demonstrate the benefit of preaching and teaching from the Prophets with an example. Micah 6 remains somewhat familiar because pastors often quote verse 8, but why not examine a larger portion of this chapter? Remember that after studying a particular passage and extracting as much as you can on your own, you will often find it beneficial to consult commentaries and biblical journals.⁷

Background study

Genre. This particular section in Micah belongs to the poetry genre; the interpretation will not be based on a story. Thus, key words are needed to guide one's study; patterns established in other Old Testament books will help determine what is occurring here. In this passage, the word *contend* (Mic. 6:1, 2) is important. The Hebrew word *riv* ("contend, strive") also refers to a lawsuit or conducting a legal case. Thus, we have a covenant lawsuit brought by God against His people (cf. Deut. 32; Ps. 50; Jer. 2; Hos. 4).⁸

Context. In Micah 6, we observe a definite contrast from what has happened in the previous five chapters because of the first word *hear*. This word calls for the reader's special attention; the words that follow reveal that the Lord will speak through the prophet. Chapter 6 can be divided into two parts: verses 1–8, and verses 9–16; the imperative exhortation *shema* means to "listen, hear" (v. 1 and v. 9 are the clues).

Structure/Literary form. As stated above, this chapter contains a covenant lawsuit, which utilizes the covenant pattern found in Deuteronomy. The exception to the usual covenant pattern in this passage is the witnesses, which are often placed at the end of the passage rather than the beginning. Thus, we have the following structure:

1. List of witnesses; mountains and hills): Micah 6:1, 2a.
2. Preamble (introduction of the *suzerain*⁹ and call to judgment): Micah 6:1, 2.
3. Historical prologue (review of the *suzerain's* benevolent acts toward the vassal): Micah 6:3–5.
4. Indictments (breach of the covenant stipulations): Micah 6:6–8 (review of general stipulations); 6:9–12 (violation of specific stipulations).
5. Verdict (guilty, "therefore") and sentence (pronouncement of the curses): Micah 6:13–16.¹⁰

A quick review of this structure reveals possibilities for at least one or two sermons drawn from this particular passage. I will now focus briefly only on the first part (Mic. 6:1–8) to suggest a possible message based on these verses.

Sermon outline

Title: God as plaintiff: A covenant lawsuit against Judah (Mic. 6:1–8).

Introduction of the case: This passage reveals the seriousness of the relationship breakdown between God and His people. This lawsuit in Micah specifies a final appeal to the people—a wake-up call. The people of God

assumed that God's covenant relationship would continue forever, even when they were not committed to worshipping and serving God. However, as announced by Moses in Deuteronomy (see 4–7; 27, 28; 31:14–21), God's people—by their actions—could sever this relationship.

The witnesses: In Micah 6:1, 2, the Lord says to His people, “‘Arise, plead your case before the mountains and hills.’” If the people have something to say, let them ask the mountains and hills, which act as witnesses. The “heavens and earth” also act as witnesses (see Deut. 32:1; Ps. 50:1). The mountains are personified so that they know about the people's immorality and false worship.

The claim: In verse 2, Micah reveals the purpose of God's lawsuit. God shows to His people that this covenant lawsuit is against His own people and states the seriousness of the charges against them. The author does not portray the relationship between God and His people as in good shape. We find the same word *contend*, or *riv*, used twice here (vv. 1, 2), and God is the One doing the contending. Micah repeats this thought in the last part of verse 2, this time not with the word *riv* but rather with the related word *ykh* (“reprove, dispute”). This time the verb is *hithpa'el*, which means “lodging a charge, to argue with,” suggesting that it will be a dialogue, a dispute, between God and the people. The question here: Who is right?

Examination of the plaintiff: In Micah 6:3–5, God does not accuse the people of Judah with a series of failures, as one might expect, but rather He uses a rhetorical approach by asking whether He has done wrong: *See what I have done wrong; where I have failed you?* Thus, God places Himself on trial before His people. God appears to open up His heart to be searched to see if there is any evidence of unfaithfulness on His part. These verses reveal the love of God toward “My people.” As pointed out by Gary Smith, “These

questions will remove the listeners' defensive posture and open them up to considering God's failure—that is, their supposed objection to what God has done for them.”¹¹ This leads one to conclude that if listeners find nothing wrong with God, then the breakdown in the relationship is, therefore, found with the people.

God shows that He has not been unfaithful to His people by reminding them of His past actions. He talks about how He brought them out of Egypt; sent Moses, Aaron, and Miriam to lead them, and acted for His people in the incident between Balak and Balaam. The past demonstrates how God cared for His people and fulfilled His promises (e.g., Gen. 12:1–3; Exod. 6:6–8).


The defendants' response: In Micah 6:6, 7, the Israelites must defend their actions in their turn. These verses are rhetorical statements in the form of questions by which the people try to defend themselves in how faithful they have been to God.¹² However, their statements are not humble; they focus on their giving and the amount of their doing rather than on the relationship.

The basis for judgment: Micah 6:8 answers the question about what the Lord really looks for—not the sacrifices and shallow outward appearances. The fact that Micah begins verse 8 with the words “He has shown you” reveals to the people something that God had done in the past but that His people had obviously not learned. God did not jump in with new ideas, principles, or truths, but rather God was consistent with His relationship and what He expected His people to do. Obviously, the people distorted what God proposed to them by simply assuming what God wanted instead of taking Him at His Word.

Summary: Thus, God wants humanity to embrace three basic concepts: (1) to do/act justly; (2) to love faithfulness, mercy, and kindness (*hsd* relates to “steadfast covenant loyalty”); and (3) to walk humbly or to walk

circumspectly,¹³ walking wisely. “By explaining these three principles Micah hopes to correct the misunderstanding of his audience in 6:6–7 and to explain the basis for God's verdict of this lawsuit in 6:13–16.”¹⁴

Conclusion

As demonstrated in this example from Micah 6, speakers will find it possible to preach or teach relevant messages from the Prophets to our congregations. The Prophets reveal God's character in a different context, and we see how He interacts with His people and how He reveals His love through the covenant of relationship. 

- 1 All Scripture passages, unless otherwise stated, are from the New King James Version.
- 2 Richard L. Mayhue, “Rediscovering Pastoral Ministry,” *Masters Seminary Journal* 6, no. 1 (Spring 1995): 50, 51.
- 3 See Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007), 3–5.
- 4 Bruce Moulton, “Analyzing the Applicability of Preaching the Minor Prophets in the 21st Century” (DMin thesis, Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, 2011), 1.
- 5 Walter C. Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching and Teaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1981), 201.
- 6 See Moulton, “Preaching the Minor Prophets,” 52–54.
- 7 Some good resources include the following: Andreas J. Köstenberger and Richard D. Patterson, *Invitation to Biblical Interpretation: Exploring the Hermeneutical Triad of History, Literature, and Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2011); Grenville J. R. Kent, Paul J. Kissling, and Laurence A. Turner, eds., *Reclaiming the Old Testament for Christian Preaching* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010); Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann, eds., *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, trans. Mark E. Biddle (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Pub., 1997); G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000); The New American Commentary series (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1990–7); New International Commentary on the Old Testament series (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, n.d.). Those who know Hebrew should consult the original language or a computer program, such as Accordance, Logos, or BibleWorks.
- 8 See Richard M. Davidson, “The Divine Covenant Lawsuit Motif in Canonical Perspective,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 21, no. 1 (2010): 45–84; J. Limburg, “The Root בּוֹרֵךְ and the Prophetic Lawsuit Speeches,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 88, no. 3 (1969): 291–304.
- 9 A *suzerain* is an overlord.
- 10 Davidson, “The Divine Covenant Lawsuit.”
- 11 Gary V. Smith, *Hosea, Amos, Micah, The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 550.
- 12 *Ibid.*, 552.
- 13 D. W. Thomas, “The Root שָׁרַף in Hebrew and the Meaning of *qdmyr* in Malachi 3:14,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 1, no. 4 (1949): 182–88.
- 14 Smith, *Hosea, Amos, Micah*, 552.

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The ordination debate:

How to approach the theological issues

The ordination of women is a passionately discussed issue not only in the Seventh-day Adventist Church but also in other churches. For Adventists, a number of questions arise: What is ordination? What does the Bible teach about ordination? What does the Bible teach about the ordination of women? Is the ordination of women a cultural issue? Is ordination not so much a biblical but an ecclesiastical issue? Is it advisable to ordain women in case ordination is possible from a biblical perspective?

While we discuss ordination, we should keep in mind that quite likely there are at least four different groups within the Adventist Church: (1) those who favor women's ordination, (2) those who oppose women's ordination, (3) those who are indifferent and do not care either way, and (4) those who are opposed or not opposed to women's ordination but are willing to go with whatever decision the Adventist Church takes at a General Conference session.

Women's ordination is not simply an issue between so-called conservative and liberal Adventists. "Conservative" Adventists are found on both major sides of the discussion—those that support it and those that oppose it.

This has serious implications. We have to be cautious. We have to listen to each other and treat each other as brothers and sisters who happen to have different perspectives. We have to study Scripture carefully and weigh the arguments. We have to be careful with preconceived ideas and stay away from blanket statements. We may find it more advisable to state, "I believe Scripture is opposed to women's ordination" or "I am convicted that the Bible is not opposed to women's ordination" rather than declaring "The Bible is opposed/ is not opposed to women's ordination." Blanket statements let others appear as heretics. In this issue, which we find incomparable to the fundamental beliefs, we should avoid hurting and blaming each other. We are called to control our feelings and ourselves, and be agents of reconciliation.

Let us turn to a possible process of engaging in the ordination debate.

Hermeneutical and exegetical deliberations

Hermeneutical foundation. For Adventists, the Bible is normative. But before we begin studying it, we need to remember our common approach to the exposition of Scripture. We accept the self-testimony of Scripture. Therefore,

we believe that God has revealed Himself in Scripture and inspired His prophets. Their writings are the Word of God. We use a historical-biblical (grammatical) method to interpret Scripture. This includes the principles of *sola scriptura* (Scripture alone is to determine matters of faith), *tota scriptura* (the Bible as the propositional Word of God with a human and a divine side, linked inseparably; the use of Scripture in its entirety), Scripture as its own interpreter and the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the interpretation process.

Exegetical and theological work.

After we have agreed to a common foundation concerning Scripture, we can engage in exegesis, biblical theology, and systematic theology.

Exegesis deals with the interpretation of verses and passages of Scripture and includes a careful study of the historical and literary contexts and of the passage under investigation before applied to our situation.¹ Exegetical studies should also carefully distinguish between biblical descriptions and biblical prescriptions. Biblical descriptions paint a picture of what happened at a certain time, but they do not always need to and sometimes even should not be followed (e.g., Noah's drunkenness). This is different

with biblical prescriptions. Divine commands—either positive (e.g., to do something) or negative (e.g., not to do certain things)—must be followed, unless they were only given to an individual or a specific group at a specific time (e.g., Jesus' command to the young rich ruler to give up his possessions).

Biblical theology studies themes throughout biblical books and the entire Bible. It observes trajectories, changes, and advances.

Systematic theology does not only discuss all major topics of the Bible, providing an overarching system of theology, but also addresses contemporary issues and questions that are not directly spelled out in the Bible.

Different categories of questions that believers encounter. This brings us to the issue that not all questions Christians raise or encounter are of the same nature. There are different categories of questions that believers face: (1) questions on biblical texts

(e.g., Dan. 7 or 8), (2) questions on biblical topics (e.g., the Sabbath), (3) questions on biblical concepts (e.g., the Trinity), and (4) theological and ethical questions not mentioned in Scripture (e.g., human cloning or the question if Christians today can be involved in one or another form of slavery because the Bible does not clearly prohibit slavery). It seems that women's ordination belongs largely in the fourth category.

Approaches to questions that cannot be answered with one or more biblical text. How do we handle fourth category questions—questions on biblical concepts not directly dealt with in Scripture? There are four major approaches to what can be done in these cases:

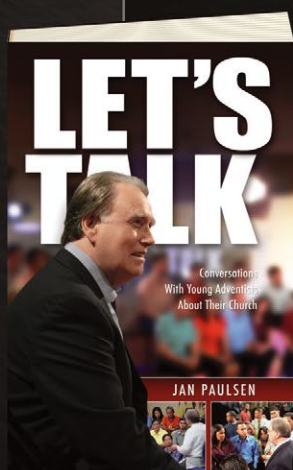
First approach: What Scripture does not prohibit is allowed. While this approach sounds good on first glance, it has major weaknesses and would, for instance, allow for the use of narcotic drugs, smoking, and involvement in gambling and pornography.

Second approach: What Scripture does not allow is prohibited. This approach is not as wide as the first one but faces some problems as well and is too exclusive. It would, for example, prohibit the use of all modern means of transportation and communication, modern medicine, and the Adventist Church structure, including most of its institutions.

Third approach: Choosing the two aforementioned approaches simultaneously. This, however, is an inconsistent way to deal with issues not directly addressed in Scripture. Although this sounds illogical, these issues are still found with believers. Under the first approach one may watch television, and under the second approach one may be opposed to candles or flowers in the sanctuary. In such cases, Scripture does not act as the guide but the authority of the human agent to determine what to include and what to exclude.

Fourth approach: Using biblical principles to determine how questions

Jan Paulsen

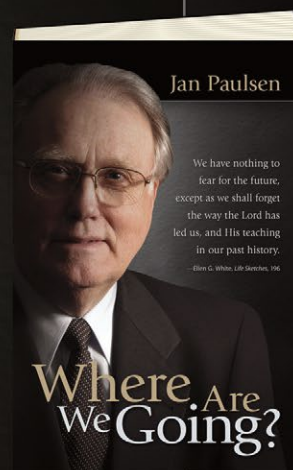


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on theological issues should be decided. A look at our fundamental beliefs and other tenets of our belief system reveals that Adventists have decided to use this fourth approach; that is, employing biblical principles to determine how questions on theological issues not directly addressed in the Bible should be decided. This is also the biblical approach (see, e.g., Jesus and divorce in Matt. 19).²

The approach of using biblical principles. The fourth approach does not do away with a literal understanding of biblical texts (unless we encounter parables, metaphors, symbols, etc.), with sound exegesis, and the discovery of biblical themes. This is all included. However, the question would be: How do we find biblical principles and apply them to the issues we face? Here are some suggestions: Read Scripture widely to recognize biblical principles that can be employed to a specific case. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you to the right principles. Be willing to listen to the church as a whole, and do not rely on your own deliberations only.

The issue of ordination

Having clarified how we understand Scripture and interpret it, we are ready to address the issue of ordination and ask some relevant questions.

What is ordination? Typically, Christian churches have a theology of ordination. The *Catholic Church* holds to a sacramental view. Deacons (different from Adventist deacons), priests, and bishops are ordained. Ordination does not only bring about an ontological change in the person ordained, but also is a matter of succession. The pope “stands” in the apostolic succession and shares it with the bishops.

Protestants have a more functional understanding of ordination and do not consider it a sacrament, and yet ordination keeps a somewhat semi-sacramental character. Ordination is understood as being representative. In some respects, ordained persons represent the body of believers.

Adventists have to ask what ordination is—if it is found in Scripture and/

or if we follow a certain tradition not necessarily found in Scripture; if it is sacramental and moves persons into a specific sphere that makes them different from the rest of the people and allows them to function in a way the rest of the church members cannot function (baptism, Lord’s Supper, marriage, preaching); how it relates to the priesthood of all believers, why we ordain deacons, church elders, and pastors and no other persons; if ordination is a biblical command or a decision of the church that the church may have the authority to take; if there are different kinds of ordination, and so on.

How to study the topic ordination? The term *ordination* is found in several English translations but in the Old Testament only. The verb “to ordain” occurs in several English translations, mainly in the Old Testament but also in the New Testament. Some translations do not employ it at all in the New Testament. “To ordain” is used for phrases and words such as “filling the hands” (Lev. 8:33), “laying on of hands” (1 Tim. 5:22), “appointing” (Titus 1:5). Quite often it occurs in a general sense (the Lord ordains/establishes peace—Isa. 26:12; Paul ordains/directs in all churches—1 Cor. 7:17, and “certain people . . . were [ordained/]designated for this condemnation”—Jude 4 [ESV]). So what should we do?

- Study the vocabulary that may point to ordination (“laying on of hands,” “filling hands,” “appointing,” “anointing,” etc.). Each word or phrase may have different meanings, depending on the context. For example, “laying on of hands” has various meanings, including blessing children. Therefore, one has to be careful not to read too much into these terms. Questions have to be addressed: What is the meaning of the term? Who experienced such procedures? What did they mean? What is the context?
- Study the broader theological concepts involved, such as: Is there a difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament

when it comes to ordination (see, e.g., the priesthood)? What does the priesthood of all believers mean? What is the relationship between leadership, offices, and spiritual gifts? What kind of authority does the church have? Consideration of such and similar questions should lead to developing a consistent theology.

- Apply the results to the practice in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Is ordination a setting apart for a specific ministry? Who should then be ordained? How do we ordain? Should we have different kinds of ordination? What are the functions of those ordained? Are these functions limited to the ordained?

The issue of women’s ordination

This brings us to the last step. How should we approach the study of women’s ordination? Here are a number of suggestions:

- Have in place a general, comprehensive, and consistent theology of ordination that clarifies the important issues.
- After having checked which males are mentioned in connection with ordination, investigate if the Bible says something about women’s ordination. Does the Bible allow for women’s ordination? Does Scripture prohibit women’s ordination? Which principles would help in the debate? Do not confuse texts that talk about the role of women and functions performed by women with the question of ordination, although indirectly they may contribute to the discussion.
- Study the ontology of the female gender. Is there a basic equality between the genders or is there none at all or is equality limited to certain areas? How must subordination be understood? If there is subordination, is it limited to marriage or must every woman be submissive to each and every man? So what place do women

have in marriage, in church, and in society? How has the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ affected the life, role, and functions of women, if at all?


- Study the biblical trajectory of the ontology and the functions of the female gender. Do we notice a change from the Old Testament to the New Testament?

Some of these questions and issues must be addressed exegetically, namely those that deal with the interpretation of biblical texts and passages. Some cannot be addressed exegetically because Scripture does not speak directly to them. They must be part of an overall, well-integrated theology of ordination that does justice to all of Scripture.

In order to be well informed, one must also read arguments, pro and con, regarding women's ordination and articles about the history of the debate on women's ordination. They force us to study Scripture more thoroughly.

Conclusion

The issue of ordination in general and of women's ordination specifically is not only a great challenge but also a wonderful opportunity for the worldwide Adventist Church to listen to each other, pray, and study Scripture intensely. This topic is certainly not enough to follow a mere gut feeling or a habit anchored in Adventist tradition only and also not enough to argue with necessary adaptations to culture and society. Culture may be opposed to God, the gospel, and biblical teachings.

Adventists are keen to maintain their faithfulness to Scripture. A sincere and deep study of the Word of God by all those already involved and those willing to get involved, if pursued in a spirit of humility, can help us be even more united. Adventist pioneers were not afraid to tackle difficult issues. Neither should we. 

¹ See, for instance, Richard M. Davidson, "Biblical Interpretation," in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, Commentary Reference Series, vol. 12, ed. Raoul Dederen (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 2000), 58–104; Gerhard Pfandl, *The Authority and Interpretation of Scripture* (Wahroonga, Australia: South Pacific Division of Seventh-day Adventists, n.d.); Ekkehardt Mueller, "Guidelines for the Interpretation of Scripture," in *Understanding Scripture: An Adventist Approach*, ed. G. W. Reid, Biblical Research Institute Studies (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2006), 1:111–134.

² For a more detailed discussion of these approaches, see Ekkehardt Mueller, "Hermeneutical Guidelines for Dealing With Theological Questions," *Reflections: The BRI Newsletter*, October 2012, 1–7.

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Trends *facing* Adventist spiritual leaders

How is our world church to be run? What model do we use to govern a church as big and expansive as the Seventh-day Adventist movement has become? The tendency has been to run the church under what has been deemed the business model. The purpose of this article is to address the trend toward viewing the church in the context of the business model and four of the potential consequences of following that model.

The church and the business model

As the Seventh-day Adventist Church emerged from the nineteenth century, it faced the need for organizational change. Leadership dysfunctions generally tagged as “kingly authority” had emerged in the absence of structures that supported the theological values associated with Christian leadership. The following statement from Ellen White is typical of her during this time: “No man’s intelligence is to become such a controlling power that one man will have kingly authority in Battle Creek or in any other place. In no line of work is any one man to have power to turn the wheel. God forbids.”¹ This kingly model was compatible with the leadership behavior in secular business, military leadership, and organizational management, wherein command and control behavior was expected. Imposing this model upon

the church and its institutions, however, resulted in abusive behavior toward the people and prompted the following comment, “In the past, the Lord’s work has been carried on altogether too much in accordance with the dictation of human agencies. . . . A time of great perplexity and distress is not the time to be in a hurry to cut the knot of difficulty. In such a time are needed men of God-given ingenuity, tact, and patience. They are to work in such a way that they will “hurt not the oil and the wine.”²

As a reaction to this kingly model, changes were implemented in the early years of the twentieth century, and these resulted in a decentralization of the organization and a distribution of the authority of the church. Reforms enacted during the 1901 General Conference Session resulted in a reorganization of the Seventh-day Adventist governance system. The body of members was recognized in a way that represented ecclesiastic authority as opposed to being subjects of authoritarian leaders. Emphasis was placed on the spiritual authority of this body, and a well-defined system of delegating authority to leaders was established. In this representative system of governance, authority clearly flowed up from the body. Buffers that restricted the power of individuals and levels of organization were set up as safeguards against the reemergence of consolidated power and abusive authority.

As the church moved through the twentieth century, the organization’s administrative structure and function has increasingly suffered from the influence of the Western business model, as well as the secular presidential model. Leaders became executives, the president was elevated as chief executive, pastors became employees, and command and control management became common practice in directing the mission of the church. Concurrently, functional authority gradually shifted from the people to the leaders as a result of increased membership, decreased ratios of delegates to total membership, longer terms between sessions, and the simple expediency of getting things done. A sense that the lower levels of the church organization were accountable to the higher levels began to emerge in place of the lower levels cooperating with higher levels and being accountable to the constituencies that elected them. The representative system, which was designed as a hierarchy of order rather than of power, continues as the Adventist model but on a decreasing scale of effectiveness.

The consequences of these changes (and possible solutions) follow.

Silencing the voice of the people

The representative voice of the people has progressively grown more

silent, leading to a disengagement of laity and the local pastor in governance of the church. This is particularly so in the developed Western world. Attempts to empower and reengage laity in ministry in these areas has had marginal impact. Commitment, engagement, and passion are inextricably linked to a sense of personal ownership in the process, but that sense of ownership has gradually passed from the membership level to the corporate level of the church.

Millions of dollars are spent on media that allow the church to speak—journals, books, television, radio, Internet, and satellite; unfortunately, however, little is invested in increasing the capacity of the organized church to credibly listen. Consequently, the organized church must find a means of listening in a manner that will rein-vigorate the voice of the body; after that, an increased sense of ownership will follow.

Our delegate processes upon which the strength of the representative model is founded, must be upgraded to assure that delegates are not voting or counseling in ignorance. Delegates should be provided with information regarding all whom they are asked to consider for election as well as the issues they are required to consider. Ignorance among the members was a primary enabling factor in the move of the early church from a system of distributed authority to a model³ that concentrated all authority in one person. Listening and ensuring an informed constituency has become the responsibility of the church organization and remains a critical need if we are to maintain a solid and effective representative system of governance.

Increase of relational distance

Closely associated with the disengagement of the laity is the progressive

increase in the relational distance between denominational leaders and the body. To many members and pastors, the organizations and leaders above the local conference or mission level are so distant. The link between their actions and the life of the member has become so vague that these organizations and leaders possess little or no relational connection to the people. Also, little significant relationship exists between the local church and what happens at the union and division levels. This breakdown of relationships in an organization designed, not as a business with control structures, but rather as one built around a relational model begs the question: Who is following the guidance of the higher organizations? If the average member perceives that the structure above the conference or mission level has little impact on his or her life, then the relationship needs to be rebuilt, whether the member's perception is correct or not.

MISSION to the CITIES

Mission to the Cities is an emphasis of the Seventh-day Adventist Church on sharing Jesus' love and the hope of His soon return with people in urban settings. It envisions initiatives in more than 650 of the world's largest cities, starting with New York City in 2013 and running through 2015.

Please pray for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Mission to the Cities:

- For the church members and church leaders working in these cities
- For the people yet to be reached with the Gospel
- For each world division and union that is now preparing the soil for Mission to the Cities
- For the thousands of evangelistic series that will take place
- For the strongholds of Satan to be broken, and relationships with Christ to be established

For a list of cities and more information, go to:

www.MissiontotheCities.org and www.RevivalandReformation.org/777

An unintended consequence of an action taken after the 52nd session (1975), and which was published in 1980,⁴ was the disenfranchisement of ordained pastors from membership in the union constituencies. Until 1980, all ordained pastors were voting constituent members of their unions; this created an immediate and large group that clearly represented the local church and whose voice resonated in both the constituency session hall as well as in the local church upon their return. This dismissal of the pastors as a block (a few pastors serving on conference executive committees or elected as delegates-at-large continued to attend constituency sessions) has contributed to an increase in relational distance in the years since.

Similarly, pastors have traditionally been invited to the ministerial pre-session of the General Conference sessions, where connection and relationships are established and renewed between the organized work and the local pastor. The pre-session event was discontinued prior to 2005, in favor of allowing each union to address ministerial training on their own within the North American Division. Again, the unintended impact is a loss of connection and presence and an increase in the relational distance between the pastor and the local congregation and the higher levels of church organization—both leaders and institution.

Leaders at all levels of the church must reemphasize the relational fabric that unites us and reduces the relational distance between members and leaders. Church members, generally speaking, do not know their leaders and perceive that decisions and actions at higher levels have marginal personal impact on their lives and local churches. The church was not built upon a command and control model but upon a network of relationships governed by the Spirit-directed common voice of the body. In order for this relationship to flourish, leaders must not only talk to the body

but also intensely and intentionally listen to it.

Pastors as employees

The business model has resulted in “administrators” and “employees.” Pastors are corporately referred to as employees. This nomenclature fits the business model, but does this describe God’s will for the church? Look at this in the context of the pastor’s salary. As an employee, the pastor is paid for his or her ministry services; in the original context of our church, the pastor was paid so that he or she could provide ministry service. In the latter, the pastor’s service is not linked to a transactional exchange of money for ministry services; the commitment to ministry is pursued, regardless of remuneration. The employee designation assumes a transactional relationship between pay and service. This subtle difference determines whether the pastor owns his or her calling, or is simply carrying out the plans of the organization, the hiring or the shepherd.

The danger that must be addressed by leaders is the tendency for pastors to gravitate toward employee behavior, which can be typified by marginal contribution, low creativity, and compliance rather than commitment. Redefining the pastor as a professional rather than an employee can restore a sense of ownership of the pastoral calling and has the potential to reinvigorate the creativity necessary to meet the unique challenges of local ministry.

What is the church?


The common perception among Seventh-day Adventists is that the church is the organized system of conferences, unions, and the General Conference and divisions. The managed structure of the church has largely replaced the mental model of a collective membership birthed and knit together by the Holy Spirit as a functioning body that represents Jesus and is commissioned to do His

work. Leaders must help the church remember that it was the church—the body—that created the managed church to serve the needs of the body. All leaders draw their authority from the body and exercise their loaned authority on a basis limited by term and scope as stewards of the body.

This concept can be virtually tested with this question: If global disaster, whether natural or man-made, resulted in the collapse of the systems that support our organization (transportation, finance, communication, etc.), would we still have a church? The answer? Yes, but without the benefit and blessing of a professionally directed organization. The body would still exist because *it is the church*.

Leaders must address this issue by intentionally avoiding any leadership or governance behavior that employs episcopal methods. The representative model that allows the aggregate voice of the body to be heard must be addressed by the stewards of the organization in a manner that moves us away from the business model and back into the arena of ministry by a collective of Spirit-directed people.

Conclusion

The issue addressed in this article represents the understanding of one man. Some of what has been mentioned is supported by recent research, but other elements may need to be established or discarded on the basis of careful investigation. An infallible source would suggest that all things should be established in the presence of two or three witnesses. Maybe we could expand that concept and ask the body of believers for their testimony regarding the issues raised above. 

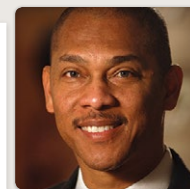
1 E. G. White, *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 4 (Washington, DC: White Estate, 1990), 292.

2 Ibid., 291.

3 Ellen G. White, *From Here to Forever* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1982).

4 General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *NAD Constitution, Bylaws and Working Policy* (Washington, DC: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1980), C 70.05.

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Pastoral support:

An interview with Bob Peach

Editor's note: Bob Peach, LPCC, serves as director of the Kettering Counseling Care Center (KCCC), based in Miamisburg, Ohio, United States. One of the services KCCC provides is the Ministry Care Line, a resource for ministers who need pastoral support.



Willie E. Hucks II (WH): What was the impetus for starting the Ministry Care Line?

Bob Peach (BP): The Ministry Care Line started in 1992 as a result of the general mission we at Kettering Health Network were calling the Kettering Clergy Care Center at that time. Hospital leadership asked us to start a program that would provide counseling and support services for Christian leaders, such as pastors, teachers, conference staff members, and their immediate family members. Kettering is a faith-based hospital, and the hospital leadership wanted to give back to the Christian community and that was one of the ideas to do it. Within a couple of years, we realized that, in order to fulfill our mission in a broader scale than just the immediate local community, we needed to do something in addition, so the telephone medium was the way we chose to expand the Kettering Counseling Care Center so it could have a nationwide impact. We called this telephone support program the Ministry Care Line.

WH: What are some of the major challenges callers face today that are addressed in the Ministry Care Line telephone consultation sessions?

BP: We have identified six major categories of calls people make to the Ministry Care Line. The first category (and 23 percent of our calls) is a simple request for a referral for face-to-face counseling with a Christian professional in the caller's community. We can usually provide two or three referral suggestions to the caller from our access to online directories.

The second category (and about 10 percent of our calls) is about the caller's professional relationship with another person; if they're a pastor, perhaps an issue with a parishioner; if they're a teacher, maybe in their professional relationship with a colleague, parent, or student; if a conference office staff member, maybe office personalities clashing. In addition, all of us, when we are counseling with people, sometimes get stuck. The Ministry Care Line is a confidential place for a counseling pastor or teacher to talk with somebody about those situations.

The third category of calls (13 percent of our calls) is for marriage and family relationship issues. Clergy and other church workers have the same family issues as everybody else: your teenagers are bugging you, and you're feeling frustrated with them; you're having some disagreement with your spouse and need

a safe place to talk about it.

The fourth category (about 22 percent of our calls) includes people calling about what we call *individual or personal issues*. The caller might be suffering from depression, an anxiety disorder, or a problem that isn't necessarily arising from their profession. Perhaps the caller is unhappy in their present job and is considering going back to school and wants to talk about the pros and cons of doing it.

The fifth category (about 8 percent of calls) is an update from a previous caller. This means that we've had an earlier phone conversation with a caller. They are calling back again to follow up with us about the previous call. Perhaps they've tried a solution to a problem suggested in the previous call and they wish to report its success or failure and continue the discussion.

The last category (about 24 percent of our calls) is what we label *information calls*. We have a free quarterly resource that is made available to subscribers—they might be calling for that. They might be a new employee that just heard about the Ministry Care Line and are asking questions about the nature of this service, etc.

WH: What are some of the warning signs that might indicate a pastor is at some kind of risk?

BP: If they are showing signs of depression and anxiety, beware. In the mental health field, we talk about the vegetative signs of depression. Things like a sleep disturbance, trouble concentrating or remembering, loss of a sense of happiness or closure, a sense of pessimism or negativity, a lowered resistance in the immune system, being more temperamental, and a decrease in interest in the sexual relationship with a spouse. If any of these signs begin to be noticed by the individual or a spouse, family member, or others around them, that is a warning to them that things are not going right, and they ought to get help before it gets worse.

Signs of anxiety sometimes overlap with that, but there is a greater sense of aggravation: The person has a hard time sitting still; they tend to feel more jittery. They are more reactive. If it gets really bad, people tend to get panicky, and it's not unusual for a person who is beginning to exhibit some panic disorder to end up going to the hospital emergency room, thinking they're having a heart attack, because panic disorder or high anxiety symptoms tend to mimic what people ordinarily think of as heart attack symptoms—the pressure in the chest, the tingling down the arms, the shortness of breath. I remember a pastor telling me years ago that he was suffering from what we colloquially would call burnout. One of the signs was that he caught himself putting his key into the church office door lock; and as he shoved the key into the lock, he would sigh. He realized he was not eager to begin his day of ministry. And that was a warning sign that something wasn't right for him.

WH: Why are some pastors afraid to get the help and support they desperately need?

BP: Pastors, along with other helping professionals, are trained and gifted with abilities to be helpers of other

people. What they're used to doing is helping other people cope with their stuff. Because of that, they are predisposed to expect, *I'll always be the helper. I help you; you don't help me.* When they get in a personal situation where life is starting to get crumbly around the edges, and they begin to feel some of the symptoms of anxiety or depression, they don't know what to do—that's very disturbing to them. The thought might come, *Well, maybe something's wrong.* But then their training and expectations reassert themselves and they say, "That couldn't be true. It's not the way I do it." And so that forms a barrier of denial. They need to be able to say, "I am not made of stainless steel. I'm a human being too. The people who've come to me for help, I'm human just like them. It's OK for me to get help from somebody else when I need it."

WH: How do church leaders go about receiving the aid that you and your staff offer?

BP: If there's an openness for the service of the Ministry Care Line, the first thing to do, practically speaking, is determine if your organization is a subscriber. This decision is an individual employing organization's decision. And right now, across North America, about half of the local conferences subscribe to the Ministry Care Line. Talk to your ministerial director to see if your organization is a subscriber. If they're not a subscriber, ask them to become one. Call me and ask for a MCL subscription application form. You can pass it along to the president or ministerial director.

WH: Is this limited just to conferences and unions or can universities and other entities also participate?

BP: No, it's not limited. Any church-related employer is certainly invited to contact us to be a subscriber. It's organized on the basis of a group. The smallest group is a group of fifteen. So generally, it's going to be an employing organization that becomes a Ministry Care Line subscriber.

WH: Can you give our readers a phone number they can contact?

BP: Yes. Our business office number is 1-937-384-6920. Our toll-free number, if that's more convenient, is 1-866-634-0493. The staff on duty at those numbers will talk to you and give you information. If you want to ask us if your organization is a member, we can tell you the answer to that question as well.

WH: Is this ministry available internationally? If not, what suggestions can you offer to others outside of North America who need such assistance?

BP: This ministry is internationally available. But, one of the challenges for us is the time zone differences. We are not accessible twenty-four hours a day. We had hoped, earlier on, that we would have a large enough subscriber base to be able to offer the service that way. It has not become large enough to maintain a twenty-four/seven presence. So we have chosen to concentrate our available time more to the North American time zones. I would be pleased if another division is interested in this concept. I would be delighted to share our experience if someone else wants to develop something similar in another part of the world.

WH: The conference ministerial secretary essentially serves as the pastor to the pastors in his territory. What would you say to them as they read this interview?

BP: Just to encourage them and to express my deep appreciation for what they do. They are in a strategic position to be of help and encouragement to their employees. Ministerial secretaries are sometimes called upon to serve in dual roles, which can conflict. They can have administrative responsibilities that make it hard for the pastors to feel safe with them when they put their "pastor's pastor" hat on. So I would encourage them, number one, to be aware of the dual relationship, and if

you feel somewhat frustrated by that, you're not alone. It is hard to straddle those dual roles. I encourage ministerial directors, if they find people have a wariness to confide in them, that's not a strange thing. But they are still in the position to use their energy to provide confidential resources. For instance, investigate a subsidized counseling program in their neighborhood, in their local field; spend some time recruiting and vetting mental health professionals that pastors can go to; enhance a local blind billing counseling program; utilize the Ministry Care Line, communicating its availability to their employees. They are in a position to be great facilitators, providers, and organizers of caring resources for the clergy.

WH: Is there anything else you would like to say to our readers?

BP: Ministry is becoming increasingly complicated and challenging. Our clergy are part of the population that the church serves. There's not some

kind of an isolated hothouse place that ministers are hatched and delivered to the church. We bring our human frailties and problems we have experienced in our lives to ministry. So if a person has been abused as a child, just becoming a minister does not instantly fix all of their negative life experiences. Unfortunately, it can even camouflage them. The expectation of being a perfect Christian and having everything work just fine can make us blind to our own humanness.

My appeal would be for ministers to be good stewards of themselves. They find themselves depressed and tend to think, *Well, if I just prayed more and read my Bible more, that would instantly get fixed.* But it isn't necessarily the thing that is going to fix the wounds of abuse that they suffered, these wounds that they bear in their hearts and lives. It might be that the wounds surface in troubled relationships with lay leadership on the board. I would like to encourage you to sit down and talk to somebody. Take care of those wounds; get rid of that internal

pain. Christian counselors are prepared to help you deal with your past. And there's no shame in recognizing and acknowledging that.

To ministerial directors, come alongside your clergy. If you are surprised at seeing an employee acting in a bizarre manner, you might be observing the external manifestation of their wounds. Your opinion of this person as being a gifted pastor, an intelligent individual, might not be wrong. You're in a position to come alongside them and say, "I have noticed some areas of concern in your ministry. Let's do something to make repairs." Even if you do not counsel that person, you may be in a position to gently prod them into taking some action to deal with the issue.

WH: Well, thank you so much for spending this time with us and with our readers. I pray that as a result of our time spent here in this interview, men and women who, deep down inside, want to get the help that they need, will reach out and get that help. 🙏

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Renewed

"But those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles" (Isa. 40:31, NIV).

No question. Getting weary is easy, in part because life demands so much of us. Where do you turn for relief, comfort, and escape from all the pressure?

God gives us a promise in His Word. The Creator, who "neither faints nor is weary" (v. 28, NKJV), invites weary ones to spend time in His presence, to bathe in the atmosphere of eternal strength, to

drink in the air of power-giving presence—to "wait" long enough to renew their lives, and to restore our souls with His healing touch. God mends our raw nerve endings with the stitches of His peace. What a God we serve!

God's promise to those who look to Him for such renewal is that they shall not be disappointed (Isa. 49:23). Are you weary? Wouldn't you like to rise above it? Have confidence in the Lord who can help you to soar on wings like the eagle.

No matter how exhausted life leaves us, when we look expectantly to God in faith, we will surely find solace, strength, and hope. This living hope renews, heals, restores, and redeems the day.

—RAQUEL ARRAIS, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR,
WOMEN'S MINISTRIES, GENERAL
CONFERENCE OF SEVENTH-DAY
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Revival
and
REFORMATION

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Dealing with doctrinal issues in the church: *Part 3*

The 1888 Minneapolis Bible conference exemplifies using wrong attitudes to deal with doctrinal controversy.

The conference was convened on Wednesday, October 17; the delegation was composed of 90 people representing 27,000 church members. The conference agenda included progress reports concerning new mission fields, the distribution of labor, city evangelism, a new ship for the South Pacific (*Pitcairn*), and several others.¹

Among the delegates, the names of Alonzo T. Jones and Ellet J. Waggoner stood out. They were close friends; both were editors for *Signs of the Times* in California.² Jones and Waggoner were at the center of the doctrinal controversy that arose during a ministerial workers' meeting, October 10–16, prior to the 1888 conference itself.

The battle lines are drawn

The divisive issue had to do with the interpretation of Galatians 3:24. Was the law referred to in the text the moral or ceremonial law?³ O. A. Johnson, in an article published by the *Review and Herald* in 1886, had concluded that the law in Galatians is ceremonial. E. J. Waggoner published a series of nine articles in *Signs*, in which he argued that the law in Galatians is the moral law.⁴

Waggoner became instrumental in the understanding and teaching of

righteousness by faith. “Waggoner was asked to present a series of lectures on righteousness by faith. We do not know exactly what Waggoner said, because beginning only in 1891 were all Bible studies at General Conference sessions recorded, but from what he wrote before and after Minneapolis we know approximately what he taught.”⁵ Gerhard Pfandl summarizes the main points: “(1) man’s obedience can never satisfy God’s law; (2) Christ’s imputed righteousness alone is the basis of our acceptance by God; and (3) we constantly need the covering of Christ’s righteousness, not just for our past sins.”⁶

Some accepted what he taught, some rejected it, and some were neutral. Among those who accepted the message were Ellen White, W. C. White, and S. N. Haskell. Among those who rejected the message were Uriah Smith, J. H. Morrison, and L. R. Conradi.⁷ “Eventually most of those who opposed the message changed their attitude and accepted the message of righteousness by faith, though some left the church.”⁸ After the Minneapolis session, Ellen White proclaimed, with Jones and Waggoner, the message of righteousness by faith. Forums for presenting the messages included camp meetings, workers’ meetings, and Bible schools.⁹ Pfandl states, “Minneapolis 1888 was a turning point in the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Through Waggoner and Jones, supported by

Ellen White, the church was saved from an incomplete understanding of the gospel.”¹⁰

Bad attitudes

The 1888 conference was, however, characterized by a battle for supremacy instead of a humble and prayerful spirit.¹¹ Their approach was a self-confident one divorced from prayer and rigorous study of the Bible. Prejudice prevailed and a spirit of debate permeated the discussions on righteousness by faith. Ellen White attempted to intervene, but her call for a change fell on deaf ears.¹²

The personal attitudes manifested during the 1888 conference contributed to the church’s polarization. Some believers, as a result of the contention, left the church. Jerry Moon observes that a mixture of issues and multiple misunderstandings characterized the 1888 session.¹³ He says the results that followed the theological conference were devastating because Scripture was put aside and personal issues were the central focus.¹⁴

The 1888 conference was held 25 years after the church’s formal organization and 44 years after the Great Disappointment. The participants were dedicated, yet divided. In fact, the attitude undergirding the conference was a “search for truth,” which ultimately became a basis for furthering personal ends.¹⁵

The pioneers also manifested negative attitudes against the Bible. They did not regard the Bible as God's Word. White mentions "caviling over" God's Word, "sitting in judgment upon its teachings," and other irrelevant handling of the Word.¹⁶ Therefore, the purposes of studying the Scriptures had nothing to do with discovering its meaning but had much to do with sustaining one's personal preferred presuppositions about the Bible.¹⁷ The process for studying God's Word

Ellen White insisted that her writings should not take the place of the Bible. Instead, they must be used to magnify God's revealed will through the Bible. In other instances, her writings may be used to clarify biblical truth in the event that the church or individuals have thoroughly studied the Bible but cannot fully understand God's will.

The attitudes that the pioneers manifested in the 1888 conference threatened the unity of the believers. Moon mentions that the neglect to

The first conference was at Rocky Hill, Connecticut, April 20–24. The conference focused on the doctrine of the Sabbath.²⁴ The second conference was held in Bristol, Connecticut, in June (the exact date unknown). The third conference was in Volney, New York, August 18, 19.²⁵ David Arnold presented his understanding of the millennium, the 144,000 people, and the Lord's Supper. Respectively, he held that the millennium was in the past; the 144,000 were comprised of the saints who were resurrected at Jesus' resurrection; the Lord's Supper ought to be held once a year, during the feast of Passover. During the same conference, Joseph Bates preached on the Sabbath truth and James White taught about the sanctuary.²⁶

Ellen White recounts, "There were about thirty-five present, all that could be collected in that part of the State. There were hardly two agreed. Each was strenuous for his views, declaring that they were according to the Bible. All were anxious for an opportunity to advance their sentiments, or to preach to us."²⁷ The presence of Ellen White was instrumental to the conclusion of this conference. Moon mentions that the two visions of Ellen White contributed to resolution of the theological differences.²⁸

The fourth conference was held in Port Gibson, New York, August 27, 28. During the conference, White received another vision after which she counseled the participants to preserve biblical unity.²⁹ The fifth conference was held at Rocky Hill, Connecticut, September 8, 9. The sixth conference was held in Topsham, Maine, October 20–22. Again, Joseph Bates and James White presented the Sabbath and sanctuary truths. The seventh conference was held in Dorchester, Massachusetts, on November 17–19. The conference participants discussed the seal of God referred to in Revelation 7:1–3.³⁰ Earnest Bible study, prayer, and prophetic guidance characterized the 1848 conferences.

In addition to the study of the Scriptures,
the pioneers spent time seeking God's
guidance through prayer.

included absence of prayer, a focus on nonessentials, use of "ad hominem arguments," use of "cloture on debate," a "wresting of Scriptures," and use of religious political alliances.¹⁸

There was also much "jesting, joking, and casual talking, but little earnest prayer in the delegates' private rooms."¹⁹ Moon observes that the order of study included presentation by Waggoner, debate with searching Scriptures, confusion and rejection of truth, and disregard or rejection of the Spirit of Prophecy.

A threatened divide

Ellen White was instrumental in dealing with the controversy. Moon shows that White called for a "fair hearing" of Waggoner's presentation, a thorough investigation of Scriptures with "humble prayer and teachable spirit, use of her writings after thorough Bible study, thorough investigation of Scriptures before applying her writings, and a willingness to re-examine the Scriptures."²⁰

first make a thorough examination of Scripture was a major factor at Minneapolis.²¹ The 1888 conference showed the most blatant shortcomings in the way the pioneers related to divine authority as expressed in God's Word and the Spirit of Prophecy.²² Richard Schwarz points out that while church leaders spent resources on theological debates, "the spiritual awakening faltered, wavered, and got sidetracked for a quarter of a century."²³ The 1888 conference exemplifies using the wrong approach to deal with controversial issues in the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

The 1848 and 1855 conferences

In contrast to the 1888 debacle, the 1848 and the 1855 conferences exemplify right approaches toward dealing with controversial issues in the church.

The 1848 conferences were intended to lay doctrinal foundations for the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

White recounts,

Often we remained together until late at night, and sometimes through the entire night, praying for light and studying the Word. Again and again these brethren came together to study the Bible, in order that they might know its meaning, and be prepared to teach it with power. When they came to the point in their study where they said, “we can do nothing more,” the Spirit of the Lord would come upon me, I would be taken off in vision, and a clear explanation of the passages we had been studying would be given me; with instruction as to how we were to labor and teach effectively. Thus light was given that helped us to understand the scriptures in regard to Christ, His mission, and His priesthood. A line of truth extending from that time to the time when we shall enter the city of God, was made plain to me, and I gave to others the instruction that the Lord had given me.³¹

She goes on to say,

We would come together burdened in soul; praying that we might be one in faith and doctrine; for we knew that Christ is not divided. One point at a time was made the subject of investigation. The Scriptures were opened with a sense of awe. Often we fasted, that we might be better fitted to understand the truth. After earnest prayer, if any point was not understood, it was discussed, and each one expressed his opinion freely; then we would again bow in prayer, and earnest supplications went up to heaven that God would help us to see eye to eye, that we might be one as Christ and the Father are one. Many tears were shed.

We spent many hours in this way. Sometimes, the entire night was spent in solemn investigation of the Scriptures, that we might understand the truth for our time.

On some occasions the Spirit of God would come upon me, and difficult portions were made clear through God’s appointed way, and then there was perfect harmony. We were all of one mind and one spirit.³²

The theological process was critical for the successful search for truth and unity among the early pioneers. The subject of discussion during the conferences was the Bible only. White describes the conference participants as people who were keen, noble, and true. These people included Joseph Bates and James White, who served as the main presenters of the biblical truths.

A better approach

The process of biblical investigation included a combination of prayer and study, avoidance of minor points of disagreement, freedom of expression, and individual prayer and study.³³ Intensity characterized the process of interpreting the Scriptures. White recalls, “Often we remained together until late at night, and sometimes through the entire night, praying for light and studying the Word.”³⁴ In addition, she says, “Often we fasted, that we might be better fitted to understand the truth.”³⁵ What this should teach us is that when church leaders and Bible scholars have a personal relationship with God and with each other, they promote unity of faith and mission in the church.

Successful outcomes of the Bible conferences also had to do with an element of persistence—seven conferences in 1848.³⁶ Bible scholars to whom God reveals His will are those who spend adequate amounts of time studying the Scriptures. These will never quit the study of God’s Word or get discouraged before they discover a “thus says the Lord” in the Bible. Instead, they will continue studying the Word until they understand what God’s will is on a given subject.

The theological process that the early church pioneers employed in their search for truth and unity influenced the outcomes of the 1848 Bible conferences. As a result of this process, clear

explanation of the passages “under investigation” was arrived at and “difficult portions were made clear through God’s appointed way.”³⁷ This process also helped the pioneers establish the doctrinal system of the church.³⁸

With these examples before us, perhaps the question that one would ask today’s Adventist Bible scholars, theologians, and leaders might be, “Are we following the footsteps of the pioneers as we, ourselves, struggle with important theological issues?”

A Sabbath question

A few years later, in 1855, the pioneers had to deal with a dispute over the beginning of the Sabbath.³⁹ Moon mentions that Joseph Bates, a retired sea captain, held that “even” in Leviticus 23:32, the time for beginning of the Sabbath, was 6:00 P.M. equatorial time. In fact, he says that Bates was well respected and followed by the majority since he was “the leading advocate of the Sabbath among Adventists.”⁴⁰ He also mentions that some Sabbath keepers from Maine, in 1847–1848, “cited the King James Version of Matthew 28:1 in support of beginning Sabbath at sunrise, but a vision of Ellen White in 1848 refuted this.”⁴¹ He goes on to say, “A tongues-speaking incident in June 1848 supporting the 6:00 p.m. time was accepted as confirming that the Sabbath begins at 6:00 p.m. As a result, from 1847 to 1855, a few began the Sabbath at sundown, but the majority followed the 6:00 p.m. time.”⁴²

In summer 1855, James White requested J. N. Andrews to study the issue, and Andrews demonstrated from the Scriptures that the Sabbath begins at sundown. Moon mentions that the study was presented to the conference in Battle Creek on November 17, 1855, and published in the December 4, 1855, *Review*.⁴³ Further, he states that the majority of attendees found Andrews’ arguments convincing. He mentions that the response was unanimous with an exception of two people—Joseph Bates and Ellen White.⁴⁴

Comparing with the 1848 theological process model that contributed to

the church's unity of doctrine and faith, the issue of Sabbath keeping would not be considered as over yet. According to Moon, "On Sunday, Nov. 18, Ellen White received a vision endorsing the sundown view. She asked the angel why God allowed this error for nine years. Answer: Because you never thoroughly studied the Scripture evidence. Direct revelation of the Holy Spirit was not given in place of thorough study of Scripture."⁴⁵

The 1855 dispute was resolved, then, by a thorough study of the Bible and by the believers' acceptance of prophetic guidance. Moon says, "More comprehensive study disproved the interpretive assumptions." Today, people of experience and influence may also contribute to wrong theological conclusions and church practices. Thorough study of the Bible, intense prayer, and prophetic guidance contribute to successful theological processes and conclusions, and hence, the unity of the doctrine and faith.

Study the Word

One of the lessons we can learn from our pioneers is that they were serious Bible students. Francis Wernick states, "They viewed the Bible as a unified whole, a message from God through human instruments writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit."⁴⁶

He goes on to say,

To reach their conclusions, our pioneers compared Scripture with Scripture, using one Bible writer to explain what another had written. They saw the Old and New Testaments as complementing one another and the Bible as a unified whole. Thus today we have a system of truth that has kept us unified for several generations.⁴⁷


Wernick mentions that the writings of Ellen White were instrumental "in helping our pioneers to unite in their understanding of the special Biblical truths that make us a distinct people

today."⁴⁸ He affirms the role of Ellen White's writings in unifying the church today.⁴⁹

In addition to the study of the Scriptures, the pioneers spent time seeking God's guidance through prayer. Moon reports that Ellen White, who was present, highlights the importance of prayer during the 1848 conferences. Their burden in prayer was for unity.⁵⁰ This is a recurring attitude throughout the writings of Ellen White as she reports on her personal experience during these conferences.⁵¹ In times when there were disagreements, there was an emphasis in individual prayer and Bible study.⁵² The focus of their study was the Bible.⁵³ The results were positive and led to a clearer understanding of the truth.⁵⁴

During the 1855 conferences on the time for beginning the Sabbath, Moon observes that there was superficiality in the manner in which they studied the Bible at the beginning stages, and with intensity of Bible study God blessed them with understanding and the matter was settled.⁵⁵ Looking at these two conferences, it is very evident that truth and light came at a price. They had to give up their own opinions and focus on allowing God to bring them to unity. In addressing the subject of the ordination of women in our time, the same attitude needs to prevail.

In his conclusion, Moon highlights three elements that are important in dealing with theological controversies. How we relate to God, the Bible, and fellow believers is important in this process.⁵⁶ However, the key toward dealing with controversial subjects in the church is a personal relationship with God. Moon states that this relationship with God is "the first issue to settle in resolving doctrinal disagreements within the church or in seeking a response to pluralism and postmodernism."⁵⁷

(Part 4 will appear in the August 2013 issue.) 

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- 5 Ibid.
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- 46 Francis W. Wernick, "Leadership Role in Maintaining Unity," in *Here We Stand: Evaluating New Trends in the Church*, ed. Samuel Koranteng-Pipim (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventist Affirm, 2005), 769.
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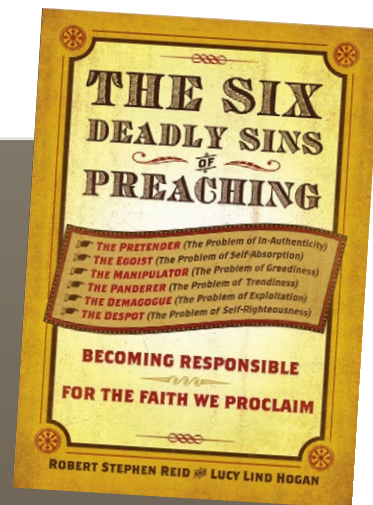
The Six Deadly Sins of Preaching: Becoming Responsible for the Faith We Proclaim

by Robert Stephen Reid and Lucy Lind Hogan, Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2012.

Many books come across my desk that I do not see the need to have reviewed. *The Six Deadly Sins of Preaching* is an exception. Robert Stephen Reid and Lucy Lind Hogan have done an excellent job of identifying what they call an “Irresponsible Preaching Typology,” claiming that “failures of in-authenticity, greed, and exploitation represent a lack of reliability for listeners. Failures of self-absorption, pandering, and self-righteousness represent a lack of faithfulness to the gospel” (10). They offer a credible alternative logically called a “Responsible Preaching Typology,” which promotes preaching authenticity over inauthenticity, self-control over greed, wooing with a reasoned reception over exploitation, selflessness over self-absorption, honesty over pandering or trendiness, and revealing an ineffable God over exercising self-righteousness (11).

The book consists of eight chapters plus an epilogue. The first chapter serves as an introduction, with chapters 2–7 detailing the six deadly sins. Chapters 2–8 are each subdivided, addressing the negative elements, then providing the antidote to each deadly sin. Chapter 8 contains an alliterated “Abecedarium of Missteps” (94–100) that address issues such as aggravating, boring, and confusing the listeners, followed by homiletic lapses in judgment (100–104), such as using technical terms that few understand or employing less-than-appreciated stories from family life, often at the expense of the preacher’s kids. After the epilogue comes an appendix detailing a code of

While reading The Six Deadly Sins, I found myself (as did the authors of the book) listing names of preachers I have known over the years who have “transgressed” in the ways mentioned.



ethics for preachers, written by Ronald J. Allen and reprinted by permission from an article in the Autumn 2005 issue of *Encounter*.

While reading *The Six Deadly Sins*, I found myself (as did the authors of the book) listing names of preachers I have known over the years who have “transgressed” in the ways mentioned. But the greatest benefit (and scariest lesson) personally derived was discovering that I have been guilty on one or two counts myself (I won’t say which). While I understand and agree with the premises behind chapters 7 and 8, dealing with the demagogue and despot, I find the first four culprits listed—the pretender, the egoist, the manipulator, and the pandarer—to be far more common and more insidious in their effects upon congregations. And those chapters, 2–5, are well worth the

value to be derived by purchasing and reading the book.

While well written, *The Six Deadly Sins* also includes lively (although copious) illustrations drawn from both the religious and political worlds. Yet despite the numerous accounts therein, it doesn’t feel like Reid and Hogan have included too many stories to prove their points; rather, they reached their mark and caused me to say, “I thought the same thing back then!” Pastors and preachers who want to seriously conduct a self-inventory of their homiletics and delivery should read this book, for it will strengthen their ministries and, more importantly, save those who listen to their sermons from being spiritually abused.

—Reviewed by Willie E. Hucks II, DMin, associate editor, Ministry. 

► A focus on comprehensive health ministry

Silver Spring, Maryland, United States—Top leaders from the Health Ministries and Ministerial Association of the Seventh-day Adventist Church met March 4–6, 2013, at the church's headquarters to examine how the two entities can encourage a comprehensive approach to mission and evangelism.

"This is all counsel we've had from the beginning," said **Jerry N. Page**, secretary of the Ministerial Association. "We just want to have it reemphasized," he said, referring to the Adventist Church's historical emphasis on healthful living.

Health Ministries director **Allan Handysides** concurred. "Our church cofounder, Ellen White, gave advice that the church's work could be more effective when the health professionals and ministers are working hand-in-hand," he said. A comprehensive approach, Handysides said, would also help ensure that the church's teachings on healthful living are more consistent throughout the world.

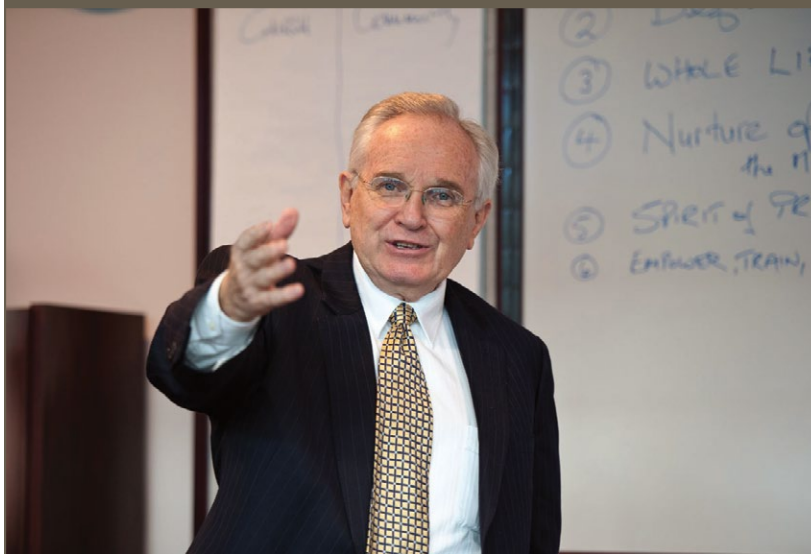
Over the next few months, leaders plan to define a core philosophy of health and prepare for the implementation of comprehensive ministry at local congregations for the coming years. For now, this represents the first step in a process of what many summit attendees said was the first top-level meeting of its kind in their church career, and it harkens back to what the denomination was first founded on.

In the coming years, leaders said possible methods of supporting the health emphasis could include bringing back a combined master of divinity and master of public health degree at the church's Loma Linda University in California, releasing a modern and abbreviated adaptation of White's

1905 book *The Ministry of Healing*, and developing training resources for Adventist schools. Leaders emphasized, however, that the future direction would not be limited to just

Finley said the highlight of the summit was public outreach during the meetings. For two evenings, the group modeled health evangelism, inviting the public to attend health

"Our church cofounder, Ellen White, gave advice that the church's work could be more effective when the health professionals and ministers are working hand-in-hand."



Dr. Allan Handysides (pictured) leads a discussion with the 13 world division Health Ministries directors about core health philosophy goals for the denomination.

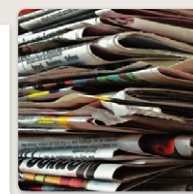
[photo: Ansel Oliver]

a few resources or events but a whole renewed approach.

"We want to use Christ's methods of developing relationships and meeting people's needs before we try to share the gospel with someone," said **Mark Finley**, assistant to the president for evangelism and organizer of the summit.

lectures and cooking demonstrations in the world church headquarters' auditorium.

"We were blessed to be able to model comprehensive, total health evangelism," Finley said. "I think this is a real model for the future." [Ansel Oliver/ANN]



► Hope Channel Ukraine

Kiev, Ukraine—The March 2013 launch of Hope Channel Ukraine gives the Seventh-day Adventist Church its fourth full-time satellite channel in Europe, along with growing Internet channels potentially laying the ground for future satellite transmissions.

The March 1 opening caps a nearly five-year application process for a license to operate. In August, Hope Channel Ukraine became the first Protestant TV channel officially granted broadcast distribution rights across the eastern European country and former Soviet Republic.

The network can now broadcast on some 600 cable networks, potentially reaching up to 60 percent of the country's population. There are roughly 45 million people in Ukraine.

Daniel Reband, who oversees TV production for the denomination's Euro-Asia Division, based in Moscow, said, "Having lived under communism and experienced for many years countless obstacles to sharing our message, I can hardly believe what I am seeing."

Hope Channel Ukraine currently operates a Ukrainian- and a Russian-language studio in the capital, Kiev, and in eight other cities.

For years, church members in Ukraine financially supported the development of the media ministry outreach, said **Kandus Thorpe**, Hope Channel vice president for international development. There are roughly 60,000 Adventist Church members in Ukraine.

The channel joins its three other sister satellite channels on the continent—Hope Channel Europe, based in England; Speranța TV in Romania; and Hope Channel Germany.

The Adventist Church also operates six Internet Hope Channel broadcast channels in Europe: Bulgaria, Czech

Church leaders hold a commemorative plaque on the opening day of operations for Hope Channel Ukraine in Kiev on March 1. The new channel is expected to potentially reach 60 percent of the country's population. [photo courtesy ESD]



The network can now broadcast on some 600 cable networks, potentially reaching up to 60 percent of the country's population. There are roughly 45 million people in Ukraine.

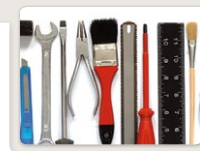
Republic, Hungary, Italy, Norway, and Poland.

Hope Channel Ukraine is the 14th full-time satellite channel in the global Hope Channel network.

Hope Channel Philippines is set to launch as the network's next satellite channel in August. The channel already operates online. Similarly, the Internet-based Hope Channel Indonesia is scheduled to also make the transition to a satellite channel later this year. Also upcoming is the launch of Hope Channel Africa. [ANN Staff] ▼



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Miroslav Pujic, DMin, is the Ministry to Postmoderns director for the Trans-European Division of Seventh-day Adventists, Hertsfordshire, England.

Postmodern cultural patterns

All statements are true in some sense, false in some sense, meaningless in some sense, true and false in some sense, true and meaningless in some sense, false and meaningless in some sense, and true and false and meaningless in some sense.”¹

Really? While the above may be a parody of inclusiveness, mocking the idea that truth and false are opposites, postmoderns do tend to see less of a distinction. Contemporary culture has blurred some previously clear lines: docu-fiction, “reality” television (TV) that has scripts, celebration of crime, and amoral behavior. Much that we have learned from culture patterns says that image is all important, and this plays into postmodern thought. Since “everything is subjective,” the implication suggests *that you can do as you please*. Of course, following such a principle does not avoid the painful consequences of being so self-referenced; denying distinctions between good and evil does not make it right. But as a characteristic of postmodern thought, the impact of cultural patterning is important to understand and address.

Playwright Harold Pinter states it well: “There are no hard distinctions between what is real and what is unreal, nor between what is true and what is false. A thing is not necessarily either true or false; it can be both true and false.”²

Such propositions are hard for moderns who draw very clear boundary lines. While it’s important not to accept that good and evil can be interchanged, when it comes to perceptions of truth, we must admit that it is possible to see things in different ways.

The nature of TV programming is a great example of how cultural patterns work. As David F. Wells says, “In our postmodern culture which is TV dominated, image sensitive, and morally vacuous, personality is everything and character is increasingly irrelevant.”³

Whether a pop idol, reality TV star, or political figure, image and personality are top priorities. This needs to be understood, not necessarily endorsed. It is the culture in which we live, and knowing this comprises the way things work is vital to be able to address postmoderns.

Here is a summary list of statements that reflect a postmodern attitude:

1. If it works for you, that doesn’t mean that it works for me.
2. Does not like to be kept in a box; prefer no structure.
3. Question everything.
4. Objectivity is out, subjectivity is in.
5. Tell the personal story.
6. Never make a final list, have an open end.

Let’s examine these six postmodern statements.

Assertion 1 is undeniably true. But behind this, you will find an overemphasis on subjectivity and a tendency to deny the applicability of a good example and objective analysis, as indicated in assertion 4.

The rejection of structure and “boxes” (2) can sound liberating, but all too often this results in the equally confining rule of the self. This need to be explored because, in the end, we all operate according to some kind of structure.

“Question everything” (3) sounds radical; but while a cultural pattern, this is a challenging maxim to live by. One response is to *accept the questioning, but then ask for answers*. Questions without answers are hardly helpful.

Since objectivity is out (4), then the personal-story emphasis (5) can be very helpful and used to share with postmoderns since this provides a vehicle to share important convictions.

The open-endedness aspect (6), while it may be challenging, does allow for continuing conversations. “All media exist to invest our lives with artificial

perceptions and arbitrary values,” concludes Marshall McLuhan.⁴


Yet, in so many ways, Jesus did exactly what these postmodern statements indicate. He challenged contemporary cultural patterns. He rejected accepted traditions. He questioned people’s priorities and religious beliefs. Most of all, He both understood and challenged cultural patterns. He was not afraid to identify truth, yet also recognized that people’s experience of truth was different. As a demonstration, examine these words of Jesus and see how many correspond to the postmodern statements above:

“‘That is why I tell you not to worry about everyday life—whether you have enough food and drink, or enough clothes to wear. Isn’t life more than food, and your body more than clothing?’ . . .

“‘So don’t worry about these things, saying, “What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?” These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but your heavenly Father already knows all your needs’ ” (Matt. 6:25, 31, 32, NLT).

More than enough to challenge many of today’s assumptions!

Question: Why is it important to understand cultural patterns? How can we deal with those cultural patterns that challenge the way that we believe?

Ancient wisdom: “‘Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need’ ” (Matt. 6:33, NLT). 

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3 “David F. Wells Quotes,” oChristian.com, accessed Apr. 16, 2013, christian-quotes.ochristian.com/David-F.-Wells-Quotes.

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