

Ministry

International Journal for Pastors

May 1987

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Looking
Through
to Redemption



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Homosexuals and the church

I am very impressed with your November 1996 issue. I believe it presents a balanced, compassionate viewpoint. Thank you for your courage!

May I, however, be allowed to push at the boundaries? I have to say I sensed a willingness to extend the ministry of the church to those homosexuals who are wanting to live by biblical principles, but not the desire to reach out to those who, because of their particular pain, confusion, and feelings of alienation, are not at that point. I am thinking especially of the many wonderful people I know who are part of Kinship. Many of them have been deeply hurt by the church, or by their parents in the name of the church. Yet they still long to be part of the church. True, we cannot compromise our moral beliefs to accommodate their lifestyle, but must we treat them as the "enemy"?

It seems to me that by refusing to speak to them when we have prison ministries and other outreaches of that type, we send a very clear signal that they are not wanted by the church. It is because they perceive themselves as despised outcasts that they turn to organizations like Kinship or join other churches where they can find the unconditional love they so desperately need. We must learn to meet them where they are and love them into the church.

I also want to say that the cover moved me deeply. I had to tell you that because I'm sure you will get plenty of criticism for it!—Kate McLaughlin.

- I just want you to know how great (and needed!) the whole November issue was. The article on praying for gays was especially poignant. It's too easy to talk about gays or to preach to gays; it's a lot harder to look at myself and say, "Am I treating people the way Jesus would?"—Carol Axelson, via E-mail.

- I am regularly receiving *Ministry* and I profit from it. However, some of the

articles that appear in it are very disturbing. Homosexuality may be a staggering problem in the U.S.A. However, because *Ministry* is an international journal, it should address only issues that are international in nature. To us in India, talking about homosexuality itself is a shameful act. Even ordained ministers speaking openly about [a] homosexual life does not speak well of our church.

We have no such problem either in the Christendom or the outside world. I do not say that it is absent, but it is not a necessity for pastors to be exposed to this issue.

I am happy to see the articles that are found in the December issue. We like to read more articles on eschatological issues than on the mechanics of Christian life.—S. Paulraj, Director, Stewardship Ministries, Karnataka section, South India Union Section, Bangalore, India.

- The November articles on homosexuality offered a beautiful balance between the twin necessities of loving the sinner and hating the sin. The Kinship philosophy as well as the civil intolerance of the Religious Right were equally opposed.

I am fascinated, however, by the local impact of this discussion on the long-debated issues of sin and salvation within the church. The following statement by John Cress was typical: "Only in the arena of moral choices and behavioral responses to one's inclination is sin or the resistance of it possible by God's grace. Inclination alone does not constitute sin" (p. 8).

Perhaps the long-term benefit of these articles is that more than one taboo subject will be open for frank discussion in our midst.—Kevin D. Paulson, Redlands, California.

- Thank you for the November issue. I especially appreciated the splendid, edifying, informative article "Compassion—An Alternative Lifestyle."—Elof H. Anderson, pastor, Village church, South Holland, Illinois.

A partnership in ministry

Before Rex Edwards composes another article dealing with partnership in ministry (March 1997), it is vigorously suggested that he peruse the Vatican II Decree on the Apostolate Of The Laity if he plans to draw any conclusions about the Roman Catholic approach to the subject. The reference he makes to St. Pius X, as well as to Yves Congar, O.P., requires recognition of context. The retort of a certain monsignor to Cardinal Manning in 1857 hardly qualifies as a theological criteria.—Robert Buholzer, pastor, St. Mary's Parish, Palmyra, Wisconsin.

Feed my different sheep

I'm always wary of personality groupings but was a little stunned when I got to the Phlegmatics—largely me to a 'T' (January 1997). I nearly looked at the author's name again to see if he knew me! The article left me thinking. And I'm sorry not to have promptly congratulated you on the music articles last year. The finest set I've read.—John, a layperson from the United Kingdom.

Empty churches or ministering centers?

Just a note of appreciation to *Ministry* for the inclusion of Will McCall's article, "Empty Churches or Ministering Centers?" (January 1997). Our church could be cited as Case Study No. X among those the author included. After 30 years of smallness, our congregation is facing some very difficult decisions. At times like these it's difficult to separate heart from head, emotional attachment from cold, hard facts. And in times like these, when the former ever-growing tithe base for the conference seems to have dipped and then never fully recovered, money may be the motivator to cause us to do what the auto dealership would have done before ever getting started—to use the author's analogy.—Jim Kaatz, Lakeside, California.

Free Subscription

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



This issue of *Ministry* confirms the conviction, foundational to Seventh-day Adventist faith and identity, that God is calling His creation to

“worship Him who made the heaven and the earth” (Rev. 14:7, NASB). Among other things we seek in this issue to validate the connection between God’s original creative act and the seventh-day Sabbath. We affirm that, consistent with the explicit wording of the moral law, the seventh day of the weekly cycle is inescapably interwoven with God’s original creative work (Ex. 20:11). For this reason the Sabbath is designated by God to be the specific weekly point in time in which human beings come to worship Him. Thus again we confirm that if the Sabbath is these things, it is not something solely for Jewish people, but was “made” by God for “humankind” (Mark 2:27, NRSV) in the beginning before the existence of Abraham, Moses, or the Hebrew nation.

This issue of *Ministry* definitely assumes these more law-oriented and conventional Adventist views of Sabbath, but its central purpose is to probe deeper into the heart of what the Sabbath is all about. We try to do this by concentrating more on the magnificent Scriptural connection between the Sabbath and the redemptive or gospel themes of the Bible. In doing so we want to contribute not only to an expanded understanding of Sabbath, but to an enhanced experiencing of it.

With this in mind, here are some introductory reflections on the Sabbath.

What happened to the Sabbath when Jesus came?

More to the underlying point is the question What happened to *law* when Jesus came? Written with passion, Paul’s discussion of this in Galatians is the most concise. The core of Paul’s thinking comes in chapter three, especially verses 19-25 where significantly Paul presents more of

a law-Christ continuum than the law-grace tension that we most often seem to see in it.

At the center of our struggle to understand this passage is the concise, seminal statement “The law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ” (Gal. 3:24). Again, we must notice that the “tension” in this statement is between law and Christ rather than between law and grace. Adventists, of course, have quite a history with this passage. Part of that history definitely includes the following thoughtful interpretation: “I am asked concerning the law in Galatians. What law is the schoolmaster to bring us to Christ? I

Law, Sabbath, Gospel, and Jesus

W I L L E V A

answer: Both the ceremonial and the moral code of ten commandments”¹ and, “‘The law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith’ (Gal. 3:24). In this scripture, the Holy Spirit through the apostle is speaking especially of the moral law.”² This interpretation has critical implications that reach in significant directions, including a direction that throws light on the question of the present role of the law and the seventh-day Sabbath.

So what *is* Paul saying in this and similar passages (such as Romans 7)? How does he believe Christ’s (or faith’s) arrival impacted “the law” and thus the Sabbath?

At the heart of what Paul is saying is this: Though Christ did not come to remove law He did come to fulfill it (Matt. 5:17). What does this mean? Even though the law is holy, just, good, (Rom. 7:7, 12,

13, 14, 16, 22), authoritative, and eternal, it still is in itself an incomplete or imperfect expression of the will of God and of all that God is (moral law included). Law, including the moral law, foreshadowed something or Someone more perfect or complete yet to come, namely the Author of that law, Jesus Christ Himself. Jesus is the ultimate expression of all that God wills and all that God is, including what was communicated through Moses (see John 1:14-18 and Heb. 1:1-3).

Thus Jesus said such things as “You have heard that it was said, ‘Do not commit adultery [moral law]. But I tell you anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery’ (Matt. 5:27, 28, NIV). And in the same context He said similar things, mixing in elements of the ceremonial law. Here Jesus is clearly showing that He Himself and His teaching is the ultimate expression of a revelation that could never be announced simply on tables of stone at Sinai, or in a written code of any kind, even when presented by someone as illustrious as Moses (see Heb. 3:3). Jesus is the complete articulation of all divine truth. He is truth (John 14:5-11).

Jesus, the ultimate expression of law and Sabbath

Jesus is the living embodiment of “law.” He is the personification of all Scripture and of all God ever meant to say to human beings. He is the word who became flesh and lived among us so that we could see the glory of God. He is also, therefore, the perfect expression of what Sabbath is. He is literally the picture worth a thousand words. He is our Sabbath, and He thus confirms and fully expresses whatever the weekly Sabbath was ever meant to portray. The Sabbath stands as a perpetual memorial etched in time, a sacrament which makes the great divine centrality of Christ and His gospel a reality to us humans.

Thus when one comes to the question of the seventh-day Sabbath, one sees that Jesus was not attempting to remove the Sabbath.

Continued on page 29

HOW SHALL WE KEEP THE SABBATH?

For where shall the likeness of God be found? There is no quality that space has in common with the essence of God. There is not enough freedom on the top of the mountain; there is not enough glory in the silence of the sea. Yet the likeness of God can be found in time, which is eternity in disguise.



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“The art of keeping the seventh day is the art of painting on the canvas of time the mysterious grandeur of the climax of creation: as He sanctified the seventh day, so shall we.”¹

With these magnificent words the late Jewish philosopher Abraham Joshua Heschel describes the beauty of holy time, time sanctified by God and celebrated with Him.

Most of the Christian world today has lost all sense of holy time. The whole idea of keeping a period of time for special relationship with God apart from the usual activities of the week has all but disappeared. This was hardly true in an earlier day. In the United States many Christian churches observed Sunday with strict rules. Most Christians today, however, would look at Puritan rules as hopelessly obsolete, if not simply humorous.

Even in Sabbatarian Christian communities, such as the Seventh-day Adventist Church, there is a developing pluralism with regard to how the Sabbath is kept. When I was a child in the 1940s, rules for Sabbath-keeping were clear. Running and playing

were all right, but no balls of any kind were to be used in our play, and all playground equipment was out. Hikes were all right, but swimming was wrong, although wading up to the knees was generally acceptable. It was amazing how common these rules were, even though they were never written down.

Today, however, there is much less agreement on a generally accepted body of rules. Even in Sabbatarian Christian communities, the idea of sacred time may be having a hard time. Pluralism and diversity in keeping the Sabbath warn of the danger of losing the sanctity of Sabbath, unique time spent with God all together.

If Heschel is right and God did sanctify time as a memorial of Creation, what are we to do? How do we preserve the sanctity of Sabbath in a secular world?

Rules are not enough

It would be tempting to argue for a new emphasis on rules for governing Sabbath observance. As tempting as it might be, however, our argument here is that we cannot accomplish the task of preserving the sanctity of Sabbath by simply getting out the old

rulebook and reestablishing these rules. Before we see why this is not the answer, however, let's admit that it would be a tempting option, for there are advantages to rules. First, rules provide security. In a complex world, it is often confusing to know how best to keep the Sabbath. Rules give us a benchmark to let us know how we're doing. They ease the confusion and make us more comfortable.

Second, rules help us preserve institutions and activities such as Sabbath. There can be no sense of holy time if there is no difference between Sabbath and the other days of the week. Rules help define that difference so that we can take care to preserve the Sabbath's unique character.

Finally, rules help keep us together in unity. When there are no rules and everyone simply does what is right in their own eyes, it is difficult for a community to keep Sabbath together. And yet at the heart of the Sabbath is the idea of community, people of God joining together in worship and fellowship. Can two walk together if they don't agree? How can you have community observance of Sabbath unless there are generally accepted rules to preserve the community?

With all of these advantages, the old rulebook looks pretty good. But there is one reason we must reject this approach as our basic methodology for preserving the sanctity of Sabbath in a secular world. That one reason is Jesus. You see, when Jesus was on earth, He took on the way of rules with regard to the Sabbath. Let's look at what He did.

Jesus' encounter with Pharisees

Notice, first, Jesus' encounter with the Pharisees, a party of Jewish leaders, concerning His disciples' activity on Sabbath.

"One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields, and as his disciples walked along, they began to pick some heads of grain. The Pharisees said to him, 'Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?' He answered, 'Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need? In the days of Abiathar the high priest, he entered the house of God and ate the consecrated bread, which is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions.' Then

he said to them, 'The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath'" (Mark 2:23-28, NIV).

The story is a marvel in its simplicity. First, there is the plain statement of Jesus and the disciples' activity. As they walked through the grainfields, the disciples plucked heads of grain and presumably ate. But the Pharisees objected: "Why are the disciples doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?" Notice that the basic issue about Sabbath here involves the rules. Jesus responds with a story from their own tradition. Hadn't they heard that when David was hungry he and those with him ate the

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shewbread from the sanctuary, food that was lawful only for priests? Then Jesus concludes with a saying about the Sabbath: "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."

Gospel scholars call this kind of story that ends with a saying of Jesus a pronouncement story. The main feature of such stories is a saying of Jesus that serves as a punch line at the end of a controversy. In a sense, the whole story leads up to the punch line.

It is generally believed that the church was interested in pronouncement stories and preserved them during the time Jesus' sayings and stories about Him were passed on orally because these pronouncements were especially helpful for the church in its conflicts. These sayings of Jesus helped the church resolve difficult problems and gave

it ammunition as it sought to defend its actions against its accusers.

There can be little doubt that this story fits this general situation. Undoubtedly the church saw itself in the situation of the disciples, accused by opponents and vindicated by what Jesus said. The church, in essence, became the disciples who were with Jesus.

Understood this way, we find nothing in the story that would hint at either a change in the day for keeping Sabbath or an end to Sabbathkeeping in the early church. The dispute between the disciples and the Pharisees had to do with how the Sabbath was to be kept. The issue was not which day to keep or whether Sabbath should be kept; rather, it was a question of Sabbath observance. The very fact that it was Jesus' disciples who were accused probably made this story especially useful for the church. History repeated itself. The disciples, those who followed Him, were again being accused of improper Sabbath observance and found their vindication in this story.

Mishnah and Sabbath observance

Jesus' saying seems to reject a whole way of approaching Sabbath observance, the way of rulemaking. It is impossible for us to know exactly what the Pharisees taught about the Sabbath, since the oral traditions that they passed along were not written down until about the year A.D. 200, in a work called the Mishnah. There is no doubt that the Mishnah records oral traditions that date back much further. We know that the first-century Pharisaic rabbis accepted a whole body of oral traditions that built a fence around the law by making additional rules to avoid even coming close to breaking the law. But we can never be sure which of the specific rules recorded in the Mishnah actually dated from the first century. We can, however, get a general idea of the shape of the oral tradition that they would have held, and that Jesus seems to reject.

For the Pharisees, proper Sabbath observance was spelled out via a system of detailed prohibitions. This does not mean that there was any lack of sincere appreciation for the Sabbath. The prohibitions were to preserve its sanctity. The Mishnah, for instance, classifies 39 classes of unlawful work on Sabbath.² In our incident Jesus would have broken at least two of these by thresh-

ing and winnowing. The degree to which rules were created for almost every conceivable situation can be seen when the Mishnah spells out rules for how to observe Sabbath, even in the specific situation in which one's home is burning down.³ Such a case presented at least a couple problems for those who adopted the rabbinic rules. Putting out a fire was illegal on Sabbath, as was carrying things from one's home. However, certain exceptions were made if one's house was burning down. One could carry food out of the house, but only enough to get each member of the family through the rest of the Sabbath. One could not carry clothes out of the house, but one could wear as many clothes as one could get on. The rabbis differed as to whether or not one could go back into the burning building and put on a second array of clothes. Putting the fire out was not allowed, but if a Gentile volunteered, a good Jew could allow the Gentile to put it out. One could not, however, ask a Gentile for such a favor.

All this may sound humorous, but we must understand the positive appreciation of the Sabbath that motivated these rules. By observing the rules, the pious follower of God would be sure that he or she did not even come close to breaking the Sabbath.

The problem in rulemaking

It would be a mistake to think that the rabbis were unreasonable with their rules. They frequently put human need above the letter of the law. Healing, for instance, was permitted on Sabbath if life was actually in danger. If this approach to rules was motivated by a positive regard for the Sabbath and its sanctity and made reasonable exceptions, what was so wrong with it?

One problem was the continual need for increasing rules. Every rule has an exception, and if you really want to spell things out, then you need to have rules to cover the exceptions, and rules to cover the exceptions to the exceptions, and finally, the exceptions to the exceptions. This methodology leads to a continually increasing need for more and more rules.

Second, this method led to an inevitable spirit of criticism. Once the rules are established, it is very difficult not to be judgmental toward those who break them. Here in our story, it seems that the religious leaders

of the day were actually watching to see if Jesus and His disciples would break the rules.

Although this incident would be sufficient to see that Jesus rejected the whole system of rulemaking, the next incident, which follows in the first part of Mark 3, makes this even more clear. "Another time he went into the synagogue, and a man with a shriveled hand was there. Some of them were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal him on the Sabbath. Jesus said to the man with the shriveled hand, 'Stand up in front of everyone.' Then Jesus asked them, 'Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to

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do evil, to save life or to kill?' But they remained silent. He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, said to the man, 'Stretch out your hand.' He stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored. Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus" (Mark 3:1-6, NIV).

The Jesus alternative

Notice that Jesus takes the initiative to heal this man. He does it in a very open way. He brings him to the center of the synagogue. Nothing secret here. And yet Jesus picks a case that is as far from the rules for Sabbath healing as possible. The rules permitted healing if life was in danger, but this man's life was hardly in danger from his withered hand. His hand had probably been withered for years. In this healing story, as well as the incident in the grainfield, Jesus seems purposefully to take on the rules and offer an alternative. What, then, is the alternative that Jesus offers?

Jesus takes rules away from the center of the Sabbath, and instead places Himself and human beings in that center. Jesus' way gives priority to the value of people. Human needs take priority over literalistic observance of rules. According to Jesus' way, the whole purpose of the law is to meet human needs and to enhance human life. For Him the whole law exists for human beings, and this is seen particularly in the Sabbath. The Sabbath is made for humans, not humans for the Sabbath.

This is related to Jesus' lordship of the Sabbath. For many years scholars have debated whether the last part of Jesus' saying "The Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath" means that Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath, or should be taken in a more general sense. In Aramaic "son of man" simply means human being. Is Jesus saying that humans are Lord of the Sabbath? This would seem to fit with the first part of the saying recorded in Mark, and yet it seems clear from the Gospel that "Son of Man" carries more weight than that. It is Jesus who is Lord of the Sabbath, but it is also clear that as Lord of the Sabbath, Jesus offers the Sabbath to humans for their benefit, and offers them freedom in Sabbath observance. At the heart of the Sabbath is Jesus in relationship with human beings. What does this mean for our Sabbath observance? Three clear implications come to mind.

1. *There must be commitment to Jesus.* Sabbathkeeping cannot merely be a matter of rules, because such an approach would detract from the real center of the Sabbath, Jesus Christ. How we observe the Sabbath must flow from our relationship with Jesus. Sabbath is an invitation to spend special time with Him and receive the healing that He took the initiative to offer on Sabbath. In this sense it is like a special occasion, those special occasions we celebrate in life such as birthdays and wedding anniversaries. When a husband and wife want to be together on their wedding anniversary, it is because there is a unique relationship they share. The day of their marriage has meaning because of that relationship. We would wonder about a husband who had a list of rules in hand, saying, "Next week is my anniversary, and I've got to keep all these rules. I've got to buy my wife a card, I've got to buy my wife flowers, I've got to make reser-

vations at a restaurant, I've got to take her out to eat." On the other hand, these kinds of activities are what make anniversaries special. They come, however, not from a rulebook, but from the heart. They grow out of a relationship. Sabbathkeeping, too, grows out of a relationship with God, who sanctified the Sabbath.

2. *Proper Sabbath observance involves the mind.* We must use our reason and think. God has not provided us with a detailed list of rules. The Sabbath commandment, in Exodus 20:8-11, does provide some basic guidelines, such as not working on Sabbath, for example. But God calls on us to reflect on our relationship with Him and think about what Sabbath means. This is part of what it means to love God with our whole heart and soul and mind. Although it is easier to follow rules than to have to reason on the basis of a relationship, God knew that the latter would lead to spiritual growth.

3. *Jesus' way means freedom.* If we must reason from our relationship with God, we will not all come to the same conclusions. There must be a tolerance for diversity in

Sabbath observance. This hardly means that anything goes. A community must have certain boundaries. But these boundaries should be based on the explicit statements of the commandment. Within that general guideline there is room for a good bit of diversity. Living with diversity will help us grow in grace and learn to love each other.

All of this does point out a certain irony. On the one hand, we are always tempted to think that without rules we will forget the Sabbath, but on the other hand, the Sabbath itself reminds us that the way of rules will not do, for Jesus uses the Sabbath to attack the whole system of rules that existed in His day.

This does not mean that laxity and a lack of concern for Sabbath observance should prevail. It does mean that the community that follows Jesus' way will be a definite kind of community. It will be a community that thinks about the meaning of the Sabbath. It will be a community that reflects together on how the Sabbath can best be kept in a way that both contributes to its meaning and benefits the people to whom God has

given it as a gift. Thus, people in the community will plan together to find positive ways of actualizing the meaning of Sabbath in their lives. It is this thinking, reflection, and planning on the part of the members of the community, always with a focus on the scriptural materials on the Sabbath, that will keep the community serious about the sanctity of the Sabbath. And if we truly keep Jesus at the center, this will do more to preserve the true sanctity of the Sabbath than any number of rules ever could. ■

Portions of this article are adapted from John Brunt's "Jesus' Way With the Sabbath," in Festival of the Sabbath, edited by Roy Branson, copyright 1985, Takoma Park, Maryland, Association of Adventist Forums.

¹Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Earth Is the Lord's* and *The Sabbath* (New York: Harper and Row, 1951), p. 16.

²Sabbath 7:2, in Herbert Danby, trans., *The Mishnah* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933), p. 106.

³Sabbath 16:1-6, in Danby, p. 114.

SPECIAL REPORT

REAL LIFE SEMINAR HOSTED BY MINISTRY

Ministry magazine and the General Conference Ministerial Association launched last month a new and vibrant ministry for pastors on an interdenominational basis.



The Real Life seminar dealt with some of the real life challenges of pastors. In addition, attendees were able to earn one continuing education credit.

Under the leadership of Jim Cress, the GC ministerial association secretary, and Will Eva, editor of *Ministry*, the three-day seminar drew participants from a number of denominations. Resource personnel included successful pastors and writers such as Morris Venden of

Loma Linda; Ken Swetland of Gordon Conwell Seminary; William Self, a Baptist pastor from Atlanta; Fredrick Russell, an inner city pastor from Baltimore; Brennon Manning, who wrote the bestseller, *The Signature of Jesus*; and Bob Bretsch, a Portland pastor.

The seminar, conducted in the Beltsville, Maryland, Seventh-day Adventist Church, offered perspectives on "The Hidden World of the Pastor," "Integrity in Ministry," "Confronting Power, Politics, and Personality," and "Finding Hope When Faith Is Shattered." The courses were practical, touching both the profession and the inner struggle that every minister goes through. "I was moved by the baring of the soul," said one pastor, commenting on the way the presenters shared their struggles and encouraged the attendees

not to give up. "Come apart and rest for a while" seemed to be the central thrust of the seminar.

Real life ministry. Real life issues. Real life solutions. From real life pastors. That was what this seminar was about.

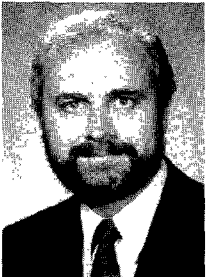
Those who want tapes of the presentations, or conference or district leaders who want to host a future



seminar, may write to General Conference Ministerial Association Resource Center, 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904. Tapes are ^{US}\$4.50 each, or ^{US}\$32 for all eight tapes. Prices include shipping and handling.

LASHED TO THE MAST

The first ministers' meeting I attended after seminary left me wondering if I had made a terrible career mistake. Instead of being a time of spiritual enrichment, characterized by fellowship, worship, and prayer, the meeting was more like a sales convention.



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I learned that my supervisors were far more interested in my being a reliable manager of the local franchise of the corporate church than an effective shepherd to my two congregations. My job was to do what I was told, be "successful," and return a healthy profit in baptisms and tithe gains. I returned home feeling confused and discouraged.

I was ready to quit

My first few months in my district were not much more encouraging. I discovered that not all saints were eager to tell the world about a soon-coming Saviour. Some seemed intent on devouring one another, critiquing the pastor, and whining about their own needs and wants. Like discontented adolescents, they believed the mission of the church was to make them happy, not necessarily to glorify God and extend His kingdom.

I seemed to be just another hired hand to the conference. My congregations saw me as an on-call domestic servant. One woman asked me to do a household task

for her, explaining that all the other men she knew *worked*. Even my loving and supportive wife couldn't understand why I should not be interrupted in my study to open a jar for her. And, of course, society viewed clergy in general as leeches and buffoons.

In those early days I thought seriously and often about getting out of pastoring. Maybe I could go into counseling or hospital chaplaincy. I completed applications for medical school, which sat on my desk waiting until I could honestly say that the Lord had released me from my call to pastoral ministry.

I was not alone in my distress. Few of my seminary classmates continue today in pastoral ministry. Several gave up on God, church, and ministry altogether. For many more the pastorate was just a waystation on the path to another career.

Why pastors quit

As a rule, pastors are no longer highly respected by their communities. Pastoral ministry is not viewed as important or

seen as making a difference. One member told me that when he was in college, the best and brightest went into medicine, the next tier went into education, and the losers went into ministry. The view of the world has become the view of the church all too often.

When I am tired and stressed, when my family rightly requests more of my time, when the bills multiply and the car breaks down, when I have absorbed the grief, anger, and pain of people in crisis and feel overextended, underappreciated, and underpaid, I am still tempted by the thought that there have got to be better things to do than this!

Internal factors

Some of the causes for pastoral dropout are internal. Pastors frequently neglect the care of the inner person. It is easy for us to be so busy "doing God's work" that we don't take time to be *with* God. We often don't take care of our bodies or our souls. We don't eat right or exercise enough, and time alone with God gets pushed to the bottom of the list.

Pastors commonly pay too much attention to what can be seen, and not enough to unseen essentials for personal well-being. We tend to be people-pleasers, and if people don't act pleased by what we do, we lose confidence in ourselves and cast about for something that will earn plaudits.

External rewards

Some of the causes of pastoral disenchantment are external. The work is never "done" in the pastorate, and all of it seems urgent. When we take a day off, it is easy to feel guilty.

The reward structure does not favor pastors in my denomination. Theoretically every church worker is paid the same salary so the "rewards" for competent pastoring tend to be bigger churches and more responsibilities within the denomination. Often the steps "up" are actually steps "out" of the pastorate altogether—a call to departmental work or denominational administration or teaching at a church-related college or university.

Most pastors' spouses in my denomi-

nation find that they must work outside the home. This imposes greater stress on the family. Pastors have less time and energy to give, and their ministry suffers.

Needed: a clear pastoral theology

With all of the inducements to burnout (and we have listed just a few), survival depends on a strong sense of security in Christ and a keen sense of personal mission. It is imperative for pastors to know who they are, where they are going, and what they are commissioned to do.¹ Only a commitment that is hammered out daily in the quiet place alone with God will survive the internal and external pressures to abandon the pastorate.

Pastors need to keep their perspective while tumbling about in a confusing and broken world. That perspective can be God's perspective, if we define our mission by biblical parameters. "Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold," Paul cautions (Rom. 12:2; Phillips). We will have to form our individual pastoral theology. Pastoral theology is God's tune for pastors. It enables them to march to the tune of God's drummer, not the tune beaten out by the world, or by the latest ministry fad, or by the newest program dreamed up by some denominational guru. The great need is not for pastors who listen to the church or the culture and shape a ministry accordingly, but for pastors who listen to God and shape a ministry accordingly.

Pastoring takes time

Ministers with a clear and strong pastoral theology have staying power. The church needs pastors who believe that pastoring is the most important ministry in the church, and who have listened to God to find out how that needs to be done. They need longer-term pastorates than they generally receive. Paul says, "We are not trying to please men but God. . . . We were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children. . . . you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children" (1 Thess. 2:4-11, NIV). Paul did what he did in ministry not out of

some desire to please men or women, but to please God. Paul had a pastoral identity!²

Further, churches and pastors ought to be joined together in long-term covenant relationships. I believe that God intended for pastors to baptize youth, officiate at their weddings, dedicate their children, and eventually baptize and marry their offspring. There is no substitute for this kind of long-term involvement in people's lives.

Most often it is the existence of some problem in the congregation or in the pastor that is the inducement to make a move. But people and congregations grow to maturity through challenge. Problems are an occasion for growth, not avoidance. Often the congregation simplistically assumes that the problem is the pastor and demands a change. There are churches that have gone through pastor after pastor while the real problems are never addressed.

The fifth year of a pastoral term is often a plateau. The honeymoon is over, all the easy problems have been solved, and what remains are the hard problems with roots entwined around the congregation's core identity. Now what the pastor is made of will become apparent. To stay or not to stay, that is the question. Calls to go elsewhere come in. New and more alluring positions beckon. Most pastors succumb and abandon their posts. If they stayed, they would break through the plateau into the most fruitful years of ministry: the years after the seventh year. Sadly, most pastors never see these years.

Pastors as coaches

We need a pastoral theology that focuses on growing people, not churches. The pastor needs to see him or herself as called to be a soul-grower, not a CEO or a chaplain. There are many important and worthwhile professions, but only pastors (and some counselors) are in the soul-growing business. If they abandon this work, who will do it?

The biblical model talks about equipping the saints for the work of ministry.³ Maybe we need to give up our outmoded language by replacing the term *pastor*

(another word for shepherd—a rural-agrarian role with which most of us are unfamiliar) with the more contemporary term *coach*. A pastor is an equipping coach.

"A coach," Tom Landry once said, "is somebody who makes you do what you don't want to do so you can be what you want to be." A coach is one who helps another be more effective. A pastor-coach helps parishioners be salt and light. He or she equips Christians to live the life and to do the work of ministry for which Jesus has called them. It takes time. In fact, growing people is a lifelong process.

I was intrigued by the coaches I saw on television during the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta. Most of them never made a name for themselves as athletes, but they had what it took to coach. They knew how to help another person become what he or she wanted to be. They could see what needed to be done differently, what was holding an athlete back from running faster, jumping farther, and doing better. They encouraged, cajoled, taped ankles, dried tears. Perhaps pastors can best understand their role as coaching Christians to become the best they can be at running the Christian race.

The work of a lifetime

There's no place in this philosophy of ministry for a pastor to enter a church, simply run the course of his or her program, and then move on. "Build people, not churches." "Grow people, not churches." If I understand my task as coming into a congregation to grow each and every person to spiritual maturity in Christ, I will have a job for life there.

Pastoring is gardening: a long-term soil-improvement process.⁴ One can't make good soil in a few months. It takes years. It's a matter of coming into a church, exploring the variety of soils and cultivating each one, planting something and watching it grow. Pastors who have no patience with soil improvement won't make successful gardeners.

Success is . . .

The church is people, not denominations or organizations or buildings or

creedal statements. Ministry is about growing people, not sitting on boards or committees or making policy or decisions. Jesus never said, "Go and make decisions." He said, "Go and make disciples." He never told us to build a church building or to write a working policy, or even to organize a church. He told us to make disciples, to baptize them, and then to teach them all the things He taught (notice the order!).

The world tells us that being president of a denominational entity, jetting to meetings all over the world, and being responsible for large numbers of people and/or dollars make a person more important than the person who quietly tends a congregation, but it isn't so. The hands-on work of building Christ into people's lives is the most important work any human being can do. At best, the other must simply be part of the support system for pastors and churches. Every step one is removed from pastoral ministry is one step further away from what really matters.

Lashed to the mast

And what about the pastor who leaves the pastoral ministry altogether? What can we say to him or her? Did God call you, or didn't He? Having put your hand to the plow, can you now look back? Were you obeying God when you went into pastoral ministry? Do you have as clear a call out of the pastorate as you had into it? What about your ordination vows? Didn't you take a vow to prayer and the ministry of the Word? Would you leave it to wait on tables?

Peterson, in *Working the Angles*, has a wonderful metaphor for ordination. He has the church saying to its pastors: "We are going to ordain you to this ministry and we want your vow that you will stick to it. This is not a temporary job assignment but a way of life that we need lived out in our community. We know that you are launched on the same difficult belief venture in the same dangerous world as we are. We know that your emotions are as fickle as ours, and that your mind can play the same tricks on you as ours. That

is why we are going to *ordain* you and why we are going to exact a *vow* from you. We know that there are going to be days and months, and maybe even years, when we won't feel like we are believing anything and won't want to hear it from you. And we know that there will be days and weeks and maybe even years when you won't feel like saying it. It doesn't matter. Do it. You are ordained to this ministry, vowed to it. There may be times when we come to you as a committee or delegation and demand that you tell us something else than what we are telling you now. Promise right now that you won't give in to what we demand of you. You are not the minister of our changing desires, or our time-onditioned understanding of our needs, or our secularized hopes for something better. With these vows of ordination we are lashing you fast to the mast of word and sacrament so that you will be unable to respond to the siren voices."⁵

Lashed to the mast by our vows of ordination. Lashed to the mast, like Odysseus, to resist the song of the sirens that lures sailors to their doom. Lashed to the mast of word and sacrament, that we might not succumb to the temptation to "make a difference" or to say what people want to hear or to become successful shopkeepers and lure more customers than the pastor down the road—this is why we were ordained.

There are many inducements to leave pastoral ministry. To do the job properly, there must be a long-term commitment. Pastors must somehow communicate to congregations, "I am committed to you and to your children. My greatest desire is for your spiritual growth. I believe in what God can do in your lives and I want to be a part of that. I will stand by your side through thick and thin. I have no desire to go anywhere else or to serve anyone else. I am not a part of your lives until something else comes along that I like better, or that moves me up the organizational ladder. I am a part of your lives because I believe that being a part of what God is doing in your lives is the most exciting and rewarding work in the world."

Finding meaning in pastoral ministry

We all long for significance. Most of us seek meaning by adapting to our culture and our subculture (in this case, our church). Our culture gives little notice to pastoral work. Churches often affirm pastoral work they like and value, but not necessarily the pastoral work they need. Pastors must lead their churches in ways they don't always like, but need to go. At such times, David Fisher says, "we must learn to live under God's smile, knowing that human smiles are mere frosting on that divine cake. Our sense of purpose and success must come from our identity as Christ's servants."⁶ Jesus will tolerate no rivals for our affection, service, and loyalty—not even our churches. He is against all "isms." He doesn't call us to build up or serve any church or denomination, but only to serve Him by building up, one by one, the people who make up His body. ■

¹Another name for this "sense of mission" is "pastoral theology": that branch of theology that deals specifically with what pastors are called to do and why. Most pastors have no pastoral theology, or rather, they have no explicit pastoral theology worked out from Scripture. They have de facto pastoral theologies, created ad hoc from bumping up against the expectations of denominational officials, parishioners, the culture, and their own ambitions and self-expectations. (This is really a part of a larger problem, which is that, by and large, we have no ecclesiology, but that's a subject for another article.)

²Curiously enough, in the Adventist Church, at least, it is the conviction that Paul's itinerant apostolic ministry should be normative for pastors today that undergirds the short-stay pastoral model. In the latter 1800s there was strong resistance to the idea of "settled pastors," claiming that Paul's example should be followed and Adventist clergy should all be itinerant evangelists. This view has been revived in recent years as the explanation for a stalled North American denomination.

³Eph. 4:12.

⁴Eugene Peterson, *Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1987), p. 57.

⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 24, 25.

⁶David Fisher, *The 21st Century Pastor*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub. House, 1996), p. 28.

SUGGESTED READING

Fisher, David. *The 21st Century Pastor*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub.

House, 1996, 248 pages. Fisher explores Paul's concept of ministry and applies it to pastoring the present and future church. Part 1 of the book is really a pastoral theology, and Part 2 applies this theology to creating a practical framework for ministry.

Hybels, Bill. *Too Busy Not to Pray*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1988, 151 pages. On the assumption that pastors who don't take time to slow down and be with God will not survive in the ministry, I include this basic but powerful book on how to do just that. Hybels knows the stresses of ministry, and his personal advice on how to find space for God is useful, practical, workable—and vital.

Peterson, Eugene. *The Contemplative Pastor: Returning to the Art of Spiritual Direction*. Carol Stream, Ill.: Christianity Today, Inc., and Word, Inc., 1989, 176 pages. Chapter 3, "The Subversive Pastor," is must reading! When tempted to assert our importance, we must remember that our effectiveness is in our subversiveness. Check it out. Volume 17 in *The Leadership Library*, published by *Leadership* journal from Christianity Today, Inc.

———. *Under the Unpredictable Plant: An Exploration in Vocational Holiness*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1992, 197 pages. A look at the pastoral vocation through the biblical book of Jonah. Devotional, useful, challenging—and preachable. If you've ever been tempted to flee to Tarshish or to complain about God

and how He treats you, you will find this book helpful.

———. *Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1987, 192 pages. A must read for every pastor! A challenging call to return to the basics of pastoral ministry, which Peterson understands as prayer, scripture, and spiritual direction.

Tidball, Derek. *Skillful Shepherds: An Introduction to Pastoral Theology*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub. House (Ministry Resources Library), 1986, 338 pages plus an extensive bibliography. A serious, biblical, successful effort to write a pastoral theology for the present generation that answers the questions "What exactly is pastoral theology?" and "What are the proper tasks and essential functions of those who are called to be pastors?" Provides a much-needed theological basis for pastoral ministry.

Warren, Rick. *The Purpose-Driven Church*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub. House, 1995, 398 pages. From his experience as pastor of the dynamic Saddleback Valley Community Church, Warren shares his convictions and methods for organizing the church around purpose rather than around tradition, finances, programs, personalities, events, seekers, or buildings—and explains why he believes the purposes he has chosen are biblical. His focus is on people-building through a deliberate process that is portable from church to church—a focus and process that has resulted in tremendous numerical growth in his church.

SABBATH: NAILED TO THE CROSS?

Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; and having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it.



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Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of any holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ" (Col. 2:14-17).

In this day of the "sound-bite," we biblical expositors have our work cut out for us. When the passage is tough, requiring serious thought and expression, the attention of our listeners wanders, eyes glaze, and we quickly reach for an easier explanation. I believe that desire for the "easier explanation" is part of the reason Colossians 2:14-17 still suffers occasional exegetical abuse. Understandably, we who hold both the law and the Sabbath in considerable esteem approach the passage with some uneasiness, since Paul's figure of nailing something to the cross (verse 14) is in close proximity to a Sabbath (verse 16) and some sort of law (verse 14). So, to protect two of our most revered pillars, we tend to interpret this passage with certain presuppositions firmly in place. However, in this exposition we will focus sharply on the Colossian context before making contemporary applications.

Colossians 2:14-17 is not a passage with a transparent meaning. Even a good English translation is not enough to resolve all the doctrinal and theological difficulties. In fact, this is one of those passages in which a few of the finer points of the original language gives us a real boost to our interpretive task.

The context

The first phrase that gives rise to some contention is *cheirographon tois dogmasin*, translated in the KJV as "handwriting of ordinances." Other translations include "certificate of debt" (NASB), or "bond written in ordinances" (RV), or "the bond which stood against us with its legal demands" (RSV). Since the words occur nowhere else in Scripture, lexical definitions must be carefully guided by the immediate context.

The context begins with 2:12, where Paul speaks of being "buried with Him in baptism." The result of that "burial baptism" is resurrection to a new life and cleansing from sin. Paul refers to that cleansing with two participle phrases that are parallel, the second repeating the thought of the first. The

first of those two phrases is “having forgiven us all our trespasses” (verse 13, RSV). The parallel and repetitive phrase is “having canceled the bond [*cheirotaphon tois dogmasin*] which stood against us” (verse 14, RSV). Both phrases mean essentially the same thing, the second simply repeating in different terms what it meant for him to forgive our sins. Thus forgiveness of our sins has resulted in the canceling of the bond that was against us.

It is primarily the KJV translation of verse 14 (“handwriting of ordinances”) that has led some to interpret the phrase as referring to the various Mosaic rituals and ceremonial “ordinances” that largely ceased to have relevance after Christ died on the cross. So if some law was nailed to the cross, it would have to be the ceremonial law, since the moral law was not made “void” by the cross (Rom. 3:31).

However, Paul rarely makes the neat division between the ceremonial law and the moral law that we are often quick to make. In fact, his references to the ceremonial laws are rare. When he does use the word “law” (*nomos*), he most frequently has in mind the moral law in general and often the Decalogue in particular. Of course, in our passage he doesn’t use the word “law” at all, which is why we have to be so careful to reason from the context to understand his meaning.

In a strikingly similar passage in Ephesians 2:14, 15, Paul tells how Christ has brought peace, not just between Jew and Gentile, but between all humans and God, by nullifying the “law of commandments in decrees” (*ton nomon ton entolon en dogmasin*) (see New Jerusalem). Here the word “law” is linked with the word *dogmasin*, the same word translated “ordinances” in Colossians. The context of both Colossians and Ephesians indicates that something more than ceremonies was involved.

One thing is very clear: when Paul elsewhere refers to the impact of the cross for the Christian, he does not limit his reasoning to abolishing the ceremonial law. For Paul the most important thing that ended at the cross was the condemnation brought about by our sin. That condemnation arose out of a broken moral law. As he says in Romans 7:7, “if it had not been for the law, I

should not have known sin” (RSV). In other words, it is the broken law that stands before us and condemns us, which is all the moral law can do for those who have broken it. But as Paul says in Romans 8:1, “there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (RSV). Or, as in verse 3, “God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: sending his own Son . . . condemned sin in the flesh” (RSV). To put it another way, the moral law could point out sin, but could not forgive it. So God had to intervene, or we would stand forever condemned by that law. At that point, the “principalities and powers” that Paul mentions in Colossians 2:15 would triumph over us. But now, as a result of the cross, that picture has changed, and the powers have been defeated. And that happened when the *condemnation* of the moral law was figuratively nailed to the cross. The NRSV smoothly translates it:

P *Paul rarely
makes the neat division
between the ceremonial law
and the moral law that we are
often quick to make.*

“erasing the record that stood against us with its legal demands. He set this aside, nailing it to the cross.” Thus He made “peace by the blood of his cross” (Col. 1:20, RSV).

The moral law after the cross

This interpretation does not mean that the moral law itself did not survive the cross. It is one thing to say that the demands of the law have been met in Christ. It is quite another to say that the law has been abolished in Christ. Or to put it differently, the law serves at least two functions—as an objective description of God’s character and expectations, it stands forever; as an unbending standard that condemns our failure to keep it and thus drives us to Christ, it has a temporary function. It is this last aspect that Paul has in mind when he uses the “nailed to the cross” figure.

But an even more problematic phrase follows in verse 16. The first word, *oun* (“therefore”), is a small but crucial word that closely connects what follows with what has just preceded. So then verse 16 begins with Paul saying, “Consequently, on the basis of what I have just established, don’t let anyone pass judgment on you in the following matters.” In other words, Christ’s death not only did away with our guilty indebtedness to the law, it also took away the basis of criticism from those who would pass judgment on the Colossian Christians. But just what was the nature of this “passing judgment”?

Passing judgment

Some have suggested that Paul’s counsel was not directed against the false teachers, but only against the believers listening to them and acceding to their criticism.¹ Such a view has Paul saying, “Pay no attention to their criticism, since your practices are above reproach.” We Sabbatarians like that suggestion, since it leaves our day of worship firmly in place.

But our peace of mind cannot be bought so easily. In this verse Paul mentions five different details of religious ritual that have been called in question: food and drink and then the three tightly connected “feast days, new moon, Sabbath day.” Are we to believe that Christ’s death simply did away with the basis of criticism so that now we can continue not only all food and drink rituals, but also the rituals of feast days and new moons? If Paul had stopped with the first two words, “food and drink,” that interpretation might fit. But after Paul listed these five things he referred to at least some of them as a “shadow” (*skia*) compared with the “substance” (*soma*), which is Christ. Surely this last phrase emphasizes flawed practices, not just some heretics’ demanding attitudes about perfectly acceptable practices.

Food and drink

But we must look more carefully at Paul’s list of five. First, with reference to “food and drink” (*brosis/posis*). These words have suggested to some that the issues at stake had to do with Mosaic food and drink offerings that were abolished by Christ’s death. But the Greek words *brosis* and *posis* don’t equate easily with anything Mosaic. For example, throughout the Septuagint and the New Tes-

tament *brosis* and *posis* are never used with reference to meal and drink offerings. Furthermore, *thusia* is the technical word for sacrifice or offering, and given Paul's Hebrew background, he must have known the correct word for meal offering. Similarly, *posis* was never used for any kind of drink offering, because *spendo* was the term that meant "to offer a libation or drink offering."² However, even if the verse is speaking of ceremonial offerings, *posis* suggests something incongruous, since the Mosaic law contained no prohibition respecting drinks except in the rare case of a Nazirite vow or the case of drinking from vessels made unclean by the dead body of an animal.³

It should also be noted that these two words have action endings, which means they would normally be translated "eating and drinking" rather than "food and drink." Accordingly, they probably refer not to Mosaic rituals, but to more general ascetic prohibitions being advocated by some Colossian false teachers. Such an interpretation harmonizes well with other references here to strict asceticism that go beyond anything Jewish or Christian. For example, in verses 18, 20, 21, and 23 Paul scorns those who delight in "self-abasement and worship of angels," and decries those who are submitting to stringent negatives, such as "Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch"! Such behavior appears to be devotional, but in fact has no value (verse 23). The point is, whether this "eating and drinking" referred to mistaken asceticism or harmless eating practices, the cross has freed us from the criticism.

The issue of sabbath

In the phrase "festivals, new moons, or sabbaths" (*heortes, noumenias, sabbaton*) in verse 16 (NRSV), the identity of the sabbaths has occasioned considerable debate. This phrase is found nowhere else in the New Testament, but occurs five times in the Septuagint (2 Chron. 2:4; 31:3; Neh. 10:33; Eze. 45:17; Hosea 2:11). Each time, speaking of the burnt offerings other than the daily offerings, the reference is to the Sabbaths (weekly), new moons (monthly), and appointed feasts (yearly). At times the order is reversed, but in each case, "new moon" is in the middle, thus making a logical sequence from weekly to yearly or vice

versa. The implication is that the sabbath being described is the weekly Sabbath.

Another point to consider is that the ceremonial sabbaths were part of the annual feasts to which the word *heortes* referred. Accordingly, when Paul here refers to "sabbaths," if he meant the ceremonial sabbaths, he was needlessly repeating himself. In that case he would be saying, "Let no one pass judgment on you in regard to a feast day/ceremonial sabbath, or in regard to a new moon, or in regard to a ceremonial sabbath," a statement neither logical nor likely.

Sometimes the assertion is made that the plural form of the word "sabbath" here in-

The singlemost
recurring element that
dominated Paul's concerns
was the low view of Christ
that characterized the
Colossian heresy.

dicates something other than the weekly Sabbath. But the plural form is used several times for the weekly Sabbath, including in the heart of the fourth commandment.

Whatever Paul is suggesting about this sabbath day, he is not addressing the age-old Saturday versus Sunday debate. Verse 17 makes clear that for the Colossians there is a more substantive issue at stake, and it is only when we keep focused on the immediate Colossian context that we can correctly resolve the difficulty.

Much has been written about the many-faceted Colossian heresy, its gnostic tendencies, asceticism, Judaism, and distorted Christianity. But the single most recurring element that dominated Paul's concerns was the low view of Christ that characterized the heresy. It is not incidental that the strongest statement regarding the deity of Christ in the entire New Testament is found in Colossians 1:15-20. Repeatedly Paul stressed the all-sufficiency of the risen Christ (1:15-20; 2:6-11, 19, 20; 3:1-4, 11), which brings

clarity to his use of "shadow" and "body" in verse 17. The word "shadow" has often been interpreted as if it meant to "foreshadow" something to come. But without exception, when the word "shadow" (*skia*) is used in juxtaposition with "body" (*soma*), the meaning is emptiness contrasted with substance or reality. By these two words Paul addressed several aspects of Colossian worship practice that had one thing in common—they are Christ-less and for that reason, empty. Some practices were ascetic and empty; others were Jewish types and now empty. The *Colossian* weekly sabbath, while not a Jewish type, was empty in two ways. First, like all their other rituals, it was without Christ, and for Paul, a Christ-less sabbath was an empty sabbath.

And second, Paul saw emptiness in the Jewishness that had become attached to the weekly Sabbath. When the Sabbath commandment was given the second time in Deuteronomy 5, its observance was directly linked, not to God's having created the heavens and the earth (Ex. 20:11), but to God's delivering Israel out of Egypt. Therefore, for that reason, "the Lord your God commanded you to keep the sabbath day" (Deut. 5:15, RSV). Over the years the Sabbath had become so identified with the regulations of Judaism that even Jesus' attempts to purge them were only marginally successful. Among the Colossians, a ritualized Jewish sabbath had emptied the day of Christ, its true substance.

It is plain from the argument that the Sabbath is here regarded not as it was primavally (Gen. 2:3) "made for man" (Mark 2:27), God's benignant gift for His creatures' bodily and spiritual benefit; but as it was adopted to be a symbolic institution of the Mosaic covenant, and expressly adapted to the relation between God and Israel (Ex. 31:12-17); an aspect of the Sabbath that governs much of the language of the Old Testament about it.⁴

In positive terms, only a Sabbath stripped of its Jewishness can be filled with Christ, its true substance. The Colossian sabbath, kept without Christ ("not holding fast to the head" [2:19, NRSV]), is still linked to shadowy Jewish ritualism instead of being a genuine rest in Christ as described in Hebrews 4:9. The fact that Paul

Continued on page 29

THE SABBATH AND SALVATION

The human heart longs for a constant reassurance of divine forgiveness, acceptance, and salvation. We want to know, “Has God really forgiven and saved me?” In the Scripture, the reassurance of divine forgiveness and salvation is communicated not only verbally but also through types and symbols.



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Circumcision, the sacrificial system, baptism, the Lord's Supper, and the Sabbath are all symbolic institutions established by God to help believers conceptualize and experience the assurance of salvation.

The Sabbath occupies a unique place among the various God-given institutions. It is unique in its *origin, nature, survival, and function*. It is unique in its *origin* because it is the first institution established by God to invite His people to enter into the joy of His rest and fellowship (Heb. 4:3-10). It is unique in its *nature* because it is not a material object or a place accessible only to few, but a day (time) available to all. Being time, the Sabbath invites the believers to experience divine fellowship, not through “holy objects,” but in time shared together.

It is unique in its *survival* because it has survived through the centuries in spite of repeated attempts to do away with it. It is unique in its *function* because it has helped Jews and Christians to conceptualize, internalize, and experience the reality of God's creative and redemptive accomplishments.

In this two-part article I wish to explore

how the Sabbath relates to salvation in the Old and New Testaments. The first part examines the Sabbatical typologies of Messianic redemption in the Old Testament and Jewish literature. The second part (to appear in July) will consider the redemptive meaning and function of the Sabbath in the New Testament.

The Sabbath and salvation in the Old Testament

In Old Testament times the Sabbath served not only to provide personal rest and liberation from the hardship of work and social injustices, but also to nourish the hope for a future Messianic peace, prosperity, and redemption. The latter function was apparently inspired by the role of the Sabbath in God's original creation.

Genesis provides no information on the actual observance of the Sabbath by Adam and Eve before their expulsion from the Garden of Eden. Yet the picture of perfection and satisfaction (note the sevenfold repetition of the phrase “it was good” in Genesis 1) it portrays, especially through the divine

S A M U E L E B A C C H I O C C H I

blessing and sanctification of the seventh day (Gen. 2:3), could easily offer to believers the basis for a vision of the Messianic age.

The parallels and equivalences between the Sabbath of Genesis, Adam's *first day* after his creation, and the *last days* of the Messianic age, though not always explicitly made, are implicitly present in the biblical and extrabiblical sources.

Sabbath peace and harmony

The peace and harmony that existed between Adam and the animals at the Creation Sabbath will be restored in the Messianic age when "the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them" (Isa. 11:6). At that time, according to the same prophet, "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea" (verse 9; cf. Isa. 65:25; Hosea 2:20). This vision of the earth full of peace and of the knowledge of God in the last days may well have been inspired by the view of the first days, of which the Sabbath is the epitome.

The latter is suggested by those rabbinical Sabbath regulations that prohibited killing insects or carrying weapons on the Sabbath because the latter represents a foretaste of the world to come. Such a vision of the world to come was inspired by the primordial Sabbath, a day of peace and harmony between the human and subhuman creation.¹

Sabbath delight

The delight and joy of the Edenic Sabbath also inspired the prophetic vision of the Messianic age. Theodore Friedman notes that "two of the three passages in which Isaiah refers to the Sabbath are linked by the prophet with the end of days (Isa. 56:1-7; 58:13-14; 66:20-24) . . . It is no mere coincidence that Isaiah employs the words 'delight' (*oneg*) and 'honor' (*kavod*) in his description of both the Sabbath and the end of days (58:13: 'And thou shalt call the Sabbath delight . . . and honor it' 66:11; 'And you shall delight in the glow of its honor'). The implication is clear. The delight and joy that will mark the end of days is made available here and now by the Sabbath."²

Sabbath delight is expressed in the Jewish tradition by kindling lights on that day—a prerogative of the woman of the house. The

redemptive role of the primordial Sabbath in the Jewish tradition is impressive. Being viewed as the symbol of primordial redemption from chaos to a perfect cosmos, the Sabbath could effectively typify the future Messianic restoration. The tradition of kindling lights on the Sabbath was symbolically linked both to the supernatural light that shone during the first Sabbath upon Adam as an assurance of salvation and the extraordinary light of the Messianic age.

The prophets envision the appearance of refulgent light during the latter days: "Moreover the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold, as the light of seven days" (Isa. 30:26). The comparison with "the light

In the

Deuteronomic version of the fourth commandment, the Sabbath is explicitly linked to the Exodus liberation.

of seven days" is presumably an allusion to the seven days of Creation, which, according to an ancient Midrash, were bathed by extraordinary light more brilliant than the sun.³

The prophetic vision of the extraordinary light of the Messianic age (Zech. 14:7) most probably derives from the notion of the supernatural light experienced by Adam on the first Sabbath—light that, according to Jewish tradition, disappeared at the close of the Creation Sabbath because of his disobedience, but that is to reappear in the Messianic age.⁴

Sabbath rest

The theme of Sabbath rest (*menuhah*) which to "the biblical mind," as Abraham Joshua Heschel explains, "is the same as happiness and stillness, as peace and harmony,"⁵ has served as an effective typology of the Messianic age, often known as the "end of days" or "world-to-come."

In the Old Testament the notion of "rest" is utilized to express both national and Messianic aspirations. As a national aspiration, the Sabbath rest served to typify a peaceful life in a land of rest (Deut. 12:9; 25:19; Isa. 14:3), where the king would give to the people "rest from all . . . enemies" (2 Sam. 7:1) and where God would find His "resting place" among His people, and especially in His sanctuary at Zion (2 Chron. 6:41; 1 Chron. 23:25; Ps. 132:8, 13, 14; Isa. 66:1).

The connection between Sabbath rest and national rest is also found in Hebrews 4:4, 6, 8, where the author speaks of the Creation Sabbath rest as the symbol of the promised entrance into the land of Canaan. Because of disobedience, the wilderness generation "failed to enter" (verse 6) into the land of rest typified by the Sabbath.

The fact that the blessings of the Sabbath rest were never realized as a political condition of rest and peace challenged God's people to look for their future fulfillment at and through the coming of the Messiah. In the Jewish literature we find numerous examples where the Sabbath rest and the septenary structure of time are used to signify the rest, peace, and redemption of the Messianic age.

For example, the Babylonian Talmud says, "Our Rabbis taught: at the conclusion of the Sabbath, the son of David will come. R. Joseph demurred: But so many [Sabbaths] have passed, yet has he not come!"⁶ The age of the Messiah is often described as a time of Sabbatical rest. At the end of the *Mishnah Tamid* we read: "A Psalm, a song for the Sabbath day, a song for the time to come, for the day that is all Sabbath rest in the eternal life." The rest experience of the Sabbath served to nourish the hope of the future Messianic peace and rest. The Messianic redemption came to be viewed, as stated in the *Mishnah Tamid*, as "all Sabbath and rest in the life everlasting."

Sabbath liberation

The freedom, release, and liberation that the weekly and annual Sabbaths were designed to grant to every member of the Hebrew society have also served as effective types of Messianic redemption.

In the Deuteronomic version of the fourth commandment, the Sabbath is explicitly linked to the Exodus liberation by means of the "remembrance clause": "You

shall remember that you were a servant in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out thence with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore, the Lord your God commanded you to keep the sabbath day" (Deut. 5:15, RSV).

The connection between the Sabbath and the Exodus deliverance may explain why the Sabbath became ideologically connected with the Passover, the annual celebration of the deliverance from Egypt. In a sense, the Sabbath came to be viewed as a "little Passover" in the same way as many Christians have come to view their weekly Sunday as a "little Easter."

The Sabbath was a real liberator of the Hebrew society by providing a release from the hardship of life and social inequalities, not only every seventh day, but also every seventh year, on the Sabbatical year, and every "seven sabbaths of years," on the jubilee year (Lev. 25:8). At these annual institutions the Sabbath truly became the liberator of the oppressed in Hebrew society. The land was to lie fallow to provide free produce for the dispossessed and animals. The slaves were emancipated, and the debts owed by

fellow citizens were remitted. Though seldom observed, these annual Sabbaths served to announce the future liberation and redemption to be brought about by the Messiah. One reason for the Messianic function of the Sabbath years is to be found in their Messianic features.

For example, the annual Sabbaths promised *release* from personal debts and slavery. Such a *release* provided an effective imagery to typify the expected Messianic deliverance (Isa. 61:1-3, 7; 40:2). In his dissertation on the jubiliary theology of the Gospel of Luke, Robert Sloan shows how the New Testament concept of forgiveness (*aphesis*) is derived largely from the release from financial indebtedness and social injustices resident in the celebration of the annual Sabbaths.⁷ These are referred to as "the release," "the Lord's release," "the year of release" (Deut. 15:1, 2, 9; 31:10; Lev. 25:10). In the Septuagint the Hebrew term for "release," *deror*, is translated as *aphesis* "release," which is the New Testament word for "forgiveness." The Lord's Prayer's phrase "forgive us our debts" (Matt. 6:12) derives from the release from financial indebtedness of the annual Sabbaths. The sabbatical release from financial indebtedness and social injustices came to be viewed as the prefiguration of the future messianic release from the moral indebtedness of sin.

An example is Isaiah 61:1-3 where the prophet employs the imagery of the sabbatical release to describe the mission of the Messiah, who would bring jubiliary amnesty and release from captivity. In Part 2 we will see how Christ utilized this very imagery to announce and explain the nature of His redemptive mission.

Sabbatical structure of time

The unique Messianic features of the Sabbath years inspired the use of the sabbatical structure of time to measure the waiting time of Messianic redemption. Some scholars call this phenomenon "sabbatical Messianism" or "chronomessianism."⁸

The classical place of sabbatical Messianism is found in Daniel 9, where two sabbatical periods are given. The first consists of the 70-year prophecy (Jer. 29:10) regarding the time to *national restoration* of the Jews (Dan. 9:3-19) and is made up of 10 sabbatical years (10 x 7). The second period

consists of "seventy weeks (*shabuim*)" technically "seventy Sabbatical cycles," which lead to *Messianic redemption* (Dan. 9:24-27). This sabbatical Messianism is frequently found in later Jewish literature. For example, the Talmud says: "Elijah said to Rab Judah . . .: 'The world shall exist not less than eighty-five jubilees, and in the last jubilee the son of David will come.'"⁹

Conclusion

This brief survey of Old Testament Sabbath themes shows that in Old Testament times the weekly and annual Sabbaths have served not only to provide physical rest and liberation from social injustices but also to epitomize and nourish the hope of future Messianic redemption.

Rabbi Heschel captures vividly the Old Testament Messianic typology of the Sabbath when he writes: "Zion is in ruins, Jerusalem lies in the dust. All week there is only hope of redemption. But when the Sabbath is entering the world, man is touched by a moment of actual redemption; as if for a moment the spirit of the Messiah moved over the face of the earth."¹⁰ The Old Testament sabbatical typologies of Messianic redemption will help us appreciate in Part 2 the relationship between the Sabbath and the Saviour. ■

Part 2 will appear in the July 1997 issue.

¹See, for example, Babylonian Talmud, Shabbath 12a, 12b.

²The Midrash on Psalms, William G. Braude, trans., (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), vol. 2, p. 112.

³See *Bereshith Rabbah*, 3:6; 11:2.

⁴See *The Midrash on Psalms*, vol. 2, p. 112.

⁵Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1951), p. 23.

⁶Sanhedrin 97a.

⁷Robert B. Sloan, *The Favorable Year of the Lord: A Study of Jubiliary Theology in the Gospel of Luke* (Austin, Tex.: 1977).

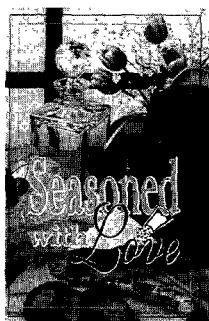
⁸See Ben Zion Wacholder, "Chronomessianism: The Timing of Messianic Movements and the Calendar of Sabbatic Cycles," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 46 (1975): 201.

⁹Sanhedrin 97b.

¹⁰Heschel, p. 68.

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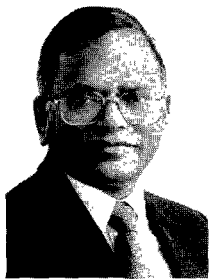
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GOSPEL AND THE SABBATH

I accepted Jesus as my personal Saviour at the age of 8 or 9. The gospel had an overwhelming impact on me, and its power liberated me not only from what I considered great sins but also my fears and apprehensions.



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The forgiveness experience was so real that I did not hesitate to share Jesus with my friends, teachers, and neighbors. Observing Sunday faithfully, I went to church in the morning and the praise hour in the evening. Although our pastor's sermons, delivered in thunderous tones, were often boring and sometimes frightening, I never missed a service.

Then one summer a young evangelist pitched his tent in our town—and preached hitherto-unknown truths, such as prophecies of Daniel and Revelation, the soon coming of Jesus, the conditional immortality of the soul, tithing, and the Sabbath. Each truth leaped from the Bible, and nothing he preached went unsupported by the Scriptures.

Thus it was I chose to join the first seventh-day Sabbathkeeper—God. I had known Him before, but now it seemed as if I knew Him more fully. Immediately I became the laughingstock of my friends and an object of scorn for my Anglican pastor. “You are a legalist, a slave to the law, and you can't have the joy of the gospel,” he said. Never had he suggested any such thing when I observed Sunday just as faithfully.

Some 42 years later I can confidently say that I may have been a fool in the Pauline sense, but certainly not a legalist. My fellowship with God increased, not decreased, be-

cause I chose to follow Him, His Son (Luke 4:16), and His apostles (Acts 13:14, 42) in keeping the seventh-day Sabbath. The joy of the gospel has only increased with my discovery of Sabbath. I could embrace the gospel as fully as ever and keep the seventh day holy without losing the joy of freedom or succumbing to the perils of legalism.

I say this for four biblical reasons: (a) the Sabbath tells me who I am; (b) the Sabbath reminds me that Jesus died for my sins; (c) the Sabbath provides me fellowship; and (d) the Sabbath points to my eternal rest in God.

The Sabbath gives me identity

Let us begin at the beginning: “And on the seventh day God finished his work which he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all his work which he had done in creation” (Gen. 2:2, 3).*

The seventh-day Sabbath shows that God is my Creator. A scientist may say I am “an accidental collocation of atoms.”¹ A philosopher may trace my life to a first principle. A poet may say that life is “a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.”² But the truth is that I am made in the image of God, and the Sabbath continually reminds me of that magnificent

fact. It invites me to enter into God's rest, even as it invited Adam and Eve. Sabbath is to join the Creator in celebrating the joy of life and to recognize forever that life comes not as a result of our work but as a gift of God's grace.

As Barth says: "[Human] history under the command of God really begins with the gospel and not with the law, with an accorded celebration and not a required task, with a prepared rejoicing and not with care and toil, with a freedom given to him and not an imposed obligation, with a rest and not with an activity. . . . The first divine action which man is allowed to witness is that God rested on the seventh day and blessed and hallowed it. And the first word said to him, the first obligation brought to his notice, is that without any works or merits he himself may rest with God and then go to his work."³

The One who made us also made the Sabbath. He rested on it. It was not a day of drudgery, but one of delight, an experience of supreme joy that can come only when one communes heart-to-heart with one's Creator. Adam and Eve along with "the morning stars sang together, and the sons of God shouted for joy" (Job 38:7), and bowed before their Creator in worship and adoration on that first Sabbath.

Could worship, praise, adoration, and fellowship be anything but a joyful experience—acknowledging the sovereignty of the Creator on the one hand and our identity as members of God's family on the other? Nowhere is this relationship between Sabbath and joy, between obedience to God and delight of the soul, stated more eloquently than in Isaiah 58:13, 14: "If you turn back your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on my holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight and the holy day of the Lord honorable; if you honor it, not going your own ways, or seeking your own pleasure, or talking idly; then you shall take delight in the Lord, and I will make you ride upon the heights of the earth; I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken."

This passage is addressed to God's people. They did not become God's people because they were keeping the Sabbath. They *were* God's own because God had created them and chosen them. To acknowl-

edge that choice, to cement the relationship that arises out of it, God calls upon us to keep the Sabbath. Thus Sabbath is no legalistic stricture. It is a point in the line of time through eternity to remind us continually of our special relationship with God. And it is "a delight in the Lord."

Sabbath reminds me God is my Redeemer

Sabbath not only gives me identity, but reminds me that I am part of God's redeemed family. When we Christians recite the Ten Commandments, we normally begin with the words "You shall have no other Gods before me" (Ex. 20:3). But the Jews do it differently. They begin with the prologue from verses 1 and 2: "And God spoke all these words, saying, I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage."

S*abbath not
only gives me identity, but
reminds me that I am part of
God's redeemed family.*

Note the difference. God did not choose Israel because they were good people, obeying God's law. No, God chose them out of His mercy, out of His love and grace. When they were slaves in Egypt, when they were no people, when they had no dignity, God remembered them, redeemed them, and made them His own. To protect that close, reconciled, redeemed relationship, He gave them the law as an expression of His eternal moral nature, and He invited them to become part of His family. There is no legalism here; only liberty—eternal liberty, initiated and preserved by His grace alone.

Thus the Ten Commandments are principles outlining God's redemptive lifestyle for the human race. The fourth commandment, in a way, is unique. It charges God's people to "remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy" (Ex. 20:8), for in six days the Lord completed the work of creation "and rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord

blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it" (verse 11). Six days are there to do our work, but when the seventh comes around, it is time to remember that we are not our own. We belong to the Creator and the Redeemer. "The Sabbath is the day on which we learn the art of *surpassing civilization*"⁴ and experience the mystery of God's commonwealth.

If Exodus provides Creation as the reason for Sabbath observance, Deuteronomy supplies a complementary reason: "You shall remember that you were a servant in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out thence with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the sabbath day" (Deut. 5:15).

Sabbath observance is a continual and clear reminder that we are not our own. God created us. He sustains us. And when we are in an Egypt of our own, experiencing sin's oppression, loneliness, despair, drudgery, and death, we need the "mighty hand" and the "outstretched arm" of God. The breath of God created us; the blood of Christ redeems us. Both mighty acts are to be remembered by the keeping of the Sabbath.

Sabbath provides fellowship

Sabbath is also a day of fellowship and worship, when God's family comes together in an absolute sense of unworthiness before their Maker. Christians are reminded of their unity and equality in Christ. "Before God's throne," writes Ludwig Koehler, "there will hardly ever be a greater testimony given on your behalf than the statement, 'He had time for me.'"⁵

The Sabbath commandment is a great leveler of people: the son and the daughter, the manservant and the maidservant, the stranger within the gates must all be blanketed by the rest of the Sabbath. Thus "the Sabbath," says Heschel, "is an embodiment of the belief that all men are equal and that equality of men means the nobility of men."⁶ Is this human equality not what the gospel also proclaims (Eph. 2:11-16)?

We cannot observe the Sabbath without taking seriously the social responsibility that comes with it. Worship is not enough; fellowship must follow. We must become responsible for our neighbors. One Jewish writer states the truth superbly: "The uneven divisions of society were leveled with

the setting of the sun. On the Sabbath there was neither banker nor clerk, neither farmer nor hired-hand, neither mistress nor maid, neither rich nor poor. . . . The carriage driver could not be ordered to wait for his master outside the synagogue to drive him home after the services; instead, both prayed together, both wore the *talit*.⁷⁷

Did not Jesus Himself point to this social obligation of life in His Sabbath sermon in Nazareth (Luke 4:16-19)? He observed the Sabbath "as His custom was," and He pointed out that such observance has meaning only as it is bonded "to preach the good news to the poor," "to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind," and "to set at liberty those who are oppressed."

Sabbath points to eternal rest

On Sabbath we cease all work, reaffirm our self-abandonment, come to God in total surrender, and enter into His rest. This entering into His rest is symbolic of entering into the eternal rest that Hebrews speaks about: "There remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God" (Heb. 4:9).

The continuation from the present to the future, from current reality to future hope, must not be missed. Just as surely as the kingdom of grace and the blessings of salvation are a present experience and a future anticipation, so are the blessings of Sabbath a present experience and an indication of the future entry into rest in God's kingdom of glory. In that light Isaiah's prophecy takes on a special meaning: "For as the new heavens and the new earth which I will make shall remain before me, says the Lord; . . . from sabbath to sabbath, all flesh shall come to worship before me" (Isa. 66:22, 23). Thus the Sabbath links the joy of today with the hope of tomorrow; it is a day that celebrates the gospel and acknowledges God's sovereignty. As Karl Barth says, it points to "the God who is gracious to man in Jesus Christ. . . . It points him away from everything that he himself can will and achieve and back to what God is for him and will do for him."⁷⁸

Embracing the gospel and observing the Sabbath

But is insistence on Sabbath observance—particularly the biblical seventh day—legalistic? Can biblical insistence on a particular lifestyle—compassion, love, go-

ing the second mile, the Beatitudes—be legalistic? The answer is yes and no and is dependent on the motivation. A legalist keeps the law or follows a particular lifestyle as a way of salvation. But no amount of keeping Sabbath or any other commandment can save a person. Salvation is possible only through the gospel of Jesus Christ, for "it is the power of God for salvation to every one who has faith" (Rom. 1:16). "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God—not because of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2:8).

Pharisees accused Jesus of breaking the law because He healed on Sabbath (Luke 6:6-11; Mark 3:3-6; John 5:1-16; etc.), and Jesus' answer in each case was consistent with the meaning of Sabbath, that it was a day to bring glory to God and not to indulge in self. The miracles of Jesus showed the real purpose of His coming: to restore and redeem life. The Pharisaic obsession was legalism; the attitude of Jesus was grace in action. Ellen White has said it well: "God could not for a moment stay His hand, or man would faint and die. And man also has a work to perform on this day. The necessities of life must be attended to, the sick must be cared for, the wants of the needy must be supplied. He will not be held guiltless who neglects to relieve suffering on the Sabbath. God's holy rest day was made for man, and acts of mercy are in perfect harmony with its intent. God does not desire His creatures to suffer an hour's pain that may be relieved upon the Sabbath or any other day."⁷⁹

Christian discipleship is not achievement of a moral status, but the reception of Christ's calling; it is not moral perfection, but an abiding in Him. It is a love relationship with Jesus. Once that abiding is established, fruit follows as a natural course. The principle is a simple one: first love, then its fruit; first grace, then obedience. Obedience does not produce love; love produces obedience. Obedience does not bring about forgiveness; grace does that. Any attempt to distort the order inevitably leads to legalism. And in rejecting legalism, any bid to deny obedience its role in discipleship turns to cheap grace. Christian discipleship has no room for either the heresy of legalism or the illusion of cheap grace.

Thus a Christian, who loves the Lord and

who is saved by His grace, will obey the Lord. The embrace of the gospel is the first step; the observance of the Sabbath is an inevitable follow-up—a delight in the Lord. For the Sabbath is an "exodus from tension,"¹⁰ "a sanctuary in time,"¹¹ "a palace in time with a kingdom for all,"¹² and its observance "the coronation of a day in the spiritual wonderland of time."¹³

We can come to that wonderland only when we have first been to the cross. ■

*All Scripture passages in this article are from the Revised Standard Version.

¹Bertrand Russell, *Mysticism and Logic* (New York: Doubleday, 1929), p. 45.

²Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, Act V, 5, 17.

³Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1958), vol. 3, part 4, p. 52.

⁴Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man* (New York: Noonday Press, 1975), p. 27.

⁵Ludwig Koehler, "The Day of Rest in the Old Testament," *Lexington Theological Quarterly*, July 1972, pp. 71, 72.

⁶Abraham Joshua Heschel, *God in Search of Man* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, Inc., 1976), p. 417.

⁷Samuel H. Dresner, *The Sabbath* (New York: Burning Bush Press, 1970), p. 4.

⁸Barth, p. 53.

⁹Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1898), p. 207.

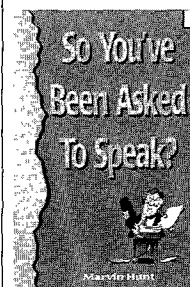
¹⁰*Ibid.*

¹¹*Ibid.*

¹²*Ibid.*, p. 21.

¹³*Ibid.*, p. 18.

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THE MEANING AND ROLE OF THE SABBATH

Three clergymen share their personal convictions and perspectives about the Sabbath in a conversation with the editor of *Ministry*.



Roy Branson, Ph.D., is the director of the Washington Institute in Takoma Park, Maryland.



Andy McRae is an associate pastor of the Sligo Seventh-day Adventist Church in Takoma Park, Maryland.



Charles Scriven, Ph.D., is president of Columbia Union College in Takoma Park, Maryland.

EVA: How would you say Seventh-day Adventists have viewed the Sabbath? What significance would you say we have seen in it, and what have we appealed to as we articulated our reasons for keeping the seventh day holy as the day of rest and worship?

McRAE: Adventists have seen the Sabbath as an evidence or proof of particular loyalty to God. Yet from my point of view, a deeper understanding of Scripture sees that the Sabbath is not only a sign of our loyalty to God, but of God's loyalty to us and God's commitment to our well-being.

Adventists have talked a lot about "keeping the Sabbath," but there is a sense in which the Sabbath has kept Adventists. Any time any of us get together and think about what it is that has held and still holds Adventists together around the world, even with our differing views on a number of issues, it is that underlying sense that we are a Sabbath people, or a people of the Sabbath, that sense of God in creation and redemption, which I believe in some fundamental way has held us together as a people.

BRANSON: We have said that the Ten Commandments include the fourth

commandment, which is to keep the Sabbath. We have said that we are a people who observe God's law, and therefore we should observe the Sabbath. For us this is a very clear syllogism.

An important question is whether or not we understand law and the Sabbath as they are expressed in the Bible. There is more to Sabbath than the legal perspective. Another way of looking at the Sabbath that you find in Scripture and also in the history of Christian thought is that the Sabbath is a celebration. The Sabbath is a time when the people of God gather together to remember what God has done on their behalf and to celebrate that.

Celebrating on Sabbath is something like the celebration of the Lord's Supper and baptism. We don't say that observing baptism itself, or the Lord's Supper, is going to save us. The truth is, however, that these celebrations are powerful ways to remember what God has done and to live in hope of what He will do further. In the same way the Sabbath is one of those things that's just as important for Christians as is the Lord's Supper or baptism. Keeping Sabbath is a matter of making vivid for us what God has done in history to save us and what that means to us in the here and now.

AN INTERVIEW BY WILL EVA WITH
ROY BRANSON, ANDY MCRAE, AND CHARLES SCRIVEN

SCRIVEN: Our conventional or customary view of the Sabbath tends to forget that every good and beautiful thing in human life is a gift from God. We don't attempt to obey God and please Him by worshiping on the Sabbath just so that we can be saved. Part of the gift of salvation is that we are given wonderful festivals such as the Sabbath. God has given them to us so that the human spirit can be nourished and cheered and hopeful and so that we might engage in life with passion. Sabbath is one of the great gifts that God has given to human beings. It is among us for us to embrace for all kinds of reasons. Not the least reason for embracing it is that in doing so, we embrace the whole history of God's people clear back not only to the call of the Hebrew people out of Egypt, but even to the very beginning of human life (Gen. 2:1, 2).

BRANSON: I would like to spend just a minute on the experience of the Sabbath and why even the way Adventists understand it generally is an appropriate way to remember not just the day, but to celebrate salvation itself. When Adventists wake up on Sabbath morning they know immediately this is a special day. This is a day that is different from all the other days. This is a day that releases us from what is otherwise an interminable obligation to work, to go to the office or the construction site. It releases us from boredom.

Without that kind of interlude, all time simply runs together in meaninglessness. For Adventists Sabbath is always a special day of release from the round of all other activities. It comes to tell us what salvation is about. Christ's death and resurrection came to save us in the midst of the indistinguishable centuries of human history. The Sabbath comes from week to week to do a similar work for us, pointing us to the essence of the salvation that came in Christ and preserving us from being victims of the endless drip of everyday life.

EVA: Are the descriptions of the Sabbath as we are expressing them here what some have called "the new case for the Sabbath"? What do you understand to be the heart or center of this new case for the

Sabbath? Comment on this a little more definitively from a biblical point of view.

SCRIVEN: Let me first of all go back to this question of what we have understood with respect to the question of law. We need to realize that for the first authors of the Bible and those who experienced the story the Bible tells, law was not something that evoked the police station or a flashing red light in the rearview mirror. Law was something that evoked the relationship that God had with the people who had chosen to help God bless all of humanity. To those in Jewish experience, for example, law was seen as a gift. It was and is something beautiful, something good, more along the lines of the way we view Scripture today.

Now, the traditional or customary view among some Adventists and also some in other faith groups has tended to be that the law is a legal demand that you must commit yourself to and give evidence of taking seriously on pain of damnation. The view of the law that is truer to the overall framework of the Bible is that the law is God's strong yet gracious command that comes as His gift to enhance human life.

Along with this, the new case for the Sabbath is seeing and living the Sabbath as a gift of grace, and not merely a piece of the law. Sabbath is unmistakably grace. When you read what Paul says about law, on a superficial level, it might seem as though he is talking out of both sides of his mouth. But reading more deeply, you realize that he loves the law. To him the law is holy, just, and good. But misunderstood, it is some kind of legalistic requirement on the part of a policelike God in heaven who is looking for ways to damn humanity to hell. Misunderstood, it is awful, but understood aright, it is grace. And this, of course, is true of the Sabbath

McRAE: Yes, and in terms of a biblical context, the new case for the Sabbath, as we speak of it here, is in some ways the old case. For even in terms of the Old Testament story it is good to ask, Where do the Ten Commandments really begin? They begin with the confirmation of a covenant relationship rather than with the first command itself. Before stating any

command, God speaks to Moses and says, in effect, "I am the Lord your God. I have brought you out of Egypt, out of the hand of the bondmaster. I have taken you out of oppression and slavery. I have released you and given you lives of freedom," and only then, or just then, the Ten Commandments begin (see Ex. 20:1-3). It is as if there is an unwritten word connecting the redemptive preamble to the beginning of the commandments themselves, and that is the word "therefore." God says, I am the one who brought you out; therefore, have no other god before Me; therefore, you have the freedom to rest from your taskmasters and worship Me on the seventh day. God releases the Hebrew people so that they can rest, even as the Sabbath commandment calls them to do.

BRANSON: Yes, that's true, but we have tended to identify the Sabbath almost exclusively with Exodus 20, while Deuteronomy 5 also talks about the Sabbath in these redemptive, covenantal terms. Deuteronomy enlarges on the fact that the Lord your God brought you out from Egypt, with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. That's a reference to salvation, salvation in the sense of being freed from oppression. Salvation is a lot more than simply our relationship to law. Consistent with the Exodus 20 Sabbath command, Deuteronomy shows that the freed Hebrews were to celebrate their freedom by freeing their own servants and slaves to celebrate on the Sabbath, so that their servants wouldn't have to work endless, uninterrupted rounds of seven-day workweeks. They would also have the weekly release of the Sabbath and all it stood for.

EVA: Yes, and isn't the redemptive emphasis we are highlighting in Exodus and Deuteronomy consistent with Jesus' view of the Sabbath and how He lived it out and spoke of it in His ministry? Doesn't this emphasis in the Old Testament prefigure how He would keep Sabbath and what He would underscore in it through the way He lived, worked, and taught? For example, in the Sabbath miracles He performed, He purposely showed, it seems to me, what the essence of the Sabbath is: a day of healing, redemption,

and true freedom (see, for example, Luke 13:10-17). He clearly went out of His way to use these miracles to make redemptive points about the Sabbath.

Thus in the hands of Jesus, Sabbath becomes an expression of His redemptive activity as a whole. He invests Sabbath with a meaning that was new to the people of His day. He creates, if you like, a distinctly Christian Sabbath in contrast to the emphasis put on it by the religious establishment of His day. Jesus is the one who really fills out what we have called "the new case for the Sabbath."

What do you think about this way of viewing the ministry of Jesus when it comes to understanding the teaching of Jesus about the Sabbath?

SCRIVEN: That's such a nice point. It's possible to say that the healing stories portray the fact that Jesus had no respect for the Sabbath, that in fact He was aiming to remove the Sabbath, when in fact the exact opposite is the case. He was reformulating an entirely worthwhile celebration, not trying to dismiss it. There is no scholar in the world who argues that Jesus did not keep the Sabbath. All four of the Gospels explicitly affirm it. Clearly Jesus purposely keeps the Sabbath as He does because that is exactly the way to honor the Sabbath, to liberate people from hurt and pain, to emphasize its healing and redemptive elements.

BRANSON: One of the other things that we would benefit from is to look back at the Old Testament and see the way in which the people of God celebrated the Sabbath. It was not with the idea that they had to do it, or that they had to stay on the right side of God. Rather they would go into the Temple, and this was the day they would encounter God. They would be in His presence. This was unbelievably gracious and good for them.

I want to read a passage from Nehemiah 8, where, of course, they have come back from Babylon and are reestablishing themselves in Jerusalem. In this setting Ezra gets all of the people together and they read from the Book, from the Law of God, with interpretation and meaning.

Nehemiah 8:9 (NIV) says, "Then Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who were instructing the people said to them all, 'This day is sacred to the Lord your God. Do not mourn or weep. . . . Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is sacred to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.'"

Now we look at the law and wrestle with it in the Old Testament, and with the Sabbath in the heart of that law. But in all our wrestling we somehow neglect to identify the Sabbath with all these great celebrations that go on throughout the Old Testament and that Christ, in a sense, brings to life in Luke 4, when He stands up and announces the arrival of the kingdom on Sabbath and quotes triumphantly and joyfully from the Old Testament.

SCRIVEN: There is a famous golf instructor named Harvey W. V. Pennick. He was coaching a woman who went on to win the Texas Amateur Women's Championship. He coached her right up to the minute of her tee time, and at that moment the woman said to Pennick, "Well, I guess I have to go out and play now." And he replied to her, "What do you mean, you *have* to go out and play? You *get* to go out and play." And what we as Adventists have got to get hold of is this kind of attitude. It's not so much that we *have* to keep the Sabbath. It's rather that we *get* to keep the Sabbath.

This passage from Nehemiah is absolutely wonderful. It's why Sabbath dinners, and Sabbath celebrations, and hymn-singing musical events on Sabbath are so wonderful. Because we *get* to do it, or we have an impoverished emotional and spiritual life.

BRANSON: The shape of the Sabbath, or however we wish to describe it, is a celebration intimately connected to the completed work of God. Calvin called the Sabbath a sacrament—a concrete, tangible way of coming into the presence of God to make tangible some great, transcendent meaning or reality. Just as baptism and the Lord's Supper have a certain shape in

order to continue to convey a certain meaning, so does the Sabbath.

In the history of Christian thought—and here we are talking about Augustine, Luther, or Calvin—the idea of the completed work of God, which is symbolized by celebrating on the seventh day, is emphasized. Although the Reformers kept the first day of the week, as theologians they saw the significance and the meaning of the seventh day, because it was a symbol of the completed work of God, which we can celebrate, just as it was by God in the Genesis story (Gen. 2:1, 2). The Sabbath represents being with God and celebrating His completed work.

SCRIVEN: Yes, in the Creation story in Genesis, God creates the Sabbath to be shared with humanity. Not only does He rest from His completed work, but humanity is also to share in that rest. And in the Sabbath we also share our whole life with God. We become, through the work God has given us, through God's work and through the Sabbath experience, partners with God and God's entire project. We are collaborators with God.

McRAE: In fact, it is important to see that the whole matter of the Sabbath reaffirms for us that we weren't created in the same way as the rest of creation. God breathed into us, God created us in His own image, and therefore we have been invited to participate with Him. And an important part of that invitation includes to rest with God on Sabbath. In that resting we are reminded who is the Creator and who is the creature, and also who is Redeemer and who is redeemed. In it we are also reminded of the real partnership regarding the planet and the real nature of the whole created and redeemed order.

BRANSON: Now, it is quite possible for people to create a symbol that emphasizes other things besides what the Sabbath emphasizes. You could have a symbol, such as the first day of the week, Sunday, which talks about beginnings, and reminds us of things, important things, such as the resurrection of Christ. That is something that you could do. The fact is, however,

that the seventh day has a certain unique combination of meanings and realities that it conveys and has conveyed from the time of the early Hebrews through to the Christian church. For example, you don't have in Sunday the idea of completion. You know, you don't have the idea of culmination, or really the idea of rest tied to God's resting. Both ideas, completion and rest, are tied not only to the biblical Creation story, but to redemption as it is revealed in the New Testament.

SCRIVEN: That's true. I would like to make another point about the Sabbath day, and it relates to Roy's. This point addresses the fundamental psychology or outlook of the believer by asking the question Are you forward-looking or backward-looking?

The Sabbath experience is not only one that looks backward to Creation and the cross, but also *one that nourishes a forward-looking frame of mind*. Each week in celebrating or keeping Sabbath, I am working with a view to the capstone of the week—the final celebrative rest day, the Sabbath. This is a parable of eschatology that I, as a keeper of Sabbath, embody in my life every day. I am looking forward.

In this is embodied the whole theme of waiting, which is a definite theme in Jewish tradition, and of course a clear theme in the Gospels. We await, we look forward to, an end. Sabbath becomes a weekly parable of the whole history of salvation. It implies that human history or destiny has an implied end, an ultimate eschatological rest. This important meaning is lost through Sunday worship.

What I am saying is that there is no tradition for Sunday as a rest day except when we try to marry Sunday to the biblical meanings associated with the seventh day in Scripture. In keeping Sunday much of this kind of meaning tends to get lost, because Sunday is not really pictured in the New Testament as a worship day. And any or all of the commentary on Sabbath in the New Testament, including passages like Colossians 2:16-18, is an attempt to rescue Sabbath from rigid, legalistic perversions. It is not there to delete Sabbath. Nor is it there to create a new day of worship, or to

open the way for no particular day of worship. The Sabbath affirms the rest that we enter into when we belong to Christ.

McRAE: Another important role for the Sabbath is raised when one thinks of the differences between Jews and Christians. Jews and Christians both share essential texts of origin, but at some point they nevertheless follow two divergent tracks. It may be said that the purpose of Christians is the salvation of the world, while for Jews it is the sanctification of Israel.

I've come to the conclusion that we have a way of resolving the divergent emphases or tracks that Jews and Christians seem to be on. The Christian idea of saving the world, and also the Jewish idea of making a holy people, is all implicit in the language of the Sabbath. This language goes back beyond Abraham and the early Hebrew nation, to the beginning of things and to the Sabbath story in Genesis 2. A glance at the essence of that story shows that we all belong in the story. It's my story, whether I am Jewish or Christian.

BRANSON: Yes, and this has other implications. Siegfried Horn, under whom I think all of us studied, was a great archaeologist and also dean of the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary. He was also an anti-Nazi German. I remember him expressing the opinion that if German Christians had been worshiping God on the same day as the German Jews, we might not have had the Holocaust. Now we don't know if that would indeed have been the case, but it is definitely worth contemplating. If German Christians had been going to their churches at the same time German Jews had been going to their synagogues, wouldn't they have been more able to think of themselves as brothers and sisters?

This has implications for today. There are people, including some Adventists, who feel that keeping Sabbath separates them from other Christians. But what about our separation from Jews? It is just as important to realize how keeping the Sabbath could tie us Christians in with Jews.

EVA: We have had a fascinating and enlightening conversation. Do you have a

summative statement or a final word about the meaning and role of the Sabbath?

BRANSON: If we understand the Sabbath as celebration, as we heard it described in Nehemiah, it can shape our attitude toward the second coming of Christ. If we observe the Sabbath only in terms of law, that has a way of shaping our expectation of the Second Coming simply as a day of judgment. If we understand the Sabbath as celebration, then we look forward to "the marriage supper of the Lamb" (Rev. 19:7-9). We will then talk of the Second Coming more like a wedding reception, and not only as the great judgment day that it will be.

SCRIVEN: The critics will come along, and there are certain critics of Adventism, wanting to argue that it's a mistake to think of the Sabbath merely as a legal requirement that we must meet in order to benefit from God's grace. The proper response to that point is of course to concede it. But it does not follow that we should concede giving up the enriching, biblical experience of Sabbath celebration.

McRAE: For several years I have been collecting books by people from a number of different religious traditions. As I've done this, I've been intrigued by a renewed attempt to reclaim Sabbath for the Christian world. We live in a world fragmented and harried, our families in tatters, our jobs overwhelming our lives, and our own deepest desires and dreams often haunted by an oppressive kind of clock-watching. In the midst of this there is this attempt to reclaim the Sabbath. It's exciting to see. What's missing in many of these reclamations is that they are trying to fit the reclaiming of Jewish and early Christian Sabbath practice into something that doesn't bear the full weight of the biblical meanings of Sabbath. We Adventists must keep trying to call for a celebration of Sabbath that does not reinvent Sabbath, but that instead ties together the whole sweep of God's great work of creation, redemption, and imminent return. ■

THE FORGOTTEN KEY TO EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP

What will cause your congregation to follow your leadership? Will they follow you simply because you are the pastor? Will they accept you because you have a great vision and you are a persuasive preacher? Will they trust your leadership because of your training and experience?



Doug Burrell is a Baptist pastor and ministry consultant in Rome, Georgia.

Undoubtedly your congregation will follow you a certain distance as a result of each of these. But whether they take a comfortable stroll or go on a journey of faith may depend on something pastors sometimes overlook: the art of good listening.

A minister friend tells how his 3-year-old son taught him an important lesson. The father was sitting in his favorite chair, reading the evening paper. The boy was enthusiastically talking to his father, who was half listening while he continued to read the paper. The 3-year-old sensed he wasn't getting through and said, "Listen to me, Daddy!" The preoccupied dad half mumbled, "I'm listening. Go ahead, son." That was when the 3-year-old crawled into Dad's lap. The boy then deliberately took his father's face into his tiny hands, looked directly at his father, and said, "Listen to me with your eyes!"

Parents who listen to their children earn their trust and excel in parenting. That's a job that can't be done with a newspaper in one hand and a remote control in the other. Similarly, if you are going to be an effective spiritual leader, you must be an effective listener. Here are four powerful "secrets" for improving your listening.

Secret 1: people are hungry to be heard

We live in a culture that would rather talk than listen. Everybody seems to have instant answers. They are ready to advise you whether you want it or not. They overwhelm you with information. But people don't need information. They need someone who will listen to them and who will understand what they are saying and feeling.

I have been surprised how eager people are to have someone who will listen to them.

D O U G B U R R E L L

Total strangers have poured out their souls to me while we waited in a line or a doctor's office. Sometimes I've simply asked, "How are you doing today?" The replies vary from "I'm fine" to "Terrible, my dog died yesterday!" People I've just met often give me their opinions on politics, the church, or the school system. Sometimes they complain about their in-laws.

One day I stopped in to have a doughnut. The gentleman next to me at the counter wanted to talk. Levi spoke with a mixture of pride and sadness as he reflected on the job he had enjoyed for nearly 20 years—before he was "let go." He was struggling to find his new place in life. He wasn't looking for advice that day. He just wanted someone to listen. Levi isn't much different from the people we pastor. They don't always want or need advice. They just need someone to listen. And if we listen, soon enough so will they.

Listening is a powerful and too-often-unused tool of ministry. Think about physicians for a moment. All their knowledge of medicine and the human body, all their experience with other patients, and all their research and knowledge of the latest in medicine are useless until they listen to you tell what ails you. Should a doctor say, "I've seen enough patients now to know what you need," would you feel comfortable? The power and importance of listening in ministry is no less important. A failure to listen is a failure in professional responsibility.

Secret 2: be a *good* listener

Most people are not good listeners! It's estimated that in 70 percent of all communication people filter out or change the intended meaning of what they hear. If you want to test this claim, just quiz your congregation on last week's sermon. Think about your own conversational experiences with people. Are you really listening closely when someone else is talking to you? Or are you thinking ahead, waiting for your turn to talk? Are you preoccupied? Do you forget a person's name almost as soon as he or she has said it? Do you find yourself doing most of the talking?

Think about how you tend to listen in various situations. Ask several trusted friends about what kind of listener you are. You can become a better listener by becoming

more aware of how you tend to listen. If you want to take this a step further, you might consider completing a *Personal Listening Profile*¹ to give you a more objective view of your approach to listening.

Secret 3: use more than one listening strategy

To be an effective listener, you need more than one strategy in your listening "toolbox." Here are five of them: appreciative, empathic, comprehensive, discerning, evaluative.²

The first two of these are more emotional. The last three focus more on facts. Each strategy must be integrated when it is appropriate. You probably listen "appreciatively" when listening to your favorite music or are watching a video. As a pastor, you will often need to listen "empathetically" to persons who are hurting. This style of listening

Listening is a powerful and too-often-unused tool of ministry. . . . A failure to listen is a failure of professional responsibility.

helps people know that you care about what they are feeling. After some time you may move with them to a more analytical way of listening, the "comprehensive" approach. In this strategy you seek to organize and make sense of what is being said. This approach helps you to understand the feedback you get from your minister-congregation relations committee. At the board meeting or in committee work you may need to move to a "discerning" style of listening. Here your strategy is to get the whole story, the complete picture, all the facts. Finally, you will employ an "evaluative" approach to listening when buying an automobile or listening to a political speech. These are times to set your emotions aside and evaluate the "pros" and "cons" of what is being said.

In using these varied strategies, you need to be flexible. You must think about the situation at hand and actively decide how to listen. Shifting your mental gears as you encounter different situations to meet the need at hand will make you a more effective listener and a more productive leader.

Secret 4: be intentional in listening

If we want to really hear people, if we want our congregations to trust us and follow our leadership, *we need to be intentional in the practice of listening.* Listen carefully at a church dinner or at a ball game. Listen to worshipers as they enter and leave the church. Set aside some specific time to be intentionally present without being busy or in a hurry. Ask questions that encourage people to open up and talk. Ask them about their jobs, their children, or their hobbies. Invite them to talk about their relationship with God. Pray with them. Ask them about their most difficult challenges—at work or at home.

Make good listening the first priority of every committee meeting, every class, and every counseling session. At the board meeting encourage people to talk. Listen carefully to each concern and opinion.

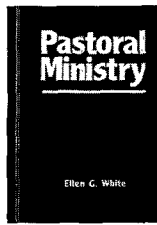
As we listen, we will build our credibility as a pastoral leader. Our congregations will know that we care about them and will award us their trust. Good listening will help us realize more of our leadership potential. ■

¹The Personal Listening Profile is developed and produced by the Carlson Learning Company and is available through Discovery Resources (1-800-291-3868).

²For detailed discussion of these strategies, see the Personal Listening Profile.

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People in crisis turn to pastors. But what happens when pastors or their spouses find themselves in trouble?

During our recent World Ministers Council in Australia, Archibald Hart of Fuller Theological Seminary identified five crises that affect ministers and four that afflict their spouses. These crises are virtually universal among clergy and their families, transcending locality and culture.

With Hart's permission we briefly note each crisis and introduce a writers' contest in which we invite you to prepare an article about your personal experience in one of these areas. Winning authors will be awarded US\$500, and the articles will become chapters in a book to be published with a special introduction by Hart.

Crises pastors face

1. Crises of identity. One great hazard of ministry is role immersion, in which professional functions become so enmeshed with personal identity that we cannot distinguish where our pastoral role ends and where we, as persons, begin. Who we are as persons becomes defined by what we do.

In Leonard Bernstein's *Mass*, a priest, preparing to celebrate the Eucharist, tries on robe after robe until the weight is so heavy that he can no longer stand up. Then he takes off one robe after another until he is finally down to a sweatshirt, blue jeans, and bare feet.

Startled as if by some great discovery, he exclaims: "Look at me! There is nothing but me under all of this." The challenge is to know when you have on your robe and when you take it off. And unless you take it off occasionally, you'll have a difficult time knowing who you are.

Ultimately, as you approach retirement, surrendering your role becomes dreaded as a curse rather than welcomed as a much-deserved blessing. Often prominent leaders have tremendous difficulty laying down the

baton of ministry. Even if they hand it on, they cannot let it go. So the new leader is continually pulled back by the predecessor.

2. Crises of priority. Pastors must discover what God really wants—worship and service—and prioritize His purposes. We want success, but God is more interested in our development. Hebrews 11:13 says: "These all died in faith, not having received the promises." Today many pastors die in faith without knowing the impact their lives have made. A surprise awaits them in glory.

3. Crises of character. The integrity of the gospel is judged by the integrity of those who preach it. This calls for intense heart-searching. In his book *The Sexual Man*, Hart reports that the sexuality of male believers—including clergy—is fraught with obsessive-compulsive

Common Crises for Clergy

JAMES A. CRESS

behavior. This issue is so little comprehended that often a parishioner is safer seeing a competent nonbelieving counselor than an unskilled clergyman. The secular code of ethics often transcends what churches expect from pastors. All this talk about "restoration" of pastors who have disgraced themselves and their calling would not occur in the secular counseling professions, which do not offer "second chances" for sexual misconduct.

4. Crises of authority. Many pastors are confused about what their authority is in the church. Many members who are boomers and busters do not believe that their pastor, or anyone else, has any unique authority. Somehow pastors must reclaim their legitimate authority in spiritual leadership while also abandoning presumptuous claims to make dictatorial decisions or to control all aspects of church life.

5. Crises of dependency. Too many clergy seem to have exiled themselves to a pastoral Patmos, becoming solo performers rather than team builders. They are solitary performers on a spiritual stage, grandstanding for the audience. This style of "ministry" betrays a number of dysfunctions, but on this point I would ask only the question: "For whom are we performing?" Let's focus on God's approval and stop the crowd-pleasing antics.

Crises pastoral spouses face

Hart also pointed out four crises afflicting pastoral spouses because of the unbalanced lives of their partners. These involve the sufferings of pastoral wives, although men who are pastoral spouses have their own challenges.

1. Crises of isolation. Pastoral wives are often warned: "Be careful who you make friends with! Don't make others jealous." On the contrary, suggests Hart, your wife needs one particular friend so close and so trusted that she can hear a complaint about anything—even you! This confidant and prayer partner is a "Jesus friend," because she represents His love in a unique way that nobody else can.

2. Crises of stagnation. Far too many pastoral spouses stop growing spiritually and sometimes educationally and emotionally. Few pastors fulfill the spiritual needs of their own wives. Hart asserts: "It is not easy for your wife to sit Sabbath after Sabbath listening to your recycled sermons, watching you repeat the same mistakes, or tell the same embarrassing stories." Even pristine, thought-provoking sermons will have little spiritual impact on someone you argued with on the way to church that morning. Your wife must find sources of spiritual nourishment beyond what you provide, primarily through her own study of the Word.

3. Crises of competing loyalties. Often when people complain about the pastor, they go to his wife, expecting her to deliver their message. Hart recommends that pastoral spouses refuse to allow themselves to be triangulated between members and their pastor/partner. They can simply respond:

Continued on next page

Common Crises for Clergy

Continued from previous page

"Please speak to my husband yourself. I have so many things to talk to him about that I can't deliver messages from others."

4. Crises of codependency. Many pastoral wives try to rescue their spouse from his self-inflicted troubles. They see their role as eternal peacemakers responsible to mop up his messes. For example, one pastor and his daughter had not communicated for several years. The wife/mother tried to mend the relationship by purchasing a greeting card as if it had come from the daughter. She imagined herself creating an atmosphere of reconciliation, but only brought their animosity upon herself. Hart recommends leaving the responsibility where it belongs: "Let him sink or swim, preferably sink, so he can learn a lesson. Don't try to rescue your spouse from every foolishness he causes." ■

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Law, Sabbath, Gospel, and Jesus

Continued from page 4

He came to fulfill it, or again, to fully express its meaning. Thus in dealing with the Sabbath in His ministry in Palestine He constantly sought to open up the real meaning of the Sabbath and to release it from the hold that misled religious leaders had put on it. He came, if you like, to give the seventh day a mature Christian expression.

It is my hope that this edition of *Ministry* will do the same. ■

¹E. G. White, *Selected Messages* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1958), book 1, p. 233.

²*Ibid.*, p. 234.

Sabbath: Nailed to the Cross?

Continued from page 15

did not carefully spell out the kind of Sabbathkeeping he advocated should not surprise us. Paul often rebuked what he considered foolish practices without giving, in that context, detailed instruction on proper behavior. Furthermore, his own practice of teaching and preaching Sabbath after Sabbath was so well known he probably felt it slightly absurd to spell out in detail what they had seen him doing every Sabbath. ■

¹See Clinton E. Arnold, *The Colossian*

Syncretism (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996), p. 198.

²See William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 769.

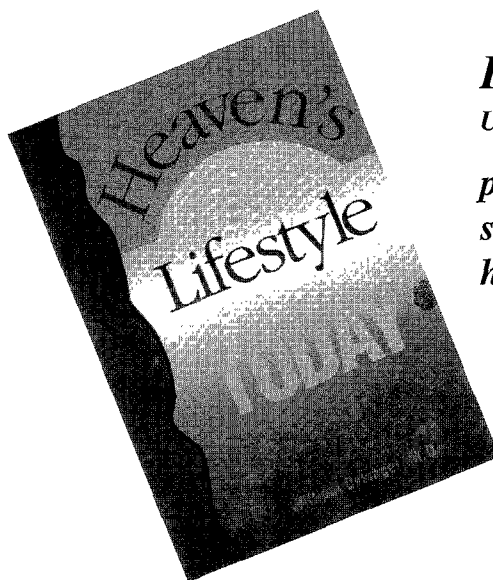
³See T. K. Abbott, *The International Critical Commentary on Colossians and Ephesians* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1897), p. 263.

⁴See H. C. G. Moule, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Colossians and to Philemon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932), p. 109.

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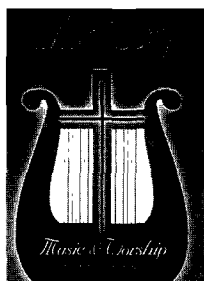
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KUDOS

Associated Church Press presents annual awards

At its annual meeting, the Associated Church Press honored publications for outstanding journalistic coverage during 1996. *Ministry* was pleased to receive the Award of Merit for the September cover and honorable mention for the December cover. Both were designed by Harry Knox. Judging for the event was done by the Medill School of Journalism at Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois.

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BOOKS

Heaven's Lifestyle Today. William Dysinger, M.D., Published by the Ministerial Association of the General Conference, 1997. 160 pp., paperback, \$12.95.

The aim of this modest work is fourfold: to show the Creator's wisdom and care as manifested in the human body, to demonstrate the good ways in life to take care of that body, to show the harmful ways in which we can damage that marvelous creation, and to put all of this in the context of the three angels' messages of Revelation. It is an ambitious task, but it is done well.

The wisdom of the Creator is manifested in such intricate mechanisms as the use of DNA for heredity with which to build up the body and the extraordinary functions of the eye and red blood cells. The chapter on good and bad nutrition is up-to-date with the latest information on antioxidants and phytochemicals. Empty calories are warned against. Water is good, but alcohol and caffeine drinks are not. Fresh air, sunshine, exercise, and adequate rest are recommended.

It is not enough to have a healthy body; that healthy body should be used to worship the Creator who gave it in the first place. In this way emphasis is placed upon various aspects of the health

message of Seventh-day Adventists such as public health studies on the extra longevity of Adventists and the Newstart program. All of these aspects of health are deftly interwoven with the messages of the three angels of Revelation 14. One would think that this could be rather strong medicine but it is handled skillfully in this book. *Heaven's Lifestyle Today* is strongly recommended to the general reader who would like to know more about the wisdom and care of the body, and to pastors who are interested in using health studies as a part of their ministry.—*William H. Shea, M.D., Biblical Research Institute, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.*

The Path: Creating Your Mission Statement for Work and for Life. Laurie Beth Jones. Hyperion Press, hardcover.

When reading *Jesus CEO* I thought it one of the best books written on management, psychology, and practical theology. But LBJ has done it again—with *The Path: Creating Your Mission Statement for Work and for Life*. Okay, so it sounds like another management/consultant/guru thing. Wrong, wrong, wrong! In *The Path*, Laurie Beth Jones comes down to earth and works Monday morning theology, practical psychology, and management into a seamless garment of spectacular worth. Her step-by-step evaluation process is not for the fainthearted. She calls for genuinely deep personal introspection and self-examination. She challenges the ho-hum assumptions of the status quo, yet her challenges are not a feminist "in-your-face" approach. Rather they are intricately crafted, deliciously worded, and thoroughly illustrated with Scripture and historical examples.

If you lead any group of two or more, do them and yourself a favor: read this book. Even if you don't see yourself as a megaleader, personal application of this volume will enrich and more than likely change your life and worldview.

A book like this is a treasure to be shared, not a relic to be warehoused. It

takes only a short time to read, but by slowing down and doing the suggested writing exercises, you will come away enriched and more focused regardless of where you may or may not be in any organizational chart. On top of it all, it is a beautifully printed volume that cries out "this is quality stuff" when you merely hold it in your hand.—Richard Stenbakken, director, Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

Sabbath Time: Understanding and Practice for Contemporary Christians.

Tilden Edwards. The Seabury Press, Minneapolis, 1982, 125 pages, paperback.

Tilden Edwards, director of the Shalem Institute in Washington, D.C., presents a well argued case for Sabbath renewal. His blend of Bible, church history, and practical implications is intelligent, challenging, and helpful. Especially meaningful for me is a brief section of one chapter on Sabbath as play, and the laughter that locates us in God's good world. Also, his presentation of the shabbat meal rituals at the beginning and ending of Sabbath opened a fresh experience for our family when the children were small.

Making Sunday Special. Karen Burton Mains. Word Books, Waco, Texas, 1987, paperback, 191 pages.

Karen and David Mains from the Chapel of the Air radiobroadcast have been a creative force in church and family ministry for almost three decades. This book is another example of Christian leaders attempting to bring fresh thinking and practical ideas to the opportunity of keeping a sabbath. The authors rework the ancient Jewish tradition of the evening meals at the gates of Sabbath time. I have used their material with happy effect in my own family's Sabbath keeping.

The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man. Abraham Joshua Heschel. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1951.

Here is a book that can be called the most important one on Sabbath published in the last 200 years. Rabbi Heschel approaches Sabbath with a spirit of celebration and joy. To Heschel, Sabbath is not just a bulwark against the world, but a "day on which we learn the art of surpassing civilization."

Rabbi Heschel is passionate about Sabbath. Consider some of his eloquent expressions: The "exodus from tension," "a sanctuary in time." "There is a song in the wind and joy in the trees. The sabbath arrives in the world, scattering a song in the silence of the night: eternity utters a day." "In the Sabbath," Heschel says, "man is touched by a moment of actual redemption."

The author is certain that the radiance of Sabbath joy would inflame all people. "There are few ideas in the world of thought which contain so much spiritual power as the idea of the Sabbath. Aeons hence, when of many of our cherished theories only shreds will remain, that cosmic tapestry will continue to shine."

Gates of Shabbat: A Guide for Observing Shabbat. Rabbi Mark Do Cheaper. Central Conference of American Rabbis, New York, 1991, 141 pages, paperback.

This book is "written in the spirit of Reform Judaism," and is useful for Sabbath beginners as well as the experienced. "It includes the basic ceremonies necessary for introducing Sabbath into the home plus background material on the origins and purposes of the various rituals." Written for contemporary Jews, it has wonderful implications for Christians as well.

Keeping the Sabbath Wholly: Ceasing, Resting, Embracing, Feasting. Marva J. Dawn. William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, 1989, 213 pages, paperback.

Marva Dawn has constructed her book around four great themes of the Sabbath experience. And experience is exactly what her book is about. Sabbath is not a

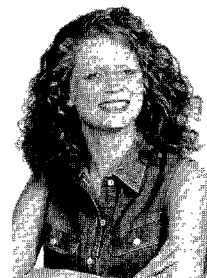
doctrine to be defended, but a practice to be engaged.

Each section presents what the Bible says, drawing practical, doable ideas that bring life to Sabbath experience. For example, the author speaks of Sabbath ceasing—to cease not only from work itself, but also from the need to accomplish and be productive, from the worry and tension that accompany our modern criterion of efficiency, from our efforts to be in control of our lives as if we were God, from our possessiveness and our enculturation, and from the humdrum and meaninglessness that result when life is pursued without the Lord at the center.

She then beautifully fulfills this and other like intentions. The book is inspiring and practical.—Andy McRae, associate pastor, Sligo church, Takoma Park, Maryland.

INTRODUCING

Sheila Draper, *Ministry's* newest staff member, joined the Ministerial



Association last September, working as an editorial assistant for the journal. A native of Greeneville, Tennessee, Sheila graduated from Southern College

(now Southern Adventist University) in 1991 with bachelor's degrees in English and Office Administration. Before coming to *Ministry*, she worked for the Department of Pathfinder, Camp, and Adventurer Ministries in the North American Division. Her many duties for *Ministry* include keying new articles, maintaining the author database, recording new manuscript submissions, circulating articles to readers, and most recently, desktop production for the journal. Away from the office, she enjoys reading, cooking, sightseeing, listening to music, running, and spending time with family, friends, and her cat Basil.

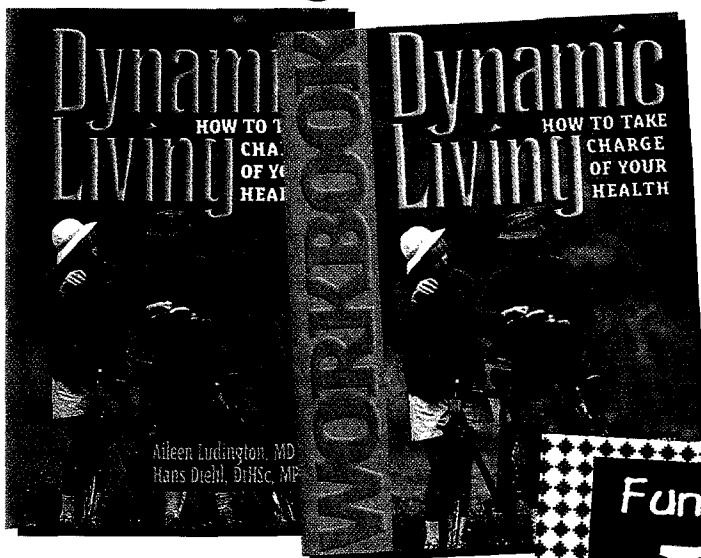
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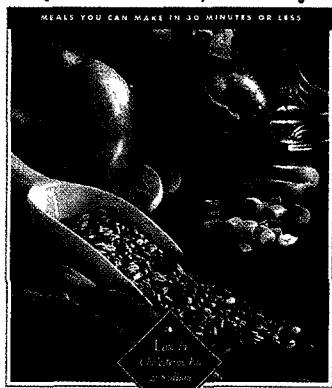
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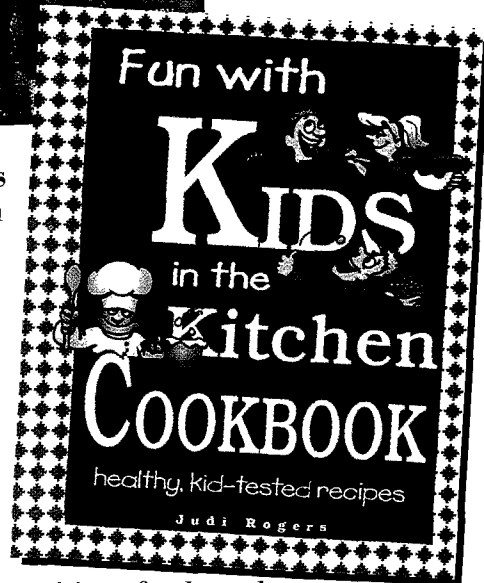
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