



Reflections

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Pope Francis, 666, and Time Setting

BY EKKEHARDT MUELLER

With the abdication of Pope Benedict XVI and the election of Pope Francis speculations abound not only among various Christian denominations but also among a number of Adventist church members. When elected, pope Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio adopted a new papal name that has not been used in the past. The last time this happened was with John Paul I, and even this was an exception after more than a millennium in which no new papal names had been taken on. The new pope will be called Francis, not Francis I. Only if a later pope would choose the same name, would he be renamed Francis I. The internet is full of articles and discussions about papal names. In addition, the new pope is the first Jesuit on the papal throne. Jesuits were instrumental in launching the counter-reformation and developed both preterism and futurism. Their relation to the papacy was of such a nature that at times they were the pope's most faithful followers and elite army and at times they were suppressed. All this contributes to extensive speculations, fears, and certain expectations, including the claim that Christ's second coming must happen during the reign of the present pope.

Theories about Popes and the Number 666

Theories of individuals such as F. S. Fowler, Jr. and Ralph Myers have caused discomfort among Adventists in the past. They may continue to raise a number of questions.

Franklin S. Fowler Jr., a medical doctor who publishes the journal *EndTime Issues* . . . and maintains his own ministry, called "Prophecy Research Initiative," suggested in 1999 that the seven heads of the beast in Revelation 17, on which the harlot Babylon sits, are not major political or religious-political powers from the past to the present but popes that have ruled since 1929. He proposed that the five heads that

are fallen are Pius XI, Pius XII, John XXIII, Paul VI, and John Paul I.¹ In his opinion, the "one who is" represents John Paul II. The eighth is the papacy, but so is the beast.² "The woman (the Catholic Church), the beast (the papacy, the Holy See, the Vatican state) and the heads (the popes, leaders of the Holy See) are all next to each other."³ But Fowler suggests also that the eighth is Satan. Protestantism supposedly represents the ten horns consisting of "orthodox churches [!], Evangelicals (including Assemblies, Pentecostals, Four-Square), Episcopal/Anglican, Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, Baptist, Christian Reform, Jehovah's Witnesses [!], Church of the Nazarene [!]."⁴

Ralph Myers went further. He developed a specific interpretation of 666, while Pope John Paul II was still alive. For him the heads of the scarlet beast were names of popes. The number 666 is related to the seven heads of Revelation 17. Since 1798 seven papal names have been used, namely Pius, Leo, Gregory, Benedict, John, Paul, and John Paul. During the history of the church these papal names occurred as follows: Pius twelve times, Leo thirteen times, Gregory sixteen times, Benedict supposedly fourteen times,⁵ John supposedly twenty-one times,⁶ Paul six times, and John Paul twice. Myers had to make some adjustments and occasionally deviated from the official counting of the Catholic Church because at times more than one pope was reigning. The one who was not considered legitimately elected, even if he had a considerable following of cardinals, was an antipope. By adding the numbers he came up with the number 665. Therefore, he insisted that one more pope would come, the eighth, taking a completely new name so that 666 would be reached. Then the end would come. In case the new pope would choose a previously taken name, he would be an antipope that would be disposed soon. After Joseph Ratzinger chose the name Benedict and Myers' initial fulfillment of his prophecy failed, the exception provided by him kicked in. So later he wrote: "Joseph Ratzinger, AKA Benedict XVI (XV) will be deposed, and attacked by an angry mob in the Vatican courtyard and trampled to death. I have no idea when this will happen. It was in the vision."⁷

This part of his prediction has not yet been fulfilled, and its fulfillment is more or less irrelevant because Benedict XVI has retired as reigning pope. However,

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interestingly enough the new pope, following Benedict XVI took on a new name, and people may believe that basically Myers is right, or they may develop their own system, similar to his. One website contains the following chart:

Head Name	Number	Count
1 Pius XII.....	(12).....	78
2 Leo XIII.....	(13).....	91
3 Gregory XVI.....	(16).....	136
4 Benedict XIV.....	(14).....	105
5 John XXI.....	(21).....	231
6 Paul VI.....	(6).....	21
7 John Paul II.....	(2).....	3
Antipope.....	Benedict XVI.....	0
8 Antichrist.....	New Name..(1).....	1
Total.....		666 ⁸

Other websites already claim that with Pope Francis the number 666 has been fulfilled, following the same or a similar system of counting papal names.

Assumptions and Their Evaluation

However, such a method of calculation rests on the following assumptions that have not been proven or even discussed in a reasonable way:

First Assumption: *The sea beast and the scarlet beast are the same beast.* R. Myers' and his followers' entire argument collapses if it cannot be shown that the two beasts are identical. That the two beasts are identical may be so or not. But at this point it is enough to point out that it is a mere assumption—far from being proven—that sea beast and scarlet beast describe the same power. Other proposals by Adventist scholars exist that would not equate the two beasts.⁹ In any case, Adventists have maintained that the sea beast of Revelation 13:1 is the same entity as the little horn power of Daniel 7 and represents papal Rome. It has been suggested that the scarlet beast, which does not come out of the sea but out of the abyss, may represent Satan, using political powers to support end time Babylon. When the Church has not made a definite decision and Scripture is being interpreted differently within Adventism, we have to be tentative with our conclusions.

Second Assumption: *The interpretation of the number 666 depends on the understanding of the heads of the scarlet beast in Revelation 17 of which “five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come” (Rev 17:10), and then there is an eighth.* The number 666 (Rev 13:18) needs to be interpreted in its immediate context of Revelation 13. Connecting it with the heads of the scarlet beast is not suggested by the text of Revelation. However, it is evident that the number 666 is the number of the sea beast (Rev 15:2).¹⁰ Beale states: “The discussion so far points to understanding the number of the beast collectively rather than as a reference to an individual Antichrist figure.”¹¹ This is what Adventists have held and still maintain. From this perspective, the excitement about an individual pope is not very productive.

Third Assumption: *The seven heads of Revelation 17 are related*

to popes and papal names. The seven heads should be found in history and not only in the end time because the beast does not only exist in the last time of earth's history. Interestingly, the heads are not involved in the defeat of harlot Babylon. Those that have been in alliance with Babylon and will turn against her are the scarlet beast and its horns (Rev 17:12–14). The heads are also called mountains and kings (Rev 17:9–10). In biblical prophecy, especially, apocalyptic prophecy, mountains stand for kingdoms not for individual rulers or ecclesiastical leaders. The mountain in Daniel 2:35 represents the everlasting kingdom of God (Dan 2:44–45). According to Jeremiah



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51:25 the Neo-Babylon Empire of the 6th century B.C. was a “destroying mountain.” Likewise the kings have to be understood as kingdoms. The four kings mentioned in Daniel 7:17 are not individual rulers but kingdoms (Dan 7:23). Although in Daniel 2:37–38 king Nebuchadnezzar is identified with the golden head, the next metal of the image is identified with a kingdom (Dan 2:39) which suggests that verses 37–39 do not refer to Nebuchadnezzar’s kingship only but to the Babylonian kingdom. Nothing indicates that the heads have to be understood as individual popes or even papal names. They rather stand for empires such as Egypt, Medo-Persia, Greece, etc.¹² Even the description of 666 as a number of “man” in Revelation 13:18 does not necessarily refer to an individual. “An important parallel is Rev 21:17, . . . where ἀνθρώπου [a human person, humanity] is clearly used generically.”¹³

Fourth Assumption: *The seven papal names have to be counted from 1798 onward.* Although we find a reference to the activity of the sea beast until 1798¹⁴ and in conjunction with the healing of the deadly wound (Rev 13:3),¹⁵ there is no indication that the number 666 will be fulfilled only during the last pope and does not already point to the beast during its existence over the centuries (Rev 13:18). The time period is neither mentioned in chapter 17 nor does it seem to be implied there.

Fifth Assumption: *Although only those papal names are important that were used since 1798, nevertheless their usage has to be traced back through the centuries of church history to the first popes.* This assumption sounds strange and lacks any rationale. If one would start counting papal names from A.D. 1798 why would one include the centuries before, while eliminating other papal names used in these centuries? Such a method is not derived from Scripture but seems to be superimposed on it.

Sixth Assumption: *The number of the usage of respective papal names through history has to be determined by addition (for Pius $1+2+3+4+5+6+7+8+9+10+11+12=78$ because so far there were 12 popes with the name Pius in church history¹⁶), and the numbers of all papal names have to be added again in order to reach 666.* Nothing in the biblical text warrants such an approach. It seems completely arbitrary. There is not even a biblical precedent in Scripture for using such a method. To employ it would introduce a method that is foreign to Scripture and rests on pure speculation. If one would think—against what we have already spelled out above—that the twelve times that the name Pius appears are important, why not count just the number twelve without using such a strange way of addition? And why choose addition at all? Why not decide, for instance, to multiply the numbers?

Seventh Assumption: *The completion of the number 666 points to the imminent return of Jesus. That*

would mean: Jesus will return during the lifetime of the present pope. Revelation 13:18 is not directly associated with Christ’s coming and not at all with date setting. Although individual church members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church have set dates for the second advent, the church itself has not accepted either hard, fixed dates or even soft (i.e. less precise) dates for Jesus’ second coming. While Adventists count on Jesus to come soon and hope that this generation will be the final generation, we avoid time setting in any form. Scripture is clearly opposed to time setting with regard to Christ’s second coming. (Matt 24:36, 42, 44). Some would argue that the Gospels are only opposed to calculating the day and hour but not larger periods but even this is mistaken. Blomberg states well: “‘Day’ and ‘hour’ are regularly used throughout Scripture for ‘time’ in general, not just twenty-four-hour or sixty-minute periods (Matt 10:19). ‘Day’ especially reflects the Old Testament ‘Day of the Lord’ (cf. esp. throughout Zephaniah) as a stock phrase for the end of the age (cf. Matthew’s “day of judgment” in 10:15; 11:22, 24; 12:36; and cf. also Rom 10:21; 1 Cor 4:5; 2 Cor 3:14; Eph 6:13). Matthew 24:42–44 will use ‘day,’ ‘time of night’ (watch), and ‘hour’ interchangeably. ‘Day’ and ‘hour’ appear in synonymous parallelism in v. 50. Hence, Christians who claim they can narrow down the time of Christ’s return to a generation or a year or even a few day’s period, while still not knowing the literal day or hour, remain singularly ill-informed.”¹⁷ Christians/Adventists need to know that the time of the Second Coming is near and they need to watch. This is enough.

Eighth Assumption: *Antipopes should not be counted.* This last point has to do with logic and definition. Myers leaves out certain popes that are considered to be antipopes. That may be acceptable. But if antipopes are understood as popes that have not been duly elected and attempted to reign when there was another pope in office, then this is not true for Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI. He was not a rival to another pope but is considered a legitimate pope. Thus already here the system collapses.

Summary and Conclusion

The approach used by R. Myers and others is exegetically not justifiable because it introduces elements not found in the biblical text and uses a methodology that is not acceptable because it is not derived from Scripture itself.¹⁸ Even if features of his prediction, such as a pope taking on a new papal name, look like an intriguing fulfillment, they have nothing to do with the tenor and interpretation of Revelation. We do not deny that we may have to face interesting and surprising developments with the new pope. We do not deny that the Lord may come during his lifetime. What we question is

that Jesus' second coming can be directly linked to Pope Francis or another pope.

When in 1948 the modern State of Israel was established, a number of Christians considered this a fulfillment of certain Old Testament prophecies. Although the events were impressive, the Adventist church has not seen light in such a suggestion, nor in the suggestion that Old Testament prophecies have been fulfilled in modern Israel. Many of the Old Testament prophecies are conditional and, as the New Testament indicates, will only be fulfilled on a larger and universal scale. In a similar vein, surprising events should not be used to legitimize an otherwise unsubstantiated interpretation of biblical texts.

When it comes to cryptic Bible texts as the one referring to 666, which still awaits its complete fulfillment in connection with the mark of the beast, we should avoid dogmatic or fanciful claims and remain considerate, trusting the Lord that He will guide His church to greater insight when it is needed and not merely to satisfy our curiosity about future events.

While we desire and pray for the Lord to come soon and as we prepare ourselves and others for His coming, we must not in any way set a date for His Coming. This may not only be disastrous but, if not fulfilled, turn secular people away from the most important message for our time, the everlasting gospel of Revelation 14.

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¹Franklin S. Fowler Jr., *The Final Years of the Papacy: Revelation 17* (Granite Falls, WA: Christian Heritage Foundation, 1999), 9.

²Fowler, 12.

³Fowler, 13.

⁴Fowler, 13–15.

⁵The Catholic Church counted fifteen up to John Paul II but Benedict X was an antipope.

⁶The Catholic Church has twenty-three popes with the name "John." Two were antipopes.

⁷<http://english.sdaglobal.org/research/666beast.htm> accessed October 25, 2009.

⁸<http://www.666beast.net>, accessed March 15, 2013.

⁹See Edwin Reynolds, "The Seven-Headed Beast of Revelation 17," *Asia Adventist Seminary Studies* 6 (2003): 103; Ekkehardt Mueller, "The Beast of Revelation 17—A Suggestion," *Reflections: A BRI Newsletter* January, (2005): 2–8. Here is a more extensive and scholarly version: Ekkehardt Mueller, "The Beast of Revelation 17—A Suggestion (Part 1)," *Journal of Asia Adventist Seminary* 10/1 (2007): 27–50; and *ibid.*, "The Beast of Revelation 17—A Suggestion (Part 2)," *Journal of Asia Adventist Seminary* 10/2 (2007): 153–176.

¹⁰See also G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 718.

¹¹Beale, 723.

¹²Cf. Beale, 875; Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2002), 619; and Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, revised edition, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 317. Simon J. Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids Baker Book House, 2001), 471, holds that "the seven hills point to world powers that have their place in history."

¹³David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, Word Biblical Commentary, Vol. 52B (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998), 769.

¹⁴See the 42 months of Rev 13:5 that should be understood according to the year-day-principle. On the year-day-principle see Gerhard Pfandl, "The Year-Day Principle," *Reflections—A BRI Newsletter*, Number 18, April 2007, 1–3.

¹⁵Rev 13:1–4 and Rev 13:5–8 must be understood as parallel passages.

¹⁶According to <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pius> Pope Pius I, saint, Pope 140/142 to 155, Pope Pius II, Pope 1458 to 1474, Pope Pius III, Pope in 1503, Pope Pius IV, Pope 1559 to 1565, Pope Pius V, saint, Pope 1566 to 1572, Pope Pius VI, Pope 1775 to 1799, Pope Pius VII, Pope 1800 to 1823, Pope Pius VIII, Pope 1829 to 1830, Pope Pius IX, Pope 1846 to 1878, Pope Pius X, saint, Pope 1903 to 1914, Pope Pius XI, Pope 1922 to 1939, Pope Pius XII, Pope 1939 to 1958 (accessed March 14, 2013).

¹⁷Craig Blomberg, *Matthew*, The New American Commentary, Vol. 22 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 365.

¹⁸Adventists maintain the Reformation principles of *sola scriptura* (by Scripture alone) and *scriptura sui ipsius interpres* (Scripture is its own interpreter) without falling into proof-texting that does not consider the context and analyze carefully the text/passage under investigation. Further, see Frank Hasel, "Presuppositions in the Interpretation of Scripture," in *Understanding Scripture* (ed. George W. Reid; Biblical Research Institute Studies 1; Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2006), 27–46 and, in the same volume, Ekkehardt Müller, "Guidelines for the Interpretation of Scripture," 111–34.

Preaching Absolute Truth in a Relativistic Society

BY ELIAS BRASIL DE SOUZA

The most urgent need in the Christian Church today is true preaching; and as it is the greatest and the most urgent need in the Church, it is obviously the greatest need of the world also.¹

This short essay is a sequel to my previous article on biblical authority and addresses some of the challenges of preaching biblical truth in the postmodern world. As

noted in academic and popular publications, postmodernity, postmodernism, and derivative words have become trendy terms to characterize the mood of contemporary western culture.² Postmodernism, reacting against the values of modernity and the Enlightenment, takes a subjective approach to knowledge, dislikes metanarratives, praises subjectivity, and abhors absolute values.³ Unsurprisingly this widespread and sweeping cultural trend has made inroads into the churches, notably into the pulpit. Although not everything postmodern is bad in itself,⁴ some side effects of postmodernism need critical examination, notably the subjectivism that when taken to its logical conclusions becomes devastating for a biblical understanding and proclamation of truth. So preaching that is faithful to the Bible must confront the challenges of postmodern culture in its multifaceted aspects.

In addressing contemporary audiences, preachers and teachers need to pay attention to some dilemmas posed by postmodernity.

Objective vs. Subjective

Although subjectivity, feelings, and emotions play a significant role in religious experience, God reveals objective and propositional truth in his word. The trend to emphasize feelings at the expense of thinking and knowing may bring immediate success, but in the long run it may corrode the theological identity of the church. Some preaching trends have advanced a sentimental and relativistic exposition of God's Word. Sermons then become entertainment pieces without touching the real needs of sinners. In some cases, authors of questionable orthodoxy may exert more influence on preachers than the apostles Peter and Paul.⁵ Topics such as how to be a good Christian, how to care for my family, or how to develop sound relationships, are important subjects that deserve attention from the pulpit. However, when such topics are addressed outside or apart from a framework of biblical authority or are regarded as the core and center of the message, it is necessary to bring balance to the preaching schedule: "woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!" (1 Cor 9:16).⁶

Specific vs. Generic

Preachers may be tempted to gloss over the distinctive beliefs of Adventism in order to avoid embarrassment and preserve a friendly relationship with their audience. It may be more comfortable to preach generic Christian messages than to address more specific issues such as Sabbath-keeping, Christian lifestyle, Christian stewardship, or the doctrine of the sanctuary and the investigative judgment. Although generic messages are important, ministers should not neglect our distinctive beliefs, otherwise one may compromise the identity and mission of the church. From time to time, the people

need to be reminded of what constitutes the mission of Seventh-day Adventists, and why they should exist as a distinct denomination. So we need to frame our preaching and teaching of the Bible in light of our mission and responsibilities towards the world. Effective preaching allows the Bible to speak with full force about all aspects of truth: "For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Heb 4:12).

Global vs. Local

Since the middle of the twentieth century, Catholics and Protestants have been confronted with the rise of contextual theologies, especially in the Southern hemisphere. Different types of liberation theologies have claimed to make the Bible relevant for people located in specific social, ethnic, and economic contexts.⁷ Such theologies, however, may be propelled by ideologies at odds with core biblical teachings.⁸ Admittedly, contextualization is necessary in order to make the message relevant to particular cultures and circumstances. Legitimate contextualization, however, does not undermine Biblical truth. Indeed, the theology proclaimed by the church is transcultural and universal, and there should be no local or circumstantial Adventist theologies. There is one church and one theology to be proclaimed from every pulpit and taught at every venue anywhere and everywhere throughout in the world. Needs and challenges may vary from place to place; one aspect of truth may strike deeper cords in some places, but Adventist theology remains one and the same. The three angels are not portrayed as hovering over specific regions of the world. They are flying "in the midst of heaven" (Rev 14:6; cf. vv. 8 and 9), which graphically indicates the universality of the Gospel to be proclaimed to "every tribe and tongue and people and nation" (Rev 5:9).

Exegetic vs. Pneumatic

As a matter of fact, there should be no opposition between exegetic and pneumatic preaching. After all, we need illumination and power from the Spirit in order to do in depth Bible study and then to translate our study into a sermon. The apparent contrast introduced here intends to emphasize that sometimes we risk trusting our own insights, rhetoric, and creativity, at the expense of serious investigation of the Bible. Once in a while people with an air of arrogance and self-sufficiency claim they do not need any Hebrew or Greek in order to prepare their sermons; others may speak of theology as if the term refers to useless speculations about worthless subjects.⁹ Such attitudes—rare among Adventists, hopefully—betray an anti-intellectual bias that characterizes

contemporary culture. In fact, exegesis or serious study of the Bible (to the best of a preacher's own ability), plays a pivotal role in effective and honest preaching. If we take Bible study seriously, we will preach a message rooted in the Bible. Sound theology, far from being a luxury, functions as an indispensable foundation to preserve the integrity of the message and prevents the preacher from preaching half truths or heresies.¹⁰ "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim 2:15).

Biblical vs. Contemporary

Biblical preaching may appear unattractive to contemporary audiences. Therefore some preachers restrict their preaching to felt needs in order to keep the audience. Nonetheless, once we rely on the Spirit of God to do His work, we realize that the Bible remains profoundly relevant and appealing.¹¹ Actually, there is no dichotomy between biblical preaching and contemporary relevance as long as preachers rely on the Spirit without neglecting their exegetical task. In fact, ministers may have to do a double exegesis. They have to exegete the Bible in order to understand God's will revealed therein and, at the same time, have to "exegete" the people they want to reach with God's word. In other words, they have to understand the context and needs of the audience in order to apply the Bible with power and relevance. In essence: "A pastor has to love two things. He has to love to study and he has to love people."¹²

Intellectual vs. Spiritual

It must be clear that these two qualifications are by no means mutually exclusive. Someone may be tempted to justify intellectual sloppiness by appealing to spirituality, but, when it comes to preaching, study and prayer should go hand in hand. Pitting spirituality against intellectuality betrays an incomplete and inadequate perception of ministry. In fact, the danger today is for a preacher to neglect both intellectual and spiritual responsibilities. Internet browsing, endless emails, and other sideline activities may deprive pastors of precious time that otherwise could be devoted to Bible study and prayer. Be that as it may, there is really no excuse for neglecting intellectual work, just as Paul clearly expressed in his advice to Timothy: "Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine" (1 Tim 4:13). "Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine" (1 Tim 4:16).

Vocational vs. Professional

There is room for professionalism in preaching and ministry if the term is understood in the sense of educated, effective, and disciplined action. However, if the preach-

er's main motivation comes from anything less than loving and pleasing God, the first victim is truth since such a ministry stands upon a lie. As Wittgenstein forcefully asserted, the "truth can be spoken only by someone who is already at home in it; not by someone who still lives in falsehood and reaches out from falsehood towards truth on just one occasion."¹³ Preaching the truth in the contemporary world requires a preacher/minister with a strong sense of God's call. Only this type of minister is capable of preaching what people need, not only what they want. The apostle Paul had a strong conviction of the divine calling and its implications (Gal 1:15, 16), which provides a model for contemporary preachers: "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Gal 2:20).

Digital vs. Analogical

Changes in culture and society usually come intertwined with technological innovations. The current interface between culture and technology has created new challenges and opportunities that more than ever demand adaptability and creativity. That is, in order to communicate the present truth in ways that are more attractive and relevant to the present generation, we may need to adapt or even abandon some of the old "analogical" ways of doing things and envision more attractive and compelling "digital" methods of communicating the absolute truth in a culture saturated with technology and new ways of thinking and doing things. Such methodological innovations, however, should not relativize the absolute claims of the Scriptures. New methods are valid only insofar as they succeed in making the biblical metanarrative more accessible, compelling, and relevant to contemporary audiences. "For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law; to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law; to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. Now this I do for the gospel's sake, that I may be partaker of it with you" (1 Cor 9:19–23).

Biblically Correct vs. Politically Correct

The pluralism and self-gratification of postmodernity abhors value judgments on the basis of any absolute norms. However, in spite of its antagonistic view of truth, postmodernism, ironically and arbitrarily reestablishes truth by means of what came to be called

“political correctness,”¹⁴ which in postmodern terms means, among other things, to accept and condone all kinds of lifestyles to the detriment of any absolute truth. In some places such “political correctness” has crept into the legal system and any challenge to it may result in serious penalties. Admittedly, in some situations to being politically correct may be tantamount to be biblically correct. Nevertheless, there may also be cases in which a conflict arises between political correctness and biblical correctness on an issue vital to the carrying out our message and mission. In such situations a preacher/minister who dares to be biblically correct may risk fines, imprisonment, and even life-threatening penalties. Although ministers should always be prudent and respectful of the laws of the land, should a conflict arise between “biblical correctness” and “political correctness,” those caught in such dilemmas ought to remember the courageous attitude of Daniel’s friends. These three young men did not bend before the powerful King Nebuchadnezzar. When required under the death penalty to perform a “politically correct” action, they courageously opted to remain “biblically correct.” As the inspired text reports, “Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego answered and said to the king, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up” (Dan 3:16–18). Another example of courage under like circumstances comes from Peter and the other apostles. Confronted by the enemies of the gospels, they boldly stated, “We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29).

Universal vs. Particular

Postmodernity denounces universal explanations as oppressive and places strong emphasis on particular, local and personal stories. It ought to be recognized that there is some grain of truth to this perspective.¹⁵ On the one hand, totalitarian regimes have used metanarratives to facilitate domination;¹⁶ on the other, the Bible reveals a God engaged with personal stories and involved in restoring broken lives. Moreover, in the incarnation God bound himself with the particularities of space, time, and culture. However, as we announce the gospel and nurture the church, we should never forget that particular and individual stories and experiences find their ultimate meaning in the grand story of God’s universal plan of salvation. Although personal stories and experiences have their place in the sermon, preachers ought to relate them to the biblical metanarrative of the great controversy and its culmination in the new creation. The restoration of broken lives—in the particularities of

space, time, and culture—converges with the grand story of God. As John the Revelator expressed so beautifully: “And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, *was* the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each *tree* yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree *were* for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him, They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever (Rev 22:1–5).

Conclusion

Solemn responsibilities lie on the shoulder of those called to preach God’s truth to the contemporary world. To proclaim God’s word effectively has become a challenging enterprise amidst a society that relativizes truth and craves for what is “politically correct.” Nonetheless, faithful preachers have the privilege of proclaiming the full message of salvation to an increasingly anxious and agonizing world. Such preaching reaches the audience as a full-fledged announcement of God’s eternal and universal plan to bring restoration to people from every “tribe and tongue and people and nation” in order to make them “kings and priests to our God” (Rev 5:9, 10).



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¹Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers* (Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 1971), 9.

²See David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1990).

³R. Scott Smith, *Truth and the New Kind of Christian: The Emerging Effects of Postmodernism in the Church*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2005.

⁴For a positive approach to postmodernism and James K. A. Smith, *Who’s Afraid of Postmodernism?: Taking Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault to Church*. The Church and Postmodern Culture. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006. See also Graham Ward, *The Politics of Discipleship: Becoming Postmaterial Citizens*. The Church and Postmodern Culture (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009).

⁵See Phil A. Newton, “Biblical Preaching,” *Reformation and Revival* 9:1 (2000), 14. Phil A. Newton, “Biblical Preaching,” *Reformation and Revival* 9:1 (2000), 13.

⁶Biblical quotations follow the New King James.

⁷See Sharon E. Heaney, *Contextual Theology for Latin America: Liberation Themes in Evangelical Perspective* (Milton Keynes: Colorado Springs, CO, 2008); for useful summaries, see also: H.

M. Conn, “Liberation Theology” in *New Dictionary of Theology*, eds.: Sinclair B. Ferguson and J. I. Packer (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 387–391; K. Bediako, “African Christian Theology” in *ibid*, 8–10; Bediako, “Black Theology” in *ibid*, 103–105.

⁸See Amin A. Rodor, “The Concept of the Poor in the Context of the Ecclesiology of Liberation Theology,” Th.D. diss., Andrews University, 1986.

⁹John Hannah thus summarized this situation: “In our day, theology is regarded as an irrelevant, even destructive topic for the health of the church. Parishioners are more attuned to quick, easy solutions to their questions—the gratification of felt-needs and slick and easily grasped answers—instead of the pain of reflection and mental exertion. Pastors, not desiring to bore the flock of God or unnecessarily divide them, seem to view theology as a subject to be broached with extreme caution, even embarrassment, while waxing eloquent on topics that are hardly the central focus of God’s revelation to us. Though perhaps a cruel judgment, it can be argued that contemporary sermonic fare deals far more frequently with self-help and psychological issues than with the knowledge of the character of God, leading to behavior that is the fruit of sound theology” (“The Place of Theology in the Postmodern World: Is the Study of Theology and History an Antiquated Discipline?” *Reformation and Revival* 11:1 [2002], 12).

¹⁰Catherine Hilbert, “Preaching and Theology: Rethinking the

Relationship,” *Worship* 65:5 (1991), 404.

¹¹“Perhaps one of the problems that has necessitated a watering-down of truth in the pulpit is a shallow theology of the Holy Spirit. Rather than believing the Spirit of God can penetrate calloused minds with the Word of God, preachers have sought to use clever devices and techniques to persuade hearers” (Newton, 20).

¹²Victor Gordon, “The Calling of the Preacher,” *Reformation and Revival* 9:1 (2000), 57.

¹³“Nur der kann sie sagen, der schon in ihr ruht; nicht der, der noch in der Unwahrheit ruht, und nur einmal aus der Unwahrheit heraus ihr langt” (Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984], 35). Translated by Philip D. Kenneson “There’s No Such Thing as Objective Truth, and It’s a Good Thing, Too,” *Culture and Value, Christian Apologetics in the Postmodern World*, ed. by Timothy R. Phillips and Dennis L. Okholm (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 170.

¹⁴David K. Clark, “Narrative Theology and Apologetics,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 36:4 (1993), 497; D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 13–54.

¹⁵See John D. Caputo, *What Would Jesus Deconstruct? The Good News of Postmodernism for the Church*. The Church and Postmodern Culture (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic), 2007.

¹⁶See Doris L. Bergen, *Twisted Cross: The German Christian Movement in the Third Reich* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996). See also Eric Metaxas, *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2010).

SCRIPTURE APPLIED

Stewardship of Gifts and Talents

BY EKKEHARDT MUELLER

Newspapers and magazines are filled with reports about sports “heroes,” especially during world championships and the Olympic Games. We admire their skills, strength, and tenacity. The same is true for top musicians, artists, and writers. There are the actors with their incredible ability to play quite different roles, imitating real life. We admire CEOs who lead huge companies and make a lot of money. We think highly of scientists that unlock natural mysteries. All these people have specific talents. Sometimes we wish we would have the same or similar gifts and be more than just “ordinary” people. But we have also received talents and gifts. Although they may not appear to be important, these gifts may sometimes be more crucial than the spectacular ones.

I. Talents and Gifts Are Given by God

All gifts and talents are entrusted to us by God. He has not only given us time, material possessions, and our

body, but also talents and gifts—James 1:17. They are not our own but should be used according to the principles of stewardship that we have discussed previously.

1. Natural Gifts

People have received natural gifts. They possess these gifts whether they are believers or unbelievers. The Bible mentions, for instance, craftsmen, musicians (Rev 18:22), and poets (Acts 17:28).

2. Spiritual Gifts

There are spiritual gifts (*charismata*) given to those who have received the gift (*dōrea*) of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38), that is to believers in Jesus Christ.

Spiritual gifts come from God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:4–6, 11; Eph 4:8, 11). However, it seems that at least in some cases natural gifts can be enhanced and can also become spiritual gifts. See the craftsmen that were responsible for building the tabernacle—Exod 31:1–6.

II. Spiritual Gifts in the New Testament

1. Lists of Spiritual Gifts

The New Testament contains three major lists of spiritual gifts:

1 Cor 12:7–11, 28–30

This is the most comprehensive list, mentioning many gifts and explaining issues related to these gifts.

Rom 12:6–8

About seven gifts are men-

Eph 4:11

tioned in this passage such as prophecy and teaching. Here we find apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers.

Apart from these lists other spiritual gifts occur here and there in Scripture. That means that not even the three lists combined are exhaustive or comprehensive, not even the three lists together.

2. Differences Between the Spiritual Gifts

Some of these spiritual gifts are more spectacular (healing, working miracles, tongues, prophecy) than others (speaking wisdom or knowledge, teaching, having discernment, service, exhortation, helping, charity, and performing acts of mercy). Some look similar to natural gifts while others are clearly supernatural. Yet all come directly from God. Some gifts are related to leadership (apostles, teachers, pastors), while others are not. However all gifts are needed—1 Cor 12:14–22.

3. Calling and Gifts

In addition, there is a distinction between gift and commission. For example, all believers are called to go and make disciples of all nations (Matt 28:19), however only some have the specific gift of evangelism. All believers are called to be hospitable (Rom 12:13; Heb 13:2), but some have a specific gift of hospitality (1 Pet 4:9–10). The ministry of persons with specific gifts can be especially fruitful in the area in which they have received such a gift.

4. Permanence of Gifts

The lists do not indicate that certain spiritual gifts are limited with regard to time. While none of the spiritual gifts had ceased at the end of the first century, but they seem to be needed till Christ's second coming (1Cor 13:9–10; Eph 4:13), the Holy Spirit may determine to use some gifts more abundantly in certain eras.

III. The Distribution of Spiritual Gifts

1 Cor 12:7

Each true Christian has received at least one spiritual gift in addition to natural faculties and talents.

Acts 2:38

Prerequisites for receiving spiritual gifts are repentance, receiving the Holy Spirit and baptism.

Matt 7:21–23

Even miracles may not be evidence that divine power has been in operation. They may be counterfeits. It is important to do the will of God.

1 Cor 12:31

One can desire specific spiritual gifts, but the Holy Spirit decides which gift(s) to grant (1 Cor 12:11).

IV. The Purpose of the Gifts

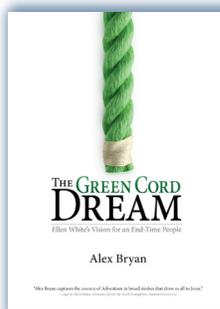
- The gifts are given for the “common good,” for the benefit of various individuals as well as for the entire church and the completion of its mission—1 Cor 12:7; 1 Pet 4:10.
- Gifts can be directed toward serving the church in order to maintain a functioning body—1 Cor 12:12–26, furthering love, service, unity, and knowledge as well as admonition and building up the church—Eph 4:12; 1Cor 14:3.
- Gifts can be directed outwardly in the sense of mission outreach. This is true for the gift of tongues (see Acts 2), the gift of evangelism, and others.
- With the gift comes a task and responsibility. We must use our gifts for the benefit of others, and yet we will personally be blessed too—Matt 25:14–30.
- Spiritual gifts are given so that God may be glorified—1 Pet 4:10–11.

V. Personal Questions

- Which gifts have I received from the Lord?
- How can I find out?
- How can I use my natural talents and spiritual gifts for God's cause?

May the Lord abundantly bless us as we personally explore these questions in order to better serve Him.

BOOK NOTES



Alex Bryan, *The Green Cord Dream*. Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2012, 125 pp. US\$ 12.99.

The title of this book refers to a dream fifteen-year old Ellen Harmon had in 1842, in which an angel handed her a closely coiled up green cord and told her to stretch it to the utmost, if she wished to see Jesus. With this reference to young Ellen's dream the author wants to capture the essence of his message – the centrality of Jesus in Adventist thinking. The Adventist church is in crisis, he says, and what we need are Green-Cord dreams emerging from every generation of Adventists. In short, we need Jesus.

The book has eight chapters which are summarized

in the form of questions in the last chapter. Chapter one: Will Jesus be everything in Adventism? Chapter two: Will Adventism be humble and generous in the way Jesus was, or will we boast much about ourselves and thereby become more isolated from the rest of Christianity? Chapter three: Will we desire the Bible again—as a way to fall in love with Jesus? Chapter four: Will we live for heaven alone, or will we live to create heaven on earth—the prayer vision of Jesus? Chapter five: Will we crave violence, wealth, and power, or will we humbly choose peace, simplicity, and service? Chapter six: Will we get lost in minor theological disputes and church spats, or will we choose Jesus instead of the accusations of Satan? Chapter seven: Will we honor and celebrate our bodies as Christ’s creation? Chapter eight: What will we think about the end times?

The style is appealing to the modern generation that is used to texting and twitter: short sentences, frequently in bullet form. The language is fresh-and-down to earth with many personal illustrations. At times it maybe too down-to-earth. To compare the Bible to a “dirty pan” (p. 42) may not exactly engender respect for it among the younger generation. *The Green Cord Dream* is a book that will primarily appeal to young Adventists, and therein lies its danger. While seasoned Adventists, who know what the Adventist message is all about, can take this book in their stride and applaud the author’s emphasis on the necessity of making Jesus the focus of their lives, young and impressionable Adventists will come away from this book with a skewed picture of what Adventism is all about. Yes, Jesus needs to be at the center of our teaching and our lives, but who is this Jesus and what is his message?

Reading through the book this reviewer was reminded of the Jesus Movement of the sixties and seventies. These people talked much about Jesus, and the words “Jesus” and “love” flowed easily from their lips. Yes, their preaching gave many a warm and fuzzy feeling about Jesus, but it was an incomplete picture of who Jesus really is. Similarly, *The Green Cord Dream* contains much valuable material, and yes we need to be reminded again and again that Jesus must be the center of our lives, but we must get the facts right and present a complete picture of Christ’s message.

Considering some facts first: In chapter one, the author identifies Seventh-day Adventists with the Millerites. While the Seventh-day Adventist Church came out of the Great Disappointment, we need to be careful not to equate Seventh-day Adventists with the time setting of the Millerites. *We* did not quit our jobs, leave our homes and walk out of our churches (p. 11). God called the Adventist church, the remnant church of prophecy, into existence because of the failure of the Millerite movement. Not to distinguish between these two

movements will confuse the young people as to the real origin of their church. And yes, contrary to the author’s contention (p. 18), the Adventist church was also called into existence to correct the teachings of already existing denominations and to resurrect long-forgotten teachings. If this were not the case, why would our pioneers have majored on such distinctive truths as the Sanctuary, the Three Angels’ messages, conditional immortality, the Second Advent, and the Sabbath? They almost forgot about Christ our Righteousness; the Lord in 1888, therefore, had to send a correcting message. The Adventist Church was not born because of a wrong calculation (p. 18), the Millerite Movement was. Our young people deserve a correct picture of our origins.

On page 69 the author says, “less than 5 percent of Adventists live in America now.” I am not sure which statistics the author used, but according to the latest statistics of the office of Archives and Statistics at the General Conference, Seventh-day Adventist membership stands at 17 million of whom 1.2 million live in America, which is seven percent not five. Let’s not make it worse than it is.

Satan did not convince the angels that “darkness is better than light, envy is better than peace, hate is better than love—and death better than life” (p. 86), he deceived some of them into thinking that God is unjust (PP 37). The results were darkness, envy, hate, and death.

More important is the fact that throughout the book there is an implied denigration of the Adventist church and its teachings. We don’t look in the mirror and admire the body of our own faith tradition, the result of our insights, our brain power (p. 31). God raised up the Adventist church to preach and teach the biblical doctrines needed to prepare the world for the Second Advent (see 1 SM 206–208), they are not based on our brain power. The author is correct in stating that we have not been given the authority to deny other Christians their sonship or daughtership of God (p. 35). We have never claimed that we are the only children of God (see Rev 18:4; Ev 575). This reviewer has been invited to and preached in Methodist, Baptist, Lutheran, and Pentecostal churches and has seen many of God’s children in these churches, but this does not mean we should soft-pedal our distinctive truths and jump on the ecumenical bandwagon, as the author seems to imply.

With the author this reviewer deplores the theological controversies in the church, but in contrast to him this reviewer does not believe that these controversies concern matters that the Bible leaves opaque (p. 43). Creation, salvation, the remnant, the sanctuary, and the Spirit of Prophecy, are not opaque matters in Scripture. To give this impression to the young people is doing them a disservice. It will only further alienate them from studying these doctrines for themselves.

Like most critics, the author (p. 47) loves Ellen White's statement that "There is no excuse for anyone in taking the position that there is no more truth to be revealed" (CW 35), but let's not forget that she also said, "Many of our people do not realize how firmly the foundation of our faith has been laid" (ISM 206). We have made a few adjustments in our doctrines since the days of our pioneers. They did not teach the doctrine of the Trinity, or that the investigative judgment in Daniel 7 also concerns the little horn. Further Bible study has made this clear, but we do not change our doctrines merely to accommodate modern trends or opinions, like evolution or a homosexual lifestyle.

A typical case of accommodation to modern trends in theology, even in some Adventist circles, is the author's statement that Babylon is "representative of all totalitarian regimes throughout history" (p. 71). Most totalitarian regimes in history were political regimes; the little horn of Daniel and the Babylon of the book of Revelation is a religious power, and the religious power that fits the prophetic picture is the religious alliance of the papacy, fallen Protestantism, and spiritualism; and our young people should know that too.

In summary, while *The Green Cord Dream* contains some excellent material, particularly on the issue of violence, health, and the need to put Jesus first, the overall impression the book conveys of the church and its teachings is not favorable. Is this really what our young people need? Most importantly, if we need to wash our dirty linen in public, and there may be such times, let's get the facts and our theology straight before we do so.

Gerhard Pfandl, BRI

WORLDWIDE HIGHLIGHTS

New state laws on euthanasia and physician assisted suicide, recently approved in some countries, prompted the Ethics Committee of BRI to discuss and suggest revisions to the document "A Statement of Consensus on Care for the Dying" (approved by the executive committee of the GC on October 9, 1992). The revised statement was further discussed and approved by the Executive Committee of the General Conference at the Spring Council in Battle Creek, on April 15, 2013.

A Statement of Consensus on Care for the Dying (revised)

For people whose lives are guided by the Bible, the reality of death is acknowledged as part of the current human condition, affected by sin (Genesis 2:17; Romans 5; Hebrews 9:27). There is "a time to be born, and a time to die" (Ecclesiastes 3:2). Although eternal life is a gift

that is granted to all who accept salvation through Jesus Christ, faithful Christians await the second coming of Jesus for complete realization of their immortality (John 3:36; Romans 6:23; 1 Corinthians 15:51–54). While waiting for Jesus to come again, Christians may be called upon to care for the dying and to face personally their own death.

Pain and suffering afflict every human life. Physical, mental, and emotional traumas are universal. However, human suffering has no expiatory or meritorious value. The Bible teaches that no amount or intensity of human suffering can atone for sin. The suffering of Jesus Christ alone is sufficient. Scripture calls Christians not to despair in afflictions, urging them to learn obedience (Hebrews 5:7–8) and patient endurance in tribulations (Romans 5:3, James 1:2–4; 5:10–11). The Bible also testifies to the overcoming power of Jesus Christ (John 16:33) and teaches that ministry to human suffering is an important Christian duty (Matthew 25:34–40). This was the example and teaching of Jesus (Matthew 9:35; Luke 10:34–36), and this is His will for us (Luke 10:37). Christians look in anticipation to a new day when God will end suffering forever (Revelation 21:4).

Developments in modern medicine have added to the complexity of decisions about care for the dying. In times past, little could be done to extend human life. But the power of today's medicine to forestall death has generated difficult moral and ethical questions. What constraints does Christian faith place upon the use of such power? When should the goal of postponing the moment of death give way to the goal of alleviating pain at the end of life? Who may appropriately make these decisions? What limits, if any, should Christian love place on actions designed to end human suffering?

It has become common to discuss such questions under the heading of euthanasia. Much confusion exists with regard to this expression. The original and literal meaning of this term was "good death." Today the term "euthanasia" is associated with "mercy killing," or intentionally taking the life of a patient in order to avoid painful dying or in order to alleviate burdens for a patient's family or society. Seventh-day Adventists believe that allowing a patient to die by foregoing medical interventions that only prolong suffering and postpone the moment of death is morally different from actions that have as their primary intention the direct taking of a life.

Seventh-day Adventists seek to address the ethical issues at the end of life in ways that demonstrate their faith in God as the Creator and Redeemer of life and that reveal how God's grace has empowered them for acts of neighborly love. Seventh-day Adventists affirm God's creation of human life, a wonderful gift worthy of being protected and sustained (Genesis 1–2). They also affirm God's wonderful gift of redemption that provides

eternal life for those who believe (John 3:15; 17:3). Thus they support the use of modern medicine to extend human life in this world. However, this power should be used in compassionate ways that reveal God's grace by minimizing suffering. Since we have God's promise of eternal life in the earth made new, Christians need not cling anxiously to the last vestiges of life on this earth. Nor is it necessary to accept or offer all possible medical treatments that merely prolong the process of dying.

Because of their commitment to care for the whole person, Seventh-day Adventists are concerned about the physical, emotional, and spiritual care of the dying. To this end, they offer the following biblically based principles:

1) A person who is approaching the end of life, and is capable of understanding, deserves to know the truth about his or her condition, the treatment choices and the possible outcomes. The truth should not be withheld but shared with Christian love and with sensitivity to the patient's personal and cultural circumstances (Ephesians 4:15).

2) God has given human beings freedom of choice and asks them to use their freedom responsibly. Seventh-day Adventists believe that this freedom extends to decisions about medical care. After seeking divine guidance and considering the interests of those affected by the decision (Romans 14:7) as well as medical advice, a person who is capable of deciding should determine whether to accept or reject life-extending medical interventions. Such persons should not be forced to submit to medical treatment that they find unacceptable.

3) God's plan is for people to be nourished within a family and a faith community. Decisions about human life in the context of this statement are a personal matter and best made within the context of healthy family relationships after considering medical advice (Genesis 2:18; Mark 10:6–9; Exodus 20:12; Ephesians 5–6). When a dying person is unable to give consent or express preferences regarding medical intervention, such decisions should be made by someone chosen by the dying person. If no one has been chosen, someone close to the dying person should make the determination. Except in extraordinary circumstances, medical or legal professionals should defer decisions about medical interventions for a dying person to those closest to that individual. Wishes or decisions of the individual are best made in writing and should be in agreement with local legal standards regarding an advance medical directive or similar document.

4) Christian love is practical and responsible (Ro-

mans 13:8–10; 1 Corinthians 13; James 1:27; 2:14–17). Such love does not deny faith nor obligate us to offer or to accept medical interventions whose burdens outweigh the probable benefits. For example, when medical care merely preserves bodily functions, without hope of returning a patient to mental awareness, it is futile and may, in good conscience, be withheld or withdrawn. Similarly, life-extending medical treatments may be omitted or stopped if they only add to the patient's suffering or needlessly prolong the process of dying. Any action taken should be in harmony with divine principles regarding the sanctity of life.

5) While Christian love may lead to the withholding or withdrawing of medical interventions that only increase suffering or prolong dying, Seventh-day Adventists do not practice "mercy killing" or assist in suicide (Genesis 9:5–6; Exodus 20:13; 23:7). They are opposed to the intentional taking of the life of a suffering or dying person.

6) Christian compassion calls for the alleviation of suffering (Matthew 25:34–40; Luke 10:29–37). In caring for the dying, it is a Christian responsibility to relieve pain and suffering, to the fullest extent possible. When it is clear that medical intervention will not cure a patient, the primary goal of care should shift to relief from suffering.

7) The biblical principle of justice prescribes that added care be given to the needs of those who are defenseless and dependent (Psalm 82:3–4; Proverbs 24:11–12; Isaiah 1:1–18; Micah 6:8; Luke 1:52–54). Because of their vulnerable condition, special care should be taken to ensure that dying persons are treated with respect for their dignity and without unfair discrimination. Care for the dying should be based on their spiritual and medical needs and their expressed choices rather than on perceptions of their social worthiness (James 2:1–9).

As Seventh-day Adventists seek to apply these principles, they take hope and courage from the fact that God answers the prayers of His children and is able to work miraculously for their well-being (Psalm 103:1–5; James 5:13–16). Following Jesus' example, they also pray to accept the will of God in all things (Matthew 26:39). They are confident that they can call on God's power to aid them in caring for the physical and spiritual needs of suffering and dying individuals. They know that the grace of God is sufficient to enable them to endure adversity (Psalm 50:14–15). They believe that eternal life for all who have faith in Jesus is secure in the triumph of God's love.