

Redefining God

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Dear Members of the Endtime Issues Newsletter:

It has been for me an educational experience to read the many comments received about the last newsletter (No. 55) on "Homosexuality and the Adventist Church," written by Samuel Koranteng-Pipim. Among other things I have been challenged to become more compassionate toward those who are seeking divine grace to overcome their attraction toward people of the same gender.

A current SDA pastor bared his soul and shared with me his painful pilgrimage from bondage to freedom. He related how his craving for male sexual partners eventually caused him to abandon his first wife and children. While involved in homosexual relationships, he began doing some soul searching. He stopped blaming God for his attraction toward men, and started instead examining his responsibility for his behavior. He sought divine deliverance and cleansing, and the Lord gave him a new heart, attitudes, and disposition. Today he is married again with children and serves successfully as a pastor in the SDA church.

The next newsletter will carry the amazing testimony of this pastor. I feel that many of our subscribers will find it very encouraging to read about the power of God to overcome inherited and cultivated sins. A pseudonym will be used to protect the identity of the author.

EAST CARIBBEAN LECTURE TOUR

From October 12 to 21 I spent 10 intense days lecturing in the three major islands that comprise the East Caribbean Conference of SDA: St. Vincent, Dominica, and Barbados. This was my third lecture tour of the Caribbean, and I can truly say that it was the most rewarding. During the 10 days I met 19 engagements, speaking an average of 4 to 5 hours a day in a temperature of over 90 degree. It was for me a steam bath (sauna) experience.

The intense heat does not compel our Caribbean pastors to remove their jackets in church. Surprisingly, everywhere I spoke, all the pastors on the platform wore their jackets, in spite of the intense heat. I did not want to look an odd ball, but it was impossible for me to wear the jacket, because I sweat profusely, even in a cool temperature.

To be able to remove my jacket without offending the sensitivity of our Caribbean believers, I asked for permission to follow the Biblical directive contained in Ezekiel 44:18: "The priests shall not gird themselves with anything that causes sweat." After reading this text, every where I spoke the congregation gave me a Biblical dispensation to remove my jacket. This made my speaking in short sleeves less exhausting.

What made this lecture tour especially rewarding, was the opportunity granted me to speak, not only at large rallies of Adventist believers, but also at Press Conferences for the media (radio, TV, and newspapers reporters), and at convocations for clergy of different denominations.

Elder James Daniel, President of the East Caribbean Conference, did a masterful job in planning and promoting my visit. He arranged for a Press Conference at each of the three islands. This meant that all my presentation were announced on the local radio, TV, and newspapers.

In St. Vincent, a beautiful island of about 80,000 people, we paid a courtesy visit to the Prime Minister, Sir James Mitchell. What was supposed to be a 10 minutes courtesy visit, turned out to be a one hour pleasant conversation. Mr. Mitchell, a man with a keen mind and broad educational background, became so interested in my research on God's Holy Day, that he asked our church leaders: "Have you arranged for Dr. Bacchiocchi's sermon to be broadcasted to the island?" The reply was "No!." Our leaders were not in a position to make such an arrangement on their own authority. Mr. Mitchell then gave instructions to the Minister of communication to arrange for the Sabbath morning service to be aired on the national radio from 10:00 to 12:00 a. m.

What a marvelous opportunity the Lord gave us to share with all the inhabitants of St. Vincent through the airwave our Sabbath worship service which included a timely message on the relevance of the Sabbath for today! The same opportunity was offered to us in the island of Dominica, which is predominantly Catholic. Our church service together with my sermon was aired to the whole island.

In St. Vincent the Sabbath morning convocation was held in a large harbor warehouse which accommodated over 3000 people. In spite of the oppressive heat the place was packed with standing room only, both for the morning and afternoon services.

A special feature of the lecture tour was the meeting with the clergy of different denominations in each island. In St. Vincent about 30 clergy attended the meeting, including the Anglican Archbishop. My presentations on the Sabbath were confessional, not confrontational. I shared with these ministers seven ways in which the Sabbath has helped me to experience the awareness of Christ's presence, peace, and rest in my life. The response surpassed our fondest expectations. Practically each pastor or priest in attendance was eager to order my Sabbath books. Some of them paid in advance for the complete set of my 16 books.

One Pentecostal "Full Gospel" minister and his wife met with me in Dominica for one hour after the meeting. They told me that they wanted to return to the Biblical principle of Sabbathkeeping for themselves and their congregation. They ordered a complete set of my 16 books and then they went to the ABC shop to buy the last three copies of my books which were still available. When I met them at the ABC they explained to me that they wanted to get started reading immediately my Sabbath books, while they were waiting for their set to come through the mail. It was a heartwarming experience to see sincere church leaders, eager to understand and experience the blessings of the Sabbath.

The meetings with our Adventist believers were well-attended. Everywhere the auditoriums were packed with standing-room only. The problem was finding facilities large enough to accommodate our people. In Barbados, where the convention center was already booked, our leaders decided to link together with a close circuit TV three auditoriums. Each of them was packed with people on Sabbath morning.

It was a thrilling experience for me to listen to the vibrant, enthusiastic singing of our believers. Elder James Daniel, the President, often whispered in my ears on the platform: "Sam, as you can see, our people do not need rock bands or "Christian rock" music to get excited about singing. They love to sing with all their hearts the sacred hymns." Surprisingly, even several musical numbers given by choirs and groups, were sung without instrumental accompaniment. They sounded great. I was reminded of the heavenly choirs in Revelation where God is praised by the sound of the human voice. Incidentally, the string instruments (harp and lyre) used in the Bible to accompany the singing, served to support the singing, and not to supplant it.

Lest some think that our Adventist believers in the Caribbean are less advanced educationally, may I say that I was utterly surprised by the level of sophistication and professional attainments of many of our believers. Our Caribbean believers place a premium on education, which they pursue at all levels. This is reflected also in their eagerness to deepen their understanding of Biblical truths. The questions they raised during the questions/answers period, were perceptive and probative. What was supposed to be an adequate supply of my books, was sold out in every island by the ABC in a matter of minutes. The ABCs will be busy for the next several days collecting all the orders. This is an indication of their interest for Biblical studies.

Truly I can say that it was a blessing for me to share my research through the spoken word and printed page with our believers and friends of other faiths in the East Caribbean Conference. I will treasure the pleasant memory of this visit. I came back home physically drained, but spiritually enriched by the vibrant witness of our Caribbean believers.

THE IMPACT OF *THE CHRISTIAN AND ROCK MUSIC*

The positive impact of the new book *The Christian and Rock Music* is being felt in many countries and across denominational lines. Every day I receive message from people of all faiths expressing appreciation for the way the book has helped them to understand the Biblical distinction between sacred music for worship and secular music for entertainment. Several messages came from music professors eager to adopt the book for their students.

You might appreciate reading this message I received few moments ago from a young man, majoring in religion/philosophy at Hope College, an institution affiliated with the Reformed Church in America, and located in Holland, Michigan. Hope College is close to Andrews University and has an enrolment of about 3000 students, the same like Andrews.

He wrote: "I was reading your book while at a rock concert today and I can relate with much of what you wrote. . . . The line of chapter 1 that really struck home reads: 'It was evident that the way the band was playing the hymn [Amazing Grace] with a typical rock beat had caused the people to forget the words of the hymn.' I find this to be very true.

"I was introduced to 'Christian rock' a few years back . . . I am a great fan of much secular music, even some that might be qualified as 'evil.' Nevertheless I find the rock worship style in many churches to be downright disturbing. Here at Hope College we have a chapel rock choir and it seems that it is the only reason, besides checking out the girls, that anyone wants to go to chapel. The people who sit in the front generally throw up their arms in praise with every song, no matter what the lyrics are. Everyone assumes that the lyrics are Christian without even pondering the words. I have been singing and find myself in a dead stare at the lyrics, in disbelief of what I am really singing for.

Anyway, I would just like to let you know that there are people who share your concern about the perils of rock for the church. I hope that informed persons like yourself can affect the masses, and make them acts as freethinking individuals. Thank you and congratulations for a great book"

Messages of encouragement such as this, mean a lot to me, because they show that there are sincere people who appreciate a book that helps them to understand the negative effects of rock music in their personal life and in the worship experience of the church.

Your personal efforts to inform your friends about *The Christian and Rock Music*, is greatly appreciated. On our part we will gladly mail you free of charge a supply of color fliers that you may wish to pass out to your friends. Just let us know how many fliers you can use and we will mail them to you immediately. Note also that we continue to offer ***The Christian and Rock Music* by the case of 26 copies for only \$170.00, that is, \$6.50 per copy, postage paid, instead of the regular price of \$20.00 per copy.** If your church has not ordered a case yet, feel free to call us at (616) 471-2915, and we will mail you the books immediately.

SCHEDULING OF SEMINARS FOR 2001

During the next few weeks I will be developing my calendar of speaking engagements for 2001. I have three popular seminars on the Sabbath, Second Advent, and Christian Life-style, that have drawn capacity crowds in many parts of the world. If your church is interested to invite me for a rally of your area churches, feel free to contact me by email or phone (616) 471-2915. I will do by best to find a suitable date for your area.

At the end of this newsletter you will find a listing of the locations for the forthcoming seminars during the month of November. The four speaking engagements for November are as follows:

- November 3-4 - Spokane, WA
- November 10-11 -Atlanta, GA
- November 17-19 - Basel, Switzerland
- November 23-26 - Birmingham/Manchester, England.

If you live close to any of these locations, accept my personal invitation to attend these seminars. It will be for you a memorable experience.

A PERSONAL NOTE ABOUT THIS BIBLE STUDY

The Bible study you are about to read on "Redefining God," was partly written during my recent East Caribbean Lecture tour. The inspiration for this study came from Lisa Miller's article "Redefining God," which appeared on the *Wall Street Journal* (Weekend edition, April 21, 2000).

Reading the article I was reminded again that the two issues of women ordination and worship music that are affecting so many Christian churches today, largely stem from the current attempts to redefine God according to prevailing humanistic ideologies. Many people are no longer satisfied with the transcendental God of Biblical revelation. They prefer to invent a God that will fit into their own scheme of things and will support their own agenda.

The trend deserves close attention, because, if allowed to prevail, it can ultimate lead to the rejection of God of Biblical revelation, and the acceptance of a God created by humanistic devising. In this newsletter we focus on how the trend to redefine God relates to the question of women ordination. In another newsletter we will examine how the change in the understanding of God during the course of Christian history, has affected the gradual evolution of church music from the medieval chant, to the Lutheran chorale, and to today's "Christian" rock. I trust that you will find these studies informative.

REDEFINING GOD

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Lisa Miller's article "Redefining God," which appeared on the *Wall Street Journal* (Weekend edition, April 21, 2000), caught my attention, because it shows to what lengths people will go to reinvent God according to their own imagination and expectations.

In ancient pagan religions, the gods were depicted like human beings with extraordinary powers. Today, God is redefined according to subjective feelings and humanistic ideologies. Dissatisfied with the Biblical male imagery of the Godhead as "Father" and "Son," many Christians are clamoring for a resymbolization of the Godhead, based on impersonal or feminine categories.

This trend is finding its way even into some Seventh-day Adventist churches. In recent years I have heard some Adventists addressing God at a graduation exercise as "Our Heavenly Mother." In a class on "Women's Studies," where I was invited to participate, the teacher addressed God in the opening prayer, as "Dear Parent."

Several methods are employed to bring about a resymbolization of the Godhead. Some are proposing dropping the personal terms for God, adopting instead nonpersonal or suprapersonal ones, such as "Fire, Light, Almighty, Divine Providence, Heavenly Parent, Cosmic Benefactor, Source of Sustenance."

Lisa Miller quote Rev. Robert Brashear, of the century-old West Park Presbyterian Church in New York, who invoked God with these words at a church service she attended: "O burning mountain, O chosen sun, O perfect moon, O fathomless well, O unattainable height, O clearness beyond measure." These images of the deity sound more like those of Greek mythology than of Biblical revelation.

Other want to redefine God as a female deity or as an androgynous Being, consisting of a male and female counterpart, or half-male and half-female (Father/Mother). Lisa Miller reports that at a National Convention on "Reimagining God," sponsored by the Presbyterian Church U. S. A., "female participants suggested that God might be a woman and questioned Christ's divinity. At one point, conference leaders celebrated the Eucharist with milk and honey, instead of bread and wine."

Lisa Miller points to two factors which are contributing to redefining God. First, "the antiauthoritarian, individualistic strain that has gradually worked its way into the mainstream divinity-school curriculums. The seminaries that train clergy are now dominated by baby boomers who came of age in the '60s and are less wedded to traditional orthodoxies."

Second there is the search for new experiences by our individualistic and affluent society. "Many Americans search for deeper connections with God. They are not facing the kind of crises that often prompt people to seek protection or salvation from above. Instead, they are cobbling together a spiritual life from a variety of religious influences, along with a dash of yoga and psychotherapy or whatever else moves them."

Prof. Randal Styers, from Union Theological Seminary, notes that “People seek out these new gods the way they seek out new products in the marketplace. It is the ultimate form of individualism.” The ultimate results of these attempts to redefine God as an impersonal power, a female deity, or an androgynous Being, is not merely switching labels on the same product, but rather introducing new labels for an entirely different product.

Biblical faith envisions God not as the Mother Goddess of mythological religion or the Earth Mother of animistic cults but as the Sovereign Lord and Almighty Father who admits of no female counterpart. “The Judeo-Christian tradition,” writes James R. Edwards, “knows nothing of an androgynous Godhead; that is, God does not need a female counterpart to complete his identity. When a female counterpart is present, fertility worship, or neo-Baalism, lurks beneath”

GOD AS FATHER AND SON

In Scripture God is presented not only in male imagery, but also female. In a few Biblical passages, for example, God is pictured in maternal terms. Perhaps the most moving passage of all is found in Isaiah 49:15: “Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you” (cf. Matt 23:37). The fact that in Scripture “God is like a father who pities his children (Ps 103:13) and a mother who cannot forget her sucking child (Is 49:15)” has led some to conclude that God can be appropriately addressed as Father and/or Mother.

Paul Jewett is right in emphasizing that both paternal and maternal references to God are analogical in character, but is wrong in concluding that “both analogies are equally revelatory” of the inner being of God. There is a difference between God’s saying, “I am a father to Israel” (Jer 31:9) or Christ’s saying, “call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven” (Matt 23:9) and God’s saying, “I will cry out like a woman in travail” (Is 42:14) or “Can a woman forget her sucking child? . . . yet I will not forget you” (Is 49:15). The first set of statements describes the *person of God* (God *is* our Father) while the second set of statements makes a comparison based on an *action of God* (God *is like* a crying or compassionate woman). The former identifies the person of God, the latter compares an action of God to an action performed by mothers.

God is the Father. The term “Father” is used in Scripture not only in a “figurative” sense to describe what God is like, but also in a “literal” sense to describe what God really is. As Hendrikus Berkhof points out, “God is not ‘as it were’ a Father; he is the Father from whom all fatherhood on earth is derived.” Similarly Karl Barth observes: “No human father, but God alone, is properly, truly and primarily Father. No human father is the creator of his child, the controller of its destiny, or its savior from sin, guilt and death. No human father is by his word the source of its temporal and eternal life. In this proper, true and primary sense God—and He alone—is Father.”

The self-revelation of God as Father stands out especially in the teaching of Jesus. Joachim Jeremias, in his massive study of the Aramaic “Abba” (“Father”) used consistently by Christ, shows that in the extensive Jewish literature there is no evidence of the term “Father” being used by itself by an individual to address God.

In startling contrast to the prevailing custom of avoiding whenever possible the name of God out of reverence, Jesus not only called God "Father" but "Abba" (Mark 14:36), an Aramaic diminutive equivalent to our "daddy." Such a familiarity with the Almighty and Holy One was sacrilegious for the Jews. "Jesus, however, not only addressed God with the warmth and security of a child addressing its father, but he taught his disciples to do the same (Gal 4:6)."

Implications of God's Fatherhood. Why has God revealed Himself, especially through Jesus Christ, as our Father and not as our Mother? Some feminist theologians believe that the answer is to be found in the patriarchal culture of the time where the father was the head and ruler of the household. God, they say, adopted this culturally accepted analogy to reveal Himself. Since we no longer subscribe to such a patriarchal social structure and world-view, they claim that the analogy of God as "Mother" would be equally appropriate today.

This reasoning is not correct because although God has used the patriarchal imagery of a Father to reveal Himself, He transcends this imagery radically. As Karl Barth aptly puts it, "when Scripture calls God our Father, it adopts an analogy only to transcend it at once." Jesus' revelation of God as "Abba" was not only counter-cultural, but also determinative for His self-understanding as the Son of God and for the self-understanding of His followers as sons and daughters of God.

God has used the language of fatherhood to reveal Himself because such language contains an abiding truth about Himself which cannot lightly be dismissed. *Fatherhood preserves the Biblical principle of headship and submission.* As our Father, God is the Creator and Controller of our lives and we are His subordinate children (James 1:17-18). If God were our Mother we would think of Her not as our Creator but as our Generatrix, that is, not as the one who created us out of nothing (*ex nihilo*), but as the one who generated us out of Herself. This shows, as Kallistos Ware states it, that "if we were to substitute a Mother Goddess for God the Father, we would not simply be altering a piece of incidental imagery, but we would be replacing Christianity with a new kind of religion."

It is important to remember that the symbol of the Fatherhood of God was not created by the prophets or apostles out of their patriarchal culture, but was revealed and given to us by God Himself. "God as Father is God's own witness to himself, not a mere human witness to God."

Headship Role. To appreciate the implication of the Fatherhood of God, it is important to note the difference between fatherhood and motherhood. In Scripture both are similar in terms of compassion for his/her child (Is 49:15; Ps 103:13). The only difference is to be seen, as Susan Foh points out, in "their relationship to one another. The father is the head of the household; consequently, his wife must submit herself to him and reverence him (Eph 5:22-24, 33). It is the husband's headship and the wife's submission that makes it necessary to address God as Father, not Mother."

The same principle applies to the headship role that a pastor/elder fulfills in the extended family of God, the church. If one erases the Biblical distinction between the roles men and women are called to fulfill in the home and in the church, as many feminist theologians are seeking to do, then there is no longer any reason for maintaining the Fatherhood of God.

Feminists have well understood the connection between the Fatherhood of God and the male headship role in the home and in the church. Consequently, it is not surprising that some of them are endeavoring to remove the Fatherhood of God, calling it a cultural vestige of a patriarchal age. To do so, however, means to reject not only the revelation which God has given of Himself, but also His creational design for harmonious human relationships.

God the Son. Why did God become a man rather than a woman? As in the case of the Fatherhood of God, some feminists seek to account for the maleness of Christ primarily on the basis of culturally conditioned reasons. For example, Paul Jewett argues that “the incarnation in the form of male humanity, though historically and culturally necessary, was not *theologically* necessary.” Is this true? Was Christ’s incarnation as a man determined primarily by cultural necessities? Would a female Christ have equally fulfilled the role of the second Adam, the head of the redeemed humanity (Rom 5:14; 1 Cor 15:22,45)? Would a female Christ have equally fulfilled such male messianic typologies as a prophet-like-Moses (Deut 18:15,18), a King-like-David (2 Sam 7:12,16), an Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace (Is 9:6), a suffering servant (Is 53), and a heavenly Son of Man (Dan 7:13-14)? It is hard to see how a female Christ could have fulfilled these male messianic typologies and become the new Adam, head of the Redeemed humanity.

The typological correspondence between Adam and Christ can help us understand a major theological reason for the maleness of the incarnate Christ. Both Adam and Christ stand in Scripture as representative of fallen and redeemed humanity respectively: “For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man’s obedience many will be made righteous” (Rom 5:19). “Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven” (1 Cor 15:49).

The reason why Adam rather than Eve functions as the head and representative of the human race is not because of any moral or spiritual superiority, but simply because, God, by creating man first, established him as the head of humanity (1 Tim 2:13; 1 Cor 11:8).

The reason why God chose the man and not the woman to function as the head of humanity, of the home, and of the church, is not given in the Scriptures. It is not a question of superiority or inferiority but of complementary functional roles men and women have been equipped by God to fulfill. Man was created to serve as father and head of the family and woman was created to serve as mother and nurturer of the family.

Being made a representative of humanity, Adam became “a type (*typos*) of the one who was to come” (Rom 5:14). Since God has assigned this representative, headship role to the male, Christ had to become incarnate as a man to be able to function as the representative and the head of the church (Eph 5:23). The male headship of Christ in the church becomes in turn the model for the headship of the husband in the home and the headship of male pastor/elder in the church.

In a sense the incarnation of God as a man reveals the importance that God attaches to the creational role distinctions assigned to men and women. It is only by blurring or eliminating such distinctions that one can deny the necessity of the fatherhood of God and of the maleness of Christ. Susan Foh expresses the same conviction very clearly:

Those who deny the theological necessity of God incarnate as a man also reject those passages which teach any differences between men and women as culturally determined. As in the case of the fatherhood of God, these theologians first eliminate the distinctions Scripture makes between men and women; then they say there is no ultimate reason Christ came to earth as a male. If one believes, "I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men; she is to keep silent" and its theological justification, "For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor" (1 Tim 2:12-14), to be true, then there is one obvious reason why Christ could not have been a woman.

In the light of the foregoing considerations we conclude that while God's mode of personal existence transcends male and female categories, through Jesus Christ He has revealed Himself supremely as Father, and He chose to incarnate Himself as a man. The male category used by God to reveal Himself as Father and as a male person through the incarnation of His Son, has great significance because it expresses the role that He sustains toward His creatures: Creator, Sustainer, and Savior. This role is the foundational analogy which serves as a model for the role men are called to fulfill as fathers in the home and as pastors/elders in the household of God: "For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom all fatherhood in heaven and on earth derives its name" (Eph 3:14-15; NIV, margin).

THE SYMBOLIC ROLE OF THE PASTOR

The pastor serves not only as representative of the congregation, but also as Christ's representative to the congregation. In the Old Testament the priests functioned as the typological representatives of the redemptive ministry of Christ. The book of Hebrews explains at great length the typological correspondence between the ministry of the priests in the earthly sanctuary and that of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary (Heb 8, 9, 10). By offering His own blood once, for ever and for all, Christ fulfilled and terminated the typological sacrificial ministry of Old Testament priests which pointed to His redemptive ministry (Heb 9:11-14; 10:1-14). Yet there is still a ministry of intercession and reconciliation which Christ, the heavenly High Priest, continues to perform on behalf of believers (Heb 7:25). The pastor, in a similar and yet different way from the Old Testament priests, serves as Christ's representative to the church.

The Protestant understanding of the representative role of the pastor differs from the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox view. According to the latter, the priest does not merely represent, but actually "presents the priesthood of Jesus Christ to the rest of the community" by reenacting through the eucharistic celebration the very sacrifice offered by Christ on the Cross. According to the Protestant tradition, however, the pastor *does not present* the priesthood and the sacrifice of Christ to the congregation, but rather *represents* Christ by serving symbolically as Christ's ambassador and shepherd to the congregation.

The sacramental view of the priest is devoid of Biblical support. The role of the leader of the congregation (elder/overseer/pastor) is seen in the New Testament as being not a personification of Christ's priesthood and sacrifice, but a representation of Christ, the true Father, Shepherd, and Head of the church.

Indications of Representative Role. The representative role of the pastor is suggested, first of all, by Christ's calling, training, and commissioning of the twelve apostles to be His "witnesses" (Acts 1:8; Matt 28:18-20; Mark 3:14). As Christ is "the apostle and high priest of our confession" (Heb 3:1), that is, the one sent to represent the Father, so pastors are sent (*apostello*) to represent the Father and the Son to believers and unbelievers: "As thou didst send me into the world, so I have sent them into the world" (John 17:18).

Paul underscores the representative commission given to church leaders when he writes: "And he [God] has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God" (2 Cor 5:19-20, NIV). There is no question in Paul's mind that he was Christ's ambassador to believers and unbelievers. To the Galatians he wrote: "You welcomed me as if I were an angel of God, as if I were Christ Jesus himself" (Gal 4:14).

While every believer is Christ's ambassador and belongs to the "royal priesthood" (1 Pet 2:9; Ex 19:6; Deut 26:19), the pastor fulfills in a special sense the role of Christ's representative, as the under-shepherd of Christ's flock. Christ describes Himself as "the good shepherd" and His mission as gathering the sheep that are not of His fold, so that "there shall be one flock, one shepherd" (John 10:11, 14-16). To accomplish this mission, Christ commissioned Peter (and in a sense all those who function in the same role as church leaders) to feed the lambs and the sheep (John 21:15-17).

Christ's commission to His disciples to be the under-shepherds of His flock represents the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies regarding the future appointment of faithful shepherds: "I will set shepherds over them who will care for them, and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall any be missing, says the Lord" (Jer 23:4). "And I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding" (Jer 3:15; cf. Ezek 34:1-31).

The promise of true shepherds who would come to faithfully tend God's flock (not as hirelings—John 10:13) is fulfilled through the ministry of the apostles, elders, and overseers who serve as shepherds of Christ's flock (Acts 20:17, 28). Peter clearly describes the function of elders as shepherds of God's flock, representing the chief Shepherd: "So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ as well as a partaker in the glory that is to be revealed. Tend the flock of God that is your charge, not by constraint but willingly, not for shameful gain but eagerly, not as domineering over those in your charge but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd is manifested you will obtain the unfading crown of glory (1 Pet 5:1-4).

Heavenly Worship. In the worship service the pastor acts as representative not only of the congregation but also of Christ. As believers we hear the word, we are baptized and participate in the Lord's Supper, not in an abstract, impersonal way, but rather in a personal way as the pastor ministers to us in Christ's name. The vision of the heavenly worship in Revelation 4 and 5 reflects the inner reality of the worship of the church. In that vision the central position is occupied by the Father and the Lamb who are surrounded by twenty-four elders, representing the twelve patriarchs of ancient Israel and the twelve apostles of the new Israel. This imagery implies that the pastor, as the leader of the worshiping community on earth, fulfills a representative role similar to that of the twenty-four elders in the heavenly worship.

The unique symbolic role a pastor is called to fulfill as representative of the heavenly Father, Shepherd, High Priest, and Head of the church cannot legitimately be fulfilled by a woman pastor, because her Scriptural role is not that of a father, shepherd, priest or head of the church. These functional roles are associated in the Scriptures with the distinctive roles God has assigned men to fulfill. To appoint women to serve as elders/pastors means not only to violate a divine design, but also to adulterate the pastor's symbolic representation of God.

Danger of Changing Symbols. C. S. Lewis rightly warns that "We have no authority to take the living and seminal figures which God has painted on the canvas of our nature and shift them about as if they were mere geometrical figures." The sexual role distinctions, Lewis notes, go beyond physical appearance. They serve "to symbolize the hidden things of God." Lewis warns that when we are in the church, "we are dealing with male and female not merely as facts of nature but as the live and awful shadows of realities utterly beyond our control and largely beyond our direct knowledge"

What this means is that the male role of father in the home and of the pastor as spiritual father in the household of faith (1 Cor 4:15) points to a much greater reality, "largely beyond our direct knowledge," namely, to that of the heavenly Father, the original and ultimate "Father" of the home, the church, and the human family. Paul clearly expresses this connection in Ephesians 3:14-15: "For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom all fatherhood (*patria*) in heaven and on earth derives its name" (NIV, margin). The text suggests that all earthly fathers, whether biological fathers in the home or spiritual fathers in the church, reflect the image of the heavenly "Father," albeit in a human, creaturely way.

It is in no way derogatory to the female sex to affirm that an elder/pastor exercises fatherhood and not motherhood for God's family, because as E. L. Mascall observes, "his office is a participation in God's own relationship to his people and God is our Father in heaven and not our Mother." The female sex has its own distinctive dignity and function, but it can hardly represent the Fatherhood of God to His people, a theme which is dominant in both the Old and the New Testaments. The reason is quite simple. The sexual and symbolic role of a woman is that of mother and not of father. To change the nature of the symbol means to distort the apprehension of the reality to which the symbol points. To put it simply, a woman who stands for motherhood cannot appropriately represent the Fatherhood of God in the home or in the extended family of faith, the church.

CONCLUSION

The efforts of liberal theologians to redefine God as an impersonal power or a female deity, is a most dangerous trend which, if it is allowed to prevail, will result in a new religion widely at variance with the Christian faith.

God has revealed Himself supremely as Father through His Son, Jesus Christ, who became a man and not a woman. God's choice of these male categories to reveal Himself is most important. It tells us something about the role which He sustains toward us His children, namely, the role of an almighty, just, compassionate and caring Father. This role of the Heavenly Father functions as the foundational model for all forms of human fatherhood (Eph 3:14-15), whether it be that of the husband in the home or of the pastor in the church.

Women cannot legitimately serve in such dual representative roles, not because they are any less capable than men of piety, zeal, learning, leadership or other aptitudes required to serve as a pastor, but simply because such roles are perceived in Scripture as being those of a spiritual father and not of a spiritual mother. To blur or eliminate the role distinctions God assigned to men and women in the home and in the church, means not only to act contrary to His creational design, but also to accelerate the breakdown of the family and church structure.

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER STUDY OF THIS TOPIC

The issues addressed in this newsletter are examined in greater depth both in my book ***Women in the Church: A Biblical Study of the Role of Women in the Church*** and in the new symposium ***Prove All Things: A Response to Women in Ministry***.

Women in the Church has been favorably reviewed by dozen of scholars of all persuasions and has been adopted as textbook by numerous theological seminaries. The book will help you to understand why the Bible includes women in the supportive ministries of the church, but excludes them from the representative role of priests, elders or pastors.

Prove All Things is written by 15 scholars, church leaders, and lay members. The book offers clear and compelling answers to questions such as these:

- Does believing in women in ministry justify ordaining them as elders or pastors?
- Does the equality of men and women mean they have identical roles?
- Did role distinctions between men and women originate only after the Fall and not at Creation?
- Are men to have spiritual leadership in the home but not necessarily in the church?
- Do “the priesthood of all believers” and “spiritual gifts” eliminate gender role differences?
- Were there some women priests in the Old Testament?
- Did women serve as apostles and ministers in the New Testament?
- Did Ellen G. White call for women’s ordination? Was she herself ordained?
- Did the 1881 General Conference session vote to ordain women as pastors?

Special Offer: We are pleased to offer you at this time both volumes ***Women in the Church*** and ***Prove All Things***, at the special discounted price of only **\$25.00, postage paid, instead of the regular price of \$40.00**. To order a set of these timely volumes, call us at (616) 471-2915 or email us your credit card information. We guarantee to mail you these two volumes immediately.

A NOTE OF THANKS TO WEIMAR INSTITUTE

From September 24 to October 11, my wife, Anna, participated in the NEWSTART program at Weimar. The main reason for her going was the hope that Weimar doctors and program might help her to find relief from her constant migraine headaches and virus infections that have made her life miserable during recent years.

Frankly, I was rather skeptical of positive results, because for years my wife has been checked by various doctors, taken many tests, and tried all sorts of natural remedies. Nothing seems to solve her problems. To my surprise, my wife came back from Weimar in much better health. She has had no migraine headaches and has not spent a day in bed—a thing that was common before. I sincerely hope that she will continue doing so well. Apparently a combination of changes in her diet and in some medications, have made a real difference to her health.

I would like to express my gratitude to the dedicated staff of Weimar Institute for all what they have done for my wife. Their dedication to help people regain physical and spiritual healing, deserves commendation. For information about their programs and services, feel free to call (800) 525-9192. One of these days I may call up this number myself to sign up for a future NEWSTART program. Somehow I feel that I too need to take some time to recondition myself.

WEEKEND SEMINARS

As a service to our subscribers, I am listing the date and the location of my upcoming weekend SEMINARS on the Sabbath, Second Advent, and Christian Life-style. Each seminar consists of three presentations: Friday evening at 7:30 p. m., Sabbath morning at 11:00 a. m., and Sabbath afternoon at 4:00 p. m. Feel free to contact me at (616) 471-2915 for a special seminar in your area.

November 3-4: Spokane - Lynwood SDA Church

Location: 6525 N. Monroe, Spokane, WA 99208
For information call Pastor Roger Cain at (509) 327-4400
or (509) 443-0699

November 10-11: Atlanta North SDA Church

Location: 5123 Chamblee-Dunwoody Road, Atlanta, GA 30338
For information call Pastor Michael Leno at (770) 399-6884

November 17-18: Rally In Basel, Switzerland

For information call Pastor Claude Richli in Basel.

November 23-25: Rally In Birmingham, England

Location: Camp Hill SDA Church
For information call Pastor Malcolm Watson at (01564) 771-353

November 26: Rally In Manchester, England

For information call Pastor Michael Smpson at (01204) 531 661

December 1-2: Wenatchee SDA Church

Location: 508 North Western Avenue, Wenatchee, WA 98801
For information call Pastor Dan Serns at (509) 663-4032

December 8-9: Silver Spring, Md:

Round Oak Baptist Church

Location: 15812 Good Hope Road, Silver Spring, MD.
The seminar is sponsored by the Southern Asia Adventist Association

A THANK YOU NOTE:

Thank you for taking time in your busy schedule to read this lengthy newsletter. If these Bible studies enrich your understanding and experience of Biblical truths, be sure to invite your friends to subscribe. All what they need to do is to email me a request at: <sbacchiocchi@qtm.net> As a result of your promotional endeavors over 11,000 people are already benefiting from these Bible studies.

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