

connection

The Newsletter of Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International, Inc. Vol. 38, No. 7, August/September 2014

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Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International, Inc. is a non-profit support organization. We minister to the spiritual, emotional, social, and physical well-being of current and former Seventh-day Adventists who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex individuals and their families and friends. Kinship facilitates and promotes the understanding and affirmation of LGBTI Adventists among themselves and within the Seventh-day Adventist community through education, advocacy, and reconciliation. Kinship is a global organization which supports the advance of human rights for all people worldwide.

Founded in 1976 the organization was incorporated in 1981 and is recognized as a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization in the United States. Kinship has a board made up of thirteen officers. There are also regional and population coordinators in specific areas. The current list of members and friends includes approximately 2,500 people in more than forty-three countries.

Seventh-day Adventist Kinship believes the Bible does not condemn or even mention homosexuality as a sexual orientation. Ellen G. White does not parallel any of the Bible texts that are used to condemn homosexuals. Most of the anguish imposed upon God's children who grow up as LGBTI has its roots in the misunderstanding of what the Bible says.



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KAMPMEETING 2014

From the Editor

This is my annual apology. There are probably lots of times in the other eleven months of the year when I should apologize, but...well, here we are. I came to Kampmeeting in Atlanta brimming with proactive plans to get the presentations from our extraordinary speakers into Word documents. Neither Herb nor Wendy use notes. So, I brought my trusty laptop and thought I would write as they spoke. I became enthralled with their messages and forgot to type. Some reporter! I apologize. However, Pearl Pangkey did her photographic job beautifully and provided us with pictures that share the joy of our time together. Andrew Dykstra did a lovely job of synthesising the messages we heard and was kind enough to send us his thoughts. Rom wrote a picture in words of the sense of community we felt. We included the presentation about pastoring that Gerard Frenk gave to the Dutch ministers at our Building Safe Places—for Everyone training in June. Since “a picture is worth a thousand words,” we’re saving *lots* of space by sharing photos. We hope you enjoy this issue. We hope you get such a sense of the caring and learning and laughter and example of healthy family that is found at Kampmeeting that you will join us next year. For now, we hope you will take good care of yourself, for you are infinitely valuable.

Catherine



A String Too Short To Save



By Rom Wilder

The heat and humidity that late July day in Georgia was oppressive. Perspiration was making me think how good it would feel when everyone's baggage was loaded up and we could get into the air-conditioned cars. That's when I noticed the hat.

Her violin case, covered with labels that screamed *youth*, reminded me of how she had used the instrument in it to make us laugh and dance and cry that week. Such a bright and gifted young woman. But a knitted hat in that heat?

"Nice hat," I commented.

Her face lit up, her eyes twinkled. "I don't think I'll ever take it off!" she bubbled.

It seems one of the older men had been knitting during the meetings that week. He regularly knits hats for the homeless. She had asked how much he would charge to knit one for her. "You can knit one for yourself," he had said, and proceeded to explain to her how to do it.

"Then this morning before he left, he brought this to me. I love it! I don't think I'll ever take it off," she added with pride and joy.

On that quiet Sunday I saw love. In her eyes and on her head. I wonder if the man, her grandfather's age, has any idea what his act of kindness did for her.

As she continues to bless and heal people with her music, I'm certain there will be times when she will still be wearing that magical hat, knitted for her during Kinship Kampmeeting 2014, by a caring man two generations ahead of her. ▼

We would like to share a note received at Kampmeeting from one of the remarkable college-age Kinship members who was able to enrich our gathering because of those of you who supported Kampmeeting scholarships.

Dear Sponsor,

I would like to thank you immensely for your generous contribution to Kinship which has allowed for a scholarship to pay for my visit. Although my visit was brief, I have met a lot of amazing people and heard some great presentations. I hope to attend next year. Thank you for your support. It is invaluable to Kinship's mission. May you be blessed.

All the best to you and your family.





By Andrew Dykstra

Kampmeeting 2014: An Oasis of Shalom

I purposely watched very little news while I was at Kampmeeting in Atlanta; but as I passed the large television on the way to the cafeteria, I noticed that Fox News was reporting on the Malaysian airliner brought down in eastern Ukraine. A few of us watched the screen, sickened at such a violent attack.

Cornelius Plantinga, formerly president of Calvin Theological Seminary, has said that sin is the breaking of *shalom*. "In sum, *shalom* is God's design for creation and redemption; sin is blameable human vandalism of these great realities and therefore an affront to their Architect and Builder." (1)

From my perspective, news of the crash was the only sour note at Kampmeeting, a reminder to me that *shalom* is possible only in part for now. Some of the messages at Kampmeeting touched me on a strong emotional level. I will try to share here only some of

what touched me. Kampmeeting was a time of deep listening to the speakers, and also to each other. For me, it was a time of deep *shalom* because of the good news that God is present with us at the margins. For me it was a place where time stood still. I cherished each conversation, the time I spent with friends old and new, really appreciating that I was heard well and understood.

In addition to other topics, Wendy Vanderwal-Gritter spoke on four principles of generous spaciousness. I had heard these before and have tried to apply them

first to myself, and only then shared them with others. They create a safe space where LGBTI voices may be heard, an oasis of *shalom* in an otherwise violent world.

- 1) **Humility.** Only God and Heaven are infallible; so whatever the issue, we each confess that we might be wrong. We assume the humble posture of “Tell me more....” We confess we have much to learn and much, much more to unlearn.
- 2) **Hospitality.** The voices of privilege are always heard; but hospitality asks, whose voices are missing? The absence of marginalized voices makes us all impoverished.
- 3) **Mutuality.** How might I see Christ in another? Not only in people familiar and comforting to me, but also in those who might make me feel uncomfortable.
- 4) **Justice.** Desmond Tutu has said, “If I diminish you, I diminish myself.” If there is no dignity and justice for *everyone*, then there is no dignity and justice for *anyone*. Not only the privileged should have a place, but so should the marginalized. The goal of seeking justice is to honour both equally.

All of this is another way of saying, “He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8).



Wendy Vanderwal-Gritter

This is the Way of Jesus, the Way of *Shalom*.

In both creation and redemption, Jesus created *shalom*, a space of wholeness. If these principles inform our lives, we reflect His character, intentionally creating safe, generous, nurturing spaces of *shalom* where all may know we are the children of God, deeply be-

loved. That was my experience at Kampmeeting.

Jesus is the express image of God (Hebrews 1:3). He took on humanity, submitting himself to the violence of men, not passively, but in a way that expressed determined, unconditional, healing *agape* love. Jesus was most often seen at the margins, closest to those whom others shunned. The work of Jesus was to make people whole through various kinds of healing, creating *shalom* for those who so longed for it. In contrast, however, his work at the margins caused escalating unrest among the privileged.



Herb Montgomery

I love how Herb Montgomery helped us understand that unrest among the privileged and then applied it to the story of Jesus. Herb based his talks on phenomena described by Rene Girard, a French-born, American historian, literary critic, and philosopher of social sciences. Girard observed that societies typically go through periods of peace interrupted by troubling disturbances. Those in power attempt to mitigate those disturbances with sacrificial scapegoat violence. Jesus' work at the margins prompted this classic scapegoating response: Caiaphas was the one who had told the other Jewish leaders, “It is better that one man should die for the people” (John 18:14). It was a troubled time. The Jews longed for the Roman oppressor to be gone and the Romans wanted to keep unrest down. The Jewish rulers and priests hated the Roman occupiers; but the powerful who had previously been enemies now became united in scapegoating Jesus. The proverb “the enemy of my enemy is my friend” suggests that two parties can work together against a common enemy. Not surprisingly, “Then Herod and his soldiers ridiculed and mocked him. Dressing him in an elegant robe, they sent him back to Pilate. That day Herod and Pilate became friends—before this they had been enemies” (Luke 23, 11-12). Girard notes that scapegoating makes that unity possible.

In times of crisis, the privileged identify one sector of society deemed by them to be of lesser value, a minority they imagine would not be missed. Those at

the margins are accused of being the ones who are causing all the problems. If they, the powerful, can remove this person or group, then peace will once again be restored. For Nazi Germany, they included Jews, Jehovah's Witnesses, Roma, and homosexuals. Nazi propaganda expressed their rationale that if Germany could be "purified" of those whom they thought "polluted" their society, then Germany could succeed unobstructed. According to Girard, scapegoating appears to succeed for a time, but must be periodically repeated to get continued results. No doubt if the Nazis had succeeded, fresh victims would have been required.



Anciently, some societies sought to rid themselves of perceived perils through ritual child sacrifice; but one ancient patriarch, Abraham, came to understand that whatever else God wanted, child sacrifice was not included. For some time, Israel practiced an array of animal sacrifices climaxing in an annual ritual of scapegoating on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:20-22); but eventually, Abraham's descendants came to understand that God did not want any sacrifices at all.

"With what shall I come before the LORD,
and bow myself before God on high?
Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,
with calves a year old?
Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams,
with ten thousands of rivers of oil?
Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression,

the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?"
He has told you, O mortal, what is good;
and what does the LORD require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God? (Micah 6:6-8)

Jesus quoted Hosea 6:8, "If you had known what these words mean, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the innocent" (Matthew 12:7).

"For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins." Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said,

"Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired,
but a body you have prepared for Me;
in burnt offerings and sin offerings
you have taken no pleasure.
Then I said, 'See, God, I have come to do your will,
O God'
(in the scroll of the book it is written of Me)"
(Hebrews 10:4-7).

Herb taught us that healing must include not only the victims, that is, the oppressed, but also the oppressors—in fact, opposing "sides" are to be erased in Jesus so that we may all be one (John 17:20). Here is how God unites us all: Jesus came to center humanity no longer around a common sacrificial altar, but around a shared table (Luke 22:19), where God's presence is perceived in the broken and spilled out elements, as God stands in solidarity with the oppressed in every generation. God is not asking us to sacrifice others, but is actually becoming the one we sacrificed to show us sacrifice is wrong.

Any attempt to approach God and *shalom* by scapegoat sacrifices has been overturned by Jesus' sacrifice of himself (Hebrews 10) and by his bodily resurrection from the dead. Jesus was resurrected from the dead and shown to be innocent; humanity is thus made aware of its violent tendencies and the cycle is broken. ▼



For a more complete view, I recommend reading the writings of Rene Girard directly.

(1) Cornelius Plantinga, Jr.,
Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin,
pages 5, 14, 16.

Finding Diogenes – The hermeneutics of a Pastor



By Gerard Frenk

The following is a reworked lecture given at the Building Safe Places conference held in The Netherlands during June 2014. The audience consisted of ministers of the Dutch union. The informality of the language has been adapted for a reading audience.

Longer ago than I care to remember a good friend received his masters degree in psychology. He thought it worth a celebration and I was asked to help mark this special occasion with a speech. In due time we received a slightly less than formal invitation.

The picture proved to be a source of inspiration. I decided to talk about the fact that we could both be considered dogs, but of two very different kinds. I posited a contrast between the Latin dog

(*canis*) and the Greek dog (*kuon*). Where the Latin dog is generally seen as man's best friend and may well be

allowed inside the home, the Greek dog is viewed as a scabby, timid, and suspicious type who spends most of its time in the shadows, wary of unpredictable human behaviour. The Latin dog has lent its name to a religious order: the Dominicans (*canis domini*). The Greek dog to a sorely mistreated and misunderstood philosophical tradition: *kunismos*. For the occasion I gave my friend the Latin label and turned myself into a Greek dog.



Kunismos

The party over, I put the speech on my desk for later filing. A few weeks later it caught my eye. I picked it up and my characterisation of myself as a Greek dog suddenly triggered a chain of thought about my ministry. The Greek dog, I concluded, has not only given his name a philosophical tradition (*kunismos*) but also embodies a core value of the gospel. (I use the Greek *kunismos* because I want to avoid the word cynicism, a word that has negative connotations).

Find the Greek dog



Let's visit the man who inspired kunismos

Diogenes: ho Kunikos (the doglike one)
lived in a barrel or more probably a large amphora
considered and treated by many as a stray dog
(kuon) given the "nickname" ho kunikos
inspired the philosophical tradition called kunismos

Diogenes was the intellectual *enfant terrible* of his day. He lived 404-323 BC. Born in Sinope, he lived in Athens until banished, then moved to and died in Corinth. A few stories will characterise him sufficiently for our purpose today.



- Diogenes walks through Athens in broad daylight. He has a burning lamp in his hand. Asked what he thinks he is doing, he answers, I'm looking for an honest man.
- Alexander the Great and Diogenes meet in Corinth. Diogenes is relaxing in the early morning sunlight. Alexander is thrilled to meet the famous philosopher, and asks, "May I grant you a favour?" Without regard for status Diogenes replies, "Yes, move out of my sunlight" literally: unshade me, which is a more telling reply.
- Alexander continues, "If I were not Alexander, I should wish to be Diogenes." Diogenes replies, "If I were not Diogenes, I should also wish to be Diogenes." In some versions the conversation continues and Alexander finds the philosopher looking at a pile of human bones. Diogenes explains, "I am searching for the bones of your father but cannot distinguish them from those of a slave."



- Socrates had thought to categorise living things. One of his distinctions was between animals walking on four feet and animals walking on two feet. One day Plato used Socrates' definition of man as a "featherless two-footer". When Diogenes heard about it he went to Plato's academy and showed him this!



Now, this last story is a crux. It is much more than a joke played on Plato. Sloterdijk concludes that Diogenes here illustrates a fundamentally different attitude to life and thinking (*Critique of Cynical Reason*, 1983). Diogenes' critique is not that Plato uses an inadequate definition; his critique is that reality cannot be *captured* in concepts and definitions. To think that you can come to understand life by abstraction, by systemic thinking, is, to Diogenes, absurd. It is a fallacy to work on the premise that thinking will result in knowledge that is *clear, self evident, and eternally true*. Diogenes would have laughed Descartes out of town. The world and life are much too complicated to be caught in words and concepts. Life is to be experienced, to be lived. *You cannot experience the concept humanity, you can only experience humans*. Abstraction creates distance. Direct experience is involvement, nearness. Distance and abstraction are forms of simplification. Involvement and direct experience expose the complexity and diversity of life.

This is why Diogenes the Greek dog, the *Kunikos*, marks an important moment in the search for truth.

Plato locates true life in the head. Thinking leads to true knowledge. Logic is the instrument to be used. With Diogenes the practical embodiment is most important. How does it feel? What is the material and factual experience? *"At that moment the search for truth is split into a discursive, highly theoretical battle order and a satirical-literary gang of sharpshooters."* (Sloterdijk 1:181)

The *kunikos* confronts society, power, and received wisdom by walking around as a living question mark. He drives people mad by repeating: *Who says so? How do you feel about that? It all depends, doesn't it? Who benefits?*

In his mind, received common knowledge is ever suspect. Power is to be undermined and resisted: not only naked abuse, but the subtle kind that claims to know natural and eternal truths while in reality defend-



Plato

ing its own interests. He questions morality when it seems most self-evident. The gods and religion are suspect because they are often allied to the status quo. The *kunikos* is a living pain in the *** for those in power and sets his teeth in the arm of bureaucracy. He barks, he yelps, he bites. People throw stones at him to keep him at a distance. He prods, he turns his verbal knives in open wounds, he laughs at the wrong moments. In its turn, the dominating culture will try to marginalise him and is generally able to do so because it controls the instruments of power. But the *kunikos* fights back with his whole arsenal: irony, sarcasm, mirrored stories, parables, his own alternative lifestyle, performances ... he is a one-man counter-culture. Nothing in life or society is simple or straightforward.



Diogenes

The Gospel

His instrumentarium should ring familiar to all of us who are reasonably at home in Scripture.

- *The LORD said to him, "Go, marry a promiscuous woman and have children with her, for like an adulterous wife this land is guilty of unfaithfulness to the LORD." So he married Gomer daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son. (Hosea)*
- *Make bread for yourself. You are to eat it during the 390 days you lie on your side. Eat the food as you would a loaf of barley bread; bake it in the sight of the people, using human shit for fuel." The LORD said, "In this way the people of Israel will eat defiled food among the nations where I will drive them." (Ezekiel).*
- *"No prophet is accepted in his hometown. I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah's time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. And there*

were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed—only Naaman the Syrian." (Jesus).

- *"You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions! For Moses said, 'Honor your father and mother,' and, 'Anyone who curses their father or mother is to be put to death.' But you say that if anyone declares that what might have been used to help their father or mother is Corban (that is, devoted to God)—then you no longer let them do anything for their father or mother. Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that."* (Jesus).

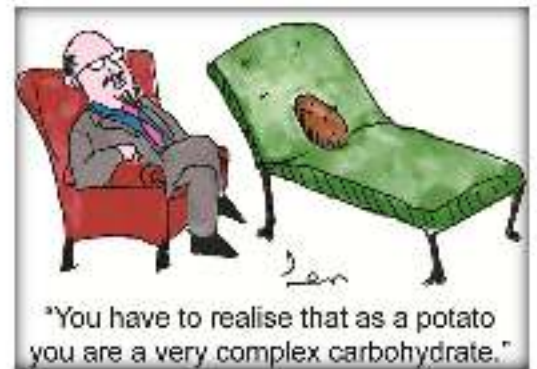
Much more of the same nature may be found in Scripture. Consider Samuel who is highly suspicious of kingship. Read his ironical speech to the elders of Israel in 1 Samuel 8. In Deuteronomy 17 the king is warned that he must not regard himself superior to any other

man. Ezekiel 16 and 20 may be read as a sarcastic/ironical retelling of the official, received history of Israel. The book of Acts knows of only one driving power: the Spirit of God. In Daniel nothing is left of the earthly powers but dust. The book of Revelation is one big question mark behind the power claims of Rome. And we could go on.

It is clear that Jesus has understood the prophets and treads in their footsteps. Like them he questions power, current morality, theology, custom. He is disruptive. Like the *kunikos* he knows that confessions, customs, norms are simplifications of reality. And simplifications are dangerous. They are generally instruments of power and therefore preferably expressed in antagonistic terms: *This is true, that is false. It's between us and them. You are either for us or against us.* This is why the prophets and Jesus in their footsteps continually complicate matters. They do so by confronting people with themselves. The parable of the Good Samaritan is a prime example. The *either-or* world of the passers-by is being complicated by the deed of the Samaritan. His action questions a dichotomous understanding of reality. In the world of pure-impure there ➤

seems to be no room for mercy. In the world of duty there is no room for charity. The victim is a problem that has to be circumvented rather than a fellow human being needing help. It is the outsider who is *moved* by the plight of the victim. The parable thus makes life more complicated and the listener is asked to place himself in that new context.

On the internet there is a plethora of sayings attributed to Confucius. A very popular one reads: *Life is really simple but we insist on making it complicated.* This is nonsense. Even a superficial look at the following table and cartoon will suffice to prove the contrary.



Embodiment

Simplifications tend to divide the world into us and them. When the *we* in the formula have power, there is generally little regard for the actual position of the *them*. That is why in power structures it is always the weak, the powerless who truly suffer. Here a deep Christian paradox surfaces. Christian theology turns on the suffering of one who is absolutely powerless and practices nearness by total identification (*splagnisesthai, kenosis*). So, if there is to be something as Christian power at all, it can only consist in forms in which suffering is not inflicted on the other and nearness is practised to the point of identification. Is that possible? That's the wrong question. The right question is: *how* to embody this theology? By talking about possibility or impossibility we are already distancing ourselves from others instead of practising nearness. It is in practising what we

Health and Everything		
Simple	Complicated	Complex
Following a Recipe	A Rocket to the Moon	Raising a Child
- The recipe is essential - Recipes are tested to assure replicability of later efforts - No particular expertise: knowing how to cook increases success - Recipes produce standard products - Certainty of same results every time - Optimism re results	- Formulae are critical and necessary - Sending one rocket increases assurance that next will be ok - High level of expertise in many specialized fields + coordination - Rockets similar in critical ways - High degree of certainty of outcome - Optimism re results	- Formulae have only a limited application - Raising one child gives no assurance of success with the next - Expertise can help but is not sufficient - Every child is unique - Uncertainty of outcome remains - Optimism re results

preach that we discover how to do it.

Another time Jesus went into the synagogue, and a man with a shrivelled hand was there. Some of them were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal him on the Sabbath. Jesus said to the man with the shriv-

elled hand, "Stand up in front of everyone."

Then Jesus asked them, "Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" But they remained silent.

He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn (porosei) hearts, said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored. Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus.

The silence is telling. The man is a *problem*, a *case*. He is abstracted from his personal situation. He is not seen as an independent ego. Worse still, he is being used as a pawn on the chess board on which the scribes intend to checkmate Jesus. The scribes are willing to let the suffering continue because they are concerned with a larger future goal. Jesus brings the man near. He complicates the situation by asking a question which challenges the simple version of the law. May healing be considered an extension of what is lawful on Sabbath? His own answer to that question is made concrete in the actual healing. He does not want to become involved in a discussion in which the actuality is ignored. He insists on the priority of embodiment over abstraction. He thereby questions the norms, the authority, the power, and the attitude of an impersonal *them*.

Diogenes and Jesus. A Greek dog and a Hebrew dog. A *kunikos* and a *rabbi*. Is it possible to recognise the *kunismos* of the Gospel in the church? Does the church manage to embody the Gospel? These are questions that reach into the heart of ministry.

Thinking about the ministry of the church, its congregations and its ministers, we may conclude that an organised church is at best a paradox, but most proba-

bly an impossibility, because it will ultimately not be able to practice what it preaches. At best it will live in continual tension with its origins. That usually leads to a bad conscience. Such a conscience becomes visible when comparing what is said with what is practiced.

- *Kunismos* is at the heart of its beginnings but as it grows and organises it begins to marginalize the *kunikoi* in its midst. The question marks are replaced by exclamation marks of its own choosing.
- The church professes to encourage independent reading of the Bible and understanding of the Gospel. At the same time there is more than a desire to control exegesis, theology, and morality. To do so, it must exercise power.
- Ministers are believed to be called by God and merely confirmed as such by the church. In practice, the minister is deemed a representative of the organisation.
- Each member is considered to have a unique and personal relationship with God. In practice, maximum uniformity is sought to maintain unity. Individual faith is stressed but membership is granted (note the verb) on the basis of assent to a confession.
- So the church is a paradox. In its body it carries instruments of power and instruments of resistance against that power, means of repression and means of emancipation.

A Question: "If sheep do not belong to the church but to God/Christ and if each "sheep" has a free and independent ego before God, is then the name "pastor" not a form of hubris?"

For those who are interested: Dostoyevsky has written the ultimate literary work on this: The Brothers Karamazov.

Personal

Up to this point I have been relatively impersonal. From now on that is impossible, for two reasons. Firstly, *Building Safe Places* specifically asked me to speak from a personal perspective. Secondly, what follows cannot be a paradigm for others. It is my experience of and reflection on ministry and I can only share it as story.

Once the *kunikos* had entered my life and had made me look intensely at what I was doing, I had a few basic

questions to answer. How does the paradox, which is church, work out in the lives of individual believers? Closer to home: how do they work out in my life as a minister? In my work I am continually in conversation with individual members. I am told unique life stories. How near do I come, how distant can I remain? How do I resolve the tension? How do I tame the paradox? How do I embody the gospel as I understand it? My answer was: become a Greek dog with Gospel genes. The *kuni-*

kos tells me that I can only embody the Gospel by opposing abstraction and simplification. That has consequences. Whenever the gospel is presented in an *us-them* fashion I have to bark. When people are kept at a distance, when norms become more important than values, I will have to howl! This is what Diogenes and Jesus have in common. They both say that you cannot experience an abstraction called humanity; you can only experience a fellow human. Therefore, my first loyalty as a minister is to the Gospel, not as formulated in dogma, but as a call to practice nearness. I must closely listen to its many calls to embody love.

Sloterdijk

An important author who accompanied and, to a great extent, inspired my journey is Peter Sloterdijk. In one chapter of his book, *The Critique of Cynical Reason*, he contrasts two ways of doing (scientific) research (which for him pictures two ways of approaching reality). In the first the ego of the researcher approaches the “object” aiming to generalise, keep distance and control. This so-called scientific method tends to aim at uniformity. Researchers use the same concepts, methodology, and have a shared interest in maintaining uniformity. The existence of differing hypotheses over a long time is seen as a weakness and as an undermining of the current methodology. The right method should lead to a definitive answer and closure.

In the same chapter Sloterdijk refers to Adorno who has written on *the priority of the object*. By that he means that an object is not approached with a set of methodological questions, as if it is to be analysed, conquered, and definitively described, but as something independent and worthwhile in itself. Sloterdijk concludes:

“The weaker our methods, the better for the ‘objects’. As long as there are a number of ‘interpretations’, objects are safe from the delusion of the researchers that the objects – which they think they know – have been fixed forever. As long as ‘interpretation’ is alive, the memory of the fact that things ‘as such’ are something independent of whatever research on our side, is kept alive. When the object enjoys priority it is approached with sympathetic understanding, without the subject being forced into an inferior position. The best example of such an approach is love. There the

Many years earlier I had read Martin Buber's *Ich und Du*. He asked the question: Do I consider the other to be a *du* or an *es*? In grammatical terms, is the other a subject in his or her own right (the familiar *du*), or do I approach him/her as an object (the distant *es*)? Am I talking with and listening to? Those questions are equally relevant for my relationship with Scripture. Is Scripture a distant *es*, an object I use. Or is Scripture a *du*, a voice to be listened to with open mind and heart. (The usual English contrast I-thou picks up on the personal distance, but does not quite reflect the “objectification” expressed by *es*.)

object is not known, but at most familiar. There's no objectivity, just intimacy. When the researcher approaches he does not do so as master of research, but as neighbour, friend, someone who is attracted. He knows that the ‘relationship’ is over on the day when things look as if they have always been the same, constant, mundane, identical, predictable. Where the sense of beauty ceases, war, indifference, and death begin.”

Here we have an open hermeneutic which is prepared to be surprised. It is prepared to forego power.

In my ministry I have tried to always give priority to the other, that which is not me. As a consequence I have been at odds with many General Conference statements, especially those on marriage and divorce, homosexuality, and hermeneutics/exegesis. These statements seek to prescribe and proscribe. In the words of Sloterdijk, to generalise, keep distance and control. The gay person, the woman who has divorced her violent husband, the theologian who claims the right to independent reading of Scripture, have become objects being judged by an (impersonal) subject. All are denied an independent ego. They are categorised, bureaucratised, and spoken to and about, not with. Their individual history or narrative is not considered relevant or important. Their faith is considered wanting, inadequate. The method, the norm, and confession have priority. This became particularly clear during the General Conference in Toronto (2000). When the changes to the Church Manual came up for discussion, it became clear that the church was capable of inflicting psychological violence on a scale I had never suspected. Delegates were asked to vote in favour of the

following:

A separation or divorce that results from such factors as physical violence or in which "unfaithfulness to the marriage vow"(see sections 1 and 2 above) is not involved does not give either one the scriptural right to remarry, unless in the meantime the other party has remarried, committed adultery or fornication, or died. Should a member who has been thus divorced, remarry without these biblical grounds, he/she shall be removed from membership and the one whom he/she remarries, if a member, also shall be removed from membership. (Church Manual)

During the discussion on the floor I pointed out that the church should leave this to the pastors and that if the wording was voted as proposed, the church would be forcing many a minister to simply ignore the manual. Upon return to the Netherlands I wrote an article with a case study of a woman who had endured almost twenty years of abuse and violence in her first marriage. I ended the article as follows:

"Remarriage? That doesn't seem to be a personal choice within the church. It may even turn out that your ex continues to dominate your life. What if, after many years of violence and the stress of a divorce you run into that gentle, loving man or woman who helps to restore your confidence and trust? Marriage? Not in church if your bully of an ex is still unmarried or hasn't been caught committing adultery in flagrante. You marry anyway? Then the church is left no other choice but to take disciplinary action. The pastor who has been your mainstay in the difficult years? He now needs to defend the indefensible. Or has he understood the gospel well enough to know that"

It is clear to me that in this case the manual sanctions the abuse of power. It inflicts violence. It leaves a wounded soul by the side of the road and at the same time claims to understand the gospel. It is time for the church to really do homework on hermeneutics and exegesis.

(Again a strange paradox. In fact, the church has already admitted that texts can only be read in context and that the Spirit is more important than the letter. How else to explain that women may be ordained as elders?! Yet on the issue of ordination and in the case of divorce and remarriage the Bible is read as though

cast in concrete. It is not surprising that those in the TOSC (Theology of Ordination Committee) who oppose ordination are also pleading for reversion of the decision to allow women elders.)

Now, an Adventist who is tempted to exercise power in this fashion must of necessity lead a schizoid life because somewhere in his or her heart he knows about the *kunismos* of Scripture and Christ. He or she knows that the Gospel raises its voice against all powers claiming to know (absolute) truth. By exercising or even representing power you run the risk of ending up not as a *kunikos* but as a cynic. What could be more cynical than publicly stating that you exercise power in the name of the Lord in order to protect the gospel? The moment you write that down or proclaim it the *kunikos* will burst out laughing and give you Dostoyevsky to read. It is the great paradox of organised religion and plays at all levels of church polity, and the minister is not excluded.

Colossians 1:13-25

*He has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation; for in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, **whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities**--all things were created through him and **for him. He is before all things**, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church;*

1 Corinthians 1:18-25

*For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, "**I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the cleverness of the clever I will thwart.**" **Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?** For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through **the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.** For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, **but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ***

the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

The appeal to nature

Many years ago the Dutch essayist Rudy Kousbroek gave a speech at a PEN conference (worldwide organisation of writers). He pointed to the fact that power of any kind aims at its own perpetuation. Among its most effective weaponry is an appeal to nature. What is natural is said to be self-evident and of unchanging character. I quote (translation by me):

"All sorts of circumstances have at one time or another been characterised as irresistible, indestructable, and inevitable: slavery, the caste and class systems, ruling dynasties, serfdom, inequality of races, sexes, social class, and income; circumcision, clitoridectomy, and other rites of passage; even the position in coitus and the length of hair have, in their time, been presented as the will of God, as revealed knowledge, as inherent in evolution, as part of survival of the fittest, as given with creation, as answering a cosmic consciousness, being part of the harmony of spheres, connected to the meaning and goal of history. What it finally always comes down to is an attempt to present culture as nature. The appeal to nature is an impediment to change and is therefore a much loved instrument of power."

Dog face

Every morning I walk into the bathroom and take a quick look at myself in the mirror. I always hope to see the face of a full blown Greek dog. Each morning I am disappointed. The eyes that look back seem to say: "Were life but that simple." The paradox at the heart of the church is none other than the paradox in the heart of the minister. There's only one thing to do: you fight the paradox. And the only weapon that truly works is that of proximity, nearness. It is the gentlest of instruments. ▼



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See you next year
in Pomona!

