

## CONFRONTING THE SHADOW SIDE OF ORDINATION: HUMILITY AND CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP

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Those formally “set apart” for Adventist ministry, such as myself, receive public blessing and encouragement, the sense of divine and communal support for challenging responsibility. Therein lies temptation. In being singled out for affirmation, the set-apart receive an impression, however muted, of their own worth. The public ceremony may resonate with reminders of grace and finitude, but the words and gestures nevertheless express confidence in the ability and character of particular human beings. The risk for those set apart is that the impression of fitness for special ministry may edge into the sense of superiority and entitlement to power. The history of Christian “ordination,” and of its slant toward arrogance and hierarchy, draws attention to this point. Lost humility is the shadow side of the laying on of hands.<sup>1</sup>

A clue from one of Christianity’s most forceful interpreters suggests that one shield against the temptation to arrogance may be deliberate, sustained focus on the virtue of humility. Augustine argued that the way of Jesus “consists, first, of humility, second, of humility, and, third, of humility.” He said that unless humility “precedes, accompanies, and follows whatever we do . . . pride will have bereft us of everything.” Humility is the virtue that supports all the others. “Are you thinking,” he asks, “of raising the great fabric of spirituality? Attend first of all to the foundation of humility.”<sup>2</sup>

On this account, humility would be particularly important for those formally set apart. But in spite of this, humility receives relatively little consideration. Two well-known works of contemporary pastoral theology explore ordained ministry without attending to this virtue at any length. One is Thomas C. Oden’s *Pastoral Theology: Essentials of Ministry*, a book whose index mentions just two pages that address humility. On one the author calls for “humble submission” to the authority of divine revelation. On the other he quotes Jesus’ declaration that the truly great are as “humble” as children. But in summing up what Jesus meant by this comparison Oden writes: “Jesus regarded children in their simplicity, trust, and innocence as heirs of the Kingdom.” He does not elaborate on the meaning or importance of humility per se. The second work is William H. Willimon’s *Pastor: The Theology and*

<sup>1</sup>My paper assumes that the “laying on of hands” may be fitting in connection with induction into pastoral ministry. But as I indicate later, the rite of “ordination” as we know it came into being after the New Testament period.

<sup>2</sup>For these quotations I rely on Daniel J. Harrington, SJ; James F. Keenan, SJ, *Paul and Virtue Ethics: Building Bridges between New Testament Studies and Moral Theology* (New York: Roman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2010), 143-145. The first two direct quotes are from Augustine’s Letter 118, the third from Sermon 60 from his *The Word of God*.

*Practice of Ordained Ministry*. Its subject index contains no reference to humility. And when the author sums up the “virtues required to be a good pastor,” he names “wisdom, truth telling, courage, compassion, study,” saying, truthfully, that these “do not come naturally to most of us.” He makes no mention of the one virtue that may be most basic and most difficult of all.<sup>3</sup>

Both works touch on humility indirectly, without paying specific attention to it. The *Seventh-day Adventist Minister's Manual* is similar. I notice that the 1992 edition, which I keep at home, reminds pastors to “overcome their pride,” and urges resistance to the “assumption that your holy calling makes you holy.” But the index to that edition contains no reference to humility. The only such reference in the 2009 edition concerns the footwashing (“Humility, ordinance of”), but the text’s three-paragraph discussion, which begins with the story in John 13, provides only how-to directives for the conduct of the footwashing ceremony. There is no theological exposition, no account of how the narrative might inform an authentically pastoral frame of mind.<sup>4</sup> But just this latter—the authentically pastoral frame of mind—is what inattention to humility gravely imperils. In what follows I wish to establish the Augustinian, or better, *biblical*, claim that humility is utterly basic for Christian consciousness, a virtue so indispensable as to be the “mother of all virtues.”<sup>5</sup> And if this is so, it surely invites the particular attention of those “set apart,” those who have received public assurance of their fitness to be *leaders* among Christians.

As I suggested earlier, the story of pastoral self-consciousness underscores the relevance of this point. Although “ordination” became the name for formal induction into pastoral ministry, that word does not appear in the New Testament (except as a mis-translation).<sup>6</sup> The New Testament confers no special status upon a class of “ordained” Christians; the distinction between the clergy and the laity does not even appear.<sup>7</sup> The New Testament church did, however, “select” persons for special responsibility. Acts 6:1-6 contains the most complete account of the setting apart process, which in this passage concludes with public affirmation involving prayer

<sup>3</sup>Thomas C. Oden, *Pastoral Theology: Essentials of Ministry* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1983), 138, 143; William H. Willimon, *Pastor: The Theology and Practice of Ordained Ministry* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), 24.

<sup>4</sup>The Ministerial Association of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists (Silver Spring, MD) “prepares and publishes” the *Seventh-day Adventist Minister's Manual*. The quotation from the 1992 edition appears on p. 59; the material from the 2009 edition, which I will reference again, appears on p. 170.

<sup>5</sup>In his *Humilitas: A Lost Key to Life, Love, and Leadership* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 131, John Dickson quotes this phrase from Stephen R. Covey.

<sup>6</sup>V. Norskov Olsen, *Myth and Truth: Church, Priesthood and Ordination* (Riverside, CA: Loma Linda University Press, 1990), 6, 123-125, 176-177.

<sup>7</sup>Gottfried Osterwal is the Adventist theologian who first emphasized this point, in *Mission: Possible* (Nashville: Southern Publishing, 1972), especially in the chapter on “The Role of the Laity,” 103-120.

and the laying on of hands.<sup>8</sup> But in the New Testament, *all* the faithful are “saints,” all set apart for service under God. All belong (1 Pet 2:9) to the “royal priesthood” that constitutes “God’s own people.”<sup>9</sup> Thus Hendrik Kraemer, the Dutch theologian of the laity, could say that in New Testament perspective all members have the “same calling, responsibility and dignity.” Gottfried Osterwal, the Adventist theologian who learned from Kraemer and in 1972 published the excellent *Mission: Possible*, echoed the thought: every member, he wrote, “shares equally in [the church’s] life, worship, mission, and government.”<sup>10</sup>

Due largely to the idea (not found in the New Testament) that the Lord’s supper is a sacrifice of the sort familiar from the Hebrew Bible, a distinction between priest and lay person comes into view by the start of the third century, some one hundred years after the end of the New Testament period. By now Christian writers are also distinguishing among levels of pastoral authority, with bishops having primacy relative to elders (presbyters) in the developing sense of hierarchy. No description of an ordination rite for installment to pastoral ministry appears in the Christian literature until about this time, and the description reflects these changes: now the bishop alone has authority to ordain presbyters and deacons, and these latter, the deacons, are not priests at all, nor even recipients of “the Spirit that is possessed by the presbytery.” Deacons exist to carry out the bishop’s commands.<sup>11</sup>

Between 248 and 258 C.E. the bishop of Carthage was Cyprian, an adult convert to Christianity who suffered persecution for his faith and was finally beheaded. But in his concern for the “unity” of the church, he expressed vivid and highly influential support for the hierarchical point of view. Cyprian wrote that the church is “founded upon the bishops, and every act of the Church is controlled by these same rulers.” He said further: “You ought to know that the bishop is in the Church, and the Church is in the bishop; and if anyone be not with the bishop, that he is not in the Church.”<sup>12</sup>

Early in the fourth century, Constantine set out to reconcile his political domain with the Christian faith, a move that had the effect of accelerating the church’s drift toward centralization of authority. More and more, it took

<sup>8</sup>Some other pertinent passages are Acts 13:2, 3; 1 Tim 4:14; 2 Tim 1:6. The book of Acts links the laying on of hands with reception of the Holy Spirit (8:18, 19; 9:17), but without suggesting that the gift of the Spirit *depends* on the laying on of hands (10:44-48).

<sup>9</sup>Paul refers to recipients of his letters as “saints,” as in, e.g., 1 Cor 1:2, 2 Corinthians 1:1, and Philippians 1:1. As Olsen writes, 26, the term’s biblical meaning is that of “consecrated persons” or persons “set apart” for God.

<sup>10</sup>Hendrik Kraemer, *A Theology of the Laity* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1958), 160; Osterwal, *ibid.*, 105.

<sup>11</sup>I am relying as in the paragraph and in the one that follows on Olsen, *ibid.*, 97-100; also 149, 150, where the author summarizes perspective on the ordination rite found in *The Apostolic Tradition* by Hippolytus, a Roman presbyter.

<sup>12</sup>See fn 12.

on the trappings of empire. As V. Norskov Olsen, the Adventist historian and former president of Loma Linda University, wrote, pagan Rome “grew into papal Rome.” By the middle of the fifth century Pope Leo the Great was reinforcing his authority by conjuring up a theory about the apostle Peter’s connection with the bishop of Rome. His ideas fed the process that finally established the medieval papacy, an organization whose most illustrious eleventh-century leader, Pope Gregory VII, could declare that the Roman pontiff “may be judged by no one.”<sup>13</sup>

Challenges to medieval ecclesiology occurred several times, but it was Martin Luther, at the beginning of the sixteenth century, whose challenge finally ignited the Protestant Reformation. Appealing to the New Testament, he simply denied the clergy-laity distinction. In his *Open Letter to the Christian Nobility*, written in 1520, Luther asserted that each baptized Christian “can boast that he is already a consecrated priest, bishop, and pope,” even if, to “exercise such office,” the individual must await the “consent and election” of the “community.” He meant by this to reclaim the New Testament idea of the priesthood of all believers. John Calvin, the Reformation’s greatest systematic thinker, was of similar mind. In Christ, he wrote, “we are all priests.”<sup>14</sup>

With respect to the ordained ministry, an institution both Luther and Calvin upheld, this reaffirmation was clearly a shift away from the sense of superiority and entitlement to power. That shift was radicalized in the thinking of the Anabaptists. Their movement, a part of the so-called Radical Reformation, was a protest against continuing reliance on state power under Luther, Calvin, and other Magisterial (as they are now called) Reformers. This latter was left over from the shift to church-state partnership that had occurred under Constantine, and further confirmed the idea that some church members may have authority *over* others. More than the other Reformers, Anabaptist writers put great emphasis on the *shared* authority of church members. For the “common good,” said one of the Swiss Brethren, each voice matters. To his Zurich-rooted Anabaptist community, sermon monologues themselves were ill-advised. Paul had noted (1 Cor 14:26) that when Christians assemble, each may bring a “lesson” or “interpretation.” No one was to dominate. The same Swiss Brother spoke unhappily of “preachers” who “presume that they need yield to no one.” That posture simply went against the movement’s grain. Another Anabaptist, the lengthily named Ambrosius Spitelmaier, described the Radical way as follows: “When they have come together they teach one another the divine Word and one asks the other: how do you understand this saying?” Expanding on the point, he declared: “Thus there is among them a diligent living according to the divine Word.”<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 50-54; on p. 175 of his book’s “Epilogue,” a theological reflection on Christian ministry, Olsen repeats the point about pagan Rome growing into papal Rome.

<sup>14</sup>Quoted *ibid.*, 155. Luther’s remark may be found in *Luther’s Works*, 44:129; Calvin’s remark is from *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, IV. xix. 28.

<sup>15</sup>Walter Klaassen, ed., *Anabaptism in Outline: Selected Primary Sources* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1981). See 126 for the quote from the Swiss Brother, and 124 for the

Teaching, then, was for the sake of Christian practice, or “living,” just as in that favorite Adventist passage, 2 Tim 3:16, 17, where the proper use of Scripture is equipping “everyone who belongs to God . . . for every good work.” To the Radical Reformers, the point of shared authority was “edification,” so that congregations could “be a bright light” against the “presumptuous attacks of the adversaries.”<sup>16</sup>

Prominent Neo-Anabaptists, modern heirs of the Radical Reformation heritage, emphasize that all this evokes the ideal of “consensus.” Commenting on 1 Cor 14, John Howard Yoder notices in Paul’s letter the “simple trust that God himself, as Spirit, is at work” in the local community’s “disciplined human discourse.” Instead of limiting responsibility to those formally credentialed or empowered, this chapter and its Anabaptist interpreters embrace what Yoder calls “dialogical liberty,” a conversational strategy in which “the individual participates and to which he or she *consents*.” Neither “arbitrary individualism” (I am my own pope) nor “established authority” (the hierarchy decides) resolves the questions that arise in Christian life. This process is a matter, as he later puts it, of “decision making by open dialogue and consensus.”<sup>17</sup> In a similar vein, James Wm. McClendon, Jr., Neo-Anabaptism’s most accomplished systematic thinker, explains why he visited twenty-five “centers” of Anabaptist thought (one was Walla Walla College) before publishing the first volume of his three-volume systematic theology. He did so in deference to an Anabaptist paradigm he calls “consensus based on conversation.”<sup>18</sup>

Conversation takes place, of course, under the authority of Christ. Anabaptism’s quarrel with the Magisterial Reformers over matters such as obeisance to the state reflected the movement’s conviction that the “apostolic pattern” must have “normative character.”<sup>19</sup> Under the apostles, Christ trumped all other claims on human loyalty, including the state’s. “To him,” wrote one Anabaptist, “is given all authority in heaven, on earth, and under the earth,” and his followers must therefore honor and love him “above all creatures.” Even to understand Scripture “correctly,” the reader must acknowledge that it comes under the authority of Christ. “The content of the whole Scripture,” wrote another Anabaptist, “is briefly summarized in this: Honor and fear God the almighty in Christ his Son.”<sup>20</sup>

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Spitelmaier remarks.

<sup>16</sup>Remarks of the same Swiss Brother, *ibid.*, 126.

<sup>17</sup>John Howard Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 29, 22, 24 (italics mine); the later remark is from Yoder, *Royal Priesthood: Essays Ecclesiological and Ecumenical* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1998), 368.

<sup>18</sup>James Wm. McClendon, Jr., *Ethics: Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, rev. ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 8.

<sup>19</sup>Robert Friedmann, *The Theology of Anabaptism* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1973), 121.

<sup>20</sup>Klaassen, ed., *ibid.*, 27, 150; Leonhard Schiemer wrote the first quote, Bernhard

Just this authority, together with the Anabaptist penchant for Scripture's *practical* meaning, sheds a dramatic light on the pastoral frame of mind that befits the end of hierarchy and the embrace of consensus based on conversation. Both Yoder and McClendon give careful attention to the famous hymn, found in Phil 2, that follows Paul's admonition to lay aside "conceit" and "in humility regard others as better than yourselves." Paul elaborates by explicit reference to Christ: "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus," following up with a long quotation from the hymn.

Both these Neo-Anabaptist scholars say that the hymn may be read simply as an account of the Incarnation. Both notice, however, that it begins (Phil 2:6) by saying that Jesus was in God's form or image, and both notice that God-likeness is an intended attribute of Adam (Gen 1). So the hymn may be about Jesus' story on earth; it may, indeed, parallel the Old Testament story of creation and fall, where the first temptation (Gen 3) is about grasping after equality with God. On this reading the hymn is a summation of Jesus' life, of his magnificent spiritual victory. Like Adam, he faces the temptation to seize high status ("equality with God") but, unlike Adam, he empties himself, embracing service (Phil 2:7) as a way of life. Indeed, Jesus humbles himself to the point (v. 8) of enduring a shameful death, "even death on a cross." And it is just because of this—just because of the humility that Adam, for his part, spurned—that God can "exalt" Jesus (vv. 9-11) into someone whom we may confess as "Lord."

Without insisting that this is the only legitimate reading of the hymn, McClendon notes that in the earliest patristic literature it was the dominant one, and that this reading continued to appear in later patristic authors. The aforementioned Cyprian, for example, said the passage makes the very same point as the footwashing story of John 13, where Jesus lays aside all conceit and shows his high regard for others.<sup>21</sup>

In any case, on this Neo-Anabaptist interpretation of Paul's hymn, Jesus is unmistakably a brother to his disciples, unmistakably an example to be imitated. And precisely to the point Augustine made and to the one I am making now, this (and even the other) interpretation puts humility at the center of the God-oriented life. *If pride portends a fall, and if humility both underlies Jesus' exaltation and also defines true discipleship, then Augustine said rightly that humility is the "foundation," the virtue that must precede, accompany, and follow "whatever we do."*

In light of all this, consider Norskov Olsen's perspective. Writing as an Adventist, he takes careful note both of the Anabaptist claim that "all the members of the fellowship had something whereby to enlighten the others" and also of its rejection of "external ecclesiastical and political compulsions."

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Rothmann the second.

<sup>21</sup>See John Howard Yoder, *Preface to Theology: Christology and Theological Method* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Books, 2002), 81-87; and James Wm. McClendon, Jr., *Doctrine: Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 266-269. McClendon also published "Philippians 2:5-11," in *Review and Expositor* 88 (1991): 439-444.

He speaks as well of the movement's "principle of consensus." At least three times, moreover, he remarks on how "covenant-remnant-eschaton motifs" color Anabaptism's ecclesiology, and he quotes Robert Friedmann's assertion that among the sixteenth-century reforming movements, only the Radical Reformation persisted in giving the Second Coming a "legitimate function" in the life of faith.<sup>22</sup>

This is more than a hint of the movement's special relevance to Adventism, although Olsen does not make that argument explicitly. But several have done so (one at book length), each making the point Adventism's Reformation roots go back to Anabaptism.<sup>23</sup> And Charles Bradford, the former North American Division president, drew a clear connection between the Anabaptists and the Adventist pioneers in an article specifically focused on ministerial ordination. In light of this connection he declares that we "must stoutly resist any reappearance of hierarchy in any form." In just this spirit he cites the third verse of 1 Pet 5: "Do not lord it over those in your charge, but be examples to the flock." He also cites Ellen White, whose "phrase 'kingly power'" was "a warning to pastors and leaders not to abuse their authority." Summing up, he writes: "The Christian ministry is not a new priestcraft. Anything that smacks of exclusivity, of special class, of privilege that comes by initiation (ordination) must be demolished with the trust and reality of the gospel."<sup>24</sup>

If the story of pastoral self-consciousness bends toward arrogance, it seems, then, also to bend back. The papal declaration that the Roman pontiff "may be judged by no one" gives way, especially in the Radical Reformation, to the idea of shared authority under Christ. And this latter idea has taken hold, though somewhat feebly, in Adventism. As Charles Bradford saw, it may be found in the writings of Ellen White, a founding member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. An example would be her commentary on Jesus and the footwashing, which focuses attention on "humility of heart," a trait precisely at odds with the human "disposition" to seek "the highest place."<sup>25</sup> And a familiar theme in her work is "primitive godliness," which she explicitly associates with "apostolic times" and thus with the age before hierarchy and centralization of authority.

<sup>22</sup>Olsen, *ibid.*, 115, 117, 176; the Friedmann quote is from Friedmann, *ibid.*, 102.

<sup>23</sup>See W. L. Emmerson, *The Reformation and the Advent Movement* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1983). Emmerson, who was born in 1901 (!), argues that the Reformation—in particular, the Radical Reformation—anticipates the vision that comes to full expression in Seventh-day Adventism. I myself located Adventism's roots in Anabaptism in "Radical Discipleship and the Renewal of Adventist Mission," *Spectrum* 14 (December, 1983), 11-20. In *A Search for Identity: The Development of Seventh-day Adventist Beliefs* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), George Knight argues that the Radical Reformation is an important key to Adventist identity.

<sup>24</sup>Charles E. Bradford, "An Emphasis on Ministry: Is Ordination for Honor or for Service?" *Adventist Review*, May 1995, 8-10.

<sup>25</sup>Ellen White, *Desire of Ages* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2002), 650.

All this has an Anabaptist ring, though Ellen White would not have known it, since the Anabaptist movement was practically unknown during her lifetime. That unawareness—historians didn’t recover the story until well into the twentieth century—may account for some of her ambivalence about centralized authority. She objected, it is true, to “kingly power.” And she certainly doubted whether the General Conference could speak for God, remarking in 1899 that it “has been some years since I have considered the General Conference as the voice of God.” But earlier she had said that the General Conference *is* God’s “highest authority” on earth.<sup>26</sup>

In popular Adventism, and also among most current leaders, her earlier remark is the better known and honored. But at its very beginning, Adventism recoiled from locating theological authority in any leadership elite. During the 1861 organizing meeting of the Michigan Conference, the first of such entities, James White argued that an official creed, voted by meeting delegates, would block “new light” and stand in “direct opposition” to the “gifts” of the Holy Spirit. And when Adventist leaders put forth a somewhat lengthy statement of their faith in 1872, it was merely informational: they were explaining themselves to the wider world. The preamble of the statement said it was to have no “authority with our people,” nor was it meant to “secure uniformity among them, as a system of faith.”<sup>27</sup> Today it is still important to remind ourselves that official statements of belief voted at General Conference sessions are not doctrinal litmus tests giving the spiritual elite who attend these sessions as delegates (most of them ordained) a certain power *over* the rest of the church.

The argument Neo-Anabaptists make concerning humility and shared authority is a compelling reason for Adventists, who in any case share the same heritage, to adjust toward fuller embrace of the Radical Reformation point of view. Phil 2 seems itself to settle the case for humility. And any concordance-assisted perusal of the New Testament will easily turn up thirty

<sup>26</sup>The cited remark on “primitive godliness” is from *The Great Controversy* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 1911) 464. Ellen White’s comments on the General Conference range from the claim (written in 1875, *Testimonies to the Church*, vol. 3 [Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 1885], 492) that the General Conference is “the highest authority that God has upon the earth” to the thought that regarding the General Conference as “the voice of God” is “almost blasphemy,” in MS 37, 1901, April 1, 1901. The comment against the General Conference as “the voice of God” appears in the 1899 *GC Bulletin*, 74. I was first indebted to Bert Haloviak, now retired from the Ellen White Estate, for this information. Now a collection of quotes on these matters may be found at [http://www.truthorfables.com/Gen\\_Conf\\_Highest\\_Aut.htm](http://www.truthorfables.com/Gen_Conf_Highest_Aut.htm) (accessed October 9, 2014).

<sup>27</sup>The Michigan Conference story is told in *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1996), 310. Another account appears in Arthur L. White, *Ellen G. White: The Early Years, 1827-1862* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1985), 453, 454. See <http://www.greatcontroversy.org/gco/orc/fb1872.php/> for the 1872 statement (accessed October 3, 2012). A brief account of Adventist statements of beliefs appears in Gary Land, *Historical Dictionary of the Seventh-day Adventists* (Oxford: Scarecrow Press, 2005), 107-108.



or more passages that bolster the case, among them the many virtues lists that highlight humility.

A crucial passage is Luke 18:9-14, which records Jesus' words to "some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt." In the parable told here, the very praying of the Pharisee is prideful, whereas the praying of the tax collector involves "beating of his breast" and a plea for mercy "to me, a sinner!" The tax collector, not the religious leader, is the one who finds favor with God. "[A]ll who exalt themselves will be humbled," Jesus concludes, "but all who humble themselves will be exalted." The parable feels, indeed, like an echo of the hymn in Phil 2.<sup>28</sup>

Another passage of particular importance is Eph 4:1-6. The disciples must live in "humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit and the body of peace." Those to whom Christ grants the various gifts of leadership—here "pastors" are mentioned—do their work for no other purpose than to "equip the saints" for ministry and to build up "the body of Christ." They seek the "unity of the faith" and the maturing of the faithful into "the full stature of Christ." Again, the theme is humility and service, and both of these summon the believer into "the same mind...that was in Christ Jesus" (Phil 2). The hymn that clinches Augustine's argument for humility as the "foundation" of spirituality seems again to have found an echo. And in this light the ideal of shared authority makes all the more sense for Christ's followers today, not least because in the New Testament there is, in any case, no hint of hierarchy.<sup>29</sup>

How, then, may those "set apart" for Adventist ministry come to embody the virtue of humility? Were a "consensus" about this virtue to emerge, discussion of its meaning would go on and on. But some things seem immediately clear. Pastors would lay aside conceit and regard others who are in Christ as (so Paul puts it) "better than" themselves. These others would include truck drivers, landscapers, nurses, computer programmers, entrepreneurs, and (not least!) scientists. What is more, the widespread sense of "hierarchy" in Adventism, to whatever degree it may be warranted, would become an embarrassment. Conversation on how to distribute authority more widely would ensue, but in such a way (although this is a subject all its own) as to preserve and enhance Adventism's sense of worldwide unity and reach. In the course of the give-and-take, the idea that the fundamental unit of Christian fellowship is the "two or three" of whom Jesus spoke would

<sup>28</sup>Here and in the next paragraph, when I say "feels like" and "seems to" I mean no more than that; as a New Testament nonspecialist, I am neither asserting nor denying the influence of the Philippians hymn upon the writers of the two other New Testament documents.

<sup>29</sup>The Catholic New Testament scholar Luke Timothy Johnson, in his *Prophetic Jesus, Prophetic Church: The Challenge of Luke-Acts to Contemporary Christians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), 70, argues that leadership in Luke-Acts is not hierarchical, not about directives from a centralized theological authority. In Acts, he says (this is, in part, a comment on Acts 15) we "find no sign of hierarchy." I have made an argument to this effect in "Drift, or Adventist Ideals at Risk," *Spectrum* 40 (Spring 2012): 3-4.

command sustained attention and would drive Adventism toward respect for, and patience with, local nuance.<sup>30</sup> At all times, however, it would be understood that humility and shared authority are *for* the unity of all—*for* the unity of all *through* the participation of all.

This agenda would be difficult. Owing to the derangement of the human spirit, the underlying values would blow hot and cold; and like the tax collector Jesus spoke about, the church—and the pastors it ordains—would often have to acknowledge their sin and pray for mercy. But this would be healthy. Karl Barth, an enormously influential theologian of somewhat Anabaptist temper, toppled the self-satisfactions of early twentieth-century Protestantism with his commentary on Paul's Letter to the Romans. Remarking on the first verses of chapter 12, he declared that precisely repentance—the “renewing” of mind, the “transformation of thought”—is the “‘primary’ ethical action.” This is the action “upon which all ‘secondary’ ethical conduct depends and by which it is illuminated.” Just here, in repentance, is that “turning about” by which we are “directed to a new behavior.”<sup>31</sup>

This primary *action* corresponds, surely, to the primary, or foundational, *virtue* of humility. Its repetition is a path to moral growth, and when the *Seventh-day Adventist Minister's Handbook* counsels the ordained to engage in “[d]evotional repentance,” it strikes exactly the right note. Faithfulness here would be the best possible support for every pastor's pledge to work for the church and to offer its members (as we might say) humble service in the name of Christ.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>30</sup>See Matt 18:15-20, a passage crucial for the original Anabaptists and also for their Neo-Anabaptist heirs.

<sup>31</sup>Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, trans. Edwyn C. Hoskyns (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988; translation first published in 1933), 436. I owe Daryll Ward thanks for directing me to this passage.

<sup>32</sup>In her commentary on Judas at the Passover meal, Ellen White, in *Desire of Ages*, 645, suggests a link between humility and repentance, as follows: “But he would not humble himself. He hardened his heart against repentance . . .” The Ministerial Association of the General Conference, *ibid.*, 21. I owe the phrase “humble service in the name of Christ,” which I love, to Adele Waller, a lead teacher of the Sabbath School class I attend.