

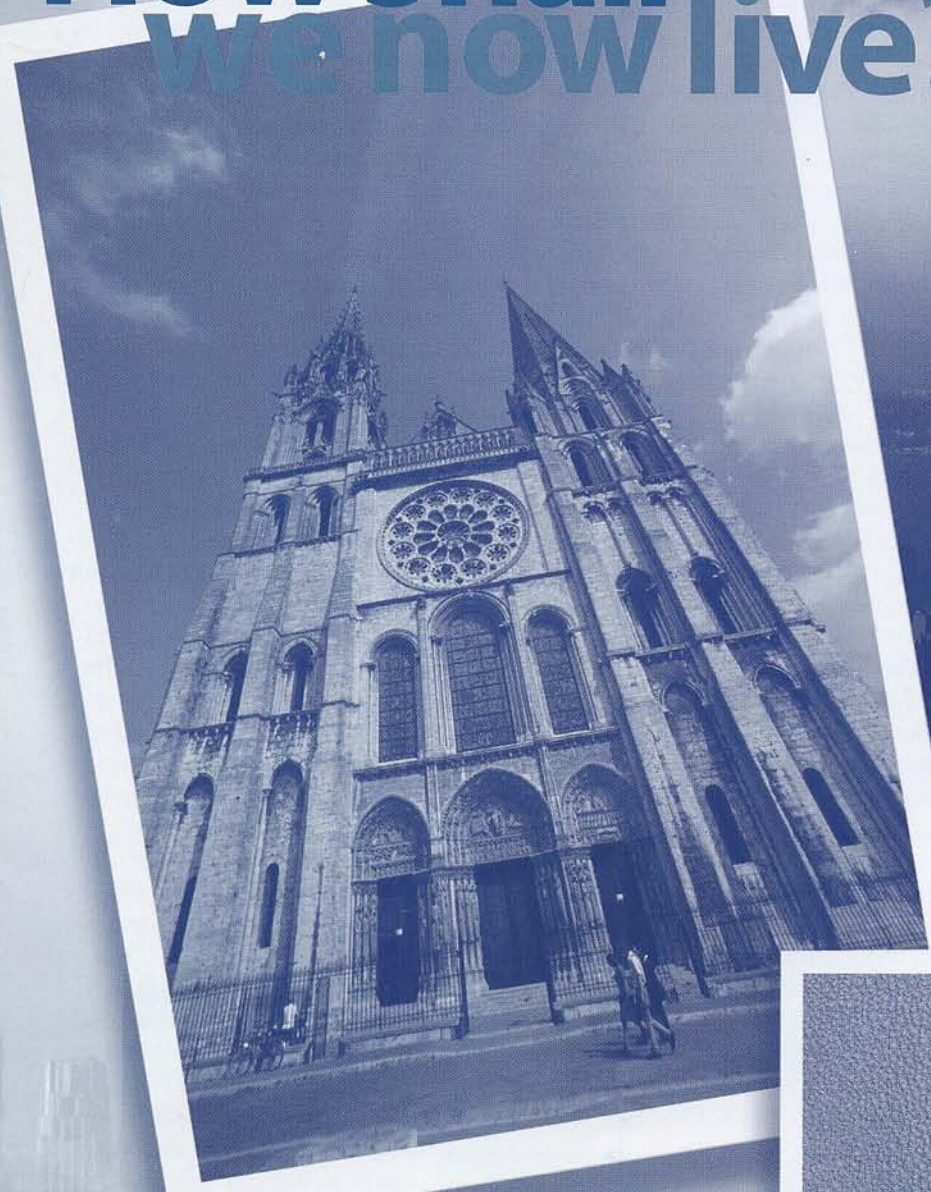
NEWS  
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# adventist today

VOLUME NINE | NUMBER FOUR | JULY, AUGUST | 2001

## How shall we now live?



## Stem cell research: Are we playing God?



INSIDE

Adventism and the stem cell debate

Life after the terrorist attacks



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# NOTES from the editor

## Ideas and Community

Debbie still remembers reading the Ten Commandments when she was eight years old. She went to her mother. "Mom, how come we go to church on Sunday when the Commandments say we're supposed to keep the seventh day holy?" Her mom explained that the Jews observed Sabbath on Saturday, but since Jesus rose from the grave on Sunday, Christians keep their Sabbath on Sunday.

Debbie didn't argue, but neither was she satisfied. Some fifteen years later when she met an Adventist at work, the long-suppressed questions came back. She joined the Adventist church and began keeping Sabbath. Her story is common. Many people find the Sabbath in the Bible and tuck it away in the back of their mind until they encounter a community that practices Sabbath-keeping. The idea of the Sabbath becomes effective in their lives only when they find a community in which the idea lives.

Sabbath-keeping is the idea or practice that most defines the Adventist community. It is what brings new converts to our community and holds cynical, non-devout adult children of Adventists in the Adventist orbit. But Sabbath by itself cannot create a genuine community.

Adventists have always been a people of ideas. Early on, our apocalyptic interpretations were highly detailed and included a substantial reliance on human scholarship. (Ironically, one of our major resources for interpreting the books of Daniel and Revelation was the work of an atheist historian, Edward Gibbon.) The priority of grace in Adventist life was rejected by most church leaders in 1888 because of another argument, current at the time, about the precise historical fulfillment of a cryptic symbol in Revelation.

We have argued over prophetic interpretation, health practices, the Trinity, theories of atonement, the inspiration and authority of Ellen White, whether women other than Ellen White should be allowed to speak for the church, the dates and processes of Creation. Our current statement of official doctrine consists of twenty-seven

■ JOHN MCLARTY

paragraphs on topics ranging from the authority of the Bible to the date of the Judgment to Christian lifestyle.

Ideas have brought us together, but they also separate us. With time the church becomes more diverse. Sabbath still unites us, but that unity is thin. In seeking a deeper spiritual communion, Adventists have formed all kinds of subgroups.

The Adventist Theological Society brings together Adventists who value education but resist any change in the traditions of the church. ASI connects Adventists in business who are committed to evangelism and outreach projects. The Association of Adventist Forums connects people with Adventist roots who have questioning minds and, usually, an advanced education. There is a plethora of small groups on the far right who are distrustful of education and clergy. Kinship networks homosexuals with an Adventist heritage.

With all the ideas floating around in the church, we need groups to remind us that we are first of all Christians, disciples of Jesus Christ. We need champions of the theology of Paul. Some of us need a community that welcomes insights from the sciences. Others need the certainty of fundamentalism. The church needs advocates of health.

The denomination as a whole cannot effectively promote all these values, but each of them is a natural development of some idea that has been present from the earliest days of Adventism. By finding ways to encourage and discipline groups with divergent emphases and patterns of life, denominational leadership can do a better job of shepherding all of the flock of God.

In "Friends of St. Thomas" [see page 8] I offer a personal vision of a community that would serve my spiritual needs. Perhaps it will speak to your heart as well. At the very least I hope it will provoke you to think

about what you are doing to foster a vital spiritual community for yourself, your friends, your children and perhaps even for your enemies. Each of us needs a home—for the heart and for the mind. ■





# FEATURES **reviews**

**PAGE 8**  
The Friends of St. Thomas  
By John McLarty

**PAGE 11**  
Stem Cells and Expectant Souls  
By James H. Stirling

**PAGE 12**  
Whither Adventism on the Stem Cell Debate?  
By Jim Walters

**PAGE 14**  
Lessons for the Church from Corporate America  
By Regis M. Nicoll

**PAGE 17**  
Does God Have a Story?  
By Gary McCary

**PAGE 18**  
Tinkering with Human Culture(s)  
By Mark F. Carr

**PAGE 23**  
Book Review: Slouching Towards Gomorrah  
By Janine Goffar

## **NEWS** **analysis**

**PAGE 5**  
Book Review: Why Religion Matters  
By Ervin Taylor

**PAGE 6**  
Creationism Consultation  
By Ervin Taylor

**PAGE 7**  
The Great Billboard Controversy  
By James H. Stirling

**PAGE 7**  
Delegates Open Door for Woman President  
By Elwin Dunn

# adventist today

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## Gospel Without Strings

You had several articles on "problems" of ethnic churches in USA [AT Mar/April 2001], but the only article that addressed the real problem was "The Gospel Without Strings Attached" by Tihomir Kukolja.

I was born in the SDA church and baptized at age 19... For the next 40 years I had no confidence in my salvation because I was taught that salvation depended on my works after baptism. But I knew that my work did not measure up. Then I heard the gospel from a notable theologian and began to study the Bible for myself, not a text here or there but reading the whole New Testament and reading straight through beginning at Matt. 1:1 chapter by chapter... Since then I have done it many times, concentrating on the 4 Gospels. Now I have total confidence in my salvation through Jesus Christ... I know that he is my salvation. My imperfect works are the "fruit, not the root."

I wish that AToday would be more Gospel oriented in its analyses of News and Views.

**Wallace Brooks | Pope Valley, CA**

## Praise Be to Bible Class

As a recent graduate from an Adventist academy, I could see where "Erin Wolfe" was coming from in her article "Academy Bible Class" in the January/February 2001 issue. However, I was shocked at how much baggage and negativity she seemed to be carrying from her experiences with Bible class at her school. Perhaps I have just been blessed to have the same wonderful, God-fearing man as my Bible teacher for the past four years, but I view my experiences in my Bible classes as having been very important to me throughout my high school career. We have a beautiful opportunity at our Adventist schools to be able to explore and enjoy God's word and wisdom. I agree, even my Bible class was not the most progressive and educational class I had, but you can't expect your Bible teacher to

assign spirituality to you as your homework. That is something you must develop on your own.

Your Bible class goes as far as you take it. I am sorry that Ms. Wolfe did not have what may be defined as a good Bible teacher, but I believe that her article seemed to take her bad experiences and generalize Adventist Bible classes as being nothing more than a waste of time. My motto here is, "You find what you're looking for." I wouldn't change my experiences at my Adventist academy for anything. And that especially includes my 32,400 minutes of Bible class.

**Sarah Pester | Sturgeon, MO**

## Academy Bible Teachers

I agree with Erin Wolfe that some Bible teachers, depending on their personality, may be less rewarding than others. I am in my junior year at an academy in Maryland, and my Bible classes have been interesting and fruitful. But the teacher was very thoughtful and cared about his students, and he brought a lot of good information and insights into his classroom. On the other hand, I had an English teacher who gave very little new information to her class; it was truly a waste of time. On the whole, my academy experience has been very good.

**Wendy Wilkinson | Warfordsburg, PA**

## Adventist Pastors

Lawrence Downing argues that SDA pastors are underpaid [AT May/June 2001]. Their church pay and benefits package is well above the average for teachers, who comprise the largest group with comparable education. Some pastors are talented and hard working and could likely earn more in another occupation (al-

though I know successful senior pastors of large SDA churches whose income dropped significantly when they had to find other work.) On the other hand, some pastors are incompetent or lazy or handicapped by important character or personality defects, and would earn minimal wages outside of the church. Most pastors are more or less normally distributed between these extremes, fine people, doing a good job, living within their means and prospering. Mandatory counseling and probation are appropriate for pastors who declare bankruptcy or are burdened with credit card debt, and certainly they are not qualified to serve on church or school boards until they get their own business in order. The conference president who recommended that pastors invest in

Perhaps I have just been blessed to have the same wonderful, God-fearing man as my Bible teacher for the past four years, but I view my experiences in my Bible classes as having been very important to me throughout my high school career.

apartments, as he did, needs to review church policy regarding conflict of interest. Managing rental properties is a demanding job, and we don't need realtors who are pastors on the side.

**David Patterson | Chattanooga, TN**

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# Why Religion Matters: The Fate of the Human Spirit in an Age of Disbelief, by Huston Smith

ERVIN TAYLOR

Smith's central thesis is that the modern world is characterized by a loss of faith in transcendence and, to him, this is very bad. "We have dropped Transcendence [Smith uses a capital "T"] not because we have discovered something that proves it nonexistent. We have merely lowered our gaze" (p. 217). In Smith's opinion, there are four major factors that account for this unfortunate aspect of the modern world: science, higher education, the media, and the modern legal system.

Smith is especially critical of science, although he calls it scientism. He views himself as the "self-appointed watchdog on scientism" (p. 66) and conducts all day seminars on the subject (p. 69). Apparently, what really bothers Smith is reading that "theology . . . suffers from being about words only, whereas science is about things" (p. 66) and science counts with numbers and theology does not (p. 67).

His response is to state that "theology takes God to be the only completely real thing there is, all else being like shadows in Plato's cave" (p. 66). To him, scientism adds to science two corollaries: (1) that science is, if not the only method at getting at truth, then at least the most reliable method and (2) the things that science deals with—material entities—are the most fundamental things that exist. Smith views scientism as an "oppressive force" (p. 63). Smith seems to agree with post-modern extremists and many fundamentalists (including members of the Adventist Theological Society) in calling for the postmodern world to renounce the epistemological privilege of science. While he attempts to protect himself from the charge of being anti-science by distinguishing in theory between "science" and "scientism," he insists that in practice the "separation is impossible" (p. 69).

Smith quotes Stephen Jay Gould's suggestion that "science tries to document the factual character of the natural world, and to develop theories that coordinate and explain the facts. Religion, on the other hand, operates in the equally important, but utterly different, realm of human purposes, meanings, and values" (p. 70-71). To Smith, this is an unacceptable distinction. Smith responds with: "... the deeper issue is who . . . is to deal with the factual character of the nonnatural, supernatural world." One wonders if Smith would agree that all

that humans are able to do is report individual "facts" about their subjective, individual perceptions and projections about the supernatural world; as their world view defines it. Science by definition does not deal with the nonnatural, supernatural world, and its success in dealing with facts in the natural world has been in large part due to its withdrawal more than a century ago

One wonders if Smith would agree that all that humans are able to do is report individual "facts" about their subjective, individual perceptions and projections about the supernatural world as their world view defines it. Science by definition does not deal with the nonnatural, supernatural world, and its success in dealing with facts in the natural world has been in large part due to its withdrawal more than a century ago from trying to deal with the supernatural world.

from trying to deal with the supernatural world.

Smith's approach to solving the "problem of modernity" is to insist that we must recognize that consciousness, not material entities, is the ultimate foundation of the universe. This solution is fundamentally a personal confession of an individual with a profound knowledge of many systems of religious thought and a personal connection to several. The cynic would perhaps suggest that Smith's real problem is that he is unhappy about the fact that in the modern Western world, theology has permanently lost its privileged position in terms of power, authority, and, above all, respect among the educated segments of the population. Smith wants it back. ■



## Creationism Consultation ♦ ERVIN TAYLOR

### What Is the Current SDA Understanding of Genesis 1-11?: GC President Calls for Consultations and Recommendations

**S**DA General Conference President Dr. Jan Paulsen has asked an eight-person committee for recommendations as to how the church should “consider ways of encouraging greater communication between the church’s academics, leaders, and members about theological and scientific questions relating to the Biblical teaching of creation” (Adventist News Network). In a communication to *Adventist Today*, Dr. Paulsen stated that the church has begun a “... process of defining how we can most constructively address the issues, and what sort of dialogue would be helpful to this end.” One member of the eight-man committee commented that this ad hoc group, referred to in the GC news release as the “creation study planning committee,” was not asked to discuss the issues but to recommend to the GC President the most appropriate approach to take in addressing the issues.

The members of the planning group, which has held meetings in June, July, and August, include Lowell Cooper, General Conference Vice President, as Chair; Dr. James Gibson, Director of the GC Geoscience Research Institute, Loma Linda, California, who serves as the committee Secretary; Dr. John Baldwin, Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University; Dr. Ronald Carter, Loma Linda University; Humberto Rasi, GC Vice President; George Reid, GC Biblical Research Institute; and Mervyn Warren, Oakwood College.

In a telephone interview with Dr. Paulsen, we asked if he was aware of any specific reason why this request for recommendations on this topic had been made at this time. He indicated that there was no particular reason, but noted that in 1998 while he was chair of the Board of the Geoscience Research Institute (GRI), a resolution of the GRI Board asked for the appointment of an ad hoc study committee to explore the theological and scientific implications of various views. In another telephone interview Lowell Cooper stated that church leadership recognizes that although this topic has been and is being extensively discussed in a number of church venues, there has not been, as yet, a “deliberate, church-initiated dialogue” on the church’s understanding of creationism. GRI Director Gibson also indicated that the origin of the request to con-

sider these issues came from a resolution of the GRI Board. *Adventist Today* asked for a copy of the text of the resolution of the GRI Board but was informed by Lowell Cooper that permission to obtain the text of this resolution can come only from the GC President, to whom the Board’s resolution was directed. Dr. Paulsen kindly provided *Adventist Today* with a portion of the text of the 1998 GRI Board action: “Voted, to recommend the following to the GC President: That consideration be given to appointment of an ad hoc study committee for the purpose of exploring the theological and scientific implications of various views of Genesis 1-11, and developing a

In another telephone interview Lowell Cooper stated that church leadership recognizes that although this topic has been and is being extensively discussed in a number of church venues, there has not been, as yet, a “deliberate, church-initiated dialogue” on the church’s understanding of creationism.

more explicit Adventist theology of origins.”

According to Cooper and confirmed by Dr. Paulsen, the recommendations of the committee will be forwarded to the GC President for his determination if any further action is desirable. If further action is desirable, the recommendations—with any comments or changes made by the GC President—would be discussed at the September Fall Council. A member of the committee expressed the view that he hoped that whatever actions are taken, “discussions should be kind, deliberate and fair to all views.”

Dr. Paulsen kindly offered to review the first draft of this report, and he was FAXed a copy. *Adventist Today* thanks him for his interest in accuracy in reporting church affairs. ■



# The Great Billboard Controversy

JAMES H. STIRLING

about two months ago motorists on Interstate 5 driving past Central Point in southern Oregon were confronted with a billboard declaring simply, "The Pope Is the Antichrist." Similar public messages had appeared from time to time over the past eight years in various places in the state, but this latest event provoked Catholic ire and an article in the *Catholic Sentinel* calling for church members to protest to the billboard company that owns the sign. The lease on the sign is paid for by Larry Weathers, a barber in the nearby town of Talent and an elder in the Rogue Valley Historical Seventh-day Adventist Church. This church says it has no connection with the "mainline" Adventists. When the case was brought up on a Fox News TV program, host Bill O'Reilly said he had contacted the General Conference headquarters and been assured that the denomination did not support Weathers or his group.

At first glance this event looks like merely another fling by someone who publicly declares he doesn't like Catholics. Lots of other people don't like them either; but at the same time lots of other people don't like any one of many religious groups, including Adventists. State legislators have been pressured to make laws prohibiting the billboards, but Weathers and his lawyer say they are only exercising their right to freedom of speech. Weathers says he has been threatened with lawsuits and even death. O'Reilly chided Weathers for his rudeness and lack of charity, to which he responded that he wasn't really criticizing the Catholic church members, but only the structure. He objected to the Pope's being "in the place of Christ."

The TV coverage was a kind of victory for Weathers and his group, for many more people heard his message. At the same time, however, other Adventists feel

he is taking advantage of a weak spot in church tradition. True, he is not part of the denominational structure; his group is an "offshoot." However, they are linked philosophically to the larger church's history. A hundred and fifty years ago the founders of the church were caught up in the then-popular idea held by Protestants that the Papacy would be responsible for the end-time events described in the Book of Revelation. In some of the church's books like *The Great Controversy*, the struggles of early Protestants with Catholic political pressures are fully described, and the future is projected with more of the same. Yet recent events in the world scene have revealed religious persecutions on a grand scale that have little to do with denominational difference. Genocides of the Jews under Hitler, the ethnic Albanians and Serbs, the Tutsis and Hutus in Rwanda, the Cambodians under Pol Pot, and non-Muslims in different Islamic republics have all illustrated the deep extent of religious intolerance.

While there are strong disagreements yet between Protestants and Catholics, and Adventists have their share, the Adventists have generally stopped their public castigation of the Catholic past. Even more, Adventist pastors and evangelists have come to view the church's central message as being gospel-driven. They have sought to win public favor and recruits through their presentation of Spirit-inspired lifestyle changes and acceptance of the Bible as a standard for life. They have also expended much effort in trying to help the sick and the poor throughout the world.

Yet the church does have this historic tradition of Catholic-bashing. It would like to forget it, but it is enshrined in some of its books. Larry Weathers and others who have been unwilling to acknowledge changes that have come about in the church will continue to be thorns in the flesh. ■

## Delegates Open Door for Woman President

ELWIN DUNN

As the Pacific Union Conference celebrated its one-hundredth birthday, delegates to the union session in Ontario, California, voted on Monday, August 27, to open the door to women leaders. Until now, only an ordained minister could be elected union president. Since the Seventh-day Adventist Church has declined to ordain women, the criteria for this and other leadership posts has excluded females.

The new constitutional provision, according to Kit Watts, local conference spokesperson, states that a union president must be credentialed as an ordained or commissioned minister. Although some men are commissioned ministers, the majority are women.

During the weekend meetings the union officers and coordinators were reelected without discussion.

The only time people raised questions was during the informational sessions with the financial and constitution committees. Perhaps the most significant question raised was whether people were losing confidence in the conference's use of tithe money, as evidenced by a proportionate percentage drop in tithe giving by individual members in recent years. Members are increasingly directing their giving to specific projects and focusing on the amount of tithe [money] available for local church and pastoral needs.

During this discussion, a woman delegate from northern California forcefully stated that "we need to make changes [in this perception] urgently, since our young people, who are now increasingly better educated [than their parents or grandparents], are not accepting the giving patterns their elders chose." ■



# the friends of St. Thomas

HONOR ONE ANOTHER  
ABOVE YOURSELVES.

JOHN MCLARTY

God has never been alone. Through all eternity God has been in community, a truth embodied in the word Trinity. Humanity was created in the image of God, and we realize most fully God's purpose for our lives in community.

We who call ourselves Friends of St. Thomas have received a special gift of community, and we commit ourselves to honor that gift and the Giver by cultivating what we have received.

We are a network of friends committed to God and each other—a handful of people linked by faith and friendship, heritage and honesty. We take ourselves seriously because of our conviction that God has called us together and our confidence that God will use even broken people like us as agents of his healing love. But we laugh a lot, too. God is too good,

and our world view have all been shaped by Adventist theology, schools and culture. We value our Adventist heritage. We are glad to be Adventists. It is in this community that we learned to be followers of Jesus and lovers of people. We pursue moral and spiritual excellence but find our rest in grace. For us the word "God" evokes joy.

Our name highlights what we do: We are friends. We practice the disciplines of friendship—with God and with people. These friendships provide a spiritual communion that is distinct from the fellowship of local congregations. The spiritual nurture we receive through participation in the disciplines of the Order empower us for service in local congregations.

The basic fabric of our community is a network of monthly conversations about God.

Friends, yes, but why Friends of St. Thomas?

As a group, we have no intention of "reforming" the denomination. Nor do we regard ourselves as superior. We simply feel called to a ministry that can best be done apart from official structures.

our blessings too rich, for us not to be glad. And we do not miss the comic contrast between our inflated sense of importance and the reality of our puniness against the backdrop of a ten-million-member church, a six-billion-member race and the gad-zillion galaxies of the universe.

We are honest about our uncertainties, but we are unabashedly believers and disciples still.

An old man named us "The Order of the Friends of St. Thomas." His daughter laughed at him, saying he needed to get out of the medieval section of the library and connect with modern times. She insisted "Sabbath Friends" would be more descriptive. Either way we are friends.

## SABBATH FRIENDS

The nucleus of our community is easy to find. The outer boundary is obscure. So we focus on the nucleus.

We share roots in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The way we read the Bible, the way we live,

Thomas was a doubter. He craved proof. He worried that faith might be a retreat into wishful thinking. But Thomas was not paralyzed by his doubt.

Not long before his crucifixion, when Jesus announced he was headed for Jerusalem, most of his disciples attempted to dissuade him. Wasn't he aware of the plots against him? Thomas interrupted these protests, "Come on," he said. "Let's go with him that we may die with him."

Thomas refused to allow his uncertainties to paralyze him. He had trouble with faith. He owned unanswerable questions, but he knew how to be a friend. And he did what friends do.

The Friends of St. Thomas pledge themselves to be friends of God and one another. Many of us know what it is to wrestle with terrible questions, to be hounded by soul-wearying doubt. But we are active in Christ's service anyway. We are certainly aware of grievous faults in the institutional church, but we



give our money and time anyway. We refuse to be controlled by our doubt or cynicism. Among Friends we can be open about both our doubts and our commitments.

How do we connect doubt and faith, doubters and believers?

Some Friends hold a detailed theology with confident certainty. We treasure these confident believers among us for their enthusiasm. They re-

of Friends who are also "Adventist" are what we want to pass on to our children.

As a group, we have no intention of "reforming" the denomination. Nor do we regard ourselves as superior. We simply feel called to a ministry that can best be done apart from official structures. (Of course, given their education and commitment, individuals among us are sure to be active in seeking to better the church.)

## Among Friends, "Seventh-day Adventist" describes a way of reading the Bible, a pattern of living, a way of understanding the universe,

mind us that truth is more often a gift than an accomplishment. They question our obsession with our personal uncertainties and the persuasive doubts of thoughtful unbelievers. They rebuke our neglect of joy. We need their reminders that God reveals himself and seeks our friendship.

Some Friends find their spiritual life characterized principally by searching and questions. We honor them for the intellectual vigor they bring to our community. We value their insistence on humility, their reminders that all human statements are imperfect and that our knowledge of God is incomplete. These doubters keep us learning.

In our community we honor both "doubters" and "believers." The true believers hold us close to our core of beliefs; the doubters keep us close to the world which most needs those beliefs. The believers keep us close to God; the doubters connect us with the world God loved enough to die for. The doubters accept the rebuke of Jesus, "Blessed are those who have not seen and still believe." The believers accept the rebuke, "Since you claim you see, your guilt remains." And both commit themselves to "honor one another above yourselves." This latter verse guides our relationships with each other and with those outside our community as well.

What is our connection with the Seventh-day Adventist Church?

We are glad to be Adventists. Adventism is our home. We want our children to grow up Adventist. But we must be explicit about what we mean when we say these things.

For us "Seventh-day Adventist" does not mean a denomination, an institution, or an ecclesiastical organization with a constitution and bylaws, a church manual and notebooks full of policies. Certainly the denomination exists, and God works through it. But the denomination is not the exclusive arena of God's activity. Among Friends, "Seventh-day Adventist" describes a way of reading the Bible, a pattern of living, a way of understanding the universe, a way of understanding the God who will not rest until he has answered every human question and has brought into intimate friendship with himself every responsive human. This and the network

We honor historic Adventist behavioral standards as communal expressions of valid principles such as simplicity, modesty, purity, care for the body temple, etc. We apply these principles variously in our personal lives, but we do not ridicule or condemn those who are freer or more strict than we are.

Some of us cannot with integrity sign a detailed statement of faith. But we honor the Adventist statement of beliefs as the heritage of our family. We have many unanswered and perhaps unanswerable questions. But we are believers still, members of Christ's Church. We are Christians. We are Seventh-day Adventists. We claim our place. We commit ourselves to faithfulness as participants in congregations, as friends of Friends, and as witnesses to the grace and the law of God.

### OUR MISSION

Our understanding of God's purpose in calling us together

1. To connect in a living fellowship those whom God has prepared for this community. Typically, those God brings into our fellowship have been shaped not only by the Bible and worship but by academia as well. They are acquainted with both confident faith and unanswerable questions. Often, in their local congregations they feel spiritually or socially isolated. It is the purpose of our Order to connect these separated people with each other.

2. To provide opportunities for Friends to regularly experience the joy of shared worship and faith, shared doubt and pain to provide a network of support for people who wrestle with the questions that arise out of the interaction of faith and intellectual culture.

3. To help each other deepen our acquaintance with God.

4. To encourage each other to keep faith with our families, friends and church.

5. To help each other become more skillful in love.

6. To search out others with Adventist backgrounds who have been alienated from the church and offer them friendship, compassion, and hope.

7. To collaborate in sharing God with the unbeliev-

**Continued on page 10**



# the friends of St. Thomas

Continued from page 9

ers God has especially equipped us to touch.

## THE RULE OF THE ORDER OF THE FRIENDS OF ST. THOMAS

1. We love God with our entire being. That love may be uncomplicated and sweet. It may be stormy, full of conflict and perplexity. But whatever its character, a passion for God dominates our lives.

2. We love people. We test theology and church practices as well as our own habits and urges by how they affect real, live people. We embrace Law as a prescription for life.

3. We practice seven disciplines: morning prayer, grace before meals, daily Bible reading, Sabbath, the Lord's Supper, monthly conversation, chapter meetings.

4. We are "environmentalists," that is, we practice Earth-care as a moral obligation and we embrace nature (experienced scientifically or esthetically) as a primary resource in cultivating spiritual life. We encourage vegetarianism as an expression of harmony with Creation and for reasons of personal health.

5. We renounce the idea that our doubts are more

Without regular, intimate, spiritual conversation the Order does not exist.

honest or realistic than others' faith, and the idea that our faith is more honest or holy than others' doubts. We bear witness to truth as we see it without passing judgment on others because of their theories.

6. Our acceptance of a wide variety of religious theories does not make us timid about opposing immoral behavior. We reject dishonesty in all its forms, verbal and physical violence, and faithlessness in relationships. Whenever these occur, God offers forgiveness and calls for repentance. We want to stand with God.

7. We protect the words and names of all Friends at all times. Friends never comment about another Friend in public or in private. The decision to experience the freedom of openness is left to each individual.

8. We commit ourselves to serve as agents of God's graciousness, promoting justice and peace and seeking to introduce others to the Divine Friend.

9. We seek to shape our lives as though God really does care passionately about our well-being and has spoken clearly through the Bible. We are aware of the intellectual challenges to such simpleness, but that is what we have chosen or have been chosen for.

10. We affirm our place in the larger Seventh-day Adventist community. The church is our home. We give it the support and correction loyalty demands.

## THE DISCIPLINES

### Morning Prayer

Part of our morning routine, before we leave our residence or get on the phone, is to explicitly commit our lives to God and ask him to guide and shape our lives.

### Grace Before Meals

Before eating, we add to the physical reality of food the emotional and spiritual joy of celebrating our meals as gifts from God and a time of communion with him.

### Daily Bible Reading

Friends read the Bible daily. For some, it may only be a verse or two, but it is constant and reverent.

### Sabbath

God has used the Sabbath as a major instrument in bringing us together as a community and in shaping our lives as individuals. We treasure the sanctuary Sabbath provides for cultivating intimacy with God and with our families and friends. We embrace its restrictions as liberations from the tyranny of busyness and bosses.

### Lord's Supper

When Friends gather in person, we usually share

the Lord's Supper. At the beginning of shared meals and often when no other food is served, Friends share grape juice and bread and Jesus' words, "This is my body ... my blood." Communion is the privilege of all Friends, not just clergy.

### Monthly Conversations

We commit ourselves to converse with another Friend at least once a month, face-to-face if possible—otherwise by phone or other electronic media. Without regular, intimate, spiritual conversation the Order does not exist.

These conversations include explicit discussions of spiritual life, affirmations of God's grace, and renewal of our vows to love God and people. Bellyaching about denominational quirks or failures is taboo because of its drain on spiritual vitality.

### Chapter Meetings

Any gathering of three or more Friends is a chapter. Campmeetings and other large gatherings of Seventh-day Adventists create opportunities for Friends to connect with each other. At these gatherings Friends share a meal, including the Lord's Supper. These are also opportunities for our children to get acquainted with each other. At these meetings we speak explicitly of our delight in God's grace

Continued on page 22



# stem cells and expectant souls

JAMES H. STIRLING

**T**he vast public attention and outcry that have been drawn to the laboratory procedures for extracting cells to be used in medical research have been fueled by ethical and religious ideas. The spotlight on this research has led to the education of many Americans about the details of genetic development in humans, and now they know more than they ever thought they would want. In the first few days of a developing embryo following fertilization there exists a cluster of cells that is capable of forming specialized tissues like skin, muscles, and the various organs. After those days, however, the cells begin to take their courses toward developing the appropriate body systems. If taken in their early unspecialized, generalized, form, they can be triggered, so researchers hope, to become whatever the clinicians need to deal with otherwise intractable diseases like Parkinson's and Alzheimer's.

The outcry has to do with the source of the stem cells—the embryos. These result from the fertilization of an ovum by a sperm. This occurs naturally as a result of sexual union, and mothers give birth to the resultant fetus. Some couples, however, have to go to extra trouble to make the fertilization process work; and fertilization clinics routinely join the egg and sperm of would-be parents in the laboratory (in vitro fertilization, or IVF), then implant the embryo in the mother's womb. To be sure the process works for a given couple, however, many embryos and when a successful implanting occurs, usually material is leftover. This can be kept in frozen storage in case the couple want to have a second child. Sometimes the leftover embryos are even used by adoptive parents who did not contribute the original cells.

There are thousands of these embryos in such storage, and routinely the donors are questioned to determine whether or not they wish to have the embryos retained for a future child. There is a limited shelf life for these, anyway, even in the freezers. Otherwise, they are simply laboratory waste.

This has been the situation for many years, and grateful parents have seen their test-tube babies grow to normal young adults. No problem, even though a leftover embryo had some potential for human life if implanted in a womb. Outside the uterus, it would never bear any resemblance to a human being.

That is where the controversy lies. When does the "human being" first form? Is it at birth, or is it when the fetus takes on human shape, or is it when implan-

tation occurs in the uterus? Or does the first moment of fertilization create the human? Here the debate resonates with the abortion issue.

Some traditional theologians attempt to locate the specific time when the "soul" enters the "body." Following the Greek notions of dualism, they believe that somehow a spirit or soul can exist outside the body, inhabit it during life, and depart from it at death. Spiritists believe such a spirit or ghost can communicate with people still alive. But the timing of this event has troubled such thinkers. If there is a spirit in an embryo, what happens to it when the stem cells are removed? Does the spirit stay with the stem cells, to take up residence with whatever other person the cells are transported to, or does it wander off to some limbo? When someone reminded one such theologian that there are so many embryos in frozen storage awaiting final disposal, he replied that there ought to be funerals for every one of them. Yet what about the funerals that are held daily for the people who might have been helped by the results of this research? How does a microscopic embryo compare with a fully developed child or adult who languishes in some hospital wishing for a cure?

This theological approach to the human condition has troubled people for a long time. Where would the necessary "spirits" come from? Would they at death go to heaven or hell or to some "limbo" in between?

In the book of Genesis the first human being is described as the result of God making the body from the dust of the earth, then breathing into his nostrils the breath of life, at which "man became a living soul." Elsewhere in the Bible it is indicated that when a person dies he/she is said to have breathed his/her last. In the New Testament there is a promise of resurrection of the body in the grand final day when Christ the Messiah returns to claim his followers, those whose names were "written in the book of life."

Thus the announcement of progress in medical genetics has uncovered deep divisions in American thinking. Perhaps if it stirs people to think more constructively about the bases of their comfortable assumptions, it may accomplish more than merely alleviate their bodily ailments.

It may help them appreciate their body as being not merely a temporary abode for a soul but a God-given temple fit for the dwelling place of his Holy Spirit. ■



# whither Adventism on the stem cell debate?

JIM WALTERS

Are human embryos the moral equivalent of adults? Should early human life be granted the same moral status as the reader of this page? Is it ethically relevant that you and I began as a single celled organism—the size of an i's dot—bursting with potential?

Modern medicine has shown that no bright line separates any of the stages of human development. Therefore, if all human life is sacred, it makes logical sense to extend that sacredness back to the conception of embryos. However, all factors considered, it doesn't make common sense to say that a one-cell human entity is the moral equivalent of a medical student.

The moral status of early human life is the real issue behind the current debate over stem cell research—the scientific dissection and analysis of initial human life. Soon the debate will grow to include the related area of therapeutic cloning—the mass multiplication of versatile stem cells for treatment of dreaded diseases. These issues divide our society. The religious right sees any use of primitive human life as immoral. Moderates and liberals are in favor of such use because of the literally hundreds of millions of diabetic, heart, Parkinson's, and Alzheimer's patients who may be aided.

The Roman Catholic hierarchy is firmly in the conservative camp today, even if this is a relatively recent development. The Seventh-day Adventist church is interestingly moderate, for basic theological reasons.

The pope and the Catholic bishops, along with the religious right, contend that at the moment of conception, embryonic human life is as surely a person as you or I. Consequently, Pope John Paul II officially lobbied President George W. Bush in July to ban stem cell research. Back in 1987 the Vatican had officially declared that the embryo is an "unborn child" deserving the same medical respect and attention given to "any other human being." (See "Respect for Human Life in its Origins and on the Dignity of Procreation.")

The official position of the Adventist church is bland in comparison to the Vatican position. The General Conference position points to the astounding growth in genetic knowledge that has yielded "potential for immense good or harm." Good comes as we restore humanity to its Edenic, "very good" status (Gen. 1:31). But this process must use means that accord with basic Christian principles. The church's guidelines here,

specifically not designed to be church dogma, enumerate ten principles—from those as general as "fairness" to as specific to genetic concerns as "confidentiality." Although the Nine-page document is crafted in the context of genetic mapping, testing and engineering, there are allusions to the issue of early human life's moral status. For example, "All interventions in human beings for genetic reasons should be taken with great moral caution and with appropriate protection of human life at all stages of its development." (See the North American Division's Human Life Committee document, "Christian Principles of Genetic Interventions.")

Regardless of one's opinion of Adventism's official guidelines on this issue, it is just the proverbial tip of the iceberg. I see three key doctrinal considerations bolstering this moderate position: a) the conditional immortality of the soul, b) the image of God, and c) religious freedom.

**Conditional Immortality.** Adventists have long contended against the idea of human immortality, the notion that God infuses an immortal soul into an early human life that accordingly assures everlasting life. Perhaps the most distinctive contribution that an Adventist has made to historical theology is LeRoy Edwin Froom's two-volume tome, *Conditionalist Faith of our Fathers* (1965-66). Adventists, unlike most Christians, contend that a "soul" is the equivalent of a person; both gradually emerge into their fullness of life, and both cease to exist at death. To an Adventist, embryonic human lives are clearly not immortal souls of great intrinsic worth.

**Image of God.** Many of us who attended Adventist colleges studied Ellen White's book *Education*, in which she clearly defines the "image" of God in which we are all created: "Every human being, created in the image of God, is endowed with a power akin to that of the Creator—individuality, power to think and to do" (p. 17). This is indisputably a cerebral, activist view of human importance, and it militates against any idea of intrinsic embryonic sacredness. God's greatness is seen in immense intelligence and ability to implement ideas; and similarly, a human life's grandeur and moral worth is essentially found in its mind and ability to act intelligently.

**Religious Liberty.** Early Adventists, kicked out of their original congregations when they embraced William Miller's call to prepare for the imminent com-



ing of Christ, vowed to never set up nonbiblical barriers to a church member's freedom of conscience. Formal organization of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination was postponed twenty years because of fear of restriction of religious liberty. Therefore, when the Bible is silent on an issue—such as the moral status of early human life—the denomination tends to be open. To the historic Adventist, the embryo's moral value comes from its future potential to become a person, as opposed to its present possession of personhood.

Thus, the Adventist church is in the moderate camp on the moral status of human embryos and on stem cell research. And interestingly, the Catholic church is traditionally moderate on the moral status of human embryos, the current Vatican pronouncements notwithstanding. Some religions, for example Judaism, are assertively open to use of stem cells for the welfare of ailing humanity.

St. Thomas Aquinas, a 13th century Roman Catholic theologian, who laid the foundational theology for his church that still endures, taught that an early fetus was surely not a person. Aquinas taught that "ensoulment" occurred at forty days for males, and at eighty days for females. The state of personhood, writes Catholic ethicist Daniel Maguire concerning St. Thomas's ideas, was attained after "three or four months."

Catholic theologian Christine Gudorf writes that the traditional Catholic pastoral view is that "ensoulment occurred at quickening, when the fetus could first be felt moving in the mother's womb, usually in the fifth month. Before ensoulment, the fetus

To the historic Adventist, the embryo's moral value comes from its future potential to become a person, as opposed to its present possession of personhood. Thus, the Adventist church is in the moderate camp on the moral status of human embryos and on stem cell research.

was not understood as a human person. This was the reason the Catholic church did not baptize miscarriages."

Laurie Zoloth, a Jewish bioethicist, articulates Judaism's perspective: "A fetus is not seen as being an ensouled person. Not only are the first 40 days of conception considered 'like water' but also even in the last trimester, the fetus has a lesser moral status." Many Jews reserve full moral status to the fetus until it's head appears in the birthing canal.

The stem cell debate will likely escalate soon into a debate on cloning—not reproductive cloning but therapeutic or nonreproductive cloning. The sides of the debate will likely be the same, but the debate itself will be more shrill because so many folk don't distinguish, at least emotionally, baby-making clones from vital tissue-producing clones.

Once medical science discovers how to use stem cells for treating currently incurable, dying patients

(there are over 100 million Americans who could benefit from stem cell therapy), where will the stem cells come from? Ideally, the patient him/herself will supply them, but only indirectly. To minimize the patient's immunological rejection of the transplanted cells, scientists now believe that using the patient's own tissues—as opposed to donated tissue—is best. The most feasible way of getting viable stem cells from a patient's own tissues is cloning—and doing it Dolly-the-sheep style. However, the intent will not be to make human babies, similar to the way that "Dolly" was produced in Ian Wilmut's lab in Scotland four years ago. Rather, the procedure would be to utilize the embryos for their stem cells. Of course, those same embryos would have the potential to develop into human persons and, yes, they are inevitably destroyed in the production of stem cells. And this is the moral—and political—rub.

Just before the August Congressional recess this year, the House of Representatives passed (265 to 162) a total ban on cloning—even for strictly research purposes. The Senate must concur with the House for its ban on cloning to stick. However, it is uncertain whether the Senate will even consider the issue this fall. Because it is such a politically hot potato, Senate majority leader Thomas A. Daschle, Democrat from South Dakota, has publicly said that he is "very uncomfortable" about cloning for research purposes. (For now, any serious Congressional discussion of cloning for human reproduction—not therapy—is a nonissue, because of safety.) So, the Senate Democratic majority, traditionally moderate to liberal on bioethical issues, is likely to punt this fall on the stem

cell debate—just because it is so socially divisive and because of preconceptions with international terrorism.

The question of stem cell research and using cloned embryos will be a burning issue for the foreseeable future. And Adventists in North America are in a fascinating position: The large majority of Adventists are socially, politically and religiously conservative (by most any standard) yet on the stem cell issue, Adventism's stated and widely held beliefs point toward a moderate, even liberal, stance. Whether the conservative Adventist ethos or the moderate Adventist principles hold greater sway in the stem cell debate is now undecided. ■

*Jim Walters, professor of Christian ethics, Loma Linda University, is one of Adventist Today's founders. His latest book, Martin Buber and Feminist Ethics, will be published by Syracuse University Press next year.*



# Lessons for the church from corporate America

REGIS M. NICOLL

**a**lthough churches and business corporations differ in many ways, they have at least one thing in common—the quest for customers, the "market." Can churches learn anything from business?

In his book *Why America Doesn't Work* Chuck Colson relates how in the 1980s a major U.S. car manufacturer became elated to learn it was reported to be No. 5 in customer satisfaction ratings; the first four ratings were held by foreign manufacturers. Only decades before, American car makers had held the top positions; now these positions had gone to foreigners. With any enterprise, decline or failure can result from many factors, like noncompetitive pricing, substandard quality of products or services, poor customer relations, and reliability problems. However, these conditions usually point to more serious root problems in the organization, such as: lack of vision, mission and goal; faulty communication; inadequate understanding of the customers needs; overconfidence and complacency; satisfaction with past successes; and isolationism.

Companies like those in the Fortune 500 list have dealt with all these problems. They have learned lessons that the church could use.

## Clear Vision and Mission

Successful companies have clear statements of vision and mission that define ultimate goals, and these are understood by people at all levels. Likewise, vision is essential for the church, as Proverbs 29:18 plainly tells us: "Where there is no vision, the people perish." As to the church's mission, Christ has made that clear also—to "preach the good news to all creation." Everything we do as a church must support our vision and mission, and anything that hinders us from them must be jettisoned. Unfortunately, the unwritten mission of many churches is simply to increase their membership. However, Christ does not want members, but rather disciples. He wants followers surrendered to his will and committed to his program.

## Understanding the Customer

A company focused on success must identify its customers. That is, who are the potential customers, where are they, and what are their needs and expectations? And what methods are most effective in communicating to the customers how their needs can be met by products and services offered? Because the customer base changes, successful companies keep in touch with the cultural and socio-

economic features that affect those changes.

The church's primary customers are current members, who need fellowship, mentoring, and spiritual encouragement and growth, as well as the corporate disciplines of worship, prayer, and praise. Other potential customers include the unchurched and those who do not have a saving relationship with Christ. And although their need is a Savior, we must recognize that the customers' expectations can be many and varied: personal fulfillment, answers to life's questions, an encounter with the divine, happiness, and others. The church's challenge is to convince them that their expectations can be met only through accepting the Person they need.

## Continuous Improvement

To remain competitive, companies must continue to meet and exceed customer expectations.

They must have a way of continuously evaluating the quality of their services in satisfying customer needs. Sometimes that means discontinuing some services or introducing new ones. At times it may call for more effort to explain the merits of a particular service to the customer base. It can also lead to organizational restructuring to help increase company effectiveness in making timely course corrections.

For the church, the gospel message is unchanging and must be the central driving force for all we do. However, we must watch the way we put across that message to see if we are really connecting with our intended audience. That means looking hard at evangelistic promotions as well as at the way we recite culturally pertinent doctrines and traditions as a means to spiritual growth. It can be dangerous for the church to live off of the successes of the past. Leaders in the church must continually seek ways to better communicate to, and understand the needs of, their customers and be willing to revise their structure and retool their methods to meet those needs, if necessary.

## Warning Flags for the Church

■ A survey conducted by the Barna Research Group in 2000 reports that "one out of three adults (33 percent) is unchurched, a proportion that represents 65-70 million adults in America."

■ Statistics gathered by Gallup pollsters indicate that the unchurched population has grown substantially over the past fifty years, in both numbers and percentages of the whole.

■ Barna estimates that "as many as 20 percent of churchgoers change their church of choice during a



typical year."

In light of these data, it is easy to conclude that American Christendom is isolated from its culture and that many citizens are looking elsewhere for ways to meet their needs. In his work *The Call*, Os Guinness says; "Christianity is often formal and dead... The trouble is not just that 'this too shall pass away.' Unlike soldiers, old expressions of faith and old religious institutions do not simply fade away—they lumber the ground with outgrowths that stultify, distort, and even contradict their original purpose."

### Challenges for Adventism

As part of the larger body of Christ, the Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America reflects the situation represented by these statistics. And here are more, supplied by the General Conference (GC): In the North American Division, church growth has stagnated, increasing by only 10 percent over the last decade; and 50 percent of our youth will leave the church by the time they reach 25 years of age.

These figures indicate that our church is likely falling victim to the same root problems as the 1980s U. S. automotive industry. Whatever the mission of the Adventist church may be, such data should be viewed as a warning flag that we are not succeeding in fulfilling the Great Commission mandated by Christ. Do our church vision and mission as under-

sage and bringing people to discipleship.

Structural and doctrinal inertia within the Adventist church is enormous. This is due not only to the "command-and-control" structure of our organizational hierarchy, but also to the doctrinal paradigms and traditions that have been passed from generation to generation *ex cathedra* since the 19th century. It can be argued that the Adventist heritage provides a certain unique and comfortable identity for the membership. However, if we are reluctant to examine our cherished doctrines periodically for gospel effectiveness, we will be destined to fulfill the prophecy of the Laodicean church.

In this new millennium we must seek to be culturally pertinent while remaining true to scriptural principles. To be successful we must be willing to critically evaluate priorities, doctrines, traditions, and heritage and, if necessary, sacrifice anything that hinders our gospel mission. But resistance within our ranks is staggering. As an example: Most would agree that our Sabbath traditions make the Adventist church an "inconvenient religion" for adherents. But more importantly, these traditions also pose a major roadblock to reaching contemporary culture and making an impact on the unchurched. Let me explain.

Most faithful Adventists would agree that our Sabbath doctrine is a primary decision point when they

**The church's primary customers are current members, who need fellowship, mentoring, and spiritual encouragement and growth, as well as the corporate disciplines of worship, prayer, and praise.**

stood "in the trenches" line up with the priorities Christ established and with those of the 1st-century Church?

Historically, evangelistic efforts in Adventism have been woven around the health message, last-day events, Daniel and Revelation seminars, and the various "Net" campaigns. Although the evangelists may present basic elements of the gospel, their major focus has traditionally been to promote the correctness of our unique doctrines. These strategies can produce some dramatic results, of course; however, the results are often short-term. People attracted by these means are often 1) persons who have already embraced Christ as their savior, but who view our doctrines as helpful in furthering spiritual growth; or 2) persons fearing that their names are not "written in the Book of Life" because they do not belong to the true church that observes the seventh-day Sabbath.

Both of these groups exhibit a very low five-year church retention, as supported by both Barna and GC statistics. The case could be made that in our tendency to promote doctrine over gospel, we are not effective in communicating Christ's life-saving mes-

make life choices. It is the key issue when they decide where to live, work, and go to church; who to marry; where to send kids to school; who to encourage children to date, etc. When they come to any "fork in the road," avoiding Sabbath conflicts generally takes precedence over:

- where can I best mature and develop into an effective disciple of Christ?
- where can I best be used by God?
- where can I best spread the good news?
- where is the mission field I need to be in?
- where can I have the greatest impact for God's kingdom?

Filtering such decisions through our traditional understanding of Sabbath places us in an ill position for making significant inroads to the unchurched. Not only are we not "of the world," it may be questioned whether we're even in the world.

Within this same context, it is also unfortunate that many within our denomination hold a negative view regarding community service, including leaf raking and other "labor," on Sabbath. It is interesting to note that six of the recorded confrontations that Jesus

**Continued on page 16**



## Lessons for the church from corporate America

### Continued from page 15

had with the religious establishment of his day involved Sabbath conflicts. In each case, Jesus shattered the prevailing thoughts of appropriate Sabbath observance. The repetition of this theme indicates that God wants to communicate something very significant to us—that "servant evangelism" in whatever form is a holy activity, as long as it is motivated out of a desire to demonstrate God's unconditional love to a world seeking transformation and an encounter with the Holy. Yet, because of our traditions we seem slow to recognize community service as a 24/7 opportunity for evangelism.

As to worship traditions, Paul urges us, "Offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship" (Rom 12:1). This would indicate that worshipping God "in spirit and in truth" is not limited to times and days, but is again a 24/7 activity. In this regard it is interesting that the pollster George Barna has suggested, based on his research, that due to societal impacts from emerging technologies, ministries will have to reconsider their event scheduling. He says; "In a 24/7 world, Sunday at 11:00 a.m. simply won't work for many people. Flexibility and creativity will be crucial ingredients to successful ministries in the future." These are ingredients the Apostle Paul certainly understood when he said, "I have become all things to all men so that I might save some of them."

Our Sabbath traditions also serve to promote the belief that expressing personal holiness in our lifestyle, coming into God's presence and encountering the holy are activities that God has limited to one day a week. However, nothing could be more foreign to Paul's revelation in Colossians 1, about "this mystery, which is Christ in you," and his declaration in 1 Corinthians that "your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you." These scriptural assurances point to the Christian's immediate and continuous access to heaven's resources.

However, when we fail to understand and embrace this assurance, we may participate in a dualistic lifestyle that is evidenced in much of Christendom. That is, who we are on Sabbath (or Sunday) is not who we are during the rest of the week. Nothing damages the Christian witness more to an unbelieving world! In this postmodern world, a substantial segment of the church's customer base is seekers, i.e., the unchurched persons seeking a genuine encounter with the Transcendent. We must find ways to relate to these customers who value the shared experience of community and the authenticity of character that are earmarks of true spiritual transformation.

In his classic work, *The Sabbath*, Jewish author

Abraham Joshua Heschel states; "That the Sabbath and eternity are one—or of the same essence—is an ancient idea... The world to come is characterized by the kind of holiness possessed by the Sabbath in this world... The Sabbath possesses a holiness like that of the world to come."

This indicates that Jews anticipate an unbroken feast or perpetual Sabbath at some time in the future, much like their anticipation for a future Messiah. However, although "we with unveiled faces" recognize that the promised One has already come and been raised to glory, we are slow to understand that our perpetual Sabbath is a present reality, as indicated in Matthew 11 and Hebrews 4. "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." "Therefore God again set a certain day, calling it Today... a Sabbath rest for the people of God."

Church leaders will always experience a certain tension between keeping the defining characteristics of denominational tradition and reevaluating that tradition in order to stay relevant and effective in accomplishing Kingdom goals. However, if we hope to be successful, the gospel of Christ will have to have a preeminent place in our mission. We will need to strive constantly to understand our modern culture so that we can best determine how to connect it with Christ. We will need to be willing to retool or let go of anything that hinders our Kingdom efforts. We will need to view no denominational doctrine as too sacrosanct for objective examination. We will need to embrace a process of "continuous improvement," whereby we commit periodically to evaluating each aspect of our peculiar canon to determine whether it is useful and effective in accomplishing the eternal objectives for which Christ commissioned us.

The Adventist church has never really established a goal of achieving top market share among American religions, much less those of the rest of the world. And although the world-wide church has grown to some 12 million adherents, the church's real success in the Great Commission is more difficult to measure than that of automobile manufacturers. It is a success determined not by number but by obedience in bringing the good news of God's grace to all people. We must learn from any source available how to accomplish this aim. ■

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# does God have a story?

## Why the Old Testament Deity often appears so different from the God of the New

GARY MCCARY

I have come to appreciate biblical scholarship—particularly that of the past two centuries. Oh, it has its faults, its presuppositions, its dangers! But there are insights into the Scriptures that could not be gleaned without the contribution of modern scholarship. Instead of decrying its modern slant, we ought to be learning as much as we can from disciplines such as source criticism, textual criticism, and so forth. These studies are not to be feared. But they should be examined with a careful eye.

Here is an example of how these studies can help us. As a pastor I have often heard this refrain: "Why is the God of the Old Testament so different from Jesus? Jesus I like, but this irritable God in the Old Testament I can do without!"

I've heard various explanations over the years. One suggests that since the early portions of the Old Testament deal with primitive peoples and societies, God had to relate to them on a somewhat primitive level—even treating them as little children. Later we see God relating to his creation in more dignified or mature ways. In other words, as the human family became more sophisticated, God was then able to relate to them accordingly. God is like a parent who has to spank his little children early on, but then as they mature he can relate to them as a parent would toward his growing children.

Yet this explanation is not altogether satisfying. What parent kills his children because they don't turn out like he wanted? Our answer is most often: "a bad parent." Yet we don't want to suggest that the God of Creation is a bad God, even though he annihilates the world in Noah's time. And so we tend to tiptoe around the issue, preferring to talk about Jesus and the God he endorsed. But the fundamental question of the difference between the God of the Old and New Testaments is still out there.

Here's where modern biblical scholarship is worth listening to. What I'm about to suggest may sound somewhat obvious to some and yet somewhat heretical to others. But I begin by asking a question: Does God have a story? Is he fixed in time and place, or does he actually have an experience? Does he have a life story? And if so, is it written down? An argument can be made that the God of Creation actually has a story—a biography—so to speak. It is found in the Old Testament. Indeed, he is its central character, its

protagonist, its star. As Jesus and Paul are the central characters of the New Testament, so God is the star of the show in the Old.

But the truly impressive thing about God's story as told in the Old Testament is that it has had a profound effect on Western civilization. There has never been a character on stage, page, or screen that has had the popularity that God has had; literally everyone knows him. Not only has everyone heard of him, everyone can tell you something about him! Thus God is more than a household word—he is, like it or not, a virtual member of the Western family.

Did the authors of the Old Testament create the God they wrote about, or did they record God's revelation of himself? Obviously Christians believe the latter, while skeptics and others lean toward the former. From a literary perspective, however, the argument is moot. In literary terms, the work of these authors has been a staggering success, being read aloud to millions every week for nearly two thousand years. No other book in history can claim that kind of success. So God's popularity is largely due to his story, and his story is recorded in the Old Testament.

Modern biblical scholarship has enabled the average student of the Scriptures to grasp certain facets of the original texts. You don't have to be an expert in biblical languages to understand the basics. All one has to do is assimilate the evidence embedded in the text and explained in any good commentary. In the Hebrew text the Deity is called by various names, by far the most common being *Yahweh* and *Elohim*. It is of some interest that *elohim* is a common noun and *Yahweh* is a proper name. Nearly every English Bible translates *Yahweh* "the Lord," and translates *elohim* "God." So when your Old Testament reads "God" that's *Elohim*, and when it reads "the Lord" that's *Yahweh*. Early in Genesis the Hebrew text refers to the Deity as *Elohim* (1:1-2:3), then as *Yahweh elohim* "the Lord God" (2:4 to the end of chapter 3). At later points in his story God will sometimes be *Elohim*, far more often *Yahweh*, and occasionally one of his less frequently used names or epithets (e.g. *El elyon*; "God Most High," *El sadday* "God Almighty;" etc).

What is worth noting is that though the text clearly regards all these names as referring to the same Deity,

**Continued on page 21**



# tinkering with human culture(s)

MARK F. CARR

**O**urs is a culture of tinkering. Whether we started tinkering by dismantling a radio or computer or exchanging parts on our dolls, we tend toward manipulating, modifying, and managing those things we can. Not that we always should, but we typically do. Perhaps I should hesitate calling modern biomedical research “tinkering” and note instead its highly skilled and regulated atmosphere. But the fundamental issues at stake appear to boil down to what we can and/or should do with our own existence.

Some general principles from Scripture and theology will help guide our individual, community, and societal thinking. These principles are, what we call in ethics, *prima facie* principles. Our moral obligation to them is immediate and universally recognized but not absolute.

To illustrate what is meant by this distinction, imagine that I were to borrow a baseball bat from my neighbor. The principle of property ownership holds over me a *prima facie* obligation to return the bat. Furthermore, I assure my neighbor that I will return his baseball bat and thereby obligate myself to another principle we call truth-telling. So, a couple of days later I stroll over to my neighbor's house; and as I approach his door, out from one of those swinging pet doors within the door, comes a cat at full speed. Nano-seconds later my neighbor bursts out behind the cat. He sees me and immediately reaches for the bat, proclaiming in a loud rush, “Give me that bat, I'm going to beat the stuffing out of that cat!” Now, at this moment do I retract the bat so that he can't reach it? Or do I offer it to him? I've explained the obligations I have to return it above, but now I also have a *prima facie* obligation to protect life.

Now, I've a number of obligations that are in conflict. If my sense of obligation to the principles of property ownership and truth-telling outweigh my sense of obligation to protection life (even feline life), then I will likely give him the bat. But if my obligation to protect life outweighs the obligations to property and truth-telling—at least at this moment—I will hold on to the bat. Nonabsolute, or *prima facie*, principles are ever in this fluid state. We have moral obligations to them all, but on some occasions one or more of them are most important for the given situation. Often, we need the wisdom of Solomon (which is to say, God's wisdom) to know how best to apply principles in any given situation.

With this notion of principles in mind then, what principles might we—with wisdom—apply to stem

cell research and genetic therapies?

## 1. Honoring the Image of God

This principle is closely associated with notions of human dignity. We have certain obligations to treat humankind with dignity. For Christians, the undergirding theological reason for this care is that humans are created in the image of God. This image is inherent in the human whether he or she is created by a lab technician or a newly wed couple.

Genesis chapter 1:26-27 establishes this attention on the image and chapter 9:5-6 notes the intensity with which the image is to be valued. So important is it to honor this image in humans that in chapter 9 it is clear that punishment is sure for anyone who harms the bearer of this image. Of course, there has been a centuries-long debate about just what this image is; is it our ability to freely choose? our ability to reason clearly? our capacity for relationships? But despite the disagreements over the nature of the image, all agree that the image of God in humankind is to be respected and honored for the dignity that it bestows.

How we perceive of the image of God makes a great difference here. We may decide, in the end, that we will be honoring God's image by conducting such research when done with care and dignity. After all, isn't the point of our effort to bring an enhanced life of dignified, healthy relationships with God and others?

## 2. Principle of Stewardship

This principle is closely related to our obligation to alleviate suffering. The book of Genesis (1:26-28; 2:15) again establishes the notion that God's creation was to be cared for by humankind in a way consistent with God's own gentle touch. Historically, we have interpreted stewardship to be relevant toward the material things we manage. Applied to stem cell research and genetic therapies, the principle of stewardship obliges us to manage well our very own species, our selves.

Thus, those tinkerers who tend toward unbridled experimentation must be carefully monitored and managed. But note that this principle obliges us to manage, not merely take a hands-off approach. Given the thousands upon thousands of embryos created and stored in fertility clinics, stewardship compels us to recognize and carefully manage the tremendous potential for human life these embryos hold. Notice that I did not say that these embryos are human life. There is a very long and very often fatal road an embryo must travel to get from blastocyst to squirming



baby. These thousands of frozen embryos are genetically human; but they are not thereby human life, as yet. Many will argue this point and turn to the perspective that at the point of conception we are presented with a human life that should be considered the moral equal of an adult in the prime of her life. Others insist there should be a sliding scale of sorts that never denies the moral significance of potential human life but does not allow for the same moral status as that of fully realized human life. Still others question the very notion of a "moment" of conception, given the fact that it takes a number of hours to complete.

Many argue that to engage in such research is to "play God," and we should not do such things. But the whole point of the principle of stewardship is that we are supposed to "play God" on this earth in his behalf. He gave us the job of "playing God" with our environment, our families, and our societies. Under this idea of stewardship is included the idea that as stewards our task is to enhance human life; to care for the spiritual and physical well-being of humankind in ways that encourage health and happiness. As Jesus put it, he came to give life and give it "more abundantly," which is why the principle of alleviation of

for, guidance from God regarding how to proceed.

While offering principles of guidance to help set the outer boundaries of acceptability is an essential part of our moral response to technical capabilities, there is more we must attend to, namely, who we want to allow to conduct such research. What kind of persons can be trusted with the development of our culture along these lines? In ethics, this concern toward the moral capabilities and characteristics of persons is known as virtue ethics.

### 1. Compassion

One of the most intense and long-standing debates in ethics revolves around the question of whether we are obligated to act in certain ways because of the nature of the act and its rational force or whether we are moved to act in certain ways because of our nature and emotional capacity to act. Typically referred to as a "duty-based" approach, many Christians uphold a "divine command" theory of ethics that holds to the former position. If God has commanded some action, we must do it not because we want to do it, rather because it is our duty to do what God has commanded.

On the other hand, those who hold to a "character-based" or "virtue" theory of ethics argue that it is not

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suffering is so closely related to that of stewardship.

### 3. Freedom of Choice

One of the important arguments that emerged from the discussions of human cloning after Dolly was born focused on freedom of choice. Some argued that as American citizens, we have a right to have children; and if this technology can help, it should be offered to those who choose it. Fundamental to this principle is the notion of human rights and how as citizens of this country we may exercise the right to have children.

Notice, however, that just because one principle moves us in a direction toward allowance of such research, it does not mean we are therefore justified in proceeding. Recall in my example above how the principle of protecting life outweighed the principles of property and truth-telling. We have a *prima facie* obligation to each of the principles noted above, and at times they may be pitted against each other. So, for instance, while the principle of freedom of choice may push us to allow reproductive cloning, the principle of honoring God's image and human dignity may mitigate against it. It is in this process of careful reasoning about which principles are relevant that one needs the "wisdom of Solomon." We long for, pray

primarily important what God may or may not command. Rather, what is important is the kind of persons we are as we engage in such action. Desiring to be Christlike, we are primarily moved toward the actions God has commanded because we are moral persons.

What is compassion and how would it relate to our stem cell research question? Compassion is an internal, emotional response to another person which is expressed in a way that focuses attention on the other person. Some virtues are considered self-regarding such as temperance and courage. Compassion would be considered other-regarding, but in such a way that it involves a personal, emotional connection on the part of the one offering compassion. More simply put, it is to enter into suffering with the other person. The result of this virtue is to emphasize character in the community of researchers and to urge they be persons of compassion.

### 2. Integrity

Like compassion, integrity when considered as a virtue is the habitual personal character trait that maintains a consistency between private action and public action; between private conviction and public

Continued on page 20



# tinkering with human culture(s)

Continued from page 19

position; between personal values and public proclamation. Furthermore, integrity seeks a rigid adherence to self-identity when faced with the temptation to engage in actions that would contradict the self. It fights against sharp distinctions in our lives that cause discontinuity in our identity.

For our stem cell scientist, then, we would be pleased to support the researcher who showed personal and professional integrity. Her research results would be consistent with industry standards and her public position regarding the moral issues surrounding her work would be consistent with her personal values and beliefs.

### 3. Discernment

Philosophers of ancient Greece called this virtue *phronesis*. They understood it to be the kind of reasoning that considers any particular moral action or decision in light of a larger picture. A larger picture would include notions as broad as God's will, human nature, and responsibility. It includes *prima facie* principles to which a person would feel a keen sense of obligation. Biblical narratives, church tradition, societal concerns, and political realities must also be a part of this very practical sort of decision making. And, as we might expect, all of the other virtues relevant in any given situation must weave their influence seamlessly into this holistic way of thinking. Furthermore, this type of wisdom is not to be equated with strict rationalism. Emotions are equally salient features to be incorporated into this virtue.

Solomon's wisdom is a good example of this virtue. Of course, his wisdom is said to be a gift from God; and we are tempted to believe that only those who have been similarly gifted will have the virtue of discernment. This is not the case, however. Virtue ethics insists that practicing any given character trait will help serve to habituate it to such a degree that it becomes a personal virtue. Christian virtue ethics is very mindful that the weaknesses of our human nature mitigate against a perfection of personal character. Thus we place our practice of such virtues in the context of our connection with Christ. As he enables us to be decent persons, we really do develop moral character. As 2 Peter 1:4 notes, it is in the practice of such godly virtues that we "partake of the divine nature."

### Conclusion

As individuals and as a society we need the wisdom of such divine nature to fashion a responsible position regarding stem cell research and cloning technologies. Are we "playing God?" and if so, are we doing it

responsibly? Without taking the notion to an extreme; yes, we do play God when we engage in research that holds the potential to fundamentally change the course of human nature. And yes, we should play God in this case. The principle of stewardship obligates us to both recognize and manage the dramatic changes that will emerge from our biomedical research. To shut down the research and bury our heads in the sand is to shirk our duty as stewards of God's creation. Even though it is a difficult task we must move forward with divine discernment, integrity, and compassion.

We must accord significant moral status upon the embryos from which stem cells are gathered. This is an obligation that the principle of honoring the image of God places upon us. That we should proceed with such research illustrates my conviction that the principles of alleviating suffering and personal freedom of choice override concerns that honoring the image of God would present in any effort to stop such research. But should our research along these lines be limited to the existing cultures, as President Bush's decision mandates? Or should we allow embryonic development for the express purpose of research? My position would allow for embryonic stem cell research to go forward without limiting it to existing cultures. While the principle of honoring the image of God insists that we treat such embryos with utmost respect because they have the potential to become human beings, they are, as yet, not human beings. Collecting these cell tissues for research purposes should be allowed for at least one week and no more than two weeks.

This points up one of the most fundamental questions in this research, namely, when does human life begin?

Contrary to a happenstance kind of tinkering, it seems to me that at best, stem cell research reflects an intuitive understanding that one of our tasks as humans is to enhance our lives here as much as possible whilst longing for a better time in God's eternal presence. Today's high-tech research with stem cells and cloning techniques is an expression of our desire to relieve suffering and enhance our lives this side of the Kingdom. Far from tinkering, we hope it will be a responsible and careful attempt to bring the Kingdom closer to reality. ■

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# does God have a story?

Continued from page 17

that Deity conducts himself somewhat differently under his different names.

For example, *Elohim* creates the heavens and the earth and all forms of life in chapter 1. The language is majestic, and God is both magisterial and magnanimous. He creates both male and female in his image, and in his first declaration to them we find a working definition of the image of God: "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground" (Gen. 1:28).

What characterizes God up to this point is that he creates and has dominion. And so his image will create and rule. In other words, he creates another kind of creator.

Furthermore, this desire that his image be fertile is a continuous refrain for *elohim*. After the floodwaters receded, *Elohim* "blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them; 'Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth' (Gen. 9:1). *Elohim's* magnanimity is also seen in his unrestricted posture toward his image. The male and female are given the "whole earth" as their domain, and "every tree" and "every seed-bearing plant" are theirs for food (Gen. 1:29). Nothing is forbidden. Likewise, in the post-Flood account *Elohim* tells Noah and his sons that "everything that lives and moves will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything" (Gen. 9:3).

Yet a proviso is added here, but only to highlight the fact that humankind is in God's image. Noah's descendants are not to eat any meat that still has blood in it. Why? Because blood symbolizes life, and life is so sacred it is not to be consumed, or taken; for "in the image of God" has God made mankind (Gen. 9:4-6). Consistently, *Elohim* is passionate about his image—both its fertility and its unrestricted domain. Again, magisterial and magnanimous are the two words that come to mind. *Elohim* appears regal, always confident, and extremely beneficent.

On the other hand, *Yahweh* (early in Genesis: *Yahweh Elohim*) relates to his creation with something of an adversarial posture. Tension seems to dominate the relationship from the start. Whereas in Genesis 1 the inference is that God created the male and female with the same relative ease as the other creatures, in Genesis 2 the Lord makes the male from dust and breathes life into him. Instead of giving him the entire earth as his domain, *Yahweh* places him in a garden. Then, in his first declaration to this man, he commands him; "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die" (Gen. 2:16-17).

A "helper" is then pursued for the man. Eventually

the Lord performs surgery, creating a woman from one of the man's ribs. Later on, after the man and the woman disobey the Lord's "tree commandment," the woman's punishment is predictably haunting: "Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you." Again, my point is to emphasize that when the Deity operates under the name *Yahweh*, he speaks, behaves, and thinks somewhat differently from *Elohim*.

At the end of the "Garden of Eden" episode, *Yahweh's* musings are almost defensive: "The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever" (Gen. 3:22). Whereas *Elohim* wants an image of himself, *yahweh* appears threatened as the man and woman become more like him. There are, from the outset, restrictions, boundaries, limitations, etc. Whereas *Elohim* creates both male and female in his image, *Yahweh* creates the male from dust and the female from the male. The woman is in the image of God in the first account but in the image of the man in the second.

One more illustration before drawing some conclusions and posing some questions. At the beginning of the Flood episode, *Yahweh*, true to form, places another limit on humanity, limiting the life span to 120 years. Then, after careful observation, *Yahweh* was "grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain" (Gen. 6:6). So he determines to wipe out humanity, saving only Noah and his family.

Have you ever read this entire episode before (Gen. 6-9)? Have you noticed how cumbersome and redundant the narrative appears? Ever wondered why it takes so long to tell the story? It seems to repeat itself at key points. Here's a hint: notice how the names for God change back and forth throughout the story. For example, immediately after we are told that the Lord (*Yahweh*) has observed all of humanity's evil, is sorry that he ever made humankind, and is going to wipe them out (Gen. 6:5-8), the narrative appears to go over the same material a second time (v. 9-13). But notice that it is not "the Lord" in this section, but "God" (*Elohim*) who is the protagonist. *Elohim*, regal and magisterial, sees how "corrupt the earth has become." But instead of responding with grief and pain, he simply announces to Noah, almost impassively, that he is going to "put an end to all people."

Notice also that "God" tells Noah to bring "two" of every living creature into the ark (Gen. 6:19-20), and then a few verses later "the Lord" tells Noah to bring into the ark "seven" of every clean animal and "two" of every unclean animal (Gen. 7:2). When we come to the Exodus account and to the giving of the Law with its various ritualistic dietary commands, we should not be surprised to find that it is

Continued on page 22



# does God have a story

Continued from page 21

"the Lord," *Yahweh*, who gives the laws to Moses.

From the Hebrew text it appears that there are at least two strands of thinking about God interwoven into the narrative. Biblical scholars often make reference to the Yahwistic and the Elohist accounts. By this they mean those Hebrew stories of the Creation, Flood, patriarchs, Exodus, etc., that utilize different names for the Deity. Theories abound regarding how these ancient stories became interwoven into a single narrative.

What is perhaps instructive for us is that God allowed his story to be written by finite mortals. The evidence indicates that these inspired writers lived and wrote within the framework of their times and circumstances. The language, terminology, geography, world view, and so forth, are those of the writers. God does not lift the author out of his culture and give him a message that is foreign to him. The words of the Bible, instead of being God's words, are actually the words of the men who wrote the various documents. It is not the words of the Bible that are inspired, but it is the authors who are inspired.

The pictures of God that we see in the Old Testament are somewhat different from those of the New. But we must remember that the times were different, the theologies were different, the anthropologies were different, the world was different. Egypt in 1200 B.C. was not Palestine in 30 A.D. God's story is not complete in Genesis or Exodus, nor is it perfect. If we get

alarmed at talk such as this, it is only because our presuppositions are that God never changes, and that he told the Bible's authors exactly what to write. The evidence seems to suggest we should reexamine our presuppositions.

Are there any practical applications from what I'm suggesting? Lots! Here's just one: The recent debate about whether women clergy should be ordained is actually—at ground zero—a debate about Scripture and how it should be interpreted. One strand of thought believes that the Bible needs to be interpreted, in the main, literally. This strand often appeals to narratives such as we find in Genesis 2 and 3, where the woman is made from the male and where the curse placed upon her includes the fact that her "desire" will be for her husband, and he "will rule" over her (Gen. 3:16).

But it is entirely within the realm of possibility that this strand of theology had a competitor in ancient times, another strand that viewed both man and woman as created in God's image (Gen. 1:27; 5:2). Perhaps this debate is thousands of years old. Maybe there are modern Yahwists and Elohist. What if most of us believed that men and women were equal, both in the image of God? What if the result of sin didn't involve the elevation of one sex over the other? Would that be a good or a bad thing—a good theology or a bad one? And might a different interpretative possibility shed new light on an entire host of difficult Bible texts? Might those texts be less difficult to understand? And more importantly, might God and the stories about him take on a new light?

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# the friends of St. Thomas

Continued from page 11

and our commitment to love God and his friends. We encourage each other in the pursuit of moral and spiritual excellence. We play with a few theological ideas.

In chapter meetings, as in monthly conversations, negative commentary on the Adventist denomination is taboo. We come together to celebrate God's goodness and the riches of our heritage and to seek help in living above the negativity of our own minds and experience.

We are not a protest movement or a reform movement; we are too aware of our own potential for genuine sin to harp on the peccadillos of others. Our knowledge of history and human nature persuades us that while we would certainly act differently, we would act no better than our forebears or ecclesiastical superiors if we occupied their positions.

We refuse to be distracted from our celebrations by interminable lamentations over the imperfections of the denomination. We have too little time together to

squander it blasting or plotting the repair of the Adventist church.

When we are together, aware of God's grace and open to his wise rule, we party.

## MEMBERSHIP

Membership is in your hands. You become a Friend by covenanting with another person to practice the rule. But we caution you that membership is costly. The obligations of friendship are not always convenient. And among us fidelity is a cardinal virtue.

The second step in membership is registering with the Order. At present you do so by calling or writing John McLarty (johnmclarty@earthlink.net).

You may want to explore our disciplines or participate in our gatherings quite apart from any commitment. You are welcome. We offer you our friendship and meager wisdom freely.

If you find yourself in harmony with our mission and methods but are not called by God to make any formal commitment, we welcome you to participate with us in ways appropriate for you.

We have no hierarchy and own no property, trusting God and each other to manage resources and the future. ■



# Slouching Towards Gomorrah: Modern Liberalism and American Decline, by Robert H. Bork

JANINE GOFFAR

The stated purpose of *Slouching Towards Gomorrah* by Robert H. Bork is to promote understanding by Americans about "what modern liberalism is and what its ascendancy means." Bork describes modern liberalism as "a corrosive agent carrying a very different mood and agenda than that of classical or traditional liberalism."

Bork divides his densely packed yet remarkably readable book into three sections: the first attempts to describe how we in America managed to get to this state of precipitous moral decline, the second discusses what he finds to be the elements of such decline, and the third asks whether America as a model of democratic republicanism can survive, or if "Gomorrah" is now inevitable.

The main thesis of the book is that "classical" or traditional liberalism, with its emphasis on social justice and equality of opportunity, has slowly morphed into a perverse form he labels "modern" or "radical" liberalism.

The resulting corruptions of two important American ideals, liberty and equality, are radical individualism and radical egalitarianism. Bork contends that these aims, untempered by the opposing authorities and traditions of earlier times, are gradually eroding our society. If unchecked, this trend will bring us to the very gates of Gomorrah.

The elements Bork identifies as among the major ill effects of modern liberalism are reflected in his Part Two chapter headings:

- The Collapse of Popular Culture
- The Case for Censorship
- The Rise of Crime, Illegitimacy, and Welfare Killing for Convenience: Abortion, Assisted Suicide, and Euthanasia
- The Politics of Sex: Radical Feminism's Assault on American Culture
- The Dilemmas of Race
- The Decline of Intellect
- The Trouble in Religion
- The Wistful Hope for Fraternity [outlining the concealed goals of "Multiculturalism"]

Centrists might find Bork too conservative on some issues. He calls for "legal and moral" censorship of the Internet, movies, music, and all television, and an almost complete legal ban on abortion, for instance. He would not want the State to allow "gay" marriage or to legalize assisted suicide. These are difficult issues on which good

people can rationally disagree. Harder to argue with are Bork's more general assertions on these subjects, such as this trenchant observation on assisted suicide:

"Mistakes do not express the full pathos, and evil, that will certainly attend assisted suicides. The patient who is a candidate for medical termination of his life will be in a greatly weakened physical condition, probably frightened or in despair, which means that his will and his capacity for independent thought will also be weakened. He will be flat on his back with his relatives and the authority figure of the doctor looking down at him. There can be few better subjects and settings for subtle or not-so-subtle psychological coercion. The patient will know, and probably will be informed, that prolonging his existence, which the physician says will be brief, places an enormous emotional and financial burden on his family. A great many people in this position are likely to accept premature death under coercion. That can hardly be called death with dignity."

Bork based the title of his book on William Butler Yeats's poem "The Second Coming," a piece rife with reminiscences to the Adventist mind. He adds these notes: "...The image of a world disintegrating, then to be subjected to a brutal force, speaks to our fears now." "When Yeats wrote [this poem] in 1919, he may have foreseen that the twentieth century would experience the 'blood-dimmed tide,' as indeed it has. But he can hardly have had any conception of just how thoroughly things would fall apart as the center failed to hold in the last third of this century. He can hardly have foreseen that passionate intensity, uncoupled from morality, would shred the fabric of Western culture. The rough beast of decadence, a long time in gestation, having reached its maturity in the last three decades, now sends us slouching towards our new home, not Bethlehem but Gomorrah."

Second Coming

Surely some revelation is at hand;

Surely the Second Coming is at hand.

... Somewhere in the sands of the desert

A shape with lion body and the head of a man,

A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,

Is moving its slow thighs . . . .

And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,

Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born? ■



# How Shall We Now Live?

JOHN MCLARTY WITH KEN WADE

**W**hat did I make of the tragedy in New York? Friends from around the country called and asked. Parishioners asked. They knew I used to live there.

It was (and is) difficult to be dispassionate in response. I haven't felt like eating since September 11. It's been difficult to sleep and sometimes difficult to work. NYC still owns a large chunk of my heart.

Is the collapse of the World Trade Center a prophetic milestone? Is this the beginning of Armageddon? I doubt it. The slaughter of innocents has been the way of this world for a long time. The assassination of 5,000 in New York is not more significant than the slaughter of 800,000 in Rwanda or the million plus in Cambodia or the 20 million (or whatever figure you prefer) by Stalin. The 5,000 got better TV coverage. It happened in our own front yard. And yes, I still dread news of acquaintances who did not make it out. But I see no value in dignifying this attack by assigning it prophetic significance.

America needs to hear a prophetic word, but not the cryptic and gory imagery of the Apocalypse. We need to hear the words of Jesus: Blessed are the peacemakers. And the words of Paul: Vengeance is mine, says the Lord, I will repay.

It might make a few Americans feel better to carpet bomb Afghanistan. Those people are poor, dark-skinned Moslems; how much can they be worth? But if the United States bombs Afghanistan (or Iraq or ...) and kills civilians, have we not simply agreed with the terrorists' method of warfare? Our pilots will be more highly trained. The innocents killed will all be on the ground. But it is still planes killing civilians.

If the United States can clearly determine who is responsible for the World Trade Center disaster and is able to respond specifically and individually, that would be an appropriate function of government. But war in response to terrorism would be immoral and counterproductive.

So what to do?

Ken Wade, writer and producer at the Voice of Prophecy, sent me an idea that I think has great

merit. What follows is an edited version.

The *Los Angeles Times* (9/17/01) carried the headline: "Afghans Teeter on Edge," with the subhead, "Refugees: Aid workers fear a major U.S. offensive could trigger mass starvation in a land where millions are already suffering."

Most people in Afghanistan oppose the terrorism of September. Why should they suffer because their fanatical rulers have sheltered Osama bin Laden? They are already on the verge of starvation and cruelly oppressed.

The U.S. has massive resources to impact Afghanistan. This immense wealth can be expended in bombs, missiles and young soldiers' lives. Or we could devote a few billion dollars to providing aid to the starving masses in that neighborhood of the world.

Air drop food to the refugees who are starving and freezing to death trying to get out of the country. Find ways to send food to villages and cities. Our government smuggled missiles and other arms into Afghanistan to support guerrilla action against the Soviets. Now we could use those channels to get humanitarian aid in before winter hits hard.

Include in every packet a message something like this: "This is a gift from America. We recognize we live in a land of plenty and have not shared our wealth as much as we should. Please forgive us and accept this gift as a small token of our care for you.

"We want to help you in your time of need and ask you to help us in our hour of need. We have recently been struck by terrorists who have indiscriminately killed men, women and children including foreigners visiting our country. You have experienced this kind of horror in your country as well. Please do whatever you can to help build a new world of peace and justice.

"Thank you, your friends the American people."

I would add two comments to Mr. Wade's words: First, terrorism cannot be eliminated with bombs. And this: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink; in this way you will heap coals of fire on his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good". Romans 12:20-21. ■