



Roy E. Gane

Once again, the Seventh-day Adventist Church is convening a General Conference session, this time in Atlanta, Georgia. There are positions of leadership to be filled and important decisions to be made in order to carry out God's work effectively in the world. It is my fervent hope that the event will be much more than a political convention. I pray that it will be a time of covenant renewal, revival of vision, and recalibration of priorities.

Covenant

For God's people in Bible times, covenant renewal took place at regular times (Deut. 31:10-13) and on occasions of special need (e.g., Joshua 24; Nehemiah 8-10). Such group events were characterized by several features: reviewing God's covenant expectations, humbly recognizing failure to live up to the divine ideal, and solemnly committing to follow Him more closely in the future.

RENEWAL OF COVENANT, VISION, AND PRIORITIES

If the ancient Israelites needed covenant renewal, it would seem that God's end-time covenant community could benefit from this as well. Rejoicing over success that God has wrought is entirely appropriate and important, but have we fulfilled His mission in our lives, in the church, and in the world so well that reappraisal, renewal of vision, and recommitment are unnecessary?

Vision

There are various kinds of vision. What our Seventh-day Adventist movement always needs is the kind that sees the big picture and the long-range view, which only God can reveal in adequate measure. Vision doesn't limit the future according to existing constraints and budgets, but trusts in God to provide for the work that He commissions.

Living by a unified vision, linked to one another through Christ, and moving ahead by the guidance and empowerment of His Spirit, our

God-given diversity of gifts (1 Corinthians 12) can combine for earth-shaking outcomes. It was the vision of Christ's gospel commission (Matt. 28:18-20) and the three angels' messages (Rev. 14:6-12) that impelled the Adventist pioneers to succeed in the audacious task of rapidly reaching millions through evangelistic, educational, and health-care systems that straddle the globe. Now we need their kind of vision to finish the work they began so that billions can meet our loving Savior.

Taking the true gospel of Christ's kingdom of love to all the world as a witness to all nations before the end comes is the largest single venture in the history of the human race. It is totally impossible, unless we let its government rest on the strong shoulder of our Wonderful Counselor, the Son of God. We are not in charge; we just work here, and He makes amazing things happen.

If we limit our vision to what we can come up with, we may as well begin preparing for Y3K. But Jesus wants us home sooner because He has our mansions ready right now, and the title to our promised inheritance is already ours. All we need to do is to trust Him and accept His gift by going up to possess our ultimate Promised Land. As Ellen G. White put it (echoing the words of Caleb in Numbers 13:30): "I declare to you, my brethren and sisters in the Lord,

it is a goodly land, and we are well able to go up and possess it."¹

Priorities

Vision shapes priorities. Human vision seeks temporal results through earthly means, such as human energy, material things, money—and more money. Human influence and distribution of power are largely based on money. Top leaders are money managers. It is true that money is an important resource that God gives us to manage faithfully for His cause. But if our distributions of influence are largely based on money, we are operating by human "politics as usual" rather than by divine vision. Divine vision leads through penniless prophets and sees in five loaves and two fish a banquet for a multitude.

Human vision sees external qualifications for leadership, such as talent, education, experience, looking good, and sounding good (1 Sam. 16:6, 7). Those are all fine things, but for a leader of God's people, the most essential qualification is to be a person in whom His Spirit dwells, who is willing humbly to take directions from the divine King. Saul looked like the king the people wanted, but he failed to follow divine instructions.

When it was time to replace Moses, Joshua was the obvious candidate in terms of experience: He was Moses' long-time assistant, a

tribal leader, and one of the two faithful scouts, and commanded the Israelite army. When the Lord announced His choice, however, He mentioned none of these impressive details on Joshua's résumé, but simply commanded: "Take Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the Spirit" (Num. 27:18, NASB).

In Acts 6, the same qualification of the Spirit guided selection of Christian deacons, who were to be the administrators responsible for managing material resources. The top church leaders were kept free from management responsibilities so that they could devote all their time and energy to more crucial spiritual and theological leadership.

This leadership structure helped to keep the early church focused on the divine vision that urgently looks

beyond the things of this world. If the church ever suffers from a shortage of fully engaged spiritual and theological leadership through Spirit-filled individuals, it will be like a ship with a defective or missing rudder.

In a spirit of beginning to renew our covenant commitment, vision, and priorities, the present issue of *Perspective Digest* reviews some key aspects of biblical teaching held by the Seventh-day Adventist movement and affirmed by the Adventist Theological Society. These concepts are not detached, disparate threads, but are interwoven into a dynamic system of active faith that is centered in Christ and His mission to rescue us.

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¹ *Early Writings*, p. 14.

“How is it possible that we may grow in grace? It is possible to us only as we empty our hearts of self, and present them to Heaven, to be molded after the Divine Pattern. We may have a connection with the living channel of light; we may be refreshed with the heavenly dew, and have the showers of heaven descend upon us. As we appropriate the blessing of God, we shall be able to receive greater measures of His grace” (*Our High Calling*, p. 217).

IF SALVATION IS BY FAITH, WHY DOCTRINE?

Adventist Christianity is viewed in many ways. For some it is a legal religion: obeying its commandments, returning a tithe faithfully, and attending church.

Others see its essence in socially correct living: giving to the poor, establishing schools, caring for the homeless, and healing the sick.

Yet others view it as the acquisition of knowledge: knowing the 28 Fundamental Beliefs, recognizing that Saturday is the true Sabbath, understanding the investigative

judgment, accepting the literal, visible soon return of Christ.

Adventist Christianity is not a check list of do's and don'ts. It cannot be reduced to meditation or a list of doctrines. It is not a human philosophy. Though each of these approaches plays an important role, what is at the heart of the Christian message?

The Essence of Christianity

Christ summarized the essence of Christianity: “This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent” (John 17:3).¹ The sum of Christianity is to come to a knowledge of God and Jesus Christ. The word *knowledge* used here does not refer to mere facts and figures, such as the distance between two cities. It involves the kind of knowledge that leads to a personal relationship with another individual. The goal of salvation is to enter into a full, rewarding, and mature fellowship with God and Jesus Christ that begins in the present and will last for eternity.

God created us for communion with Himself. He spent the very first evening after Creation in the garden in fellowship with Adam and Eve. He made us in His own image so we may fellowship with Him. When our character is in harmony with that of God, we can relate to Him with no barriers. The Lord desires such close fellowship with us that the Bible often uses the imagery of marriage to describe it (Jer. 3:14).

Unfortunately, sin shattered the original Edenic picture of life in harmony with God. Our sins have separated us from God and have hidden His face from us (Isa. 59:2). We are like a branch severed from the tree, a light bulb removed from its socket, a water faucet disconnected from its source.

Sin is the transgression of the character of God (1 John 3:4). When we violate the character of another individual, we distort or even break our relationship with that person. Thus we are not at peace with God because our characters are out of harmony with His. We have chosen to live independently of Him (Isa. 53:6).

The result is that we cannot rectify our situation with God by our works, knowledge, meditation, or any other human effort. There is nothing within us by which we can commend ourselves to Him.

The grace of God is that even while we were sinners—in fact, enemies—God reached down through His own Son Jesus Christ so that our fellowship with Him might be restored (Rom. 5:8-10). We can now be grafted into the vine; we can be adopted into God's family.

The Role of Doctrine in Christianity

If the essence of Christianity is the restoration of our original relationship with God, why bother with doctrine?

To enter a relationship with another person, it is essential to know something about that person. The two parties can sit and stare at each other all day long, but without knowledge of each other, the relationship would have no substance.

In addition, when entering relationships, it is essential to under-

stand oneself. A lack of self-understanding can easily lead to misunderstandings, causing relationships to flounder.

It is also important to understand the parameters within which the relationship can flourish. For example, relationships vary, depending upon whether one is relating to a spouse, a son, a daughter, a boss, or a secretary. Each of these relationships functions with unique guidelines.

Doctrines are essential to our relationship with God, for they provide the information we need to enter into deeper communion with Him. They tell us about ourselves, and how we may appropriately relate to God. Just as there are various types of unique human relationships, so also there is a unique relationship appropriate with God.

A Systematic Whole

In addition to the vital connection between the doctrines and fellowship with God, there is also a relationship among the doctrines themselves. They form a systematic whole. Sometimes we approach doctrine as we do a cafeteria line: *I'll have a lot of righteousness by faith, a little works, some Sabbath, a little creation, and no judgment.* We may attempt to choose what suits us best. Since doctrine tells us about God, choosing only what is palatable is to develop a “designer God,” a God who suits us, who fits our culture,

who can be sold in the contemporary marketplace.

But “the precious, golden links of truth are not separate, detached, disconnected doctrines; but link after link, form one string of golden truth, and constitute a complete whole, with Christ as its living center.”²

Imagine a beautiful sandy beach. Majestic rocky cliffs tower on either end. Waves roll onto the beach and crash against the rocks along the cliffs. Clouds fleece the sky, painted red and orange by the setting sun. The rays of the sun glisten in the wet sand and sparkle in the splashing waves.

Now watch as the scene changes. You are sitting in the same place, looking at the same beach, but the sun has vanished. The sky is dark and gray. The sand does not glisten; no pink tints the sky. Although you have not moved, are you looking at the same picture?

All biblical doctrines comprise a beautiful mosaic and must be viewed as a whole. When we remove from it even one of the basic fundamental doctrines, it is as if we have erased the sun from the picture. We might be sitting in the same place, but the picture is not the same.

Illustrating the Role of Doctrine in Christian Life

A vital relationship exists between doctrine and Christian living. The Sabbath, for example, tells us

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that God is our Creator, our Redeemer, and the One who holds our future in His hands.

The Sabbath also assures us that God is personal. He is not the impersonal God of deism, who set processes in motion and then abandoned His creation. Nor did He return thousands of years after Creation to inform us that we were created for relationship with Him. Rather, He was there the very first day of Creation, to reveal Himself to us and to fellowship with us. Thus, the Sabbath assures us that God is not some impersonal object, force, or concept; rather, He is a personal God who created us for fellowship.

The Sabbath also tells us about ourselves. In our fast-paced world, it is tempting to think that humankind is its own creator and sustainer. The Sabbath reminds us that we were created by the hand of God and that we are redeemed by His power. It assures us that our future is in His hands, and that we can rest our lives

in His care just as He rested and ceased His labors on the seventh day.

The Sabbath also describes our relationship with God. He is the Creator, and we are the created. Our existence cannot be credited to our intelligence or power. We are not autonomous. We are the creation of God. Thus the Sabbath is a reminder that God is God and we are human. We do not relate to God as equals. Our appropriate response to God is worship.

The Sabbath also reminds us that authority lies within God's self-revelation in His Word. As such, the Sabbath plays an eschatological role, demarcating those who are willing to rely on God's Word in spite of the dictates of our senses, reason, and human powers.

Thus, the Sabbath represents our entire relationship with God (Ex. 31:12-17). From creation to redemption, from sin to salvation, from self-centeredness to God- and other-centeredness, from self-re-

liance to reliance upon God's power and Word. The Sabbath is not simply a doctrine; its meaning is fulfilled when it initiates, defines, and provides the opportunity for restoration to fellowship with God.

The doctrine of God's self-revelation and the resultant authority of the Bible are also important to our relation to God. Imagine Adam and Eve waking from creation. Without God's revelation they would not have known about the dangers of the tree in the center of the garden, about the meaning or existence of the Sabbath, or about God as a personal, loving Being. Without the Bible, we are left with guesses about the existence and nature of God and about His relationship with us. It is through the Bible that we can know God, understand our own existence, and have the confidence to look forward with purpose in our lives.

The biblical doctrine of a recent, literal, six-day creation also illustrates the importance of doctrine for the development of our understanding and relationship with God. Theistic evolution, the popular alternate explanation for the existence of life on earth, leaves open many questions about the nature and relationship of God and humankind. Does God exist, and did He create life on earth? If so, is He really a personal God, or is He some kind of impersonal force or concept? If He is a God of love, why would He take hundreds of millions

of years of tooth and claw to create human beings?

And who are we, the distant result of a lightning strike that initiated life in a rich pre-biotic soup? Did we humans ascend through the chain of the animal kingdom and finally through our ancestors, the apes? If so, do we have a soul, and if we do, when, where and how did it originate? When did God decide to initiate fellowship with us? Why did it take millions of years to make that decision?

The acceptance of evolution for the origin of life raises many questions about the nature of God and humankind. We are left without a basis for knowledge of God and an understanding of ourselves.

The Results of Denying Essential Characteristics of God

Imagine you know someone who is extremely friendly and outgoing. She has excellent people skills. Now suppose that you deny her essential characteristic, namely, that she has a keen interest in people. How would this denial impact your relationship with her? She would doubtless respond by continuing to reach out to you. But your relationship would be impacted because you would begin to withdraw from her.

What happens when we deny essential characteristics of God? Suppose we say, "God, I don't believe that You created life on earth in six days; nor do I think that You created

Adam and Eve in your image. Furthermore, it is pagan to think that you sent Your Son to die in my place. Also, I can't imagine why You would send a prophet into this world just before Your second coming, and it makes no sense to me that You would conduct an investigative judgment in heaven as preparation for the Second Coming." Denying essential characteristics of God and His activities is just as detrimental to our relationship with God as is denying key elements in the personalities of our close friends.

In addition, it is the law of the mind and character that we will become like the individual, thing, or concept that we admire most in life. If we have placed God first in our lives and accept His self-revelation to guide our lives, He will send His Holy Spirit to transform us in harmony with His character—and the closer we can live in relationship with Him. On the other hand, if we accept false concepts of God and allow them to mold our lives, our character will be out of harmony with His, and our relationship with Him will be distorted if not eventually destroyed.

The apostle John tells us that eternal life comes from knowing the only "true" God (John 17:3) as He has revealed Himself to us in the living Word, Jesus Christ (1:18), and in His written Word, the Bible. The Bible "is the voice of God speaking

to us. The Bible opens to us the words of life; for it makes us acquainted with Christ who is our life. In order to have true, abiding faith in Christ, we must know Him as He is represented in the word."³

Christianity is not Christian if it attempts to find its basis in knowledge of doctrine, works, meditation, or any other human effort. These do provide the guidelines and the context within which our relationship with God can flourish.

But Christianity is fulfilled when we are restored to a right relationship with God through Christ. It means that Christ is the center of doctrine, not simply because the study of doctrine refers to His name, nor because His words are quoted when teaching doctrine, but because doctrine leads to knowledge of Him so that we might fellowship with Him.

The Adventist Theological Society is committed to Christ as our Savior and to the Bible as His Word and as our guide to life. Doctrine *is* important, not as an end in itself, but as a means of fuller understanding of and relationship with God. □

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¹ Unless noted otherwise, all Scripture references in this article are quoted from *The New King James Version* of the Bible.

² *Appeal and Suggestions to Conference Officers*, p. 26.

³ *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 433.

CHRIST'S SUBSTITUTIONARY DEATH

**Christ's death in our place
is at the very heart of His justice
—and love.**

From early on, biblical faith testifies the necessity of substitutionary death for the salvation of sinners. Seventh-day Adventists affirm that Christ's death on the cross was an atoning sacrifice for sin that had the character of penal substitution. His substitutionary death pays the just penalty for sin in our behalf and provides forgiveness on the basis of divine grace.

Of course, the idea of an atonement that is made *for us* through Jesus Christ presupposes that the re-

lationship between God and humankind is disrupted through sin. Reconciliation is not needed if the relationship is intact. The necessity for Christ's substitutionary death is rooted in our alienation from God.

To overcome this estrangement, Jesus became one of us and died for us. According to the apostle Paul, Christ Jesus, "although He existed in

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Christ's life-giving death was the very purpose of His coming into the world (John 12:27). It certainly is no accident that to redeem humanity Jesus died on a Friday, the very day of the biblical week when God created the human race. Though our creation was effortless for God, our salvation cost Him great pain and even His beloved Son.

the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. . . He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Phil. 2:6-8).¹ But what is the meaning of His death?

Jesus did not die from accident, illness, or old age. He purposefully died for sinners in order to save them. Jesus came into our world: “just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, *and to give His life a ransom for many*” (Matt. 20:28, italics supplied).

In John 2:4 at the wedding at Cana, Jesus said to His mother: “My hour has not yet come.” In 8:20, “no one seized Him, because His hour had not yet come.” In John 12:23, however, while having His impending death clearly before Him, Jesus said: “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.” In verse 27, Jesus utters these words: “What

shall I say, “Father, save Me from this hour”? But for this purpose I came to this hour.” The context in which Jesus speaks these words is clearly His soon approaching death, for “He was saying this to indicate the kind of death by which He was to die” (vs. 33). Jesus was fully aware that His death was His purpose for being born.

Though all of us are born to live, Jesus was born to die. We were not redeemed with perishable things, from our futile way of life which we inherited from our forefathers “but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ” (1 Peter 1:19).

Christ's life-giving death was the very purpose of His coming into the world (John 12:27). It certainly is no accident that to redeem humanity Jesus died on a Friday, the very day of the biblical week when God created the human race. Though our creation was effortless for God, our salvation cost Him great pain and even His beloved Son.

At the beginning of the Gospel of John, Jesus is depicted as “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29). The Greek word for “Lamb” here is also used in Isaiah 53 for the suffering servant of the Lord, who takes our iniquities upon Himself. Jesus died a substitutionary death for us, taking upon Himself the sin and guilt we deserve. No other passage from the entire Old Testament is alluded to by New Testament writers more often than Isaiah 53. It is as if they wanted to emphasize precisely this substitutionary aspect of the death of Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ saw Himself as this substitute. In John 15:13 he said: “Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.” In His high-priestly prayer at the end of His life, Jesus described His death in language that indicates that He saw himself in a sacrifice for us: “For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth” (John 17:19). The Greek word for *consecrate* is common in sacrificial contexts, where a priest and a sacrifice is prepared and thus very appropriate for Christ.²

Perhaps no other passage brings out the substitutionary character of Jesus' death clearer than 1 Timothy 2:5, 6: “There is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony given at the proper time.”

The English word *ransom* stands for the Greek word that normally describes the thought of deliverance from some sort of bondage in exchange for the payment or compensation or the offering of a substitute.³ There is a price to be paid for sin. The wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23). That's why the price had to be paid by someone who is not guilty but able to give life.

Forgive Simply Out of Love?

But why can't God forgive the same way He asks us to forgive? Why doesn't God practice what He expects from us: to forgive one another out of love?

These questions betray a superficial understanding of the problem of sin. The comparison between our forgiveness and God's misses the important fact that we are private individuals and other people's sins are personal injuries to self and others. God, however, is not a private individual; nor is sin just a personal injury. God is the Creator of the universe and the giver of the law we break. In fact, His law is an expression of His character (Rom. 7:12), which is love (1 John 4:8). Love is basic to God's law and government of the universe because it is the only principle on the basis of which intelligent beings with free choice can co-exist without destroying one another. Love includes justice/fairness as well as mercy. If God is to extend

mercy through forgiveness, He must find a way to do it with full justice, or He would damage love, which would be disastrous.⁴

Sin is completely incompatible with God's holiness, which includes His moral character of love (1 Thess. 3:12, 13). God and sin cannot coexist because sin is "unlove" and He is love. Our sin has evoked God's just wrath, and sin separates us from God, who is the Giver and Sustainer of all life. Sin, therefore, leads to death (Rom. 6:23). Our sin is more than a debt. It is a crime against the only true and living God, who is perfectly holy. Because God loves us, He gives us the opportunity to be saved from the just penalty through the sacrifice of His Son (John 3:16). By bearing our penalty, Christ makes it possible for God to be just when He justifies those who believe (Rom. 3:26). In this way, God is able to forgive us without compromising the justice part of His love.^v

The substitutionary nature of Christ's sacrifice is clearly shown in that He bore our sins as our Priest and then died for those sins (1 Peter 2:24). Without a substitutionary sacrifice, the judicial penalty awaits those whose sins are not covered by the blood of Christ. Deep within every human being is a conviction that good ought to be rewarded and sin ought to be punished. And the transgression of the Law deserves a punishment if the Law of God is still valid. For this reason, there must be a

substitute for us sinners to pay the penalty we deserve. We are hopelessly lost and unable to redeem ourselves.

The issue is not why God should simply forgive sinners out of love. The real question is much deeper: How does God find it possible to forgive us at all?

Forgiveness is one of God's most profound problems, for which there is only one solution: the substitutionary death of Christ, who lived a sinless life. With His death, He fulfilled the work His Father in heaven had assigned Him (John 4:34) so that God "reconciled us to Himself through Christ" because "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them" (2 Cor. 5:18, 19).

The Idea of Shedding Blood

Jesus' substitutionary death on the Cross is not cosmic child abuse, as some construe it; nor is it a pagan idea. But "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). In Galatians 2:20, Paul writes that Jesus "'loved me and gave Himself up for me.'"

The biblical idea of Christ's substitutionary death can be understood only within a Trinitarian concept of God. Only then is the biblical message coherent. The death of Jesus on the cross is not His idea alone, as if to satisfy His ill-tempered Father. Instead, the God-Father so loved us

as to send his Son, Himself God, to bear and take away our sins.

The persons of the Triune God freely commit themselves to redeem human sinners. Jesus voluntarily gave His life for us. He says: "The good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep" (John 10:11) and then continues: "I lay down My life. . . . No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative" (vss. 17, 18). Yet "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself" (2 Cor. 5:19).

Understood in the light of God's Trinitarian love, the substitutionary death of Christ is something entirely different from a violent pagan idea that reflects a revengeful deity, as some surmise. In stark contrast to all human-initiated actions of satisfaction and propitiation, in which humans come to God with a gift of appeasement, the living God of biblical revelation comes to humanity in self-giving love to overcome the divine-human alienation.^{vi} God is not only the initiator but also the primary actor in the process of substitutionary atonement. God not only tells us how to be saved; He Himself provides the only possible and acceptable sacrifice: His Son Jesus Christ.

"We must not, then, speak of God punishing Jesus or of Jesus persuading God, for to do so is to set them over against each other as if they

acted independently of each other or were even in conflict with each other. We must never make Christ the object of God's punishment or God the object of Christ's persuasion, for both God and Christ were subjects not objects, taking the initiative together to save sinners."^{vii}

Christ's substitutionary death is not incompatible with an authentic biblical understanding of the character of God. In fact, it is the supreme revelation of God's holy love and justice. It kindles our deepest love and elicits genuine gratitude, culminating in our adoration of the Triune God and leading to our praise for His salvation through Jesus Christ alone. □

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³ Edwin Hatch and Henry A. Redpath, *A Concordance to the Septuagint* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), pp. 890, 891.

⁴ Roy Gane, *Altar Call* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Diadem, 1999), pp. 110, 269, 270.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 110, 237.

⁶ Thomas C. Oden, *The Word of Life: Systematic Theology: Volume Two* (Peabody, Mass.: Prince Press of Hendrickson Publishers, 2001), p. 352.

⁷ John R. W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1986), p. 151.



THE WORD MADE FLESH

**The book that Christians call
“Holy Scripture” is ever so much more
than one of many sacred texts.**

Today the Bible is popularly evaluated as Christianity’s best spiritual literature—and then equated with the writings of Buddha, the *Bagivad Gita* of Hinduism, or other such human documents. This implies that each religious tradition spawns a few very spiritual persons who express generally comparable reflections.

Why have Christians insisted on the absolute nature of the Holy Bible? In contemporary thinking, the primary “textbook” of the Christian faith needs to be reconsidered.

Of course, it isn’t a textbook by modern definition. But the biblical materials must be studied attentively, involving appraisal of the fun-

damental assumptions and parameters within which the many Bible writers work. Thankfully, these are often explicit.

None of the Bible writers ever attempts to prove God’s existence. Each one assumes He exists. Biblical prophets claimed to have real knowledge of an infinite God. And they were absolutely certain that God was speaking through them.

Moreover, all insist that God

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makes truthful claims. He declares that He can foretell the future, and that doing so indicated His divinity: “I am the Lord, that is My name; and My glory I will not give to another, nor My praise to carved images. Behold, the former things have come to pass, and new things I declare; before they spring forth I tell you of them. . . . Indeed before the day was, I am He; and there is no one who can deliver out of My hand; I work, and who will reverse it?” (Isa. 42:8, 9; 43:13).ⁱ

Through the prophets God announced time prophecies concerning the history of nations and the coming of the Messiah. Some modern minds assume that God could not be so precise, that such prophecies were written after the fact. This idea, however, appears nowhere in Scripture.

Furthermore, biblical writers were certain that God could and did communicate with human beings. They never argue that human language is any kind of barrier to direct communication from God. In fact, with great frequency God is referred to as the actual Person speaking through the prophet. Elijah’s words in 1 Kings 21:19 are referred to in 2 Kings 9:25 as the oracle that “the Lord uttered” (NRSV), and Elijah is not even mentioned.

The message of a prophet was considered equivalent to direct speech from God. And to disobey a prophet’s words was to disobey God.

In Deuteronomy 18:19, the Lord speaks through Moses of the coming prophet through Moses: ““Whoever will not hear My words, which He speaks in My name, I will require it of him.”” When Saul disobeyed Samuel’s command at Gilgal, Samuel rebuked him: ““You have done foolishly. You have not kept the commandment of the Lord your God, which He commanded you. But now your kingdom shall not continue. . . because you have not kept what the Lord commanded you”” (1 Sam. 13:13, 14).

The biblical writers also recorded numerous incidents of God speaking directly to human beings: conversations with Adam and Eve after the Fall (Gen. 1:28-30; 3:9-19); the divine call of Abram (12:1-3); the interchange with Elijah at Mount Horeb (1 Kings 19:9-18). The civil code in the Pentateuch is recorded as words spoken directly by God to Moses.

Old Testament prophets are pictured as sent by God to speak His words. The repeated use of the introductory formula “thus says the Lord”—or its equivalent—clinches the divine authority. In fact, a distinguishing characteristic of true prophets is that they do not speak their own words. God said to Moses: “I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall say” (Ex. 4:12); to Jeremiah: “I have put My words in your mouth” (Jer. 1:9).

Extensive evidence suggests that

biblical prophets experienced something far more than a “divine encounter” that merely inspired their mystical conviction for God. God gives human beings actual information (Deut. 29:29). Indeed, it is striking that one Person of the Triune God is known as the “Word.”

Numerous times, prophets wrote down the words of God, which were then assumed fully authoritative: “Joshua wrote these words in the Book of the Law of God” (Joshua 24:26); “Samuel explained to the people the behavior of royalty, and wrote it in a book” (1 Sam. 10:25). Even the recording process is divinely controlled with the penman being “moved” (2 Peter 1:21).

Both Testaments consistently testify that the truth of God is not the end-product of diligent human search for the divine. It comes exclusively through God’s initiative. God speaks for Himself *through* His prophets. And human language is assumed to be capable of conveying divine communication.

The New Testament apostles write with the same absolute authority as the Old Testament prophets, insisting that they speak by the Holy Spirit (1 Peter 1:10-12), to whom they credit the content of their teaching (1 Cor. 2:12, 13). Significantly, the same Paul who urged that believers seek to work together peaceably, often used harsh language to defend the absolute truth of the

gospel he had preached (Gal. 1:6-9). Apostolic teaching is very “directive,” issuing commands with the strongest authority (1 Thess. 4:1, 2; 2 Thess. 3:6, 12).

The prophets and apostles do not describe how they recognized the “word of God” when it came, but they were clearly certain that God had spoken. Sometimes He spoke in ways that they did not understand and on occasion even objected to, yet they never questioned the divine origin of the message.

The Bible, however, was not verbally dictated by God. The human messenger was divinely guided in the selection of apt words to express divine revelation, and thus the prophetic words are called the Word of God. The individuality of each writer is evident, yet the human and divine elements are virtually inseparable.

“The Bible, with its God-given truths expressed in the language of men, presents a union of the divine and the human. Such a union existed in the nature of Christ, who was the Son of God and the Son of man. Thus it is true of the Bible, as it was of Christ, that ‘the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.’”ⁱⁱ

Careful reading of Scripture also reveals a basic continuity and unity of both Testaments. The extensive New Testament citations of the Old Testament indicate that the earlier writings were considered by New Testament writers to be divine reve-

“Never let mortal man sit in judgment upon the Word of God or pass sentence as to how much of this is inspired and how much is not inspired, and that this is more inspired than some other portions. God warns him off that ground. God has not given him any such work to do.”

lation. Isaiah’s words in Isaiah 7:14 are cited as “what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet” (Matt. 1:22, NRSV); Jesus quotes Genesis 2:24 as words that God said (Matt. 19:5).

Words of Scripture are said to be spoken by the Holy Spirit: in quoting the prophet Joel, Peter inserts the words, “says God” (Acts 2:17). Paul and Barnabas quote Isaiah 49:6 as something that “the Lord commanded us” (Acts 13:47, KJV), contending that an Old Testament prophecy placed moral obligation on them also.

New Testament writers also knew it was possible for God to speak directly to people in human language: the baptism of Jesus (Matt. 3:17); the Transfiguration (17:5; 2 Peter 1:17, 18); instructions to Ananias (vss. 11-16); and the revelation to John (Rev. 1:11–3:22).

Jesus Himself asserts numerous times that He speaks the words of God: “The Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say

and what I should speak” (John 12:49). Paul claims revelation from God in 1 Corinthians 14:37.

Jesus Christ Himself confirmed the Old Testament as foundational in His teaching and ethics. Old Testament prophecy was the pattern for His life, as He declared often: “it must be fulfilled” or “as it is written.” He rebuked the Jewish theologians of His time for permitting human tradition to cloud and even falsify God’s written word in the Old Testament (Mark 7:1-13).

Jesus expected others to accept the Old Testament as authoritative: “Have you not read” (Matt. 12:5; 21:16; Mark 12:10). In response to a lawyer’s question about salvation, Jesus asked: “What is written in the law?” (Luke 10:26). The lawyer answered with a direct quotation from the Ten Commandments, and Jesus declared: “You have answered rightly.”

The apostle Paul similarly refers to the authority of the Old Testament. In the Book of Romans he

builds a powerful argument for the gospel built upon the Old Testament, and in the process demonstrates the paramount principle of listening to what Scripture says about itself.

Moreover, Jesus and the New Testament authors accepted the historicity of the Old Testament. In fact, the New Testament writers relied on the historical narratives of the Old Testament to predict the certainty of future actions of God.

The Bible is impressively self-authenticated. Yet it appears to some as an enigmatic collection of seemingly unrelated materials: narratives, poetry, legal codes, sermons, letters, prophecies, parables, royal annals, and genealogies. Scripture itself clearly instructs that it is possible to misread and misinterpret Scripture. Many of the biblical writers, along with Christ, warned against false teachers and false teaching.

Thankfully, the Lord Jesus provides a vital interpretive key: “The Scriptures . . . testify of Me” (John 5:39). The apostle Paul testifies that when seeing Jesus in Scripture, a veil is taken away from the eyes (2 Cor. 3:14-16). The two disciples traveling to Emmaus had an authenticating experience in the correct understanding of Scripture through the risen Lord’s interpretation of the Old Testament (Luke 24:32).

Today some suggest that different portions of Scripture are of ques-

tionable value. No modern writer addresses this issue more straightforwardly than Ellen G. White: “Never let mortal man sit in judgment upon the Word of God or pass sentence as to how much of this is inspired and how much is not inspired, and that this is more inspired than some other portions. God warns him off that ground. God has not given him any such work to do.”

God Himself expresses the same sentiment: “Thus says the Lord: ‘Heaven is My throne, and earth is My footstool. Where is the house that you will build Me? And where is the place of My rest? For all those things My hand has made, and all those things exist,’ says the Lord. ‘But on this one will I look: on him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word’” (Isa. 66:1, 2).

The Christian doctrine of Scripture is about a Book—but truly, more than a Book. Through its many writers we are confronted with a God who yearns for His children, who is in earnest to communicate His love to them, and who loves them more than He loved His own life. □

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¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references in this article are quoted from *The New King James Version of the Bible*.

² *The Great Controversy*, p. vi.

³ *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 919.

A LITERAL READING OF GENESIS

**The first 11 chapters of Genesis
form a solid and consistent reporting
of human history.**

In 1999, PBS aired a critically acclaimed special on the biblical Book of Genesis. Though it received numerous favorable reviews, a question that apparently lurked in many minds was voiced by *Newsweek*: “But Did It Really Happen?” It is one thing to read and even enjoy the stories in the Bible; it is quite another to hold that they are historical. Certainly, recent conclusions of both evolutionary science and historical-critical analysis of the Bible have cast doubt on the historicity of biblical events—especially those in the first 11 chapters of Genesis.

Dillard and Longman¹ point out that a long tradition of Jewish and Christian scholarship supports the

view that most biblical narratives impart information about real events and characters of the past. Only in the past two centuries, with emerging challenges of modern science, have alternative genres been seriously proposed.

During this time, three schools of thought have emerged concerning a literal interpretation of Genesis. The first was the historical-critical school. Generally, advocates of this position argue that the author of Genesis in-

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tended readers to understand the narrative as literally and historically true. Historical critics assert, however, that modern science and archaeology have shown that much if not most of the Genesis narrative did *not* really happen historically.

The second school of thought emerged out of the early 19th-century evangelical movement as a response to historical criticism. This school of thought continues today, though its name has changed since. It has been called “neo-evangelical,” although presently it is described as part of the “young” or “younger evangelical” movement. Though some describe it as liberal evangelicalism, defenders view it as progressive.

Generally, this school of thought has denied that the author of Genesis intended the narratives to be understood literally or historically. Rather, these narratives were intended to be read in a non-literal way. Some argue that the text is mythological; some say it is poetic—a literary artwork not meant to be understood literally; some say it is theological; some say it is symbolic. Some have proposed interpretations that the days of Genesis were not 24-hour days, and that the Flood was local instead of global—or not real at all. A number of Adventist scholars have been attracted to the interpretations of this school.

The third school of thought is described as conservative orthodox, al-

though its critics dismiss it as fundamentalist. Ironically, this school agrees with the liberal, historical-critical school that the author of Genesis indeed intended to describe literal, historical events with regards to Creation and the Flood, etc. The difference is that conservative orthodox advocates accept not only the intention of the author, but the accuracy and veracity of his claims. They accept a six-day creation and a global flood.

This last school of thought is closest that expressed in Ellen White’s writings: “We are dependent on the Bible for a knowledge of the early history of our world, of the creation of man, and of his fall. Remove the word of God, and what can we expect than to be left to fables and conjectures, and to that enfeebling of the intellect which is the sure result of entertaining error. We need the authentic history of the origin of the earth, of the fall of the covering cherub, and of the introduction of sin into our world.” Clearly, Ellen White saw the Bible’s historicity as a critical factor in the opening chapters of the unfolding of the Great Controversy.

Old Testament View of Scripture’s Historicity

For several reasons, a significant number of scholars, liberal and conservative, believe that the author of Genesis meant his accounts of Creation and the Flood to be under-

stood literally and historically.

The Temporal/Spatial Sweep of the Story. Most readers can detect the overall unity of the narrative plot in Genesis that runs from the account of Creation all the way to the Exodus. It recounts past events within a narrative structure (see below). Indeed, Genesis 1–11 clearly serves as a prologue for the rest of Genesis and the Pentateuch.

The Waw Consecutive Verbal Form. A certain Hebrew verbal form, known as the *waw consecutive*, is found throughout the historical narratives in the Old Testament. Interestingly, this same verbal form typical of the later biblical historical narratives is also used in Genesis 1–11. This suggests that the author made no distinction between Genesis 1–11 and later biblical narratives with regards to historicity.

The toledoth Formulae. Some scholars have also noted the presence of the *toledoth* formulae (“these are the generations of”) in Genesis 1–11. This expression points to a “historical impulse” for Genesis.

Genre Similarity. There are no dramatic genre shifts (shifts between types of literature) between Genesis and the rest of the Pentateuch, and none between the Pentateuch and the so-called “historical” books (Kings, Chronicles, etc.). “Indeed, if we are speaking of the original intention of the biblical writer(s), the style of the book [Genesis] leaves lit-

tle space to argue over the obvious conclusion that the author intended it to be read as a work of history that recounts what has taken place in the far-distant past.”²

Historical Content of Extra-Biblical Primeval Histories. A point that critics often overlook is that those accounts of origins and earliest human events are not necessarily completely non-historical. Because these ancient stories often include the activities of gods, secular historians have tended to dismiss them as mythological, legendary, etc. It has recently been noted, however, that elements within Mesopotamian primeval histories such as the Sumerian King List and the Gilgamesh Epic mention the names of people and places that archaeology has actually confirmed.

Interestingly, some of these people would be considered legendary by today’s standards—they accomplish incredible feats and have incredibly long life spans. Specifically, the name of Gilgamesh himself, and (En)mebaragesi, one of his contemporaries, have been found on an inscription that date to the time when the later legends say Gilgamesh and Enmebaragesi lived.

(En)mebarabesi, king of Kish, listed as king No. 22 on the Sumerian King List, is credited with having ruled 900 years!

The Gilgamesh epic recounts the building of the wall of Uruk by Gil-

A number of elements of the story of the Tower of Babel have been recorded in extra-biblical sources, suggesting that the story was not simply contrived by the biblical writer. A Sumerian text from the late Third Dynasty of Ur (Mesopotamia) tells how the Sumerians had once been a people of one language, but that a god, Enki, confounded their speech.

gamesh. This very wall has also been found, which has led some scholars to caution that just because an individual's name appears in ancient literature within a supernatural or mythological context, it should not be assumed that they did not truly exist or that they did not accomplish the achievements ascribed to them. Likewise, that the literature may assign them incredibly long life spans or reigns does not deny the possibility that they were historical persons.

A number of elements of the story of the Tower of Babel have been recorded in extra-biblical sources, suggesting that the story was not simply contrived by the biblical writer. A Sumerian text from the late Third Dynasty of Ur (Mesopotamia) tells how the Sumerians had once been a people of one language, but that a god, Enki, confounded their speech. The Sumerians, of course, had special towers, ziggurats, that were supposed to link heaven with earth. The parallels between these various Mesopotamian stories and the Bible

have jumped out at scholars. Though the relationship between the biblical account and the Sumerian texts is difficult to determine, there appears to be a connection between them.

Old Testament View of the Historicity of Genesis 1–11

Before examining evidence that New Testament authors believed in the historicity of the early chapters of Genesis, it should be noted that many such statements occur in a context of apprehension about the credibility of the gospel to a pagan world. There was concern about the ideas that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah and that He had risen from the dead. Peter wrote: “We did *not* follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty” (2 Peter 1:16, italics supplied).³

In beginning his first Epistle to the Corinthians, Paul admits that “the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, [those who

refuse to believe], . . . to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness” (1 Cor. 1:18, 23).

Yet, Paul affirms the reality of the resurrection in a stirring appeal that occupies all of chapter 15. The climax: “For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable” (15:16-19).

Though it is tempting to believe that people were more gullible in those days, many, if not most, were as cynical about the resurrection of a dead man as people are today. The controversy between the Sadducees and the Pharisees (Acts 23:6-10) shows the uncertainty among educated Jews about the possibility of resurrection. Paul's speech to the intellectual elite of Athens on Mar's Hill (Acts 17:32, 33) was being well received until he mentioned the resurrection, whereupon he was sneered at by some and politely dismissed by the rest.

New Testament writers, however, viewed Genesis 1–11 as historical. In Matthew 19:4, 5, Jesus introduces quotes from Genesis 1:27 and 2:24 with the phrase, “have you not read . . .” indicating the truthfulness, historicity, and authority these passages held for Him. Genesis 1:27 refers to the creation of Adam and Eve in a

manner that suggests this was considered an historic event and the reference from 2:24, that the two “shall become one flesh” is used to justify Jesus' teaching of the permanence and sanctity of marriage. In Luke 17:26-29 Jesus warned that the last days would be “as it was in the days of Noah.” Obviously, the threat of the final judgment is seriously diminished if the judgment of Noah's day was not considered real and historical.

The author of Hebrews cites seamlessly events from these early chapters of Genesis along with later, commonly accepted historic events that suggests no distinction of their relative historicity in the minds of the early church (see Hebrews 11). Peter's references to the time of the Flood assumes their historicity (2 Peter 3:3-7).

When viewed together, these and other New Testament passages suggest that the historicity of Genesis 1–11 was taken for granted by the early church. So Christians who believe in the New Testament should also accept this. □

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- ¹ Raymond D. Dillard and Tremper Longman, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1994, p. 49).
- ² *Medical Ministry*, p. 89.
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CHRIST'S HEAVENLY SANCTUARY MINISTRY

The Adventist understanding of the heavenly sanctuary pertains to the church's one unique contribution to theology.

The fifth core belief affirmed by the Adventist Theological Society (ATS) as a teaching of Scripture and of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is as follows: "I affirm a real sanctuary in heaven and the pre-advent judgment of believers beginning in 1844, based upon the historicist view of prophecy and the year-day principle as taught in Scripture." This briefly summarizes Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Belief 24 and adds explicit reference to the

historicist interpretive approach, including recognition of the year-day principle, which makes it possible to identify 1844 A.D. as the date when the pre-advent judgment began.

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Importance of Pre-Advent Judgment

Outside the Seventh-day Adventist movement, some Christians accept the reality of the heavenly sanctuary, priestly mediation of Christ there, and a judgment of believers. However, the biblical teaching of a judgment that serves as a second, final phase of atonement through Christ's mediation in the most holy place of the heavenly sanctuary before His second coming, beginning in 1844 and continuing through to the present, is unique to Seventh-day Adventist understanding. In fact, this combination of Great Controversy and sanctuary themes comprises *the only unique contribution of Seventh-day Adventists to biblical theology*.

Many wish Adventists would abandon their distinctive pre-advent judgment view and be absorbed into the evangelical mainstream. But the importance of this sanctuary teaching goes far beyond the historical fact that it began the Adventist movement when some disappointed followers of William Miller realized the connection between Daniel 8:14 and the biblical teaching of a heavenly temple (Hebrews 8-9; Revelation 4-5, etc.). Understanding what Jesus is doing for us now during the final stage of atonement helps us to realize the imminence of His coming, to get in touch with Him, and to cooperate with His end-time mission for the world.

From Christ we receive the gift of

empowerment from the Holy Spirit (Joel 2; Acts 2) to proclaim the last gospel invitation during the time of the Creator's judgment (Rev. 14:6-12). The Spirit's power shows itself in lives transformed by love poured into hearts (Rom. 5:5), lives characterized by "love, joy, peace, . . ." (Gal. 5:22, 23, NIV) that bring healing to broken relationships (Mal. 4:5, 6). Just as the apostles received the Spirit at Pentecost when they looked by faith to Christ in heaven at the time of His priestly inauguration, end-time Christians are to receive the Spirit from Him where He is now in the heavenly holy of holies.

Locating ourselves in salvation history as living during the end-time judgment defines Adventist identity and the urgency of our interconnected teachings, such as the Second Coming of Christ (soon!), the seventh-day Sabbath (end-time pledge of allegiance to the Creator), and the non-immortality of the "soul"/life (needing resurrection and/or transformation at the Second Coming). Our end-time context depends upon the historicist approach to biblical apocalyptic prophecies, which prevailed among Christians for many centuries. *Historicism* refers to an interpretive approach that sees how the apocalyptic (meaning "revelatory") prophecies of Daniel present continuous overviews of history from the time of the prophet to the second coming of Christ (chapters 2, 7, 8, 11, 12).

Biblical Support for Pre-Advent Judgment and Historicism

There is solid biblical support for the interdependent concepts in the ATS statement regarding the pre-advent judgment and historicism.

A Real Heavenly Sanctuary. God has a real sanctuary/temple center of divine administration that has been in heaven since at least Old Testament times (Ps. 11:4). In this and other passages, "sanctuary" is not simply a symbol; nor does it refer to all of heaven. The sanctuary on earth was patterned according to the pre-existing heavenly temple (Ex. 25:9).

When Christ ascended to heaven after His resurrection, He was inaugurated as Priest to continue His work of atonement by distributing the benefits of His sacrificial death to those who believe (Heb. 4:14-16). This mediation is an essential part of Christ's atonement, just as ritual activities performed by an Israelite priest following slaughter of an animal victim were an integral part of the sacrificial process (Leviticus 1, 4).

Christ's sacrifice on earth and priestly mediation in the heavenly sanctuary, illuminated by the dynamic model of the ancient Israelite ritual system, show us how God saves people by extending mercy without compromising His justice, the other side of love (Ex. 34:6, 7). The biblical sanctuary services teach us a balanced view of atonement, which is both "legal" by removing our condemna-

tion (Lev. 4:31; 5:1, 6) and "experiential" by giving repentant sinners the experience of receiving God's transforming grace (Lev. 4:27-29).

Judgment of Believers. There is a phase of judgment concerning those who have had a connection with God through at least nominal belief in Him (Heb. 10:30). At the Old Testament sanctuary, a second and final stage of atonement on the Day of Atonement involved judgment between loyal and disloyal Israelites. Ritual purification of the sanctuary reaffirmed those who were loyal to God (16:29-31), but the disloyal received no benefit and were condemned (Lev. 23:29, 30).

Cleansing of the sanctuary, God's place of administration, represented His justification/vindication as Judge. This was necessary because He condemned the disloyal but had forgiven guilty people when they accepted sacrificial atonement throughout the year (Leviticus 4, 5), which a just judge normally should not do (Deut. 25:1; 1 Kings 8:32). Vindicating the Judge for having saved loyal people showed that He was right in having forgiven them. For the loyal, whose forgiveness and unhindered connection with God was reaffirmed, the judgment was good news.

Similarly, the end-time judgment in Daniel 7:9-14 benefits God's faithful people. In the overlapping parallel prophecy of Daniel 8, the same event is the ultimate, end-time

Day of Atonement in that it justifies/vindicates God's sanctuary (vs. 14). This event is good news for those who stay loyal to God.

The judgment is not to find out who has sinned. God doesn't need a judgment for that. Neither is it for His own information because He already knows everything. The purpose of the judgment is to show the universe of God's created beings that His love (= justice + mercy) is not compromised when He saves the right people because Christ's sacrifice makes Him just when He justifies *those who believe* (Rom. 3:26). This means that they keep on believing, as shown by the fact that their faith works through love (Gal. 5:6). Works are used in the judgment (Eccl. 12:14) as evidence of faith.

Location of Judgment in Heavenly Sanctuary. The judgment of believers takes place in God's heavenly sanctuary, where One like a human being (Christ) comes to the divine "Ancient of Days" to receive His kingdom through a judgment that determines who His subjects will be (Dan. 7:9-14). Because the judgment is an end-time event, the sanctuary through which it is justified in Daniel 8:14 cannot be the earthly temple in Jerusalem, which was destroyed long ago (in 70 A.D.).

Judgment Before Christ's Second Coming. The judgment of believers occurs before Christ comes to earth again. Use of books/records (Dan.

7:10) indicates investigation or demonstration of evidence before announcement and execution of the verdict. Final destruction of God's human archenemy (symbolized as the "little horn" in Daniel 7-8), who opposes His rule and law, will come at Christ's second coming (Dan. 8:25). Therefore, the investigative/demonstrative phase of judgment must precede Christ's second coming.

Judgment Beginning in 1844, Shown by Historicist Year-Day Principle. Timing the pre-advent judgment more precisely, it begins in 1844 at the end of 2,300 years prophesied in Daniel 8:14. Historicism recognizes that Daniel includes some predictions of long time periods in which expressions for "days" represent years (8:14; 12:11-12). Though a year-day or day-year principle should not be applied indiscriminately, several factors support the possibility of "years" and require this meaning in these contexts. The following factors are most relevant to Daniel 8:14:

1. The Hebrew word for "days" can also mean "years" (1 Sam. 27:7).
2. Periods of years corresponding to the same number of days appear elsewhere in the Bible (Num. 14:34).
3. In Daniel 9:24-27, "seventy weeks" (NKJV) must be weeks of years, that is, 70 sabbatical year cycles of seven years each (compare Leviticus 25) = 490 years. They cannot be weeks of literal days because

the period covers too much history: It reaches from the Persian decree in 457 B.C. to restore Jerusalem to the Jews as their civil capital (Dan. 9:25) until the coming of the Messiah at the beginning of the 69th "week." Confirming that "weeks" are "years" and identifying Jesus as Messiah, He began His public ministry in 27 A.D. (Luke 3:1—15th year of Tiberius, following Jewish inclusive reckoning and with no zero year between B.C. and A.D.), 483 years after 457 B.C. This accurate fulfillment in the Roman period, after even the time of Antiochus IV Epiphanes when preterists say Daniel was written, validates real predictive prophecy.

4. In Daniel 8:14, the 2,300 evenings-mornings (= 2,300 evenings and 2,300 mornings) are "days" that must represent 2,300 years: They cover the period of Daniel's "vision" (Dan. 8:13), which begins by symbolizing the Medo-Persian empire (vss. 1-4, 20), continues through the Greek/Macedonian domination by Alexander the Great and his successors (vss. 5-8, 21), and keeps going through the oppressive rule of a subsequent "little horn" power (vss. 9-12, 23-25). If the "days" were literal (= 6 and 1/3 literal years), Daniel would not have been so upset when he realized that only for this long would the 70-year domination of the Jews by foreign power be prolonged.

5. In Daniel 9:22-27, the angel Gabriel answers Daniel's distress over

the "vision" of 2,300 evenings-mornings in chapter 8 by explaining its first segment ("cut off"/ "determined"; 9:24) regarding the near future of the Jewish people, which lasts "seventy weeks." These are weeks of years, so the longer period of 2,300 to which they belong must also consist of years. Since the "seventy weeks" segment began in 457 B.C., the 2,300 began at the same time and lasted (with no zero year) until 1844 A.D.¹

We have found that interpretation of Daniel 8:14 in its context yields 1844 as the beginning of the end-time justifying of the heavenly sanctuary through the pre-advent judgment. Thus 1844 is not a self-standing doctrine based on a single text; it is one important detail regarding an event that is well-attested in Scripture. It is important for God's people to know when the judgment begins so that they can cooperate with Him (Rev. 14:6-12), just as the ancient Israelites needed to know when the Day of Atonement began so that they could participate (Lev. 16:29-31). □

¹ For more information on the meaning and timing of the pre-advent judgment, see Roy Gane, *Who's Afraid of the Judgment? The Good News About Christ's Work in the Heavenly Sanctuary* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press Publ. Assn., 2006) and other works cited there.

INSPIRATION OF ELLEN G. WHITE

**A full understanding of the role
of Ellen White's writings is vital to the mission of
the Seventh-day Adventist Church.**

The Paraná River is the second in size of the South American rivers, and it runs through Brazil, Paraguay, and Argentina. Before emptying into the Río de la Plata and the Atlantic Ocean, the river splits into several tributaries and forms the Paraná Delta, with a length of some 320 km and a width varying between 18 and 60 km. When a foreign vessel arrives at Buenos Aires and has to sail through the delta, a national pilot is usually hired to guide it through the

navigable canal, avoiding the possibility of running aground in one of the lower tributaries.

The history of the world can be compared to a lengthy river that forms a huge ideological-religious delta before emptying into the ocean

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of eternity. Based on an analogy suggested by Uriah Smith, we can consider the Bible as “a book of directions” for the “whole journey,” and the prophetic gift of Ellen G. White as an additional “pilot” for the last part of the voyage. The mission of that pilot is not to replace the instructions of the book, but rather to assist in applying them to the complex end-time eschatological context.¹

Recognizing the devotional relevance of Ellen White’s writings for our days, some people place them on the same level as those of Martin Luther, John Calvin, and John Wesley. But Seventh-day Adventists acknowledge her writings not only as devotionally *inspiring* but also as prophetically *inspired*.

Evidences of Inspiration

There are three basic evidences for the inspiration of Ellen White’s writings. One is her own supernatural experiences and prophetic claims. She began to report her first vision (December 1844) with the words, “As God has shown me in holy vision.”² Many of her other prophetic experiences were introduced with similar terms.

By claiming to have received prophetic visions, she placed herself under judgment in regard to their origin. In 1875, she wrote: “God is either teaching his church, reproving their wrongs and strengthening their faith, or he is not. This work is of

God, or it is not. God does nothing in partnership with Satan. My work, for the past thirty years, bears the stamp of God or the stamp of the enemy. There is no half-way work in the matter. The *Testimonies* are of the Spirit of God, or of the devil.”³ Undoubtedly, she was fully convinced about the genuineness of her prophetic gift.

Another basic evidence for the inspiration of Ellen White’s writings is the acknowledgment by many of her contemporaries. Already in August 1845, James White referred to her in following words: “There is one Sister in Maine who has had a clear vision of the Advent people traveling to the City of God.”⁴ In April 1846, Otis Nichols wrote to William Miller that “God called her and told her to go out and tell the flock what he had revealed to her.”⁵ Many other Seventh-day Adventist pioneers expressed their trust in the divine origin of her visions.⁶ More recently, even the famous archeologist William F. Albright qualified Ellen White as a true modern prophetess.⁷

As meaningful as both Ellen White’s personal conviction and the witnesses of her contemporaries are, however, they alone cannot *prove* the inspiration of her writings. Crucial for the whole discussion is, indeed, their inner witness to Scripture. Though many self-alleged prophets tend to replace the authority of

Prophetic inspiration is a mysterious divine-human process, with the Holy Spirit providing the ideas and assisting the prophet in expressing them either in written or oral forms. Although the words are usually chosen by the prophet himself or herself, there are instances in which they are provided by a divine agent.

Scripture by their own teachings, Ellen White uplifted consistently, throughout her writings, the Bible and its authority. Mrs. S. M. I. Henry compared those writings to a telescope, which does not add stars to the skies but only helps us to discern better the ones already in existence.⁸ It is only from such perspective that one can harmonize the prophetic relevance of Ellen White’s writings with her own statement that in the last days: “God will have a people upon the earth to maintain the Bible, and the Bible only, as the standard of all doctrines and the basis of all reforms.”⁹

Scope of Inspiration

Prophetic inspiration is a mysterious divine-human process, with the Holy Spirit providing the ideas and assisting the prophet in expressing them either in written or oral forms. Although the words are usually chosen by the prophet himself or herself, there are instances in

which they are provided by a divine agent. Reflecting on her own experience, Ellen White declared, “although I am as dependent upon the Spirit of the Lord in writing my views as I am in receiving them, yet the words I employ in describing what I have seen are my own, unless they be those spoken to me by an angel, which I always enclose in marks of quotation.”¹⁰ Such divine assistance makes all inspired writings fully trustworthy and authoritative.

Yet, there is a modern tendency to read the inspired writings from a dichotomous perspective, restraining their trustworthy range only to matters of salvation, and leaving outside that range all other themes. Unquestionably, the primary purpose of those writings is to build up faith for salvation (John 20:31). But salvation is so integrated into the overall thematic interrelationship of the inspired writings that it is almost impossible for someone to speak of

While dealing with inspired writings, one should not overlook the contrasting experiences of John the apostle and Judas Iscariot. Under the influence of Christ and His teachings, the humble John was gradually transformed into the likeness of his Master, but the proud Judas was not.

them as reliable in some topics and not in others. Despite their selectiveness in some areas of human knowledge (John 16:12, 13; 20:30; 21:25), the inspired writings cannot be considered as untrustworthy in those areas.¹¹

With emphasis on plenary inspiration (2 Tim. 3:16; 1 Peter 1:19-21), Ellen White stated in 1882: “In these letters which I write, in the testimonies I bear, I am presenting to you that which the Lord has presented to me. I do not write one article in the paper expressing merely my own ideas. They are what God has opened before me in vision.”¹²

In regard to common, non-inspired matters, she added in 1909: “But there are times when common things must be stated, common thoughts must occupy the mind, common letters must be written and information given that has passed from one to another of the workers. Such words, such information, are not given under the special inspiration of the Spirit of God. Questions are asked at times that are not upon religious subjects at all, and these

questions must be answered. We converse about houses and lands, trades to be made, and locations for our institutions, their advantages and disadvantages.”¹³ The balance between these two statements can be reached only by avoiding any confusion of the sacred and the common.

Enlightened by the Inspired Writings

There are many subtle ways one might confuse the faith-uplifting influence of the inspired writings (including Ellen White’s) in his or her life. One of the most common is to allow *form* (writing style) to replace *essence* (message). This is usually a temptation for those concerned with such issues as literary borrowings, grammatical mistakes, and secretarial assistance. Another way is to distort the overall thematic balance of the inspired writings by overemphasizing some teachings in detriment of others. A third way is to subordinate the inspired writings either to the prophet’s ancient surrounding culture or to the reader’s modern culture. Instead of being allowed to

judge culture, those writings become judged by culture, losing their normative function.

But the inspired writings are a “lamp” to the feet and a “light” to the path (Ps. 119:105) of all those who acknowledge them not only as devotionally *inspiring* but also as prophetically *inspired*. Aware of the existence of human pitfalls and technical difficulties in those writings, the sincere readers are not satisfied just with dry issue-focused analyses. They still have enough faith to discern, in the human person of the prophet, a divinely sent messenger; and, in the prophetic writings, the infallible message of the Lord.

While dealing with inspired writings, one should not overlook the contrasting experiences of John the apostle and Judas Iscariot. Under the influence of Christ and His teachings, the humble John was gradually transformed into the likeness of his Master, but the proud Judas was not. Unfortunately, “Many accept an intellectual religion, a form of godliness, when the heart is not cleansed.”¹⁴ In order to avoid the dryness of mere intellectual religion, one has to “read,” “hear,” and “take to heart” the inspired messages (Rev. 1:3, NIV). Only so a person can be genuinely sanctified “by the truth” (John 17:17, NIV). □

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THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH AS REMNANT

**Seventh-day Adventists see
themselves as fulfilling a unique part of
prophecy for the end-times.**

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has, from its inception, seen itself as a movement prophetically identified as God's "remnant" for the last days. Is this in harmony with the biblical concept of remnant?

The concept of "remnant" may be defined basically as "the portion of a community which is left, in case of a devastating calamity."¹ The future existence of that community portion would depend on the remnant.

The Old Testament refers to the

remnant concept using mainly derivatives of six Hebrew stems that are translated: (1) "remain, be left over"; (2) "escape, get away"; (3) "escape, make for safety"; (4) "be left over, remain"; (5) "survivor"; and (6) "rest, remainder, balance."

Though the occurrence of any of these terms in the Old or New Testament may not necessarily designate

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the remnant motif or contrariwise, they generally connote a smaller group remaining or surviving after a calamity to ensure the continuity of the community. Where the terms have a religious connotation, they may refer positively to a faithful remnant or negatively to an unfaithful remnant.

Altogether the terminology of *remnant* in the Bible may be viewed as covering three categories or perspectives of the remnant concept: historical, faithful and eschatological.² According to Hasel, the historical remnant is “made up of survivors of a catastrophe.”³ These may not necessarily be faithful to God, as was Judah’s historical remnant from the Babylonian invasion who fled to Egypt against the command of God. They did not carry any covenant promises (Jer. 6:9, 29). The *faithful* remnant is set apart from the historical remnant “by their genuine spirituality and true relationship with God; this remnant is the carrier of all divine election promises” and responsibilities.⁴

Out of the faithful remnant arises the eschatological remnant who will “go through the cleansing judgments and apocalyptic woes of the end-time and emerge victorious” to receive the everlasting kingdom.⁵ The three categories may overlap. Noah was both a historical and a faithful remnant (Gen. 7:3).

Israel’s collective unfaithfulness to the covenant not only affected

their covenant relationship but also breached the apparatus for the fulfillment of God’s redemptive purposes for humankind. The remnant, therefore, is God’s solution to carry on the covenantal relations. The characteristics of the remnant are the critical element for the continuity of God’s plan of salvation and also the group that becomes the eschatological remnant.

Characteristics of the Faithful Remnant in the Old Testament

The remnant concept permeates the Old Testament, and certain characteristics emerge in relation to the faithful as well as the eschatological remnant. They are faithful to the commandments of God.

Noah, the remnant after the Flood (Gen. 7:23), “found grace in the eyes of the Lord” (6:8),⁶ and was said to be righteous. This implies that he kept God’s commandments, though it should be pointed out that Ham, who was part of the remnant, displayed some unrighteousness. During Elijah’s time, God reserved a remnant of 7,000 in Israel (1 Kings 19:18), who had not bowed to or kissed Baal. Isaiah declares that the remnant shall have faith, trust, willing obedience, and holiness (Isa. 1:18, 19). In addition, they possess covenant promises of salvation (Isa. 28:5), preserve the faith of God (Dan. 7:25-27), are given a mission (Isa. 2:1-4), and are inclusive (Isa. 45:20).

Characteristics of the Remnant in the NT

In the New Testament, metaphors and imagery like “shepherd,” “sheep,” “few,” “the chosen” convey the remnant idea. The preaching of both John the Baptist (Matt. 3:2, 8) and Jesus (Matt. 4:17) put “the few,” “chosen” or “the little group,” who are saved, in contradistinction to the larger population who are lost. They are depicted as accepting the grace offered through the gospel as well as living by obedience inspired by faith.

Paul uses the remnant theme to propose the idea of the new Israel, which will comprise those of physical Israel and others who will accept the gospel and live a life of obedience induced by faith in Christ (Romans 9-11).

Generally, therefore, the faithful remnant in the Bible is characterized by its acceptance of the grace that comes through faith in God and the commitment to a life of obedience. Those of the faithful remnant who go through the end-time cleansing and persecution become the eschatological or end-time remnant, which would be expected to have the same characteristics. Seventh-day Adventists in their self-understanding identify with the end-time remnant.

Characteristics of the End-Time Remnant

The end-time remnant, prophetically the last in the history of salva-

tion, exemplifies the characteristics of the remnant of the people of God. These are explicit in Revelation 12:17 and 14:12. Revelation 12 begins with a woman ready to give birth to a child. The woman represents the people of God, while the birth of the child “is the fulfillment of the messianic prophecies of the Old Testament in the incarnation, life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus.”

A dragon, the devil according to verse 9, stood before the woman ready to devour the child when born. She bore a male child who was caught up to heaven. The dragon, not able to get to the child, persecuted the woman, who fled to the wilderness and remained there for 1,260 days (vs. 6). Then “the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ” (vs. 17).

Revelation 12:17 delineates two identifying marks of the end-time remnant: (1) they keep the commandments of God, and (2) they have the testimony of Jesus Christ.

The first, “keep the commandments of God” is repeated in 14:12. The question is: Which commandments are being referred to here? In these two cases are indicated that the “commandment” is given by God. In a number of New Testament texts, this word, “commandment,” clearly

refers to the Ten Commandments (e.g., Matt. 15:3, 6). In Revelation 12:17 and 14:12, the only two occurrences in the Book of Revelation, the possibility of the reference being to the Ten Commandments is heightened by the introductory vision in Revelation 11:19, which displays the Ark of the Covenant, which contained the Ten Commandments. This would depict the involvement of the Ten Commandments in the following events described in Revelation 12:1-15:4. This would establish that keeping the Ten Commandments is one of the characteristics of the end-time remnant.

Second, the end-time remnant is characterized by “the testimony of Jesus” (Rev. 12:17). The Greek phrase translated “the testimony of Jesus” lends itself to two interpretations: “our witness to Jesus Christ” or “the self-revelation of Jesus that moves Christian prophets.” The phrase in 12:17 must be taken as referring to the self-revelation of Jesus that He gives to the church through prophets.

The parallel passage, Revelation 19:10, offers further explanation to the phrase “the testimony of Jesus”: “I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, ‘See that you do not do that! I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren who have the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.’” The parallelism between the expression “spirit of

prophecy” and the gift of prophecy in 1 Corinthians 12:10, as well as in Revelation 22:9, where the expression “prophets” substitutes for “spirit of prophecy,” points to the meaning of the “spirit of prophecy” as the spirit that inspires the words of the prophets.

The end-time remnant will also keep the faith of Jesus (Rev. 14:12), which is interpreted as the holding on to the doctrinal content of the Christian faith in its entirety. Furthermore, they possess patience. They have the resilience to remain committed and loyal to God and His Word while suffering persecution.

Finally, the end-time remnant arises after the 1,260 prophetic days’ wilderness experience of the woman (Rev. 12:6, 13-17). The 1,260 prophetic days, which symbolically represent 1,260 years, began in 538 A.D. and ended in 1798. The implication is that the end-time remnant arises after 1798. They are portrayed in Revelation 14:6-12 as given the mission of bearing the everlasting gospel during the last days to all nations. Furthermore, Revelation 18:4 specifically mentions that there are God’s people outside the remnant who should also be called into the fold: “‘Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues.’” These are part of the people of God who are scattered among the apostatized entities represented by Babylon.

They must be brought into the visible remnant church of God.

Seventh-day Adventists and the End-time Remnant

From the inception of the denomination, Seventh-day Adventists have understood themselves as a prophetic movement fulfilling the specifications of the end-time remnant identified in the Book of Revelation. Joseph Bates portrayed the church as the remnant in 1874,⁷ W. H. Littlejohn in 1883,⁸ Uriah Smith in 1891,⁹ and John N. Loughborough in 1892,¹⁰ among others. This understanding was based on the church interpreting and identifying with the characteristics specified in Revelation 12:17 and 14:12.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church upholds the entire Ten Commandments of God, including the Sabbath commandment. This is significant because the Sabbath commandment is rejected by most of the rest of Christianity. It also has within it the testimony of Jesus Christ, the Spirit of prophecy, recognized in the prophetic ministry of Ellen G. White. The Church keeps the faith of Jesus and proclaims the everlasting gospel in these last days. Furthermore, in harmony with the specification of prophecy (Rev. 6:6, 13-17), the church arose after 1798, the end of the 1,260 years.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church fulfills all the characteristics

outlined by prophecy for the identification of the end-time remnant. Significantly, it acknowledges that it is commissioned to call out God’s people, who are part of the invisible, universal church, from Babylon into the visible remnant church. □

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Gary B. Swanson

College student Chris van Rossmann answered an abrupt knock at the door of his apartment in Corvallis, Oregon, to find police and civil air patrol and search-and-rescue personnel standing there, demanding to know why he was sending out a distress signal. Dressed comfortably in his bathrobe and slippers, Chris clearly wasn't in any apparent distress, and he was completely unaware that he was doing anything whatsoever to summon help.

After a little investigation of the premises, the crack response team was surprised to discover that the signal was being emitted spontaneously, and completely unknown to Chris, by his year-old flat-screen television. The distress call had been transmitted into the stratosphere, received by satellite, and routed to the Air Force Rescue Center at Langley Air Force Base in Virginia.

"They'd never seen a signal come that strong from a home appliance," the 20-year-old told reporters. They

A BOLD, NEW STEP FOR PD

had apparently expected to find a malfunctioning transponder on a boat or small plane, the usual problem in incidents like this.

As the response team left, they told Chris not to turn on his TV set or he'd be facing a \$10,000 fine for "willingly broadcasting a false distress signal." (Up till that time, of course, he hadn't been broadcasting "willingly.") And fortunately, the manufacturer of the TV offered to provide him with a free replacement. So now Chris van Rossmann can get back to *Letterman!*

With the frequent misunderstandings many of us have with DVD players and laptops and scanners and fax machines, some of us occasionally feel the upsetting need to be rescued. Keeping up with the possibilities in cutting-edge technology—not to mention trying to stay *ahead* of the curve—is sometimes a daunting challenge.

Or, to take the concept a step further, with the quality of broadcasting (e.g., so-called reality shows, social

and political commentary, and even some news programming) that are being provided on the air waves and the Internet these days, maybe we'd *all* be a bit better off if our TVs—and our computers—sent out an occasional distress signal. As Robert Wilensky, computer science professor at the University of California Berkeley, said in a 1996 speech: “We’ve heard that a million monkeys at a million keyboards could produce the complete works of Shakespeare; now, thanks to the Internet, we know that is not true.”¹

But as we are all aware, technology has brought us a great many blessings too. Consider, for example, all the good that comes from such fields of study as fiber optics, magnetic resonance imaging, microwave technology, artificial intelligence, and others.

Even these, of course, also have their negative applications. Such is the nature of humankind. Every gift that God has bestowed on humanity—except His very own Son—has been perverted horribly in some way. Yet each of those gifts, prompted by His love, is meant to be for the betterment of individuals and humankind in general. Each is an expression of His love. Each has its intended applications in God’s kingdom on this earth.

For this reason, there is no room for a Neo-Luddite in the Christian family. Anyone who would seek to

prevent the full utilization of every technology to carry out the mission of the church is simply refusing a blessing proffered by God.

In 1972, Larry Norman, a contemporary Christian musician, recorded a song that asked the provocative question, “Why should the devil have all the good music?” Without venturing into the divisive issue of Christian music, a similar question might be paraphrased: Why should the devil have all the good technology?

In 20/20 hindsight, most of humanity would probably be thankful that Gutenberg was willing to ask the same question back at the early part of the 15th century. It may be difficult to imagine, but there were probably people of the time who, considering the possibility of using Gutenberg’s innovative combination of movable type, oil-based ink, and wooden presses, said, “No thanks. The only way to communicate the truth is through illuminated manuscripts!”

But Gutenberg surely recognized the potential that this new print medium promised for the proclamation of the gospel.

The history of Christian mission began in the time of the New Testament itself. The apostles were compelled to take the message of Christ the Messiah to a waiting world. This was a truth that could not be stored protectively in backwater Palestine.

They did do some letter writing—pretty much the only readable medium of the time. But the *Pax Romana* offered new roads to spread the Christian message.

Philip, one of the first to preach the gospel outside Jerusalem, went to Samaria. Peter and John traveled to Samaria and to other places as well. And, probably most notably, Paul—joined by Silas, Barnabas, John Mark, Timothy, and others—took the mission, literally and figuratively, to new frontiers.

At this point in human history—in the first decade of a new millennium—humanity seems to have entered well into a new era. The cultural changes being issued in by communication and technology may well rival those of the 15th century, when the print medium galvanized Western culture and paved the way for the Reformation and the Enlightenment.

There is no certainty that the print medium will, anytime soon, go the way of cuneiform and papyrus. (We don’t see too many people at the bus stop, in the aisles of our airliners, reading cuneiform or papyrus or other pre-movable-print media today.) In fact, if we’re to listen to some of our futurists, we may begin to wonder if reading itself will become an outmoded way of learning.

Yet technology offers new roads for the proclamation of the gospel today. And this has prompted the

Adventist Theological Society to make a decision regarding *Perspective Digest*. Effective with the fourth quarter 2010 issue, *PD* will transition to a solely online publication. This present issue is to be the last one that will appear in print.

There are, of course, some economic reasons for this decision. But there are also some very compelling positive considerations as well. An online publication can be exponentially more accessible, more interactive, more engaging, and more timely than a quarterly print publication. And we look forward to these immediate kinds of constructive improvement.

In setting out on this road, we are aware that we must trust in the continuing support of our readers. We will place our hope that *PD* readers will uphold our efforts in prayer and take advantage of every opportunity to share with others the resource that an online *PD* will be able to provide. Accessibility, interactivity, engagement, timeliness—these will be the stars by which we guide our editorial efforts as we set out on this new road. And we invite you to come along.

¹ http://www.quotationspage.com/quotes/Robert_Wilensky, accessed April 24, 2010.