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EDITORIAL ■ *from the editor*

Reading | BY BONNIE DWYER

While breakfasting at Hudy's Café in Champlin, Minnesota, I spotted what looked like children's artwork nestled between the salt shaker and ketchup bottle. Reaching over to take a closer look, what I picked up was an enthusiastic student book review on laminated paper. Looking around, I was delighted to see that each table setting included a similar document in honor of February being "I Love to Read" month in Minnesota.

Reading and Responding to John's Gospel is the subtitle of the book that I am currently reading, Kendra Haloviak Valentine's *Signs to Life*. With the gusto of the Minnesota children reviewers, I'd like to recommend it to you because it demonstrates "dialogical" text and calls attention to the fact that the fourth gospel is also dialogical: "the author of the gospel is in conversation with others in his community—for John that means Jewish Christians, Gentile Christians and Jews. These conversations helped create the work just as they create the interpretations readers will give to the stories," she writes.

In the introduction to her book, Haloviak Valentine tells a story from her childhood when then-General Conference President Neal Wilson presented her and her brother with a book as a reward for sitting quietly in the front row of the General Conference worship sessions. "I remember the moment President Wilson handed me that book (*Tell Me About Sister White* by Marye Trim). It was a moment when I could tangibly feel and appreciate that my church community had special stories, traditions and ideas it valued, and it was passing these on to me."

These are the stories that we, too, are reviewing, debating, and celebrating in this issue of *Spectrum*. Several authors trace the history of our past readings: Gil Valentine takes us to Australia to show how our understanding of the Trinity changed because of the readings by W. W. Prescott. Richard Rice examines more recent history,

including the preparation of the SDA Bible Commentary. I've written about the Theology of Ordination Study Committee's January 2014 meeting, utilizing the papers that are now available for all to read at the website of the Adventist Archives, Statistics, and Research (<http://www.adventistarchives.org/january-2014-papers-presented#.Uw-i9Cj6RCg>). And in the section on Racism, members of the Society of Adventist Philosophers examine our history in terms of race and provide the basis for a renewed dialogue concerning that topic.

One thing that I took away from reading these materials is a more acute awareness of what we do to biblical text, even while claiming to stand outside of it. Plus, the material gave me a renewed appreciation for the conversation about the biblical text that has been at the heart of our community life.

Writing for the North American Division's Biblical Research Committee, Kyoshin Ahn pointed out that "for Adventists, meaning is a property of the text rather than the result of a reader's engagement with the text." And yet, he notes, "The bottom line is that regardless of whether interpreters openly and candidly recognize it, they bring themselves to the text." Ahn also points out that our official document, *Methods of Bible Study Document* (MSBD) voted by the General Conference, "emphatically advises the interpretation of Scripture in its cultural and historical context."

With Haloviak Valentine, "I believe that the Adventist church has valuable insights and important ideas to pass on to others." The dialogue about those ideas—the conversation about how we read the Bible—continues to fascinate and challenge me.

I invite you to read along. Every month is an "I love to read" month in Adventism. ■

Bonnie Dwyer is editor of *Spectrum* magazine.



What's Better Than a Fight? | BY CHARLES SCRIVEN

Adventist fundamentalists—and those who are not—meet at a perpetual crossroads: the local congregation. There they deliberate together in Sabbath School classes, pray and sing in collective worship, share potluck duty in the fellowship hall. Some of them return for board meetings on weekday evenings. They are bound together by ample, even energizing, solidarity. When these perspectives collide divisively, the occasion is often educational or bureaucratic, in settings where the disagreeing parties neither sing nor eat together. Both participant and onlooker commentary ramps up, and sharp-edged words fly here and there like shrapnel. Always, it seems, some of us care more about (our version of) doctrinal correctness than about Christian life humbly shared, even across lines of disagreement.

The New Testament ideal of *koinonia*—fellowship, life in common—presumes a moral vision that ought, when we are quarreling, to bring us up short. In true Christian fellowship, Paul wrote to the Philippians, we embrace humility instead of conceit. Putting others' interests ahead of our own, we serve, even suffer, for the good of all, and think of others as "better than" ourselves (Phil. 2).

Humility, not toadying subservience. Both Paul and Jesus stood up for what they believed; against strong opposition, both advanced controversial visions of human authenticity. New Testament *koinonia* is fully compatible, then, with intellectual integrity in the face of disagreement. Still, genuine intellectual integrity acknowledges human limits—allows that we know, in part, that

we hold our treasure in earthen vessels. Such integrity allows, too, that love matters more than knowledge—that the only thing that counts is faith working through love. Love is the one indispensable sign of our having passed from death to life.

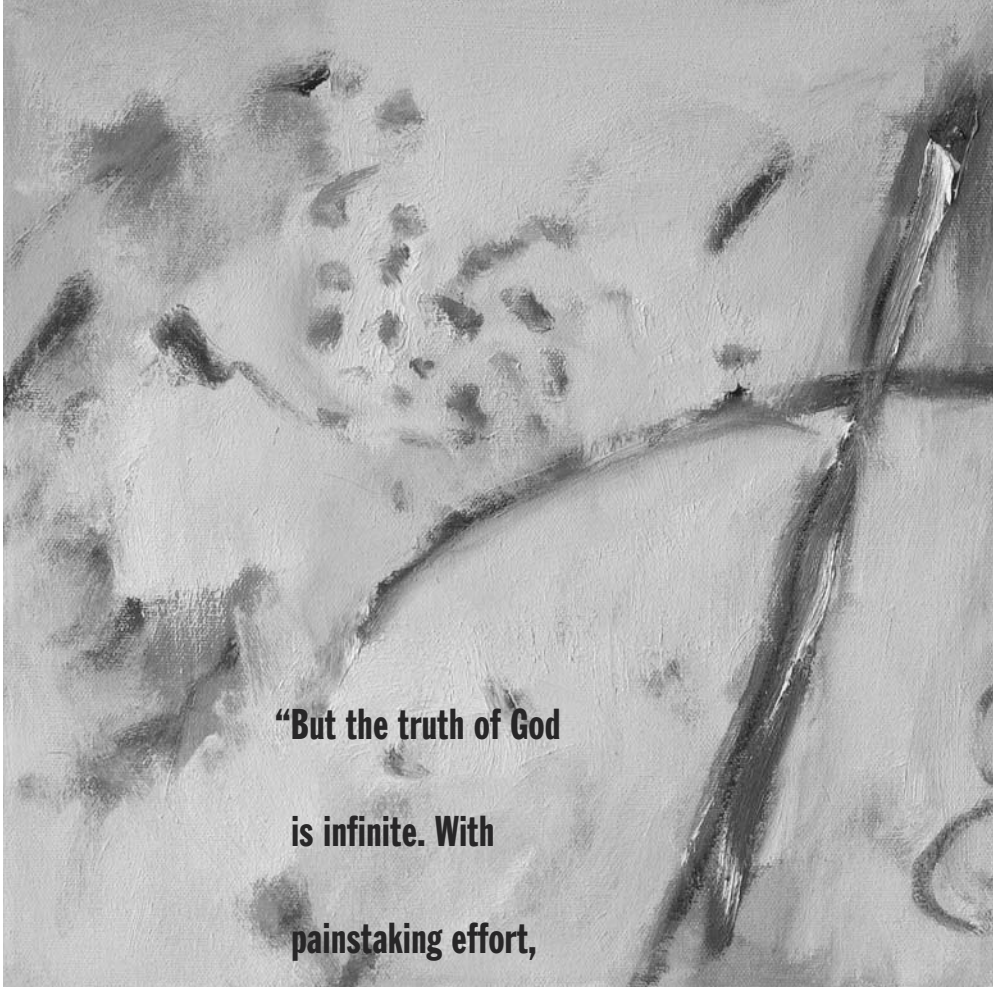
So intellectual integrity is one thing, but intellectual self-indulgence is another. The latter consists in bloated and inconsiderate conviction of one's own rightness, and it is vice pure and simple. Self-indulgence, as Paul suggested in Galatians 5, renders the *love of neighbor* null and void, and gives expression to "desires of the flesh" that oppose the work of the Holy Spirit. These desires generate a whole catalogue of depravities, among them "enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions..." Paul went on to say, by contrast, that "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, gentleness and self-control."

Just now there is considerable pressure in Adventism to conform to an official—and highly detailed—doctrinal standard. There is great preoccupation with eliminating loopholes from the Statement of Fundamental Beliefs, great determination to sharpen the boundaries of acceptable conviction. But if we had a New Testament perspective on "revival and reformation" (a cliché but still a worthwhile goal), wouldn't we think twice about pushing too hard for uniformity of thought? How can a community of the finite shed all disagreement, or even all substantive disagreement? Who is privy to the God's-eye view?

Every student of the Adventist pioneers knows that we first saw creed-like statements of

Scriven editorial ➔ continued on page 76...

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**“But the truth of God
is infinite. With
painstaking effort,**



**we should work in
the mines of truth,
discovering the
precious jewels that
have been hidden.”**

– (RH June 4, 1889 Par. 3)

Selected Messages on Reading the



BIBLE

PAINTING BY LISIE S. ORJUELA

in white; oil on canvas, 12" x 37", 2006

The Second Lie | BY GREG PROUT

The second lie says your created self is not good enough; that God is holding out on you; that you are deficient.

You surely shall not die" is the first lie in the Bible (Gen. 3:4).¹ Some churches have staked out vital doctrinal positions on this "first lie" emphasizing their belief in "soul sleep" and thus asserting no intrinsic immortality of the soul. They argue only God has immortality, an important value for them, but it is the flipside of that lie—a second lie often ignored—which has proven to be far more insidious and self-destructive. The second lie promises "you will be like God..." (Gen. 3:5). An obvious distortion of fact, it is the implication that packs a debilitating wallop. The insinuation is *you are not*. C. Baxter Kruger writes insightfully about this in his book *The Great Dance*.² The second lie says your created self is not good enough; that God is holding out on you; that you are deficient. The idea that "you don't measure up" creates the inference that your essence is undesirable as it is; you need something more to be acceptable.

The serpent's mendacities attack two sides of the human ego. One side is his devious suggestion that a creature could become Creator. History is brimming with the havoc this notion delivers. Mankind has felt its sting. We all know the obnoxious windbag, the know-it-all, the self-referential big shot who knows better than you, who thinks his opinion demands your

attention. These individuals think they are God. They glory in their god-ness. We frequently see this bloviating manifested in our politicians or pompous actors. But they can be deadly too if their delusions of grandeur take over a country and seek to dominate the world (classic figures like Napoleon, Hitler, Stalin, or Pol Pot come to mind). A god complex deceives us into thinking

we are more than a created being, leaving us acting the fool, or worse.

What is interesting is when God declared it was not good that man remain alone, he made a helper for him, giving Adam and Eve an inside track to understanding the Trinity God. The love and communion they shared was to experience first-hand what it is

like being God. Yet the snake injected the thought, "You could actually be gods if you only listen to me." Masked in his fabricated concern for their welfare was the sinister notion assaulting the very core of a person, an ontological put-down; and through Eve, humanity bought it!

The other side, the second lie, is craftier with its poison, less braggadocio, more often observed in the quiet and slow destruction of personal lives. It lays siege to the underbelly of the human psyche. Less flamboyant, more pervasive, more devilish than the god com-



The temptation

plex, this “I am not good enough” is more subtle as it sneaks up on us. One does not have to look far to see its cruel results. Witness the American slave history. Treated as chattel, slaves grappled with penetrating inferiority. Being bought and sold like farm tools by their white owners created a mentality of “I am not good enough, I am less-than,” and inbred self-loathing. Such beliefs cruelly embedded in the soul of the slave and his ensuing generations fashioned a whole subculture of the US population suffering from the lie “you are not.” In 1963 Jesse Jackson delivered his famous chant “I Am Somebody”³ to address the dignity-robbing, life-destroying effects of thinking you are less-than. His “I am Somebody” mantra directly countered the tragic lie foisted on a people by a mainstream culture that just happened to think it was God.

In the Genesis story, once Adam and Eve swallowed the lie that the fruit would make them wise, they immediately found grievous change and sought loin coverings to conceal their shame (Gen. 3:7).

This launched the very first cover-up and the genesis of regaining our stature with God through our own efforts. Sewing fig leaves, emblematic of ritual and religion and the first attempt to save ourselves, was evidence we departed from simple trust in the loving Father. Illusions, erupting from distrust, are vain efforts to regain our place in Paradise; “fig leaves” (illusions) became our tradition, the original self-righteous ritual of hiding from the truth about who we are. Our behavior says “we are okay.” Salvation by performance is a sorry remedy for core feelings of worthlessness, of feeling “you are not.” When we do not

qualify, we are less-than, incomplete, unworthy, unloved, and on and on it goes.

Could it be that much of evangelical Christianity promotes this feeling of “you are not good enough,” particularly the more fundamentalist traditions? Fundamentalism cartons God up in dogma and creates conformity,

insisting the believer accept certain truths the authoritarian church deems necessary for belonging and salvation. If the acolyte decides she can’t accept specific beliefs based on her own spiritual convictions, she is admonished, and if she persists, she is shown the door, keenly aware she was not approved. Creeds and doctrinal lists deconstruct God to a prescribed lifestyle which often demands the believer to separate from those who don’t believe like they do. We separate from those whom we judge as falling short; whose beliefs we consider less than what is “fundamentally” correct. Fundamentalists therefore disassociate from

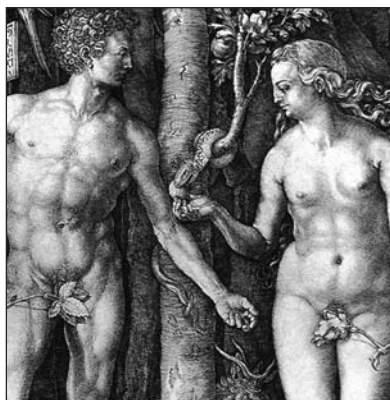
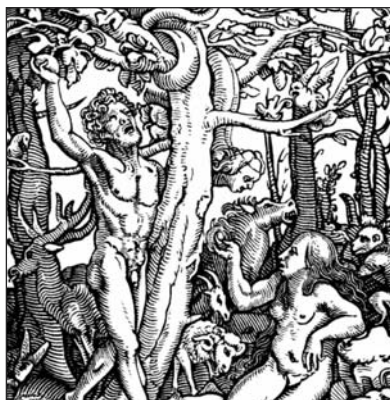


Fig leaves



The serpent

interfaith dialogue, feeling such practice is dangerous. Harvey Cox writes, “...fundamentalists in every tradition concur on one thing: they vociferously oppose interfaith dialogue. They see it as clear evidence of selling out.”⁴ Community and fellowship are sacrificed for the sake of identity purification. In effect, they are living out the lie of the serpent in Eden: “you are not good enough for God to accept you; you must find doctrinal fig leaves to secure his approval.”

Furthermore, the fundamentalist believer is forever flirting with his own paucity of character as he never quite lives up to the high stan-

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dards required of him. Failing to adhere to doctrinal purity is intrinsic with the implication of being less-than, leaving the believer battling guilt and feelings of failure as they strive for perfect performance. The message “Jesus loves you as you are” gets fuzzy, often implying you need to do more (believe more, pray more, surrender more, witness more, give more, etc.) to win his favor. Sanctification is a popular term that means to perfect yourself for God’s glory, with the self the focus and behavior the emphasis; God’s grace is subservient, though fundamentalists would deny this. “Character development” is a code term for this holy exercise. Grace is distorted by claiming it is the *opportunity* and *power* to perfect your life, not the reality of divine acceptance as found in the love of the Father. God is occluded as the Self strives to overcome. In this environment, guilt is inevitable and “fig leaves” are never in short supply. Much of evangelical religion and fundamentalism in particular unwittingly promote the second lie the serpent sold to Adam and Eve.

Admittedly, we are fallen and in need of redemption. We see how quickly things unraveled in Genesis 3:7 ff., which describes the resultant shame, fear, blame, pain, burdens, thorns; and with Cain and Abel, envy, and eventually murder. Something had changed, but it wasn’t God; it was us. We had fallen, a condition in which we found ourselves helpless. Fig leaves could not mask our new identity; only God could fill the void that inhabited our souls. It was not God who became wrathful and vindictive—it was we who saw him that way. We were broken, but in God’s eyes we

were never worthless, less-than, or deficient. And this is vital. God never rejected us nor did he find us unworthy of his presence and love. Hurriedly he sought us out in the Garden as we cowered behind trees, and clothed us in skins signifying our adoption (Gen. 3:8–9, 21).⁵ Religion must never teach that we do not measure up because God is angry with our sinful condition. As Philip Yancey writes: “And grace means there is nothing I can do to make God love me more, and there is nothing I can do to make Him love me less.” I am invited to the table of grace just as I am, not scolded or condemned as worthless, not berated to develop my character, but loved and redeemed by him.

It is one thing to negate a person’s value, but it is another for the victim being diminished to believe the negation. God’s grace interrupts that cruel process by affirming our value in his eyes, our sins notwithstanding. Common sense affirms that believing “I am less than” or “unacceptable” is rudimentary to aberrant and destructive behavior. Google “self-concept” or “self-esteem,” and you will be overwhelmed with studies affirming the need for healthy self-views. It is particularly devastating to believe God is affronted by our character, often revealed in our self-view of unworthiness. Yet religion is frequently behind this notion. The idea that God is distant and angry with us, and that we need a savior so we can have a relationship with this offended God, is a nasty belief that pervades much of evangelical Christianity. It underscores the second lie.

Observe Jesus relating to the Samaritan



Cain and Abel



The Samaritan woman

TOP: CAIN MURDERING ABEL BY JULIUS SCHNORR VON CAROLSFELD; BOTTOM: “JESUS AND THE WOMAN OF SAMARIA” BY GUSTAV DORE

woman who had moral issues staying married. He speaks to her as an equal, though the Jews treated her Samaritan people like dogs. Watch him address the “wee little man” Zaacheus, a thief and much-hated tax collector: he has lunch with him, a gesture of friendship and honor.⁷ Jesus lifted people up, treated society’s outcasts like he does all future kingdom-dwellers—with dignity, respect, and acceptance. Never did he react to anyone as less-than or beneath him. Should the church be any different? Yet fundamentalism often finds an enemy to rally against, be it the homosexual community, abortionists, atheists, or people of other faiths. They believe God’s honor is at stake and they must defend his honor by rallying against groups they feel deserving of God’s displeasure. All the while they miss the glaring testimony of Jesus’ inclusive address of the other, regardless of who that might be: thief on the cross, woman caught in the act of adultery, Roman centurion, the leper, you, me. It did not matter who it was then, nor does it matter now.

It is crucial to remember we are the creature and not the Creator, but it is equally important to remember that in God’s eyes, “we are somebody”—persons to be loved, respected, included and forgiven. When Jesus ascended to heaven, he did so as a human being. As our representative, we went with him as more than “somebody,” and we sit with him as co-regents (1 Cor. 6:2; 2 Tim. 2:12). We have gone from hiding in fear behind trees to ruling with him; for with God, there is no “you are not.”

Jesus commands us, “Do not judge lest you be judged yourselves.” Judging is a form of put-down, dismissal, condemnation, portraying others as excluded or beneath us, and is simply another rendition of “you are not,” the

second lie. In Jesus’ compassion for us, the second lie is obliterated. We need to rise from the grave of this sinister idea and firmly believe, “He has now reconciled you in the fleshly body through His death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach...for in Him you have been made complete” (Col. 1:22, 2:10). ■

Greg Prout is happily married to Mary Ventresca and has three grown children and two grandsons. He has been a pastor, a teacher, and a realtor for 33 years. Greg and Mary live in Sierra Madre, CA. He loves reading, gardening, walking, and writing, and always enjoys time with family and friends.



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Zaaccheus

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Inerrancy, Adventism, and Church Unity

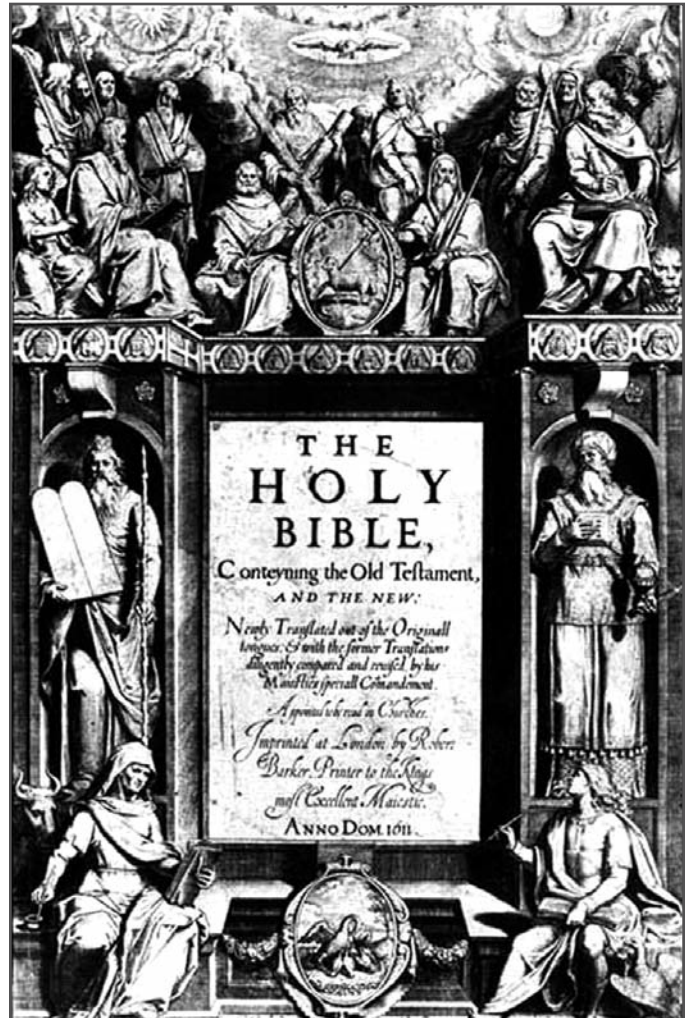
BY RICHARD RICE

Nothing is more important to a Christian community than its view of the Bible. And nothing is more perplexing than the presence of conflicting views of the Bible. In fact, there may be no issue within the range of Christian doctrine where lines are drawn more sharply and sides are taken with more determination than here. But the issue is with us to stay, and for Adventists today it is inextricably connected to the current debate over women's ordination. The purpose of this discussion is to note one source of tension among Adventist scholars and express the hope that we can learn to live with it whether or not we find a way to resolve it.

Although Adventists have hardly ever applied the word "inerrancy" to their views of the Bible,¹ a number of Adventist scholars seem to endorse certain aspects of the inerrantist position. I fear this implicit acceptance of inerrancy may have a fragmenting effect on our community, as it has on others. In what follows, I will briefly outline the features of inerrancy as conservative evangelicals describe it, note the appearance of inerrantist ideas within Adventism, and suggest ways to avoid its divisive effects.

Evangelicals and inerrancy

References to biblical inerrancy appear frequently in the publications and organizations of conservative evangelical Christianity. The preface to the New King James Version informs readers that "all participating scholars" "signed a statement affirming their belief in the verbal and plenary inspiration of Scripture, and in the inerrancy of the original autographs."² And inerrancy occupies a prominent position in the doctrinal statements of a number of conservative institutions and organizations, including the Evangelical Theological Society. ETS members are required to subscribe annually to this statement: "The Bible alone, and the Bible in its entirety, is the Word of God written and is



therefore inerrant in the autographs." The organization's website directs members to the "Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy"³ for more information.

Since it is inspired by God, the Statement asserts, the Bible is "of infallible divine authority in all matters upon which it touches: it is to be believed, as God's instruction, in all that it affirms," including its statements about God's acts in creation, the events of world history, and its own literary origins. Indeed, to limit in any way this

“total divine inerrancy” inescapably impairs the authority of Scripture. Divine inspiration extends to the whole of Scripture, right “down to the very words of the original.”⁴ “Being wholly and verbally God-given, Scripture is without error or fault in all its teaching.”⁵

The Statement also identifies “grammatico-historical exegesis” as the appropriate method of biblical interpretation and denies “the legitimacy of any treatment of the text or quest for sources lying behind it that leads to relativizing, dehistoricizing, or discounting its teaching, or rejecting its claims to authorship.”⁶

While the only reference to historical criticism per se appears in Article XVI,⁷ it is clear that the document sets forth an alternative to both the method and the results of critical approaches to the Bible.

An extensive argument for biblical inerrancy appeared in Carl F. H. Henry’s six-volume magnum opus, *God, Revelation, and Authority*.⁸ According to Henry, revelation is supernatural in origin and propositional in character. And because propositions are nothing if not verbal expressions, the divine authorship of Scripture must extend not only to the concepts expressed in the Bible, but to the very words employed by its writers. Propositional revelation necessarily implies verbal inspiration.

For all his emphasis on inerrancy, Henry believes that too much can be made of the idea, and he is unwilling to make it a test of evangelical orthodoxy. However, the same cannot be said of other advocates of inerrancy.

Church historian Martin Marty once observed that the 1980s were a time when the world was moving away from toleration, not toward it.⁹ That was certainly true of one of America’s largest denominations. During that decade, “the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) was torn apart by the most serious controversy in the history of the denomination.”¹⁰ As described by one participant, “Two factions, Fundamentalists and Moderates, polarized the SBC from 1979–1990.”¹¹ Although a number of issues were at stake, the popular ral-

lying cry of the Fundamentalists was “the inerrancy of the Bible.” And, perhaps significantly, those on different sides of this issue placed themselves on opposite sides of the question of women’s ordination. Fundamentalists argued for biblical inerrancy. Moderates “contended for the authority of Scripture ‘for faith and practice’ but not as an inerrant scientific and historical book.” Fundamentalists insisted on a hierarchical model of male-female relationships and denied a woman’s right for ordination. . . . Moderates advocated equality between women and men and affirmed ordination for women.”¹²

Contrasting Adventist hermeneutics

Just what the Bible represents and just how the Bible is appropriately interpreted form the backstory of current Adventist discussions over women’s ordination. Which biblical statements present us with the timeless principles and which statements reflect the customs and cultures of bygone ages has always been a source of perplexity, and it has emerged with new urgency in the current debates. Behind this familiar principle-application distinction lies the issue of just what the Bible represents, and how its contents are appropriately construed. While we have avoided the turmoil afflicting other denominations, the sharp lines that have been drawn among Adventist scholars between those who reject any use of historical-critical methods of Bible study and those who find them helpful in modified form is reminiscent of divisions that have emerged in other conservative Christian communities.¹³

Historical criticism rejected

While Adventists typically avoid the expression “inerrancy,” a good deal of the language and logic employed by those who advocate inerrancy appears in Adventist discussions of biblical interpretation.¹⁴ Notable examples include the document “Bible Study: Presuppositions, Principles, and Methods”¹⁵ voted by the 1986 Annual Council, and Richard M. David-

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of current
Adventist
discussions
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ordination.**

Most importantly, we can maintain that the most important aspects of the Bible involve things that historical criticism doesn't really touch.

son's essay on "Biblical Interpretation," which appears in the *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*.¹⁶ Both documents affirm God's direct influence on the authors of the biblical writings and insist that human reason must stand under the authority of the Bible. Most importantly, they reject historical criticism and insist that any reliance on its methods is inappropriate for Adventist Bible scholarship.¹⁷

According to the "Methods" Statement, "even a modified use of the [historical-critical] method that retains the principle of criticism which subordinates the Bible to human reason is unacceptable to Adventists." Such an approach "deemphasizes the divine elements in the Bible as an inspired book (including its resultant unity)."

Davidson rejects the "historical-critical" in favor of the "historical-biblical" method.¹⁸ Whereas the former makes human reason the ultimate criterion for truth, he maintains, the latter uses "methodological considerations arising from Scripture alone."¹⁹ Because the disciplines of literary (source) criticism, form criticism, redaction criticism, and canon criticism all treat the biblical documents as products of human ingenuity rather than divine inspiration, all their results are suspect, including the familiar theory that the authors of Matthew and Luke relied on a written version of Mark.²⁰

No Adventist scholar rejected the use of historical-critical approaches to the Bible more emphatically than Gerhard F. Hasel. Over the course of a highly productive and tragically truncated career, Hasel repeatedly insisted that historical-critical method cannot do justice to the divine dimension of the Bible as the Word of God and therefore does not provide a hermeneutic adequate for both the divine and human dimensions of the Bible.²¹ One of the reasons he most frequently gives is that method and presuppositions are inseparable. In other words, one cannot make use of any historical-critical approaches to the Bible without committing oneself to the idea that the Bible is to be viewed as nothing more than a

collection of human documents. Citing Ernst Troeltsch, Hasel insists, "The theologian or exegete must not get the impression that he can safely utilize certain parts of the historical-critical method in an eclectic manner, because there is no stopping point."²²

Historical criticism affirmed

The exclusion of historical criticism from Adventist biblical scholarship on the grounds that it is incompatible with confidence in divine authority of Scripture is reminiscent of the concept that the Bible is without error in any of its affirmations.²³ Does this mean that Adventists are, at least implicitly, committed to inerrancy?

Not if one notes that this rejection is not typical of Adventism. In fact, it may represent an exception to the way Adventists have generally thought about the Bible. Note, for example, the striking contrast between the 1986 "Methods of Bible Study" declaration, and this statement from the "Bible Commentary" in 1956: "there is a legitimate, as well as a destructive, higher criticism."²⁴ The call to reject all historical-critical study of the Bible thus represents a notable departure from the views that respected Adventist biblical scholars held a number of years ago.

It also varies from what seems to be the qualified approval of historical-critical methods we find in *The Symposium on Biblical Hermeneutics*,²⁵ which followed the 1974 Bible Conference. In his contribution to the book, Raoul Dederen described the Enlightenment approach to history as a "perfectly legitimate undertaking," which yielded many positive results when applied to the Bible. The methods of literary and historical criticism, says Dederen, provided us "with a flood of light on our 'background' knowledge of the Bible." Since we need divine illumination in order to understand "what God really expressed in the Bible," the knowledge achieved by historical inquiry is "inadequate." But this does not render it unacceptable. Instead, says Dederen,

“These two levels of reading the Bible are not contradictory” and may be assembled into a unity.²⁶

In a similar vein, Edward Zinke notes a number of the benefits to be gained from “certain aspects of modern biblical studies,” although he wonders if it is possible to separate the method that produced these benefits from the presuppositions of those with whom they originated.²⁷

These qualified affirmations of historical inquiry leave us with an important question. Granted that something more is needed to appreciate the Bible as God’s Word, are the results of historical investigation acceptable as far as they go? Do all uses of historical-critical inquiry inevitably involve a depreciation of the Bible as the inspired means of divine revelation? Zinke’s essay raises the question, but the answer he and Dederen give is not entirely clear. In some ways they seem to issue a caveat rather than a call to reject such methods out of hand, although the church’s official position hardened noticeably in subsequent years.

Historical criticism incognito

There is another similarity between Adventist biblical scholars who reject historical criticism and those who endorse inerrancy: in practice each group departs from the view of the Bible it embraces in theory. To quote a chapter title from Thom Stark’s book, *The Human Faces of God*, “inerrantists do not exist.” His point is that proponents of inerrancy never consistently adhere to the method of “historical-grammatical exegesis.” In actual practice, they embrace a “hermeneutics of convenience,” bringing biblical statements into harmony with their theological presuppositions whenever the two conflict.²⁸ We could say something similar about Adventist biblical scholars who reject historical criticism. Whatever our position on the question of its acceptability, in practice all Adventist biblical scholars find the selective use of historical-critical methods not only helpful, but in certain cases indispensable.

For example, even though the “Methods of

Bible Study” Statement formally rejects “even a modified use of historical criticism,” other parts of the Statement clearly endorse such a use. While “the *usual techniques* of historical research” are inadequate, the Statement concedes that “there may be *parallel procedures* employed by Bible students to determine historical data.”²⁹ In certain cases, apparently, historical-critical methods, or something very much like them, are permissible.³⁰

For example, the Statement acknowledges that a background knowledge of Near Eastern culture is “indispensable” for understanding certain biblical expressions. Indeed, “in order not to misconstrue certain kinds of statements, it is important to recognize that they were addressed to peoples of Eastern cultures and expressed in their thought patterns,” rather than ours. For example, “Hebrew culture attributed responsibility to an individual for acts he did not commit but that he allowed to happen. Therefore the inspired writers of the Scriptures commonly credit God with doing actively that which in Western thought we would say He permits or does not prevent from happening, e.g., the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart.” Given the difference between our perspective and theirs, the assertion, “The Lord hardened Pharaoh’s heart” (Ex 9:12) is not to be taken at face value. A knowledge of ancient culture permits a different interpretation.

It appears that appeals to the insights of historical criticism have been summarily dismissed by the “Methods” Statement only to be employed when they are needed in order to avoid unwelcome exegetical conclusions. What the text says, and what it evidently meant to the people who originally wrote it, is not what the text means for us.³¹

A well-known passage where Adventists employ historical and literary considerations in order to discount a literal reading is Luke 16:19–31. *The Andrews Study Bible* describes Jesus’ account of the rich man and Lazarus as “an imaginary story, built on popular folk tales.”³² It represents a “popular yet mythical story” that

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Jesus used in order to illustrate the point. So, instead of taking all biblical statements literally, we must attribute many of them to the cultural perspective of the time, and occasionally to sources other than divine inspiration.

The same is true of certain descriptions of the natural world. In a response to a reader's question about Psalm 121:6, George W. Reid attributes the notion of being smitten by the moon to the author's prescientific worldview. So, "While God was revealing Himself and His truth to the ancients, He did not at the same time correct every misunderstanding they had accepted as part of their culture. The Bible describes the ancients as believing certain things about the operation of nature that we now know to be inaccurate. Even inspired Bible writers were not . . . purged of all incidental misbeliefs."³³ To summarize, biblical statements are not automatically to be taken at face value and regarded as divinely authoritative. In numerous cases, they give expression to ancient religious, ethical, and cosmological beliefs that are no longer credible.

Historical criticism and Ellen White's writings

There is another reason to question the rejection of all historical-critical methods. Adventist scholars have found them immensely helpful in responding to questions about Ellen White's inspiration. Several decades ago, various studies revealed that Ellen White made extensive use of other writings and relied heavily on literary assistants. Though Adventist leaders were well aware of this long before,³⁴ the issue was not addressed openly until the early 1980s. When it finally was, church leaders argued that these practices should not undermine our confidence in her inspiration because the writers of the Bible themselves followed such practices.

In a 1980 article, "This I Believe about Ellen G. White," Neal C. Wilson declared, "Originality is not a test of inspiration," and to support this conviction he appealed to the

evidence of literary dependence in the Bible itself. "A prophet's use of sources other than visions does not invalidate or diminish the prophet's teaching authority." And the example he cites is Luke, author of the third Gospel. "Luke was not an eyewitness," Wilson observes. "He used the materials available. One of his source materials though he did not mention his indebtedness to it, was Mark's Gospel, much of which was directly copied, often word for word."³⁵

In a later article, Wilson once again mentioned the similarity between Ellen White's writings and the Gospel of Luke. "Our knowledge of how the Lord worked in the life and experience of Ellen White," he wrote, "helps us understand how the Bible writers functioned under the Spirit's influence."³⁶ So, knowing how Ellen White's writings were produced helps us understand how the Bible writers functioned, and vice versa.³⁷ What we find in both cases is literary dependence, or to put it another way, a lack of total originality.

The qualification "total" is important, because a writer may use material derived from others in a highly original way. And this brings us to another way in which Adventists have made use of historical-critical methods. In *Luke, A Plagiarist?*,³⁸ George Rice demonstrates that the third Gospel provides a distinctive portrayal of Jesus' life and work, in spite of the fact that the author's account has a great deal in common with the first two Gospels. Rice presents what he calls the "lucan model of inspiration"³⁹ as a distinct alternative to the prophetic model. And although he never characterizes his approach as an exercise in "redaction criticism," it clearly exemplifies that particular historical-critical method.⁴⁰

Given Wilson's endorsement of the scholarly consensus regarding the similarities between Luke and Mark, it is puzzling to find Adventist scholars suggesting years later that none of the Gospel writers drew material from the others. It is also puzzling to find a later General Conference President flatly condemning historical-

critical method as “one of the most sinister attacks against the Bible” and “a deadly enemy of our theology and mission.”⁴¹

Looking at the way Adventists go about interpreting the Bible, we have to wonder about the emphatic exclusion of all historical-critical methods, even in modified form. The principle seems out of harmony with our actual practice.

Historical criticism and inerrancy: ironic similarity

When lines are so sharply drawn on issues of such importance, it may be impossible to stake out a middle ground or imagine anything in the way of compromise that would transcend the divergent perspectives. But there are a couple of factors that may reduce the force of the challenge that historical criticism seems to pose for those who accept the authority of the Bible. One is the fact that historical criticism and biblical inerrancy have something in common. The roots of both lie in the Enlightenment, the historical phenomenon that transformed the shape of human knowledge.

The Enlightenment background of historical criticism is well known. What is not so well known is that inerrancy trades on the same view of rationality. When inerrantists insist that the Bible is absolutely trustworthy in all its assertions—not only in the “spiritual, religious, or redemptive themes” found in the Bible, but also in the fields of history and science—they are actually embracing an Enlightenment standard of truth, a standard that derives not from the Bible itself, but from outside the Bible. From the Enlightenment perspective, the reliability of the Bible stands or falls with the precision of its historical accounts and its descriptions of the natural world. If the Bible is inspired, all its claims must be accurate by scientific standards.⁴²

An inerrantist view of the Bible thus imposes an immense apologetic burden on those for whom the Bible has religious significance. They must defend its authenticity at all costs. They must demonstrate that the Bible meas-

ures up to modern standards of historical and scientific inquiry. Regrettably, in the thinking of some, this view of things makes the Bible hostage to a scientific perspective. According to Robert E. Webber, for example, “Both conservatives and liberals have approached the Bible through empirical methodology in search of truth. Liberals used reason to demythologize the Bible... [C]onservatives argued for the exact correctness of everything in the Bible... In this vicious circle the liberals tore the Bible to shreds with biblical criticism while the conservatives continually followed ... trying to put the pieces back together with rational arguments.” And with this, Webber concludes, something essential was lost. “[T]he foundation of the Christian faith shifted from the centrality of the person and work of Jesus Christ to the centrality of the Bible.”⁴³ If Webber has a point, those who are determined to defend the Bible’s inspiration from all the perceived threats of historical criticism may be forcing the Bible into a container where it doesn’t really fit, or, to change the metaphor, playing the game by their opponents’ rules.

Criticizing historical criticism

This is not to say that there is nothing objectionable about historical-critical approaches to the text. To the contrary, there is a great deal to object to. The point is that we are not forced to choose between a preoccupation with the Bible’s complete accuracy and an uncritical embrace of historical criticism. We can appreciate a good deal of what historical-critical approaches to the biblical documents have to tell us. And we can do this without accepting all their conclusions, nor embracing their presuppositions. Most importantly, we can maintain that the most important aspects of the Bible involve things that historical criticism doesn’t really touch. As it turns out, the shortcomings—or shortsightedness—of historical criticism are well known to those for whom the Bible has great value.

For Eleonore Stump, historical criticism is a

The point is that we are not forced to choose between a preoccupation with the Bible’s complete accuracy and an uncritical embrace of historical criticism.

Is our common conviction in the dual nature of the Bible strong enough to enable us to transcend the differences in our emphases?

rather “blunt instrument” for examining certain features of the Bible. What is interesting about a text, she says, is hardly exhausted by a historical examination of it or the circumstances in which it arose. We may have other concerns as we study the Bible, and it is perfectly acceptable to approach the biblical texts in different ways. We can view a biblical narrative as a unity, even if it was composed of “simpler bits assembled by editors with varying concerns and interests.” And we may be interested in the meaning a passage has when taken in the context of the Bible as a whole.⁴⁴

Putting historical criticism in its place

If Stump is right, there must be a way between the horns of this dilemma: either affirm the humanity of the biblical documents, accept the negative conclusions of historical criticism, and abandon confidence in the Bible as divine revelation; or affirm the divinity of the Bible and deny any applicability of historical-critical method. In other words, there must be a way to avoid both biblical inerrancy on the one hand and historical reductionism on the other.

Our reflections suggest two steps toward this goal. One is to apply historical criticism to historical criticism. Recognizing the cultural assumptions from which historical criticism springs gives us a way to discriminate among its claims. We can accept some of the insights that historical criticism gives us into the biblical texts, but we are under no obligation to accept all of its conclusions. In other words, as the “Bible Commentary” of 1956 indicates, we can make legitimate use of historical-critical methods while avoiding its destructive consequences.

A second step is to recognize that historical criticism typically overlooks the essential nature of the biblical texts. The Bible is first and foremost a religious text. Whatever its more particular features, its specific aim is to put human beings in touch with God, and to ignore this intention is to fail to take the text seriously. A view of the Bible that takes seriously what the Bible is ostensibly and obvious-

ly about must consider the claims that the Bible makes on the reader, a claim that God reaches into history and offers us salvation.⁴⁵

The fact that the biblical documents are thoroughly human does not mean they are merely human, that they exhibit no transcendent dimension whatsoever. If we ask, “What occasioned their production, their collection, their preservation, their enduring power to attract and transform lives?” the answer takes us beyond the sphere of human invention. These documents were nothing less than the response of faith to God’s actions in history—in the history of the people of the covenant and in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.

Accordingly, the Bible is instrumental to its purpose, but neither identical nor incidental to it. The essential purpose of the Bible is to communicate God to human beings and to awaken a response within us. Its central concerns are clear and its essential claims are reliable, whether or not all its descriptions of historical events and natural phenomena are factually precise.

A concluding hope

People looking at Adventism from the outside would probably be most impressed with the things we hold in common, the beliefs and practices we all embrace, the forms of service we all endorse, and the worldwide mission we are all committed to. It is ironic to find that within our community we are deeply concerned about our differences. Yet, as a church historian once observed, “nothing divides so bitterly as common convictions held with a difference.”⁴⁶

Divergent perspectives regarding women’s ordination have become enormously important to us. Many among us believe they pose a real threat to unity within our church. I hope it never comes to that. I also hope that divergent views regarding the Bible will not threaten unity among Adventist scholars. All Adventists agree that the Bible is the Word of God, the product of divine inspiration, and as such the

ultimate authority in matters of faith. They also agree that divine revelation takes expression through human words and thoughts. For some, the human dimension invites us to explore the historical aspects of the Bible, including the composition and collection of its documents. For others, the divine authority of the Bible forecloses such inquiries. Is our common conviction in the dual nature of the Bible strong enough to enable us to transcend the differences in our emphases? The future unity of the church may depend to no small degree on our ability to answer this question affirmatively.

I began by saying, "Nothing is more important to a Christian community than its view of the Bible." I would like to rephrase that. "Nothing is more important to Christian *community* than its view of the Bible." A common reverence for the Bible as the Word of God, a reverence which respects its divine authorship, but does not insist that there is only one view of inspiration that upholds that authorship, can provide us with a uniting, unifying basis for developing our doctrines, nurturing our spirits, and inspiring us to finish the work to which we are all committed. ■

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his wife Gail, who also teaches at LLU, have two grown children and four grandchildren. His latest book, *Suffering and the Search for Meaning: Contemporary Responses to the Problem of Pain*, will be available from Intervarsity Press next July.

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1. An exception was House, Benjamin L., *Analytical Studies in Bible Doctrines for Seventh-day Adventist Colleges: A Course in Biblical Theology* (Berrien Springs, MI: College Press, 1926).
2. *New King James Version*, ed. Thomas Nelson (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1997).
3. ICBI, "Chicago Statement of Biblical Inerrancy." Statement formulated at the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy conference, Chicago, IL, October 1978.
4. *Ibid.*, Article VI.
5. *Ibid.*, Article XIX.
6. *Ibid.*, Article XVIII. According to the Statement, biblical inerrancy and infallibility, though not identical, are inextricably connected. And while divine inspiration and inerrancy apply directly to the original biblical autographs, the Bible as we have it is nonetheless the infallible word of God (see Article XI).

7. "We deny that inerrancy is a doctrine invented by Scholastic Protestantism, or is a reactionary position postulated in response to negative higher criticism."

8. Henry, Carl F. H., *God, Revelation, and Authority*, 6 vols. (Word Books, 1976–1983). For a more extensive discussion of Henry's account of inerrancy, see my review of *God, Revelation, and Authority*, vols. 1–4, and Bloesch, Donald G., "Essentials of Evangelical Theology," vols. 1–2, in *Religious Studies Review*, 7, no. 2 (April 1981), 107–114.

9. Cited in *The Struggle for the Soul of the SBC: Moderate Responses to the Fundamentalist Movement*, ed. Walter B. Shurden (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1993), 282.

10. *Ibid.*, xix.

11. *Ibid.*, xix.

12. *Ibid.*, xx.

13. For example, see Thompson, Alden, *Inspiration: Hard Questions, Honest Answers* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1991), and the reactions to it by a various Adventist scholars in *Issues in Revelation and Inspiration*, ed. Frank Holbrook and Leo Van Dolson (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventist Theological Society Publications, 1992).

14. I'll set aside certain coincidences, such as the fact that a number of Adventist scholars hold membership in the ETS, and the fact that the *Andrews Study Bible* uses the NKJV.

15. The statement originated as a report to the 1986 Annual Council by the "Methods of Bible Study" Committee.

16. *The Handbook of Adventist Theology*, eds. George W. Reid, Raoul Dederen, et al (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000).

17. For informative studies of varying Adventist attitudes toward historical-critical methods see McIver, Robert K. "The historical critical method: the Adventist debate," *Ministry* (March 1996); and Bruinsma, Reinder "Adventist and Protestant Fundamentalism," *Spectrum*, Winter (2002), 24–36.

18. Cf. the thesis of Gerhard Maier's book, *The End of Historical-Critical Method*, trans. Edwin W. Leveranz and Rudolf F. Norden (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia, 1977): "the historical-critical method is to be replaced by a historical-Biblical one" (52, [quoted in Stuhlmacher, Peter, *Historical Criticism and Theological Interpretation of Scripture*, trans. Roy A. Harrisville (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1977), 68]).

19. *The Handbook of Adventist Theology*, ed. George W. Reid, Raoul Dederen, et al. (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 94–95.

20. Davidson approvingly cites Etta Linnemann's conviction that none of the Gospels is dependent on another, so there is no "Synoptic problem" (*Handbook*, 92). For more from Adventist scholars about Etta Linnemann and her rejection of historical-critical approaches to the Bible, see Hasel, Frank M., "'The Word of God should be the measure': An interview with Etta Linnemann," *Ministry* (July 8, 2008), 13–15; Gulley, Norman R., "An Evaluation of Alden Thompson's 'Incarnational' method

in the Light of His View of Scripture and Use of Ellen White," *Issues in Revelation and Inspiration*, eds. Frank Holbrook and Leo VanDolson (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventist Theological Society Publications, 2005), 81–83; and Gerhard F. Hasel, who describes her book on historical criticism as "a must for understanding the historical-critical method of today" (Hasel, Gerhard F., "Reflections on Alden Thompson's 'Law Pyramid' within a Casebook/Codebook Dichotomy," *Issues in Revelation and Inspiration* (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventist Theological Society Publications, 2005), 169, f.n.15. One wonders if Linnemann's view of the Synoptic Gospels may have contributed to a change in the curriculum at the Adventist Theological Seminary. While attending the Seminary in the late sixties, I took a graduate seminar on "the Synoptic Problem." Some years later, however, an acquaintance of mine earned an MA in Bible Studies at Andrews University, but never even heard of the Synoptic problem until they pursued further study at another university.

21. "Principles of Bible Interpretation," *A Symposium on Biblical Hermeneutics*, ed. Gordon M. Hyde (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1974), 167.

22. Hasel, Gerhard F., *Understanding the Living Word of God* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 1980), 26. As the quotation from Troeltsch indicates, some of the best known proponents of historical criticism share Hasel's all or nothing approach to the discipline(s). According to Rudolf Bultmann, for example, "The mythical view of the world must be accepted or rejected in its entirety" (Bultmann, Rudolf, "New Testament and Mythology," *Kerygma and Myth: A Theological Debate*, ed. Hans Werner Bartsch [New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1961], 9). And the historical method presupposes that it is possible to understand the whole historical process as a closed unity, which cannot be rent by the interference of the supernatural powers (Bultmann, Rudolf, "Is Exegesis Without Presuppositions Possible?," *Existence and Faith: Shorter Writings of Rudolf Bultmann*, ed. Schubert M. Ogden [Meridian Books, 1960], 291–292).

23. As the "Chicago Statement" asserts: "Holy Scripture, being God's own Word, written by men prepared and superintended by His Spirit, is of infallible divine authority in all matters upon which it touches: it is to be believed, as God's instruction, in all that it affirms..." and "Being wholly and verbally God-given, Scripture is without error or fault in all its teaching, no less in what it states about God's acts in creation, about the events of world history, and about its own literary origins under God, than in its witness to God's saving grace in individual lives."

24. "Legitimate criticism," the article continues, "seeks to take all that linguistic, literary, historical, and archeological study has proved in regard to the Bible, and to use this in determining the approximate dates of writing, the probable authors, where the authors' names are not stated, the conditions under which they wrote, and the materials they used in their writing" ("'Lower' and 'Higher' Biblical Criticism," *Seventh-day*

Adventist Bible Commentary, vol. 5 [Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1956], 188). For an engaging account of the production of the *Adventist Bible Commentary*, see Cottrell, Raymond F., "The Untold Story of the Bible Commentary," *Spectrum*, 16, no. 3 (August 1985), 35–51.

25. Dederen, Raoul, "Revelation, Inspiration, and Hermeneutics," *A Symposium on Biblical Hermeneutics*, ed. Gordon M. Hyde (Washington, D.C.: RHPA, 1974), 9–10.

26. *Ibid.*, 12–13.

27. Zinke, Edward, "Postreformation Critical Biblical Studies," *A Symposium on Biblical Hermeneutics*, ed. Gordon M. Hyde (Washington, D.C.: RHPA, 1974), 85.

28. Stark, Thom, *Human Faces of God: What Scripture Reveals When It Gets God Wrong (and Why Inerrancy Tries to Hide It)* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 15, 37. James Barr makes a similar observation. "In order to avoid imputing error to the Bible," he argues, "fundamentalists twist and turn back and forward between literal and non-literal interpretation" (Barr, James, *Fundamentalism* [Norwich, UK: SCM Press, 1981], 40).

30. According to Davidson, both historical-critical and historical-biblical methods "analyze historical context, literary features, genre or literary type, theology of the writer, the development of themes, and the process of canonization." The difference is that the latter "analyzes but refuses to critique the Bible" (*Handbook*, 96). However, the extensive similarities between the two methods, and the selective use of historical-critical methods that historical-biblical methods involve, blur the distinction between the two approaches to the Bible (cf. Stuhlmacher's description of Maier's proposal as a "half-hearted dependence on historical criticism" [Stuhlmacher, 70]).

31. Other aspects of the Bible also require us to acknowledge the vast difference between ancient and modern perspectives, including divinely commanded genocide and the tacit acceptance of practices that many Christians today find morally objectionable, such as polygamy, divorce, and slavery. "Although condemnation of such deeply ingrained social customs is not explicit, God did not necessarily endorse or approve all that He permitted," asserts the Statement.

32. Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2010; q.v.

33. Reid, George W., "'Windows on the Word': 'Smitten by the moon?,'" *Adventist Review* (April 28, 1983).

34. Adventist leaders knew of this decades ago and wondered how they could address the topic without undermining the faith of church members in Ellen White's ministry. For an extensive analysis of W. W. Prescott's deep perplexity over widespread misconceptions of Ellen White's writings, see Valentine, Gilbert M., "The Church 'drifting toward a crisis': Prescott's 1915 Letter to William White," *Catalyst*, 2, no. 1 (November 2007), 32–94. Although the issue was seriously considered by church leaders at the 1919 Bible Conference, their discussion was not publicly available, nor even generally known, until the minutes of the

conference were finally published—sixty years after the conference took place (*Spectrum* [Winter 1979]).

35. Wilson, Neal C., "This I Believe about Ellen G. White," *Adventist Review*, 157, no. 12 (March 20, 1980), 8–10.

36. Wilson, Neal C., "The Ellen G. White writings and the church," *Adventist Review*, (July 9, 1981), 4.

37. This is not to say, of course, that Wilson endorsed all uses of historical-critical methods. A subsequent article urges readers to avoid the extremes of both liberalism and conservatism. Though we must reject the idea of biblical inerrancy, it says, we dare not treat the Scriptures as just another human document. Accordingly, "we cannot, without extensive modification and a different set of presuppositions, employ the critical method used by secular scholars in the study of the Bible." Wilson, Neal C., "Together for a Finished Work," *Adventist Review* (December 17, 1981), 5.

38. Rice, George, *Luke, A Plagiarist?* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 1983).

39. Rice, George, "How to Write a Bible," *Ministry* (June 1986), 9.

40. Redaction criticism "is concerned with studying the theological motivation of an author as this is revealed in the collection, arrangement, editing, and modification of traditional material, and in the composition of new material or the creation of new forms within the traditions of early Christianity." Perrin, Norman, *What Is Redaction Criticism?* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1969), 1.

41. These remarks come from President Ted N. C. Wilson's July 3, 2010 sermon, his first as the newly elected President of the General Conference.

42. See Taylor, Charles, *A Secular Age* (Harvard University Press, 2007), 330.

43. Webber, Robert E., *Ancient-Future Faith: Rethinking Evangelicalism for a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1999), 45.

44. Stump, Eleonore, *Wandering in Darkness: Narrative and the Problem of Suffering* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2007), 34, 32.

45. Harrisville, Roy A., and Walter Sundberg, *The Bible in Modern Culture: Baruch Spinoza to Brevard Childs*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2002), 336.

46. Cragg, Gerald R., *Freedom and Authority* (Santa Ana, CA: Westminster Press, 1975), 222; quoted in *The Struggle for the Soul of the SBC: Moderate Responses to the Fundamentalist Movement*, ed. Walter B. Shurden (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1993), 282. This phenomenon is not peculiar to Christianity, of course. In a recent lecture, Rabbi Hillel Cohn noted the sad irony that just as the walls that have for so long separated Jews and non-Jews are coming down, intrafaith relations (relations between Jews and Jews) have become more strained ("Interfaith and Intrafaith: Where We Have Been and Where We are Going," presented at the 18th Annual Rabbi Norman F. Feldheim Lecture, Congregation Emanu El, Redlands, California, February 6, 2013).

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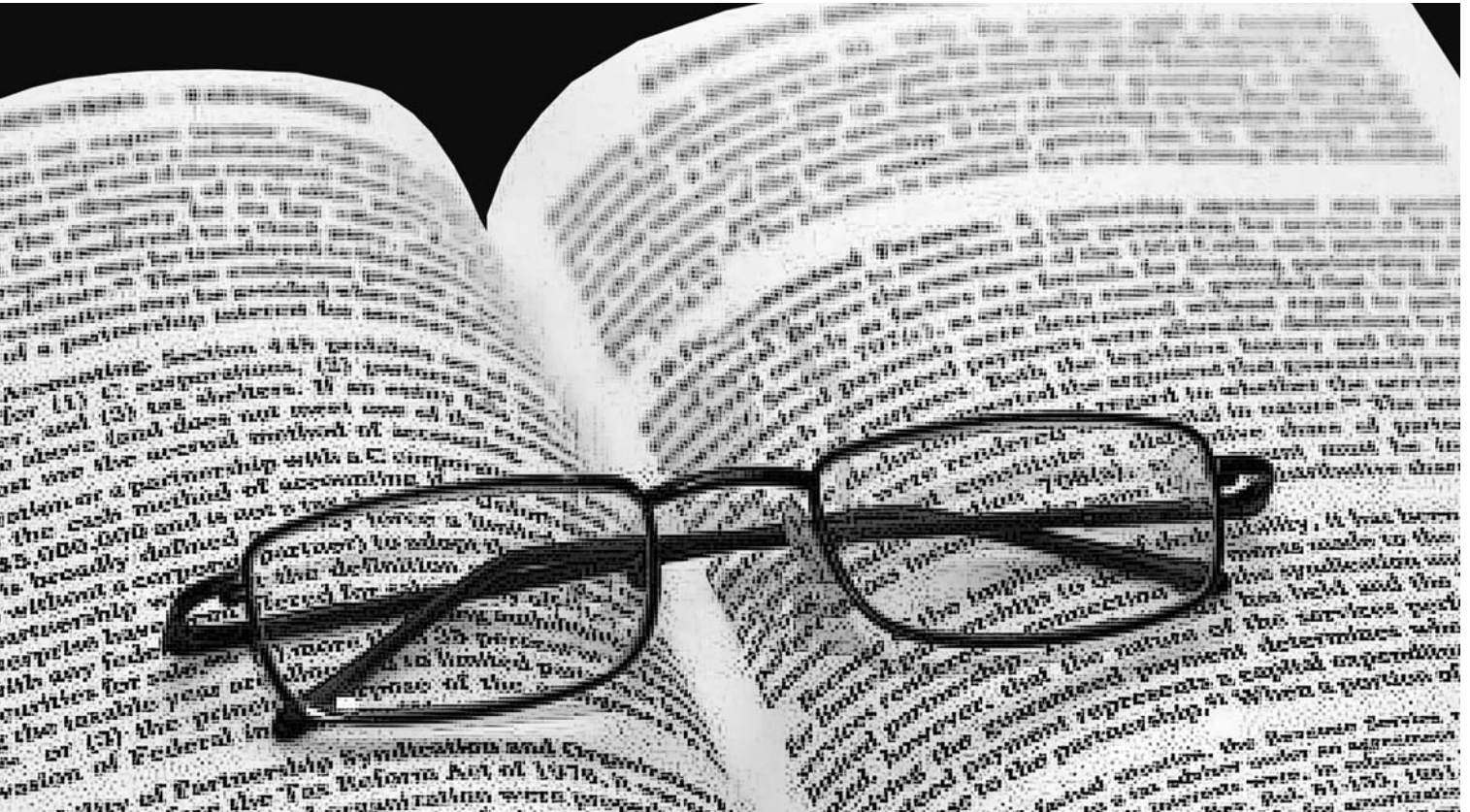
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Bible and Adventism: *A Monocentric or a Polycentric Unity?* | BY HANZ GUTIERREZ



The starting point for Adventist belief and living is the Bible. Therefore, the search for today's much-needed church unity must start here. Yet is our access to the Bible as immediate, direct and neutral as we Adventists presuppose and would like it to be? Certainly it is not—because we only understand the Bible through Adventism itself, and through our roots in Western culture. The widely praised nineteenth-century “objective” reading method does not exist, because it is actually an extremely biased approach to reading the Bible insofar as it is unaware of its own historical limitations. We Adventists have managed to develop a kind of pre-lapsarian hermeneutics, i.e., the belief that our interpretation of the Bible has the objectivity and purity of the

pre-Fall Adamic situation that is by no means conditioned, modified, or biased by our current cultural, sociological and epistemological limitations.

For this reason, a true and solid Adventist reading of the Bible cannot be achieved by a resolved, persuaded and inflamed declaration or an outspoken defense of the “Sola Scriptura Principle” in any of its forms, as much as one doesn’t become American, Peruvian or German just by singing a country’s national anthem. Adventism’s relation to the Bible is not an easy one, yet we have unfortunately oversimplified it by underestimating all its theological and cultural implications.

We keep clinging to a simplistic and linear model of our relationship to the Bible. This linear model has

become, among our members and pastors and also among some theologians, a kind of magical amulet that by itself gives somebody an immediate patent of unquestionable orthodoxy. In reality, our relationship to the Bible is not linear but circular (see the hermeneutical circle).¹ Not only does the Bible influence us, but it is also the other way around. As rooted historical beings, we tend to privilege and foster our own personal or communitarian ideological context as intermediary between us and the Bible. Said differently, ours is just an Adventist reading of the Bible that we naively try to elevate to a universal reading. There are in the Bible numerous categories and other heterogeneous material we don't see and we don't use simply because they don't belong in our Adventist mindset—for instance, ecology, emotionality, instinctiveness, corporality, corporatism, hierarchy or, as is the case, alternative and parallel forms of unity as the “polycentric unity.” We read the Bible just as Adventists, and this reading makes us even more Adventist. Our situation is worse today than in the past because, in opposition to our Adventist forebears, we are now conditioned by a larger and heavier Adventist tradition accumulated over time.

This is not the worst news for our so-called purist Adventist hermeneutics, because what conditions our biblical reading even more than Adventism is our Western cultural imprinting. We read the Bible as Westerners, and the fact that we try to label ourselves as illuminated post-modern theologians only highlights our cultural belonging even more. We post-moderns may be less modern, but our post-modernism doesn't make us less Western. On the contrary, our post-modernity radicalizes our Western-ness.

Are we, then, ineluctably determined by our culture? Not necessarily. We can't avoid being culturally influenced, but at the same time we must resist any kind of cultural determinism. This is not only because the force of the Gospel would therein be denied, but also because we would unduly elevate one culture

above the others. Though cultural determinism is an ugly anti-religious ideology, it is also a diffuse and implicitly-working religious attitude found both without and within Adventism.

Our search for a current Adventist biblical model of unity has become, at present, a circular endeavor. We find in the Bible apparently “new” motives for unity that are in reality just updated re-elaborations of classical Adventist and Western concepts of unity. To break this cycle, we need to deconstruct our understanding of unity in order to evidence its biased limitations. To do that, we will proceed in three steps. We will consider our current understanding of the biblical, Adventist and Western paradigm of unity.

Adventist biblical reading on unity

We Adventists like to underline the heterogeneity of the Bible. Compared to other sacred texts, the Bible appears to be a pluralistic book containing various authors, different periods, diversified historical settings, a plurality of characters and even a variety of theological viewpoints and perspectives. More so than in the past, Christians today can appreciate this enormous plurality thanks to the visionary and disciplined research going on in biblical history, linguistics, literary and psychological studies. In contrast, the Koran appears to be more homogeneous, synthetic and linear. The Bible has a more fragmented, sinuous and tortuous profile in comparison. But the point is precisely this. The miracle is that all this radical and structural diversity and plurality seem to have been superseded and overcome by a miraculous theological unity. In other words, we take biblical diversity just as a circumstantial and transitory condition that cannot contain the final message of truth. Yet for Adventist reading, diversity is not a noble theological category. Rather, the Bible's diversity is accepted only because it allows the power of the final theological unity to emerge. Reading the Bible like this makes us overlook the enormous biblical relevance of its own diversity, and leaves us with a depleted concept of theological unity.²

**Is our access
to the Bible
as immediate,
direct and
neutral as we
Adventists
presuppose
and would like
it to be?**



Western Adventism reading on unity

The Western model of unity applied to biblical reading is just the application and extension of a more primitive model—that of Adventism itself. In fact, Adventism looks into itself the same way it looks into the Bible. It starts by listing and proudly counting the enormous diversity existing in the Adventist community around the world: ethnic diversity, linguistic plurality, diversified witnessing strategies, heterogeneous family organizations, multiform historical sensibilities, etc. Adventism, we like to emphasize, is only second to the Catholic church in securing an international transversal presence in almost every country in the world. But here as with the Bible, all this diversity easily evaporates and disappears at the altar of the Church's main Moloch: unity. Diversity in Adventism seems to be only transitory and circumstantial; we Adventists believe that the essence of Adventism can only be expressed in unity and by no way in diversity. In fact, we become rapidly suspicious and even administratively repressive toward whatever kind of theological diversity may emerge in the church. Our prized linguistic and ethnic diversity is in reality just a folkloristic and aesthetic manifestation without any serious theological validity or relevance. Our theology, as much as our liturgy or hymnology, is universally the same in South America,

Cameroon, Florence and New York. Unity always manages to resist and win, but which unity? In the end, it is an impoverished unity that overlooks and supersedes diversity, and by this diminishes its motivating and inclusive power. Great is our Adventist diversity, but even greater is its overcoming unity. A typical example of this reductive Adventist unity is the anachronistic, naïve and caricatural Sabbath School lectionary imposed, in content and even in form, to every Adventist in the world.

Western cultural reading on unity

This model of unity applied by Adventism to Adventism after having been applied to the Bible itself is also the application and extension of an even more primitive cultural model—that of Western culture.

As no other culture before, Europeans discovered cultural diversity on a massive scale: in geography, radical ethnic differences, linguistic plurality, differentiated kinship systems, parallel religious mindsets, alternative medicines, diversified and sophisticated economical organizations, etc. But much like Adventism with the Bible, Europeans managed to overcome and dismantle this great diversity by imposing onto every culture and nation in the world their normative European abstract universalism.³ This type of abstract universalism can be found in arts as much as in lit-

erature, science and theology. This reductive type of unity would like us to naively believe that polyphony, sociology, philosophy or science just started two or three centuries ago in Europe. This Western abstract universalism has been diffused and disseminated through a couple of powerful and sophisticated cultural strategies: namely, assimilationism and multiculturalism.

The assimilation model⁴

Coming from the French liberal tradition, this first model of Western universalism is based on the idea that equality can be achieved through the full adoption of the rules and values of the dominant society and through the avoidance of any consideration of diversity. It promotes the need to respect common legal values and principles that are shared by all in order to foster a cohesive, inclusive society. This republican assimilationist model is based on the idea of monoculture and the full adoption, either by submission or absorption, of the rules and values of the dominant society so that the minority group becomes culturally indistinguishable from the dominant society.

The multicultural model⁵

This second model comes from the Anglo-Saxon pluralistic tradition, which was also present in countries like Sweden, the Netherlands and Canada. It is based on the respect and protection of cultural diversity within a framework of shared belonging. Cultural diversity is acknowledged, protected and even promoted. The state doesn't try to eliminate or stigmatize diversity or cultural differences, but rather tries to adequately administer diversity by assigning appropriate spaces and moments in which it can be freely manifested and cultivated. Here monoculture is apparently overcome and gives way to cultural pluralism. But the problem remains that this, too, is a non-communicative and a non-dialogical pluralism. In this model, each culture grows up in its own corner segregated and excluded from the real present history, while cultural supremacy belongs to the dominant culture with the ironic alibi that it

formally and juridically recognizes other cultural sensibilities. But formal recognition of cultural diversity is just an elementary and rudimental kind of recognition that paradoxically can cohabit and even justify cultural subordination and segregation.

The discovery of the complexity of unity

In opposition to classical Western abstract universalism, there are also parallel movements in the biblical sciences. The discovery of complex systems presupposes a different kind of unity that we will call a "polycentric" unity. We'll just briefly refer to two scientific disciplines: physics and anthropology.

Classical Newtonian physics worked with a mechanical, homogeneous, Unitarian and predictable understanding of time-space reality. Twentieth-century theoretical physics came out of the relativistic revolution and the quantum mechanical revolution. But it was still all about simplicity and continuity (in spite of quantum leaps). Its principal tool was calculus. Twenty-first-century theoretical physics is coming out of the "chaos revolution." Its principal tool category is complexity.

The same goes for other fields of study, such as anthropology. Italian anthropologist Francesco Remotti⁷ of the University of Turin claims that Western societies are not complex but complicated societies, because they obsessively privilege one culture above all others—therein creating monocentric societies only interested in quantitative growth (as the GDP obsession shows). Non-western societies are slower societies not because they are lazy but because they try to maintain a sophisticated equilibrium of the various contradictory levels of human existence: relations to others, to nature, to God. Their complexity is a result of the polycentric organization and orientation of their internal life.

The same can be said of the Bible. The new developments, particularly in the synchronic approaches to biblical interpretation, evidence

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We read the
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the irreducible complexity of the biblical narratives. In opposition to this complexity, the Koran, for instance, offers a different image: the image of a strong and compacted unity and homogeneity. The problem is that many Adventists read the Bible as if it was the Koran—but clearly, it is not. I would like to describe the indubitable unity in the Bible as three words: polycentric, developmental and paradoxical.

A polycentric unity

The Bible is polycentric not only because it has integrated structurally-varied narratives of the same events or because it has included a diversified list of authors. The Bible is theologically polycentric because it gives way to diversified theological projects that cohabit together despite their mutual excommunication (specifically, the Jewish-Christian community and the Gentile-Christian community in the New Testament canon). The same could be said of the pneumatology issue. Is the epistles' subordinate, ethically-oriented pneumatology the only pneumatology possible? Certainly not, because in Matthew, for instance, we have a pneumatology that is not subordinated to Christology but is rather life-oriented. In fact, Christ is born by the action of the Holy Spirit. Both pneumatologies are licit and cohabit together. This polycentric unity creates a plurality of the various existing theological options.

A developmental unity

The Bible is written in such a way that it doesn't end this theological discussion, but rather fosters and facilitates it. Contrary to what is generally thought and said, the Bible never says the last word but wisely articulates its discourses to enhance further theological thinking. This developmental strategy is seen especially in the Creation narratives. The Creation is not a homogeneous story in the Bible. It has various versions, each with different contexts and periods. There are theocentric versions of Creation such as the book of Genesis or those of the last chapters of the book of Job. There are anthropocentric versions of Creation such as evident in Psalm 8. There are also soteriological versions of Creation as witnessed by various New Testament hymns and prayers. Finally there are cosmo-centric versions of Creation like the one we find in Psalm 98. This "developmental" unity allows a diachronic plurality of the various existing theological options to emerge.

A paradoxical unity

The Bible is not obsessed, as we Adventists are, with theological synthesis. While the Koran works out a final synthesis of the various reported narratives, the Bible leaves the various versions of the narrated events untouched, thereby integrating a structural tension that increases the possibility of theological meaning. A theology that is not able to cohabit with this tensional element derived from the structural heterogeneity of biblical material (such as Adventist theology, unfortunately) is just a poor theology. Sure, the final editor of a biblical book or passage doesn't remain passive in registering this heterogeneous material. He does his theological work by creating a common theological horizon and mediating perspective—not a corpus of formal theological statements and declarations. Such is the case for the two Creation narratives in Genesis 1 and 2. The stories are not altered by the editor but are linked together in their diversity by a theological and editorial bridging strategy. This paradoxical unity creates a positive tensional plurality of the various theological options.

The new paradigm needed for unity today

Even this beautiful biblical paradigm of unity—a polycentric, developmental and paradoxical unity—is not enough by itself. We can't always submit to historical reality and relate it to the biblical paradigm in order to preserve the validity of the biblical model. This would actually represent only the "centripetal dimension" of the Bible that needs to be maintained but not absolutized. The Bible has a strong "centrifugal dimension" by which it tries to accommodate itself according to the external historical reality.

The limits of the biblical model of unity are mainly that it cannot directly comment on current events, such as what is happening today in Adventism or in today's societies. The same goes for other topics such as women's ordination, homosexuality, or lifestyle issues. For instance, the Old Testament unity is "temporarily" long, but at the same time just an intra-ethnic unity that can hardly be the final model for us Adventists, who are an

inter-ethnic community. The New Testament unity has become a true inter-ethnic community that remains "temporarily" short, which can hardly become a model for us who are celebrating our 150-year anniversary of existence and all it implies in relationship to unity.

In other words, the Bible will not do what we ourselves are called to do, i.e., invent a new paradigm of church unity. We will get the best ingredients from the biblical testimony, from a realistic reading of ourselves as a multicultural religious community, and finally, from accurate and intelligent perceptions of today's society that represents, more than we believe, the historical arena from which every theology is born. ■

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TOSC Struggles Reading the Bible | BY BONNIE DWYER

Is there hierarchy within the Trinity?

Were Adam and Eve priests in the sanctuary of the Garden of Eden?

Does 1 Cor. 11:4–6 refer to headship or head coverings while praying?

What does the Bible teach about slavery?

If one agrees with women's ordination does that mean s/he is an "evangelical feminist"?

As the Theology of Ordination Study Committee continued in January to wrestle with key biblical passages about women and authority, it became clear that the texts could be interpreted in more than one way. That prompted the further question: if this is so, does it mean that the Bible and the writings of Ellen White are unable to solve the question of women's ordination?

For some, the fear of that insufficiency led to labeling those reading Scripture differently from themselves as being influenced by "evangelical feminism," a pejorative term to many. Clinton Wahlen presented a chart to describe the effects of evangelical feminism on biblical interpretation and lamented the state of hermeneutical practice within the church, saying, "When I joined this church thirty-five years ago I never would have imagined that I would be standing here with all of you, looking at two possible pathways into the future based on which set of hermeneutics we choose for the study of Scripture: the historical-grammatical method that refuses to limit the Bible's authority, or a new hermeneutic, based on evangelical feminism, that finds reasons to limit the Bible's authority on the issue of women's ordination."

Note: All of the division reports and research papers presented at the TOSC sessions can be read at: <http://www.adventistarchives.org/january-2014-papers-presented#.Uwah3yj6RCg>



Artur Stele (r) led the TOSC, with co-chair Geoffrey Mbwana

After his presentation at the meeting in Columbia, Maryland, some committee members were questioning whether there was any point in continuing the conversation because they felt they were being incorrectly labeled. Ekkehardt Mueller of the Biblical Research Institute, Denis Fortin, former dean of the Seminary at Andrews University, and Jiri Moskala, the current Seminary dean, all expressed their displeasure over the way those against ordination had made personal attacks, disparaging the methods of Bible study embraced by many in the room. Wahlen got the point. When his paper was posted online at the website of the Adventist Archives, Research and Statistics, all references to Moskala were removed from the paper, although Wahlen continued to imply that the "evangelistic feminism" label was appropriate for other participants in the conversation.

Name-calling wasn't the only kerfuffle at the January meeting, however. Another revolved around the paper "Interpreting Scripture on the Ordination of Women" by P. Gerard Damsteegt, Edwin Reynolds, Gerhard Pfandl, Laurel Damsteegt, and Eugene Prewitt. The paper had been added to the program at the last minute and was not vetted by the Steering Committee. Eugene Prewitt was the author who read the paper, and there were many ques-

tions, not the least of which concerned the paper's treatment of slavery.

"And what does the Bible teach about slavery?" the paper said. "God's law established that men might indenture themselves either by crime or by debt or even through a desire of some advantage (such as the hand of a daughter.) This 'slavery' has none of the moral evils that come with a more modern idea of slavery."¹ This breathtaking endorsement that slavery is OK (if it is practiced as the Hebrews practiced it) was felt necessary in order to deny a basis for including women in ministry.

The reason for this discussion of slavery was because of hermeneutics, the paper's authors said. Prewitt read:

Among some interpreters there is an approach to the Bible that has been called "trajectory." This approach assumes that there is a development of Bible truth on specific teachings that are not clearly present in the Bible, but through the light of the Gospel it has become accepted in today's society. An example of this reasoning is slavery, a practice which Christians today fully reject. Yet in the Bible it is practiced and legislated. Here the trajectory shows a positive development based on our understanding of the Gospel. The trajectory has been used to advocate the ordination of women. The danger lies in "creating a trajectory"—especially when there is nothing within the text that would point to such a trajectory, or even worse, when such a trajectory actually would be contradictory to the explicit intention of the text itself.²

As questions mounted for Prewitt, he told the committee that he had not actually written the paper. Gerhard Damsteegt, the first author listed and a member of the Steering Committee, apparently asked Prewitt to read the paper. Gerhard Damsteegt had presented four other papers (more than any other participant) in earlier sessions. Later another of the co-authors, Gerhard Pfandl, said that he had never seen the paper before it was read, despite the fact that it bore his name. Prewitt in his presentation of the material pleaded for a plain reading of Scripture. Using the trajectory method of read-

ing the Bible was problematic in his mind, as was the common practice of intertextuality which he also disparaged.

No matter which side one was on, hermeneutics (that is, the method of biblical interpretation) was found problematic to those on the other side. Ángel Rodríguez, the retired director of the Biblical Research Institute, had been asked to write a paper that evaluated the arguments of those in opposition to women's ordination. He wrote the following under a section subtitled "Hermeneutical Diatribe":

Our friends charge those who disagree with them of using a non-biblical, non-Adventist hermeneutics. This type of diatribe is not constructive and closes the possibility of any meaningful conversation. It leads away from a discussion of the arguments themselves into an evaluation of the character and intentions of those involved in the discussion. This approach seems to attempt to resolve the problem by instilling fear against those who disagree with them; they are the enemy. My careful reading of their papers made it clear to me that the major hermeneutical problem we face is located in the definition and application of one principle of biblical interpretation, namely, the proper use of the context of a biblical passage.

In summary the hermeneutics used by those opposed to gender-inclusive ordination does not appear to be completely faithful to MBSD (Methods of Bible Study document voted by the General Conference in 1986). They claim to be following the principles of the totality of Scripture, Scripture interprets itself, and Scripture alone, but their use of a few biblical passages as their hermeneutical key to interpret or reinterpret other passages (a canon within a canon?) raises questions about the validity of their hermeneutics. Their main hermeneutical problem is to a large extent their desire to prove their point and to undermine the arguments of those who support the ordination of women to the ministry.³

But there were other problems, too. Rodríguez found the presentation of headship by those who oppose women's ordination a serious deviation from Adventist theology and doctrine because it redefined the doctrine of God. "If one of the three members of the Godhead has been the

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eternal leader of the other two, even at a functional level, we have introduced a fissure within the unity of the Godhead that brings us too close to polytheism," he wrote. "If one member of the Godhead has to tell the others what to do and when to do it, then, we have to conclude that the exercise of the divine attributes of the other two is being limited or that not all of them have the same divine attributes—they complement each other. If we were to insist that eternal headship is consistent with monotheism, we would have to argue for something very close to modalism—the one God is functioning in three different ways."⁴

The Doctrine of the Atonement would also be affected by their interpretation of headship, Rodríguez said. "The eternal headship of the Father could imply that the sacrifice of the Son was the result of an order given by the Father to Him to save us; the assignment of a function. This would destroy the biblical doctrine of the atonement and would damage in a radical way the biblical understanding of the nature of divine love."⁵

Gerhard Pfandl got the assignment to write the reciprocal paper critiquing the arguments in favor of women's ordination. He included the names of the other opponents of women's ordination in the byline with him: Daniel Bediako, Steven Bohr, Laurel and Gerhard Damsteegt, Jerry Moon, Paul Ratsara, Ed Reynolds, Ingo Sorke, and Clinton Wahlen. This group selected ten items from the papers in support of ordination of women with which they *disagreed*:

1. Full equality of male and female in the Garden of Eden;
2. The suggestion that Adam and Eve served as priests in the pre-Fall Eden;
3. Male headship did not exist in the Garden of Eden; it is a result of the Fall and applies only to the marriage relationship and not to the church;
4. The qualification lists in 1 Tim. 3 and Titus 1 are gender neutral; therefore they do not need to exclude women from serving in these ministries;
5. Junia in Rom. 16 was a female apostle;
6. Gal. 3:26–29 applies not only to salvation, but it also abolishes the subordination of females to males;
7. 1 Tim. 2:12–14 applies only to a specific situation in Ephesus and does not refer to the relationship that should universally exist between men and women;
8. The priesthood of all believers permits women to be ordained;

9. Ministry in the New Testament Church was non-hierarchical;
10. "Head" in 1 Cor. 11 has the meaning of source rather than authority.

After listing the arguments against each of these points, Pfandl also faulted the other side on their Bible reading. He said, "The hermeneutics used by egalitarians goes beyond the grammatical-historical method. For example, the *ad hoc* argument restricting Paul's counsel in 1 Tim. 2:12–14 to a specific issue in Ephesus is exegetically not a valid argument. All of Paul's letters, with the exception of Romans, 'are *ad hoc* responses to deal with specific problems,' yet no one limits the other letters of Paul to the original recipients. Why should 1 Tim. be limited to the local situation?"⁶ The paper continues:

In order to accommodate the push for women as elders in the church, every biblical argument that in the past had been used against women's ordination to pastoral leadership has been explained away or reinterpreted by seeking a deeper meaning in the text, by an appeal to other supposedly contradictory texts (e.g., 1 Cor. 14:33–35 speaks against 1 Cor. 11:5), or by a reinterpretation of the meaning of biblical words. Some of the arguments are based on imaginative or creative reasoning and assumptions which are not supported by Scripture. At times, questionable information from non-biblical sources and hypothetical situations are brought into play in order to reinterpret or set aside the plain meaning of the text. We believe that what is simple and clear to the common reader of the Bible has been mystified and relativized.⁷

He concluded that if the women of the church could only respond like Paul when he said that "Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel," then they could preach the gospel as a "lifelong career—without violating Scripture or dividing the church."⁸

Pfandl's conclusion was that with a different credential women might preach, which is essentially the current situation. It was C. Raymond Holmes who got the assignment to suggest "What We Should Do Now," for those who oppose women's ordination. And while he wanted to affirm women in ministry, he suggested that a completely different track be created for them at the seminary and that the vote to allow for women elders be reversed:

Should the reasoning and arguments in favor of ordaining women as elders not be challenged, how will texts such as 1 Cor. 6:9–10 (RSV) be interpreted in the future? "Do you not know that the unrighteous

will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the [sexually] immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals. . . will inherit the kingdom of God.” Most proponents will passionately insist, and sincerely mean, that they would never interpret texts such as this in ways that would support the approval of same-sex marriage, or the ordination of practicing homosexuals. However, no confidence can be given to such assurance because the contemporary history of some Protestant churches proves otherwise. The one has inevitably led to the other. Throwing the Seventh-day Adventist Church over the hermeneutical cliff will eventually produce the same result. The same arguments of gender-neutralizing passages used for the ordination of women as elders would eventually be used in support of gay marriage and the ordination of homosexual clergy, because we would have already allowed for it hermeneutically.⁹

Holmes lamented the long argument over the issue of whether women should be ordained as elders, saying that it had become wearisome. The debate has gone on long enough, he declared. But he had qualifications for the solution:

Any solution that would ignore the biblical principle of headship, as well as the plain Bible facts that there were no female priests in Old Testament times, that there is no direct biblical evidence that Jesus appointed any female apostles or that female elders were appointed in the early church, is simply untenable for a church that claims to be the extension of the Reformation in an uncompromising stand on sola scriptura.¹⁰ (emphasis in the original)

It is imperative that we all submit to the direction and guidance we have been given, and recognize formally that the ministry to which women are set apart by “laying on of hands” is complementary to, not identical with, the ministry to which men are set apart. Recognizing also that in terms of ministry a prophet’s authority, whether male or female, is direct from God; that the male minister’s authority is derived from Christ who is the head of the church and the “head of every man” (1 Cor. 11:3), and who thereby has something to say about how the church and its ministry functions; and that the female minister’s pastoral care role is delegated by those holding the office of overseer/elder exercising the authority of their headship role. This trajectory preserves the biblical principle of head-

ship, understood by all concerned that headship is not, repeat not, a license for cruel domination or the exercise of hierarchical power.¹¹ (emphasis in the original)

He also called for repentance and the rescinding of all previous actions permitting the ordination of women as local elders, as well as “careful reconsideration” of the 1990 General Conference action allowing women to perform most of the functions of an ordained minister in their local churches. After repenting of these past sins, our academic institutions must cease “training women for the same ministerial role as men” and instead develop “a specialized track . . . that would prepare women for the ministry to which God is calling them, for which they are uniquely qualified and gifted, and recognizing that call by the ‘laying on of hands.’”¹²

Barry Oliver, the president of the South Pacific Division, presented the paper for the pro-ordination side on where to go from here: “Moving Forward in Unity: Differing positions on ordination without gender distinction can be respected in the global Seventh-day Adventist Church and enhance the unity and mission of the Church.” In his paper, Oliver called for flexibility in practice. He reminded the committee that appropriate flexibility of practice had been a significant reason for the growth, development and sustainability of the global SDA Church. His examples of flexibility were drawn first from Christ, and then from James and Ellen White, both of whom spoke out for specific forms of organization only to change their minds within a few short years.

Next, the action on local women elders voted by the General Conference Executive Committee in 1975 said each division was free to make provision as it may deem necessary regarding women elders. He declared that this action has served the global Church well. There have been no deep schisms, and it has promoted the preservation of unity. He recommended a similar type of action regarding the ordination of women ministers with the following possible wording:

That each division be given the prerogative to deter-

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*mine and make provision as it may deem appropriate within its territory for the ordination of men and women to the gospel ministry.*¹³

In practical terms, he said that this would require an enabling action for *The Working Policy*. It would recognize that global nature of ordination, but leave the authorization of a person for ministry to the local territory. He made it clear that such an action would impact only those divisions which are ready to proceed with the ordination of women.

*This Church exists because there are people who have given their allegiance to God and the church, and they act on it. They come from "every nation, kindred, tongue and people" and they go to "every nation, kindred, tongue, and people" (Rev. 14:6). They are one but they are different. Difference requires adaptation. Unity is ultimately dependent on the recognition that diversity exists. We can move forward together as the Holy Spirit leads us to love and respect one another and to find a solution which works.*¹⁴

Oliver's proposal just might have a chance to work, given the recent reports from the Divisions. According to Denis Fortin's analysis of the reports that were given at the same meeting in Columbia, Maryland, only one division is totally opposed to any action in support of ordaining women, and even in that division there are churches which support women's ordination. The reports from the other twelve, even those who are not in favor of ordaining women, suggest that for many this is a cultural issue and they would be agreeable to whatever the church decides or allowing other divisions to do so. In the end, this decision will hinge a lot on how church leaders will frame this recommendation to the larger church. It remains to be seen whether the committee will endorse the approach suggested by Holmes, which returns the church to the mid-1970s, or the possible way forward presented by Oliver, or yet another path. The final session of TOSC will take place in June 2014. ■

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9. Holmes, C. Raymond, "Women in Ministry: What Should We Do Now?" *Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research*, accessed February 21, 2014, <http://www.adventistarchives.org/women-in-ministry-what-should-we-do-now.pdf>, 7.
10. *Ibid.*, 10.
11. *Ibid.*, 13.
12. *Ibid.*, 15.
13. Oliver, Barry D., "Moving Forward in Unity: Differing positions on ordination without gender distinction can be respected in the practices of the global Seventh-day Adventist Church and enhance the unity and mission of the Church," *Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research*, accessed February 21, 2014, <http://www.adventistarchives.org/moving-forward-in-unity.pdf>, 6.
14. *Ibid.*, 10.

Holmes

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The Society for Adventist Philosophers Discusses

RACISM



PAINTING BY LISIE S. ORJUELA

(un) rooting; oil on canvas, 62" x 62", 2006

The Society of Adventist Philosophers Addresses the Issues of Race and Gender

BY ZANE YI

What, exactly, are humans? Aristotle influentially classified us as “rational animals.” It is our rationality that distinguishes us from other animals and makes us what we are; it is our “essence.” According to Aristotle, however, it turns out that some humans are less rational than others, and therefore less fully human than others: “The slave is wholly lacking the deliberative element; the female has it but it lacks authority” (*Politics* 1260a11).

There are some humans who, because of their gender or race (Aristotle thought non-Greeks, i.e., “barbarians” should be slaves), should naturally be “ruled over by others.” Aristotle’s views strike us today as being naively patriarchic and ethnocentric. Yet we know they have been tremendously influential in the West, and through followers like Thomas Aquinas, also shaped Christian thinking on these matters.

How influential has Aristotle been in Adventism? To what extent must we disentangle ourselves from his way of thinking about human nature?

For the past several years, Adventist scholars have gathered annually to broach a variety of philosophical themes—epistemology, the teaching of philosophy in Adventist institutions of higher education, and the relationship between faith and reason. This year, our focus (broadly speaking) was metaphysical. One of our reasons for narrowing our focus further was the issue being examined by a sister scholarly society, as well as the world church—ordination. We want-

ed to explore the philosophical issue undergirding the theological debates. Hence our theme “Essentialism: Adventism and Questions of Race and Gender.”

Although papers were presented on both race and gender at our conference in Baltimore, Maryland (November 21, 2013), the essays published here focus on the former of the two issues. The reasons for this are primarily practical (space and time), but the similarities between the ideological and social challenges of addressing both racism and sexism in our faith community makes a philosophical examination of race relevant for understanding the ways we think about gender.

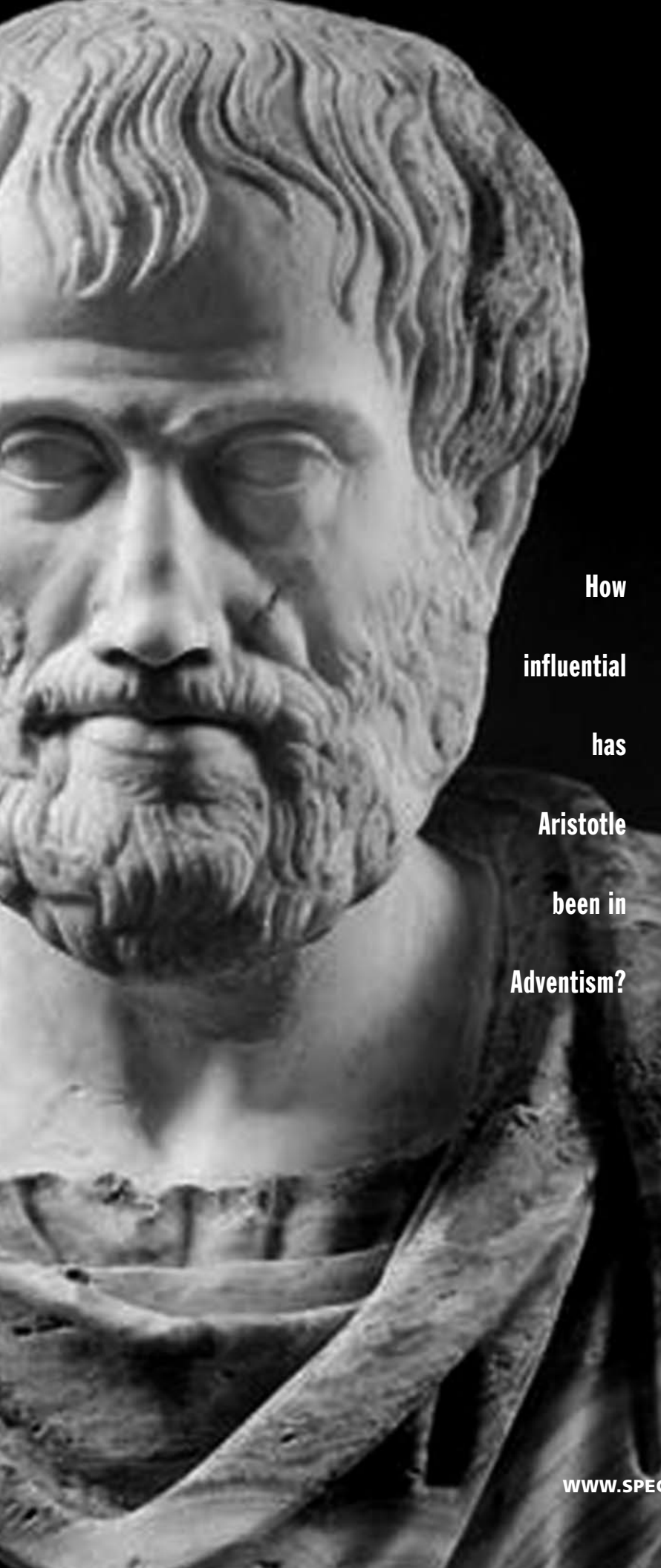
G. Russell Seay, associate professor of religion at Oakwood University, observed the following before offering his response to this year’s keynote speaker:

“The Society of Adventist Philosophers, perhaps the youngest of the Adventist scholars’ societies, is the first to raise (to my knowledge) the issue of race for analysis and critique in the Adventist church. The seriousness of your effort to enter thoughtful conversation around this pervasive, distracting, and demoralizing issue is demonstrated in your choice of a plenary speaker, George Yancy, one of the leading philosophers of race in America.”

Professor Yancy’s gripping presentation, “Speaking from Behind the Veil,” drew on phenomenological, logical, and theological analysis to help those in attendance not just understand, but feel what it is like to be “black” in America.

Yancy’s address was preceded by other thought-provoking papers, three of which are

WWW.BRITANNICA.COM; MARBLE BUST OF ARISTOTLE, ROMAN COPY (2ND CENTURY BC) OF A GREEK ORIGINAL (C. 325 BC); IN THE MUSEO NAZIONALE ROMANO, ROME



How
influential
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shared here. Matthew Burdette's essay, "Adventism and American White Supremacy," clarifies that race is not simply biological and racism is not simply mistreating others. Both have to do with the way we look at each other and this has a lot to do with our collective sense of where we have come from and where we are going. We have to retell that story, perhaps radically, in order to overcome racism.

In "Do It Yourself," Timothy J. Golden examines the two conflicting interpretations of Scripture offered by Adventist leaders regarding involvement in the civil rights movement: African-American church leaders demanded participation while white Adventists advocated withdrawal. After his analysis and explanation, Golden draws out some implications for our reading of the Bible today.

Lastly, Aleksandar S. Santrac provides a historical overview and analysis of Adventist leaders John Harvey Kellogg and Ellen G. White's views on race, contextualizing these views in nineteenth-century America.

While these essays do not represent the consensus of the members of our diverse society, they are presented here in the hopes of advancing a shared vision articulated by G. Russell Seay in his concluding comments at the conference:

"Is it possible that this conference, willing to address this important issue facing the Seventh-day Adventist Church, is the beginning of God showing us a better way? A better way may not be getting to a place where race is no longer an issue, but a place where we acknowledge its powerful gravitational pull to view the other with contempt, while affirming our value to their detriment." ■

A special thanks to Abigail Doukhan, assistant professor of philosophy at CUNY-Queens, for her help in organizing and editing these papers into their present form; Bonnie Dwyer and the *Spectrum* team for providing the space for them in this issue; and *Spectrum* readers, for allowing us to join and contribute to the conversation.

Zane Yi, PhD is an assistant professor at Loma Linda University's



School of Religion, where he teaches courses in philosophy and theology. He currently serves as the president of the Society of Adventist Philosophers.

Do It Yourself: Adventism and the Problem of Race | BY TIMOTHY GOLDEN

"Truth is subjectivity."

—Johannes Climacus, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Fragments*

"I am the way, the truth, and the life."

—John 14:6

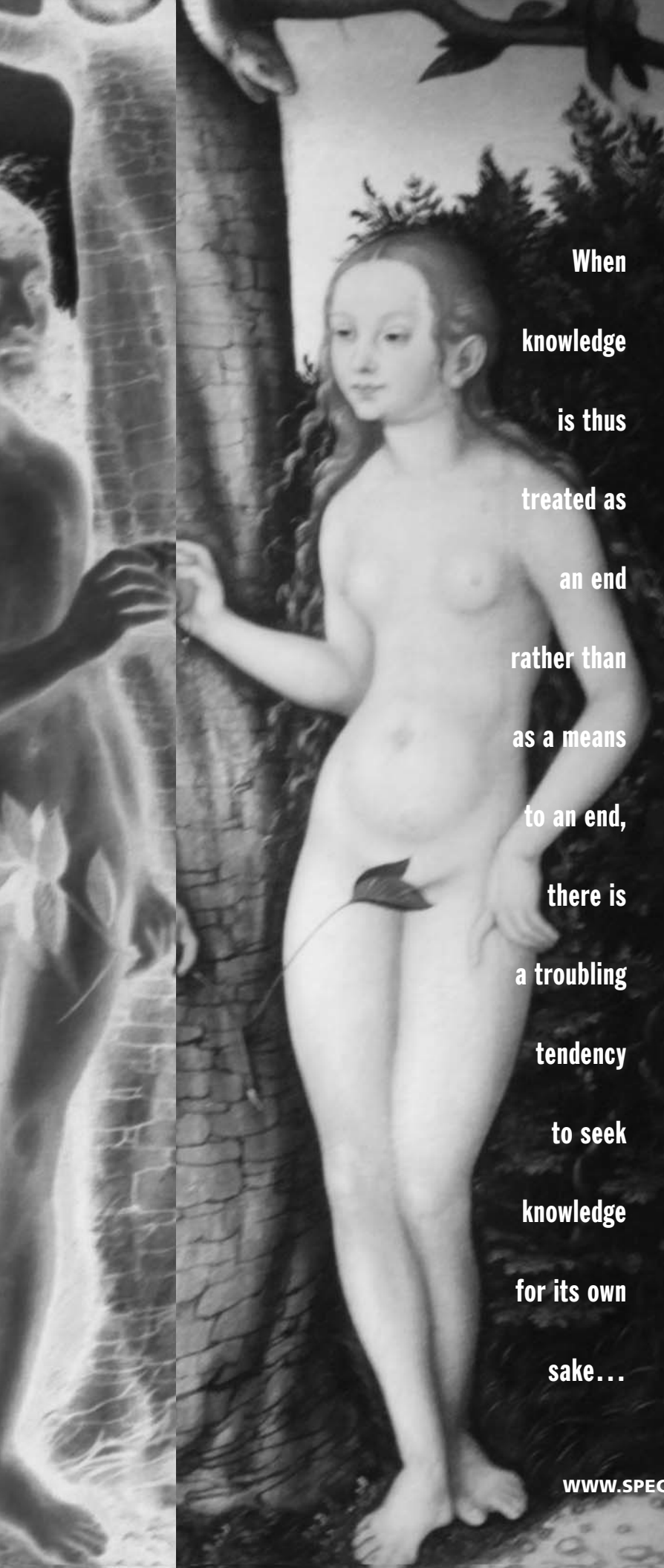
Most tasks, if we are honest with ourselves, we would prefer to delegate to someone else. Whether it be some mundane household chore or errand, we often simply do not have the time to handle it, and it would make our lives much easier if someone else did it for us. But every rule has an exception. And our preference for delegation meets its match when it comes to one task: that of humility.

Scripture recommends that we humble ourselves rather than have someone else—especially God—do it for us. Just ask Nebuchadnezzar. Relegated to the status of a beast for seven years, he is a perfect example of what Jesus means when he says “he who exalteth himself shall be abased, and he who humbleth himself shall be exalted” (Luke 14:11). Since he did not perform the task of humbling himself, God had to do it for him. And when God did it, it was done—well done, indeed!

As it is with ancient kings, so it is with contemporary theology. When exegetical and hermeneutical practices presuppose a stable, fixed, unitary subject whose access to an unencumbered “original meaning” is the starting point for our theological reflection, Adventists

run the risk of epistemic addiction and hermeneutical hubris. Epistemic addiction, which I have written of elsewhere,¹ is that condition where one seeks knowledge—either philosophically or theologically—without regard for ethics. Such a search for knowledge is problematic because good and evil are things to be done, not merely things to be “known.” God thus prohibited Adam and Eve from eating of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. So it is that Adam and Eve “fell” because they sought an objective knowledge of good and evil, where only a subjective application would do. When knowledge is thus treated as an end rather than as a means to an end, there is a troubling tendency to seek knowledge for its own sake, which is precisely what God forbade Adam and Eve from doing. Treating knowledge as an end rather than a means is problematic for another reason: carried too far, we begin to treat all matters both natural and supernatural as things that we can know, grasp, and understand. And this is a serious problem. Consider the following example. Imagine that you are looking at the earth from the view of outer space. Although you see the earth, you do not see it in its entirety all at once, perfectly comprehending all that is; you only see part of the earth. Moreover, if others are looking at the same view of the earth as you, they will inevitably view the earth from a different vantage point. The point here is that if we cannot even observe the totality of nature, which is finite, all at once, what makes us think that we





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can grasp all that there is to know about God, who is infinite? To think that we can is silly.

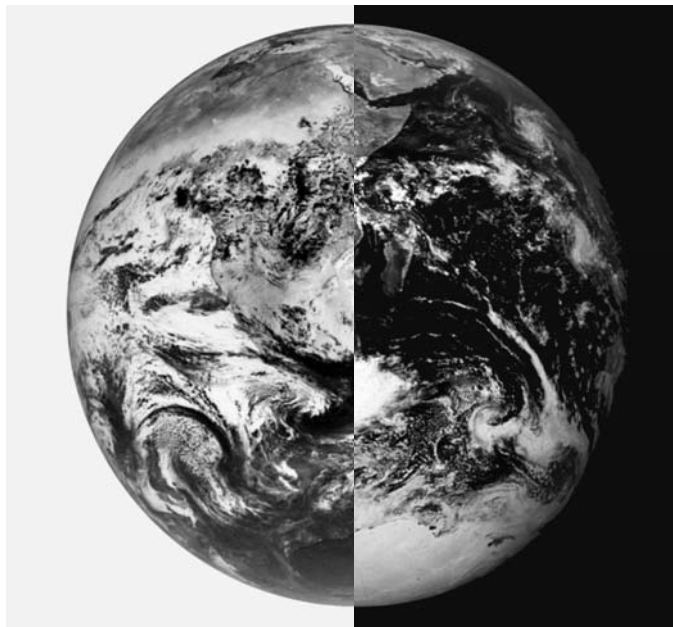
Yet this is exactly what we do in our approach to biblical interpretation: we presume that our finite minds are somehow capable of discerning the meaning of the infinite Word. Adventists have a hermeneutical hubris that is grounded in the troubling notion that Adventists sit upon a perch of epistemic and hermeneutical certainty with immediate access to the original meaning of biblical texts. Upon accessing this undeniable "truth," we then proclaim ourselves correct and everyone else wrong, unaware of the blind spots in our hermeneutical standpoint. Interpreting Scripture in this way has serious ethical and practical implications, which, if not critically evaluated, will result in the kind of humiliation that no one wants: humiliation at the hand of God in Nebuchadnezzar-like fashion. I want to avoid this sort of God-induced humiliation.

This essay is thus an attempt at self-humiliation through the work of Samuel G. London, Jr., an Adventist historian, and the philosopher Hans Georg Gadamer. In his book, *Seventh-day Adventists and the Civil Rights Movement*,² London details two distinct interpretations of Adventist doctrine: one that demands withdrawal from involvement in the twentieth-century African American civil rights movement, and the other that demands participation in it. And what is more interesting, both claimed access to truth based upon the principle of *Sola Scriptura*. Not surprisingly, according to London, white Adventists advocated withdrawal, and African American Adventists advocated participation. London thus expresses through his historical analysis of Adventist involvement in the twentieth-century American civil rights movement what Gadamer told us in *Truth and Method*:³ that the truth and method are at odds with one another, and that our prejudices inevitably affect all of our interpretations to such a degree that we are much better off if we recognize this, and seek understanding instead of "truth." The aim of this essay is thus a "do it yourself" project: I want to put London and Gadamer in conversation with one another to

pursue epistemic and hermeneutic humility as it relates to the problem of race within Adventism. When I speak of race, I mean a powerful and abiding social ontology of race beneath the surface of London's historical account of Adventist involvement in the civil rights movement of the twentieth century; the sort of social ontology that completely debunks the false notion that we live in a "post-racial society;" a social ontology that recognizes that "color-blindness" is actually a sinister form of white privilege that actually sustains white social, political, cultural, and theological hegemony rather than eliminating them. It is this notion of race that is at work in London's book, and that I discuss in what follows. I turn first to Gadamer and his critique of the Enlightenment.

Evangelical theologians have a critique of the Enlightenment. This critique, touting itself as anti-modern, typically surfaces in the context of a polarized debate about creationism versus evolution, theism versus atheism, et cetera. Interestingly, the evangelical theologian, although intensely critical of the Enlightenment and what it believes to be its "scientific skepticism" on one hand, is actually quite steeped in Enlightenment principles on the other; for its notion of "truth" is rooted in a one-to-one correspondence between thought and being, which is a conception of truth derived from the modern notion of a subject located within a world who is able to "know" "truth" through a correspondence of one's ideas about the world with the world itself. Although this narrow conception of truth is useful in mathematics and the natural sciences, theology is different. Immanuel Kant argued this point in his landmark text, *Critique of Pure Reason*, where he tried to show that theological matters are practical and ethical, not theoretical and epistemological. But it seems that evangelical theology and Christian fundamentalism—even in, or *especially* in, its SDA incarnation—have adopted the Enlightenment notion of truth, for Christians are caught in an endless (dare I say meaningless) cycle of debate with atheists and evolutionists, trying to "prove" the existence of God, almost like the way that one "proves" that $2+2=4$. Adventist theology has then unfortunately been infected with this Enlightenment notion of truth. Witness its lapse into apologetics that seeks historical "proof" of biblical texts, like we do in our Revelation seminars. By the end of the seminar, we have presented the prospective converts with a neat package that we call "the

truth." But is this advisable? After all, is the truth, in its totality, really just a set of doctrines? I think not. The truth—that is, the complete truth—is not simply objective knowledge, but also is subjective practice. The point here is that for all of our criticisms of the Enlightenment, Christians, perhaps unconsciously, adopt its notion of truth, and



we make the mistake of treating God and spiritual matters like matters of scientific investigation. We become what James K.A. Smith has called "theological positivists,"⁴ thoroughly grounded in a verification theory of meaning, and applying that theory of meaning intended for epistemic certainty about objects to spiritual matters, resulting in a disturbing false sense of epistemic certainty about *subjects and about spiritual matters*, as though we know that we are saved and others are lost! In other words, we think that we have achieved the impossible: finitude comprehending infinity. This is a serious problem, because it turns God (the infinite) into a finite idol of human rationality. Rather than admit that we are created in the image of God and exist to serve him, we create a god in our image to serve us; and our biblical interpretation is thus corrupted because we fail to recognize our own epistemic and hermeneutical limitations. Again, we must attempt to humble ourselves.

Enter Gadamer. For Gadamer, the Enlightenment has a problem. It fails to recognize that in its quest for objective truth and scientific certainty, it has a "prejudice against prejudice."⁵ Gadamer writes that "there is one prejudice of the Enlightenment that defines its essence: the fundamental prejudice of the Enlightenment is the prejudice against prej-

udice itself, which denies tradition its power.”⁶ In other words, the Enlightenment way of thinking, rather than acknowledging that in every interpretive endeavor we unconsciously have prejudices that color our interpretation of texts, we instead purport to have unmediated access to the author’s original intent, making every endeavor an objective and scientific one. The problem for Gadamer is that the scientific and objective approach of Newtonian physics has spilled over into the interpretation of texts, where we demand objective knowledge and rational consistency without recognizing that these very demands have, at their core, the Enlightenment demand for objectivity, as in Schliermacher and Dilthey. Gadamer points out that the task of classical hermeneutics always aims to render a text consistent, showing the author’s true intentions, and then exalting those so-called original intentions as the standard for interpreting that text. We develop, in classical hermeneutics, then, certain principles of interpretation, the adherence to which will afford us access to the author’s intent, and then the interpretive enterprise is concluded. But this presents a bigger problem. Namely, what prejudices of his/her own does the interpreter bring in construing the text? And how do those prejudices affect the ultimate interpretation of the text? When we don’t ask these questions, we end up with a version of the text that is skewed in favor of the interpreter. And this creates serious problems, especially when the interpreter is a dominant individual or social group. For example, as London points out, there were conservative ideological and theological factors “that infiltrated Adventism upon the passing of its founders, which some white Adventist leaders, in the 1950s and 1960s, used to discourage church members from participating in sociopolitical activity.”⁷ When white Adventists proceed in this fashion, they have effectively constructed a hermeneutical totality infected with the prejudice of what Gadamer would call their own “historically effected” consciousness:⁸ a consciousness affected by white supremacy and white privilege. Theological and doctrinal proclamations thus situated are

actually proclamations of white supremacy, especially when they prohibit political involvement for the liberation of oppressed people. Thus we get the statement from Nietzsche in *The Anti-Christ* that “Pure spirit is pure falsehood. . . . It is upon this theological instinct that I wage war. I find traces of it everywhere. Whoever has the blood of theologians in his veins, stands from the start in a false and dishonest position to all things.”⁹ Nietzsche indicates here a certain “theological instinct” toward objectifying the truth that is problematic for the reasons just stated.¹⁰ Nietzsche declared the death of God in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and the *Will to Power* for a reason: the naïve Socratic optimism that generated an unjustified hope in the power of rationality had infected theology to such a degree (as the Enlightenment notion of truth, grounded in that same naïve optimism has infected Adventist theology) that theology ceased to make the Word flesh, favoring theoretical obfuscation, manifested in theoretical preoccupations with doctrine over creativity and responsibility. The “god” that Nietzsche pronounced dead is not the God of the Bible, but rather a god of rationality; an onto-theological god grounded in reason; the opposite of a human being grounded in God; a god that human beings created to serve them, rather than a God that creates human beings to serve him. In short, it is a god of an oppressive hermeneutical totality that white Adventists used to hypocritically disengage from the quest for civil rights on one hand, and yet benefit from it on the other. For what is the Adventist reliance on Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 in the area of religious liberty when a Sabbath accommodation is needed on the job—an Act of Congress born of the blood of African Americans and whites of genuine good will—but a reaping of benefits without a sharing of burdens? Indeed, each time an Adventist pastor, religious liberty official, or lawyer argues for a Sabbath accommodation under Title VII, they do so in the shadow of the heroes of the movement that they opposed; heroes like the three African-American girls

Golden ➔ continued on page 74...

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John Harvey Kellogg, Ellen G. White, and Adventism's Philosophy of Race

BY ALEKSANDAR S. SANTRAC

One of the Adventist pioneers and progenitors of the health reform was an active member of the eugenics program in the nineteenth and twentieth-century United States. John Harvey Kellogg (February 26, 1852–December 14, 1943), who himself adopted a number of black children, was outspoken on his beliefs on race. His philosophy of race and establishment of the Race Betterment Foundation in 1906 (a major center of the new eugenics movement in America) appears to be irreconcilable with the general ethical stance of the later Adventist theology of race. This paper¹ seeks first to find and assess evidences for Kellogg's position and then to explore the potential reasons for the incongruity between his philosophy and the "official" position on race in early Adventist theology based primarily on Ellen G. White's testimony. The paper will also draw out some ethical and practical implications for the current Adventist understanding of philosophy/theology of race.

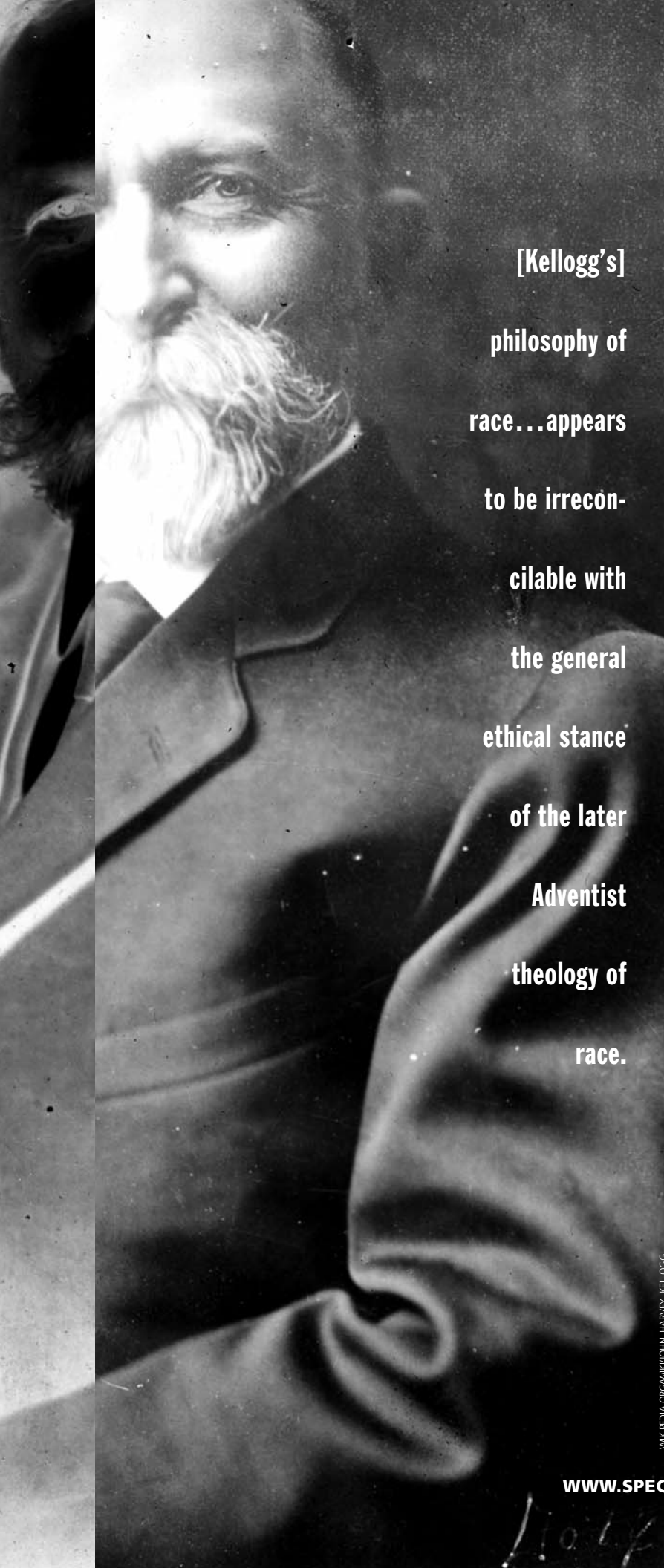
Historical background and Kellogg's views on race

John Harvey Kellogg was a notable American doctor who is best known for his invention of Corn Flakes, the revolutionary American breakfast cereal. He founded a well-known sanitarium, the Western Health Reform Institute (1866) or the Battle Creek Sanitarium (following 1902) using some holistic methods of healing, and he propagated preventive medicine in a time when the majority of the population was ignorant

about the concept. I will not explore Kellogg's biography here² or his odd beliefs in sexless marriage, the vice of masturbation (he epitomized the anti-masturbation mania), pantheistic ideas about God, extreme vegetarianism and his criticism of ministers as meat-eaters, or his practice of eugenic ideas, hydrotherapy and other creative techniques to promote good health. It seems that some of his ideas, mostly presented in his volume *The Plain Facts for the Old and Young*,³ permeated early Adventism,⁴ and strangely his co-workers, including Ellen G. White as family friend and sponsor of his educational career, never found these unbiblical and heterodox ideas harmful or destructive for the early Adventist movement. Only when he published *Living Temple*⁵ in 1903 did some of the leaders and Ellen White fiercely react against what they took to be pantheism, a view that they understood to be in complete contradiction to the biblical view of divinity. This brief overview merely demonstrates the fact that Kellogg was an influential figure in early Adventism with other leaders adapting, sharing, or reacting against his views. With this established, we can turn to investigate his philosophy of race.

Kellogg mentions the expression "negro" about five times in *Plain Facts*. None of these uses are particularly remarkable in the sense of being racist. He speaks about the onset of puberty in Negroes and Creoles. He says that the African race demonstrated "precocity" in this regard. He attributes this to the climate, however, rather than any racial flaw. In one of





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the more notable quotes, he observes: "It has been observed that the children of negro women, even by husbands of *pure negro blood*, are much lighter in color than usual if she has had a child by a white man previously" (*italics mine*).⁷ Though this statement does not necessarily undermine the humanity of blacks, it speaks about blood in terms of purity which resembles a eugenics distinction.⁸

By far the most important quote on "negroes" in *Plain Facts* is the following one:

*Are not these wholesome lessons for that portion of the human race which professes to represent the accumulated wisdom, intelligence, and refinement of the world? Those who need reproof on this point may reflect that by a continuance of the evil practice they are placing themselves on a plane even below the uncouth negro who haunts the jungles of Southern Africa.*⁹ (*emphasis mine*)

Obviously Kellogg's statement "uncouth negro" does not mean that all Negroes are uncouth any more than a statement like "old man" would mean all men are old. Nevertheless, he apparently categorized human beings according to their cultural practices with connotations of these practices to race. There are some races that, according to Kellogg, represent "the lowest of those who wear the human form."¹⁰ In the American context of the nineteenth century this expression could allude only to one racial group—Negroes—which was considered "the *inferior* race."¹¹

While there is nothing within the book that denigrates the black race directly, allusions to the inferiority of uncivilized races support Kellogg's overall philosophy of race which is evidenced in his role of the development of a eugenics program. In 1906, together with Irving Fisher and Charles Davenport, Kellogg founded the Race Betterment Foundation, which became a major center of the eugenics movement in America. Kellogg was in favor of racial segregation and believed that sexual relations between immigrants and non-whites would damage the gene pool. What was the purpose of the Race Betterment Foundation according to the first 1914 conference proceedings?

It is fitting, on establishing a new organization, to define

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its objects and explain its methods. As officially announced, the objects of the Conference are two-fold, as follows: 1. To assemble evidence as to the extent to which degenerative tendencies are actively at work in America, and, 2. To promote agencies for race betterment. Giving to the word “degenerative” its ordinary meaning — a loss or impairment of the qualities peculiar to the race — our inquiry and research includes every matter or thing which in any wise, nearly or remotely, affects unfavorably the normal physical development and functional activity of any member of the race. The second object of the Conference — to promote agencies for race betterment — opens a world-wide field for observation, research and practice, for these agencies are innumerable. The term “Race” includes the “Human Family,” “Human Beings as a Class,” “Mankind.” “Betterment” means improvement in its broadest and largest sense.¹²

These aspirations of the society were not far removed from programs like the Nazi eugenics program of 1930s Germany, which was inspired by the US eugenics program especially from California.¹³ In fact, the Nazi eugenics program borrowed many ideas and techniques from the US eugenics program, perhaps even the Race Betterment Foundation.

To strike a sense of balance, Booker T. Washington was present at the Race Betterment conference and claimed that he owed Kellogg his gratitude because Kellogg trained a “colored man” who treated Washington when he was ill. In Kellogg’s presentation “A New Human Race,” direct statements concerning the inferiority of certain races were made. Kellogg quoted Professor Ray Lancaster:

*The traditional history of mankind furnishes us with notable examples of degeneration. High states of civilization have decayed and given place to low and degenerate states. At one time it was a favorite doctrine that the savages were degenerate descendants of the higher and civilized races. This general and sweeping application of the doctrine of degeneration has been proved to be erroneous by careful study of the habits, arts, and beliefs of savages; at the same time there is no doubt that many savage races, as we at present see them, are actually degenerate and descended from ancestors possessed of a relatively elaborate civilization. As such we may cite some of the Indians of Central America, the modern Egyptians, and even the heirs of the great oriental monarchies of pre-Christian times. While the hypothesis of universal degeneration as an explanation of savage races has been justly discarded, it yet appears that degeneration has a very large share in the explanation of the condition of the most barbarous races, such as the Fuegians, the Bushmen, and even the Australians. They exhibit evidence of being descended from ancestors more cultivated than themselves.*¹⁴ (emphasis mine)

Kellogg used this statement to introduce the idea that the present condition of America was not necessarily the result of progress alone. He proposed that the state was just as likely the result of degeneration. He did not use it to make any statements about the “negro” race or any other. His entire speech never directly blamed inherent traits of race to be the problem. He blamed poor attitudes, habits and the lack of interest in progress. The presence of notable black presenters suggested that the purpose of the event was not the segregation or expulsion of any race. Yet the use of expressions like “savage races” or “most barbarous races” might point to the racial inferiority of black races in the nineteenth-century United States.

To sum up, Kellogg’s view of race might be characterized as ambiguous. Considering his context, Kellogg held pretty moderate views of race. His interest in cultural and genetic development did not single out black people. Yet his active participation in the eugenics program eclipsed his overall moderate position.

How different is this view from a “mainstream” Adventist philosophy of race?



Ellen G. White’s views on race

Ellen G. White (1827–1915), the most notable founder of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, expressed her views on race or racial segregation in the context of dealing with an overall redemptive message of Scripture within the nineteenth-century church setting. First of all, her positive view of “negroes” was tied to the context of Church unity, evangelism and mission. She claimed that prejudices towards the blacks had to be

removed in evangelistic efforts and the worship service.^{15 16 17} An observation that the black race was not inherently inferior and that only forces of evil through slavery made them degraded spoke much in that regard.^{18 19} Colored people are precious in the sight of God of heaven and they deserve respect, said Ellen G. White.²⁰ She described the Negro race as “downtrodden” and not inherently inferior. She was constantly calling for action of renewing the unity in Christ between whites and blacks.²¹

This was a trend within her writings when referring to colored people. Her comments in context were far more a criticism of the white man than the black. She claimed that Christians had to make efforts to right the wrongs of historical degradation of the black race and slavery.

Nevertheless, there are a few enigmatic statements in her corpus of writings which may be interpreted as “racial,” or at least ambiguous and unclear. She argues:

*If there were one sin worse than another before Noah’s flood, it was the base crime of amalgamation of man and beast which defaced the image of God, and caused confusion everywhere.*²²

*Every species of animals which God had created was preserved in the ark. The confused species which God did not create, which were the result of amalgamation, were destroyed by the flood. Since the flood, there has been amalgamation of man and beast, as may be seen in the almost endless varieties of species of animals, and in certain races of men.*²³

Though it might be possible to finally determine the meaning of these cryptic statements,²⁴ it remains ambiguous and controversial. If the meaning points to amalgamation of men with men and beast with beasts, the puzzling allusion to the “base crime” of this amalgamation remains a mystery. Was Ellen White under the prejudice of the US nineteenth-century “scientific racism” like Kellogg? Can we justify the statement by the common explanation based on the fact of her immature spiritual discerning impacted by the general opinion of the Protestants in the 1860s? Even Uriah Smith, who defended the authenticity of the prophetic gift in Ellen White, understood the statement as it has been

written and confirmed that the results of amalgamation can be seen in “such cases as the wild Bushmen of Africa, some tribes of the Hottentots, and perhaps the Digger Indians of our own country.”²⁵ It is extremely difficult to explain this enigmatic statement to what has become a racially diverse and open denomination today.

The second major controversial statement is the following one:

*God cannot take the slave to heaven, who has been kept in ignorance and degradation, knowing nothing of God, or the Bible, fearing nothing but his master’s lash, and not holding so elevated a position as his master’s brute beasts. But He does the best thing for him that a compassionate God can do. He lets him be as though he had not been.*²⁶

It looks as if this theological reflection contradicts Romans 1:19–20,²⁷ which points to general revelation for every human being, including the “brute slaves.” If ignorant slaves are spiritually unreachable and untouchable, are they really fully human? Will the righteous and loving God judge them as emptied of their sense of divinity,²⁸ and therefore hypothetically “unsaved” after they were degraded and mistreated by other wicked human beings?

There are a few more ambiguous statements, namely that in heaven “there will be no color line; for all will be as white as Christ himself,”²⁹ and that leaders of the southern US should be white.³⁰ These statements may be interpreted contextually,³¹ yet they remain controversial in the context of Ellen White’s overall positive assessment of the inherent abilities and features of blacks as well as their capacity to be the leaders in the work of the Lord, if not deprived from the opportunity to develop and exercise their abilities of thinking and acting.

Kellogg and the Church on racism

By examining the similarities or dissimilarities between John Harvey Kellogg and Ellen G. White on the issue of race, one may conclude that both of them, though not scientific racists at the core, made some ambiguous statements that

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There are some races that, according to Kellogg, represent “the lowest of those who wear the human form.”

demonstrate that they were under the influence of the nineteenth-century US zeitgeist. Of course, Kellogg went beyond the Church’s general position both of his time and today due to his lifelong commitment to the Society for Betterment of Race and eugenics program. Kellogg’s view of race contradicts the general and overall positive SDA position (especially after he was disfellowshipped in 1907). Yet the fact that he was never openly rebuked by Ellen G. White or any other leader of the SDA movement for his ambiguous views on race gives some evidence that the official position sanctioned by Ellen G. White might have been much closer to some of Kellogg’s views, and thus more controversial than we have thought before.

Ethical implications for contemporary Adventism

Michael James, in his article “Race,” expresses the scholarly consensus amongst contemporary philosophers of race:

*The ambiguities and confusion associated with determining the boundaries of racial categories have over time provoked a widespread scholarly consensus that discrete or essentialist races are socially constructed, not biologically real.*³²

It seems that contemporary Adventism, too, has transcended racial categories based on biological features (essentialism), although of course there still may be a few among us who determine the value or position of individuals on the basis of their biological genes or mere appearances. Early Adventist pioneers seemed to have shared in Kellogg’s views on race. In their context, these views are moderate or even progressive because they do not claim that God created some humans to be “essentially” inferior to others, but that any such inferiorities are the result of what humans have done to one another. This suggests the need to address and undo past wrongs.

Furthermore, due to the historical-social constructions of the past decades or centuries of our collective history, partially influenced by the

ambiguity and uncertainty of Kellogg’s position and some more notable pioneers of the Adventist faith, the Church continues to contribute to racial segregation rooted in certain institutional arrangements. This leads to *unconscious feeling of the necessity for exclusion*. Unintentionally, by certain attitudes and gestures we communicate to specific groups of people that they do not belong to “us.” This is mainly due to institutional inertia or the lack of genuine apostolic love and faith based on the power of the Word of God. The ideal of a brotherhood/sisterhood of men and women is not based on an ideology foreign to Scripture, but is the straightforward result of a Christ-centered experience of love and understanding of his acceptance of every human being. Cultural or ideological limitations cannot become the determining factor in this struggle for contemporary authentic expression of the Church’s perennial faith. ■

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1. I want to thank Mr. Kheenan Walkins, my research assistant and a senior student of theology at the University of the Southern Caribbean, for providing some important materials and valuable comments in this research paper. Thank also goes to Dr. Zane Yi, assistant professor at Loma Linda School of Religion, for his reading, editing, and much appreciated comments.
2. See Schwartz, Richard W., *John Harvey Kellogg: Pioneering Health Reformer* (Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald, 2006).
3. Kellogg, John Harvey, *The Plain Facts for Old and Young* (Burlington, IA: I.F. Segner, 1882).
4. *Plain Facts* has many useful ideas about the balanced development of human being. Nevertheless, some extreme

ideas found its place in early Adventism and even writings of Ellen G. White.

5. Kellogg, John Harvey, *The Living Temple* (Battle Creek, MI: Good Health Publishing Company, 1903).

6. "Certain nationalities and families are marked by the earlier occurrence of puberty than in others. In Jews, the change is commonly a year or two in advance of other nationalities in this country. It also occurs somewhat sooner in negroes and creoles than in white persons, the African race seeming to retain something of the precocity occasioned by the tropical influence of its native clime" (*Plain Facts* 39).

7. Kellogg, *Plain Facts*, 84.

8. Nazis believed that type O blood represented the ideal or pure blood.

9. The context of this quote points to abstinence from sex during pregnancy: "The untutored barbarian, even some of the lowest of those who wear the human form, together with nearly all of the various classes of lower animals, abstain from sexual indulgence during pregnancy." See Kellogg, *Plain Facts*, 129–130.

10. *Ibid.*

11. On June 5, 1873, Sir Francis Galton, distinguished English explorer and cousin of Charles Darwin, wrote in a letter to *The Times*: "My proposal is to make the encouragement of Chinese settlements of Africa a part of our national policy, in the belief that the Chinese immigrants would not only maintain their position, but that they would multiply and their descendants supplant *the inferior Negro race.*" See Galton, Francis, "Letter," *The Times*, (1873).

12. "Notes," *Official Proceedings: Proceedings of the First National Conference on Race Betterment* vol. 1 (Battle Creek, MI: Race Betterment Foundation, 1914), 431–450, last accessed February 18, 2014, http://www.archive.org/stream/proceedingsoffir14nati/proceedingsoffir14nati_djvu.txt.

13. Black, Edwin, "Eugenics and the Nazis – the California connection," *San Francisco Chronicle*, Sunday, November 9, 2003, last accessed February 18, 2014, <http://www.indiavine.org/audarya/ayurveda-health-wellbeing/968389-eugenics-nazis-california-connection.html>.

14. "Notes," 431–450.

15. See White, Ellen G., *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9 (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate Inc., 1909), 204: "I am burdened, heavily burdened, for the work among the colored people. The gospel is to be presented to the downtrodden negro race. But great caution will have to be shown in the efforts put forth for the uplifting of this people.

Among the white people in many places there exists a strong prejudice against the negro race. We may desire to ignore this prejudice, but we cannot do it. If we were to act as if this prejudice did not exist we could not get the light before the white people. We must meet the situation as it is and deal with it wisely and intelligently."

16. See *Ibid.*, 204.3: "One of the difficulties attending the work is that many of the white people living where the colored people are numerous are not willing that special efforts should be put forth to uplift them. When they see schools established for them, when they see them being taught to be self-supporting, to follow trades, to provide themselves with comfortable homes instead of continuing to live in hovels, they see the possibility that selfish plans will be interfered with—that they will no longer be able to hire the negro for a mere pittance; and their enmity is aroused. They feel that they are injured and abused. Some act as if slavery had never been abolished. This spirit is growing stronger as the Spirit of God is being withdrawn from the world, and in many places it is impossible now to do that work which could have been done for the colored people in past years."

17. See White, Ellen G. *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 4 (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate Inc.), 8.1: "How little of the spirit of Christ has been manifested in the treatment given to the colored race in this so-called Christian country! The negro's color, the features that tell of his African descent, are a badge of humiliation to the whole race, *because of the prejudice of the white people against them. They are often treated as if it were a disgrace to sit by their side, or even to worship in the same congregation.* There is a large class with white blood in their veins, and bearing in their faces only the slightest traces of African descent, whose lives are embittered by the prejudice against them, being stigmatized as unworthy to associate with the whites, even in the worship of God." (italics mine)

18. See White, Ellen G., *A Place Called Oakwood: Inspired Council*, ed. Benjamin Baker (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2007), 36.5: "There are among the negro race those who have superior natural intelligence, and who, if converted to Christ, could do a good work for their own people."

19. See White, Ellen G., *The Southern Work* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1966), 60.3: "The whole system of slavery was originated by Satan, who delights in tyrannizing over human beings.

[Ellen White]

described

the Negro

race as

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**Was Ellen
White under
the prejudice
of the US
nineteenth-
century
“scientific
racism” like
Kellogg?**

Though he has been successful in degrading and corrupting the black race, many are possessed of decided ability, and if they were blessed with opportunities, they would show more intelligence than do many of their more favored brethren among the white people.”

20. “While at St. Louis a year ago, as I knelt in prayer, these words were presented to me as if written with a pen of fire: ‘All ye are brethren.’ The spirit of God rested upon me in a wonderful manner, and matters were opened to me in regard to the church at St. Louis and in other places. The spirit and words of some in regard to members of the church were an offense to God. They were closing the door of their hearts to Jesus. *Among those in St. Louis who believe the truth there are colored people who are true and faithful, precious in the sight of the God of heaven, and they should have just as much respect as any of God’s children.* Those who have spoken harshly to them or have despised them have despised the purchase of the blood of Christ, and they need the transforming grace of Christ in their own hearts, that they may have the pitying tenderness of Jesus toward those who love God with all the fervor of which they themselves are capable. The color of the skin does not determine character in the heavenly courts.” This was presented by Ellen White on March 21, 1891 to thirty church leaders in connection to the General Conference. She was outspoken and vocal about racial issues and encouraged the church leaders to treat colored people like children of God.

21. *Review and Herald*, Dec 17, 1895, paragraph 5 says: “Walls of separation have been built up between the whites and the blacks. These walls of prejudice will tumble down of themselves as did the walls of Jericho, when Christians obey the word of God, which enjoins on them supreme love to their maker and impartial love to their neighbors. For Christ’s sake, let us do something now. Let every church whose members claim to believe the truth for this time, look at this neglected, downtrodden race, that, as a result of slavery, have been deprived of the privilege of thinking and acting for themselves. They have been kept at work in the cotton fields, have been driven before the lash like brute beasts, and their children have received no enviable heritage. Many of the slaves had noble minds; but the fact that their skin was dark, was sufficient reason for the whites to treat them as though they were beasts. When freedom was proclaimed to the captives, a favorable time was given in which to establish schools, and to teach the people to take care of themselves. Much of this kind of work was done by

various denominations, and God honored their work.”

22. White, Ellen G., *Spiritual Gifts* vol. 3 (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate Inc., 1864), 64.

23. White, Ellen G., *Spirit of Prophecy* vol. 1 (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate Inc., 1870), 78.

24. Denis Fortin explains: “This statement, ‘Amalgamation of man and beast,’ occurs only twice in Ellen White’s writings; it was not carried over into *Patriarchs and Prophets*” (1890):

a. Ellen White made this rather cryptic reference only twice in her writings, in 1864 and in 1870, in reference to the Flood, in materials first published in *Spiritual Gifts* vol. 3 and *Spirit of Prophecy* vol. 1.

1. It is interesting—and possibly significant—that she did not perpetuate this curious expression in her later expansion (and most mature writings) on the flood narrative in *Patriarchs and Prophets* (1890).

b. Dr. Robert Brown, a distinguished SDA scientist (who has prepared a compilation of “Statements on Science” under a White Estate commission), was asked to explain these strange expressions in the light of American dictionary usage in the last third of the nineteenth century.

1. He concluded that there is insufficient textual elaboration in her writing to enable us today to determine precisely her meaning then; her meaning and intent are unclear due to the paucity of material.

c. A debate between Dr. Harold Clark, founder of the Pacific Union College biology department, and Dr. Frank Lewis Marsh, longtime biology teacher at Union College and later a member of the Geo-Science Research Institute team, took place on Sept. 8, 1947 near San Francisco, CA. Clark took the position that Ellen White meant “amalgamation between man and animals” with offspring being born as a product of such union. Marsh held, contrarily, that White meant “amalgamation of man with man, and of beast with beast.” (For a report of the debate, see Shigley, Gordon, “Amalgamation of Man and Beast: What Did Ellen White Mean?” *Spectrum* [June 1982], 10–19.)

d. Francis D. Nichol treats the subject in *Ellen G. White and Her Critics*, Chapter 20; the White Estate Document File DF 316 contains helpful resource materials. See also Ellen White’s *Messenger of the Lord*, pages 491–492; Sourcebook, F-1.e. Some have foolishly, most inaccurately, interpreted the “amalgamation” statements to teach that the black race of humans sprang from apes! There is no hint of such an idea in any of her writings, ever!

See also Coon, Roger W., "Ellen G. White and Science: The 'Problem' Statements," Andrews University, last revised May 29, 1996, www.andrews.edu/~fortind/EGWProblemStatements.htm.

25. Smith, Uriah, *The Visions of Mrs. E. G. White, A Manifestation of Spiritual Gifts According to the Scripture* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press, 1868), 103–104. Full text: "Since the flood there has been amalgamation of man and beast, as may be seen in the almost endless varieties of species of animals, and in certain races of men.' This view was given for the purpose of illustrating the deep corruption and crime into which the race fell, even within a few years after the flood that signal manifestation of God's wrath against human wickedness. There was amalgamation; and the effect is still visible in certain races of men. 'Mark, those excepting the animals upon whom the effects of this work are visible, are called by the vision, 'men.' Now we have ever supposed that anybody that was called a man was considered a human being. The vision speaks of all these classes as races of men; yet in the face of this plain declaration, they foolishly assert that the visions teach that some men are not human beings! But does any one deny the general statement contained in the extract given above? They do not. If they did, they could easily be silenced by a reference to such cases as the wild Bushmen of Africa, some tribes of the Hottentots, and perhaps the Digger Indians of our own country, etc. Moreover, naturalists affirm that the line of demarcation between the human and animal races is lost in confusion. It is impossible, as they affirm, to tell just where the human ends and the animal begins. Can we suppose that this was so ordained of God in the beginning? Rather has not sin marred the boundaries of these two kingdoms?"

26. White, Ellen G., *Early Writings* (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate Inc., 1882), 276.

27. "Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath showed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse." (Romans 1:19–20)

28. Santrac, Aleksandar S., 2009. "Sensus Divinitatis and Mission of the Church" (2009), accessed February 18, 2014: http://dialogue.adventist.org/articles/21_2_santrac_ep.htm.

29. "'The Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, Whom the Father will send in My name, He shall teach you all things,

and bring all things to your remembrance.' You are the children of God. He has adopted you, and He desires you to form characters here that will give you entrance into the heavenly family. Remembering this, you will be able to bear the trials which you meet here. In heaven there will be no color line; for all will be as white as Christ himself. Let us thank God that we can be members of the royal family."

This statement was made by Ellen White to a church in the colored division in Vicksbery. She gave the address to encourage members because of the racial separation in the Church. There are multiple ways to interpret that quote in isolation. Literally, as a matter of skin color. One could say that she means that the skin of every man would be washed white to be like Christ's. Poetically, she could be contrasting the darkness of racism to the character of Christ.

30. See White, Ellen G., *Testimonies for the Church* vol. 9 (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate Inc., 1885):

"Opportunities are continually presenting themselves in the Southern States, and many wise, Christian colored men will be called to the work. But for several reasons white men must be chosen as leaders. We are all members of one body and are complete only in Christ Jesus, who will uplift His people from the low level to which sin has degraded them and will place them where they shall be acknowledged in the heavenly courts as laborers together with God."

Ellen White clearly states that white men must lead the colored people. The historical context of that statement, however, sheds some light on the issue. The title of the article is "A call for coloured Laborers." She starts by saying that colored missionaries need to be trained and sent to the south. This statement was originally published in the *Gospel Herald* on April 1, 1905. She was addressing the need for black missionaries in the south to reach the black community. In the same article she states: "Schoolhouses and meeting-houses should be built in different places, and teachers employed. In the small schools established, let colored teachers work for the colored people, under the supervision of well qualified men, who have the spirit of mercy and love. The white and the black teachers should unite in counsel. Then the white teachers are to work for the white people, and the colored teachers for the colored people."

31. See footnote 30.

32. James, Michael, "Race," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Winter 2012 Edition), accessed February 18, 2014, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2012/entries/race/>.

**Due to the
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Adventism and American White Supremacy

BY MATTHEW BURDETTE

The argument of this essay is that Seventh-day Adventist theology is inherently white supremacist. This argument rests on two basic observations: that white supremacy is inherent in the American political project, and that Adventism is a defense of that project.¹

Theology is never politically neutral. Often, it unwittingly buys into certain political commitments and inherits their problems. I hope to demonstrate that Seventh-day Adventist theology exemplifies this problem.

I will go through this in three steps. I propose how to think about what makes a community political. Then I examine the American and Adventist political narratives, and consider how race operates in each. Finally, I outline what it would mean for Adventists to disentangle their theology from Americanism.

What makes a community “political”

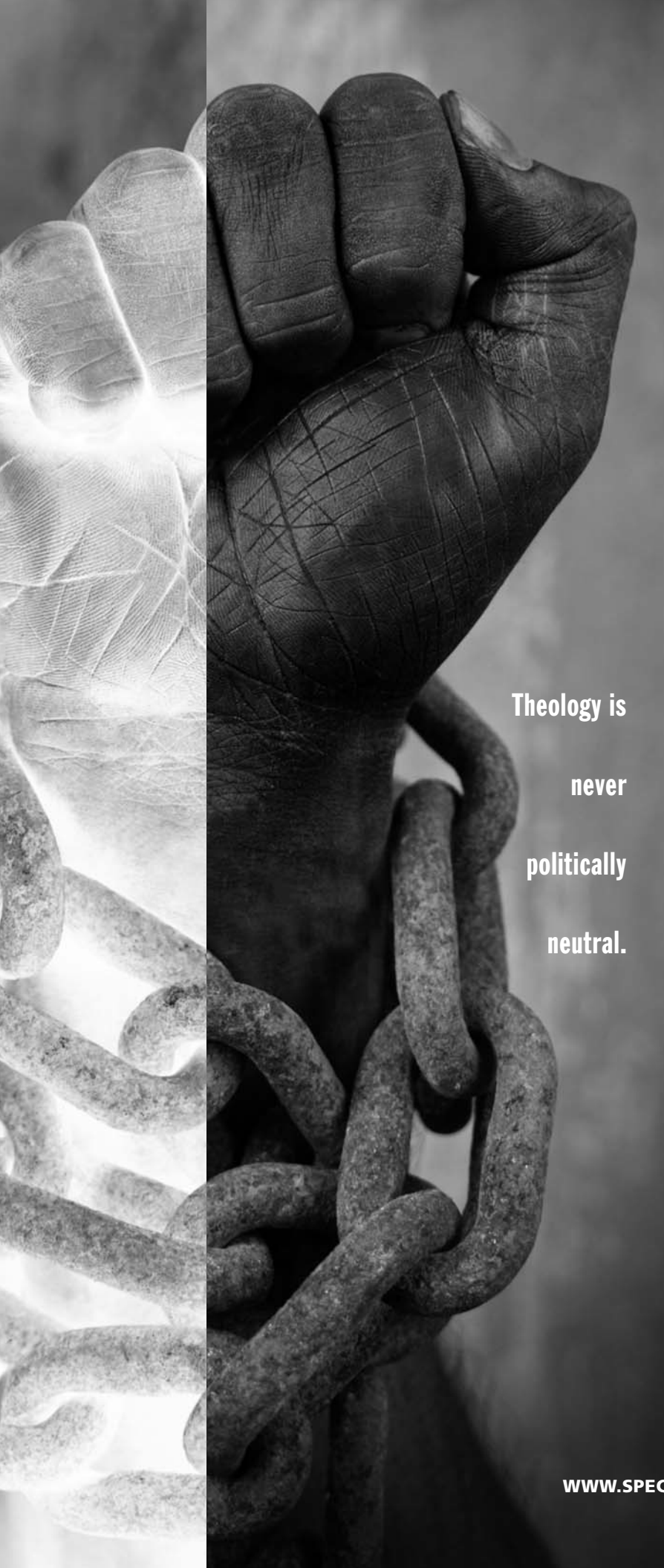
I’ll begin with a few simple assertions and then unpack them. The central and most important: the political emerges from collective remembrance and anticipation. To remember and anticipate is to construct a narrative; therefore every politics has a narrative, which helps determine a community’s life and moral judgments. Communities agree politically to the degree that their narratives converge, and differ to the degree that their narratives diverge. Thus storytelling is essential for the politics.²

The church is political, for it remembers Christ’s death and resurrection, and anticipates

his coming. It is an unfortunate development in public and ecclesial life that the political is assumed to be limited to the workings of government. This actually signals the victory of a particular political system, which says that the revolution is behind us, and that all that is left to do is debate *policy*. But to conclude that politics is limited to the state, one must accept the state’s particular narrative about the past, and particular hopes, fears, and expectations for the future. But surely the church’s memory and anticipation is not the same as the state’s, and it is this stuff, which lurks quietly in the background, that is the substance of politics.

The meaningfulness of any moment is bound up with its relationship to the past and the future; therefore meaning is always embedded in narrative. And because communities need meaning to cohere,³ collective life requires a collective narrative. This narrative shapes the identity, and therefore the politics, of a community, because politics is concerned with realizing hopes and averting fears. For example, the narrative told by Marx is that all of the past has been characterized by the class conflict between oppressors and the oppressed, and the future that is anticipated is a classless society; and it is this narrative that transforms workers into the *proletariat*, and motivates revolutionary action.

This means that a chronology of events is not yet a history. Things happen in time; but the *interpretation* of these happenings—which involves choices to remember and to forget—is what history is. So all history is mythology, and every



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mythology is a politics. And these narratives are asymmetrically future-oriented. We interpret the past and present in light of the hoped-for future, and this is always for particular people.

However, because individuals are always members of multiple communities, they are also members of various political bodies. This is why those communities that are self-consciously political always demand allegiance in some way, whether by pledging to a flag, taking up arms, forming a “Super PAC,” or choosing to die rather than burn incense before images of Caesar.

So there is no such thing as a non-political community. When a church thinks that it is not political, it leaves its members to support the political aims of other entities, whether corporations, or military or prison industrial complexes, or for-profit healthcare. One of the church’s political questions for itself is whether it has adopted the political aims of another community, like the state. The way to evaluate this is to examine the divergence of the church’s narrative with the state’s. If there is a great degree of convergence, then the church is providing religious legitimacy to the state. And in the American context, the church giving the state legitimacy is also giving legitimacy to its white supremacy. This is because race and racism are essential in America’s narrative.

Race and the American political project

In American history, the notion of whiteness has always been central to collective identity. As an Enlightenment project, the collective identity of the American people—those who would remember and anticipate together—was a specifically white identity since racial slavery.⁴ American white supremacy is *not* defined by an attitude toward non-white people, but by an attitude about whiteness, seeing *it* as normative, because white people are the central subjects of history.

White identity was forged in America. This is abundantly clear in the way that different ethnic groups had to “become white” in order to become fully a part of American society,⁵ and in the way that white Americans often work so hard to

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recover an ethnic identity.⁶ Whiteness is very real in America, which is why it is not enough to simply say that race is socially constructed. This is what is attempted by “color-blindness,” which tries to erase the categories without altering the narrative of history. Color-blindness is white society’s offer to black people to become white, just as the Irish, and Italians, and Jews had been welcomed into the white fold. The underside of this reasoning is clear: A white person saying to a black person, “I am not racist; I don’t even notice you’re black,” is in fact saying, “I see you as equal because I see you as white. But were I to notice that you are in fact black, then we’d have a problem.” And those who try to appeal to biology to prove that race is not real are only ontologizing this color-blindness. This normativity of whiteness is racism. The only way to deal with it is to rethink the interpretation of history that enabled it in the first place. And I suggest that America’s narrative has enabled and perpetuated its white supremacy.

Summarizing the American political narrative is obviously too big a task for a single essay, so what I will do here is give the broad outline of a narrative that lies at the heart of the American experiment.

America is an Enlightenment—and therefore Protestant—project. At its roots lies a “revolt against the authority of the church and the search for models of unrestrained criticism. . .

a recovery of classical antiquity, and especially. . . a new appreciation and appropriation of the artistic and cultural heritage of ancient Greece.”⁷ Not only is this a source of modern white supremacy, which has whiteness as a measure of what Cornel West calls the “normative gaze,”⁸ but it also has a particular liberal notion of political liberty as one of its central elements. American colonists saw the “New World” as a place to escape political persecution. If there is a “fall” in the American narrative, it is a mythic past in which once naturally-free peoples were overtaken by political tyrants—acts which were usually religiously-motivated. The salvation from this was the liberal revolutions in Europe. More particularly, the American state was

founded, which prized freedom from such tyranny. This freedom is achieved in at least three ways: rejecting a monarchy, rejecting the authority of the church, and protecting private property (including slaves). Having secured its freedom, America’s revolution is in its past. The future America anticipates is just this freedom; it seeks to preserve its freedom against the threat of tyrannical political or religious authority.

But remember that Americans were slave owners. This was not in contradiction to this political hope, but precisely because of it. As Domenico Losurdo demonstrates, slavery was at its height during the formation of the liberal state.⁹ American freedom has always been freedom for white people, and the American political hope has always been the preservation of this group’s freedom, which has always included the un-freedom of those outside the group, as evidenced by chattel slavery, and now domestic wage labor, the prison system, and the exploitation of cheap foreign labor. In America’s history, the villains are those who threaten the basis for arrangement: the communists, who challenge private property, or now Islamists, who reject the separation of religion from public life, and so threaten the secular state which guarantees American freedom. Consequently, America has never hesitated to vilify and punish these groups and others like them, who dare to envision a different end to history than that projected by the American revolutionary story.

Adventism and Americanism

What about Adventism? It would be a mistake to identify the founding story of Adventism with the events in 1844. What actually matters more than how Adventism itself came into existence is how Adventists understand the Christian church’s history leading up to its birth. In the Adventist narrative, the church began well, worshipping God as Scripture intended, and suffering for it. The church’s “fall,” in this narrative, is what happened with Constantine, for here the church joined hands with temporal power, symbolized by blending

human laws with the law of God in the change of worship from the Sabbath to Sunday. The beginnings of the church's salvation from its fall were the few voices of dissent against this power in the medieval church, and then finally the Protestant Reformation. But the reformers themselves did not finish the job they started, and it is this job that Adventists understand themselves to have inherited. Adventists understand themselves as a part of the radical reformation, or even the final agents of the reformation. Central to their reforming work is to protect the separation of church from state, restoring what was lost after Christianity was transformed into the imperial religion by Constantine.¹⁰ Note here that this separation is because the church thinks of itself as non-political. Moreover, the liberal secular state—especially the United States—plays a key role in the very salvation of the church.

Nor can we miss Adventism's apocalyptic expectation. The *catastrophe* that Adventists anticipate is the reversal of what *America* has accomplished; the coming Beast is the revived Constantinian church, upheld by the power of the United States, which is expected to betray itself by supporting the papal church, the legal enforcement of Sunday worship, and the confiscation of private property. In other words, the return of monarchy, ecclesial authority over temporal power, and the violation of private property—the undoing of the *American* project!¹¹

What one must notice is that this narrative about the future functions to defend the merits of the American political project and its current arrangement by averting a catastrophe (not unlike the possible catastrophe that the American state seeks to protect itself against) based on its own narrative. The American understanding of freedom is built into Adventist theology, for the God of the Great Controversy is one who so values freedom that he would rather respect that freedom, even to enslave others, than violate that freedom in order to protect the well-being of those whom some intended to enslave. How so? The Adventist cosmic conflict is quite

literally a narrative in which God proves that he is good precisely by respecting freedom and calling for his followers to do the same, just as the American political arrangement calls for.

It is no accident, therefore, that Adventists have a theology that still usually ignores the existence of Native Americans, that largely Adventists did not participate in the Civil Rights Movement, or that Adventists are still largely segregated, even institutionally. Moreover, it is difficult not to notice that the sort of theological purity that Adventism strives for by disentangling itself from the operations of government is wrapped up in notions of racial purity, for the purity of the American project has always revolved around the purity of the white race. White racial purity was the quest that emerged from the Enlightenment's "normative gaze," and Adventism's inheritance of America's Enlightenment goals retains that racial logic.

And perhaps most troubling is the role of Ellen White in Adventism—not simply in general, but because of White's particular understanding of the history of the Christian church, as well as her particular apocalyptic expectations. By inheriting (and effectively canonizing) *her* understanding of the meaning of history, which for the most part converges with key elements of the American narrative, Adventists have frozen into their theology Ellen White's nineteenth-century American racial reasoning. To the degree that race—and class—are viewed as socially essential parts of American society, this remains the case with Adventism. The only way forward is to rework the Adventist narrative by reinterpreting the past and rethinking hope for the future.

Conclusion

For Adventism to shift its racist politics, it must change its understanding of history. The only way forward is a new narrative: a new past and a new future. This has implications for our theology. I do not believe it is possible for Adventist theology to remain unchanged or change only a little if it is to overcome its white supremacy.

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The racism is built into the only narrative within which current Adventist theology is meaningful.

I suggest that Adventists must learn to transform their theology of *cosmic* conflict into *class* conflict, seeing the revolution not as an event of the past, but as one that lies ahead. This means embracing a future that overcomes the determinations of the past. More explicitly: Adventism must abandon notions that the future has already been decided and made known.

Further, Adventists must rethink their understanding of the church's past and overcome Ellen White's particular reading of that past. This will involve rethinking her role and authority in the tradition. The church must learn to ask what Ellen White now means in light of the moment we now live in, and in light of the future we now anticipate. The church will be enslaved to Ellen White so long as the current moment and anticipated future is interpreted by her. She must be de-canonized, and placed alongside other figures in the tradition, to be remembered or forgotten as the church needs at each moment in history.

Finally, Adventists must come to think of themselves as a political entity that is automatically in tension with the state, and that its job, as a community that believes in the Gospel, is to disturb the political status quo, and to challenge any entity which claims itself as the savior of history. Only in this way can Adventists come to see their political complicity in Americanism, with its racism, classism, militarism, imperialism, and ongoing oppression of the poor—especially those of color. And only then can Adventists actually offer the critique of Americanism that they have for so long believed themselves to be offering. ■

Matthew Burdette is from Princeton, NJ. He is a doctoral student in systematic theology at the University of Aberdeen, writing a dissertation on revolution in dialogue with the theologies of James H. Cone and Robert W. Jenson. He and some friends write about theology, race, class, and politics on the blog "Interlocutors: A Theological Dialogue."



References

1. Though these observations are finally basic, the actual work to coming to these is not simple. In one respect, this short essay is probably best thought of as a short outline for a book that would not rush through all the details.
2. The main insights that make up the argument of this section are drawn primarily from Robert Jenson. See especially "Eschatological Politics and Political Eschatology," *Dialog* 8, no. 4 (Autumn 1969): 272–278; *Story and Promise: A Brief Theology of the Gospel About Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973), 62–102, 177–198; *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2, 73–94; "Eschatology," in *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, ed. Peter Scott and William T. Cavanaugh (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 407–420.
3. Only the nihilism of postmodernity would deny that this is self-evident. After all, one wouldn't call a group of people coerced into association with one another a "community."
4. See Allen, Theodore, *The Invention of the White Race* (London: Verso Books, 2012); West, Cornel, *Race Matters*, 1st ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001).
5. Ignatiev, Noel, *How the Irish Became White* (New York: Routledge, 2009); Roediger, David R., *Working Toward Whiteness: How America's Immigrants Became White: The Strange Journey from Ellis Island to the Suburbs* (New York: Basic Books, 2005).
6. Waters, Mary C., *Ethnic Options: Choosing Identities in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).
7. West, Cornel, *Prophesy Deliverance!: An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 53.
8. *Ibid.*, 54ff.
9. Losurdo, Domenico, *Liberalism: A Counter-History* (London: Verso Books, 2011).
10. Recent evidence for this is an article written by the church's president, Ted N. C. Wilson, "Keeping Church at Arm's Length From State," *Huffington Post*, November 6, 2013, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/ted-nc-wilson/keeping-church-at-arms-le_b_4226809.html.
11. This is a basic summary of what Ellen White describes in *The Great Controversy*.

Note: This essay prompted a vigorous discussion at the SAP session and when it was posted on spectrummagazine.org. Read the online discussion at: <http://spectrummagazine.org/blog/2013/12/03/what-white-supremacy-part-1-2>

Revisiting Adventist

HISTORY



PAINTING BY LISIE S. ORJUELA

clouds parting; oil on canvas, 44" x 50", 2010

The 1960s Crisis at the Seminary | BY HEROLD WEISS

1968 has come to be recognized as a significant moment in history. The war in Vietnam had become a quagmire and the anti-war demonstrations in many countries were in full swing. Student unrest in both Europe and the United States often occupied center stage in the evening news, overcrowding the pictures of the chemically-induced deforestation of Vietnam or the cold-blooded killing of civilians without ascertainable reasons. American young men were burning their draft cards in public places, and some were leaving for Canada. Of course, the events of 1968 were not spontaneous outbursts. They were the culmination of a long series of circumstances, and they cannot be properly understood apart from them. The same is true of the crisis that gripped the SDA Theological Seminary at that time. It also must be understood within its historical context.

Tensions between members of the faculty of the Seminary and officers of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists were frequent when the Seminary was housed in a building in the same block as the General Conference offices and the facilities of the Review and Herald Publishing Association in Takoma Park, Maryland. At that time Adventists were somewhat uncertain of the benefits of advanced academic studies. Undergraduate literature professors at Adventist colleges could find themselves in jeopardy before an administrator eager to avoid raising the ire of parents and members of the Board of Trustees because they had assigned the reading of a novel to their students. At the Seminary, Dr. Winton Beavon had to be cautious about his forays into philosophy and logic as oratorical tools. He was somewhat protected because of the very popular oratorical contests he conducted in Adventist colleges as an arm of the Temper-

ance Department of the General Conference. No Adventist college taught classes in logic or philosophy at that time.

Dr. Roland Loasby, the professor of New Testament at the Seminary, was a very engaging person, always jovial and eager to pull a student's leg. His classes on the Greek, Hebrew and English versions of the biblical texts were very popular with some students. To others, however, they were demonstrations of his lack of regard for the traditional Adventist interpretations and the writings of Ellen G. White. On account of their complaints to officers of the General Conference, Dr. Loasby often had to spend hours defending his teaching before people who had no competence in biblical languages.

The Old Testament professors avoided dealing with the theology of the Old Testament as if it were an electric third rail. Dr. Siegfried Horn taught history and archeology of the ancient New East. Alger Johns, who was doing doctoral studies at Johns Hopkins at the time, taught exegesis of some of the prophetic books and Daniel. Dr. William Murdoch, who had a doctoral degree in Church History from the University of Birmingham in England, taught an occasional course in Hebrew exegesis of a prophet, but was mainly the Professor of Theology.

The theological issues debated in the hallways and during lunch at the Review and Herald cafeteria centered on the kind of human nature assumed by the Son at his incarnation. Did he assume the human nature of Adam as he had been created, or the human nature of Adam after his expulsion from Eden? Or did he assume the human nature of his contemporaries, which by then was marred by the hereditarily-increased propensity to evil acquired after four-thousand years of human sinning? The significance of these debates and what made them extremely relevant, was the certainty that the 144,000 people who were to be translat-

ed to heaven without tasting death would have achieved the nature of Christ. There were also heated debates about how to understand this number. Was the reference to 144,000 to be taken literally or to be understood symbolically?

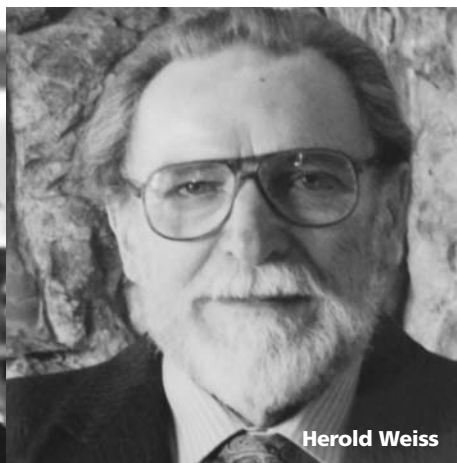
The decision as to who would be among the 144,000, of course, was being made right then at the Investigative Judgment. Everyone understood that it was a contemporary event taking place in heaven at the time, and its purpose was to determine who was going to be among the 144,000

the redeemed to their heavenly home. God's action on behalf of humanity was just. God is a God of love, not a God of wrath.

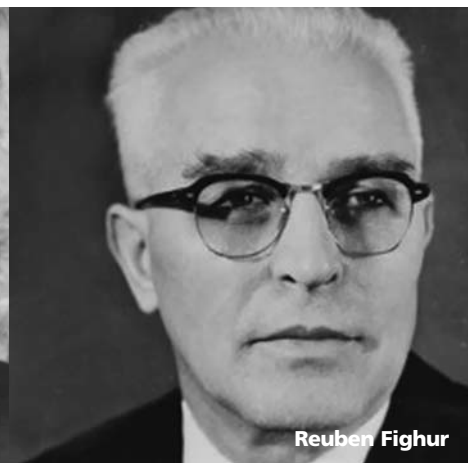
Heppenstall was a man who thought that the constant preaching of a judgment was not "good news." He had been deeply touched by the love of God; therefore, he chose to name what was going on in heaven "the Vindicating Judgment." To many students this was a heretical departure from traditional Adventism, and some officers of the General Conference agreed with them. (No



Siegfried Horn



Herold Weiss



Reuben Fighur

saved. The Sabbath sermons preached everywhere took care that no one forgot this for a moment.

This understanding of the Investigative Judgment, however, was challenged by Dr. Edward Heppenstall, a wonderful human being and a very effective theologian, even though his doctoral degree was in education. He was very much admired by some students and somewhat despised by others. (On account of this, he was often also called to explain himself at the General Conference offices next door.) Heppenstall's understanding of the Gospel did not equate it with a call to sinlessness in order to pass an examination at the Investigative Judgment. He gathered quotations from Mrs. White to the effect that the issue at the heavenly assize was not primarily to determine who would be among the 144,000. At issue was God's justice. Did God have the right to save anyone at all? God's character needed to be vindicated. At the heavenly sanctuary Jesus was demonstrating God's amazing love for humanity, and God's right to take

one at the time would have predicted that in 2013 the Sabbath School Lesson Quarterly would teach Heppenstall's understanding of the Investigating Judgment.)

Facing these recurrent confrontations, Elder Reuben Fighur, the president of the General Conference, "put on his construction-site hat and let the stones fall," as one of the faculty members put it. He kept a cool head and, even though quite conservative, supported moves to lead the denomination to a more honorable place in the Protestant landscape. At that time Adventists were considered a sect that specialized in stealing the sheep of other Christian folds. At the Seminary, E.D. Dick, the president, was a retired administrator who did not consider himself a theologian and basically stood by his faculty. His job was to be the middle man between the General Conference and the Seminary. Faculty members who had to report to a General Conference officer would occasionally also have to talk with Elder Dick, but only to keep him informed of

**No Adventist
college taught
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that time.**

what was going on. The Seminary's Dean, Dr. Charles Weniger, was in charge of the day-to-day affairs of the institution. He was an effective spokesperson for the Seminary with a wide circle of influence in Washington, and enjoyed considerable social connections. As a Dean he was an able administrator and a consummate diplomat.

The constant attacks on some members of the faculty, however, did take a toll on the psychological health of some. When it was decided to create Andrews University by incorporating the SDA Theological Seminary and Emmanuel Missionary College into one institution, Beavon

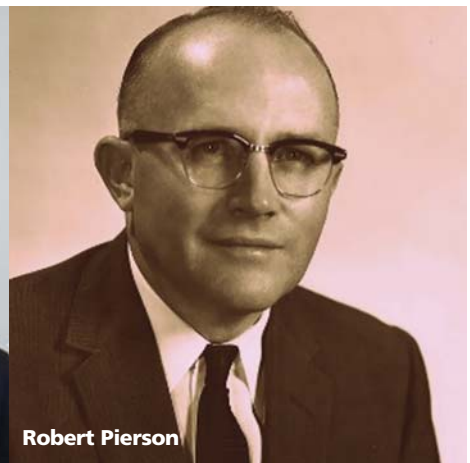
another very significant change took place. This one had to do with the student body. At Takoma Park the student body had consisted almost entirely of ordained pastors who had been working in different capacities, and had demonstrated scholarly interests and abilities. Many were missionaries who had returned from a five or seven-year assignment in a foreign land. Most of the students were involved in an MA program, with or without a thesis, which could be completed in four quarters, twelve months. Of the roughly one-hundred-thirty students in the Seminary, only twenty or so were working toward a



Karl Barth



Sakae Kubo



Robert Pierson

and Loasby chose, no doubt on account of many reasons, not to move to Berrien Springs, Michigan. Heppenstall did make the move, after much soul searching. No longer working a stone's throw away from the General Conference offices, he and others who made the move felt a bit liberated. They were now occupying a larger, better-designed building with room to grow. The faculty also received some new blood. Prominent in the faculty was Earle Hilgert. He had begun teaching at the Seminary in Takoma Park in the early 1950s, but had left in 1956 to work toward a PhD in New Testament Studies at the University of Basel in Switzerland, where Karl Barth, the most prominent neoorthodox theologian, taught. In 1959 Hilgert was back, working along with Loasby in the New Testament Department, where he soon began offering advanced seminars in New Testament Theology. When the Seminary was moved to Michigan in 1960, Loasby stayed in Maryland, and Hilgert became one of the most respected teachers at the Seminary. Soon Sakae Kubo with a doctorate from the University of Chicago joined him; and in 1965 I also became a member of the New Testament Department.

Not many years after the move to Berrien Springs,

Bachelor of Divinity degree. Among the one-hundred-ten MA students, only a few had graduated with a BA the previous year. SDA pastors were expected to have only a BA degree in religion from an Adventist college.

In the early 1960s, when the denomination was eager to shed its "sect" label and was gaining recognition as a legitimate Protestant body of believers, it was felt necessary to upgrade the educational requirements of its ministers. Thus, it was decided that the Bachelor of Divinity (BD) degree would become the requirement for ministry. Conferences would hire BA graduates and sponsor their study at the Seminary for two years (eight quarters). Then the students would work at the sponsoring Conference for nine months, as a kind of internship, and return to the Seminary for a final quarter the following summer. Thus they would fulfill the nine quarters required for the degree.

The decision to upgrade the educational level of ministers made it necessary for the Seminary to redesign the BD curriculum as a course of study for future pastors. Until then the degree had been designed as a course of study for professors of religion at Adventist colleges. Students fulfilled the requirements with a concentration in a specific area and

were required to write a dissertation. In other words, the degree had been conceived as an academic degree. Now it had to be redesigned as a professional degree, as it was in every other seminary in the country. The new curriculum would give the first-year students a foundation so that in their second year, they would be ready to take more advanced courses. Each department of the Seminary, therefore, designed its own two-tier course of studies.

The students who entered the Seminary in 1965 were the first to matriculate in the new BD curriculum. They were also the largest class ever to register because the degree had become the requirement for denominational ministry. In deference to accuracy, it must be acknowledged that many Conference presidents ignored the General Conference policy and continued to hire students and put them to work in churches straight out of college, and this has been the case even to this day.

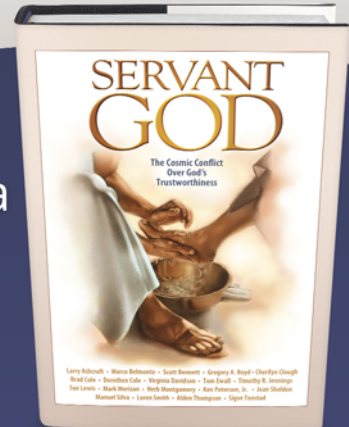
If Adventist ministers were to take their place among the respected ministers of other denominations, it was thought, they should be conversant with the different methods used for Bible study. They should also be conversant with the problems that biblical students face when the text is read with a commitment to understand its author, rather than as a mine from which to extract texts that support one's preconceived ideas. It should be legitimate, therefore, for a student to ask, Does the Bible teach what some say it teaches? Doing this kind of study, one ends up building a context within which it is possible to make sense of what a particular author wrote in a particular place. Anyone wishing to have an intelligent dialogue about the Bible with someone who has studied it seriously must be able to understand where a dialogue partner is coming from, and how they arrive at the views being offered. This means that a minister who is going to represent the Adventist church before people of other denominations or other faiths must know how others explain the composition of the Pentateuch, or the relations among the Synoptic Gospels. In order to equip students with the ability to carry on meaningful dialogues with non-Adventists, the new curriculum introduced courses such as *Introduction to the Old Testament* and *Introduction to the New Testament* that dealt with these kinds of problems in a serious way. In these courses it was made clear that investigating these questions was not a matter of faith, and that in this kind of historical exercise one could never achieve certainty. Of course, the text-

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books used had been written by conservative evangelicals who always ended up presenting the traditional solution to these problems as the most probable.

Many of the students taking these classes could not be happy with anything less than certainty. They could not see how becoming conversant with these problems and their solutions was at all helpful. Some of them thought that these exercises in the use of reason and problem-solving in regard to the writing, copying and interpretation of the Bible were a threat to their faith. Soon the professors realized that the attitude of the students, to a large degree, depended on their undergraduate experience. Students from some colleges immediately saw the value of coming to terms with modern biblical studies. Students from other colleges complained to their sponsoring Conference officials about what they were being taught.

The intensity of these complaints and the extent of their reach to the upper layers of the ecclesiastical hierarchy were not immediately appreciated by the Seminary faculty. Part of the problem was that the first-year students in 1965–66 did not have fellow students in the second year of the curriculum who could tell them how they were now enjoying the benefits of the foundational courses taken during the first year. These students were the trail blazers of the new curriculum and could not envision how these courses would help them to get a deeper understanding of what theology is and does. They could not differentiate between theological and historical studies. Many felt overwhelmed and disoriented when facing what advanced studies in historical, literary, psychological and social studies demand from serious Bible students. Even though the school year had its ups and downs, as all school years do, the faculty thought that the difficulties attached to the introduction of a new curriculum would pass. With time things would fall into place and the student body would come to calm the fears and comfort the insecurities of those who felt threatened by their advanced studies of the Bible, or by their confrontation with the history of Christian theology.

At the end of February 1966, Elder R. R. Bietz, the President of the Pacific Union Conference, came to conduct the Spring Week of Prayer at the Seminary. His theme was "Spiritual Dimensions of Christian Leadership." Elder Bietz preached at the morning Chapel period and at an evening meeting, when student wives would also attend. During the day Elder Bietz was available for private counseling and prayer with students. A faculty member thought it would be

profitable to have the faculty get-together with Elder Bietz. After informally seeking the opinion of the rest, he invited Elder Bietz to an informal meeting on Thursday night before he went back to California after the Vesper service at Pioneer Memorial Church. Since the requirement of a BA for ministers was still very much under discussion among church officials and some conferences were not supporting the policy, it was thought an opportune time to discuss this with a very prominent Union Conference president. Elder Bietz was a member of several General Conference committees, and his name was frequently mentioned as a possible future president of the General Conference. That meeting turned out to be an eye-opener for the faculty.

The meeting started, as planned, with a very friendly and productive conversation about the new curriculum and how it would impact the future of the church. The faculty was particularly interested in learning how the church administrators saw the changes and what they expected from them. After a fruitful time together, when it looked like the meeting was winding down, Elder Bietz said he needed to unload a burden on his heart before he left. He then reported that during the private counseling sessions with students he had heard mostly complaints about what they were studying, and that some had accused specific professors of destroying their faith by questioning the authority of the Bible and Mrs. White.

The revelation of the extent of student dissatisfaction with their Seminary experience fell on the faculty like buckets of ice water. Elder Bietz did not break student confidentiality. Neither did he point a finger at any faculty member. His decision to communicate to the faculty what he had learned during the week was taken by the faculty as a great favor. It made clear that something had to be done to improve student-faculty communication. No member of the faculty had in fact been doing what they had been accused of doing. It became evident that the students had not been prepared to take a look at areas of concern in theological reasoning. Just asking questions in an attempt to seek better answers was taken by some students as an assault on their faith. They had not learned the difference between faith (an ultimate commitment to God) and knowledge (the processing of information that is subject to review).

How to improve the situation, however, brought about some tensions among the faculty. On the one hand, there were those eager to reaffirm an ultra-conservative past with a strong sectarian attitude. On the other, there were those

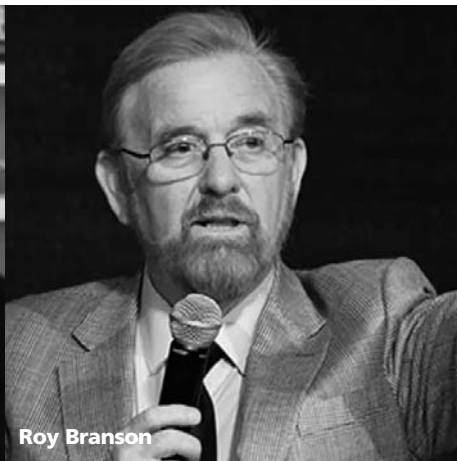
who wished to find ways to do a better job trying to move the church forward toward a more effective witness in the modern world. In the middle were those who felt that professors are professionals committed to both their faith and their disciplines, and public relations was not part of their job description.

In the summer of 1966, Elder Robert Pierson, rather than Elder Bietz, became President of the General Conference. He had been working of late as president of two African divisions and had not

that would gain accreditation from the American Association of Theological Schools (AATS). The Seminary now had professors with degrees in theological studies from well-known European universities such as Basel, Geneva, Amsterdam, Edinburgh, and Birmingham, as well as from leading American universities such as Harvard, Princeton, Johns Hopkins, Chicago, Michigan, Vanderbilt, and Duke. No doctoral program would be accredited if the theological faculty had only degrees in history or education. Hammill had been working



Gottfried Oosterwal



Roy Branson



Edward W. H. Vick

been part of the North American dialogue with the evangelicals nor involved in the production of the SDA Bible Commentary. He had no personal experience of the rigors of a graduate education, and was a proponent of the spirituality of revivals and public confessions at prayer meetings. His goal in life was to be the General Conference President who welcomed Christ at the Second Coming. One of the things he immediately thought necessary to the achievement of his goal was to purge the Seminary of questionable faculty members. Thus, he began to pressure Dr. Richard Hammill, the president of Andrews University, to conduct an investigation of the Seminary faculty.

This placed Hammill in a very difficult situation. His goal in life was to upgrade Andrews University to an institution granting doctoral degrees, particularly in biblical studies and theology. To that end he had been working to bring well-qualified professors to the faculty with doctoral degrees from prestigious universities in their teaching areas. This was a prerequisite for any doctoral program

on a long term plan, and by this time he felt about ready to approach AATS and begin the process to institute a doctoral program that would be accredited by it. He was not eager to upset the faculty he had worked so hard to assemble. Therefore, he found ways to avoid an inquisition of the Seminary faculty. He kept assuring Pierson that the faculty was fully committed to the mission of the Adventist church. In fact, in the years after the initial shock with the new curriculum in 1965, the atmosphere in the Seminary had noticeably improved. As expected, first-year students were coached by second-year students as to how to go about their studies, what to expect, what to take lightly and what to avoid. Things seemed to have finally fallen into place, and the train was running on its tracks.

Pierson, however, grew impatient, and threatened Hammill that he would purge the faculty himself if Hammill would not. The last thing Hammill needed was to have an outsider come in to make decisions about the internal affairs of the university. This would derail his hopes for

Many of the students taking these classes could not be happy with anything less than certainty.

the accreditation of a doctoral program. Thus, in the fall of 1968, he invited the Seminary faculty to a closed meeting in a conference room of the Administration building on a Friday morning when there were no classes at the Seminary. The meeting lasted two or three hours. The discussion had to do with how to make sure that all faculty members were working together toward a common goal. It appeared that some did not have a clear sense of what others were doing, and therefore the students may have been getting mixed signals that disturbed them and caused them to complain to their conference presidents. It was suggested that it would be good to have a series of faculty retreats in which to discuss with each other how each saw their role, and each could receive feedback from their colleagues. Mounting these retreats, of course, would require a budget. Moreover, it was difficult to predict how beneficial they would turn out to be. Would they help to unite the faculty? Or would they create further tensions? Time went by, and nothing was achieved, so Hammill announced that there would be another meeting on another Friday morning some weeks hence. During these stormy times, Dr. Murdoch, the towering Scottish gentleman who had become the paternalistic Dean of the Seminary when Dr. Weniger died shortly after the move to Berrien Springs, chose to remain a passive spectator.

At the second of Hammill's meetings with the faculty the conversation turned more specific. It had to do with the inspiration of Ellen White and the story of creation in the book of Genesis. All faculty members expressed themselves in support of Mrs. White's inspiration. The faculty consensus was, however, that neither the writings of the biblical authors nor the writings of Ellen White were *verbally* inspired. This point had been well established in the dialogue with the evangelicals, and had been a major factor in the failure of those talks. Adventists had refused to agree with evangelical claims to an inerrant, verbally-inspired Bible.

When the conversation turned to the story of creation and a concomitant short chronology of the earth's history, things became more complicated and some people tried to establish some room in which to deal with the problems attached to these matters. After the conversation had gone around and around, Siegfried Horn, the recognized authority in ancient history who was beginning to make a name for himself as a field archaeologist at the dust heap of ancient Heshbon, lost his patience and said that if it was a requirement to affirm that the earth was six-thousand years

old, he would offer his resignation on the spot. At this, president Hammill said something to the effect that nobody was required to affirm a six-thousand-year chronology. The number could be taken as a ball-park figure. Still, millions of years were not in the ball-park. The meeting ended shortly after that.

The local gossip had it that the members of the faculty specifically under suspicion of lack of adherence to traditional Adventism were Roy Branson, James Cox, Gottfried Oosterwal and myself. Oosterwal, who as an anthropologist was more knowledgeable of the ways of the world than any of us, decided that the best defense was a good offense. He challenged Hammill privately as to the basis of his being under suspicion. Hammill assured him that this was not so. Encouraged by this, the rest of us also had private conversations with Hammill and received assurances from him that he would vouch for our faithfulness before Pierson.

The one member of the faculty who had probably aroused most students against him was Edward W. H. Vick. His problems with students could not at all be related to a lack of orthodoxy. He was in a real sense one of the most conservative members of the faculty. The seriousness with which he challenged his students to look at issues, unfortunately, was beyond the limited abilities of many of them. Vick was at this time on sabbatical in England pursuing a DPhil at Oxford. He already had earned a PhD at Vanderbilt some years before. During the summer of 1967, Earle Hilgert, who was now the Academic Vice President, had visited him at Oxford and discussed with him the time of his return and his plans for the courses he would like to teach when he was back on campus. To Vick's astonishment, a few days before Christmas 1968 he received a letter from Hammill telling him that he was fired. To Vick's repeated letters asking for an explanation of this unreasonable turn of events, Hammill never gave a reasonable answer. Whatever the reasons for Hammill's decision, this affair gave the impression that Vick had been the one sacrificed by Hammill to placate Pierson's insistence for a purge at the Seminary.¹

What went on at the Seminary between 1965 and 1968 did not go unnoticed by the faculty at the other schools of the university. The heavy hand of the General Conference President was felt in all its threatening overtones by all faculties. Early in the 1970s the Arts and Sciences faculty had a retreat with Pierson at Camp Au Sable in the northern woods of Michigan's lower peninsula. Its aim was to bring the whole faculty to toe the new party line.

In subsequent years several members of this faculty decided to seek employment elsewhere; the asphyxiating atmosphere reigning on campus surely was a factor in some of these moves. Edward Specht, the highly respected long-time chair of the Mathematics Department, went to teach at Indiana University South Bend (IUSB). Bruce Zimmerman of the Physics Department also went to teach at IUSB. Another member of the Mathematics department Don Rhoads decided to open an electronics store in Bloomington, Indiana. James Van Hise of the Chemistry Department went to Tri-State University in Angola, Indiana. Joseph Battistone of the Religion Department left to become a pastor in the North Carolina Conference. William Peterson of the English Department went to teach at the University of Maryland at College Park. Peterson, in particular, bore much of the brunt of Pierson's ire on account of his having authored a paper revealing the extent of Mrs. White's borrowing from other sources. Battistone, instead of presenting a theology of Mrs. White by extracting "proof texts," did a theological study of her writings and showed that the center of her theological constellation was the Great Controversy theme. They were the pioneers in the academic study of the writings of Ellen G. White, but felt uncomfortable at the only Adventist university which then had graduate programs in arts and sciences.

At the Seminary, Earle Hilgert had largely left the classroom to become Academic Vice President. A few years later he resigned to fulfill his vocational dreams at McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago. Sakae Kubo found refuge as the Seminary Librarian, away from the classroom. Roy Branson went on a fellowship to the Center for Bioethics in Washington D.C., a think-tank that advised Congress and the Executive branch of the national government on legislation that affected medical ethics, and decided not to come back. I resigned from the faculty and went on to teach full-time at Saint Mary's College in Notre Dame, Indiana, where, in the fall of 1968, I had been sent by the Seminary to teach a course in Protestant Theology.

It must also be noted that this significant moment in the history of the Seminary produced one of the most exceptional cohorts of Adventist leaders. Between 1965 and 1969 the following were given their theological foundations for doing further study and becoming distinguished servants of the church. While in fear of failing to list all who belong in this group, I will mention Roy Adams, Niels-Eric Andreasen, Gordon Bietz, John Brunt, Jaime Cruz, Pieter Damsteegt, Jon Dybdahl, Walter Douglas, Erwin Gane,

Ronald Graybill, Warren Johns, Paul Landa, David Larsen, Rick Rice, Samuel Schmidt, Charles Scriven, Johan Storfjell, Alden Thompson, Warren Trenchard, Jan Smuts van Rooyen, Manuel Vazquez, Nancy Vyhmeister, Werner Vyhmeister, Jim Walters, Woodrow Whidden, Richard Winn, and Gerald Winslow. I know of no other four-year period in which the Seminary produced a comparable group of educational leaders.

To conclude this account, I will suggest that in its short-lived golden age, the seminary made a most significant impact on the church by empowering a generation of Adventist leaders that have been serving the church under very trying times, providing a more biblically-informed and relevant understanding of the Gospel. This is true notwithstanding the reactionary backlash it produced, whose effects are felt to this day. The current crisis of the church is in marked ways the completion of a forty-year cycle in which the reactionary forces of those wishing to reaffirm a sectarian past and the initiatives of those wishing to respond to the call of the future are at odds. Some are eager to conduct purges on the basis of nineteenth-century Adventist positions and others are seeking ways to express the Gospel that transcends all cultures in ways that are understood in any culture. The search for "present truth," the contemporary understanding of the Bible, is not a threat to faith, but the best way to keep faith alive. Facing the present crisis it is well to remember the dictum: "Those who ignore history are condemned to repeat it."² ■

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College in Notre Dame, Indiana. He is a native of Montevideo, Uruguay and received his BA from Southern Missionary College, his MA and BD from Andrews University, and his PhD from Duke University. Dr. Weiss also was a columnist for spectrummagazine.org. He is the originator of the Café Hispano section of the *Spectrum* website.

References

1. Dr. Vick has given an account of the affair in his article, "From My Point of View." It is available from his website: www.ewhivck.com.
2. For a more personal account of the events covered here, see my book *Finding My Way in Christianity: Recollections of a Journey*, chap. "Berrien Springs" (Cantonment, FL: Energion Publications, 2010), 137–161.

Is the Ellen White Era Over—Or Has It Just Begun? | BY DAVID THIELE



At first glance, the title of this article may appear to be a joke or sheer nonsense. Of course the Ellen White Era is not over! Sales of Ellen White's books are still high. The General Conference President is pushing for a worldwide distribution of *The Great Controversy*. A recent survey of young Australian Adventists (ages fifteen to twenty-five) found almost 60 percent of those surveyed were "very

familiar" or "extremely familiar" with Ellen White's writings; almost half had at least ten of her books in their home and almost three-quarters had at least five of them; nearly 60 percent thought her writings worthy of attention today, and 80 percent saw Ellen White as moderately, very and extremely important in their personal faith development.¹

Yet despite these facts and figures, the question remains: Is the Ellen White era over? It is neither a joke nor nonsense. The question is forced upon us by one simple, unchangeable fact: Ellen White died in 1915, almost a hundred years ago. Since she died at age eighty-nine, she has now been dead longer than she was alive. Now there is a very simple, facile response to this: the Bible writers lived even further in the past than Ellen White and the Bible era has not passed because of it. This is true as far as it goes, but it may also be beside the point.

Adventists have traditionally drawn a clear distinction between writing and non-writing prophets.² These labels are not entirely adequate because "non-writing prophets" sometimes wrote! This can clearly be demonstrated from scripture (Josh. 10:13; 2 Sam 1:18; 1 Chron. 29:29; 2 Chron. 9:29, 12:15). The distinction then is between "canonical" and "noncanonical" prophets. Adventist apologists have consistently grouped Ellen White with the "non-writing," that is, "noncanonical" prophets. It is clearly impossible to do otherwise and retain any sense of *Sola Scriptura* or any claim to be a Bible-based Christian church.

Exactly what that distinction means in terms of Ellen White's authority vis-à-vis the Bible is an issue that remains unsettled. A variety of answers have been proposed, but none seem to have been able to sweep the field.³ But the fact that Adventists have *always* affirmed a difference between canonical and noncanonical prophets, and have

always placed Ellen White in the latter category, means that we cannot now simply jump from the continuation of the Bible era to the continuation of Ellen White's era.

What then is the difference between a canonical and a noncanonical prophet? Here again, Adventist apologists have generally been remarkably consistent in their comments. Canonical prophets were entrusted by God with a message that had eternal relevance—or at least “eternal” for the duration of the sinful world. The message is primarily a message of salvation, but it also provides a revelation of the character of God and the core principles of behavior that should govern the lives of his people in this sinful world. Herbert Douglas puts it this way: “The primary purpose of the Bible is to give later readers a clear understanding of the plan of salvation and the highlights exposing the great controversy between Christ and Satan.”⁴ Noncanonical prophets, in contrast, are focused on the context in which they live. They provide concrete application to that context. The messages they conveyed “were of local and relatively temporary value.”⁵ Their writings are not intended, by God, to be for his people for all time. This does not suggest or imply any difference in the inspiration of canonical and noncanonical prophets—only a difference in function.

The Bible provides a useful case study illustrating the role of noncanonical prophets in the encounter of Nathan and David (2 Sam. 12:1–7). The story is well known: David has committed adultery with Bathsheba and consigned her husband, Uriah, to death in the battlefield. Nathan seeks an audience with David and tells him a story of a rich man who takes a poor man's sole lamb to feed a guest. David is filled with righteous indignation until Nathan points out that the story is actually about David.

Eric Livingston has argued that this story shows that noncanonical prophets (in this case Nathan) have authority, occasionally even over canonical prophets (in this case David).⁶

However, this misses the point entirely. For a start, such a view is highly anachronistic. David neither recognized himself as a canonical prophet nor was he so recognized by anyone else at that time. It is certainly strange to associate his actions with regard to Bathsheba and Uriah with his prophetic calling. To understand the story as an illustration of the authority of noncanonical prophets vis-à-vis canonical prophets is surely not reading it in its own terms.

Nathan does not reveal new theological truth to David, nor does he provide new principles of living that David was previously unfamiliar with. David knew that adultery (and murder) was wrong. Moses had been crystal clear on this in the Torah. Certainly David had punished murderers before (2 Sam. 1:15, 4:9–12). What then is the issue here? David manages to convince himself that these principles, which had general validity, did not apply to him as *king*. There was no king in Israel when Moses wrote. But in David's time Israel had a king “like the nations.” As with totalitarian dictators of today, the kings of the nations in the ancient Middle East were prone to assume all sorts of privileges denied to lesser mortals—and who was to stop them? This is exactly what David did to Bathsheba and Uriah! Nathan does not reveal new truth or new principles, but he makes a powerful application of the eternal principles already revealed by the earlier canonical writer.

How does this model work in the case of Ellen White? It is actually a perfect fit. She proclaims that she is a lesser light pointing to the greater light.⁷ The “greater light” with this model contains the eternal principles; the lesser light, a specific application of those principles. More tellingly, Ellen White states categorically that if the church had studied the Bible as it should have, there would not have been a need for her ministry at all. This is obviously an incomprehensive, incoherent statement if Ellen White saw her purpose as the revelation of new truth, but it fits perfectly

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with the model that sees her role as providing an application of biblical principles and teachings. Such an application could be discovered by the study of the Bible itself.

Clearly, Ellen White's comments in certain areas are far more detailed than those found in Scripture. Her teachings on health are a case in point. But it is scarcely unusual that the application of a principle be more extensive than the principle itself! If it is a biblical principle that we should care for our bodies—a position I think is easily defensible—then a question arises: What does this mean in practical terms? In Ellen White's context, it meant vegetarianism, among other things. Would we see her insist on the same application of this principle on the Pacific island nation of Kiribati, where the only local diet options are fish and pumpkin tips? Surely not! Her application was specific to her era and not universal.⁸ The biblical principle of care for our health is, however, universal. This coheres with George Knight's evaluation of what he calls "the myth of the inflexible prophet."⁹

[Ellen White's]

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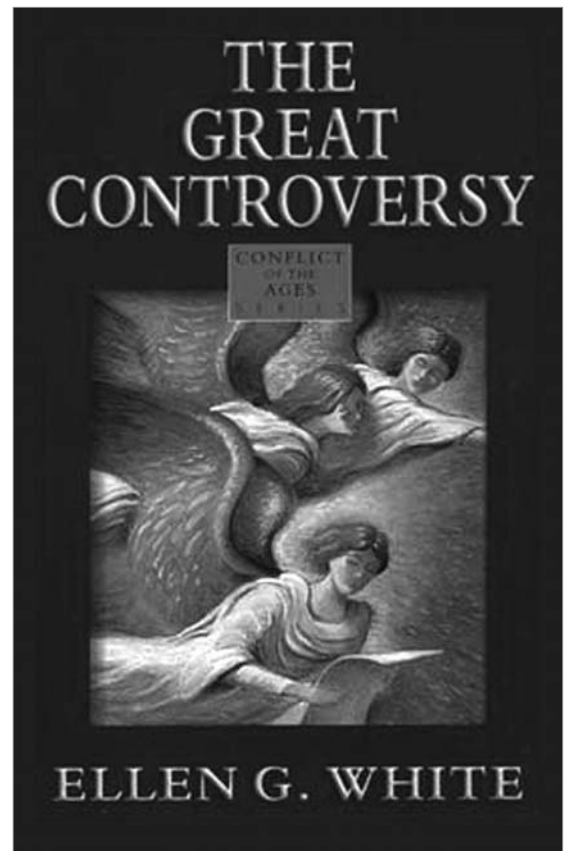
to her era

and not

universal.

This may also explain why Ellen White's position on alcohol appears far more stringent than that made explicit by the biblical writers. Although they condemn drunkenness, it is impossible to show that they condemned the use of alcohol altogether. However, when Ellen White applied the biblical principles relating to alcohol in the heyday of the American temperance movement, she supported a strict abstinence position. The question to ask is not whether Ellen White's comments on the topic have universal applicability or whether they are "biblical" in the strictest sense (i.e., specifically taught in Scripture), but rather whether they reflected the message of God in the context to which she spoke directly.¹⁰

But this brings us back to the key issue: Ellen White died in 1915. The world she lived in was in many ways closer to that of Abraham than it is to our world. She lived in a world without jet travel, the Internet, instant messaging, satellite communications, Global Position-



ing Systems, smart phones and in vitro fertilization. Yet these are things we take for granted. We have firsthand familiarity with most of them and know about the rest. Even television was unimaginable to Ellen White.

At the most basic level of all, language has changed during the generations since Ellen White's death. This is seen with stunning clarity in the use of the word *intercourse*, which Ellen White uses hundreds of times but never with the sexual referent that the word predominantly has today.¹¹ The change of language has led to the production of "modern language" editions of key Ellen White books.¹² Inevitably, much of Ellen White's counsel cannot be taken literally anymore. Is there any Adventist today who believes that women should be taught to saddle a horse? How, then, is this problem addressed? It is addressed by the simple expedient of reinterpreting Ellen White's application of biblical principle to a new situation—by providing a reapplication of her application!¹³

It is instructive to look at Ellen White's con-

demnation of Spiritualism, which was growing in popularity in her day. She warned that Spiritualism would be an instrument in fomenting the final eschatological crisis.¹⁴ However, Spiritualism as known in Ellen White's day is quite passé today. Her comments are reinterpreted as having reference to the New Age Movement. This is undoubtedly a valid reinterpretation, but it is equally clear that it was not Ellen White's primary intention.

One may wonder if Ellen White's comment—that of all the books she had written, the one she most wanted circulated to the public was *The Great Controversy*—might not provide another example.¹⁵ *The Great Controversy*, originally published in 1888, was written against an American backdrop in which the predominant white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant culture was feeling threatened by an influx of Catholic migrants.¹⁶ The dominant culture of the day was deeply anti-Catholic.¹⁷ *The Great Controversy*, which has its first explicitly anti-Catholic statement on page 42, fit this cultural milieu perfectly. The net effect of circulating *The Great Controversy* among the public in this context is easy to imagine. Protestant readers were immediately predisposed to the book, with its strong defense of biblical truth in the face of the Catholic threat. Readers identified with those who stood boldly for biblical truth against Catholic opposition—the Waldenses, Jan Hus, Jerome of Prague, and Martin Luther. Up to this point, readers are challenged by nothing and the credibility of the author is reinforced in their mind. Then the challenges: the discredited William Miller also followed Bible truth! The despised “Jewish” Sabbath is Bible truth! The world will again be divided between those who follow the Bible and those who persecute them. At this point each reader is challenged: “Do I truly stand on the Bible alone or on tradition? Will I stand for biblical truth as did the heroes of the Reformation, if it means being grouped with the despised and discredited? These issues are apparently about to come to eschatological climax. Where will I stand?”

The cultural milieu today is radically different. The 1960 election of a Catholic, John F. Kennedy, as president of the United States was controversial in its day, but did not prove to be the end of the republic.¹⁸ President Ronald Reagan's appointment of an American ambassador to the Vatican twenty years later, by contrast, passed virtually without comment.¹⁹ The long papacy of the charismatic, popular, and world-travelling Pope John Paul II saw unprecedented favorable reactions to Catholicism even among secularists.²⁰ All of this is in keeping with the increased acceptance in Western society of a post-modern worldview—with its disdain for absolutism, dogmatism, and sectarianism.

Today's readers, then, enter an utterly foreign world when they open *The Great Controversy*. Unlike the readers in Ellen White's day, nothing is familiar to them. Rather than a comfortingly familiar defense of Bible truth, modern readers perceive bigotry and narrow-mindedness. Such a bigoted screed is scarcely worth reading and is likely to be discarded.

How then might we make sense of Ellen White's comments on getting *The Great Controversy* before the public? She is talking about evangelistic strategy. Her advice is a contextualized application of a very sound principle, which she articulates clearly elsewhere: start where the people are; start with topics which build credibility; hold challenging truths until such a foundation is laid.²¹ It may well be that in order to do what Ellen White *meant* we may have to do the *opposite* of what she actually said!

Of course, Ellen White wrote many things that are timeless. When she directly echoes Scripture, this is most evident. Some of her most powerful theological statements about God and salvation fit into this category as well. As Arthur L. White has observed in another context, “Truths are quite as much truths in the abstract as in an immediate setting. The truth expressed in the words, ‘God is love,’ needs no context or explanation.”²² However, he absolutely fails to deal with

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Controversy.*

those many statements—predominantly in her counsels—which depend on a historical context to be correctly understood. Thus, the timelessness of some of Ellen White's writings is not evidence that her era continues.

There are two primary arguments against seeing the Ellen White era as over. On the one hand, Gerhard Pfandl has argued that inspiration confers authority on a prophet and that such authority is permanent.²³ Thus, he writes that if archaeologists discovered the book of Nathan it would still be an *authoritative* book. This is surely not a valid argument, and it is actually difficult to see what it means in practical terms. *Authority* is a function of purpose. It may be conferred by inspiration, but the question of the purpose and range of that authority remains. If the *purpose* of the book of Nathan was to give an *authoritative* application of principles to David, surely the authority of the writing ceases with the passing of its purpose.

There is only one further argument against seeing the Ellen White era as over. Did not Ellen White herself declare that her writings would be available to guide the church "as long as time shall last"?²⁴ This, she suggests, would obviate the need for a new prophet to arise. While it is certainly true, it is equally true that Ellen White did not envisage a delay of a century or more between her demise and the Second Coming of Jesus. It is quite clear that she saw the Second Advent as *imminent*.²⁵ If the Second Advent had occurred in the time frame she envisaged, it would have happened within her era. But this did not happen, and the question of the validity of her comment in light of that changed situation necessarily arises.

So, is the Ellen White era over? It is not for me or any other individual to say. Rather, that is something for the community as a whole to wrestle with. What can be said with certainty is that the passing of time is making the issue urgent. Traditional Adventist apologetics may need to be abandoned if we insist that the Ellen White era is not over. If we need to translate Ellen White's writings into modern English, and

find them as directly applicable a century and more after her death as they were during her own lifetime, we may well ask: "Is Ellen White also among the [canonical] prophets?" ■

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2. *Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1957), 90–99.
3. The difference in perspective among Ron Graybill, Graeme Bradford, and Herbert Douglas, for example, at this point seem to differ considerably. See Graybill, Ron "Ellen White's Role in Doctrinal Formation," *Ministry* (October 1981), 7–11; Bradford, Graeme, *More Than a Prophet* (Berrien Springs, MI: Biblical Perspectives, 2006), 205–11; Douglas, Herbert, *Messenger of the Lord: The Prophetic Ministry of Ellen G. White* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 1998), 416–425.
4. Douglass, Herbert E., *Messenger of the Lord: The Prophetic Ministry of Ellen G. White* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1998), 17.
5. Jemison, T. Housel, *A Prophet Among You* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1955), 73.
6. Livingston, Eric, "Inquire of the Lord," *Ministry* (April 1981), 4–6.
7. White, Ellen G., *Evangelism* (Berrien Springs, MI: Review and Herald Publishing Association), 257.
8. A useful comparison is provided by A. G. Daniels at the 1919 Bible Conference, where he relates Ellen White's response to Daniels' report of a vegetarian Adventist worker he had met in Scandinavia who lived mostly on the north wind. According to Daniels, Ellen White shook her head and quietly said "When will they ever learn?" when he related this situation to her. See, "The Bible Conference of 1919," *Spectrum* 10, no. 1 (1979), 23–57. Daniels thus provides strong evidence that Ellen White did not see the details of her health message having universal applicability.
9. Knight, George R., *Myths in Adventism* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1985), 17–26.
10. Given the wealth and power of the alcohol industry today, not to mention the human misery it contributes to, I have no doubt Ellen White would take a very similar stance

today. It is, of course, precisely the existence of the alcohol industry that makes the situation now so different from that of the biblical writers.

11. An electronic search of Ellen White's published writings came up with three-hundred-eighty-two hits for this word.

12. For a survey of this practice see Fagal, William, "Adapting the Writings of Ellen White: Is there a Need?" *Adventist World* (May 2011), 38–39.

13. It needs to be stressed that such reapplications of biblical principles can still be valid because the underlying biblical principle has not changed. The process, however, does raise the question of whether it would not be better—and simpler—to simply make a new application directly from the biblical principle.

14. See, for example, Ellen White's comments regarding Spiritualism in *The Great Controversy*, page 588. Earlier in the same work she links "Spiritualism" directly to the "mysterious rapping" (553). There is no doubt that this is the form of Spiritualism she envisaged playing a role in the final crisis.

15. White, Ellen G., *Colporteur Ministry* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 1953), 127–128.

16. Butler, Jonathan, "The World of Ellen White and the End of the World," *Spectrum* 10, no. 2 (1979): 2–13.

17. Bruinsma, Reinder, *Seventh-day Adventist Attitudes Toward Roman Catholicism 1844–1965* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1994), 15–19.

18. Reinder Bruinsma reports that the US Department of Justice identified one-hundred-forty-four producers of anti-Catholic literature in connection to the Kennedy presidential campaign. Of course, the early campaign by the first Roman Catholic presidential candidate Alfred Smith ended in failure when he lost the Democratic Party nomination in 1924. See Bruinsma, *Adventist Attitudes*, 259–61.

19. Bruinsma notes that "practically every major Protestant organization and publication protested" the earlier attempt of President Harry S. Truman to appoint Mark Clark as ambassador to the Vatican in 1949 (*Adventist Attitudes*, 258). This appointment never took place, a fact that again highlights the changes in attitudes between Truman's presidency and the presidency of Ronald Reagan.

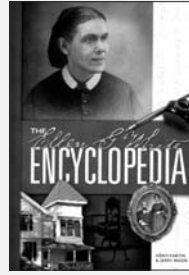
20. One might point to the twenty-four pages—much of in the tone of fulsome praise—which *Time* dedicated to Pope John Paul II at the time of his death. Other secular media were equally enamored.

21. White, Ellen G., *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2003), 119–20.

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23. Pfandl, Gerhard, "The Authority of Non-Canonical

New Books on Ellen White



Released at the end of 2013, *The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia* is 1,465 pages of information about the Prophet. It includes photographs, maps, and a chronology of her life as well as a biography, a genealogy chart, a chart of the relationships between her early books, lists of her letters and manuscripts, and two sections of alphabetical entries with one on her biography and one on topical issues. There are essays on her writings, her theology, and how her statements measure up to current science. The list of contributors includes one-hundred-eighty-two names of present and past scholars. Denis Fortin and Jerry Moon edited the volume published by Review and Herald Publishing Association, with Michael W. Campbell serving as assistant editor and George R. Knight as the consulting editor.

The Review and Herald plans to release another volume in 2014 titled *Ellen G. White Letters & Manuscripts with Annotations*.



Ellen Harmon White: American Prophet is the title of a book to be released in the summer of 2014 by Oxford University Press. Edited by Terrie Dopp Aamodt, Gary Land, and Ronald L. Numbers, it is the product of a group of scholars who met in 2009 to discuss Ellen White and her contribution to American religious history. Seven of the contributors to *Ellen G. White Encyclopedia* also contributed to this volume, but fourteen other contributors wrote chapters. This volume analyses White as a prophet, author, speaker, and builder. It also discusses her in the context of society and culture, science and medicine, war, slavery, and race. It examines her testimonies, theology, and legacy.

Look for reviews of these books in upcoming issues of *Spectrum* magazine.

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25. Brinsmead, Bernard H., "An Analysis of 'Prophetic Tension' in the Eschatology of E. G. White," *Daniel 8:14, The Day of Atonement and the Investigative Judgment*, ed. Desmond Ford (Casselberry, FL: Euangellion, 1980), A246–A255. See also, Thompson, Alden, "The Angels Always Say the Time is Short," accessed January 27, 2012: http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:HgVXJPE9TYwJ:people.wallawalla.edu/~alden.thompson/text/unpublished_lectures_sermons_papers/eschatology_the_angels_always_say_the_time_is_short.rtf+Alden+THompson+%22The+e+Angels+Always+say%22&cd=1&hl=pt-PT&ct=clnk&gl=tl.

In order
to do what
Ellen White
meant we
may have to
do the
opposite
of what
she actually
said!

Clearer Views of Jesus *and the Doctrine of the Trinity in the Seventh-day Adventist Church* | BY GIL VALENTINE

In his recent insightful *Spectrum* article on the way Seventh-day Adventists express their view of God, Rick Rice referenced the oft-noted observation by Adventist scholars that the Adventist view of God as Trinity, as held today, has emerged through a process of “evolution.” He also ventures that he is not sure we can tell just when and how the transformation took place.¹ Recent historical research, however, does in fact enable us to know more clearly how the transformation happened, and it is a fascinating story. This article will explore how the change came about.

Anti-Trinitarian antecedents

George Knight makes the claim at the outset of his book *Search for Identity: The Development of Seventh-day Adventist Theology* that most of Adventism’s founders and pioneers would not have been able to join the church today if they had been required to agree to the 27 Fundamental Beliefs. Most of them, he says, would not have been able to get past Belief #2 on the doctrine of the Trinity.² Beliefs #4 and #5 on the Son and the Holy Spirit would have been equally problematic. Knight is right.

Prominent Sabbatarian Adventist leaders came from the Christian Connection movement and they brought their anti-Trinitarianism with them.³ These early Adventist leaders were not just passive objectors to the doctrine as *non-Trinitarians*; they were actively hostile to the doctrine. They were *anti-Trinitarian*, and they were hostile to any “creed” that enshrined it.

What is remarkable is the about-turn that occurred in Adventist thinking on the issue. By 1980 an explicit doctrine of a triune godhead was enshrined prominently as #2 on the list of the church’s carefully crafted statement of 27 Fundamental Beliefs and formally voted by the church.

A number of Adventist scholars including Erwin Gane (1963), Russell Holt (1969), LeRoy Froom (1971), Merlin Burt (1996), Woodrow Whidden (1998) and Jerry Moon (2003) have documented these beginnings and the change. And all have suggested that Ellen White was in some way the source of the change.⁴ But what is the backstory? Why did she change?

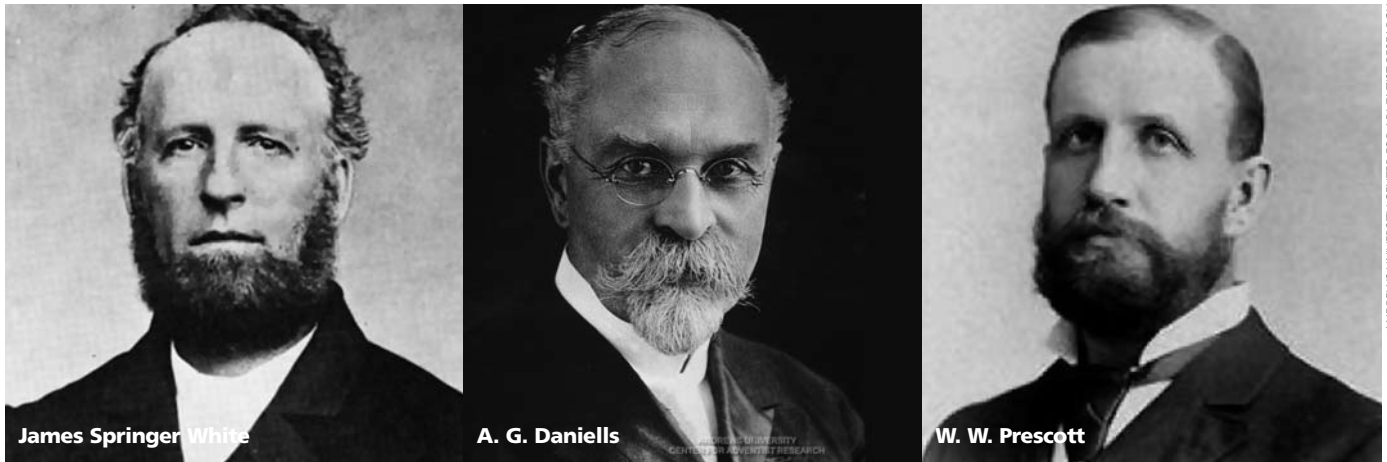
We know that the young Ellen White was an informed and confessionally-baptized Episcopalian Methodist Christian. And we know that Episcopalian Methodists held the doctrine of the Trinity as their first article of faith.⁵ However, as an early Sabbatarian Adventist living in the midst of anti-Trinitarians and married to a very vocal one by the name of James, she too adopted an anti-Trinitarian stance.⁶ Later, as both George Knight and Jerry Moon observe, her language at best was vague and ambiguous, able to be accepted by both anti-Trinitarian and Trinitarian viewpoints. Then with the publication of *Desire of Ages* in 1898, things changed.⁷ What brought the change of understanding?

A new slice of history

None of the accounts by Adventist historians seem to have been aware of the existence of a cluster of letters written in the 1940s in which LeRoy Froom, then editor of *Ministry* magazine, and Arthur Spalding, author of the *Origin and History of Seventh-day Adventists*, dialogue with Herbert Camden Lacey about the change and its contextual background. A retired bible teacher and brother-in-law to the late W. C. White, Lacey recounts a series of important theological developments in Australia in the mid-1890s.⁸ Evidence from the contemporary 1890s correspondence between W. W. Prescott, A. G. Daniells, E. G. White and W. C. White confirms and

complements the general account by Lacey. The events related by Lacey, Prescott and Daniells unfold a fascinating backstory that helps us understand why and how new perspectives on the nature of the Godhead made

ogy on the part of the wider church. The underlying conviction—that the source of salvation for the believer can only be God—strengthened. In its simplest form, the argument ran, “Created beings cannot be saved by one



their way into the *Desire of Ages*.

The story begins with the 1888 conference and its initiation of a radical realignment in Adventist soteriology. Subsequently the person and salvific work of Jesus came to be the focus of Adventist preaching and teaching rather than the Law. Clearer views of Jesus and the wonder of God’s grace opened windows on new landscapes for Adventists. The clearer understanding of soteriology—particularly the primacy of Justification by Faith—struggled for recognition in Adventism during the immediate subsequent decade following 1888. This was associated with a growing awareness by several church thinkers that this new and clearer emphasis on the atoning work of Christ and on righteousness by faith was and needed to be integrally linked with a more adequate understanding of the full deity of Christ, and led to the undermining of Arianism in Adventism.

The controversy over new soteriological insights may be seen as paralleling similar developments in the early Christian Church. As Maurice Wiles points out, the decisive factor in the triumph of Athanasius over Arius during the Christological controversies of the third and fourth centuries in the early church can be attributed to a clearer understanding of soteriol-

ogy who himself is a created being.”⁹ Robert Gregg and Dennis Groh also point out that early Arianism “is most intelligible when viewed as a scheme of salvation.” At the center of the scheme was “a redeemer whose life of virtue modeled perfect creature-hood and hence the path of salvation for all Christians.” Salvation was ultimately by good living. Early Adventism, with its strongly legalistic understanding of salvation, was perhaps linked to and dependent on its Arianism in more subtle ways than we have previously realized.¹⁰

The story

A close study of the context of the Lacey letters suggests that the events in Australia involving the ministry of General Conference Education Secretary W. W. Prescott helped bring about this doctrinal development. In the years following the landmark 1888 session, Prescott began to rethink Adventist evangelism and apologetics in order to cast them in the new soteriological and more Christocentric framework. In late 1893 in a public evangelistic program at the Independent Congregational Church in Battle Creek, Prescott pioneered a public presentation of Adventist teachings, the Sabbath, the Covenants and the prophecies in a fresh gospel setting. One promi-

According to Lacey, Prescott’s preaching on John significantly shaped sections of *Desire of Ages*.

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ment citizen, James Upton, attended the meetings and remarked to W. A. Spicer that “they had heard more gospel here than they have heard for many years.”¹¹ It was a Christocentric presentation of Adventist theology and mission—and represented a radical departure from the traditional approach to presenting Adventist teachings. During 1894 and early 1895 Prescott continued to read and reflect on what a Christocentric focus for Adventist teachings meant.

In mid-1895 Prescott travelled to Australia to spend almost a year “down under” helping get Avondale College started and working with A. G. Daniells (Australian Conference President), Ellen White and W. C. White in strengthening the Adventist presence in Australia and New Zealand. Just prior to leaving for the South Pacific, Prescott had accepted an assignment to write the study material for the Sabbath School lesson quarterly scheduled for use in the church in late 1896. The assigned topic was the Gospel of John, but the series was to be different in an important way. Instead of taking one quarter to study the Gospel fairly superficially, it had been decided that the whole year—fifty-two weeks of lessons over four quarters—would focus on the Fourth Gospel, and Prescott would write all four. On his month-long voyage out to Australia the professor spent much of his time studying the Gospel, and the notion apparently began to develop within him that the church needed to be clearer in its convictions about the eternal preexistence of Christ and its corollary, the eternal full deity of Christ.

Not long after he landed in Sydney, Prescott made his way to a secondhand bookstore and bought himself an English translation of the German theologian Augustus Neander’s influential *Lectures on the History of Christian Dogma*. He focused his study on chapter six, which deals with the Christological and Trinitarian controversies of the early Christian centuries. (Prescott’s underlined copy of the book was still on a shelf in the Andrews University Library when I studied there in the early 1980s. It was heavily under-

lined in Prescott’s distinctive style in the chapters dealing with those controversies.)

This doctrinal history informed Prescott’s thinking about the implications of the teaching of the Fourth Gospel. By December of 1895 at the Tasmanian camp meeting, he had completed the first quarter of readings and had shown the manuscript to W. C. White to get feedback. White was impressed because it opened up a new “wide field of thought.”¹²

In the meantime, Prescott had been serving as the lead preacher at an evangelistic camp meeting in Melbourne and had presented his new Christocentric gospel-centered approach to doctrine to appreciative audiences there. Ellen White and her son W. C. White were both in attendance and were very impressed with the new approach. “His theme from first to last and always is Christ,” reported an awed W. C. White. His mother was certain that “the inspiration of the spirit had been on him.” According to Daniells, “preaching Christ and him crucified” rather than traditional Adventist doctrinal sermons made for sermons “full of power.”¹³

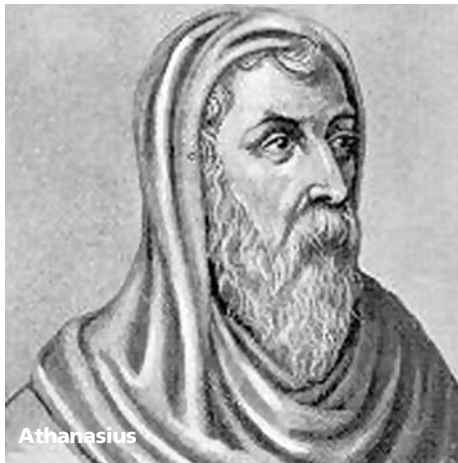
Prescott’s new approach was particularly helpful because Uriah Smith’s *Daniel and Revelation* had been widely sold by colporteurs in the strongly Anglican city, and this had produced a negative reaction among the public that Adventists were a semi-Arian sect who did not believe in the preexistence of Christ nor his full divinity. However, Prescott’s preaching of “sound Christian doctrine” and his “uplifting of Jesus,” with its strong emphasis on the full deity of Christ, “completely disarmed the people of prejudice,” reported Daniells. “The minds of the people have been completely revolutionized with regards to us as a people,” he added in his report to the General Conference President.¹⁴ Prescott’s approach also drew a better class of people to the meetings, noted Ellen White. Clearly, the Christocentric approach, apologetics and deeper bible study were working together in a symbiotic way to bring about the reshaping of Adventist thinking about the nature of the Godhead.

Further reflection on the full deity of Christ

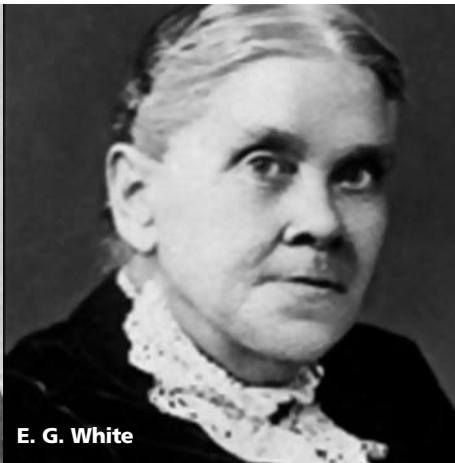
Prescott continued his intensive study of the Gospel of John as part of his preparation of the second quarter sequence of Sabbath School bible

ment and therefore fully God and co-eternal with the Father. He then went on to see the same theological implications in all the other “I Am” statements of Jesus in the Gospel.

Herbert Lacey, the twenty-five year-old



Athanasius



E. G. White



Arius

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study guides, and this study led him to a reconsideration of the theological implications of the series of Jesus’ “I Am” statements in the Fourth Gospel. These insights led to a deepening conviction about the eternal deity of the Son.

Early January 1896 found Prescott in Coorabong, New South Wales, about eighty miles north of Sydney, where he shared in the pioneering establishment of a new school at Avondale. Although the teachers were already on hand, legal complications over the transfer of land had delayed the erection of buildings and the planned beginning of classes in March. With the frustrating delay it had been decided that beginning in late March, instead of having classes for students, the church leaders would convene an “institute”—a month-long general Bible and education conference. A large tent was pitched and Prescott was the featured instructor. Participants considered matters of curriculum and pedagogy, but the meetings were most memorable for Prescott’s preaching on the Gospel of John and the divinity of Christ.

The integrating theme for Prescott’s studies on the Gospel of John was the “I Am” statement of Jesus in John 8:58, which Prescott linked with the “I Am” declaration of Yahweh in Exodus 3:14. Christ was the Yahweh of the Old Testa-

ment and therefore fully God and co-eternal with the Father. He then went on to see the same theological implications in all the other “I Am” statements of Jesus in the Gospel. Herbert Lacey, the twenty-five year-old brother-in-law to Willie White, also attended the institute meetings. He had recently obtained his BA degree in classics from Battle Creek College and had returned to teach at the new school. Thus he was also invited to speak at the Institute. He and his new wife boarded with his younger sister and W. C. White and became part of the extended Ellen White household near her new house called “Sunnyside.” In his later recalling of the events of 1896, Lacey reported on other highly significant factors that contributed to making this a particularly important year in the development of Adventist theology.

During early 1896 and even as the Institute was being held, Ellen White was working through an extensive revision process on the manuscript for her new book on the life of Christ, eventually published two years later as *Desire of Ages*. Ellen White had asked Prescott to read the entire manuscript critically. Marian Davis, Ellen White’s “book maker,” was struggling with the collation and arrangement of materials for the first chapter and also the sequencing of some events in the narrative for other early chapters. Both Marian Davis and Ellen White attended Prescott’s Bible studies on John and were deeply engaged and impressed. Marian took extensive notes of the sermons and

...A second strand of theological insight contributed to the development of the Adventist doctrine of the Godhead at this same time...

The insight that the Spirit was the “third person of the God-head” was first publicly expressed in writing by Ellen White in 1897.

there were many moments of new insight.

Marian sought further help with the editorial and book-making process and according to Lacey, both he and Prescott helped extensively with the difficult first chapter and also in clarifying significant parts of the harmony of the Gospel events that provided the undergirding storyline for the book. According to Lacey, Prescott’s preaching on John significantly shaped sections of *Desire of Ages* concerning the eternity of the Son. “Professor Prescott was tremendously interested in presenting Christ as the great ‘I Am,’” he explained, noting that Marian Davis was very impressed by this, “and lo and behold, when the *Desire of Ages* came out, there appeared that identical teaching on pages 24 and 25, which I think can be looked for in vain in any of Sr. White’s published works prior to that time.”¹⁵ Lacey went on to explain, “Professor Prescott’s interest in the ‘Eternity of the Son’ and the great ‘I Am’s’ coupled with the constant help he gave Sr. Davis in her preparation of the *Desire of Ages*, may serve to explain the inclusion of the above-named teaching in that wonderful book.”¹⁶

Another noticeable inclusion in the *Desire of Ages* that reinforced the changing paradigm was Ellen White’s statement about Christ’s life being “original, unborrowed, underived.” This statement was also placed in the context of a Johannine “I Am” statement. “Jesus declared, ‘I am the resurrection, and the life.’ In Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived. ‘He that hath the Son hath life’ (1 John 5:12). The divinity of Christ is the believer’s assurance of eternal life.”¹⁷ It is interesting to notice that most of the scriptural passages that Ellen White drew upon to underline the new emphasis on the divinity of Jesus in *Desire of Ages* came from the Gospel of John.¹⁸

The Holy Spirit as a person

The account provided by Lacey also informs us that a second strand of theological insight contributed to the development of the Adventist doctrine of the Godhead at this same time and in this same place. This second strand involved the

beginning of a shift to understanding the Holy Spirit to be a person instead of an “it.” Again, documentation from the 1890s corroborates Lacey’s recollections written in the 1940s.

Following Prescott’s successful evangelistic meetings in Melbourne, A. G. Daniells and his evangelistic team stayed on cultivating interests and establishing churches with the newly baptized members. Lacey joined them. In their regular workers’ meetings together each morning, the ministers decided to use as a devotional guide a little book Daniells had picked up in a secondhand bookstore entitled *The Spirit of Christ*, published in 1888 by the well-known Dutch Reformed South African author Andrew Murray.¹⁹ This book written on the person and work of the Holy Spirit proved to be spiritually and theologically helpful to Daniells and his minister colleagues. In the opening chapter in the book, Murray asserted,

*It is generally admitted in the Church that the Holy Spirit has not the recognition which becomes Him as being the equal of the Father and the Son, the Divine Person through whom alone the Father and the Son can be truly possessed and known, in whom alone the Church has her beauty and her blessedness.*²⁰

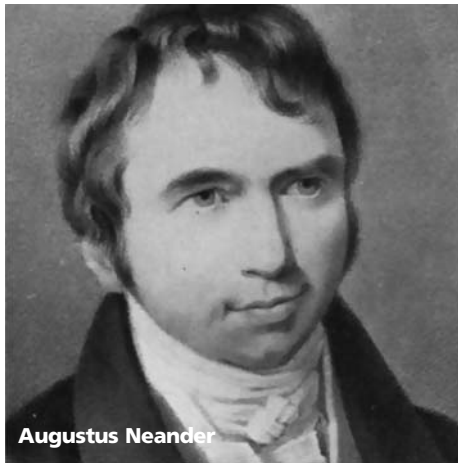
Daniells remarked to Prescott (who by now had become a spiritual mentor to the Australian Conference President) that he found chapter sixteen on the Holy Spirit and Mission to be particularly helpful. The mission of the church would be empowered if the work of the Spirit was more widely appreciated.²¹

The lack of recognition of the Holy Spirit as the equal of the Father in Adventism was soon to be addressed. At that same Cooranbong Bible Institute in March and April, A. G. Daniells presented a series of Bible studies on the Holy Spirit based on his reading of Andrew Murray’s book, and he was supported in the preaching endeavor by Lacey who had developed a keen interest in the topic.

Before Lacey’s return to Australia, he had attended an International Student Volunteers meeting in Detroit. There he had heard famous

preachers like Hudson Taylor, A. J. Gordon, J. R. Mott and A. T. Pierson speaking on Mission and the work of the Spirit. Moved by what he heard, Lacey had studied the topic on his month-long voyage back home to Australia in late 1895.

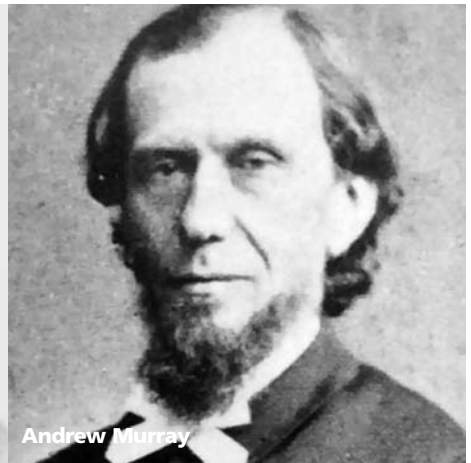
dents on the Avondale Campus in these terms: “We need to realize that the Holy Spirit who is as much a person as God is a person, is walking through these grounds.”²⁵ She could not have shared such an insight three years earlier.



Augustus Neander



Marian Davis



Andrew Murray

LEFT: VOM-GLAUBENDE; CENTER: WWW.THESEVENTHUNDERS.COM

The encounter with Daniells’ secondhand copy of Andrew Murray strengthened the new convictions. They were soon advocating that Adventists begin to think of the Holy Spirit as the third person of the Godhead. According to Lacey, there was considerable discussion amongst the ministers on the matter of the personhood of the Spirit and a realization that they would need to adjust their language to accommodate this understanding. The meeting at Coorabong was the venue where these twin streams converged.

The very next month, on May 10, 1896, Ellen White used the personal pronouns “He” and “Him” repeatedly to describe the Spirit for the first time in a manuscript she wrote on the “Holy Spirit in our Schools.” It took some time for Daniells, Lacey and Ellen White to reprogram their long-established speech and writing patterns, as they continued to occasionally refer to the Spirit as “it.” But change had begun. The insight that the Spirit was the “third person of the Godhead” was first publicly expressed in writing by Ellen White in 1897, in letters written to ministers.²² It was also reflected in the *Desire of Ages* published in 1898.²³ Daniells pointed out this particular statement to Lacey on the campus at Coorabong.²⁴ The following year, Ellen White would address the stu-

Change comes slowly

There was not much turmoil apparent over the quiet developments about the Godhead in far-off Australia. Prescott continued his Christocentric emphasis. *Desire of Ages* was read more widely and the church’s patterns of thought slowly began to change until it was more common to talk of Adventists believing in the doctrine of the Trinity. Seventeen years later, the new understanding was tentatively included in an informal summary of the “cardinal features” of Adventist faith in the *Review* in 1913. The statement, framed by editor F. M. Wilcox, referred to Adventist belief in the “Divine Trinity.” But the statement was still ambiguous enough on the divinity of Christ as to be acceptable to those who were of the old view. The statement referred to Jesus as “the Son of the Eternal Father.”²⁶ Within the General Conference in Washington, D.C., there were also forward-thinking leaders increasingly aware of the need not only to clarify and restate Adventist theology but also of the need to make sure that other Christians and the general public had a correct understanding of what Adventists now believed about soteriology and Christology. Apologetics—the need to avoid being misunderstood—continued to be a driving motivation in the widening consensus on the doctrine of the

Desire of Ages

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Trinity in Adventism. W. A. Spicer, the well-informed General Conference secretary, reported to L. R. Conradi in the early months of World War I that the Review and Herald Publishing House had appointed a committee tasked with the work of revising the widely-circulated book *Bible Readings for the Home Circle* to ensure the removal of the now inappropriate semi-Arian expressions on the nature of Christ. Urgent work had also been undertaken to revise the Arianism out of "Thoughts on Daniel" while "Thoughts on Revelation" still needed to be attended to.²⁷

During the 1920s, as is evidenced by the 1919 Bible Conference transcripts, the topic of the Trinity was still a very sensitive issue, with pastors being labeled either as progressives or conservatives depending on their stance on the issue. Discussions on the topic became so heated at the conference that the stenographer was asked to stop taking notes on the discussion. But that was about as disruptive as the topic became. Again in 1930 F. M. Wilcox and a committee of four church leaders were requested to draft a more formal summary statement of Adventist beliefs in response to a perceived need to have such a document in the denomination's annual Yearbook. According to Froom, Wilcox drew up the twenty-two-point statement for consideration by his colleagues. It was also reviewed by F. D. Nichol before being published without any further formal consideration or approval in the 1931 *SDA Year Book*.²⁸ Froom reports Nichol as telling him that Wilcox still had to word the statement conservatively "in the hope that it might be acceptable to those who had held divergent views, especially over the Godhead."²⁹

Ellen White's own growing understanding and the wide influence of *Desire of Ages* and other works slowly led to a broad consensus of understanding on the nature of the Trinity. Clearer views of Jesus and of the Spirit who testifies of him changed the way Adventists think about the Godhead. The change, profound though it was, never seemed to seriously threaten the unity of the church. Rather, the temperature of the discussions over the issue seemed to have stayed at

a low level with an occasional localized boiling-over. For example, Prescott was vigorously attacked by a fundamentalist pastor in the late 1940s over his views on the Trinity. In the mid-1950s, debate over the nature of the deity of Christ and Trinitarian doctrine again moved to center stage following discussions with evangelical leaders Walter Martin and Donald Barnhouse. On this occasion the issue of apologetics again became the main motivating factor in the attempt to find ways to express Adventist understandings more clearly and adequately both for those inside and those outside the community.

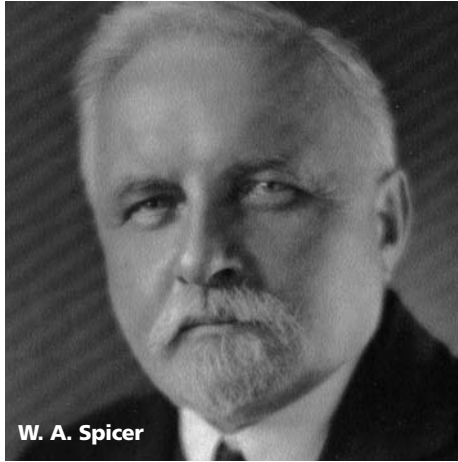
This change in theology eventually reflected itself in the worship experience of the church. In his 1947 letter looking back on the state of affairs in the church fifty years earlier, Lacey lamented that Adventists did not ever sing Trinitarian hymns. This was a notable omission for people who became Adventists from an Anglican background as his family had done. Not until the 1941 edition of the hymnbook could Adventist compilers bring themselves to include such grand favorites as "Holy, Holy, Holy" in an Adventist hymn book. The editorial committee was even prepared to include the stanza concluding with the words "blessed Trinity." R. B. Hannum, the chair of the editorial committee who was of Arian leanings, took it upon himself without authorization to rewrite the language of the poet, as "God over all who rules eternity."³⁰ The word "Trinity" still squeaked in however, in the last stanza of Hymn 45, "The Sun is on the Land and Sea."

In 1985, in the new edition of the hymnal, Adventists eventually included in their version of the grand and familiar hymn "Holy, Holy, Holy" the stanza that had the expression "God in Three Persons, Blessed Trinity." It is the only hymn in the 1985 hymn book that uses the word "Trinity," although there are six others that refer to the Godhead or the expressions "three in one" or "one in three."

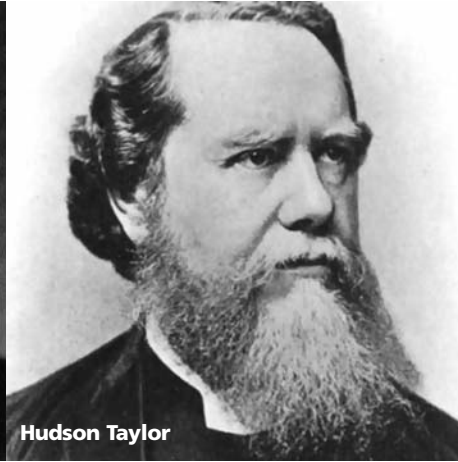
Adventist theology has changed in this area for a number of reasons. It changed because we came to have clearer views of Jesus, because we

came to understand the doctrine of salvation more clearly and because we needed to help others understand us better—which helped us to understand ourselves better. It changed because we studied scripture more closely and because

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W. A. Spicer



Hudson Taylor



F. M. Wilcox

RIGHT: ELLEN G. WHITE ESTATE GALLERY

the promised Holy Spirit continues to lead into truth, toward clearer understandings of God and the wonder of God’s grace. ■

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6. The language of her Methodist creed that asserted God was “without body and parts” made God seem unreal to her and her fellow Adventists.

7. Moon, “The Adventist Trinity Debate” Part 2, 278. Knight, *Search for Identity*, 115.

8. The letters were initiated as an inquiry from Froom to Lacey in an effort to understand the background to the discussions on the eternal existence of Christ. M. L. Andreason had been proclaiming that Ellen White was the source of the

...the wide influence of *Desire of Ages* and other works slowly led to a broad consensus of understanding on the nature of the Trinity.

change and that there had been no discussion or study by the community itself. L. E. Froom to H. C. Lacey, August 8, September 26, 1945. H. C. Lacey to A. W. Spalding April 2, June 5, 1947. A. W. Spalding to H. C. Lacey, June 2, 1947. Copies of the correspondence may be found in the Center for Adventist Research at Andrews University.

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12. W. C. White to A. G. Daniells, December 13, 1895.

13. W. C. White to Brethren, November 21, 1895; E. G. White to J. E. White, November 18, 1895; A. G. Daniells to O. A. Olsen February 14, 1896.

14. A. G. Daniells to O. A. Olsen February 14, 1896.

15. H. Camden Lacey to L. E. Froom, August 30, 1845. Lacey himself thought the interpretation to be stretched too far and that in the latter cases of the use of the “I Am” in the Gospel and that in these cases it was a simple use of the copula in the Greek.

16. *Ibid.* See also the corroborating letter H. C. Lacey to A. W. Spalding June 5, 1947.

17. See White, Ellen G., *Desire of Ages* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1898), 530. The wording in this expression had been paraphrased from Cumming, John, *Sabbath Evening Readings on the New Testament: St John* (London: Arthur Hall, Virtue and Company, 1857), 6.

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20. *Ibid.*, 20.

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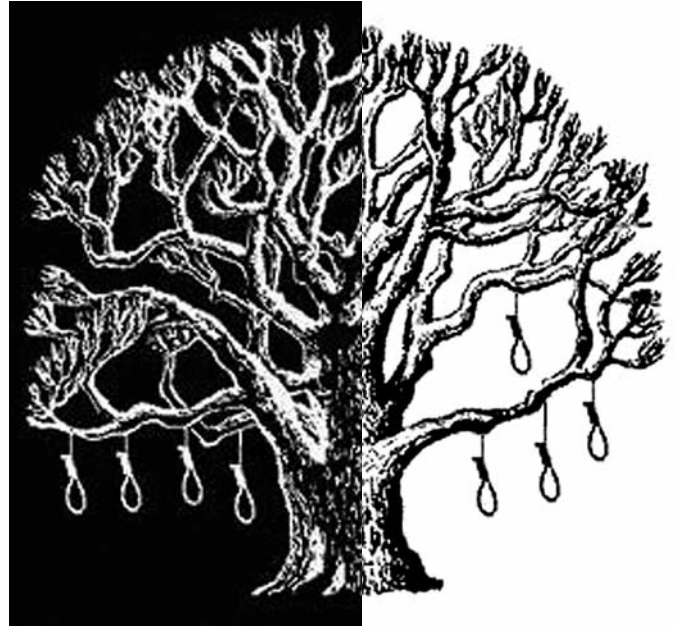
27. W. A. Spicer to L. R. Conradi, October 30, 1914. “We lately have been attacked in publications as believing this teaching, the attack being based on *Thoughts on Revelation* which in this matter certainly does teach Arianism straight.”

28. *SDA Yearbook* (1931), 377–380. See Froom, LeRoy Edwin, *Movement of Destiny* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1971), 413–414.

29. *Ibid.*

30. John Brunt, a former student of Hannum, relates the anecdote.

Golden → continued from page 37...



whose Sunday School class was firebombed in September of 1963, just a few weeks after the March on Washington, which led to the signing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964; heroes like the many whites who were either killed or harassed for their support of civil rights for African Americans in the twentieth century. In short, how dare a segment of our church want to reap where it hasn't sown! This is hypocrisy of the highest order, and it is contemptible, to say the least. We can and must do better!

London's work is important for my purposes here because it displays what Gadamer argued in *Truth and Method*: that our social, cultural, and political ideologies color our interpretations of sacred texts. This is how, on the one hand, there are white Adventists who would oppose the twentieth-century African American civil rights struggle, and how, on the other hand, there are African American Adventists like E.E. Cleveland and Charles E. Dudley who embrace London's notion of “community awareness” to justify involvement with the same struggle. As London describes it, the tension within the church over involvement in the African-American struggle for civil rights in the twentieth century was palpable. Interestingly, both groups are part of a Protestant denomination that embraces the principle of *Sola Scriptura*, which, according to Gadamer, is itself situated in a certain historical situation that demands the liberation of poor, illiterate persons from the coercive

jurisdiction of the papacy; a liberated biblical hermeneutic that predates Luther in the voice of Marsilius of Padua in the *Defensor Pacis*, and continues to this day in the voice of James Cone in *God of the Oppressed* and most recently in his book *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*.

Reading London with Gadamer enables me to continue the work of epistemic and hermeneutical humility that Martin Heidegger began: the work of destabilizing the notion of a fixed self that can immediately access the original meaning of a text. What then, is the solution? Is there no absolute, fixed, universal truth? I wholeheartedly believe that there is, but this is not the right question. The question is: can anyone know absolute truth absolutely? And the answer to that question is, in my view, an emphatic “no.” This does not mean that we lapse into an ethical relativism or hermeneutical chaos. To the contrary, reading London with Gadamer provides us with a deeper, richer conception of the truth understood as everyone bringing their own unique interpretive baggage to the text; a truth that is profoundly ethical, as it brings us full circle to the biblical admonition for self-humiliation; a truth that resists hegemonic interpretations of texts that become oppressive; a truth that leads us to the path of understanding one another, rather than being a continuous source of conflict and meaningless debate about matters far beyond our finite minds as though we can transform infinity into finitude; a truth that prevents the construction of our own social, political, cultural and theological idols that lead to injustice. ■

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**The question
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belief as a snare and a delusion, and that later, when summaries of Adventist conviction began to appear, they were informational, not instruments of intellectual control. Every student of the pioneers knows, too, that Ellen White condemned doctrinal self-satisfaction and attempts to close off of disagreement about how and what the Bible teaches.

But after World War I (and Ellen White's death), Adventism took a turn toward fundamentalism. If we had always argued for our point of view, we now veered, or many of us did, toward a more unforgiving vituperation, aping certain other Christian communities in their fearfulness, their infallibilism regarding inspired writings, their lust for doctrinal certainty and sameness, their slide into proud and disputatious factions. American fundamentalism was in fact heroic for its early grasp of modernity's murderous potential, now symbolized, chillingly, by the death camp and the mushroom cloud. But the downsides of the movement were toxic, and the toxicity affected Adventism, as the strife-ridden follow-up to the church's 1919 Bible Conference makes clear. Ongoing, and often willful, forgetfulness of the pioneer spirit (not that it was perfect) shows that the unhappy effect continues.

But fundamentalism did address vulnerabilities we are all familiar with, and it did resist, even if imperfectly, society's secularizing drift. So it is unlikely, inside of Adventism or out, to go away. And if many of us cannot in good conscience bear the fundamentalist banner, we should no doubt think about, and even learn from, what it stands for. Anything less would be intellectual self-indulgence. A certain epistemological modesty is not only becoming, it is required. God's thoughts and ways are higher than ours, and mature Christian faith salutes this fact as certainly as it salutes the lordship of Christ.

In February my wife and I attended the One Project gathering in Seattle. More than seven-hundred participants were taking seats at round tables as the first day began. It turned out that

four people at our table had also attended conferences put on by the (fundamentalist-leaning) GYC, or Generation of Youth for Christ. A very professional couple had shown up at the One Project gathering with misgivings, having been "warned" about dangers associated with the meeting. Not fully pleased with the goings-on through the day, they stuck around anyway. Before going to bed that first evening they watched a YouTube video of an Adventist lambasting the next morning's lead-off speaker.

But they came back for day two, and after the first talk expressed puzzlement about the YouTube video. Then, at mid-day, we had lunch together. Despite some difference in perspective (paired up, of course, with plenty of agreement) there was a... connection, and a level of mutual regard that felt like *koinonia*.

That sort of experience gives me hope. In Seattle, Bill Knott, editor of the *Adventist Review*, said that our movement "is either about a conversation and a journey, or it has lost its way." Later, thanks to an article in his magazine, I reflected again on Ellen White's belief that Christian unity does not consist in unanimity concerning "every text of Scripture." Church resolutions to put down disagreement "cannot force the mind and will," cannot "conceal" or "quench" all difference of opinion. "Nothing can perfect unity in the church," she continued, "but the spirit of Christ-like forbearance" (*Manuscript Releases*, v. 11, 266; italics mine).

The Nicene Council tried in the fourth century to impose uniform belief on the faithful. Fifty years of acrimony, and even violence, followed. It was true then and is true now that Christ-like forbearance is the key to *koinonia*. Doctrinal uniformity is a chimera, and we will fail to actually be God's Remnant—a people who embody the mind of Christ—until we realize that this is so and, with due discernment, love, accept and employ one another anyway. ■

Charles Scriven chairs Adventist Forum.

...genuine
intellectual
integrity
acknowledges
human limits
—allows that
we know,
in part, that
we hold our
treasure
in earthen
vessels.

Mortality and Animal Existence in Ronald Osborn's *Death Before the Fall* | BY DARYLL WARD

Death Before the Fall: Biblical Literalism and the Problem of Animal Suffering

by Ronald E. Osborn
(Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014)



HTTP://WWW.BILLHOLSTEN.COM/PHOTOS/BOTS/WANA-2008--MAMMALION-ON-BUFFALO-KILL.JPG

Ronald Osborn's *Death Before the Fall* opens with an unforgettable story of his own childhood witness to three young female lions feasting on their recent kill of a cape buffalo. He describes the lions' chests and muzzles soaked in blood and recalls the "stench" of death in the air. The lions had not dragged the buffalo's carcass out of the road on which their family car was traveling, so they were forced to move around what Osborn describes as "this beautiful scene of carnage" (12). His childhood world, Osborn tells us, "was deeply mysterious, untamed, dangerous, beautiful and good... And the danger was part of its goodness and its

beauty." Indeed, the beauty and goodness are "inextricably linked to cycles of birth and death, as well as suffering, ferocity and animal predation" (13, emphasis mine).

If we can see the beauty and goodness of lions eviscerating their prey, it will not "ring true" to call this world of ours cursed or evil. "There is a doubleness to all of animal existence... with birth and death, comedy and tragedy, suffering and grandeur, appearing as *the interwoven and inseparable aspects* of a single reality that defies easy moral categorization (14, emphasis mine).

In order to see that the reality of animal existence makes easy moral categorization impossible, one must recognize the

Is animal suffering truly a dilemma?



profound deficiencies in the account typically offered by individuals who read the Bible literalistically. As his opening narrative implies and his declaration that the “central” riddle of the book lies in the relationship between animal beauty and suffering confirms, the deep problem the book addresses is “...Why...would a just and loving God... require or permit such a world to exist” (14)?

Biblical literalism claims to have an answer. God’s initially-perfect creation is groaning under the divine curse justly imposed in retribution for Eve’s and Adam’s sin. Literalists who might not claim this as a satisfactory answer to the question are minimally certain that any other narrative would prove God is neither loving nor just.

Osborn devotes two-thirds of his work to dismantling the ideas that the Bible must be read literalistically to be read faithfully, and that the narrative arising from such a reading is theologically superior to any reading that acknowledges what is known about natural history regarding “death before the fall.”

My mother taught me that “a man convinced against his will is of the same opinion still,” and Osborn’s critique of literalism and its theodicy will not persuade the convinced. But what it can do, and what we may hope it will do, is supply anyone not yet or no longer convinced of literalism with multiple reasons for faithful reading of Scripture that eschews literalism and inspires theological wisdom regarding animal suffering.

Briefly catalogued, the reasons he offers for rejecting literalism (as opposed to such literal readings as his own and those of figures like Augustine and Calvin) are as follows:

1. Literalism is an example of failed epistemological foundationalism (44).
2. It shares with scientism the false notion that there is only one kind of knowledge, namely “scientific” knowledge (49).
3. The “scientific” pursuits implied by literalism amount to the conglomeration of ad hoc hypotheses that are definitive of degenerating research programs (59).
4. Literalism fails to grasp the theological necessity of methodological atheism in science, a

- necessity implied by divine transcendence of all secondary causation (72).
5. Literalism is closely allied with fundamentalism, which leads to a coercive communal politics originating in a need for communal purity (79).
6. Literalists exhibit “identity foreclosure” and “premature integrity” as described by Erik Erikson (82).
7. Literalists belie their claim regarding the primacy of Scripture by insisting on authoritative interpretations (83).
8. Literalism manifests a long list of the characteristics of Gnosticism, a besetting heresy (86).

All of this is by way of prolegomena in preparation for addressing the central riddle of animal suffering. Osborn is clear that “...there are no tidy answers to the theodicy dilemma of animal suffering...” (126). This is well said, with one important reservation: is animal suffering truly a dilemma? As with all the dimensions of “the problem of evil,” there is in fact an entirely satisfactory answer to the problem of animal suffering—namely, the elimination of animal suffering and the redemption of its myriad victims. Then again, perhaps we are dealing with a dilemma after all.

Death Before the Fall can be fruitfully read seeking what its various insights suggest for accumulating wisdom regarding animal suffering as we wait for redemption. Three things in particular deserve concentrated attention. First, the author offers a ringing affirmation that the world and animal existence are “very good.” Osborn is firmly in accord with the whole span of Christian and Hebrew theology on this point as his reading of the book of Job demonstrates. Second, Osborn points to a Christology of kenosis as a model for understanding God’s being in relationship to history. And third, he suggests God’s way of creating and sustaining life primarily takes the form of providence working within history as opposed to radically interrupting it.

Others inclined to join Osborn in thinking along these lines will do well to consider more extensive development of these notions than was

either necessary or possible within Osborn's chosen rhetorical context. To begin, we ought to question the inseparability of the goodness of the earth from its accompanying horrors. If actual animal existence, with its "inextricably-linked cycles of birth and death" and its "inseparable aspects of suffering and tragedy" is beautiful and good, surely it is entirely fitting for a just and loving God to create a world manifesting these forms of beauty and goodness. This is not to say that a just and loving God either intends or permits concomitant animal suffering. It is simply to note that if animal existence as we know it can be called very good and beautiful, and the only possibility of realizing that goodness and beauty is inseparable from suffering, then God cannot be faulted for enduring the suffering for the sake of the goodness. If there is an actual problem with animal suffering, as opposed to a mere failure to grasp its essential relation to animal beauty, then we must assume that, as necessary as such suffering is in the world as we know it, it is finally unnecessary.

The degree to which the author may be willing to assert a necessary connection may be seen in his critique of a notion of deathless creation assumed by biblical literalists who deny the presence of death before Eve and Adam's fall. Concerning the problem of "stasis" that burdens a literalistic reading of Genesis, Osborn writes, "In a spatially finite and deathless world... there could not be endless procreation... It would be a creation without new creation." In agreement with John Haught, he asserts such a world would be "dead on delivery" (128–129).

Such arguments seem to me to underestimate the radical character of Christian hope. What makes them powerful and worthy of critical reflection, however, is the fact that inconceivable states of affairs cannot exist. Therefore if the beauty of animal existence cannot even be conceived apart from animal suffering—if the link between beauty and suffering in animal existence is inseparable in this sense—then God himself could not create a world with animals that did not include suffering. A few more thoughts on

necessity may be useful for further reflection.

Christian theology has generally denied the necessity of our cosmos, including the earth, in two senses. It has denied that the world exists necessarily, and it has denied that the form of its contingent existence is necessary. These convictions regarding contingency and the freedom they imply turn out to be crucially important to Osborn's interest in theodicy. Even more fundamental to his sense of the goodness of the creation than the facts of procreation is the fact of indeterminacy and the possibilities of freedom it affords. In a cosmos exhibiting indeterminacy and agency, many have asserted, suffering is inevitable. Just as the price of procreation is supposed to be death, many argue that the price of freedom is pain. One thinks here of the process-creationists Charles Hartshorne and Philip Clayton, to name only two. Robert John Russell is to be commended for his dissent from this view.

The assertion of the "inevitability" of suffering in an indeterminate world requires the assumption of a multiplicity of agents whose actions are not fully ordered toward, or by, any transcendent good. It is far from obvious that an open world fully ordered by perfect goodness is inconceivable. By my lights, the two most insidious features of evil are the degree to which it succeeds in appearing necessary for the enjoyment of good and its power to capture the imagination by this appearance.

Although *Death Before the Fall* occasionally comes close to a freewill theodicy of the sort that accommodates evil in the interest of the superior goods freedom bestows, Osborn does not go the distance, to his credit. Theodicies in general and freewill theodicy in all of its forms exaggerate the actual freedoms of finite agents and unjustifiably constrict the freedom of the infinite one.

Here Osborn's second important insight comes into view. Divine freedom includes the possibility of full participation in the contingencies of history, natural and recorded. On this side of the question, Osborn says the Cross denies us any "stoical pact with the cruelties of death as divinely fated necessities of life. Death

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stands.”**

is the final enemy” (158). It can, and also should, be said that the Cross denies the necessity of seeing suffering and death as the inevitable outworking of an open creation. Kenotic Christology supplies the key for understanding. Such a Christology reveals that “...God’s creative might and sovereign rule are always expressed in harmony with his character revealed in the historical person Jesus, whose way was one of co-suffering humility, nonviolent self-limitation and liberal self-donation” (162).

Challenging his readers, Osborn asks: “...are we prepared to follow this Creator who...enters into the suffering and contingency of his creation and in so doing redeems it?” (164). Much—or should one say everything—depends on the meaning of that redemption.

If the life of Jesus is actually revelatory of the Creator, then Christology offers us more than a “fellow sufferer who understands.” Instead, that life makes hope for the Sabbath Rest of all creation rational. It is important to recall that the central affirmation of Christology in all of its forms (including kenotic ones) is that the Creator really participates in his creation with the precise purpose of overcoming evil and its correlative suffering and death—i.e., to redeem it. God in Christ does not, according to the author of Philippians, reconcile himself to the world. He does not simply dwell with us. He reconciles the world to himself. (The ultimate vice of theodicy is the reconciliation of God to the world.) If reconciliation of the world to God is the effect of his self-emptying, then the world will become non-violent.

The reality of the Cross makes the full participation of divinity in the literal conditions of the creation undeniable. However, it is only the Cross because of the resurrection. Without Easter, the Cross becomes a potent demand for a stoic pact with the necessity of death. Osborn rejects such accommodation. “There are things under heaven and in the earth,” he writes, “that we should not be at peace with, and the jaws of the Behemoth, I would submit, are one” (157). Jesus Christ makes his rejection plausible.

Finally, a kenotic Christology can facilitate the formation of a coherent doctrine of providence. It strikes me as one of the book’s most valuable recommendations that creation be prominently understood in terms of providential participation in the world. Such thinking need not compromise the equally necessary affirmation that before God began to create the world, there was nothing other than God.

The desire for a satisfactory theodicy may originate with anxious revulsion at one’s own mortality, even if one is not moved by the suffering and death of others (including our animal siblings). But there is a deeper issue than our mortality and suffering. The question raised by our own animal existence is whether there is any one worthy of unrestricted praise and unqualified submission. Is there one worthy of worship? If we examine the creation, we might conclude it fitting to worship the creator. But Christians must be clear that they hold God to be the Creator. They do not consider just any conceivable creator to be God. If Jesus is the revelation of the Creator, a Creator thoroughly hidden in the remainder of the creation, then there is one worthy of worship. There is one worthy of worship because the story of Jesus is the story of real participation in the creation that relieved its suffering, vanquished its demons and raised the dead to life—gifts that only divinity can give.

It is to be hoped that this thoroughly informed, fair-minded, generous and insightful volume will find a large audience. And it is to be even more fervently desired that the book will supply the impetus for genuinely new approaches to its themes. It is reasonable to hope that even literalists will enlarge their love of the Bible if they see that recognition of the facts of natural history does not compel stoic despair. The seeds for such recognition are present in this valuable essay. ■

Daryll Ward, PhD is Professor of Theology and Ethics at



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Cover
again, oil on canvas, 44" x 50",
2011. By Lisie S. Orjuela.

Artist's Statement

The world of paradoxes currently engages my attention. Our interior territories, with the struggles and contradictions of the soul, the spirit, the psyche, and the mind is a vast, complicated, and intriguing field. I work in a way that reflects natural life; in a slow organic process, with multiple layers of paint, visual textures, rich earthy colors, as well as human and animal forms. Paintings I recently finished are part of the series "groundings," loosely based on the ten *Paramis* or virtues. I visually explored the *Paramis* and their contradictory impulses and the tensions that can arise in us. I was interested in visually exploring these virtues without the constraint and exclusion of particular religions.

About the Artist

Lisie Orjuela's heritage and influences are quite a mix of cultures, visual experiences, and living rhythms garnished with a strong dose of early emphasis on the spiritual dimension of our existence. Originally and culturally from Argentina, she has lived in Uruguay, Switzerland, and Mexico, as well as within several states of the United States. Currently, the artist lives and works in Connecticut, where her studio is located in the historic American Fabric Arts Building in Bridgeport. In this studio space she works for weeks and months on each of her pieces, letting layers of paint, patterns, and energies slowly intermingle, shift, and weave themselves into the finished paintings. You can view more of Orjuela's work on pages 4-5, 31, and 51 in this issue, or online at: www.lisieorjuela.com.

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Led by the Light

BY BRUCE FORBES

With an eye toward the sky
while listening to the weather forecast
on the car radio
I head out and up the road
to another day of "blue skies and happy people."
Finding or making or bewitching
or waiting for
what others expect to see, and hope for.

And I do, too. I anticipate beauty
like others hope for rain.
I seek a subtle, yet lush, emergent green
of endlessly varied hues
visually fragrant skies — the incredible range
from cold deep certain overhead blue
to sensuous forgiving languid orange-tan
evening warmth and light
when the cares and troubles of the day
give way to lighter breezes
and more innocent play
and the camera sees everyone
as they remember themselves
and the wonderful sweep and shape of light
encompasses and enfolds us all
as if taking us carefully but completely
into yet another good-night
where nothing too wrong can happen
where we will be all right.

So the nuances of light and shape and color
of vantage point, of frame of mind,
of the strong yet delicate act of timing
are my tools — the things with which I work
to bring back memories that never were
but which we all wish for —
happiness, well-being, rightness
comfort, love, wholeness.
While the subjects may vary, the goal
is always the same.

And as I do this wonderfully visual dance
for yet more years
I learn to quickly recognize suitable partners
which will yield most intimate results
sometimes through the research of map, clock, and compass
other times through accident of discovery and intuition

when I am led by the light
directed
as surely as if by a voice within my head
to places and situations
where magic gathers.
I work with my heart.
If you can understand that
you will understand me.

Bruce Forbes serves as chair for the Division of Fine Arts at Union College in Lincoln, Nebraska, where he teaches courses in photography and graphic design. He loves people, images, and words.



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