Adventist Today

High-five Friday!
May 27, 2011

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. **A Beam in Search of a Mote?**: Is the Genesis creation account literal, metaphorical, or a mix? Ervin Taylor says the fight is an addiction that needs to be put to rest. But is Dr. Taylor himself more than a bit “compelled” by the struggle? David Newman, *Adventist Today* editor, raises the question in comments. Gentlemen, gentlemen! (to view complete article, click title)

. **Getting the Hell Out of There***: Is Christianity finally dousing the fires of hell? Could be! Popular mega-church evangelical pastor Rob Bell has written a best-seller, *Love Wins*, panning the doctrine as unbiblical and unchristian. The battle is heated. Read the review by atoday.com’s Nathan Brown in REVIEWS. (to view complete article, click title)

. **Ahead of Our Time—Again?**: *atoday.com* offers a second opinion on the same book, *Love Wins*, this time by blogger Monte Sahlin. Consider, too, that Adventism was about 130 years ahead of its time in pointing out the importance of the Second Coming; now it appears to have anticipated by 150 years the crumbling of the Gates of Hell. In another 20 years, will the seventh-day Sabbath revive in Christianity? Never say never—God works in mysterious ways! The author looks carefully at the book and its implications. (to view complete article, click title)

. **Celebration Worship, Church Growth, and Mega-churches**: Mega-churches and celebration-style communities of Adventist faith have traveled a difficult journey in Adventism. But several are still with us. A brand new name in the *Adventist Today* blogosphere, long-time pastor Dr. Lawrence Downing, looks at the historical—and ethical—processes in play. (to view complete article, click title)

. **The Editor Turns Author**: *atoday.com* is pleased to announce the publishing of Editor David Newman’s brand-new book, *Where To?: The Adventist Search for Direction*. The author looks at where the church stands in time—and where it may be headed. Available soon at *atoday.com*. So new it's not yet posted. Watch for it.

*Available to subscribers only, at this time.*
Evolution: Cliff Goldstein's Addiction

Submitted May 23, 2011
By Erv Taylor

I regret to report that it appears that my good friend, Cliff Goldstein, the editor of the Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide and frequent contributor to Adventist Review, seems to have an addiction. That seeming addiction is evolution—biological evolution, that is. (Cliff seems to wish to call it “Evil-ution”). His addiction is that he can’t leave it alone.

In his case, perhaps we should call it an obsession. Whatever one wishes to call it, Cliff seems to have a compulsion to write about evolution over and over and over again. Of course, in his case, he is compelled to write how much he is against it. An adapted Shakespeare line (Hamlet Art III, scene II), “Methinks he dost protest too much.” comes to mind, but unpacking this observation is for another day.

His latest encyclical on this topic is entitled “A Safe Place” (Adventist Review, April 21, 2011). As is usual with him, he moves beyond his own personal distaste for evolution and insists that “you can be an Adventist or an evolutionist, but not both.” He must project his own addiction onto everyone else and make his personal dislike a normative belief for every Adventist.

Saying that one can’t be an Adventist and an evolutionist is, of course, factually incorrect as there are a number of Adventists, with whom I have personally discussed this topic, who have accepted the view that the contemporary scientific understanding of biological evolutionary processes is the currently best model—from a scientific perspective—to explain the fossil record and contemporary life forms. All of these individuals are members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in good and regular standing in their respective home churches—all of which, by the way, are not located in southern California or even California.

Now if Cliff had written that “you can’t be my kind of Adventist and be an evolutionist,” I, for one, would have no objection. That’s his thing and he has a right to express his opinion. His own understanding of the Bible will not allow him to be an Adventist and an evolutionist. Fine, no problem.

But his obsession or addiction will apparently not allow him to take that position. To Cliff, there is only one kind of Adventism—his kind. It is a classical, traditional 19th century fundamentalist Adventism where, it would seem, theological orthodoxy is the highest value. Right now, the political reality is that General Conference Adventism and its mouthpiece, the Adventist Review (AR), is controlled by people like Cliff.

Cliff’s own personal convictions as an Adventist convert are squarely in alignment with the current political winds now blowing through institutional Adventism. By the way, I see that the AR is advertising itself as “The Most Respected Source for Church News and Information.” That is an interesting use of the word “respected.” At least, even they don’t say that they are the most accurate source of Adventist Church news.

To be honest to the facts, we should immediately note that Cliff’s position on this topic precedes by many years the radical right wing takeover of the General Conference. Also, to be honest, I would assume that the vast majority of Adventists agree with Cliff. Regretfully, Adventist culture has
linked the whole complex of issues surrounding the so-called “creation-evolution” debate, e.g. a recent literal, seven-day creation week, a recent whole wide flood, etc. etc., as being central to providing Biblical support for the Adventist Sabbath worship practices. Rather than seeing the example of Jesus as totally and completely sufficient to commend Sabbath worship, Cliff and others make a fundamentalist understanding of the Genesis narratives normative. This is an understandable but tragic situation.

Also we should take note that in this article, Cliff has categorically stated that he does not—repeat not—advocate that “anyone who believes in evolution ought to be thrown out of the [Adventist] church.” This is something we can all agree upon.

On the other hand, in his discussion of the church as a “Safe Place,” Cliff talks about such a place only for someone “struggling (his emphasis) with this attack on his or her faith.” Evolution might constitute an attack on Cliff’s faith, but it is not a problem for many other Adventists who do not share Cliff’s theology. They are certainly still a minority even in First World Adventism, but they constitute a significant proportion of the academic and professional parts of Adventism.

The sad part is that Cliff’s never ending personal jihad on this point and the political efforts inside the Adventist Church by other right-wing extremists will foster the continuing polarization in our faith community in the First World. But it appears that Cliff and others holding his views really do not care if they continue to undermine efforts at reconciliation and peaceful co-existence. It’s all or nothing with them.

I know I am asking the impossible but may I suggest to Cliff a policy of “benign neglect?” If he stops writing about evolution, then the rest of us can turn our writing projects toward more productive topics.

J. David Newman
3 weeks ago Reply

My good friend Erv feels that my other good friend Cliff has an addiction. He writes too much about evolution and creation. Could I dare suggest that my good friend Erv might suffer from the same malady? In 2010 Erv authored 17 blogs. At least six of them were on the subject of science, evolution, and creation. In 2009 out of 16 blogs half of them were on the same subject. In 2008 out of the 10 blogs recorded on this website 7 were on the same subject. It seems that Erv might be writing more on this subject than Cliff. Is that possible?

Ervin Taylor
3 weeks ago Reply

May I suggest to my good friend David that I would be very happy to reduce or eliminate my blogs on the subject if two circumstances present themselves. The first would be that my good friend Cliff refrains from his insistence in print that you can’t be a “good” Adventist and evolutionist. He has ever right to believe this but using his “bully pulpit” in the Adventist Review to propagandize this view is another matter. The second would be if the Adventist Review refrains from promulgating Cliff’s position on a continuous basis. Once the playing field on this topic becomes a little more balanced, I will be eager to move on and contribute blogs that focus on much more important topics.
OK Then! Only write a blog on this point when Cliff writes on this point. While I agree with Cliff in some areas I do not agree with his point that you cannot believe in theistic evolution and still be an Adventist. Adventists are supposed to live under a large tent. Nowhere in the Bible does it say that we must believe 28 doctrines to get to heaven or even to belong to God's church. The Bible is much more concerned about relationships than it is about doctrines. Jesus made that clear when he was asked to comment on which was the most important of the commandments (rules). He insisted that relationships were what was most important. How do you love God and how do you love those around you? I long to see our denomination focus on loving relationships rather than drawing lines in the sand.

Elaine Nelson

"In the early 90s, Goldstein interpreted the end of the Cold War as a new sign of the end of the world, with the end of the Soviet Union as the end of "the most implacable barrier to Adventist eschatology."

Hmmm, he's also a prophetic voice like Camping? The above taken from Wikipedia on Cliff Goldstein.

J. David: perhaps if Cliff would not consistenly goad the intellectual scientists among Adventists (yes, there are a few), Erv and others would have other, perhaps less controversial topics. Cliff is making evolution the "Great Satan" of Adventism and in so doing, he has the applause and encouragement of the G.C. administration and has been a mouthpiece via the SS quarterly for more than 12 years and with his prolific books, published, thanks to SDA publishers. Who can deny that he has been given a unique position in Adventism as his personal bully pulpit? His call for Adventists to be either "biblical literalists" or jump ship is to foster more polarization within Adventism that benefits neither position but only fosters animosity.

As for the Review being "The Most Respected Source for Church News and Information," it has neither reported the obituary of a highly respected and beloved teacher, Graham Maxwell; nor has it reported on the New England conference church treasurer who embezzled more than $150,000 and was not charged by the administration! Supposedly, it is not news worth reporting--but it can be read here on the AToday website.

Elaine Nelson

I should add that Erv has far more qualifications to write about scientific subjects than Cliff with his M.A. in Ancient Northwest Semitic languages.

Trevor Hammond

The fall of the Soviet Union was a significant World event and one which supported traditional Adventist eschatological views in terms of the USA in Bible prophecy. The USSR/Communism was vilified as the anti-Christ and labelled a direct threat to Christianity and the West (much of this was largely Capitalist propaganda though).
Traditional SDA eschatology held that the USA (the lamblike beast with two horns) was the only major Superpower/Dominant Political Power which will forge an alliance with the Church of Rome and setup an image of false worship, that is, Sunday Sacredness as opposed to the Holy Sabbath of the Fourth Commandment through a union of both Church and State.

So Mrs Nelson seems to have missed the context of what Goldstein saw as a significant ‘sign’ of end time events.

I’m sure die hard evolutionists won’t be impressed if I quote Darwin’s line on the ‘eye’ out of context when he CONFESSED:

“To suppose that the eye, with all its inimitable contrivances for adjusting the focus to different distances, for admitting different amounts of light, and for the correction of spherical and chromatic aberration, could have been formed by natural selection, seems, I freely confess, absurd in the highest possible degree.” (Darwin 1872)

T (Rex?):

### Doctorf Doctorf1

2 weeks ago  Reply

Trevor,

Just as there will be no 2nd coming in 2011 there will be no conspiracy where the US will join hands with the RCC and throw out the constitution and force Sunday worship. To interpret these beasts representing modern govts specifically the USA is ridiculous. Erv's post and reading Cliff's ongoing nonsense in the SS quarterly reminds me of why I will never look at the SS quarterly again. It's propaganda, nothing more, nothing less.

### Elaine Nelson

3 weeks ago  Reply

Labeling all with different views as "evolutionists" is similar to Joe McCarthy's calling "Communists" who did not agree with his definition of true Americans.

It matters not what Goldstein, Camping, EGW, or anyone else decides indicate end time events: this has been an on-going prediction since before the end of the first century. The bogey man of "Sunday sacredness" which may have seemed possible more than 100 years ago, seems almost ludicrous today when the Muslim world which honors Friday, has become a major player in the religious world. Roman Catholicism is fighting its own inner battles and increasingly, its members flout the papal pronouncements. If it declared Sunday as the only day to worship, who would be listening and follow? How many of its parishioners pay heed to its messages on birth control? Even in the largest Catholic countries, it is almost exclusively ignored. The fear of Catholicism is a 19th century belief, and EGW who wrote of this was only following the trend at that time. This was not only SDA eschatology, but was identical to the anti-catholicism, anti-semitic reasoning held by many 19th century Americans. Before that time, it was anti-Irish and anti-German, and during WWI and WW11 it was isolation that was preached by many.

Globalism has radically changed the concept of Britain as a world power, and the U.S. is still clinging by its fingernails to have that power today but with its tentacles in nearly every country around the world it has over-extended itself and has become burdened with the financial impossibility of continuing to be the power it once was.
Even if the Catholics attempted to enact a Sunday law, who would enforce it? Congress is composed of many legislators with many religious beliefs, but they cannot long rule on religious beliefs but are beholden to the lobbyists who continually fill their pockets. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce is very influential and one of the largest financial contributors, and to believe that they would ever agree to a Sunday closing of all businesses is preposterous. With retail businesses operating 24/7, who would dare think they would be willing to close shop one day when profit is the name of the game? Dream on.

laffal 3 weeks ago  Reply

Elaine,

Sunday Blue Laws are on record in every state of the union.

As for Congress being composed of many religious beliefs, it would be wise to remember that the Jews in Christ's day HATED the Romans, but who did they call upon / call king when it came to getting rid of Jesus Christ? The Romans! The apparent diversity of religion is not reasonable / viable criteria to draw this conclusion. BTW, Catholics spend more $$ thru lobbyists then you can begin to imagine... and have been since the turn of the 20th century. Peace

Doctorf Doctorf1 2 weeks ago  Reply

Elaine,

Nice job in putting the RCC demon to bed. Catholics that I know rarely go to church, are decent people, practice birth control and are rather independent thinkers, especially their educated class. The idea that an eclectic group of over 500 US lawmakers are going to "suddenly see the light" and invoke a Sunday law is a classic SDA lunacy. Congress right now can't even agree on a budget much less invoking religious tyranny and shutting down commerce on Sunday.

So Trevor, relax and have a virgin margarita.

Stephen Foster 2 weeks ago  Reply

Elaine,

You dismiss the concept of Blue Laws as if they (were something that) could never have been enacted in a profit-driven, laissez-faire, capitalist society. There was a time when the United States was arguably more capitalist, in a pure sense, than it is now; and of course this coincides with when the Blue Laws that remain in many states were enacted and/or enforced.

In many parts of the South and Midwest you cannot legally purchase packaged alcoholic beverages on Sunday, right now. The argument that the pursuit of profits precludes the enactment and/or enforcement of Blue Laws is manifestly and historically faulty, at best.
Stephen, I am well aware of Blue Laws which were active in the Deep South. I was a child there, beginning in the 30s, when everything was closed up tight on the "Sabbath." What was adopted and accepted 70 years ago, will not be readily accepted today. Alcohol sales have always been tightly regulated unlike other commodities, and still it is impossible in many areas to buy after midnight or the wee hours of Sunday. These are not properly called "Blue Laws" as only alcohol is affected. Why would this possibly be a concern of Sabbatarians not to be able to buy on Sunday? If both Saturday and Sunday were affected, there might be reason to protest. The government has been very considerate of Adventists by delivering mail on Sunday so as to avoid the saints getting their mail on Saturday--as if that were not properly keeping Sabbath!

Ervin Taylor

It appears that there is no need for me to comment on Mr. Hammond's "interesting" statements. Elaine does such a better job than I can ever do.

Trevor Hammond

Mrs Nelson---> I see no 'reason' for one to instigate a 'paper' sword fight in an ad-hoc attempt to try and discredit someone not from ones own camp based on the 'who's who in the zoo' rationale.

Many millions of Christians around the world are Creationists and believe in the literal Genesis account of it which, I might add, is not based on just blind faith but on the testimony of the Holy Bible and by faith and trust in God our Creator. Something that is ‘made’ or ‘created’, clearly implies that it is not evolved, at least in terms of what evolution ‘theories’ assert.

Why should we listen to mere mortals who theorize fanciful eccentrics regarding our origins when the All Knowing, All Powerful, All Present God of Creation has already given us a good basis for our belief? Evolution therefore, in my humble opinion, is a plagiaristic attempt to defraud God of his rightful place as the Creator and Sovereign Ruler of this whole Universe, including time and space...

It seems that one has to be a tremendously compromised Christian (if there is such) in order to simultaneously embrace dodgy theistic evolution and ‘real’ Adventism (not the pseudo kind), at one go.

At what point does a traditional conservative, maybe third (fourth? Fifth?) generation Seventh-day Adventist Christian ‘cross-over’ or ‘morph’ into becoming a Theistic Evolutionist or even a step further – a ‘wholesale’ evolutionist? Is it upon enrolment at an institution teaching such; or at the final payment of fees; or at the receipt of qualification; or maybe at some esoteric moment during a lecture where the Prof with the halo proposes the theory and voila ... suddenly... it – takes – place? A ‘progressive’ reaches ‘realisation'. Is it something similar to an eastern god-realisation experience but minus the god...? Huh!

T (Rex?) ;)

Doctorf Doctorf1
Trevor,

There you go again invoking the weak argument that "truth lies in numbers." To those who have studied religious history know that the genesis account is two non-overlapping stories separated by about 400 yrs. The 2nd is a copy of the Babylonian 6 day creation myth. The difference between the Jewish story and Babylonian? The Jewish story is monotheistic.

Darrel Lindensmith

I normally do not comment, but I read the blogs, and I am speaking out of my fields of Theology and Psychology, however in a past life I was a Biology major, and do keep up on the literature relating to Origins. In a word, Erv’s view that “... evolutionary processes is the currently best model—from a scientific perspective—to explain the fossil record and contemporary life forms,” is being quickly undermined as scientific research advances.

What inspired me to interlope here is an article I read in the journal “Cell Cycle.”

This article discusses the discovery of genetic construction programs for eyes and antibodies in creatures that do not have eyes or antibodies. The instructions for higher taxons were ‘front loaded’ from the beginning before any mythological mutation and selection could create them.

Michael Y. Sherman Department of Biochemistry, Boston University School of Medicine, Boston writes:

“This model has two major predictions, first that a significant fraction of genetic information in lower taxons must be functionally useless but becomes useful in higher taxons, and second that one should be able to turn on in lower taxons some of the complex latent developmental programs, e.g., a program of eye development or antibody synthesis in sea urchin.”

Cell Cycle: Universal Genome in the Origin of Metazoa: Thoughts About Evolution Vol. 6 Issue 15 August 1, 2007 pgs.1873 - 1877

More recently, Conway Morris argues that the pervasiveness of convergent structures show that evolution may be in some way “channeled” toward similar functional and structural endpoints. Just as physicists are pointing to design in their discussions of anthropic fine-tuning, convergent structures in the history of life and the front loading of genetic instructions at “primitive” levels are leading to teleological thinking to biology. Conway Morris himself states that the evolution might be “underpinned by a purpose” (2000, 2003). Yes, “A Purpose!” This “prediction” was made earlier by many others: (Denton 1986, 1998; Thaxton 1992; Kenyon & Mills 1996: Behe 1996, 2004; Dembski 1998, 2002, 2004; Conway Morris 2000, 2003, 2003, Lonning 2001; Lonning & Saedler 2002.

Dawkins (1986), Mayr (1982) and Lewontin (1978) have long acknowledged that organisms appear to have been designed, but have remained in denial about why.

All this reminds me of Charles Kingsley’s lecture. Preaching at Westminster Abbey, in 1871 on Natural Theology, in response to Darwin’s work on the “Contrivances” of how British and foreign orchids are fertilized by insects, he stated:

“We knew of old that God was so wise that he could make all things; but, behold he is so much
wiser than even that, that he can make all things make themselves."


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**Doctorf Doctorf1**

David,

I think you are using the word "purpose" in a different context. Reading the same the word "purpose" may be more of a utilitarian word. I do not think these scientists are suggesting that purpose pre-supposes a God. If all complexity requires a creator with "purpose" then you need a higher purposeful God to make the God we think we know. In the end, God, is a creation of the human frontal cortex. Everything you think you know about God was invented using human language.

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**Doctorf Doctorf1**

Darrel,

In my response to you I addressed you as David. Sorry, I was a bit tired from doing my reading this afternoon. You do raise some good points but most scientists I know, including myself, openly acknowledge that the teleological arguments venturing into the realm of "why" are mystical and usually start occurring after a few after dinner drinks.

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**Ervin Taylor**

I thank Mr. Lindensmith for his citations. Might we stipulate that biological evolution in the strict sense of the term does not"origins" as in the "origin of life." It deals with what happens after life appears. However, as we all know, there are a number of biologists interested in how life may have appeared. I call reader's attention to the phase "from a scientific perspective" in my suggestion that evolutionary processes constitutes the currently best model—from a scientific perspective—to explain the fossil record and contemporary life forms.” Since scientific explanations must only deal with natural causation, i.e., any appeal to supernaturalism is, by definition, not part of a scientific explanation, I would submit that the statement is correct.

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**Elaine Nelson**

"have long acknowledged that organisms appear to have been designed, but have remained in denial about why."

Scientists are not endeavoring to decide "why" but only study what is evident. Anyone can speculate "why" which is the province of others--who often speak without knowledge.

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**Doctorf Doctorf1**

Elaine,
Indeed the search for "why" is in the theological realm, not the scientific one. Darrel is taking great poetic license in his interpretation of what he is reading. The "why" questions are speculation and there are no answers in these discussions, just more mystery.

Darrel Lindensmith

Interesting discussion. Are we really saying that modern evolutionary theory says nothing about "why"? We can't be serious. Browse the literature of evolutionary psychology or socio-biology. In the area of psychology "why" is the main focus of inquiry. My use of the word "why" is as Arthur L. Schawlow uses it:

(Professor of Physics at Stanford University, 1981 Nobel Prize in physics) "It seems to me that when confronted with the marvels of life and the universe, one must ask why and not just how. The only possible answers are religious... I find a need for God in the universe and in my own life."

To limit science to only materialistic causes cripples one's epistemology and philosophically locks us into the "error of infinite regress."

Materialism does address the "why" and the answer is materialism--chance and natural selection.

Dr. Pierre Grasse years ago expressed his frustration with this problem:
"Directed by all-powerful selection, chance becomes a sort of providence, which, under the cover of atheism, is not named but which is secretly worshipped...To insist, even with Olympian assurance, that life appeared quite by chance and evolved in this fashion, is an unfounded supposition which I believe to be wrong and not in accordance with the facts."

Doctorf Doctorf1

Darrel,

It is interesting that you take Dr. Grasse's belief suppositions as fact. He does not speak for me as I do not worship evolution nor does evolution explain "why" life is here. But, what it does explain quite well is how life forms change and adapt. His final statement begins with "....which I believe...."

Believers have no superior argument or position as to the "why" of life. Inventing God as the creator of life explains absolutely nothing in terms of how and why life exists. Interjecting God into any scientific discussion moves the discussion from the scientific realm to the realm of belief.

Ervin Taylor

Believers have no superior argument or position as to the "why" of life. Inventing God as the creator of life explains absolutely nothing in terms of how and why life exists. Interjecting God into any scientific discussion moves the discussion from the scientific realm to the realm of belief.
There are certainly distinguished scientists--usually in their senior years and usually after they have retired from active research--who make statements that transition from scientific discourse into philosophy and, in some cases, theology to ask the ontological "why" question. But they and their colleagues know they have moved out of the realm of mainline scientific discourse. Those outside the scientific arena understandably sometimes misunderstand what is going on.

Darrel Lindensmith
2 weeks ago  Reply

I see! You are right; these issues are beyond people like me. I will leave them for the scientific Right Estate to answer for me. :-)  

Elaine Nelson
2 weeks ago  Reply

There is no place to reply to Stephen, above. This is most confusing not to list in sequential order as one must hunt through all the comments to locate one.

Stephen, is it definitively known that all liquor sales that close on Sunday were to honor Sunday sacredness? In the U.K., they close at 2 am Sunday morning (some places) so that carousing and fights will not extend through Sunday, but whether to honor sacredness or not, Sunday is rarely attended by Christians there. Whether those were the original intentions, it is doubtful they would be enacted again if they were put up for vote.

Trevor Hammond
2 weeks ago  Reply

Doctorf Doctorf1 ---> My point is that many believe in Creation based on the sure 'testimony of the Holy Bible and by faith and trust in God our Creator' which to the Christian is NOT what constitutes 'blind faith'. I did not say that 'truth lies in numbers'.

Religious historians, theologians and even scientists are NOT the custodians of TRUTH: God is! I consider the question asked by Pilate: "What is Truth?", when addressing Jesus, as one of the most important questions asked by a mortal. His walking away from Jesus before an answer is the 'error' we are prone to make even today. Pilate walked away from TRUTH: Jesus IS the TRUTH!

There were/are some who have in the past and even today who have tried to discredit the Christian Biblical View of Creation by falsely accusing the Church in the Middle Ages of teaching and preaching the flat earth myth. So too do others who "trump up" charges against Fundamental Christian Belief. The issues that Galileo and the Catholic Church had, seems to have been used as leverage for this false claim that "Christian's believe the flat earth myth."

Your fellow creature in Christ

T

Doctorf Doctorf1
1 week ago  Reply

Trevor,
"The sure testimony of the Holy Bible..."? That leaves a lot of open territory. The Bible is "holy" because humans say it is. It is a product of the human experience nothing more, nothing less.

Trevor Hammond
2 weeks ago Reply

@Mrs Nelson --> Who would have thought that 'proud' Capitalist America would have invoked a Socialist 'fix' in order to provide a crutch for the feeble economy after the recent Financial Crisis?

...and it was the US Government which did just that. 'Now what were you saying they wouldn't do? ... Pass Sunday Laws?'' I wouldn't put that far from them! Well, having 'absolute' confidence in Secular Society and Government; and the 'Laws of the Land' may, in your view be reliable; but the Bible is what I'd rather trust; and so far the word of God has been, and will be, the Truth that will keep marching on.

Your fellow creature in Christ

T

Darrel Lindensmith
2 weeks ago Reply

Brother Doctor, Thanks for your comments. Can I ask two questions:

1. Would you agree that front-loaded purpose pre-supposes a Mind?
   (Let's not answer "no, because then where did that mind come from?" Let's avoid the 'error of infinite regress' and agree that we either have eternal Mind or eternal Matter.)

2. If "in the end, God, is a creation of the human frontal cortex," then would not the idea of evolution also be a creation of the human frontal cortex?
   In other words, is not 'reductionism' a double edged sword cutting in both directions? If not, why not?

Thank you

Doctorf Doctorf1
2 weeks ago Reply

Darrel,

Good questions of which answers are most likely ethereal. Before humans had written language written concepts of God did not exist. The postulate of a supreme being makes sense to me as our brains can ask questions. However, positing a question and formulating an answer does not themselves make something true. He is what we do know, we are made up of the "stuff" that is in abundant supply in the universe, carbon, oxygen, nitrogen, hydrogen and other metallic elements.

Science argues that life forms are made up of these elements and can show this using numerous analytical methods. The concept of evolution is both a creation of the human cortex but also is supported by data. The data currently is powerful genomics where we can look at functional gene sequences in different life forms and look at overlap. These overlaps suggest that life forms
are interconnected.

One can argue that a God made the elements, constructed the physical laws etc, but that is pure speculation. Science cannot prove or disprove God's existence and thus cannot take a position on God. Indeed atheists take a position that there is no God and their arguments are based solely on reason and logic. But, in the end many atheism starts looking more and more like religion as they are also stuck with the frustration that proof of their position is lacking. That said not being able to prove that there is or is no God does not make the arguments true. In the end the "truth" appears to be unknowable.

Elaine Nelson

Trevor, you have chosen labels for the U.S. government. Officially, it is a republican form of democracy: not directly by the vote of the people but their elected representatives. It is neither "socialist" or "capitalist" by official designation. Socialism as practiced in some other countries much more closely applies.

As to future Sunday laws, that is solely the interpretation by a few religious people and not, by far, the accepted interpretation even of all Adventists. Whether the church has taught this, it also has taught errors throughout Christianity so we cannot always rely on such official pronouncements. To say that one's interpretation is straight from the Bible is to claim that a particular interpretation equals the Bible's intent.

Cherry Ashlock

Blue laws where i used to live in new jersey had nothing to do with religion. every time it is put to a vote it is voted to continue having all the stores shut on sunday.....the people in that community like how quiet it is when stores are closed on sunday and the traffic is so much less.

Elaine Nelson

How could this become a distinct problem with Adventists? Even if there were a "Sunday Law" which SDAs have long preached, who would be put to a disadvantage? There will always be drug stores and safety services that will continue to operate 24/7. What's to worry about?

Trevor Hammond

Check this out! Many have used Evolution Theory to justify racism. A quote from the "pig's tooth"/Nabraska man scam. This guy probably dreamt what fossils dream of...?

"The Negroid stock is even more ancient than the Caucasian and Mongolian, as may be proved by an examination not only of the brain, of the hair, of the bodily characters, such as the teeth, the genitalia, the sense organs, but of the instincts, the intelligence. The standard intelligence of the average adult Negro is similar to that of the eleven-year-old youth of the species Homo sapiens."
Reprinted in Natural History 89 (April 1980): 129.
Question is - is God responsible for such; or is Evolution? or are these dodgy findings just what Fossil Dream dream of?

Theistic Evolutionists convienly 'drag' God into the picture in an effort to compromise with evolution theory. This is an insult to God and Jesus' death on the Cross for the sins of the human race as well as us as people. Could it perhaps just be that Theistic Evolution is merely a philosphical concept which has been propped up by scientific theory?

Your fellow creature in Christ

T

Doctorf Doctorf1 1 week ago Reply

Just as people used the Bible to justify slavery. Good heavens, these were weak arguments to begin with and have been placed in their appropriate context.

Martin Weber 2 weeks ago Reply

I am deeply grieved and offended by this attack on Clifford Goldstein. If he has spoken evil, bear witness to it and deal with it logically. But otherwise, don't smite him with an ad hominem smack-down. You accuse Clifford of an "addiction" in his campaign against evolution (and David Newman in his comment quantifies the fact that you are the one who seems to have an obsession on the subject). But anyway, was Martin Luther King "addicted" to racial equity, or did Susan B. Anthony suffer an addiction to gender equality? Maybe a better word would be "conviction."

Clifford Goldstein is obviously convicted about the importance of creation as a fundamental fact of life. Is that necessarily a problem? I believe God has raised him up for such a time as this. I find both spiritual and intellectual inspiration in his well-reasoned case for creation.

Clifford is not a lightweight intellect or a shallow-minded sloganeer, as I acknowledge that many proponents of creation seem to be--including some popular Adventists. He engages seriously with his opponents' best arguments and, I think, emerges with credibility intact. His arguments are reasoned and nuanced, and that gives him the intellectual warrant to throw down the challenge: "You can be an Adventist or an evolutionist, but not both."

As others have commented, Clifford does not attempt to take Adventists with honest struggles and throw them under the bus. He does expect those who teach in Adventist schools to be able to defend creation as a fundamental fact of life and teaching of the church. I don't think that's asking too much. If you work for Toyota, you can be expected to sell the Prius instead of a Chevy Volt. If you not only prefer the Volt but want to go on a sales campaign for Chevy, then it seems only sensible and honorable to quit getting supported by Toyota.

I don't think it's fair to portray Clifford as a knee jerk right-winger. He is nuanced--in fact, in regarding some issues he could be considered as leaning toward the liberal. He certainly has a liberal attitude toward people in need. I have personally witnessed him showing compassion to those who struggle, both doctrinally and financially. He engages his theological and philosophical foes with self-effacing wit, and he is disarmingly honest about own his character flaws. It is unfair
to categorize him or characterize him as insensitive or narrow-minded.

And now a word to the person whose comment appears to ridicule Clifford's M.A. in Ancient Northwest Semitic languages. Remember that in graduate study, one's narrow focus of research or expertise is based upon broad training in critical thinking. And whether you agree with him or not, Clifford certainly qualifies as a bonafide logician. Also, let's keep in mind that the creation/evolution debate is not just a matter of science, narrowly defined, but also of philosophy, theology, metaphysics as well as other disciplines. And Clifford is quite well-versed in most if not all of them.

That same respondent compared Clifford's prophetic voice to that of Harold Camping, the frustrated rapturist, because of Clifford's eschatological commentary on the fall of the Soviet Union. The demise of Euro-Communism sent shockwaves that still ripple today, in places as relevant as Afghanistan--where militant Islamists overcame the Soviet invaders and morphed into the formidable enemy we face today, and not just in that part of the world.

More could be said, but I must summarize: Clifford is a serious scholar with serious arguments on a serious subject. And yes, he is passionate, along with many people whose beliefs engage their hearts as well as their heads. If you disagree with Clifford, deal with what he says, rather than denounce him as being on a "never ending personal jihad."

Enough said, perhaps. I don't have time for a snowball fight in this forum, having responsibility to stock another website with continuous content (www.outlookmag.org). But I just had to record a protest and lament about what seems to be an unmerited and illogical attack on a guy who has convictions, not addictions.

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Elaine Nelson

"well-reasoned case for creation." This is, of course, an opinion often expressed.

Cliff is extremely intelligent and a master of language. However, his comments range far afield of his ability at times. One may be "convinced" of a position, as he is, but science is not his field of study, nor does an M.A. in Semitic languages constitute the ability to discourse on scientific disciplines. Many who comment here have graduate and terminal degrees if that is the only qualification needed. When a well-qualified and credentialed scientists speaks to this subject he or she is much more circumspect and demonstrates less certitude. If the SDA leadership had given sufficient thought to give this time to a well-recognized scientist on geology, biology, or paleoanthropology, it would be given more weight.

The abuse by many preachers who are "way over their heads" in these areas only bring direpute to Adventism who recognize the paucity of knowledge.

Cliff appears to have been given the bully pulpit by this administration to defend SDA doctrine on Creation which only exposes the inability to either find a reputable scientist to defend this position or give that chore to someone who is loquacious but has no background, even as he has confessed, to elucidate on a subject of which he has no scholarly credentials.

If the Adventist leaders are unable to recruit a qualified scientist to take a public stand on the
truthfulness of a six-day Creation it would be much better to discontinue the constant effort to support the unsupportable. Why is the SDA doctrine of Creation solely limited to the first chapter in Genesis and not the second? Many could agree with the second as it establishes God as Creator but without the strong emphasis on each day's activities as being the only "approved" doctrine.

Refusing to accept Goldstein's position of either "Adventist or an evolutionist, but not both," is to draw a line in the sand that the church has not drawn. Everyone who accepts the latest medical science has benefited from microevolution so even the word has different connotations when used in Adventism. If Goldstein is the "front man" for Adventist Creationists they have chosen badly.

Ella M Rydzewski

There are Adventist scientists who are not evolutionists and they have written in the Review, but they have not made a difference to those who choose to believe otherwise. The magazine does not print on the same subject frequently. However, Cliff is a committed, clever writer who has the ability to stir up the opposition and give good material for people like Irv to write on. It makes his blogs more interesting and controversial and gets lots of comments. None of this changes minds or makes us more spiritual, closer to God, kind or loving. Ask why?
It is hard for people to change long-held presuppositions that they have been trained in, worked in, and become committed to. Only God can change a wrong idea. The education we choose can be a learning or brainwashing experience. We just choose who will do the brainwashing. Could an evolutionist just as well been a fundamentalist Christian in a different environment since they both tend to be dogmatic? And life experiences--good and bad--determine our direction. If church experience has been negative, we tend to be critical or go to the extreme (generally speaking only--there are amazing exceptions).
Perhaps if we spent more time focusing on Christ as Sabbath; He is the real rest. Sabbath as in Heb. 4, seems to infer to Christ as our rest from our works. Sabbath is only a symbol and was from the beginning.
None of us really know how the world was created, only that God created it. The creation story is simple and worthy of my belief. I don't know if it is metaphor or not. If it helps some people to believe it is metaphor, so what. If they focus more on the "unscientific" death and resurrection of Christ, it just won't matter.

Darrel Lindensmith

Amen Martin! It is so important to discuss issues with facts, logic, openness and respect. Otherwise we will not learn from each other.

TXalchemist II

Darrel, you may want to see a response to your 2nd point here:
http://whyevolutionistrue.wordpress.com/2009/02/14/simon-conway-morris-becomes-a-creationist/
Darrel Lindensmith

Hello Dr. Johnston, Thank you so much for the reference. Truely an Anthony Flew moment again.

God Bless

Darrel Lindensmith

Ervin Taylor

A minor housekeeping matter: I happened to notice that, about a week ago, in an exchange with my colleague, the editor of Adventist Today, David Newman, we agreed that I would only write yet again on the subject of evolution and creation in my blog if the following circumstances occur: (1) my good friend Cliff Goldstein publishes an article on some aspect of the subject or (2) an article on the subject appears in the Adventist Review. In responding to this understanding, David just mentioned the part about Cliff and neglected to note the second stipulation--that of an article appearing in the Adventist Review. I thought it might just be helpful to make sure we are agreed on both stipulations.

Trevor Hammond

To: The ‘thinker’ Accreditation Department at AToday.

Both the illustrious Mrs Nelson and the honourable Dr Taylor have made a decided effort to silence the ‘thinkers’ of other professions, and have arbitrarily brushed aside even the views of distinguished scientists and their ‘colleagues’ who have since retired and are not involved in directly in current scientific research and discourse.

It is obviously well noted that they even seek to brush off lightly the views of others too (like Goldstein) by again, arbitrarily playing the role of ‘paper police’ and have tried to discredit them by virtue of 1) their field of study 2) their current engagement in such field of study 3) which ‘side’ they are perceived to be on. This ‘who’s who in the zoo’ rationale used to ascertain the credibility of contributors in this type of discussion, reeks of the same style of philosophical arguments that they accuse others of.

Can they please enlighten us then, as to who is properly qualified to think? Those who hold the same radical rebel views and come out in support of the honourable Dr Taylor are immediately ‘qualified’ and accredit as worthy contributors. This goes against the spirit of ‘Freethinking/Freethought’ of which, from what I have gathered, seems to be the underlying thread of some on this Website who propagate radical (really archaic) Philosophical concepts and thrust these radical views upon Adventism.

The honourable Dr Taylor also spurs ‘certain’ key allies on, yet attempts to silence other seasoned senior scientists who oppose or question his views by debunking them as ‘softies’ who have lost the essence of true scientific thinking and alludes that they, as a result of been 'out of touch' have turned to philosophy and even theology.

What if this philosophical/theological perspective from some renowned retired scientists IS actually the maturing of Scientific thinking? In other words, is not (perhaps) the maturing of progressive
scientific thinking really ‘fundamentalist’ in the end?

T

Doctorf1

Trevor,

Read your comment. Just a question. How are those on the other side of the argument being "silenced"? You certainly are not. Indeed a scientist can behave like a fundamentalist but the beauty of science is that it is self correcting. New ideas and theories come along to explain new data that may not fit into a particular paradigm.

I agree with Erv, your post was a good representative of the position of many.

Ervin Taylor

In response to Mr. T, let me say that it seems to me that his characterization of the positions I have espoused on this thread and other places are well-stated in good humor. As he would probably expect, I am required to take exception to the substance and semantics of some of his points but, on the whole, I would rate his rhetorical exercise as an A-. Good show, jolly good show.

Trevor Hammond

Whilst looking for a book on Biomass for my son in the local Library's Non-Fiction' Section, I came across a Richard Dawkins Book 'The greatest show on Earth - the evidence of evolution'. I'm not sure if the Librarian put this book in the Non-Fiction Section by mistake... ;)

So I was hoping for some real ‘scientific evidence’ but the first chapter was just long winded biased evolutionist rhetoric. Among his Chapter One talk of ‘evidence’ he mentions support for evolution from Religious Leaders and Theologians but he also clearly alludes that even Theistic Evolution is not acceptable.

Here is a quote from his book regarding this (Chapter 1 Page 6):
“'They may think God had a hand in starting the process off, and perhaps didn’t stay his hand in guiding its future progress. They probably think God cranked the universe up in the first place, and solemnized its birth with a harmonious set of laws and physical constants calculated to fulfil some inscrutable purpose in which we were eventually to play a role.

His reasoning is somewhat flawed in this first chapter as he repeatedly makes biased statements which seek to discredit and thereby weaken arguments against his rhetorical recital in Chapter One (can I call it rhetoric?).

Here are a few of this type of flawed reasoning where bias is clearly propagated:
1] ... but all except the woefully uninformed are forced to accept the fact of evolution.
2] ... thoughtful and rational churchmen and women accept the evidence of evolution.
3] ... ill-informed opposition is also stronger than I can remember.
4] ... Is it really so easy for an uneducated churchgoer to guess?
5] ... No reputable scientist disputes it, and no unbiased reader will close the book doubting it.

Some comments made here on this blog also use this type of reasoning to ‘sway the vote’, so to speak. I still maintain, however, that Science has no place to ‘audit’ the Bible, as science makes no provision for Salvation. The Bible is the Revelation of Jesus Christ and hold the keys to understanding God: not Science. In other words, True Science only reveals God’s Glory, Majesty and Power : the Cross shows His Love!

[Psalm 19:1] The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.
[John 3:16] "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

See a ball rolling! One may ask who rolled the ball. True Science is the study and observation of how the ball rolls. The Bible reveals WHO rolled the ball.
[Genesis 1:1] In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

Your fellow creature

T

Doctorf Doctorf1

Trevor,

Theistic evolution is rejected by Dawkins, because it is not scientific. Science argues from the pre-supposition that all phenomena are natural. Not being able to explain something and interjecting the magical God explains nothing and Dawkins is right. Interjection of God into a scientific argument puts the discussion into the metaphysical world and is untestable by science and out of the purview of science.

Ron Lindsey II

Cliff is 100% spot on with his continued vigilance against the fallacy of Darwinian Evolution. I find it ridiculous that anyone could claim to believe in the word of God while still claiming to believe in such a farce as the Evolutionary tale. People have gotten so impressed and caught up with the reasoning of man that they have forsaken the sure word of God. God gave us His word which has withstood over 2000 years of scrutiny, yet still we doubt. People love to quote Galileo, and his comments on reason and intellect, so why don't we use that on God's Word for a minute instead of mankind's "weight of scientific evidence."

What we have had in writing for the last 2000 years.

1. The Creation account clearly indicates that each day consisted of evening/morning, starting with the 1st day and carrying through all the way to the sixth day. It seems clear that however long each of these days cycle of evening/morning were, they were all of equal length. There is absolutely nothing in scripture to indicate that the 1st day cycle of evening/morning was not the exact same length as the 6th day cycle of evening/morning. Considering that by the 6th day cycle of eve/morn all celestial timepieces were in place and Human existence had begun, simple logic and reason would tell us that we are in fact by, at the very least the 6th Day, dealing with a planet rotating on
it's axis at a rate of roughly 24,000 miles and hour, accounting for 1 day equalling about 24hrs.
Now if God can create everything He made in day 6 in 24hrs, then it is sheer audacity for anyone
to doubt that He could have completed each of the previous days work within the same amount of
time.

2. The Bible clearly lays out the years from creation to the flood, and beyond, through the
genealogy of Adam/Noah. There are ample genealogical age listings and dates given, through out
scripture, to make clear that from the first day declaration "Let there be light.." till now the years
that have passed can be measured in the thousands, and not the millions (or 10's -100's of
thousands either).

3. The 7th Day Sabbath was specifically stated in exodus to be a memorial to Creation. This 7th
day was counted out for 40 years by God Himself, with Mana falling consistently for 6 days and
stopping on the 7th. It is quite clear that these were most certainly 24hr days.

4. When Christ himself walked upon this earth, under the Roman empire and calendar, that he kept
the 7th day Sabbath, and clearly knew that the day He kept coincided with the 7th day of creation
upon which He rested. Once again, we are clearly at this moment in time dealing with 24hr days,
occurring on a 7 day repetitive cycle.

5. For the last 2000 years, God's word has told us that Satan is the Father of lies and a master at
deception. He appeared to Saul as the prophet Samuel, to Christ as an Angel of Light, and will one
day soon appear to all the earth as Christ himself. There is no being on earth more capable of
warping human perception and distorting the reality of what a persons 5 senses are trying to convey
to them. For 2000 years the Bible has declared "But they deliberately forget that long ago by God’s
word the heavens came into being and the earth was formed out of water and by water. By these
waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed." 2 Peter 3:5-6. Scripture here makes
it clear that man would one day seek to discredit God as creator and deny that the Flood ever
occurred. Now, knowing how skilled a deceiver Satan is, what would give anyone the perception
that he couldn't possibly get mankind to believe the fallacy that is Darwinian Evolution? To those
who put so much stock in "the weight of scientific evidence", what will you rely on when Satan
assaults your five senses with signs and wonders that pass your test of "scientific inquiry" yet go
completely against the sure word of God? Do you honestly believe that Satan is incapable of
showing you "scientific evidence" in a way that would get you to second guess the word of God?
Just think about which world view forms an easier path towards atheism, the notion of a literal 6
day creation roughly 6k years ago, or the idea that today's "scientific interpretation" of observable
data is the most accurate world view. When you have some of the most revered scientists making
statements like "God is not necessary for the universe to have come into existence" the answer
seems pretty clear.

Cliff has stated before that one can be an Evolutionist or a 7th Day Adventist but cannot be both,
and I would have to agree with him completely. In fact I would go further to state that a person can
believe in Evolution or believe in the Word Of God but they cannot believe in both. The moment a
person believes in Evolution, they relegate the bible to nothing more than a book about God, and
certainly not the word OF God.

Ervin Taylor
1 week ago

Mr. Lindsey has focused on one of the roots of the difference of opinion--how one views what
exactly the Bible is. He states the issue well. Is the Bible the word OF God or a testimony about
God? I would suggest that to view the Bible as THE word of God is essentially to elevate a physical book to the level of an object of worship. The Bible is indeed a book about God written by human beings who tell us their experience with the Divine. To characterize that as "nothing more" is regretful.

Ron Lindsey II

Dr. Taylor, your suggestion, that viewing the Bible as the Word OF God is essentially elevating a physical book to the level of an object of worship, is a tad bit disturbing. Do you sincerely believe that those who hold this view of scripture worship a physical object? Which of my Bibles then do I physically worship? Is it the larger print of my NKJV Bible, or do I worship the rich ink and leather binding of my Parallel Bible? Oh, no, now that I think about it, I haven't carried a physical Bible to church with me since I got an iPhone, seeing as I have a library of bibles stored on it, does that mean that I am worshipping my iPhone? You state that the Bible is "a book about God written by human beings who tell us their experience with the Divine." and then failed to realize that you are the one who characterizes it as "nothing more" by your suggestion that to elevate it any higher is idolatry. To view the Bible as anything less than the authoritative Word OF God is to diminish it, and what any person aware of Satan's existence should know and understand, is that he doesn't really care how much it is diminished, only that it is in fact diminished. Satan works in slights and subtleties. Which view do you think he wants people to believe, the the Bible is the Word OF God, or a book ABOUT God?

Every election year we start to see many a political ad that ends with "i'm politician X and I approve this message". What difference does it make who physically put the ad together, if the politician examined the whole ad and approved it's message than it becomes his message. To view the Bible as the Word OF God is to understand that God examined every word from Genesis 1:1 to Revelation 22:21 and said "I'm God and I approve this message". Doesn't matter if He used human beings to put pen to paper, even let them put it in their own words at times, that doesn't mean that it was not God's message. Satan wants us to view the Bible as just as flawed and errant as human beings themselves, and it opens the door for every heresy known to man.

Mustang Molly

Mr. Lindsey II,

WELL SAID, SIR !!!!! It's about time someone stood up for our Almighty Creator!!!
2 Pet.3:3 Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts,....

Trevor Hammond

One of the flaws of Theistic Evolution is that at its core it is contradictory and therefore defies one of the Cardinal Laws of logic, which is the law of Noncontradiction. It should be either/or (Theist or Evolutionist) NOT both, and Cliff Goldstein has got it right in terms of the logic of such argument.

Your fellow creature in Christ
Elaine Nelson

How is a day defined if not by the sun? If the sun was not created until the fourth day, how were the first three days called "days" without the sun to signify "evening" from "morning." Without clocks, even today in the most northern areas of the world that is their only method of separating day and night. There are far too many problems for a literal reading of this chapter in Genesis.

It is best not to depend on accurate genealogies as more than one are found in the Bible and they cannot be harmonized. Even in Matthew and Luke's genealogies they are definitely not the same.

Ervin asks an important question which relates to Bibliolatry: Is the Bible ABOUT God, written by men; or is it to be considered God's writing? There is abundant internal evidence that men wrote as they perceived God, as "no man has seen God" and neither does any man have insight into God's thinking or actions. This borders on blasphemy to infer that any human completely understand's God.

Ron Lindsey II

So then Elaine, are you willing to admit then that at the very least, days 4, 5, & 6 of creation were in fact 24hr cycles, seeing as the timepieces to measure those cycles were in place by then? If not, would you mind sharing your reasoning behind why not? If you are willing to admit that days 4-6 were clearly 24 hr periods, due to the fact that the celestial clocks were established, then why would days 1-3 be any different than 24 hr periods of time, when the same expression is used consistently to denote each daily cycle?

Imagine I were to tell you a story about a six day adventure, and after telling you about each day I said "and the total distance I traveled that day was one click" would you have any idea what a click was? No, but it wouldn't matter at what point in the story I stated that one click = 1 mile, I could wait till the end of day 5 to tell you, so long as I tell you. God certainly didn't need the celestial clocks to mark off the passing of 24 hrs, and it seems pretty clear that He wasn't creating anything that would need those markers till sometime after day four. We are the ones who needed the Sun to tell what time it was, not God. Your comment about clocks makes it sound like you don't think God would know what time it was without a clock. You may have a problem with a literal reading of Genesis 1 but I assure you God had no problems with a literal doing of Genesis 1.

Darrel Lindensmith

Brother Doctor

Are we saying that genuine "Design" is undetectable by the methods of science because science must only 'see' chance events? ""Science argues from the pre-supposition that all phenomena are natural."

Is this not assumming what you are trying to "prove?" I am beginning te think that Popper was right that "evolution is unfalsefiable" and therefore not testable. Like the Freudian Theory--everything that happens becomes 'proof' of the theory.
As many are coming to recognize the digital programs of DNA are positive proof of a Highly Intelligent Mind. This is not a god-of-the-gaps attempting to explain what we DON'T understand but 'recognizing' what we DO understand.

Why have we placed millions of dollars in the SETI program if science must not be allowed to recognize Intelligent Design?

"...An intelligible communication via radio signal from some distant galaxy would be widely hailed as evidence of an intelligent source. Why then doesn't the message sequence on the DNA molecule also constitute prima facie evidence for an intelligent source? After all, DNA information is not just analogous to a message sequence such as Morse code, it is such a message sequence."

Elaine Nelson

Even if "an intelligible communication" were picked up, that would not determine who or what was the source. To postulate an "Intelligent Designer" is to simply give a name signifying that what is observed has no identifiable source. Some say that it was the Devil who was given the opportunity to create. That cannot be proved just as God as the creator cannot be proved: it is accepted on faith.

It is difficult to understand why those of faith are not content with having faith, but want additional affirmation from science to demonstrate their beliefs are rational and have evidence.

We can observe how the natural world operates: spring time brings growth; fall brings on death or a rest period for both plant and animal life, and man has been able to simulate many forces that were once thought completely out of human control. This is seen in the many discoveries of the causes of sickness and death that for most of this world's history were thought to be sent by the Devil. The source that was previously identified as either God or the Devil now has been determined to have more definitive sources.

Science studies much, but only what can be observed. The origin of many things cannot be determined with certainty. Meterologists can predict weather patterns but earthquakes still elude them as far as predictability. Such "natural" disasters cannot be attributed either to God or the Devil. Science does not study "who" sends those, but only the conditions under which they may occur.

Religion attempts to answer questions science does not. They are two entirely different disciplines and attempting to harmonize them will pollute both. Faith cannot be "proved" or demonstrated in the way science seeks answers.

Ervin Taylor

Elaine comments on an interesting behavior by those who say they have "faith." (When one encounters that comment, one might wish to ask "faith in what?" but that is for another time.) She...
notes that "[i]t is difficult to understand why those of faith are not content with having faith, but want additional affirmation form science to demonstrate their beliefs are rational and have evidence." I used to have the same difficulty until it was pointed out to me by a very wise individual that what is probably happening is that these individuals are, in reality, insecure about their own belief system, but have some "need to believe" a particular proposition so that they will be able to belong to a certain, to them, high value group. Because they are insecure, they need other people to concur and accept their beliefs. Because of this, they often actively engage in evangelism with the goal of having more people join their particular brand of religion, thus validating their beliefs. They also seek confirmation of their beliefs by pointing out where other highly regarded sources of authority in their culture, such as science, supports their views. Where the scientific consensus agrees with them, they eagerly accept a science-based conclusion. Where it does not, they must reject it and call it "junk science" or use some similar term. Thus they are very selective in what they will accept or reject from other authority systems. I would ask if this explanation makes sense to Elaine.

Elaine Nelson

Erv, Yours is a more fitting description of those who are so insistent on having scientists validate their position. I also believe that it demonstrates insecurity. When those who firmly believe in any position they are unwilling to stand on their own conscience but looking for others to agree. This is why "group think" is so prevalent in many religions.

Wasn't it the SDA prophet who wrote about men who will stand for their beliefs though the heavens fall? This does not demand unanimity, but singleness of belief whether one is alone. Adventists have been taught to "stand firm" for their belief in Sabbath by risking unemployment. What is risked in claiming belief in either evolution or YEC?

Darrel Lindensmith

I am sorry. I must have touched a nerve. Please notice that you have only made theological and psychological arguments (both weak in my opinion) against the scientific reasoning for an Intelligent Designer.

I am sorry, because I must have come across in a sneering way. I did not mean to.

Trevor Hammond

Doctorf Doctorf1 Sir,

The Metaphysical realm or Spiritual realm - as I prefer to call it - is where the Supernatural interacts with the Natural. This is a normal environment for the Child of God who is a recipient of His Grace and accepts Him as Sovereign Ruler and Creator of this whole Universe as we know it, including all time and space of course.

This discussion seems to have an interesting twist to it by some trying to accuse those from the so-called 'metaphysical' position, of stepping on the wrong 'turf'. They feel scientific evidence should not be used to prove that there IS intelligent design in what we see around us. I see nothing
wrong with this position as God is the author of all True Science and is 'the' Omniscient One.

(Not Dawkins! I read Chapters two, three and four - very dissapointing - no real scientific proof yet, just more long winded athiest evolutionist rhetoric, dogs, cats, shrews and cabbages - and the hairpin bend from waaaaaay back in the day, which he proposes represents the link which sets one on a path to becoming a 'cabbage', a 'shrew', or 'whatever' + a few billion years...)

He (Dawkins) then says that evolution + time equally produces the same results that man gets when breeding dogs, etc. or when manipualting genetics. Seems they have ironically given evolution a 'metaphysical' mind/brain in order to pull that off... or is it just more stuff that Fossils dream of?

T
Love Wins - Reviewed by Nathan Brown

Submitted May 12, 2011
By Nathan Brown

While visiting a recent church camp meeting, I was asked a number of times what my thoughts were on the Rob Bell “thing.” Of course, it was a reference to the recent online uproar preceding the publication of his most recent book, Love Wins. There are a couple of responses to such questions.

First, it was a remarkable piece of marketing, probably exceeding anything the publisher would have hoped for and showing how the sensitivities of certain issues within Christianity can lead to unreasonable overreactions. Marketing snippets—in this case, the back cover blurb and a video preview—are designed to provoke responses, raise questions and prime potential readers to want to get their hands on a copy of the book. Thus, primarily by asking questions, Love Wins marketing team did a great job.

But that such “gimmicks” could provoke such controversy in the wider Christian community shows what suckers we can be for a provocative question—and not in the best sense. The rush is not to engage with a well-asked question but to almost blindly defend the orthodoxies. That this plays into the hands of the marketers much more than contributing to a useful conversation seems obvious to everyone but ourselves.

Second, the book itself—Love Wins: A Book About Heaven, Hell, and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived. Unlike most of Bell’s early critics, I have now had the chance to read the book.

My review is simple: Love Wins begin by arguing strongly and usefully against the traditional belief in an eternally burning hell but then spends quite a few chapters unsure as to what to do with the “bad” people, those who resist and reject God and His love. Bell explores a variety of possible answers to these questions before arriving at a stalemate: “Those are questions, or more accurately, those are tensions we are free to leave fully intact. We don’t need to resolve them or answer them because we can’t.”

The last couple of chapters find Bell getting back into stride, emphasising the salvific love of God and trusting that God will save everyone He can. He also turns the spotlight back on us, urging us to get over our preoccupation with mere “entry” in favour of “enjoying” the present reality of the kingdom of God at the same time as anticipating its coming fullness.

Although this book misses the ultra-cool design that his previous books have enjoyed with the Zondervan–Flannel team, Love Wins is written in Bell’s usual light but questioning style. As such, quite a bit of the informed criticism of the book comes about because of what it doesn’t say. And there are many brighter reviewers than I who have re-examined these questions at the prompting of Bell’s book and its notoriety.

However, we can be thankful that there continue to be prominent voices that challenge the assumptions about hell and point out this doctrine’s inconsistency with a loving God. With Love Wins offering such a brief overview, perhaps the book’s greatest role will be as an introduction to N T
Wright’s more comprehensive and careful *Surprised by Hope*, from which Bell has drawn significant inspiration. If that’s the outcome, then maybe the hype is really about more than marketing.

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**Ella M Rydzewski**  
2 weeks ago  

Thank you for an excellent review. I don't think I will take the time to read it, as there are so many other things to read. I like NT Wright's book, and have it read and underlined and have loaned it out to others. His historical coverage was thorough about the evolution of immortality of the soul, which he staunchly denies, and repeats many other arguments we have heard all our lives in the church.

After all this, I was surprised by the view he finally arrived at: "...that all the Christian departed are in substantially the same state, that of restful happiness. Though [death] is sometimes described as sleep, we shouldn't take this to mean that it is a state of unconsciousness." Then he calls up Paul's quote about 'being with Christ, which is far better.' He continues: "Rather, sleep here means that the body is 'asleep' in the sense of 'dead,' while the real person--however we want to describe him or her--continues. This state is not, clearly, the final destiny for which the Christian dead are bound, which is, as we have seen, the bodily resurrection.

"But it is a state in which the dead are held firmly within the conscious love of God and the conscious presence of Jesus Christ while they await that day. There is no reason why this state should not be called heaven, though we must note once more how interesting that the NT routinely doesn't call it that and uses the word heaven in other ways."

Wright uses the only biblical verse that could indicate awareness to avoid a state of nonexistence or sleep. However, it seems clear to me that Paul's words indicate that Christ is always with His people even in death; they are alive in the Creator's memory.
Time for a Sermon on Hell?

Submitted May 1, 2011

The cover of the April 25 (2011) issue of Time asks the question, “What if there’s no Hell?” The accompanying, lengthy article reports the growing conflict in Evangelical circles over a new book by Rob Bell, pastor of Mars Hill Bible Church in Michigan where weekend attendance averages more than 7,000.

Bell recalls a quote by Gandhi on a poster displayed at the church and a sticky note someone posted next to the famous name; “Reality check: He’s in hell.”

“Really? Gandhi in hell? He is? We have confirmation of this? Somebody knows this? Without a doubt?” The slim volume proceeds to dismantle the classic Christian teaching on hell because it is a contradiction of God’s character. (God will perform miracles to keep people alive so they can be tortured? Forever? Really? The Bible actually says this?)

The book also suggests that a kind of universalism is a possibility. Perhaps no one will, in the very end, be lost. Maybe all humanity will be reconciled to God. In fact, Bell finds it easier to leave many questions up in the air, to allow God answer them in His own good time, than he does to make doctrinal assertions. This is what has infuriated many conservative Protestants.

If there is no threat from God of everlasting torture in the hereafter, will people lack the motivation to follow Jesus? Or, at least, to rigorously follow His way? If we reinterpret all of the texts about a “lake of fire,” etc., do we run the risk of nullifying the entire text of Scripture?

When Bell writes, “I have long wondered if there is a massive shift coming in what it means to be a Christian,” he does not make them feel any easier. Yet he is the pastor of a Bible church and his text for Easter Sunday is Revelation 3:1-13, the last two in the vision of the Seven Churches, Sardis and Laodicea.

Now that someone as visible as Rob Bell has raised the topic, maybe it is time for Seventh-day Adventist preachers to (again) address the topic of Hell. Time notes that “Christians have debated atonement and judgment for nearly 2,000 years.” There continue to be a number of contesting positions. Adventists have taken their lumps for being too ambiguous on some aspects, and now we are confronted with a generation that is more comfortable with ambiguity than asserting what is just wrong.

In fact, Adventist theology on these questions is somewhere between Bell’s alleged vague universalism and the conservative Evangelical’s class teaching on Hell. It provides a better accounting for the literal Scriptures involved than do either the traditional expositions or Bell’s book.
We have something to offer here. We have insights to share that go beyond simply persuading converts. If the Evangelical world were to take seriously the Adventist biblical studies and theology on this topic—and were not afraid to adopt anything from an Adventist source—they would find good solutions to the problems that Bell has opened to view. And Bell would find his “something new” without throwing out the baby with the dirty bathwater.

Frankly, Adventist pastors and theologians have a duty to speak up at this point. We have something the larger church needs. We have some solid answers. Don’t be afraid to do it. Preach about Hell.

laffal

Monte, I pause to wonder if a book written on the Biblical details of hell, the ultimate consequence for rejecting God's reconciling love in Christ, would get the kind of pub / hype Bell's book does / has. A Baptist lawyer, Edward Fudge has a fine book on the subject, The Fire that Consumes. He upholds our position of the extermination of the wicked, those who choose death rather then life in Christ. Personally, I believe that when we SDA's get our house in order when it comes to what the gospel of the kingdom actually is and proclaim it as we are called to do, the subject of hell and all others pertinent will become front page news.

laffal

Elaine Nelson

Having read Bell's book several weeks ago I believe he is raising important questions for Christians: what would Christianity be without hell? It is been the fear of hell since Christianity began (Jews had no fear of Sheol, or (hell) as they had no belief in the afterlife.

What is the suggestion that pastors and teachers should now teach? Even though the fear of hell may have been softened, nevertheless, it is still taught that only a very short period of suffering, vs. forever burning. Even the much quoted EGW remark that "some would suffer longer than others" is insufficient for much comfort, as is the idea, often taught, that the saints inside the walls would look over and see the destruction of all those who were lost. Is this anyone's idea of a heaven--to watch people burn in fire sent down from heaven?

Bell makes a good defense of universalism compared to the "narrow" way of the "remnant" as being a small group entering heaven. Could you elucidate on what "good solutions" Adventists have to offer that has not been taught yet? Why withhold such good information?

The SDA theologians have a "hot potato" in trying to adjust or teach about hell. Good luck, they will surely need it.

Glenn Hansen

Monte, Why do you think that people who read your blog don't read Time magazine? I guess that most of the people here are interested in current events. I read Time, the Washington Post, the NYT, the San Francisco Chronicle, and link to articles in other papers and magazines, on a daily
basis. Why would I need you or anyone else to interpret or explain the news for me?

One church I used to attend, the sermon often revealed a careful scrutiny, by the pastor, of Time magazine. Really, if I want to know what Time magazine says, I'll read the magazine. From preachers, I want to hear the word of God explained.

Do most Adventist clergymen assume that congregants are uninformed and stupid?

The real issue regarding hell and why it is as big a battleground as the Sabbath is because the doctrine of eternal torment turns upon the nature of man. If man does not have an inherently immortal spirit, then eternal torment is impossible. People would simply cease to exist, as Adventists teach. Most churches, however, subscribe to the idea that man, even sinful man, will not surely die, that our spirits/souls are immortal; consequently, those separated from God do not die but continue to live in torment. That's the real issue. Hell is a peripheral one.

Advent preachers simply offering a few proof texts isn't adequate nowadays. There are good texts in the NT that obscure what often seems clear in the OT. The OT itself appears to provide conflicting information on the relationship of the soul to the spirit. People who are interested enough in doctrine to be studying it are not going to be duped by a slick evangelist as easily as in the past, unless you are angling for emotionally driven, barely literate people to fill your pews, not that there is anything wrong with that.

Doctorf Doctorf1

There are many thoughts on the concept of hell. John Pokinghorne spoke of hell in a book The God of Hope and the End of the World.

He does not make the claim of a "traditional hell" but suggests that hell may be a place where the divine life has been deliberately excluded and thus the inhabitants will "fade away into nothingness." Pokinghorne further adds that within the universalist view of hope, in the end God's love will be victorious and a hell, if any, will be empty.

Hell as presented by traditional adventism would be a motivator to the simple minded. The idea of eternal torment really strikes a note of discord with the concept of a loving God. If God judges the good and evil, why can't he just dispense with the evil and then let them rest? A place of eternal torment makes God look sadistic.

Elaine Nelson

How are we so certain that John wasn't doing much "wishful thinking" that the Roman empire and its persecution of Christian weren't destined at the end to get their just reward?

laflaf

Elaine, John could easily see / recognize what Jesus had said would happen to His followers:

"Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their
synagogues, and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles. (Matthew 10:16-18 ESV)

Elaine Nelson 1 month ago Reply

laffal, his already occurred when John wrote this? Was Paul not described as actively persecuting the Christians decades before the Gospel writers or John wrote? When does describing current happenings become prophetic?

laffal 1 month ago Reply

Elaine, the text quoted was Jesus prophesying about persecution coming those who would follow Him.

Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. (John 15:20 ESV)

Persecution is part and parcel of being a follower of Christ.

Elaine Nelson 1 month ago Reply

When does expecting persecution become a self-fulfilling prophecy? I have known people who claimed to being persecuted when they lost their job because of sabbath. This is NOT persecution: when a person makes a choice there are always consequences and knowing in advance what those might possibly be is merely the course of events. Persecution as something to expect has been highly over taught. What persecution has the average, even majority of Adventists experienced today?

Tom 2 weeks ago Reply

A sermon on Hell. I say who in the hell needs it, except maybe those who have a persecution complex, or feel a hot torch is needed to singe one's pants to keep them on the narrow path.

I have come to the conclusion a long time ago that fear is a poor lasting motivator. Oh sure a small dose of it when necessary will motivate into action, but it is a very poor sustainer. Just witness the many people who grew up in the SDA church, who were fed a steady diet of fearmongering in their formative years, who have left.

I firmly believe that those whose experience of staying in the church is based on a fear of the consequences if they leave, will indeed be the first to jump ship when the fear of the "beast" and what will happen to them if they don't tow it's line when the "dragon" has almost full sway of this world.

To me there is nothing to be gained by preaching about darkness. Things look so much better when the lights are turned on. That is, unless you are talking about a messy house. Jesus said, "I, if I be lifted up with draw all men unto me." Sounds are lot more winsome to me than scaring the "Hell"
Tom,

While it may be true that fear is a poor long-term motivator, it certainly is a good one for getting one’s initial attention in the short term in order that one might hear, listen, live, learn, and ultimately love.

I know that for me, as with probably most children, I first feared the consequences of disobedience before I matured and learned to respect and love my parents because I realized that their “commandments” were loving guidelines. That’s not to say that I uniformly obeyed them, but I understood that I should. When I left the nest, so to speak, and didn’t have to obey them, I realized that I wanted to; and lived to regret that I hadn’t been more obedient earlier in my life.

Is our relationship with God like this?

Unlike you, I can only speak for myself and my experience. I can speculate about other children but, I can only speak for me and mine.

I was brought up with nothing but love, but I am hard-headed (or strong willed) in the extreme. If consequences to disobedience had never been introduced to me, I would probably still have sought to please my parents—when their wishes intersected with my perceived interests.

Thank God that my parents realized that without consequences, there would have been no hope—in my case. I think I’ll write a blog on this.

As for the origins of the concept or the doctrine of hell, all I know is that Jesus the Christ had a
lot to say on the subject. I will take His Word for it.

Trevor Hammond  
1 week ago  Reply

There is a saying that goes like this...

"Don't do the crime, if you can't do the time!"

On a more serious note however, it is ultimately God who moves the heart of the preacher to proclaim His Message.

"Preaching is the proclamation of the Incarnate Word from the Written Word via the Spoken Word" The Message should always remain God's prerogative...

T

Trevor Hammond  
1 week ago  Reply

Love doesn't necessarily mean that a favourable response will be reciprocated. Jesus' death on the Cross magnified the deep extent of God's Great Love yet like the one thief next to Jesus, many spurn that love, while others respond like the second thief: Lord remember me!

People learn about God Love in diverse ways and are Saved. Whether by a Fire and Brimstone Message or a Prophetic message or a Bible Story – they learn about God’s Love through the working of the Holy Spirit.

I know of a preacher who learned about Jesus from his drunkard father and who gives testimony of his experience in accepting Jesus as a result of this.

Again I say, whatever the theme of a Preacher’s message – Christ should always be the central focus: Always! Sabbath, Hell, IJ, whatever...

T
Diversity, Church Growth and God's Kingdom

Submitted May 23, 2011
By Lawrence Downing

The roots of the contemporary Church Growth movement that has led to the mega-church phenomena reach back into the 1960s when Fuller Seminary professor Donald McGavern and others began to research how churches grow. I was a student at Fuller and attended McGaven’s inaugural chapel presentation where he presented the basics of his research and his initial findings on church growth.

In his studies, McGavern and other scholars, many of them based in Southern California, discovered several factors each growing church shared. One of the most consistent was that “Like Attracts Like.” This finding was developed into a principle: Target those who are most like you. Many mega-churches, Saddleback Church in Orange County, California, have implemented this principle with significant effect.

From a corporate perspective Saddleback Church is among the most successful church organizations in the world. Many other mega-churches follow the model Rick Warren perfected: define your audience, discover their needs, design programs to meet those needs.

From a social and psychological perspective there is an argument to be made that diversity is not the ideal. We are more comfortable with people like ourselves. There is often an inverse relationship between the diversity of people and the comfort of those in the mix: the greater the diversity mix, the less the comfort. Think of the potential for a Church of the Cloned Saints!

Notice: in the above account there is no reference to ethics or theology. Bring either ethics or theology into the discussion and complications arise. True, there are passages in the Older Testament that inhibit diversity. Kill all those foreigners. Spare none! (Deuteronomy 20:15-20). This passage and others like it do not tell the complete story. The same corpus of which this text is a part includes Isaiah, Ezekiel and other voices that promote inclusiveness and diversity. There is more. We Christians take serious the teachings of the Newer Testament. We pay attention to how we apply our theological conclusions—the oneness of humanity, for example. There is within our belief in Trinity the affirmation of equality; all have equal worth. There is the mandate that separation one from the other is not an option. And within this Trinitarian oneness there is diversity. One is not sublimated into the other nor are there degrees of significance among the separate individuals.

The teachings and practice of our Lord and his apostles affirm that within the construct of our faith there is neither Jew nor Greek, male or female. There is no shibboleth between or among races, nationalities, languages or other demarcations that we have invented to define one person or group from another. We listen to Jesus’ prayer recorded in John 17 imploring the Father that his followers might be one as he and the Father are one.

With the New Testament writers as our guide, we affirm that God’s family is expansive in its embrace. All are loved by the Almighty and each person has equal opportunity to share in God’s
kingdom. There is a right thing to do, and an ethical way to be. To do or be otherwise is to violate the essence of what our Lord taught. The system that values and promotes exclusivity or separation from others of God’s children does violence to Jesus’ example. He welcomed the outcast. The followers of Jesus, therefore, have no truck with corporate mindset that promote rules or policy; efficiency or production while ignoring the more important measurement: response to those who need help, Matthew 25:31-46.

With the above factors as context, we celebrate the ethnic diversity within Adventism. Our diversity is to be celebrated. The racial, social and ethnic mix of people in our congregations demonstrate our belief that we are to be governed, not by corporate interests, nor are we to be defined by those practices associated with corporate mentality. The follower of Jesus accepts scripture as our handbook and guide as we form and work out our theology. It is our obligation, under God, to turn round any practice or policy that limits or diminishes another person’s standing before the Lord. Likewise, it is our mandate to support and promote any practice or policy that enhances the oneness of the body of Christ.

Join in the discussion:

Elaine Nelson 3 weeks ago Reply

While we may, as a church claim diversity as the ideal, we cannot change human behavior and all the evidence indicates that "like prefers like," we are more comfortable with those who are similar in many ways, and are uncomfortable if there is a very discernible difference. Whether socio-economic, racial, or language differences, it is difficult to attract and bridge these divides.

What should the church do to overcome these very recognized differences? It is easy to talk of them but what solutions are being offered to break down these barriers?

One method would be to join with Habitat for Humanity, the many NGOs in every city that with insufficient funding and willing hands, trying to lift the homeless and "outcasts" of society who may be there because of the recession. All of these organizations are calling, even begging for help in the form of donations and time. Rather than trying to get bodies to fill our pews, we should be out in the "byways and highways" helping those in need, not inviting them to fill our "needs"--meaning come to our church: take the "church" to them in the form of an outstretched hand.

Trevor Hammond 2 weeks ago Reply

“Church of the Cloned Saints!” HaHa I like this! A good read indeed, Sir. “Newer Testament” – yeah! Unity and Oneness in Christ is what Jesus Himself prayed for. Sincere decided effort towards unity in Christ resulted in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and is what made Pentecost happen...

Numerical growth has its place in the Church but Spiritual Growth is what makes the difference to us as individuals and ultimately, as a Church. The ‘happy clappies’ sometimes call us the ‘chosen frozen’, tongue in cheek of course, and taken with a pinch of salt; but I see the positive of it by focusing on the closeness that freezing offers.

Those of us (including myself) who may have been ‘pew warmers’ or those who have been campus nomads chasing ‘papers’ for far too long can easily lose touch with the ‘grassroots’ of Adventism. The church is on the move, lukewarm and all; but on the move, nonetheless. Going into the highways and byways has been a way of life for many Adventists, albeit without fanfare or fuss, just going into all the world and loving, caring, sharing and preparing...
Some prefer to take up their QWERTY machine guns and fire their bits and bytes. Others just take up their cross and follow Jesus wherever He may lead. Both can contribute to unity: both should!

uniTy

**Edwin A. Schwisow**

2 weeks ago

It's so GOOD to see that the excellent article you wrote in our current issue of AT is being followed up with a commitment to the WEB! We are fortunate indeed!

I was a young journalist in the 1970s struggling with the "Church Growth Movement." I concluded that "because of the hardness of [human beings'] hearts," some accommodation was indeed necessary in bringing new converts into church homes where they were comfortable. (In fact, Adventism has a history of doing this, most specifically with its ethnic members.)

Perhaps the real problem emerges when these congregations remain sociologically "separate but equal" for long periods of time. It would seem that we need to understand that at the formative phase of congregations, "like attracts like" in every way. But as maturity sets in, church congregations naturally cease to grow as rapidly as before, and should appropriately encourage diversification as they "grow in grace."

These mature churches can, and often do, become fountainheads for church planting. Many Anglo churches have created satellite congregations with specific groups—Hispanics, in particular—here in the Northwest. This approach seems to accommodate the need of humankind's "hard hearts" as we bring in new souls, and the "growing in grace" we expect in the long-term Christian experience.

**Ella M Rydzewski**

2 weeks ago

Elaine, Most churches I have known of do have active community programs, and they should. My local church is involved in Habitat for Humanity. My suggestion would be that instead of duplicating some of these helping programs, that we become involved with others in the community to support them.

**Dean Riley**

2 weeks ago

The goal of ethnic and racial diversity in congregations seems to me to be getting the cart before the horse. The gospel should be the first priority, regardless of race, etc. At any rate, I agree with other comments to the effect that diversity as a specific goal often doesn't work.

Such goals are often unrealistic. One has to consider what a given congregation has to offer those groups it may be trying to target. For example, all members seem to believe if "we could just get some young people in the church, everything would get better." Yet what does a church (congregation) with virtually no regular young people in attendance and the average member age being 50 or above have to offer the prized young people. These congregations are frequently very small and have limited resources and program offerings. The larger churches have become the standard for imitation yet they are not typical of our congregations. I've read that churches of less
than 50 are almost doomed to stagnate and die.

What is wrong with targeting people who are demographically similar to the majority of current members? It's as if certain categories of people are irrelevant or at least problematic. Political correctness has limited what we might be able to do evangelically.

Elaine Nelson
2 weeks ago  Reply

Young people, particularly, are drawn to places where their age group gathers. They do not care to always be associated with older people unless it is work. Church and all other entertainments must be "sold" as a great place to be before they will simply try something, especially if there are not young people also there. Their attention spans are short, and they better find it worth their while to be there.

This is the Catch-22 dilemma: How to attract more young people because they attract other young people. The answer to that will get someone a big promotion.

Markham
2 weeks ago  Reply

If accommodation indicates compromise of principle, which it so often does, then we are offering newbies pablum instead of true spiritual food. Individuals should not be led to think that a church community project, worthy though it may be, is a substitute for individual compassionate service.

The primary focus of the church always must be the gospel to all, not social service. Social service is not to be all consuming.

Elaine Nelson
2 weeks ago  Reply

Is the Gospel merely belief? If not demonstrated in action what benefit is there? Is the Gospel to be taught in words or actions?

Ella M Rydzewski
1 week ago  Reply

"we are more comfortable with those who are similar in many ways, and are uncomfortable if there is a very discernible difference" BORING!
This seems to be a common belief, but it does not fit all of us. I actually like diversity and making friends with people of other cultures. I learn from them; I enjoy the novelty they bring to a church. I appreciate the differences and sometimes prefer them to my own cultural upbringing. I enjoy the different attire and wish it were more common to wear national dress. I like the diversity of foods. This comes easy for some of us but not others. But it is an appreciation that each individual should work on developing. It enriches life.