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**The Other Barack: The Bold and Reckless Life of President Obama's Father**

The complex figure of the brilliant but fatally flawed Barack Obama Sr., father of the U.S. President, haunts not only the American presidency, but Adventism's missionary heritage, as well. Barack Sr. attended a prominent Adventist school, where he showed amazing ability in mathematics. This book, written by a respected journalist, provides context for the Adventist reader who wishes to understand the deadly social and political turmoil associated with mission life. Read the Review…
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Annual Meeting of the Adventist Church in North America

Some of the people arriving for the annual business session of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America had some days earlier been in the General Conference (GC) Annual Council. Several observed the contrast was subtle, but clear. At least one item on the agenda may widen the differences considerably...

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Gender Issue Key Item at Annual Meeting of Adventist Church in North America

Submitted Nov 2, 2011
By Atoday News Team

Seemingly small agenda items can sometimes become big issues in a meeting. That is what happened this week during the annual meeting of the governing body of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America.

The issue is gender equity. It has troubled the Adventist movement for decades now despite the fact that the General Conference in Session ruled on it definitively some 130 years ago and one of the cofounders of the denomination was a woman who played a distinctive leadership role.

This time around the issue was Working Policy E-60. Two years ago the North American Division (NAD) Committee — the governing body for the denomination in the U.S., Canada and Bermuda — revised this policy so it allowed for both ordained and commissioned ministers to serve as conference presidents. Women are not permitted to be ordained ministers except in the People’s Republic of China, but they are permitted to be commissioned ministers, a parallel credential used in North America, Europe and some other parts of the world.

Three weeks ago at the Annual Council of the world-wide Adventist governing body voted to deny a request from two of its regional divisions to grant a ‘variance’ allowing just such a policy. This created a need for the NAD Committee to either revise its policy in line with the world church decision or stand its ground. It voted 162 to 61 to stick with a non-discriminatory policy.

Not since the 1995 General Conference (GC) Session in Utrecht has the line been so clearly drawn on this issue. Many, but not all, church leaders in the southern hemisphere seem stuck on maintaining some kind of status difference between men and women in the Church, while those from the industrialized nations see the need to open the ministry to both men and women.

The Adventist News Network (ANN), the official news operation of the General Conference, described the NAD decision as, “a carefully balanced pair of actions,” linking the vote against a policy of gender discrimination with a vote to, “fully participate in the world church’s recently launched study of the theology of ordination.” The NAD news and information office released the full text of the resolution voted by the NAD Committee.

The North American leadership went out of its way to affirm the unity of the denomination, noting that the NAD, “is an integral part of the World Church and respects and values the position of the General Conference,” and explicitly its desire for, “compatibility in all policies” including those “that deal with women in leadership.” Yet due to the principle of equality and “the unique needs of our field...we vote to affirm” the policy allowing women as well as men to serve as conference presidents. The resolution makes the point that gender equity is ‘not acting in any way contrary to the Bible nor the Spirit of Prophecy.’

Pastor Dan Jackson, president of the Adventist Church in North America, very carefully handled this divisive issue. He allowed ample time for members on both sides to speak and encouraged them to say what was on their hearts and minds. He led the committee in the hymn, ‘Have Thine Own Way Lord’ and prayed for the Holy Spirit to lead in the proceedings. Time was also spent in prayer bands. “My desire,” he told the group, “is that at the end of this discussion everyone present says in their own mind, ‘I was in the presence of the Spirit of God.’”
The Adventist denomination may now be at a juncture where it must find some way to meet the needs of both the Western church that wishes to give women an equal role in church leadership and the Southern Hemisphere church which still has large pockets of those who do not. This issue has played itself out for some time around the question of extending ordination to women who serve as pastors, and the vote on Working Policy E-60 is simply a proxy for that larger issue.

Ellen White exercised the role of prophet in the denomination from its formative days in the late 1840s until her death in 1915. She was clearly the most respected leader in the denomination and for most of her life was issued the credentials of an ordained minister. Some point out that there is no record of a laying-on-of-hands ceremony, but it is also true that there was none for her husband or any of the others in the first generation of Seventh-day Adventist ministers.

Ellen White’s role as a preacher and leader was repeatedly criticized by others during the early days of the denomination and defended in a number of articles in its journal, The Review & Herald. A significant number of other women served as preachers and evangelists in the emerging denomination and in 1881 the General Conference Session voted to approve the concept that women could be ordained. Although a number of women were issued ministerial licenses, the first step toward ordination, none of them were ever actually ordained, perhaps because of the death of James White the same year.

The issue did not surface again until the 1970s when a request from Europe caused the GC to appoint a special committee for in-depth study of the topic in the Bible, Ellen White’s writings and church history. These studies reported that nothing could be found that prohibits women from being ordained as pastors.

Throughout the 1980s there was further discussion and steps were taken in the direction of ordaining women. A number of women were hired as pastors and permission was given for women to be ordained as local elders. At the 1990 GC Session a two-part resolution was voted by the delegates. Number one, it was recognized that there was no consensus among Adventist Bible scholars and theologians either for or against the practice. Number two, it was decided not to move ahead in order to maintain unity in the church.

At the next GC Session in 1995, the NAD presented a request for the divisions of the GC to be able to decide the matter on their own. This simple plea became the occasion for an emotional debate and the delegates voted to refuse the NAD request. Consequently, no further action had been taken up to the latest GC Session last year.

Much of the theology that opposes ordaining women comes out of Roman Catholic tradition and there are no explicit Bible texts giving instruction on who to ordain. Despite those facts many of the Adventists who argue against the ordination of women claim to do so on ‘biblical’ principle. Privately many church leaders who have voted against the issue say they do not believe it is unbiblical, they just do not want to create schism in the Church. In some nations large numbers of local churches have left the denomination over something as small as the creation of a Department of Women’s Ministries.

One solution to the problem in North America has been the creation of an Ordained or Commissioned Minister credential seeking to downplay the differences between the two parallel statuses. Some theologians have questioned the whole idea of ‘ordination’ since it is not explicitly taught as a mandate in the New Testament and is steeped in extra-biblical tradition of the type that Adventists have historically eschewed. When Ted Wilson was elected GC president in the summer of
2010 he responded to questions from delegates with a promise to commission a study of the topic.

This week the NAD Committee voted to appoint a NAD Biblical Research Committee alongside those in the other world divisions. This will be the primary vehicle for the NAD’s participation in the process that the GC has initiated. It also raises questions about the role of the Biblical Research Institute (BRI) at the GC. The GC and the NAD have always had one Biblical research group that served both North America and the world headquarters.

Other Decisions

Although gender roles is a highly visible, even symbolic issue, the annual meeting did have other important business to conduct:

By a relatively close vote (109 to 76) the committee voted to give a 2.35% salary increase to pastors, teachers and other denominational employees after three years with no increases. Implementation was delayed until September 1, 2012.

A new strategy for the media ministries sponsored by the denomination in North America was presented. Work began on this framework in May at a ‘media summit’ in California. It addresses the image and identity of the Adventist Church, vision and values for media ministry, how to encourage innovation, production quality and standards, recognition, training, distribution channels and access by pastors and local churches to media tools.

A committee is planning for the Mission to the Cities initiative in North America. It is currently focusing on New York City. Each of the nine union conferences in the NAD will be asked to develop plans for major cities in their territory.

A travel warning was announced advising against mission trips and similar projects in Mexico because of the drug war and thousands of ‘indiscriminate’ killings there. Essential travel must get special approval at the GC and conform to the U.S. State Department requirements.

Steve Billiter

From the article

"Ellen White exercised the role of prophet in the denomination from its formative days in the late 1840s until her death in 1915. She was clearly the most respected leader in the denomination and for most of her life was issued the credentials of an ordained minister"

This statement is not true at all. The credentials issued her as an ordained minister were honorary only--not at all official. Why would she even need such a "useless" degree as an ordained minister when God had called her to prophet status--which is far, far, above any ordained minister status? Additionally, she was not called as a propeht in the "late 1840's"--she was called in December of 1844.

From the White Estate,

“For 70 years, until her death on July 16, 1915, Ellen White faithfully delivered the messages God gave her for His people. She never was elected to an office in the church, yet her advice was constantly sought by denominational leaders. Her formal education ended at age nine, yet her messages set in motion the forces that produced the present worldwide Adventist education system,
from day-care centers to universities. Though she herself had no medical training, the fruitage of her ministry can be seen in the network of Adventist hospitals, clinics, and medical facilities that circle the earth. And though she was not formally ordained as a gospel minister, she has made an almost unparalleled spiritual impact on the lives of millions, from one end of the earth to the other” (http://www.whiteestate.org/pathways/ewhite.asp).

“In the latter part of December, 1844, Ellen White and a few other women were visiting at the home of a Mrs. Haines of Portland, Maine. When they were all kneeling together in prayer, she became oblivious to her surroundings and was given a vision of the future experiences of the Advent people, and the coming of Christ: here in her own words is a part of this vision:

“While I was praying at the family altar, the Holy Ghost fell upon me, and I seemed to be rising higher and higher, far above the dark world. I turned to look for the Advent people in the world,.... ( http://everlasting-gospel.blogspot.com/2010/08/ellen-g-white-gods-end-time-messenger.html--and see on Early Writings p.14).

"Those who are about to enter upon the sacred work of teaching Bible truth to the world, should be carefully examined by faithful, experienced persons. After they have had some experience, there is still another work to be done for them: they should be presented before the Lord in earnest prayer, that He may indicate by His Holy Spirit whether they are acceptable to Him. The apostle says, "Lay hands suddenly on no man." [1 Timothy 5:22.] In the days of the apostles, the ministers of God did not dare to rely upon their own judgment in selecting or accepting men to take the solemn and sacred position of mouthpiece for God. They chose the men whom their judgment accepted, and then placed them before the Lord to see if He would accept them to go forth as His representatives. No less than this should be done now. {GW 438.1}

In many places we meet men who have been hurried into responsible positions as elders of the church, when they are not qualified for such a position. They have not proper government over themselves. Their influence is not good. The church is in trouble continually in consequence of the defective character of the leaders. Hands have been laid too suddenly upon these men. {GW 438.2}

Ministers of God should be men of good repute, capable of discreetly managing an interest after they have aroused it. We stand in great need of competent men, who will bring honor instead of disgrace upon the cause which they represent. {GW 439.1}

Ministers should be examined especially to see if they have an intelligent understanding of the truth for this time, so that they can give a connected discourse upon the prophecies or upon practical subjects. If they cannot clearly present Bible subjects, they need to be hearers and learners still. In order to be teachers of Bible truth, they should earnestly and prayerfully search the Scriptures, and become conversant with them. All these things should be carefully and prayerfully considered before men are sent into the field of labor.--"Testimonies for the Church," Vol. IV, pages 406, 407.
With the 2012 presidential just one year away in the United States and the incumbent president, Barack H. Obama II, virtually assured a place on the ballot, books are now rolling off the presses to capitalize on, and in some cases contribute to or detract from, his candidacy. This book, The Other Barack, seems to belong in the first category — it is by no means a complimentary or image-building portrayal of the President’s father and depicts the man in the fullness of his strengths and weaknesses. Conversely, it is clearly not intended to overtly embarrass the President or his family, but to fill out the picture of a man Barack II has alluded to frequently in his own writings. This book is clearly journalistic in its approach (consistent with the vocation and reputation of the author) and presents a picture of the President’s father as a complicated, gifted man caught up in Kenya’s transition from colony to sovereign nation, between 1935 and 1982. The book is highly recommended for reasons stated below.

That the main character in this nonfiction, posthumous biography was educated in an Adventist school (Gendia Primary School, about three miles from his ancestral home, near Lake Victoria) and that his own father (the President’s paternal grandfather, Onyango Obama) had at one time been a Christian is clearly stated in the book. But Onyango, an ambitious and compulsive man in search of upward mobility, apparently appreciated the sterner personality of the Muslim faith and its allowance for multiple wives — he renounced Christianity as an adult, but remained on friendly terms with Christians and clearly practiced a form of ‘liberal’ Islam that among other diversions allowed him and his family to drink alcoholic beverages (addiction to which would at least lead to the untimely death of the President’s father, in 1982, at age 47).

This transition to Islam allowed Barack Sr., as a youth, to express his gifts as an accomplished dancer, and his connection with the Adventist education program helped spur him forward to remarkable achievements in mathematics. Barack Sr. eventually became the first Kenyan to gain an all-expenses-paid scholarship to Harvard University. On the negative side, Barack Sr. ’s life was immensely complicated by his aforementioned addiction, his arrogant attitude toward those he regarded as his inferiors, and his sense that as a first-born son of Islam, monogamy did not apply to him.

For Adventist readers the book is particularly interesting in its portrayal of the nation of Kenya, and the influence of the Adventist church’s missionary outreach in the upward mobility of its people, including Barack Sr. Adventism, in fact, is proportionately far more prominent institutionally in many Third World nations than it has ever become in the United States. In many countries, it is one of the larger, and in some cases the largest, Protestant denomination. This is a story not always told well by the Adventist press (and perhaps it cannot be told well, because of the church’s complicated relationship with governments in some of these countries). While by no means is Adventism the...
theme of this book, the story told here adds dimension and context to mission stories that rarely
dwell with the immense sociological and political realities inherent in the cultures where Adventism
ministers.
Breakaway Adventists Expected October 15 Second Coming

Submitted Nov 2, 2011
By Atoday News Team

Echoing recent North American predictions of Christ's Second Coming, Adventist Church officials in the South American nations of Bolivia and Perú have reported a breakaway group of former Adventists suffered a disappointment of their own, October 15.

The group, which advocated living far from towns or cities in preparation for the Time of Trouble and worldwide Sunday law, formed in South America in the late 1990s under the leadership of Edgardo Zagarra (pronounced Sah-GAH-rah) a former Adventist pastor known for his radical messages and animated style of preaching.

During the early 2000s, his followers, said to number in the hundreds, broke off from local Adventist congregations and often moved to remote encampments where they could await the Lord's return in peace, at one time setting May 17, 2000 as the day in which Sunday legislation would be announced worldwide.

"I read a manifesto distributed by Zagarra, and the first half of the lengthy paper sounded very much like standard apocalyptic Adventist preaching," says Edwin A. Schwisow of the Adventist Today news team, who personally interviewed several members of the breakaway group.

"The problems arose in the second half of the paper, in which Zagarra argued for specific times when these events would be fulfilled. Most Adventists in the Andean area rejected Zagarra's teachings, but as I interviewed various breakaway members, it appeared the decision to follow Zagarra was fueled in part by dissatisfaction with some aspect of their local congregations — they may have felt overlooked or demoted by the nominating committee, or have lost a vote in what they believed to be a rigged business meeting. Fallout seemed particularly strong in congregations that were building new structures. Disagreements over how to build, finish, decorate, and pay for a new house of worship seemed to be associated with the decision to move away into a separate enclave and await the Lord's return alone."

Recent communication from Bolivia to Adventist Today indicates the breakaway group met for Sabbath services on October 15, singing and preaching throughout the day, then dispersed quietly at sundown.

“There was no uproar, nothing noteworthy,” reported Samuel Antonio Chávez, a former education director in the eastern (Andean) portion of Bolivia and now a doctoral candidate at the Adventist university in Vinto, near Cochabamba. He said to his knowledge no one currently on Adventist church books took an active role in the day of waiting, October 15.
Horace Butler  
2 days ago  Reply

This underscores the perils of disregarding the counsel of Ellen White. She clearly states that there will be no more messages based on time.

I remember back in the early 60's some folks thought the time of trouble might be imminent because, just as Noah preached for 120 years before the flood came, so Adventists had been preaching for nearly 120 years since 1844.

Then there was a group back in the 80's that predicted the beginning of the time of trouble around 1992. They based it on their understanding of the Jewish Jubilee Year cycles.

Will we never learn?

Elaine Nelson  
2 days ago  Reply

These "end-of-the-world" followers do not come from the Mormons, the Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, but from the sect and fringe groups who began with announcing the end of the world. JWs have also been unsuccessful in their predictions as have Adventists. It is easy to blame Adventists, but those who still need to believe and follow the out-dated EGW advice to "head for hills and out from the cities" are vulnerable to such preachers. Blaming them for fully following the prophet's advice is counter-productive: they have been taught to beware of "city folk" and retreat to the hills as the time of trouble is soon coming.

Where else could they have gotten such ideas if not from the Red Books?

Horace Butler  
1 day ago  Reply

What makes you so sure that the counsel to leave the cities is so out-dated? Who is most vulnerable in a crisis? City dwellers. I've lived in suburbia and I've lived in the country. Those in the country are much more independent and able to cope with major disruptions in the flow of goods and services. During a major ice storm back in the 90's it was those in cities who suffered the most. They had no heat, no electricity, and, in some cases, no water. In our country home, heated by wood, we were warm and well fed, and had access to water. But that's not the only reason she counseled us to move away from the cities. Another reason was the corrupting influence found in the cities. Life in the cities is like living in an artificial world.

Certainly during the time of trouble the city is the last place one would want to be because I suspect that nonconformists who live in the city will be the first to be rounded up.

No one who reads the "Red Books" carefully could come away with the idea that the end of the world scenario should be sensationalized or that dates should be set. Just the opposite is true. So I heartily disagree with you last statement. And I must take exception to your characterization of the Millerites as a “fringe” group. And, by the way, SDA’s have not been announcing the end of the world; only that we are in the time of the end, and that the final events will be rapid ones. We’ve never set a date for the end of the world. The SDA Church didn’t exist until nearly 20 years after
1844.

Trevor Hammond 1 day ago Reply

Ex-Adventists do and say some weird stuff as usual. Talk about kool aid.
♥T

Vernon P. Wagner 1 day ago Reply

Hiding in the hills is useless in the 21st Century. We live in an era of smart bombs, stealth aircraft, and drones. A computer geek can blow an entire mountain away on the other side of the palnet with a single mouse click.

Vernon P. Wagner 1 day ago Reply

Erratum: 'palnet' = 'planet'

Horace Butler 1 day ago Reply

That was a joke, wasn't it? As if modern technology could outwit the Creator and Ruler of the universe. That's almost comical. It sort of sounded like Nebuchadnezzar's boast about no one being able to deliver the 3 Hebrews out of the fiery furnace.

Just as an angel blinded the wicked men of Sodom when they tried to break into Lot's house, so they can disable even the most sophisticated technology. You greatly underestimate the power of God.

Elaine Nelson 1 day ago Reply

What's the flavor of that Kool-aid?

Trevor Hammond 22 hours ago Reply

Well I do hope it's NOT the potassium cyanide flavor...for one.! Maybe just the good ol' Ex-SDA flavor...perhaps!
♥T

Vernon P. Wagner 13 hours ago Reply

Loma Linda Foods used to make a nasty, brown fruit drink. Can't recall the name, but it could kill without the cyanide!
Vernon P. Wagner 13 hours ago  Reply

No, Horace, I wasn't joking. Taliban terrorists pray 5 times a day, but get blown away nevertheless. Of course, western religions say they prayed to the wrong god, but our Christian brothers & sisters are getting blown away by IED's everyday as well...in spite of the prayers of their loved ones.

How many souls, stranded at the top of the WTC. were caught on 'angel wings' as they fell to their deaths? I went to war four times in two wars. Body bags containing Christians outnumbered those of atheists. To assume that God will intervene in ANY situation is not something to count on. That's why 'I-of-little-faith' wore a parachute during my 230 combat support / search & rescue missions.

Horace Butler 8 hours ago  Reply

Go back and read *Great Controversy*. Sure people will die during the time of trouble. As long as they're ready it's no big deal. But after the close of probation the devil can't touch the faithful, with or without all the modern technology. God has promised to shield the righteous during that time, and, though I may be in a minority, especially here, I take Him at His word.
Annual Meeting of the Adventist Church in North America Begins

Submitted Oct 31, 2011
By Atoday News Team

Some of the people arriving for the annual business session of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America had some days earlier been in the General Conference (GC) Annual Council. Several observed the contrast was subtle, but clear. At least one item on the agenda may widen the differences considerably.

Officially it is called the Year-end Meeting of the North American Division (NAD) Committee. Each of the 13 ‘divisions’ or regional sections of the GC have one during the time between the Annual Council and the end of the calendar year. Long-established policies dictate that major changes in denominational programs, finances and policies can only be made at this yearly meeting.

The divisions of the GC are described in the denomination’s constitution and bylaws as simply a part of the GC itself. And they are given the full authority of the GC within their territory. This inevitably creates conflicts, especially with the emergence of a division in North America which did not really exist until 1985. It is also true that as the denomination becomes larger, it is no longer possible for a handful of men at world headquarters to manage everything at the level of detail they did only a generation ago. Consequently the delegation of operational space to the divisions has become more and more important as well as frustrating to some who work at world headquarters.

The NAD Committee is different from most of the other division committees in that about half of its members are pastors, teachers and lay leaders. All 58 of the conference presidents are members, as well as all the union conference officers (about 30 individuals), the presidents of the 14 Adventist colleges and universities, the nine union conference education directors, all of the NAD officers and department heads, as well as leaders from several key organizations in health care and other areas. It is a large group with 200 to 300 members participating in each yearly meeting. Most division committees are less than a third this size and have very few pastors and lay leaders in attendance.

Pastor Dan Jackson is the new president of the Adventist Church in North America. He was elected a little over a year ago and this is really the first annual meeting where he has had time to reflect, plan and prepare. Last year the meeting came soon after the GC Session where he was unexpectedly asked to assume leadership and the agenda was focused on the selection of the NAD staff for the next five years.

His report to this year’s meeting started with a one-word theme, “Collaboration.” It was an expression of his exceptionally collegial style. He quoted Ellen White, “those who are called to responsible positions...permit ourselves to feel altogether too much care...We need to trust [Jesus] and go forward.” (Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, Volume 7-A, page 1161) One of the forward steps introduced in the first day of the meeting is a new mission statement specifically for the NAD.

The new statement: “The mission of the North American Division is to reach our territory and the world with the distinctive, Christ-centered Seventh-day Adventist message of hope and wholeness.” As organizational experts generally agree, it is more succinct than the GC mission statement: “The mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is to make disciples of all people, communicating the everlasting gospel in the context of the three angels’ messages of Revelation 14:6-12, leading them to...
accept Jesus as personal Savior and unite with His remnant Church, discipling them to serve Him as Lord, and preparing them for His soon return.”

Pastor Jackson told the committee that in the last year he has spent time on the strategic planning process which would be a key part of the agenda at this meeting, participated in the development of a strategy for the denomination’s media ministries, overseen the reorganization of the Ministerial Department, played a key role in nine union conference constituency meetings and preached a public evangelism campaign in Houston, Texas, one of the ten largest cities in North America.

He also listed a number of challenges facing the Church: “Recognition of the great need...to intensify our outreach” and especially the involvement of Church members in evangelism, church planting and community service. “More involvement for our young people.” Major hurdles for the future of Adventist schools. The financial problems of a denomination in the midst of the Great Recession. More effective use of media, especially the new social media on the Internet.

Research has shown that church outreach activities have largely declined over the last decade both in the amount of activity, the number of members volunteering time and the measurable outcomes. Public awareness of the Adventist Church is also declining and knowledge of precisely what the denomination is all about has never been widespread in the U.S. and Canada.

Some items on the agenda will be quickly voted without much discussion. The committee members have a large binder to work through and if they give detailed debate to every item they will be here until Christmas. It has already been voted to accept the request of the GC to move Guam and Micronesia into the NAD territory. These are mission fields that were long part of the Far Eastern Division, but also happen to be U.S. territories so they have more in common with the NAD. It is a historic addition to a region that has long included the U.S., Canada, Bermuda, two small French islands off eastern Canada and a few largely uninhabited islands near Hawaii.

Two agenda items may spark considerable debate and even conflict beyond this meeting. One has to do with a new policy for ‘local hires.’ This terminology refers to personnel hired with local church or school funds which have long existed in what the denomination’s attorneys have determined was legal limbo. It has long been common for churches of all denominations in America to hire part-time works on a ‘stipend’ basis. For example, most Baptist churches hire a youth pastor for considerably less than what could be considered a full-time salary. This person has another job or may be enrolled in college and is happy to spend as much time as he can working with the teens in the church for perhaps $400 a month.

The denomination’s legal office has recommended this kind of employee in the Adventist Church conform to the legal requirements which were written in the 1940s for union labor working in auto plants and coal mines. That is they must turn in time cards and be paid minimum wage. Their employment must be handled by the conference treasurer’s office even if he turns around and invoices the local church for the cost of the employee. This creates a lot of paperwork for conference treasurers and may prove to be entirely impractical. Most churches ignore these requirements and there are no visible cases of their being challenged, but most denominations do not have the centralized structure of the Adventist Church which might make it a more inviting target for some aggressive Federal attorney. After all, local Adventist churches are not incorporated like most Baptist congregations, and legally exist only as activities of the conference.

In the past year a number of conferences have gone through major changes to make way for this new policy. It remains to be seen how many of them may come back to this meeting with negative experiences and challenge its further implementation.
A more visible potential conflict has to do with NAD Working Policy E-60. This policy has long stated that conference presidents must be ordained ministers. Last year the NAD Committee voted to amend that, making Commissioned Ministers also potentially eligible to hold that office. What is the difference? In a word, gender.

When the GC Session in 1990 refused to move ahead with the ordination of women serving as pastors in the Adventist Church and in 1995 denied the request of the NAD for divisions to be allowed to make their own decisions on the topic, the NAD Committee created a new credential, that of a Commissioned Minister. It provides something of a parallel track for women in ministry and it is despised by some who favor ordaining women, as well as damned by some who are against it.

Over the last decade many conferences have begun to issue a single credential for an “Ordained/Commissioned Minister” and many policy documents have been amended to include this conjoint language. A year ago the NAD Committee inserted it into NAD Working Policy E-60, theoretically opening the door for a woman who is a Commissioned Minister to be elected a conference president.

This created an irregularity in the eyes of some GC officers since the GC Working Policy did not have a similar provision. At the recent Annual Council the NAD and the Trans-European Division (TED) requested that a variance be voted to care for this difference. GC President Ted N. C. Wilson spoke against the request and the delegates voted not to grant it.

Will the NAD Committee go along with this decision? There are several possible outcomes. The NAD Committee might rescind its vote from last year and return to the old language in E-60. Or, it might not rescind its vote and simply wait to see what happens. Frankly, it is unlikely the GC officers will take any action until a woman Commissioned Minister is actually elected a conference president. There are other possibilities that might involve different revisions of the policy language or the appointment of a committee to meet with the GC officers and seek to work out some more acceptable arrangement.

A number of the men currently serving as conference and union presidents in the NAD believe that the refusal to ordain women in ministry and the policy against women serving as conference presidents are simply unbiblical and unjust. They profoundly disagree with the views expressed by the GC president. They do not think that if Europe and North America were allowed to ordain women pastors or elect women to the role of conference president that it would cause significant disunity in the world church. This may be a moment for them to make a statement of their own.

The deeper damage to the Adventist movement is among the members and potential members under 45 years of age. In North America research has shown that about half the young people growing up in Adventist homes leave the church when they become adults. Among the second generation in immigrant churches it is an ever higher percentage. Denominational leaders in Europe, Australia and New Zealand say the same thing is happening there.

It is widely believed that the denomination’s insistence on maintaining discrimination against women on this point is at least partly to blame for the loss of young adults. With the stakes as high as this, if there is no debate on this item it will come as a surprise to most observers.
The real problem is that the palatability of a message holding high standards viewed as outdated, but as absolute as time immemorial, is simply difficult for a world focused on material wealth and a philosophy that asserts the ends justify the means. It is best described as "selfishness" and a difficult test to bare in a world where self gratification is advocated and memorialized 24/7 on the all too powerful multi-media video screens.

As time moves forward, we must have Faith that the standards will prevail and lead to eternal life, the reverse thereof is a nullity.

It will become more and more difficult and serious penalties will one day face us for that privilege, but a privilege it will be and it will be rewarded if we simply cling to that most precious Faith.

Gailon Arthur Joy
AUReporter

To perceive all those who are not "holding the high standards" that, evidently is believed to be the SDA standards, is to look askance at most of the world as selfish, and unattracted to anything not focused on material wealth.

With this attitude, how can it be expected to reach the 99% of the world's population who are not Adventists? This is a very crass evaluation of all those except the small minority who claim to be clinging to the faith. It's the self-righteous attitude that is a complete turn-off to rational people.

Elaine Nelson

"It is widely believed that the denomination’s insistence on maintaining discrimination against women on this point is at least partly to blame for the loss of young adults. With the stakes as high as this, if there is no debate on this item it will come as a surprise to most observers."

While this could certainly be a piece of the puzzle, I don’t think this is a significant factor why the younger folks are leaving. I also firmly believe it has little to do with “standards” as the statement above said, “As time moves forward, we must have Faith that the standards will prevail and lead to eternal life, the reverse thereof is a nullity.” Scripture is clear that everything we do is compared to “filthy rags.” I digress...

My hypothesis (based from my experience) about the younger generations leaving the church, especially Gen X & Y, is that the baby boomers and older generations have capitalized the leadership. Compounding this issue is that discipleship is virtually non-existent in our church, especially among men. If the older generations are dominating the leadership and not mentoring younger leaders, what motivation would a young person have if he/she can’t give their talents to the church and ultimately to the God they serve? My next hypothesis would be that while many young folks may be leaving the SDA church, they are not turning their backs on God, but rather finding outlets for service where they can be of value.

Steven Karst
Once again, Elaine has said it well. It's an attitude that is rampant in sectarian religions such as: LDS, SDA, JW, etc. Rational free-thinkers run for the hills to escape it. Another reason the word 'disgruntled' may actually mean 'enlightened.'

BTW, what's the definition of 'gruntled?' Did an SDA baptism make me gruntled? Will the 144,000 be gruntled? No wonder I can't get raptured...I've lost my 'gruntle.'

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I can't believe that the first four comments on this post are so muted! Why isn't someone singing the Hallelujah Chorus? Horray for Jesus! Hip, Hip, Horray! Finally someone someplace has given a small hope that our children may have a church they can be proud of, instead of ashamed of! Thank you NAD, thank you Dan Jackson, thank you Jesus. Hello and finally welcome Galatians 3:28! At last, at last, a small crack in the door has opened for Adventist women. It will mean so much to my children to see that the truth as it is in Jesus means at least some place in the church, Madam President is welcome.

May God grant that before I die I live to see an African woman president of our General Conference, who understands that her job is to make the lives and work of church members and employees easier and more efficient as an administrator, not to be a self appointed theological "savior" of a church already very well saved and busy on their Father's errands, thank you.

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Some of the above comments remind me of a story that I heard a few years ago. A friend had a dream that was so vivid he felt that it must have been a vision from God. In his dream or vision he actually met and spoke to God - face to face!

Since the Bible writers give several differing versions of what God is like, I was MOST interested in knowing what God REALLY looks like. When pressed as to what God really looked like, he simply replied, "She's black."

I believe that when the truth is finely revealed about the full nature of God, we're all going to be very surprised!

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Because black women have been the ones throughout history who have nurtured, cared for and taught the children, what would be more ideal than such a person to nurture, instruct in discipleship and not be a control freak who wanted to push a personal agenda.

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Having lived on five continents, I've discovered that every earthly religion seems to induce divinity related dreams that fit its' specific belief system. I've never met a Buddhist who had a vision of 'Our Lady of Guadalupe,' nor have I met a Catholic who had a vision of 'Lord
Krishna.' Religion specific images are burned into our psyche at a very young age, and are permanent.

Alyce's last sentence says it all. Mere humans with unfounded hubris, who think they know all about God, are indeed in for a surprise. It's like the ant crawling on a jumbo jet's tire thinking it knows all about the aircraft. I am married, however, to a lovely black lady who has no problem with imagining a black Creator.

Elaine Nelson

This brings up the subject of those "near-death" experiences. Always the individual sees a beautiful light, but have any seen a fiery, burning pit? Dreams are always based on our memories of previous, even childhood experiences. Interesting, but to give them such importance is a lost cause.

Vernon P. Wagner

Elaine...do you mean we need not worship an image of St. Mary on a tortilla? I've been near death a few times, and never saw what is described by some. I consider it just another mind game related to transient hypoxia.

Elaine Nelson

Hpoxia and anoxia affects the mind in strange ways.

Elaine Nelson

Hpoxia and anoxia affects the mind in strange ways.
In 1879, teens Luther Warren and Harry Fenner wanted to do evangelism for Jesus. Praying together often for ideas and vision, young Fenner and Warren initiated the first Adventist youth group. Their Michigan Adventist Youth Society was successful from the beginning, and soon spread to other conferences.

In the early years of Adventism, youth work was often initiated by youth for the purpose of sharing Christ with their non-Christian friends, first in their own communities. Soon, their focus expanded, and youth began extending their evangelistic outreach to the world. Early SDA Youth Societies’ emphasis on personal revival combined with regular missionary activity buoyed the members, providing a strong sense of purpose, structure, and community.

So how does youth ministry compare today with the purposes of youth societies in the early years of Adventism? Although nearly every facet of youth ministry today — Pathfinders, short-term mission trips, youth camps, youth and young adult retreats, youth camp meeting programming — could be said to have sprung in some way from Warren and Fenner’s dreams in 1879, there are differences. Are those differences in principle, or merely differences in practice?

Today’s youth programming and ministries are usually adult-initiated (GYC might be an exception) and administered. Although there is still an underlying aim of evangelism, that focus is often centered on evangelizing the youth of the church, rather than for the conversion of non-Adventist youth. In addition, the methodology for achieving the salvation of Adventist youth is often more entertainment-oriented than organized with the purpose of providing opportunities for youth to do sustained, systematic evangelism.

Let’s again note that Youth Societies in early Adventism sprang up as youth-initiated and youth-managed organizations in response to Christ’s clear mandate to evangelize the world. (Matthew 28:19-20) Although the response to the call to witness and save souls was strengthened, perhaps even awakened, by adults in Adventist congregations who shared this passion for the lost and by Ellen White’s own messages on youth organization and empowerment, nevertheless early Adventist Youth Societies were largely the outgrowth of youth commitment.

By 1903, however, adults had largely assumed the management of Youth Societies. Certainly, every organization goes through periods of growth that include some degree of institutionalization. But this growth need not stifle the initial purpose for the organization if some plan is kept in place whereby that original purpose and vision is not obscured by bureaucracy or programming that does not contribute to the founding purpose. In the case of Adventist Youth Societies, the vision of reaching the world for Christ appears to have remained intact at least to the turn of the 20th century.

Unfortunately, however, personal proclamation and verbal witness have been in serious decline in churches now influenced by a post-modern culture. Adventist youth ministries may now be in danger of not only a loss of mission (outward — toward others) but even a distortion or reversal of mission (inward — toward us). Additionally, it is becoming increasingly rare to find an Adventist youth professional who is willing to identify ‘Babylon,’ much less suggest that the mission of Adventist youth includes calling other Christians out of it.
In 2011, at least in North America, with occasional exceptions in the Hispanic and African-American culture, there are few or no Youth Societies, no Missionary Volunteer societies, and even Adventist Youth Societies (AY) are largely defunct. With the exception of student literature evangelism programs, on-going, systematic organization of youth for the purpose of working for the lost is largely missing from Adventist youth ministries.\(^2\)

Though there is evidence of informal small Bible study groups within the Adventist youth ministries structure, much of today’s youth ministry focuses on youth rallies, camporees, retreats, forums, and camp meeting programming. These feature dynamic preaching, drama, and culturally relevant gospel music, with little or no emphasis on organizing and training for soul-winning outside the Adventist community.

In his book, *Theology and Evangelism in the Wesleyan Heritage*, evangelical James Logan writes, “For a long time, some leaders and analysts within Methodism have regretted the unfortunate tradeoffs experienced when Methodism went ‘a whoring’ after [the respectability of the more formally-structured main-stream denominations], and shifted its accent from lay ministry to professional ministry.”

Although the transfer of youth ministry from youth to professionals may have affected the paradigm shift from evangelism to entertainment, that shift may not have been inevitable. Youth professionals could successfully restore evangelism in youth ministry if they again see themselves as coaches and mentors, training youth for actual soul-winning, rather than seeing themselves as primarily programmers of inward focused ministry.\(^3\) It seems evident that today’s Adventist adolescents need more than entertainment or fast-moving programming to anchor them to Christ and to His church body.

Youth ministries advocate Kevin Ford once wrote, “The problem with most Christian young people is that they have no game. We keep giving them all the things they need to do as Christians — read the Bible, have devotions, study, pray, do God’s will, do the right thing — but they have no reasons to do all that. There is no game to use it in. They need a mission.”

The reason today’s young people do not appear to have the same appetite for evangelism as evidenced by the members of early Youth Societies may be they’re getting little exercise in evangelism. Adventist youth in the 21st century, particularly in western culture, are in danger of being spiritual couch potatoes — over-entertained and under-challenged, and filled with spiritual junk food. To appreciate the meat of the Word and the beauty of a living, life-changing relationship with Christ, they must once again organize and seek training in order to experience the rejuvenating reality of evangelism.

It is yet possible that this generation of youth will re-capture the vision of early Adventist youth societies and become that segment of the church body who model, lead, and inspire the church at large to engage in Spirit-led inclusive evangelism. Maybe it will be today’s youth who will see beyond gender, age, education, power, and tradition so that, “the boundary of man’s authority will be as broken reeds, and the Holy Spirit will speak through the living, human agent, with convincing power.” (*Selected Messages* Book 2, pp 58-59)

\(^1\) I am defining evangelism here as sharing the Good News about Jesus (the gospel message) in the context of the three angels’ messages of Revelation 14.
There are some fine exceptions. Philadelphia Youth Challenge and REACH Philadelphia led by Pastor Tara Vincross is a model of systematic, on-going youth-led evangelistic training.

A good example of such coaching is in Robert Folkenburg’s generationally inclusive ShareHim initiative.

Thomas "Vastergotland"

I agree with your main point regarding making evangelism a main part of church life for youth, and adults alike I might add. Following Jesus doesn't work all that well as a spectator sport. That said, I must ask why you have to insist on evangelism being about shuffling cells around within the body of Christ. How does influencing someone who is Christian by the preaching of Peter or Apollos to become a Christian by the preaching of Paul count as evangelism by any biblical standard or definition? As if there were a lack of unbelievers. What exactly is the deal here?

Elaine Nelson

it is becoming increasingly rare to find an Adventist youth professional who is willing to identify ‘Babylon,’ much less suggest that the mission of Adventist youth includes calling other Christians out of it."

If that is to be the central theme, it is no wonder that it is neither appealing to Adventist or other youth. Looking upon all non-Adventists as being in "Babylon" is a terrible motive. People want to be invited INTO something that is better, not coaxed out of their former lifestyle as Babylon. Adventists must eradicate these outdated words from their vocabulary and mind if they wish to look at others as just as good, kind, and worthy of the kingdom.

Has anyone asked the youth for suggestions on approaching other young people? Perhaps we should also remove the word "other" signifying they are not "one of us, the saved" and consider that all of them are God's children and have equal rights to heaven. Stop looking and treating non-Adventists as needing "to be salvaged" and they are just as worthy as we who are "out of Babylon."

The whole vocabulary and mental view of non-Adventists must change if we are to welcome them into our family. Just as a marriage brings into a family someone who we may not know too well, she instantly becomes part of the family, no training in family practices, rituals, and habits must be taught first, by rite of marriage, she is now "family."

With this attitude, young people would have to make and be friends with those not in the church. This is a complete turn-around, as since Adventism began we have been taught to have nothing to do with the "world" and its amusements. Young people are eager for the new, and they are far more jaded than their parents with all the visual and aural technology available. Discover what they are looking for, what they want in their future. Listen, Listen, Listen, both to the SDA youth and all young people. Make friends with them, remembering that most young people don't initially trust "anyone over 30" and you must be able to both understand and talk their language.

This is a daunting task, but the most important of all is a complete change of attitude: see all young
people as valuable and worthy and that understanding the third angel's message is probably so far down their list of importance as to be unrecognizable. They are worried about their future: education, jobs (where are they?) and far more than what Adventists have usually been eager to tell them. Remember: telling someone about something in which he has no interest will be given no interest.

William Noel 1 week ago Reply

Elaine,

You are making a great point.

Something that gets quickly overlooked in most discussions (and laments) about youth evangelism is that our teachings are historically weighted heavily toward convincing people about facts first and hoping their hearts will follow instead of winning their hearts first so the facts can follow. Over time this has become a horribly negative presentation, except we're so convinced of the facts that we have a hard time understanding how anyone outside the church could see it as negative. My Baptist friends go around telling people they need to accept Jesus so they can avoid going to hell. That makes the Gospel sound like it is the only slightly better of two very undesirable options. The love of God and the sacrifice of Jesus to make salvation possible are presented as minor attractions.

Just like you and me, our youth are repulsed by negatives and attracted to positives. The big reason so many are leaving the church is all the negatives they see as compared with positives elsewhere. So, what if we were to reorient our message to focus the incomparable positives of how much God loves us, what he's done and doing to save us, and the joys of having a daily walk with God? This is the challenge we must meet if we're going to keep our youth in the church and have that army of well-trained workers to spread the Gospel.

Ella M. 1 week ago Reply

Elaine,

You have provided a lot of good insight in your above post. Listen and know their needs. William, I agree with you as well. After listening and helping, present that message that brings a lifetime of stability and peace that we wouldn't otherwise enjoy.

Doctorf 1 week ago Reply

Elaine,

What an insightful post! There are a lot of "terms" we need to get rid of in Adventist ministries. I am an American citizen and hardly associate myself and lifestyle with what the term "Babylon" encompasses. Maybe Cindy should ask another question. That is, why is the SDA message so unappealing to 21st century youth?

Bill Cork 1 week ago Reply

"Today's youth programming and ministries are usually adult-initiated (GYC might be an
exception) and administered. Although there is still an underlying aim of evangelism, that focus is often centered on evangelizing the youth of the church, rather than for the conversion of non-Adventist youth."

I think we need to be clear who we mean by "youth." In much of the world, that term means 18-25 year old young adults. In the US, it tends to mean teenagers (sometimes even children). GYC, though operating in the US context, has a global understanding--it targets young adults over 18, and was organized by college/grad students and young professionals.

That being said, I think you are right about the shift in focus. Though in my church, our youth invite their friends to Pathfinders, and we have seen baptisms as a result.

It might be well to remember that we got the idea of Missionary Volunteer societies from Evangelicals--specifically, from John Mott (complete with his call to "keep the morning watch"). We followed the evangelicals then ... and we're doing so now (for better or worse).

Cindy,
I think you have hit the nail on the head. We have become so worried about 'losing' our youth that retaining them has become the main focus. However, this inward focus comes from adults that seem to inevitably focus on youth and kids rather than externally, as keeping the kids/youth is extremely difficult, but reaching out to secular minds is even more daunting.

I would have to question the idea suggested by Kevin Ford that youth don't see the relevance because there is no game or mission to use the tools provided as surely there are many reasons and motivations for using them. The anachronistic calling people out of Babylon would not be the answer in terms of motivation.

William Noel

Again, you have given us a thoughtful exploration of a timely topic. Thank you.

What happens with our youth is critical because they are the future of the church. With growing numbers of churches in North America having few or no children it is obvious that our denomination is headed for a serious decline in membership as the senior generation dies.

You touched on a number of serious contributing factors. First is that the youth are not allowed ownership or even significant input into the ministry that is supposed to be for them, so they become disconnected from it. Second is that the historic emphasis on calling people out of Babylon has ceased to be an issue for them, not because it is unimportant, but because the way it is presented is so boring and negative. What is there in the topic to give them purpose and make the topic a priority when they have no ownership of it and the topic fails to resonate with their community? Adults who are quick to answer that they should feel otherwise are illustrating how differently they view things than our youth.

Sometimes success requires that we let failure be complete, that we let the wrong approach die and
stay undefenced long enough that whoever takes on the challenge does so with a view unatinted by the failures of the past. That may be what has to happen with youth ministry. What clearer proof of the failure of the old model do we need than the current working state of youth ministries? Our youth need a vision of effective mission outreach that they are not seeing in the church today. They need to be given ownership of the challenge and the freedom to run with it without interference or limits from older generations. When that is allowed to happen we will all be amazed at what God does through them.

Cindy,

How relevant is the Value Genesis Report to your observations? In addition, do the youth see evangelism as the work of witnessing / taking Christ to a lost world? Or do they see evangelism as a process of making Adventists? With so many Adventist youth leaving the church, and many joining the other churches, how do they see the value of being a 7th Day-Adventist?

As you well know, there are many theological in-house differences / debates (many very much intrenched). This has been as much a turn off to young folks as anything we have / have not done in our planning for their active participation in the church / evangelism. How can we train the youth aright with so many in-house disturbances going on?

Could it be that the grown-ups can / will only be able to empower the youth for becoming that "army of youth well trained" when we determine to lead by example? By that I mean, follow the lead of the disciples in the upper room after Christ's ascension and work out / settle our differences in the light of Christ's great love for us in the context of how much we have actually misapprehended what He's called us to do / be? What will happen when the grown-ups determine to no longer do anything that will cause Christ the grief that He has borne because of our self-styled (that which we are actually not yet aware of = Revelation 3:17) ministry / evangelism? I believe this has a lot to do with why the spirit of evangelism is waining in the church today. Let the Media Ministries do the work, we'll support them as we watch them from our couches, and send the our $$$ so they can keep on doing the work we were called to do.

The body of Christ, which includes the youth, lacks the unity that only the Holy Spirit can develop / bless. And if there is anything a young person can detect is disunity. All of us want to belong to something that gives us a sense of belonging / well being, especially 21 century youth. So my question is this, is the church ready to receive, much less develop a youth movement that will change / charge the world for Christ? Or are the present schisms within the church doing their appointed work of dividing and conquering, of which the youth (or lack of) are a documented casualty?

If the same 'vibrant spirit' that was part of the MV Society in bygone years were even just a small part of the current AYS and AY (both Senior and Junior), there would be a whole different ballgame. I have found that much of today's focus is been directed towards getting the youth 'qualified for buying power', which has its important place, however this is done at the expense of spiritual development and growth. Yeah sure, the youth are 'smart' and can see right through hypocrisy, dodgy standards and of course the self-righteous lukewarmness of those who profess...
Christ. Economics (including Sabbath work/vocation/affluenza), Cultural peer pressure (including worldliness/dress/music/lifestyle/behavior), friendships and marriage, sinful living, etc., all play a major factor in choices young people make. Then also a major player all of this is education which in itself is good but this can easily sway a child of God by virtue of the 'buying power' it affords which in turn can also lead one astray.

I was a different case. I left the church in my teens as a result of many reasons but much of it was a result of losing my focus on Christ. I got mixed up in some political activism at school, messed up with drugs, alcohol, smoking, sinful living - I even played in a band which made music a negative influence too - you know, the textbook prodigal - been there, done that, got the fed the pigs T-Shirt.

I don't know if this will work for the youth of today, but I got saved the old fashioned way: the Cross. (Sorry to mention this all the time but this is the best way I know by my own experience. Someone even remarked on another blog that I make a big deal of the Cross. Well yes, guilty as charged but I will stand by this position: THE CROSS OF CHRIST WILL SAVE OUR YOUTH!). It wasn't saved in a church or evangelical meeting with fiery sermons etc., jus' Jesus and me. Yeah! I got saved - hook, line and sinker - by God's grace power and mercy. Jesus changed my life and I KNOW he can do the same for all the young people of today.

There's a song that the Sunday Churches and some Adventists sing which I like to sing too: "I went to the enemy's camp an' I took back what he stole from me..." - It's time parents, and church leaders and young people take back their turf from the devil and take back the young people he has ensnared and "In Jesus Name" claim them back...

Maybe that is one route we can use: the Cross. Now I know the First World kids are smart - but the love of Christ outsments us all. I would suggest though that if ALL church leaders, including Pastors, were to complete the good old Master Guide Class at least, either doing the Junior or Senior Youth course or both, we would have leaders equipped to commit to the objectives of the Adventist Youth Society.

There are some other points regarding some of my thoughts about in-house reasons why we as a church need to 'come to the party' so to speak regarding Youth Ministry but I cannot discuss this on a public platform where many good non-Adventists and ex-Adventists frequent and I don't want to weaken their faith further by any Adventist ordinary domestic issues which may alarm them.

By the way, let's not forget that there are many many youth in our churches and outside who are faithfully walking in the path God has blazed for us, under the blood-stained banner of Christ our Lord. Praise the Lord for the youth we HAVE and have always HAD!

- "With such an army of workers as our youth, rightly trained, might furnish, how soon the message of a crucified, risen, and soon-coming Saviour might be carried to the whole world! How soon might the end come,—the end of suffering and sorrow and sin! How soon, in place of a possession here, with its bleft of sin and pain, our children might receive their inheritance where “the righteous shall inherit the land, and dwell therein forever;” where “the inhabitant shall not say, I am sick,” and “the voice of weeping shall be no more heard!” [Psalm 37:29; Isaiah 33:24; 65:19.]—“Education,” page 271. {GW 66.2}

I would say though, that part of the Adventist Youth issue seen in the cultural dominated churches is that many adults, both members and parents, have openly given Ellen White the boot and
historical Adventism the backseat which unfortunately the Youth are bearing the brunt. That's why we pray for them ALL. Sadly though many pass the blame on Traditional Adventism for this; but they have themselves to blame - not the Church.

♥T

Thomas "Vastergotland"

Trevor,

You mention two different paths to salvation in your post. The path of the cross where you meet Jesus, and the path of the evangelical meeting (revelation seminar type?). Those who champion the first path, which brought you to God, often get slandered as goodness liberals by people who champion the second path. And despite of having been brought to God through the cross, you conclude your post in your final paragraph as a champion of the second path, which did not work for you to bring you to God (per your testimony above). Tell me Trevor, is it the Gospel of the Cross, or the "yes gospel, but/and" of the historical Adventism that is needed? Is the church in lack of the message that worked for you or the other message?

Trevor Hammond

Hey Thomas "Vastergotland"

Didn’t mean to confuse anyone but let me explain. My personal experience was different as I didn’t get back to God via a formal evangelism program of some sort. It just happened under odd circumstances which I have mentioned on another blog. A chain of events so to speak, while still away from church. So my point is that one doesn’t necessarily have to have only certain forms of ministry or programs to reach others. We shouldn’t limit evangelism to just a few options only but rather that ALL possible avenues of evangelism should be pursued where and when or if possible albeit that they remain in principle - ‘Christ centered’. Neither should youth ministry be a forced overbearing effort but one that is stimulating, uplifting, energetic and most of all loving and supportive without compromising our church standards. Different strokes for different folks would also apply here. We should meet the needs of our youth in terms of spiritual direction and their personal development also.

(I know of a preacher who learnt about Jesus from his ‘drunkard’ dad who used to have regular family worship in spite of him been intoxicated). That obviously won’t be our first choice to minister to our youth or even as a mainline means for outreach though. I’m saying that the cross has to be the central focus in all our formal and informal efforts at winning souls to Christ. There is no name under heaven by which we are saved (Acts 4:10, 11, 12).

I only stressed the Cross and its ultimate importance in all of this to make my point and in no way intended to allude ‘different’ paths to salvation. At the end of the day it is the Cross that matters and young people should not be denied this or be side-tracked with fixing their focus on just entertainment and compromise only.

Regarding Ellen White and Traditional Adventism. There’s no denying that Ellen White, by default, points sinners, always, to the Cross. Cultural Adventists have lost the beneficial Ministry of Ellen White by, as I have said, giving her writings the ‘boot’. Then they blame Traditionalists, who I must add, preach the Cross just the same, yet they are blamed for not
compromising enough with cultural and socio-political changes and therefore responsible for youth leaving the church.

The ‘but/and’ gospel is an illogical approach to me: I would prefer the ‘either/or’ which we all have to eventually at some point make a choice. This would include the youth. I have a seventeen year old son and a thirteen year old daughter (a real cutie) - which I as a parent have by God’s Grace been committed to leading them to Christ – firstly by example and then with much prayer and supplication, allowing them to make their personal decision for Jesus. Both aren't baptised yet but I am praying and doing and contributing towards a conducive 'place' where they can choose whom they will serve. In our church planting effort which my family is involved in, we have about fifty or so who meet in a school hall on Sabbaths. About ninety percent are 'pre/non-SDA' and come from diverse religious persuasions. Thirty of the fifty or so are children and young people. We really 'get down' with praising and worshipping God and learning about Jesus and the Cross. A lot of hard work and sacrifice goes into something like this and we usually spend the entire day at 'church' doing stuff and cooling off. Our youth and kids at church accompany us into the neighborhood where we have singing, stories and some tasty treat for kids on the block. Just a guitar and lots of energy is all you need for this exercise. Youth enjoy going out in the community and distributing, clothing, food, toys, tracts, dvd's, etc. We work in an area with many souls from poorer communities reside and have made a difference together with our young people leading out with us.

Peer pressure, music, the media, fashion, worldliness, ungodliness, sexual immorality etc., etc., is a reality and challenge we must face. I would be fully in agreement with Ellen White when she wrote that “While men have slept, Satan has stolen a march against us”. Many youth regretfully have and will also become casualties in this war against the powers of darkness. Christ is our only hope.

♥

Thomas "Vastergotland"

Trevor

When you write, "At the end of the day it is the Cross that matters and young people should not be denied this", I agree fully with you.

Regarding Ellen White and Traditional Adventism, the problem with Traditional Adventism would be that it does not take the good example of Ellen White and point sinners always to the Cross. Rather it wishes to entertain those who would hear and whos ear are suitably tickled with prophetic interpretations of days both in the future and the recent past. Had this been otherwise, it would be the Desire of Ages that was printed by the millions to be spread over the earth, rather than the Great Controversy.

I find the work done through your church commendable. Really, how you describe it, it sounds like the average SDA church has much to learn from it (including churches of any theological leaning). I wonder though whether you misunderstood what I meant by "yes, gospel, but/and". To try and be a little less cryptic, it meant a refusal to let the gospel stand alone. "Yes, the gospel is important, but not until these other requirements have been fulfilled." Or, "Yes, the gospel is important, and it will apply to you as soon as you have ticked off this modest list of other requirements."
The Gospel, meanwhile, teaches that there is nothing you can do to make God love you more, nor is there nothing you could do to make God love you less, and every aspect of your salvation is provided for free by God. Last week’s SS-study indicated that this includes even the faith that leads to salvation. And, the implication of this is that since you provide 0% of your salvation requirements with God providing the other 100%, there is no foundation for stopping someone who is not with us from preaching the gospel (Mark 9:38), and there is no valid foundation for placing any pride in coming to faith through this preacher rather than through that preacher (1 Cor 1:12). Indeed, when Christ is become all in all (Col 3:11), gone is all foundations for and desire to place ourselves as better than others (Phil 2:1-10).

There is a time and place for the "either/or", but that line is not drawn through the church, or between the churches, or even at the borders of the Church. That line is drawn equally accessible for all men and women, and it goes through the heart.

/Thomas

Trevor Hammond

1 week ago

Dear Thomas "Vastergotland"

It's nice to know that we can agree on a number of things. Thanks for explaining your "yes, gospel, but/and". I read it loud and clear now. I did misunderstand what you meant. Maybe it's because of the mandate in Matt 28:19, 20 that some may tend to get a bit carried away which really isn't necessary. The Gospel has that covered quite adequately. All we have to do in essence as instruments in God's hand is to preach and teach the Good News wherever, whenever, however and let the Spirit of the Lord water the seed that is planted.

Thanks for the kind words regarding our church planting effort. I have been involved with other church planting efforts in the past but this one has been special to me as it is the only one which is, not just a 'low' budget initiative, but a NO budget initiative, which has been faith based from inception and going strong for over six years now. The Lord God Almighty, Jehovah Jireh is indeed Provider. We don't have fancy pews and airconditioning and other five-star church luxuries, but hey, what can I say - the we have the Lord...

I like this statement you've made regarding how God provides everything we need in terms of Salvation: "this includes even the faith that leads to salvation." God is Provider. ♥

Ella M.

1 week ago

Thomas Vastergotland: An excellent post and quote: ... . "Had this been otherwise, it would be the Desire of Ages that was printed by the millions to be spread over the earth, rather than the Great Controversy."

You have really made the point that is right in my opinion. We are to point to Christ first. I was appalled by the decision to send GC to millions of people as it gives a wrong first impression of what the SDA church is about. It is not the Gospel and it is not even the Gospel in the context of the third angel's message. (Neither of which I believe is
Kevin Riley

Cindy

Perhaps you should take a look at the STORMCo program in Australia. It is led mostly by youth (with the adult supervision required by law) and finds creative ways to reach the community. It has had an impact on the youth in my church.
http://stormco.adventistconnect.org/

Elaine Nelson

With all the youthful energy and innovative skills, they should be trusted to design their own programs. They are not attracted to a church where the main activity is sitting and listening to a speaker or watching 3ABN, but need action. Let them decide their weekends could be spent helping the many in every community today who desperately need so many things. Let them walk and take a census of a neighborhood, registering the specific needs and addresses and then return next week to help. All help does not involve money. There are yards that need cleaning, houses that need painting (ask for donated paint from nearby stores), perhaps transportation to doctors. All these are wonderful sabbath activities and imitate Jesus who did not spend all day sabbath sitting in a synagogue.

These activities from a high school group or club are regularly shown in the local papers. Wonderful publicity and far better than announcing an upcoming Revelation Seminar.

Harlen Miller

Sitting here in my SDA K-12 School office, after 35+ years as SDA educator, after 1-18 grades of SDA education (plus non-SDA M.A. and numerous+ summer non-SDA workshops) (choral music, by the way), (plus Music Director in many Protestant Denomination churches), I find myself wondering about the value of the SDA educational system from the standpoint of this blog. Are our members stronger in their witness as a result of our system of education? I have found that my biggest enjoyment of Christian witness (no-not SDA witness), and my greatest growth in my Christian experience, has come in conjunction with my relationships with non-SDAs. Too much fish-bowling our denomination. Too much salt staying in the shaker. Too much light under the bushel. What would happen if we let our kids go to public school, invest half that tuition-cost into the church directly, and minister to our kids needs via the church? I wonder what would happen. I see the Mormons doing it that way, and they don't seem to be shrinking. I watch us, and look what's happening.

William Noel

Harlen,

Excellent question! I think the value of SDA education varies from place to place depending on
circumstances and whether or not it is a "mission" school that recruits students outside the membership of the sponsoring SDA church. This turns teachers into evangelists and gives students real-life experience testing their beliefs by contrasting them against the beliefs of the non-SDA students. This produces both more believers and more students who know what they believe.

Kevin Riley 1 week ago Reply

In Australia, most of our schools have a majority of students who are non-SDA, sometimes up to 90%+. It changes the nature of the school. Most schools have baptisms of non-SDA students (and sometimes their family as well) each year. Because of government limits on how small schools can be and remain open, we don't have a multitude of small struggling schools like the US.

Connie Severin 1 week ago Reply

Mr./Dr. Miller, I found your particular post very interesting as our son is about to graduate with a piano performance degree from a secular school. He's interested in masters programs in sacred and choral music and has been directing our church choir. Unfortunately, our he had a rather bad experience in the one SDA school he attended with his sister and they both did much better at the primarily Baptist though nominally nondenominational school where they did most of their pre-college education. While both of them are uncomfortable with churches that emphasize Ellen White, I think both of them are better Christians than I am as far as their walk with God. They're both very active members of the churches to which they belong. They weren't exposed to some of the more rigid SDA beliefs that aren't particularly biblical in origin but rather more social 1800s cultural, and I think they are the better for it.

Elaine Nelson 1 week ago Reply

SDA education risk innoculating young people to Adventism, and with rejecting Adventism they also risk rejecting Christianity as that is the only form of Christianity that they know.

Whether or not this is the intent, the results demonstrate it. A Mormon family I know sent two their four children to BYU, the other two to public unversities. Guess which ones remained Mormon? Not those who attended BYU.

What surveys have been done of SDA-educated youth vs. non-SDA education some 10-20 years later. If we don't know, how can we make plans for the youth?

JaNe 3 days ago Reply

You're a walking Gallup Poll with a representative sample size and a margin of error of +/- 3%? What was the confidence level of your survey? Just curious....

Cindy Tutsch 1 week ago Reply

Kevin, I'm headed "down under" on Monday. Would love to hear more about "STORMCo"!
Kevin Riley

Cindy,

Ask any Youth person. They will tell you as much as you're prepared to hear.

Cindy Tutsch

Kevin,

I am prepared to hear about anything that combines an outreach to the whole person--body, mind, and spirit. Painting houses is great, as well as soup kitchens. My students and I have done plenty of it and been blessed. But if we are not combining acts of mercy and progressive social concern with care for their souls, that is, taking an interest in where our neighbors are spiritually and pointing them to Jesus and His Word, we are missing the proverbial boat.

Elaine Nelson

What are the specific details for "caring for the soul"? Is this a corporate or private undertaking? Does individual prayer and/or meditation not aid the soul? If it not merely a cliche, please explain in detail what a church or group should be doing to properly care for the soul.

Kevin Riley

Cindy,

Part of the reason many STORMCo teams return to the same towns year after year is that it takes time to get to know people and be able to talk to them about Christ. I can't speak for every STORMCo event, but unless the youth in my church are telling less-than-truthful stories when they come back, they do take every opportunity to share the gospel when they see an opening. Australia is a lot more secular, and I suspect has always been less overtly religious, than the US and most people do not appreciate having religious forced upon them.

Konner Dent

In regards to the Kevin Ford quote.

I'm kind of new to this so hear me out. It seems (to me, after switching from public school to Adventist) that any Adventist (undergraduate) program should have a steady, important witnessing program. I mean when I went to public school I had a need to represent my faith because there was so few Adventists and I wanted to give it a name it deserved as well as witness about it when times when the subject was brought up (which was like every other day). At my current Adventist academy everyone is Adventist, so it feels that there is no reason to "get the word out" or give the faith a good name. I have no reason to witness (that they tell me of) and nobody to do it to. I/we (I feel as Adventist youth) not only need a "game", but also a field to play it on. That field is the mission field, in its many forms - something all Christian youth (Adventist or otherwise) should be
all-too familiar in.

William Noel

Konner,

Great point! Our traditions in the church typically limit our concepts about where and how it is "safe" to minister God's love instead of being willing to expand our views and go anywhere. That restricted attitude shows how little we trust the power of God to be a light that dispels darkness.

I was raised in the church and taught that the apostle Paul's statement about spiritual gifts being for the "building-up of the church" was so we could be more effective at public evangelistic crusades and other overtly spiritual outreaches designed to bring in new members. Along the way I've seen at least as many people leave the church as we brought in because the church was not a loving community of believers who nurtured each other in various facets of life. Fortunately, I am not part of a congregation where gift-based ministries are encouraged and nurtured. What we have discovered is that the first blessing from spiritual gifts is building the internal community of the church. That makes it something people really want to be a part of, including visitors and non-believers. That is a big reason why we're growing without holding public crusades, distributing literature, or any of the other traditional outreach methods. The sooner we expose our youth to the unlimited creative opportunity that gift-based ministry offers, the sooner they can find their own opportunities to minister.

Ella M.

Konner,

You are right. Every Christian school should have some sort of outreach to the public. This could be community work (even within already-established organizations). It could be creative evangelism. It could be a concert series or Christian dramas or musicals at the school (and a reception) in which to invite the community.

You are in a position to suggest something like this and bring it to the attention of the faculty.

Cindy Tutsch

Konner,

When I was a Bible teacher at various SDA day and boarding academies, I organized outreach and witnessing activities for the students to do in the communities where the schools were located. We had hundreds of students involved. You could get ideas for such activities from my book "Teens on the Witness Stand." It's out of print now, but I noticed you can still get it on Amazon for a student affordable $3.24!

SecondOpinion

Cindy,
Seems to me that much "entertainment-oriented" ministry results - not from youth leaders gone astray - but from a church that has no greater vision for its youth than to "keep them in the church" - or perhaps, to "keep them in their place in the church." There is a tendency for adults to view adolescents as either gods or monsters. We both fetishize and fear youth. We want to be associated with their energy and vibrancy, yet see them as a threat to order and stability. So we try contain them and use them to our advantage.

We may do this in a couple of ways. 1) We placate youth with programs meant to socialize them into a "nice" but otherwise lack-luster life in the church. We diminish any real transformative power they might bring to the table and treat them in ways that could be seen as hegemonic. 2) We use youth as poster children for an idealized image of the church. We send them door-to-door and take pictures for the union paper, as if to say "See, all is well with the church." We may even try to use young people as foot soldiers for our agendas. One youth organization I know of comes dangerously close to this. It concentrates its resources on the production of large conventions, which includes short bursts of "witnessing" activities. Church administrators flock to the photo-op and organizers claim victory for their cause. I would call this the ideological approach to youth ministry.

What is needed more now than ever before is a deeply pastoral approach to our youth - one which takes them seriously as persons - not as a market segment, an ideal category, or "boots on the ground." They each have real hurts and struggles. Unimaginable wounds, at times. They are looking for purpose and significance, yes. But they don't want to be used as props. They long to be drawn into a accepting, healing and passionate communities of faith filled with adults who are leading the way. They need real mentors in life and in mission, not just someone to drive the van while they knock on doors. If we seek to involve youth in mission and evangelism, it should be the mission and evangelism of the church as a whole. Kenda Dean fears that the church may be "just another sagging social convention, like Dracula, that needs young blood to survive." And that is my concern, too. That the church may simply be "shooting up" on the enthusiasm of youth, like a heroin addict looking for another fix. This is a dead-end street - for young people and for the church.

Cindy Tutsch

SecondOpinion,

I agree whole-heartedly with many of your points. Though I think large conferences or events, particularly those that train for evangelism, have merit, it is not the ultimate solution. Most young people will not return home from these mega-events and continue to engage in systematic, regular mission activities. Thus, the spiritual enthusiasm generated at such convocations could end in apathy or even disillusionment. Pastors and older church leaders need to partner with the youth to provide on-going leadership and witnessing opportunities and training.

I am indicting myself as well. When I was conference youth director, I did have a program whereby 35-70 youth were trained for evangelism and engaged in it systematically for eight weeks each summer of my tenure. For four of my six years as youth director, I even had a school year program of training and engaging in evangelism one night a week. I was focused and intentional in mentoring the student leaders among the group. and several of them have gone on to establish their own on-going evangelitic missions, even training other youth to become engaged in active witness.

What I did NOT do, and regret deeply, is have regular training events for local church leaders to
show them how to develop a plan whereby all of their local church youth could be invited to participate in on-going witnessing. We did sporadic training events, but nothing that really resulted in training a conference-wide movement of youth to not only know how to give an answer for the hope that is within them, but provide structured opportunities for that witness to occur on an on-going basis.

Youth rallies and short-term mission trips can be a great experience, an enriching experience, even a learning-more-about-what-it-means-to-be-a disciple of Christ experience. But again, I don't see those things as the ultimate solution. Witnessing for Jesus must become a lifestyle. Leadership opportunities must go far beyond Junior Deacons. Interest in our young people, many of whom face huge spiritual and emotional challenges, must go beyond "casual." It will take time, effort, self-sacrifice to know them in ways that allow trust to develop. We neglect those opportunities at peril to their souls--and ours.

William Noel

SecondOpinion,

My contention is that the concept you defend is a major reason why the youth are leaving the church. That traditional approach has become hugely ineffective because our society is no longer as receptive as it was once upon a time. I want to urge you to buy and study the book "Unchristian" because it will give you an unvarnished "look in the mirror" to both see Christianity as the world sees it and understand why. That book was a real eye-opener for me that changed my thinking about evangelistic outreach. It is time for new approaches with continual ministries that focus first inside the church before reaching out.

Jan

First, my admission is, I have not read every post in this blog. I would like to make a defense of the "youth". In attending a pre-mission trip planning session with my son last night, I learned that many students at his "Adventist" high school, arrive to school **without breakfast**. One of the teachers, is trying to set up a corner in his classroom, to address providing breakfast options. In this same meeting, of 5 student missionaries, there was one student with his father present. The other 4 students were there with their mother(s) or other significant female relatives. Maybe part of this issue is that there has been no leader, no father power, in the lives of our youth. "I just need a dad", one student said, so clear and profoundly. Can we consider, many of our youth, do need to be reached to as if they themselves, are the mission field? This is a fatherless generation. This takes the wind, completely down, out of their sails. Even Jesus, had Father Power. What about the youth, who have yet to see a role model who they can call "Daddy"?

Elaine Nelson

You can't feed someone the Gospel until you first feed his stomach. There are longings which will not be met by the G.C. or 2300-day prophecy. Meet people's needs FIRST, then be willing to listen to those needs.
1) **The Love-Naked** - *I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.* Matthew 25:36

2) **The Gospel** - *Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.* Isaiah 1:18

3) **The Doctrine** - *And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen,... I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.* Revelation 18:2,4

Kevin Seidel

I was thankful when became old enough to say "no" to going door to door. Kevin Ford's tool kit is sadly incomplete: "read the Bible, have devotions, study, pray, do God’s will, do the right thing". They are very general tools. There are more tools that are needed to apply these to specific situations, problems, issues. William Noel mentioned Spiritual Gift based ministry. That is getting closer. Helping youth to discover and develop their Spiritual Gifts is one part. But it is even bigger than Spiritual Gifts. It is discovering and becoming the person God created us to be. The hard part is finding the tools to do that. Part of that is a community that recognizes and expresses appreciation for people and also role models the wide variety ministry. Cleaning up after potluck is just as important a ministry as singing in the choir.

William Noel

Kevin,

Please allow me to expand your understanding of gift-based ministry. The relationship we enjoy with God in a gift-based ministry blesses us in many ways and He uses that experience to teach us what He wants us to be regardless of our age. Listening to sermons about what we're supposed to become fills us with theory that is generally detached from reality. Actually working with God helps us discover things about ourselves and God we might never have seen otherwise. It is a wonderful experience in both spiritual and personal growth. What is more, gift-based ministry is not getting closer to what God wants us to be, it is actually experiencing what God wants us to be today as He leads us into tomorrow.

My ministry is called the Angel Team. We were given that name by the people we helped who said we were like angels to them for what we had done. We focus on home-related projects that improve lives by solving problems. Two years ago we had a project where we were helping a widow in the church after her house flooded. A two year-old insisted on going with his mother to help. His mother recounted to me with amazement about how he had avoided play and worked steadily at her side because he wanted to help "Grandma Linda." Today that boy is four. He has no idea what he wants as a career when he grows up, but will tell you without hesitation that he wants to do things that make people happy by helping them.
When I think back on my youth which was not really a happy one after my sister died. I was not part of a church, but when the family went back (after my father's heart attack and his awakening), I was so shy I hardly spoke to any one. I attended a youth convention which was helpful spiritually but not socially. I wish the Adventist schools/colleges I went to after that would have taught me how to socialize and build self-worth and give me a cause.

I think youth need a mission and to be taught how to give. Youth by nature are very self-centered on their appearance, acceptance, popularity, and self-worth. They need affirmation but also that they are needed to give affirmation, to help and to be sensitive to others. They need to mentor as well as to be mentored. They need to have leadership roles in the local church and beyond. None of them should be ignored no matter how introverted they may seem. They may be hiding some wonderful talents.

Running a youth organization is a daunting task. Those who succeed, in spite of unbelievable temptation, are very special people.

I saw many failures during my four college summers as an MV camp cook. Even the most sincere prayer can barely quell a continuous display of raging hormones all summer, every summer! Between the married staff members, counsellors, campers, and co-workers, it was like walking through a mine field. Chastity, in my case, was due to fear rather than virtue.
General Conference President Announces Plans to Distribute the 'Great Controversy'

Submitted Oct 26, 2011
By Atoday News Team

General Conference President Announces Plans to Distribute 162 Million Copies of Great Controversy

A goal that Ted N. C. Wilson, the world president of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, has repeatedly promoted is the wide distribution of Ellen White’s book, The Great Controversy. It is a review of Christian history and extends into a description of the return of Christ and end time events.

Wilson has announced that plans are in place to circulate at least 162 million copies of the book next year. A total of 70 million of these will be in Latin America where the majority of the population is at least nominally Catholic. The book includes a critique of the Roman Catholic Church.

Most of the copies that will be distributed under this plan are actually condensed versions of the nearly 700-page volume. For example, Project Steps to Christ, an ASI-member organization, publishes an abridgement which they will distribute through direct mail at 65 cents per household. Any organization or individual can pay for delivery in communities they select.

This version is 112 pages in a small paperback format and carries a new title, On The Edge of Time. The main thing the abridgers did to shorten this beloved, but hefty, book was simply to leave out the first two-thirds, which deals with the history of the early reformers, the Protestant Reformation, and the early Adventist movement in Europe and America, the story of William Miller and others. Chapter 29 in the original volume, “The Origin of Evil,” is chapter 1 in this version.

These 13 chapters included in the abridged version are condensed. Some of the material that has been removed includes quotations from early Catholic journals saying that Protestants ought to keep the Sabbath if they are really against Catholicism, much of the discussion of detailed prophecy charts, most of the description of the papacy and its policies, material on the sanctuary and its relevance to our time, as well as considerable repetition and some illustrative stories, both biblical and non-biblical.

The main principles of “the conflict of the ages” are still there. The material that is retained is not changed, but is word-for-word the originally-published Ellen White material.

The other major change is some reordering of the chapters. After shortened versions of the original chapters 29, 31, 33, and 34, this version jumps back in the time line and inserts some of chapters 17, 25, and 27, including Jesus’ promise to return and the signs of His second coming. It leaves out the Lisbon earthquake as fulfillment of prophecy. There is a presentation of the three angels’ messages of Revelation 14, the Sabbath, some review of prophecy time lines, a discussion of 1798, and the “lamb-like beast” of Revelation 13.

This version then goes back to Chapter 36 from the original and follows the full version, abridging it some, but retaining the main message. It greatly reduces the description of the time of trouble, people worrying about “one sin not repented,” the appearance of the ark in heaven just before Jesus comes, the detailed reunion of Adam with Christ, and other more features from the original that have raised arguments. The famous and lyrical ending is intact.
It introduces people to the traditional Seventh-day Adventist understanding of the great battle between good and evil, and how it will end. Yet, it is not precise about every small detail in the traditional telling of this narrative. The emphasis is on how the reader can align with God’s side in their daily lives and look forward to Christ’s promised return.

Ron Corson

So it sounds like the chapter 28 "facing lifes Record" or as titled in the orginal, "The investigative Judgement" is not part of this new widely distributed version. That is interesting, perhaps even the GC is learning that such a view is unworkable.

Horace Butler

Actually, the IJ is the only view that makes sense of the passages in Daniel that talk about judgment. The parallels in each of the prophetic visions are so clear that a child can understand it. As usual, it is theologians who have the most difficulty accepting what is really quite simple.

Stephen Foster

If John 5:22 and Romans 8:1 mean anything, it’s that the IJ is what is referred to as “transparent” to those who love, trust, and are in Christ.

In other words, practically speaking, it does not apply to those “who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.”

With Christ as our Advocate and Judge, we are in a “no lose” situation.

Elaine Nelson

Why edit, subtract and add, to a book? Why can't someone write a condensed version of SDA beliefs on the end times without continuing to re-write EGW? To cannibalize another writer is as wrong as she was in taking other writers' thoughts and making them her own. Is there no other original writer in all of Adventism who cannot improve her writing and give the same message?

George Tichy

Elaine, just wait until "the competition" learns that the book that attacks them has been edited!!! I can't believe that the GC is manipulating this issue by "editing" the book. Do they have the author's authoprization to do that? Can they just edit it as they please?

This is not only ridiculous. It's outrageus!

And what message does it send to those adventists who were reading the "old version" so far? Does it mean that the church is actually recognizing some of those (now deleted) issues as being
actually not legit?? And if they are legit, why to "edit" them.

Can anyone, please, explain this "irrationale" ...

Horace Butler 1 week ago Reply

Don't go down the "EGW is a plagiarist" road again, Elaine. That's been debunked many times and has no credibility. She was no more a plagiarist than were many of the Biblical writers.

And how can one improve on something that was inspired by the Holy Spirit? I don't see how one could improve on Desire of Ages, to cite one example. The recent pitiful attempt (Messiah, I believe it is called) to "improve" on her writings was a dismal failure, in my opinion.

George Tichy 1 week ago Reply

Debunked? How can that overt plagiarism be ever "debunked"?? Don't go down the road of insisting to convince people about this absurdity utilizing the "repeat until they get tired of it." The facts about EGW's plagiarism can't be "debunked" because it's all well documented in the books of... EGW!!!

exorcising Ellen 1 week ago Reply

@ Horace. Exactly where and when were her plagiarizing myths debunked? Because in all sincerity, I would like to know. I have you read the 1919 GC notes, Walter Rea, D.M.Canright, & DaleRatzliff's books, and am pretty convinced otherwise. Are you trying to make nothing out of something big? Of course if I'm wrong, please inform me, because I'm exorcising Ellen.

Horace Butler 1 week ago Reply

Those 3 authors you mentioned are all disgruntled former Adventists. I would expect such nonsense from them. Of course she borrowed from other sources. She herself admits that she did, and gave the reasons why. The way she wrote was in harmony with the accepted practices of her time. Whenever we try to impose current standards on people long dead, we can always find reasons to condemn them. If current standards were applied to Moses, he would never have been allowed to lead the Israelites. After all, he was a murderer. A murderer, even if he repents, isn't fit to lead--according to current standards.

And then there is the issue of context. Those who hate the SOP can always find ways of making her statements mean something contrary to their original intent. To be blunt, I don't believe that Ellen White denied borrowing from others in the way it is portrayed by Mr. Taylor. This issue will never be resolved. Those who recognize that the woman was obviously inspired by the Holy Spirit to write the things she did, will continue to be blessed by her writings. Those who hate her because she condemns their pet sins and teaches "embarrassing" truths, which are out of harmony with the lies of Babylon will continue to find fault with her. Time will tell who is right.

George Tichy 1 week ago Reply
This is an insult to everyone's intelligence. At least to those who have proper knowledge of the facts, and of those who are not engaged in any crusade to "salvage Ellen".

Please stop deceiving those who may not have all the knowledge of the facts about EGW's plagiarism. This is intellectually dishonest. Enough of this nonsense about saying that her critics were "debunked!" It's not true, it's just the opposite of the truth!

Ella M.

Why not read what is said instead of attacking the messenger? Distracting from the devotional and spiritual content is dishonest. This is what certain mindsets do with the Bible. It can be an escape from the reality and truth of the words, but that is not my place to judge. It is between the individual and God it they believe in one. Unless one can show me that the words are not true in a spiritual sense, then I have no time for this sort of attack. I am sure you have heard all the logic of both the Bible and church writings and see no need to go over this again and again. I do have a problem with your verbage that is insulting to those who find inspiration in these writings. Why would one do that?

Elaine Nelson

"Shooting the messenger" is oldest trick of refutation and does nothing to change to message. If someone said "your house is on fire" would you curse the messenger and send him away?

Ad hominem attacks "to quoque" (look it up) is empty and shows no evidence of careful thought.

Vernon P. Wagner

"Disgruntled former Adventists"....now, there's a term from my distant childhood. A perjorative phrase to excuse all manner of contention. Other time-worn dismissive terms include: outsiders, unbelievers, back sliders, apostates, etc. When believers differ, and conclude that God might not be a card-carrying SDA, they may not be 'disgruntled' in the least...merely enlightened.

Ella M.

" When believers differ, and conclude that God might not be a card-carrying SDA, they may not be 'disgruntled' in the least...merely enlightened."

I can agree with this statement, but if one is truly a believer they will not insult the beliefs of those who find inspiration in church writings. I am not opposed to those who have questions on EGW but I find it unChristian to use extreme terms concerning those who do. If this isn't disgruntled, I don't know what else to call it. Do you have a suggestion that is not offensive? By the way, my family were once "backsliders" and I agree with the term.

Vernon P. Wagner

I know I'm in danger of the Inquisition for using the word 'enlightened' for those whose
sincere beliefs evolve along lines that differ from organized religion of any kind. Ron Numbers, author of 'The White Lie,' was my classmate at Collegedale (Class of '61). The man is a genius, and not even slightly 'disgruntled.'

Virtually all of western Christianity follows the Roman model. All who differed with Papacy approved Augustinian views were eliminated long ago. Protestantism has retained the vestiges thereof until the present day.

I know a lifelong SDA minister who was 'de-frocked' for siding with Robert Brinsmead. He remains just as spiritually 'connected' as ever, but wants nothing to do with the SDA Church who treated him thus. None of those non-Christian derogatory slurs are appropriate for this dear friend. Any religious body who uses them is not on the same page as Yeshua.

I now expect the furnace to be made seven times hotter for me, but I'll be in good company!

**Vernon P. Wagner**

I forgot to mention my own parents were also disfellowshipped for befriending Mr. Brinsmead...as I recall, he'd stayed at their house on occasion. Until the day she died, my mom regretted the years she'd spent as a member of a Church that didn't allow members to think 'outside the box'...similar to past Vatican behavior. I have no idea what terms of disgust the 'Faithful' must have hurled against my parents. Nevertheless, they rejoiced in their newfound spiritual freedom.

**Elaine Nelson**

Vernon, Walter Rea was the author of the "White Lie." Ron Numbers wrote "The Prophetess of Health" and other books on this subject.

They exposed the very soft underbelly of Adventism and lost many members, of which I was also one.

**Vernon P. Wagner**

Oooops...you're correct. Memory is mush these days...been a long time since I read them. My membership waned long before either book was published. I crossed the color line in dating in 1960 at an SDA college. Both of us were victimized by racist letters to our parents with copies secretly slid under our doors in the dormitory. A former missionary arranged our expulsion, but we were allowed to stay after promising NOT to return the following year. His advice to me: "God loves them, but you should not."

**Elaine Nelson**

Horace, while for you she may be "debunked" it indicates that you disregard completely the abundance of evidence proving otherwise. There will always be true believers who can never
accept that their icon is crumbling or that she was human. Only by ignoring the voluminous
evidence, including the G.C. paid investigator, Fred Veltman, who for five years investigated ONLY
the Desire of Ages and wrote that his findings questioned her honesty. It was never published, and
one can only estimate why.

Ervin Taylor

I'm surprised that anyone in 2011 can, with a straight face, deny that EGW did not plagiarize a lot
of material. Everyone, even our GC friends, agree that she "borrowed" material without any
attribution. The interesting statement is that "she was no more a plagiarist than were many of the
Bible writers." Absolutely true, but I am not aware of any Bible writer who was asked, "Did you
copy from others your material?" and answered, "No, I did not!". The major problem is not that
she "borrowed." Many Bible writers did that. The big problem is that she denied borrowing. But
this does not make her a bad person. It just means that she was a human being. She did not want
that fact to be widely known among converts for fear of what it would do to her influence on the
church. A very human and reasonable concern. But to say she did not plagiarize is just silly.

Ella M.

I would say you have an element of truth here in her reasons for denial. I don't remember
what she said, but I am sure you are right. She was human and borrowed from the beginning by
using material from other sources and saying so in written articles and SS materials that appeared
in the church papers. But I believe in inspiration in most written material, even that borrowed.
This seems logical and not a crime. Even in conversation we echo the ideas of others, I certainly
do--there is nothing new under the sun.

Ned

Ervin,

In the Introduction to The Great Controversy (of which I know you would be aware) Ellen White
is so open and clear about her use of the material of others and why that it is hard not to wonder
about the time you refer to when she said she did not copy. What the occasion was, what exactly
the question and her response was referring to. Something very specific? I would need to know
much more about the incident for it to supersede her declaration so widely available in GC. Her
use (as explained in the introduction there) does not "steal and pass off (the ideas or words of
another) as one's own," ordinarily an aspect of plagiarism. True, she did not credit the sources,
which certainly would not be acceptable today and perhaps was very unwise in her day too. Even
so, it does not seem deserving of the extreme criticism directed at her for it today.

Elaine Nelson

"I would need to know much more about the incident for it to supersede her declaration so
widely available in GC."

It is widely available if one is truly interested. Several of the sources are mentioned above.
Many of her books were updated and proper credit was given, but in their original state not
shown. The problem: she said that everything she wrote came straight from God. Do yourself a
favor and read the many articles and books before casting stones at those who mention plagiarism, it does no credit to one's statements to speak about a subject when he has little knowledge of the subject. Particularly, read the 1919 Bible conference which is available on the internet.

Trevor Hammond

I fully support the sentiments expressed by Ned's post above in which he tries to reason with her vehement detractors. I also fully support the Stephen Foster and Horace Butler comments regarding the validity of the IJ which is undoubtedly based on the Bible. Ellen White was never convicted in a court of law for what she has been maliciously accused of here, yet again. Here is a quote from a formal investigation into this:

- Roman Catholic attorney Vincent Ramik: "Based upon our review of the facts and legal precedents . . . Ellen White was not a plagiarist and her works did not constitute copyright infringement/piracy." "It is impossible to imagine that the intention of Ellen G. White, as reflected in her writings and the unquestionably prodigious effort involved therein, was anything other than a sincerely motivated and unselfish effort to place the understanding of Biblical truths in a coherent form for all to see and comprehend.""Considering all factors necessary in reaching a just conclusion on this issue, it is submitted that the writings of Ellen G. White were conclusively un plagiaristic." (quoted in Adventist Review September 17, 1981)

Tom

I should have known that any suggestion that copies of CG be widely distributed would follow with a ressurection of the plagarism charge. I'll take a pass on that one. That aside, I'm not so sure that a revised and condensed GC is the best book to do what Ted Wilson is proposing. I remember a paperback of same with the last ten chapters of GC being used 30 years ago. It was entitled "The Impending Conflict."

Our minister at the time quoted EGW as saying this was the book that should be first and widely circulated for our (late 1800's) time. I reluctatnly went along with it at the time. The result stirred up quite a great controversy in town with many folks getting a prejudicial view of Adventism from that first time introduction to the writing of EGW. I don't want to go down that road again, but it appears that Ted Wilson is bent on doing so, notwithstanding the consequences, even though the paradigm in 2011 is vastly different from the 1880's when GC was written.

George Tichy

It seems that uncle Teddy has a very poor ability to foresee what can happen as result of an unresponsible distribution of GC books. Why to declare such a war on the RCC? Is he crazy??? It looks like!
G.W. Bush declared an unnecessary war against Iraq. Is he responsible for the blood of about 4,500 of our best troops, besides all the other damage? In my opinion, YES he is.

Ted Wilson is declaring an unnecessary war on the RCC. Will he be responsible for the consequences? You judge it by yourself!!!

Elaine Nelson

If the validity of the IJ is based on the Bible, why did not Bible students discover this valuable information until just prior to the supposed event?

If is decoded in the Bible, please explain how one can be absolutely certain of what occurs in heaven and at a particular earth time. Does heaven operate on earth's calendars?

Horace Butler

Because they didn't need it, yet. And the angel had specifically told Daniel that his message was sealed until the time of the end.

John the Baptist didn't come along and start preaching his advent message until about 6 months before Jesus started His ministry. There would have been no point in anyone preaching the message that the Messiah's arrival was imminent too far in advance of the event.

George Tichy

Elaine, it's not even worth to discuss it again.
The IJ can't be find in the Bible. Try to give someone a "Bible Study" about it before talking to that person about the SOP and you will see the problem right away.
How can someone pretend to teach a biblical doctrine that is not in the Bible?
Even little kids can understand the absurdity of this matter!

Horace Butler

I'm sorry you're unable to find the IJ in the Bible, because is is so clear that a child with basic reading skills could comprehend it. It doesn't take the SOP to find it, either. It may take longer than some other Bible studies, but it's not a difficult as many would have us believe.

"How can someone pretend to teach a biblical doctrine that is not in the Bible?" Most Christians do it all the time by telling everyone that dead people go to heaven or hell when they die. But the IJ is clearly there, if one wants to find it. The hatred against this doctrine is puzzling, especially when coming from professed Adventists.

Ella M.

Elaine,
I will not go there (the IJ controversy), but you are right that heaven/God is not on the same
time schedule as the earth. Time varies everywhere in the universe as does space. We don't understand either and that to me is why we can not claim to know the truth about the age of the earth, young or old (according to Gen 1:1, the earth can be very old by our current time; life, by God at least, not so old.) But where is heaven? Is it really up there? Maybe it is an alternate universe or dimension not so far away. (see Wright's book Surprised by Hope) Maybe it is right next to us or in that part of the universe we can't see and science cannot explain. So many questions that we cannot afford to say anything is certain other than God is love.

Vernon P. Wagner 6 days ago Reply

Oh, for sure...without the Vatican, heaven wouldn't even have saints!

Elaine Nelson 1 week ago Reply

"The time of the end" is one of the most ambiguous date-setting ever known. If you are in your 80s as I am, you are living in the "time of the end." The apostles, told by Jesus, was that they were living in "the time of the end." This message is as old as Christianity.

George Tichy 1 week ago Reply

By the way Elaine, HAPPY BIRTHDAY!!!

Horace Butler 1 week ago Reply

Typical skeptic's answer, which ignores the certainty of the final "time of the end," because of a rejection of the time frame set forth in the prophecies of Daniel. No point in arguing because you seem to have already made up your mind.

Vernon P. Wagner 1 week ago Reply

"Time of the end"
Wasn't that 1844?
Missing out on so many 'raptures' is discouraging.

Edwin A. Schwisow 1 week ago Reply

As a member of a long-time Adventist medical-missionary family in South America, and having participated in a number of evangelistic campaigns there, it has beome clear that by and large attacking the papacy poses no general advantage in persuading people to consider joining Adventism. The Great Controversy is a two-edged sword, and should be used judiciously, or it can and will close more doors than it opens in Catholic nations. On the other hand, circulating the book is seen in some Adventist circles as proof positive that one is a "straight message" leader. We need to understand this as we evalutate this outreach.
Elaine, your comments about the "time of the end" reminded me of something someone told me when I used the term "the end of time". When he corrected me and said we were living in the "time of the end", I shrugged my shoulders and said what difference did it make, the terminology that is. He replied that there is a big difference between the "time of the end" and the "end of time" and then he proceeded to tell me an illustration I have never forgotten.

A turkey that is being fatten in the fall is living in the "time of the end". When his neck is finally stretched over the chopping block and the ax falls just before thanksgiving; for that turkey, THAT is the "end of time."

Every generation, since Christ's ascension, has believed it was living in the "time of the end." No one knows the day or hour of Christ's Second coming, except for the God the Father. The only certain thing is that with passing of each day we are another day closer to the "end of time." Beyond that is speculation.

"Particularly, read the 1919 Bible conference…"

I have for some time been familiar with the 1919 Bible Conference and have read an electronic version of the minutes. One comes away from the reading with sympathy for the participants over the difficulty of the issue with which they were dealing, admiration for the open, freedom of discussion with church administration, and a wish that the ongoing result would have been different. Though they were concerned about the misuse of Ellen White’s writings, here are just two comments from the minutes in her support. (Abreviated here; full context is very interesting.)

"W. W. Prescott: …I was over in England, stopping at the home of a brother there. It came to me just like a voice, "Read what it says in 'Patriarchs and Prophets' on that subject." I turned right around to a book case back of me, and took up "Patriarchs and Prophets" and began to look through it. I came right to the chapter that dealt with the subject, and I found exactly the thing I wanted to clarify my mind on that subject…"

"A. G. Daniells: …Sister White was never a fanatic, she was never an extremist. She was a level-headed woman. She was well-balanced. I found that so during a period of 40 years of association with her.”

Over four-plus decades of reading and re-reading her books, I have found balance, inspiration, beauty, strength, hope, wisdom, and encouragement in them. I will always value them from whatever source the information is found to be. However, as is clear from the 1919 Bible Conference and elsewhere, our church has been at fault in the use of her writings. I recommend David Newman’s article on Ellen White in the summer 2011 issue of Adventist Today and Richard Coffen’s response in the following issue, Fall 2011.
Preston Foster

Edwin,

No doubt, distributing TGC will be a catalyst for strong reactions from all sides. If this is done on the magnitude presently considered, things will not be the same. But, I believe, this is the mission of this church which has, too long been avoided (see "Have We Lost Sight of Our Mission?" http://www.atoday.org/article.php?id=459).

The message of The Great Controversy narrative of Daniel and Revelation is, in my mind, the unique message of SDA's for "the end of time" (GREAT analogy!). It is the both the "7th day" and "adventist" message. It is not a laodicean mission. It is, however, a primary work for this part of the body of Christ.

It will test both our beliefs and the extent to which we actually believe.

George Tichy

What about concentrating on "preaching the Word of God, the Gospel" instead of focusing on triggering a worldwide religious conflict that could trigger a really bad, unnecessary situation?

One problem is that Adventists believe in this pretense "mission" of being the last and only true church, with the mission of disturbing the peace - and considering it a spiritual "mission". This is just absurd.

If The Desired orf Ages had been picked it would change the "mission" completely. Though, do we really need to utilize ANY book other than the Bible? It almost appears that publishing so many books may be benefiting someone... I am thinking on starting a publishing company and bidding for this printing... (and yes, I can also think of a small "commission" if necessary...!!!!)

But seems that uncle Teddy is much more beligerent than people thought. He will put us all in a very troubling situation, a situation that had nothing to do with God.

Ella M.

If this is seen than more than just an advertising gimmick and thrown out, then we may be in trouble--maybe a time of trouble before it is necessary, brought on by ourselves. (Where is that EGW quote that says something like this?) is this a way to get attention? Maybe, I just wish it were positive. Why not the book, Desire of Ages? It has the Gospel in it. GC is no spiritual mission and does not really appeal to the spiritual nature and the contemporary belief in tolerance.

If all we have to share is a day, we are bankrupt spiritually; and if we don't present its symbolism as rest in Jesus and His re-creation for us, it's a false gospel. Jesus is the seal, the Lord of the Sabbath with the Sabbath being the symbol--we maybe worshiping the symbol. Creation in the OT; re-creation in the NT period.
George,

It would seem to me the Adventist church either needs to advance its mission, change it, or abandon it. It says:

"The mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is to make disciples of all people, communicating the everlasting gospel in the context of the three angels’ messages of Revelation 14:6-12, leading them to accept Jesus as personal Savior and unite with His remnant Church, discipling them to serve Him as Lord and preparing them for His soon return."

Personalizing the issue to "Uncle Teddy" is a distraction that trivializes the issue to a person, rather than to the explicit, long-standing, stated mission of the Adventist church.

I agree, the Bible is the only book we need -- if it is read. The problem is that church-going people of all stripes don't read, they merely listen, selectively, to their preferred pastor or priest (and politician, in some cases). The proper use of the so-called "lesser light" is to lead us (and others) to the greater light -- the Bible. Perhaps the predicted controversy that this catalyst will bring will create demand for The Word, leading all to seek out exactly what it says and means.

"The Word of God, the Gospel," must be preached. If fact, it is. TBN, TCC, and other Protestant-backed networks are doing just that. What is not being being preached is the Adventist interpretation of The Revelation of Jesus Christ to St. John (which, in fact, is gospel as well).

You may disagree with the mission, but, at least this GC president is working to accomplish what the organization claims as it reason for existence.

Preston Foster

George Tichy

1) The "decree" that Adventist people don't read the Bible is just judgmental and a mere justification to force other literature on them. Why not to encourage them, then, to read the Bible more often? Why to come up with more books if they don't even read the one most important? By the way, "salvation by reading" is not such a hot idea. It sells books, but has no other relevance in itself. Learning is more important than reading. Reading a little and learning a lot is much better than reading a lot and learning a little. No "salvation by reading!"

2) Nobody ever needed, nor they need, any "lesser light" to lead to the ONLY light. This is just a retrograde adventist jargon to persuade people about the pretense relevancy of the red books. The black book is more than enough. To tell non-adventists that they need some "other books" to be able to understand "THE" Book is just ridiculous and absurd. Does that mean that for some centuries God kept the real/plain truth hidden from His own people? That's tooooo much of a stretch.

3) The content of TGC is way far different from the "Adventist interpretation of Revelation".

4) AHA, here it is: It's a matter of denominational survival! "...to accomplish what the organization claims as it reason for existence." Do you really believe that the reason for the existence of the
SDAC is to preach a message that is above, and sometimes outside, the Bible?
I used to think that way too, in the past. Because I was trained (brainwashed) to think that way. Until I started to really think independently and objectively. Only then I realised the absurdity of my prior thinking. That was when SOLA SCRIPTURA became the only source of faith and believe for me.
But..., this is just me...

---

**Edwin A. Schwisow**

1 week ago  
Reply

Is "The Great Controversy" the best book in the Adventist arsenal for making our first impression among such a vast Catholic public, in Latin America? Let us patiently distinguish between recognition of the central genius of the book in classical Adventism and concerns about how to use the book in marketing the faith. Differences of opinion regarding the second question should not necessarily imply disrespect for the book itself. It certainly doesn't in my mind.

---

**Elaine Nelson**

1 week ago  
Reply

The Gospel lived is by far the best method. Reading is almost passe today and a throw-away book is headed for the landfill. A quiet, Christian life is far more Gospel than will ever be achieved by a thousand G.C. books. Little, or no thought has been given to the possible results of this foolish endeavor. It's your tithe money, folks.

---

**Vernon P. Wagner**

1 week ago  
Reply

Elaine is right, of course.

When I travel by air, I'm usually the only one reading one of those oldtime things called a 'book,' Almost every passenger has an Amazon Kindle, or iPad for reading. Today, I watched a minister on TV preaching not from a Bible, but from one such digital device. Clay tablets replaced petroglyphs, scrolls replaced clay tablets, books replaced scrolls, computer science has replaced books. If they intend to reach the masses, they should use the appropriate medium, and it ain't books!

---

**Preston Foster**

1 week ago  
Reply

George,

I don't argue against sola scriptura. The point I am pushing is, what will drive people to read the Bible? Perhaps a discussion of who the beast and the image of the beast in Revelation are will do so (indeed, if scripture is believed, it points to someone or entity). That discussion might begin with the distribution of TGC -- whether it is actually read by the masses or not. Given modern media, it is likely to be controversially excerpted, in order to "frame the story."

The Great Controversy is not needed to understand the Bible. I don't recall saying or implying that. However, without a catalyst PRIOR to the actual end time events themselves, we are unlikely to
have a focused public conversation about the prophecies of Revelation -- particularly about the Adventist interpretation about those prophecies. The purpose of prophecy is to provide a framework for understanding events BEFORE they happen. It is possible that a catalyst can, very effectively, drive others to the Bible.

It is not about denominational survival (if that were the point, they would likely NOT initiate such a controversial tactic). It is about being true to what you say you are about.

That is is more rare than most people care to appreciate.

---

**John Mark**  
1 week ago  
Reply

George,
The doctrine of Sola Scriptura itself would not have spread or become established if it was not for the reformers writing tons and tons of books beside the Bible. Writing is like preaching it's just another way of proclaiming the Word of God. By your logic all Christians should be doing is printing Bibles. And your logic also seems to view the Gift of Prophecy as dead because of your interpretation of the concept of Closed Canon and Sola-Scriptura; ideas which ironically are not explicitly found in the Scriptura.

---

**Elaine Nelson**  
1 week ago  
Reply

Men made the decision to close the canon several hundred years after the last book now in the Bible was written.

There is also nothing in the verses in Revelation designating Ellen White as the "Spirit of Prophecy." A corruption of the text and assumption that cannot be validated from the Bible which was closed nearly 2,000 years earlier. That is no different than Joseph Smith being proclaimed a prophet at about the same time as EGW. A claim that neither can be supported by scripture.

---

**William Noel**  
1 week ago  
Reply

All these discussion points ignore a major question: will distributing so many copies of any book be effective? Our illusions say yes while reality shouts an emphatic "NO!" Literature ministries have largely disappeared in North America for a simple reason- ineffectiveness. That distributing so many books would even proposed shows how deeply they are rooted in what worked a century ago while removed from present reality. The majority of people in North America are post-Christian and on-guard against any such obviously religious books. Their defensiveness causes them to be offended when someone sends or gives them such a book. Such offenses grow their anti-church prejudice. So there is more than just the potential for a well-intended effort will do far more harm than good, there is the reality that it will drive people away from the Kingdom of God instead of drawing them closer.

There is yet a second problem with such an approach: that we Adventists have become so exclusively enamored with the writings of Ellen White that we have allowed them to become our be-all and do-all resource. This causes us to refuse to even consider the possibility that the Holy Spirit could inspire a more effective approach to the public.
If the church in North America is to grow instead of shrink as the senior generation dies, then we've got to learn new ways of spreading the Gospel.

Kevin Riley

I wouldn't say book distribution is ineffective entirely. There is still a sector of the public for whom it is effective. We need to distribute books AND ALSO do other things, new and old. What we should not do is discontinue anything that proves not to be effective in reaching everyone. The idea that we will someday come up with the perfect program that will somehow appeal to everyone is a chimera. It is as likely as finding utopia somewhere in the next valley.

Ella M.

Tichey,
You have a right to your opinion, and I don't dispute it, but I don't see a right to downgrade those who have other ideas with terminology such as "brainwashed." In a sense we are all brainwashed in what we choose to listen to or read, aren't we? I find the church writings to be filled with Bible quotes on almost every page or paragraph. Where do you get the idea it is not biblical? And it certainly was never a "source" of belief or faith. Misused, most definitely.
Maybe the Lord can turn this unwise decision to send GC around into some sort of blessing or, if not, to do no harm.
We could send the "black book" [Bible] around and take out all the offending language in that. :)

Elaine,
The quiet Christian life is our personal witness that glorifies God and the only Gospel many will see. My problem is that so few can live up to it, including myself, at least on a consistent basis. As a child with some ADD problems, I used to pray intensely that I not embarrass God. But I did, many times. Maybe acceptance of each other is just as important.

John Mark

Elaine, of course, the Bible does not specifically endorse or condemn Ellen White. My point is simply against George's view that Ellen White's books should be excluded from being considered important by the doctrine of Sola Scriptura when the Scriptura contains explicit support for the ongoing gift of prophecy and no such support for the doctrine of sola scriptura or the doctrine of a closed cannon. Not that I disagree with upholding a form of Sola Scriptura or the closed cannon but those beliefs shouldn't be used to exclude future spiritual guidance.

David

While this heated debated continues in AT without significant consequences, the SDA church will delivery 162,000,000 copies of the GC. The results could be significant for the global grow of the church. Even if is only effective 5-10% that means that another 8,000,000 to 16,000,000 new members for the church. Assuming the worse predictions 1-2% that represent another 1,600,000 to 3,200,000 new members. Surprise? Looks like president is a very smart person! What other method could be as effective like he is planning? Good for him he deserved to be the president of...
our loved church!

William Noel 1 week ago Reply

Try .01% effective, or less. The bigger problem is the number of people who will be offended by receiving an unsolicited book of the type and how it will harden their anti-Christian opinions, thus making it more difficult to win them in the future. If the research detailed in the book "Unchristian" is even partly accurate, each copy sent out in North America that is received with what we consider a "positive" response will be counter-balanced by at least a hundred times than many negative responses.

We need to reconsider if we're really in the business of bringing people into the Kingdom of God, or driving them away. We operate under the illusion that we're doing the first when we're best at doing the latter.

Kevin Riley 1 week ago Reply

I believe in Australia the literature evangelists are handing out the book to those who indicate some receptiveness, rather than distributing them to all and sundry. I also would prefer Desire of Ages or Steps to Christ had been chosen, but it is still a better strategy than sending the books out unsolicited. That would not go down well here.

John Mark 1 week ago Reply

"I used to think that way too, in the past. Because I was trained (brainwashed) to think that way. Until I started to really think independently and objectively. Only then I realised the absurdity of my prior thinking. That was when SOLA SCRIPTURA became the only source of faith and believe for me. But..., this is just me"

I missed this part. Interesting that in this thread we have a human subject declaring that objective thinking will lead straight to SOLA SCRIPTURA while in "Shift The Way You Think" we have another human subject declaring that good objective thinking will invariably lead one to enlightenment style questioning of Biblical authority. Funny how many contradictory objective truths our various human subjects come up with. Perhaps this is why the current era is abandoning the search for objective truth. What I find ironic is that some in the church want us to adopt modern thinking to stay relevant when the world is quickly moving onto post-modern thinking, if we are going to sell our spiritual birthright for a bowl of lentils, why not at least get a steaming fresh bowl.

David 1 week ago Reply

While this heated debated continues in AT without significant consequences, the SDA church will delivery 162,000,000 copies of the GC. The results could be significant for the global grow of the church. Even if is only effective 5-10% that means that another 8,000,000 to 16,000,000 new members for the church. Assuming the worse predictions 1-2 % that represent another 1,600,000 to 3,200,000 new members. Surprise? Looks like the president is a very smart person! What other
method could be as effective like he is planning? Good for him he deserved to be the president of our loved church!

William Noel
1 week ago Reply

Please remember that the distribution of that many copies is just a dream and one that will cost a huge multiple of the largest amount that has ever been given to any mission outreach project in church history. Wake me up when the number passes five million.

Elaine Nelson
1 week ago Reply

Is this the best way to gain new members? It may be the most expensive, but how many persons do you, individually, who were converted to Adventism solely by reading GC with no other influence whatsoever?

John Mark
1 week ago Reply

David the figures you give are more likely to be the number of people who don't throw the GC in the trash bin than the number of people who convert. What I don't get about this venture is it goes against Ellen White's specific counsel to not give the books, but to sell them. I'm not anti GC like most of Atoday and Spectrum crowd, but I do question the pragmatism in mass give aways. If we sell the books we will be targeting the people who have an interest in these things and thus avoid waste. Even people who would read the GC are going to be less likely to read something they get in the mail for free than something they invest their own money in and see as their own. It is ironic that we are about to do a mass give away of a book who's author said to not do mass give aways - but maybe I'm missing something.

William Noel
1 week ago Reply

Here are some hard direct-mail marketing numbers for religious publications. In the US, 99.95% of such unsolicited items go into the trash within five minutes of being taken out of the mailbox. Of the remaining .05%, .04 will go into the trash within 24 hours. Of the remaining .01%, only one in about 30 will ever be opened and even partly read. How many will result in a response? How many decimal places can you count? It is a well-motivated challenge, but a horrible waste of money.

Preston Foster
6 days ago Reply

William,

Business people don't go around losing money for kicks. If direct mail, cold-calling, DTDR, weren't cost effective, it would have stopped long ago. The larger the "buy" (in terms of "reach," in this case 162 million) the cheaper (more efficient) it gets. With a large buy, you can go way behind the decimal and still make money.

I advertise on Facebook. A "good response rate for me is 0.069%. Of those, about 1% buys.
From this computer, I can reach 82 million women in 13 countries.

I advertise every week. It's VERY efficient.

But making money isn't the issue here -- it is saving souls. And our ways are not His. Christ came to earth to ransom whosoever will. I'm sure, in terms of the efficiency of His blood, that doesn't make "sense" either.

Thank God.

Elaine Nelson

How cost effective will it be for millions of GC to be mailed or distributed? Has the cost been calculated? Is it not important to the church that the monies they are given to be used in the best way? How does this compare with the other forms of evangelism? Shouldn't there be some estimates? There must be a cost for each book printed and mailed, what are those figures and how will they be decided? Will each conference agree to take a certain number of books which they will distribute? How much is known about this entire program? Has anyone seen the cost estimates?

Businesses must estimate the costs of any new venture, especially when it is their money. The G.C. is much like the government: it's not their money so there is no reason to use it wisely.

William Noel

Preston,

I have an MBA so I understand what you're saying. Remember, it all depends on what you're selling, how it is presented and if it appears to match the recipient's recognized need(s). Each week or so we get a thick envelope in the mail that is stuffed with coupons for replacement windows, pizzas and whatever else. We have used a few of those coupons but 99.9% have gone in the trash. Commercial products are one thing because they are generally viewed in a positive manner. Yes, a customer may prefer one brand of pizza over another, but they're both generally viewed in a positive manner. Churches are viewed very differently and, as a result, generally get far lower response rates. Two pastors of large churches (1,000+ members) in the Huntsville area have told me of spending significant sums of money to put ads in that same envelope and getting no identifiable responses.

The problem gets even worse when you start sending people religious books. People feel like whoever is sending the book is saying whatever they believe is wrong. That's a big turn-off that increases negative prejudice and makes future soul-winning more difficult. A good example of this was a few years ago when an Adventist group in the area was distributing a book about coming Sunday laws. It was a big issue to them because of their particular prophetic obsession. Those books created huge anti-Adventist prejudice that continues to this day. A while back I was working on a home improvement project at a house in the northwest part of the county where the area had been books had been delivered to every house several years before. The home owner appreciated our help. Then she overheard a conversation between two of my workers about sunday laws in prophecy. She was ready to throw us off the property with the work incomplete until I assured her we had
not been involved with the distribution of those books.

George Tichy
1 week ago  Reply

What about using a different book? Why do we need to declare an unnecessary war on people of other faith? Is this what some are calling "Ted's wisdom"?? I can't believe it!!!

Horace Butler
1 week ago  Reply

You write like this is some novel idea. Ellen White wanted this book distributed far and wide. We've fallen down on the job in recent decades. All Brother Wilson wants to do is get back on track. No one is declaring war on "people of other faith." That is the straw man that is aways set up to make us look bad. The dispute is with the church itself, not with the man in the pew. It's no different from someone saying that they love Cubans, but have issues with their government. The papacy has departed far from Scripture, and appears to have no intention of ever going back to the truth. The sins of Babylon need to be exposed, one way or another.

John Mark
1 week ago  Reply

Ellen White wanted her books distributed far and wide through the canvassing work. Do you have anything where she says to give her major books away, but because I recall reading her specifically counsel against such methods.

William Noel
1 week ago  Reply

Good point! Her concept was distribution through the canvassing work. A person who buys a book is far more likely to read it than if it arrives unsolicited. The problem is that the canvassing work has largely died.

Vernon P. Wagner
6 days ago  Reply

Tried canvassing about 50 years ago, because of propaganda I'd been hearing all my life about canvassing. My 'big idea' was to visit LLU Alumni offices, and sell the stuff to SDA doctors for their waiting rooms.

Sales...ZERO!

If SDA docs don't want 'em, may as well forget it.

Preston Foster
5 days ago  Reply

Remember, this is not a sales effort nor a business deal where efficiency is the primary metric. This an attempt to start a world wide conversation about a set of prophecies. What worked or didn't work in a neighborhood or metro area may be a function of timing or affected by complementary tactics (or the lack of them). Distributing 162 million copies of a book that challenges Protestant and Catholic traditions will likely not be
The point, I believe, is to purposefully upset the equilibrium in a way that sets the stage for a specific conversation.

Concerns about cost-effectiveness pale in comparison to concerns about the mark of the beast and that of his image. Let's not avoid the real work.

Like it or not, this initiative is directly "on mission."

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**Elaine Nelson**

Amazing! That efficiency is unimportant on such a massive distribution plan! That the church would embark upon a plan with no cost estimates and the whole idea of "upsetting the equilibrium"?

Currently, the equilibrium of millions is focused on the global economy and their own pocketbooks. To initiate such a program in a time of serious financial distress worldwide and expect millions to be interested in a "mark of the beast" is to ignore reality. If this is the mission, it is very short-sighted and poorly planned.

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**Preston Foster**

Elaine,

Many who believe the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation and the Great Controversy narrative of them see those issues as having more importance (and perhaps providing context to) this and worldwide problems. What would be the ideal state of world affairs to begin such a conversation? The mission of this church is, explicitly, to preach the gospel, in the context of the 3 angels' messages. That it is doing so seems mighty threatening to those who claim neither membership nor belief it the church's take on prophecy.

Why is that?

If you are not a member, presumably, it is not your money that is being "wasted." There is no evidence that costs have not been considered, only speculation by critics that they have not. I'm a member -- and I fully support the initiative. What metrics would make this a wise investment from your standpoint?

The church is moving on its mission.

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**Preston Foster**

CORRECTION: " . . . see those issues as having more importance THAN (and, perhaps, providing context to) this and OTHER worldwide problems."
Elaine Nelson

Preston, who are the "many who believe the prophecies of D&R and the GC as having more importance"? How many Adventists believe these are so important and to liberally support this program? Has anyone done a sampling survey to determine this interest?

As for "many," because Adventists may feel it is important, presumably these books are to be distributed to non-SDAs, who may not at all believe that the ideas expressed are of any importance. Shouldn't there first be created an interest, even a desire to obtain and read a book? With fewer reading books daily, to be given a non-requested book does not suddenly create a burning desire to read it. Is this the best way to evangelize the cities?

Preston Foster

Elaine,

Again, the purpose of this initiative may not be traditional evangelism (i.e., seeking "convert" others to Adventism via baptism). The likely purpose, I believe, is to inject a catalyst into the body of Christ to begin a public conversation about the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation in the context of present day and future events.

As I have said many times in this space, the purpose of prophecy is to inform others PRIOR to the fulfillment of those prophecies. Providing timely information allows those who read it to act or react wisely. Adventism is a prophetic church. Unless we share what we believe before the time of its fulfillment, it will be useless. Further, if we believe it to be true, but do not share it, it would be irresponsible, bordering on negligent.

Traditional cost/benefit analyses do not apply. What is the price of a soul?

Elaine Nelson

How is Christ introduced via D&R if merely a free mailer? It only introduces SDA interpretation of prophecy. If a pamphlet is in the mail informing of a new nightclub in town, a new free seminar, information on life insurance, it will not be equally considered timely at all. Timely is in the eye of the beholder. What is "timely" prophecy to an SDA is not what is equivalent in the general population, which is who the recipients will be.

The sentiment expressed that "if we do not share it we will be irresponsible" is another form of Pilate washing his hand and releasing himself from all responsibility. "I've done my work, now let them read the book." That is not Christian witnessing but relieving one's conscience. Has witnessing become so impersonal as to remove all personal involvement? Why not just send money and let others do the work and call it witnessing.
Preston Foster  4 days ago  Reply

You seem to think the distribution of the Great Controversy is the end rather than a means to an end. The strategy is, likely, to leverage the free media surrounding the story to begin a conversation about what the prophecies mean.

Christ is introduced to all by the Holy Spirit. The fact that the book is "merely" free, has no effect on the content of the book. The full title of the book is "The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan." In that context, it is fairly easy to see how Christ is introduced.

It is, perhaps, your cynicism that sees sharing urgent news as an abandonment of responsibility (it has been said, "Cynicism is the embers of idealism"). Doing so, if it were true, might fool men/women, but not God. Pilate was looking to be politically correct. Adventists are looking, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to be effective (and, clearly, not politically correct).

It would seem that those who are demanding a rational cost/benefit analysis to determine whether or not people should be warned would be more likely to be in search of Pilate's wash basin.

Elaine Nelson  4 days ago  Reply

What are the plans to follow up and how will it be done? Are these not legitimate questions? Where are those plans to be found and shouldn't they all be laid out before beginning, or merely playing by ear?

Call it cynicism, but as one who has seen many such plans for the initiation with nothing to follow, shouldn't there be a revelation of the entire program or will it be just "waiting to see"?

George Tichy  1 week ago  Reply

I know it's not a novel idea. It's actually a very old idea. But this doesn't make it a "good" idea. Are Adventists able to preach the Gospel without opening fire on other religions? Apparently not!

Vernon P. Wagner  6 days ago  Reply

Yes, apparently not!

Trevor Hammond  6 days ago  Reply

Well Mr. Tichy and Mr. Wagner I go out street preaching in the area where we work as a Church. I have had Sunday Christians call us to conduct church services at their homes and have on numerous occasions put up a tent outside their homes to accomodate larger numbers. I have been preaching also in some Sunday Churches as well where the Pastor's or members
have been close friends of mine. I think you guys miss the 'bigger' picture of the gospel and as Mr Tom would say looking through the telescope the wrong way 'round. I have a large percentage of Sunday Church members who attend Sabbath Services including, Muslims, Hindu's, a Jehovah's witness who wants to be baptized (He's the guy I carry from his house up and down some stairs to the car/wheelchair, every Sabbath morning and back home after the Youth Meeting, including pushing and pulling him in wheelchair up fifteen stairs at the school where we use the hall for church). Yeah the gospel in my world is much bigger and dynamic than you assert within the Adventist context and understanding of it. Adventism still offers a relevant channel for the Gospel of Jesus Christ of which I testify too. Many are currently in the valley of decision and we hope that the Gospel will bring us a few more souls into the kingdom via the Adventist Church ministry in Christ Jesus.

♥I

William Noel 3 days ago Reply

Keep up the good work, Trevor! We need more people who are willing to step out and do what you are doing. You understand the reality of needing to get out and mingle on the streets of Babylon before we can call people out and expect them to move.

David 1 week ago Reply

Not been born in SDA home I know personally the effect of the GC. Also I know many people who were impressed and became Adventists because of this book! We could all speculate about the results, but judging from the past, I believe that this book will continue to help many people to be interested in the Bible and became Christians. Although we don't know all the details how these books are going to be distributed, for sure all the churches around the globe will have some adaptation for their needs in their regions. For sure this book will be (after the Bible) the most printed ever. I will be delighted to give donations and time for this project. GO SDA CHURCH is about time! We know that Holy Spirit is in this project!

David 1 week ago Reply

You the ones in AT that criticize and oppose to this idea probably ignore the potential of the GC. For the ones who at one time we did not have any interest in the Bible, this book was a key to open our eyes to the eternal gospel! and became SDA Christians.

David 1 week ago Reply

It is hard to believe that some people here in AT that suppose to be Christians are criticizing a project that will bring people to know Jesus as Lord and Savior. I wonder under of what kind of influence are writing in this bog.

George Tichy 1 week ago Reply
In my case, under the influence of about 60 of adventism, including attending an adventist scholl from 1st grade until finishing college (School of Religion, BA in Theology). Also under the influence of many people (including some bright scholars) who taught me to think objectively. And under the influence of my father who always encouraged me to utilize the brains given by God, and to avoid being a mere repeater of other people's ideas or biases. But I am aware that there are some people who become uncomfortable with independent thinkers, and often start judging their spirituality. I already got used to that...

JIMS Seven 1 week ago Reply

The name of the book: On The Edge of Time- it is clear to me that just by going through the name the book would naturally be focussing on on the times as these and their implications from the Adventist perspective. When we say we are living on the edge of time there has to be a message of urgency to take the right side in this great battle between the good and the evil forces aka the GC which ultimately means that the issue of Judgement are to be the subject of the discussion. Talking about Time and the circumstances as ours from Adventist perspective and ignoring the IJ to me cannot happen. One might not find the phrase 'IJ' or some might even quickly claim or assume that the Church has debunked the scripture based belief of 'IJ' just through this review as seen here but the reality is that 'IJ' is as inseperable from SDA belief as that of Sabbath (Don't comment quickly telling me 'Oh JIMS777 you mean other beliefs/doctrines should be debunked'.....i don't mean that). How can one talk about the SDA movement and it's 3A's message of REV 14 and say that IJ has been dismissed.......people here on the forum to promote their own agendas would perhaps quickly come up with their assumption...'hey guys GC has debunked IJ' ....LOL.....A movement lead by the Spirit of truth that has much to do with understanding of God's judgement of love and his designated time frame....such a movement as this would not give up the truths upon which it's founations are rooted....that easily......

Some respected dear elderlies here have even made their own interpretation of the 'Time of end'......i.e if i am on 80's or 70s then Jesus is talking only about my life span and my individual physical end and not the end of time from Adventist perspective ....oops.......i hear such interpretations in my country so often......to think of the end of time that way is to clearly miss the eschatological issue from the theological point of view if we really want to discuss it from Biblical perspective.......What more funny thing here is that as a a trademark of AT bloggers and commentators to prove their anti adventist points they as usual love dragging EGW into some controversy.....it gets to such mean level that through the personalizing of the issue such as 'Teddy' they display that they even don't respect their ownselvses........And mind you these are the dear people who love fingerpointing the traditonals that they are legalist who forget grace and live by work not by faith.......but as the wise man says' Wisdom is justified in her doings (mine)'

yes there might be more people who would hate the SDA church when the project finishes circulation but there might be also the working of the SPIRIT in such a manner that more people might be joining the mainstream SDA Church......people are different and make their own choices and those choices always don't have to be for SDA Church's membership or lets say other advantage....We are called to speak of God's judgement alongside of His endless love. We don't have to be popular and crowd pleaser......we are to be telling the truth......Truth is bitter at times and might seem stranger than your hollywood flicks but then it is the truth that sets free and triumphs......I see that in SDA's traditional beliefs......For me it gets this simple......I don't change my true traditional beliefs but i tell them if possible from rooftop because i know IJ means gospel, Rev 14 means gospel Rev 12 means gospel, Prophetic timelines means gospel.......though these are too
hard for some here to accept...... thanks

David
1 week ago  Reply

That really is a paradox! under the influence and “independent thinking” and "religious background" to oppose and criticize a method that for many people was a “key” to be interested in the Bible and eventually accept Jesus.

Trevor Hammond
1 week ago  Reply

Hey JIMS Seven (Wise man from the East) [part 1]

RE your comment: “A movement lead by the Spirit of truth that has much to do with understanding of God's judgement of love and his designated time frame....such a movement as this would not give up the truths upon which it's founations are rooted....that easily.....”

I would concur wholeheartedly with your comments in your recent post and the excerpt I pasted above. I particularly like the ‘judgement of love’ in reference to the Bible based Investigative Judgement which is still very much a part of traditional Adventist belief and you are right, it ain’t goin’ away ‘that easily’ jus’ yet even if culture progressives any further into the cultural sand. It IS a Judgement of LOVE. Nicely put. I have tried to reassure many commenter’s here on the ‘Apple Tree’ by trying to allay their ‘spooky IJ’ fears and remind them that the IJ isn’t a ‘spooky’ boogieman and that it is God’s Love that allows us by Grace to ‘BOLDLY ENTER’ into the presence of God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Also, so good to note that the proverbial ‘axe’ didn’t ‘cut’ your Apple Tree comments down this time ‘round. Maybe, like me, you are off ‘death row’ for now at least. Through the positive influence of the GC in my life I can say that my journey to 'skid row' was averted when Jesus turned my life around.

I like this line too in your comment: “Truth is bitter at times and might seem stranger than your hollywood flicks but then it is the truth that sets free and triumphs.....I see that in SDA's traditional beliefs......For me it gets this simple......”

Yeah, cultural progressives can be so narrow minded and fundamentalist in their thinking and approach that it really surprises me and shows in contrast how broad-based and progressive Trad’s really are when the gospel is concerned. After all we don’t teach cheap Grace and limited gospel etc.

♥T

Trevor Hammond
1 week ago  Reply

Hey JIMS Seven (Wise man from the East) [part 2]

By the way, from what I have gathered, JIMS Seven, from some posts, is that EVERYONE in the US of A doesn’t read paper books any more, they ALL have got access to e-books via internet, iPad/iPod, Kindle, phones and other sorts of electronic devices which apparently they ALL have available so they don’t need books. There aren’t long power outages it seems, so candlelight reading is extinct. (Who knows? One day they may invent ‘wireless electricity’ lol …)
One last thing JIMS Seven, I have had the personal experience of been led to Jesus Christ by the very same book which some deride here. The Great Controversy writings led me to a personal relationship with Jesus and a journey in which I have never looked back. IT WAS AT A POINT IN MY LIFE WHEN I WOULD NEVER HAVE PICKED UP EITHER THE BIBLE OR EVEN THE DESIRE OF AGES OR STEPS TO CHRIST for that matter; but the somehow the GC got me stuck into my search for truth and pointed me in the direction away from the ‘camp of satan’ to his more than able (more than wonderful)opponent in this great controversy: the Mighty Lord of Hosts, Jesus Christ, The Lamb of God, Who was for sinners slain. The rest is history (even in the making 'cos He ain't finished with me yet).

Hey, what can I say, I probably would not have been posting here on this Apple Tree were it not for my ‘journey’ with the Lord. Praise God for the Ministry of Ellen white and for the way her writings have lead souls to Christ and the Holy Bible: always by default – all the time – to Christ and the Bible - and it even was the full version GC that made this significant start in my journey with Christ for me.

I would put my head on the block and venture out and say that this has been the experience of thousands (if not millions) who have encountered Christ through the pen of inspiration. Praise God! So long, and Peace JIMS Seven, (Wise man from the East).

♥

William Noel

Trevor,

Your experience highlights the conceptual challenge that is created when we look at what has worked on a limited basis in the past and assume that future results will grow in a linear fashion according to how much we increase distribution. It seems logical. Unfortunately, it doesn't work that way. No matter how many times you increase distribution the potential number who will respond as you did does not grow. Being effective requires that we have a variety of resources and, as we are guided by the Holy Spirit, we individually distribute those materials to those who appear interested. That is a far more effective approach because it combines personal contact with private study and, hopefully, invitation to join a nurturing spiritual family in the local church.

Trevor Hammond

Well Sir, just to let you know that the work of sowing the seed is what we have been called to do. The numbers? Well that's the work of the Holy Spirit. He convicts; He subdues; He tranforms. All we are is instruments in His hands. Every nation, kindred, tongue and people, is based on the premise that each individual from within each of these groups is given opportunity to 'HEAR' the gospel of the kingdom, which includes the Three Angels Messages of Revelation 14.

This is why I will say again, that cultural progressives are much more narrow minded in their evangelical vision for our church. Traditionalists will in most cases support diverse manners of evangelism including the distribution of this inspiring book especially to a secular lost society who have NO real interest in who Jesus is and what He has done on the cross. The GC looks
at the whole picture from a different perspective which in many cases through the perfect working of the Holy Spirit. The recipient of such a book will then be drawn to Christ the Saviour and be ready to 'step to Christ' and learn about the 'desire of ages'.

Yes, many sadly will choose otherwise and reject its message just like many cultural Adventists have done and as always they will have to deal with the consequences of rejecting light. Perhaps we have progressed so much that we have forgotten who we are and what we have been called for as a church. Maybe some have been side-tracked from our mission in our effort to compete with the Charasmatics, perhaps, with the cheap grace and all...

♥

William Noel

Trevor,

Apparently you and I have had very different experiences. From where I stand, it is the traditionalists (most particularly senior church leaders such as those at the GC) who are defending and promoting singular and exclusive methods of outreach without regard to their effectiveness and the progressives who are promoting innovations that are proving to be far more effective.

To give you a contrast, the church I used to attend held public crusades, distribute EGW books, etc. It consistently lost as many members as it gained. The church I now attend tried that and quickly realized the futility. So we allowed God to develop gift-based ministries. The results? We haven't held an evangelistic crusade or had any serious literature distribution in six years. Our membership has almost doubled since then. People cry when they have to move away. There is more love and closer fellowship than I have experienced in any other congregation.

Trevor Hammond

Hey JIMS Seven (Wise man from the East)

By the way, JIMS Seven, ironically, it was a Sunday Church lady who, literally told me to 'read the Great Controversy, in a chain of unexpected events which - just happened - just like that...

♥

Trevor Hammond

Yeah Dr. David, I agree - from my personal experience the GC book was a "KEY' which opened my heart to the gospel. The Holy Spirit worked in my life through Ellen White writings. It's a pity that so many culturalists have progressed so far into the rabbit hole...that they don't know White from wrong. ☺

♥

Trevor Hammond

Here is an excerpt from the 'controversial' book which seems pretty Christ centred to me:
"In the banishment of Satan from heaven, God declared His justice and maintained the honor of His throne. But when man had sinned through yielding to the deceptions of this apostate spirit, God gave an evidence of His love by yielding up His only-begotten Son to die for the fallen race. [Page 501] In the atonement the character of God is revealed. The mighty argument of the cross demonstrates to the whole universe that the course of sin which Lucifer had chosen was in no wise chargeable upon the government of God.

In the contest between Christ and Satan, during the Saviour's earthly ministry, the character of the great deceiver was unmasked. Nothing could so effectually have uprooted Satan from the affections of the heavenly angels and the whole loyal universe as did his cruel warfare upon the world's Redeemer. The daring blasphemy of his demand that Christ should pay him homage, his presumptuous boldness in bearing Him to the mountain summit and the pinnacle of the temple, the malicious intent betrayed in urging Him to cast Himself down from the dizzy height, the unsleeping malice that hunted Him from place to place, inspiring the hearts of priests and people to reject His love, and at the last to cry, "Crucify Him! crucify Him!"--all this excited the amazement and indignation of the universe.

It was Satan that prompted the world's rejection of Christ. The prince of evil exerted all his power and cunning to destroy Jesus; for he saw that the Saviour's mercy and love, His compassion and pitying tenderness, were representing to the world the character of God. Satan contested every claim put forth by the Son of God and employed men as his agents to fill the Saviour's life with suffering and sorrow. The sophistry and falsehood by which he had sought to hinder the work of Jesus, the hatred manifested through the children of disobedience, his cruel accusations against Him whose life was one of unexampled goodness, all sprang from deep-seated revenge. The pent-up fires of envy and malice, hatred and revenge, burst forth on Calvary against the Son of God, while all heaven gazed upon the scene in silent horror.

When the great sacrifice had been consummated, Christ ascended on high, refusing the adoration of angels until He had presented the request: "I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am." John 17:24. Then [Page 502] with inexpressible love and power came forth the answer from the Father's throne: "Let all the angels of God worship Him." Hebrews 1:6. Not a stain rested upon Jesus. His humiliation ended, His sacrifice completed, there was given unto Him a name that is above every name."

♥T

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**Trevor Hammond**

From what I have gathered here, we need to keep some copies of the book for the many unbelievers, ex-believers, dis-believers, and those mis-believers, right here, even on AT.

♥T
"Those who honor the Bible Sabbath will be denounced as enemies of law and order, as breaking down the moral restraints of society....As the Protestant churches reject the clear, Scriptural arguments in defense of God's law, they will long to silence those whose faith cannot overthrow by the Bible....The dignitaries of church and state will unite to bribe, persuade, or compel all classes to honor the Sunday....In free America, rulers and legislators, in order to secure public favor, will yield to the popular demand for a law enforcing Sunday observance....As the Sabbath has become the special point of controversy throughout Christendom, and religious and secular authorities have combined to enforce the observance of the Sunday, the persistent refusal of a small minority to yield to the popular demand will make them objects of universal execration"

Only one of the paragraphs in the book which is centered on "Sabbath keepers" and "Christendom" will enforce Sunday observance.

The book and the paragraph you quote is spot on though. If rulers and legislators could force evolution theory on the mainstream Christian America and get it accepted as a norm then Sunday observance would be a piece of cake. It will just be a matter of time. Hey, even homosexual 'marriage' is been sweeping across the American states. Stringent security measures since 9/11 has changed what was 'free' America. The economic instability, social depravity and depleted health care funds are an easy taking for the Sunday movement. They've already started the march in Europe and the US WILL follow suite as the leader of the so-called 'free' First World. How appropiate that they call it the First 'Day' World. Seventh-day Adventists have a mandate to warn the world of this. Why would ex Adventists and other non-believers be so agitated by such Adventist activity. Why don't they go and preach their own ex-Adventist brand of the gospel. So far I have never ever had one ex-Adventist knock on my door or approach me with the message of ex-Adventism. I just see them standing on the sidelines doing lots of heckling even though they have no real dog in this fight. Weird!

There's nothing in the copied portion that has anything whatever to do with either evolution, homosexual "marriage" that you mention. They are strawmen and red herrings introduced that have nothing to do with what has been presented. Introducing subjects never mentioned does not divert from the original article and is only a diversionary tactic.

A straight message is unabridged and does not water down the Plain Truth. Where is our Faith that we water down and abridge the message the Lord's own Messenger has given us. Will it become of Non-affect?
The message is a two edged sword by design and is certain to raise the issues addressed to a
crescendo that will convict or harden the heart of the reader...so be it!!!

Disappointed in the lack of Faith demonstrated by abridging such an important message;

Gailon Arthur Joy
AUReporter

William Noel
3 days ago Reply

The unborn are not ready to drink milk and newborns cannot eat solid food. So how do you
defend the concept of presenting the undiluted "plain truth" to the growing majority who are not ready to receive and digest it? How many souls will we prejudice against the Gospel by trying to force-feed them more than they are ready to receive?

Elaine Nelson
3 days ago Reply

"A straight message is unabridged and does not water down the Plain Truth."

How's that been working for you?

Ella M.
2 days ago Reply

To those who say that Ellen White wanted this book distributed, consider that at the time there was a lot of anti-Catholic feeling in the country and many would have welcomed the ideas and read the book. This is just not the world today. In this era putting down another belief system (unless it is "fundamentalism"), is not tolerated. Therefore, I cannot see this book making a positive impression at all. Rewritten for the current age of "present truth" it might work. But the church apparently finds the wording too sacred to change.

If we are a church that uplifts Christ, then SC or Desire of Ages should have been chosen. or a special book written showing God's love and plan of salvation that would show how SDA doctrines are part of this plan and promote God's character. I find the book GC to have little to say about the important things of God to the present world other than "God will gitcha."

William Noel
3 hours ago Reply

Ella,

Ellen White wanted the books distributed through the canvassing ministry, which has since largely died. That ministry had the element of personal presentation to evaluate if the potential recipient would be receptive. Delivery via the postman assumes impersonal delivery will be successful when it is simply not the method we were told would make it effective.

Gregory Matthews
1 day ago Reply

I have been challenged as to the accuracy of the posted description of the 112 page abridgement that is being circulated with the title The Edge of Time. Can someone skuggest a website to me...
that will document the posted description? Thanks,
Our Catholic Friends Have a Right Wing Too

Submitted Oct 25, 2011
By Ervin Taylor

As a consequence of the changes in Roman Catholic polity and forms of worship that were brought about as the result of the Vatican II Council, there was an upsurge in the number of Roman Catholic dissident groups. Some of these groups accused Catholic Church authorities, including all of the Popes since Pope John XXIII, as being heretics as defined by Roman Catholic canon law. As a consequence, since Vatican II, there have been several Roman Catholic groups which have declared that the office of the Pope vacant and several have 'elected' others to that office thus creating a number of modern “anti-Popes.”

One of these dissident groups gathered around a former French Roman Catholic archbishop, Marcel Lefebvre (1905-1991). In 1988, when Lefebvre consecrated four bishops against the express prohibition of Pope John Paul II, Lefebvre was excommunicated. On October 20, 2011, a member of the Roman Catholic clergy who is a supporter of Lefebvre held a press conference to make the following statement in conjunction with an upcoming ecumenical meeting in Assisi, Italy. The first meeting in Assisi was organized by John Paul II as a World Day of Prayer for Peace. The third meeting, Assisi III, will be attended by Pope Benedict XVI as well as the representatives of many other religions bodies both Christian and non-Christian:

Here is the statement by the supporter of Lefebvre:

“I declare, with the blessing of ten Catholic Bishops, that the ecumenical gathering in Assisi on October 27, 2011, is a crime that offends the divinity of Jesus Christ and the Blessed Virgin Mary.

1. God is One and has revealed one religion only, not sixty.

2. The constant teaching of the Popes, most recently Pius XI [Pope 1922-1939] in his encyclical Mortalium Animos where he states that those who promote such meetings ‘completely abandon the religion revealed by God’.

3. Ecumenism is a violation of human nature in its most noble part, the spirit. Instead of bringing souls to Jesus, Benedict XVI strengthens those who wander in error away from Christ, as he leads his own sheep to false religions and on to Satan. As Holy Scripture in Psalm 95 says, “All the gods of the nations are demons.”

   The consequence is complete spiritual and religious disorientation, a situation that favors discord instead of peace in Jesus Christ. Benedict XVI does not propose Jesus Christ as the Unique Peacemaker in the world, but proposes rather the United Nations for that role.

4. Canonical law at Canon 1258 prohibits any active participation in a non-Catholic rite.

5. As Bishop Pivarunas recently said, "It's incomprehensible that someone could claim to be the head of the Church, the successor of Peter, the Vicar of Christ and blatantly disregard the First Commandment."

For these five reasons I agree with the words of Bishop Lefebvre when he said in Econe [France] on Easter Sunday, 1986: “Is the Pope still pope, if he is heretical?...[If we do not talk about it] to our
faithful…they will lose faith…”

And on September 4, 1987 he said: “Rome lost the faith, dear friends, Rome is in apostasy…We cannot trust these people anymore. They have left the Church…”

“I am a simple priest. I do not declare that Benedict XVI be removed from his papacy. Not even Mgr. Lefebvre formally made this assertion. But I assert with the Bishops and priests I have visited, and the faithful, can assert it too, that it is not possible to recognize the hierarchy of the modern Church as legitimate without endangering one's own Faith. And without Faith we cannot be redeemed.”

**Comment**

It appears that conservative Catholics and conservative Adventists share certain views. Both groups are deeply suspicious of ecumenical dialogue, believe there is only one revealed true religion (the one they espouse), and agree that the Pope is leading people into error. We live in interesting times.

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**Stephen Foster**

If you think we live in interesting times now, allow me to quote the great Al Jolson (or was it Bachman Turner Overdrive?), “you ain’t seen nothing yet!”

The intellectual/philosophical/theological descendants of the RCC right and the SDA right appear more likely to come into conflict with each other than the respective leftward counterparts of each.

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**Joe Erwin**

Ervin, perhaps you remember a course in "Social Psychology" at PUC (we might even have been in the same class) in which the professor (whose name I have forgotten), administered a psychometric instrument designed to measure "F" (for "fascism"). This was the scale used for much research centered on "The Authoritarian Personality." I remember that most members of the class scored as very "authoritarian," and that the professor informed us that that result was typical of SDAs AND Catholics. More recent research identifies "Right-wing Authoritarianism" as a term for the most reliable cluster of "F" characteristics. I think there is little doubt that some substantial subset of SDAs and Catholics still score similarly on that scale, even though they may be absolutely intolerant of one another. Perhaps others here can guess why that is so, and perhaps also speculate about why other Catholics and adventists (and others) are relatively more "tolerant of ambiguity" and of each other.

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**Elaine Nelson**

The test can be found:

http://www.anesi.com/fscale.htm

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**Nathan Schilt**

1 week ago
As an informative piece on internal conflicts in the Catholic Church, this blog is really interesting, Erv. But using it as a springboard to pursue your jihad of intellectual bullying against conservative fundamentalists is really beneath you. I'm sure there is no end of disparaging comparisons, insinuations and innuendoes that you can substitute for actual engagement on real issues. It is amusing how blind you and your choir are to the reality that those whose religion is science and reason also only believe in one religion, are deeply suspicious of ecumenical dialogue, and agree that Ted Wilson is leading people into error. Does that mean you too share certain views with conservative Catholics?

Would there be any point in cataloguing the similarities between atheists, communists, fascists, etc., and liberal Adventists? I don't think so. Such an ad hominem exercise would certainly produce points of comparison, but would be intellectually dishonest, and a lazy substitute for critical thought. Can't we elevate the dialogue on AToday above this level?

Doctorf

Nate what is the basis for such statements as "jihad of intellectual bullying...."? This is a discussion. Erv draws a parallel between conservative catholics who view that there only "one christian church", the Catholic Church and any ecumenical outreach to other Christians is heresy. Thus, conservative Catholics are much like SDA conservatives, espousing one "true church" the SDA church. I was taught such, that the SDA church is gods latter day church and the standard bearer of "true" Christianity. The argument placed forward by SDA or Catholic conservatives is nonsense. They "declare" themselves the true Christians. Thus, it is true because they say it is true. Much like the Bible is gods word because the Church deems it so and uses the self ascribed authority of the bible to buttress its claims. What a classic example of circular reasoning.

Trevor Hammond

Mr. Schilt, If it wasn't for your name in the post above, I would have thought I wrote it!  lol ☺
♥T

Ervin Taylor

I would think that my good colleague Nate would wish to think twice (perhaps even three or four times) about expressing the same opinion as Mr. Hammond. But Nate might think this was an ad hominem statement, so I will not make it. I must admit that Nate does have a way with words, very much as does my good friend Cliff Goldstein. (Opps, there I go again with ad hominem statements) For example, "jihad of intellectual bullying against conservative fundamentalists" I wish I could come up with such high sounding phrases.

However, what I would really like to do is to try to "catalogue the similarities between atheists, communists, fascists, etc. and liberal Adventists." Hmm. I'm having some trouble in doing that and so I wonder if Nate could help me?

If Nate can not immediately see the similarity between conservative Adventists and conservative Catholics, which has been pointed out many, many times, by many, many people, then I must wonder about how he makes any comparisons. But here I am making an ad hominem statement
again and Nate wants me to stop that. Well, I will just have to go off into my little, dark, corner and work on that character defect.

Nathan Schilt

Erv, there is a sometimes fine, but nonetheless clear line between using analogies or comparisons as a common point of reference to support an argument, and using such tools as tactics to stigmatize one's opponents and demagogue a conclusion. The latter is what protesters do when they carry signs painted with slogans and epithets.

You seek to marginalize SDA conservatives by dressing them in offensive garb, thereby hoping your own extremist views will appear as mainstream and moderate. These tactics are straight out of Saul Alinsky's *Rules for Radicals* where, under the rubric of "Power Tactics" - Rule 13 - he advocates: "pick your target; freeze it; personalize it." This happens all the time in the political arena. I am just disappointed that some find it attractive to stoop to that level on this website.

Your preference for "us vs. them" identity group warfare is underscored by your suggestion that I should be embarrassed by Trevor's Hammond's endorsement. Intimidating others from rallying to the defense of your target is another Alinskyite tactic. It makes you sound like a high schooler trying to protect the boundaries of a clique. **There is no shame in identifying and condemning moral and intellectual bullying, even one may not share the beliefs and worldview of the object of scorn.**

Trevor Hammond

I wish to edit my statement above:

**Mr. Schilt, If it wasn't for your name in the post above, I would have thought I wrote it! lol😊.**

I should be:

Mr. Schilt, If it wasn't for your name in the post above, I would have WISHED I wrote it! lol😊.

Trevor Hammond

In Mr. Schilt's comment above, I particularly like the phrase "**It is amusing how blind you and your choir are**" which he uses when addressing the blog writer.

♥ι

Bill Cork

So some of Lefebvre's associates are still huffing and puffing, despite the fact that, in the last few years, the Vatican has been bending over backwards to reconcile with the SSPX (as one result of those conversations, any priest who wishes to can celebrate mass using the 1962 without the need to get his bishop's permission).

The differences between them and the Catholic church are not as great as might appear. The
Catholic Church believes it alone as the fullness of the Christian faith. It accepts the Eastern Orthodox churches as "churches" in the full sense, because they have valid (in Roman eyes) ministerial ordinations and sacraments. It regards all Protestant bodies as mere "ecclesial communities," that are not "churches" as Rome defines them. It does not accept Protestant ordinations as valid. It does not allow intercommunion with Protestants. Vatican 2 presented a "kinder, gentler" face of the Catholic beliefs, but didn't change them.

Vatican 2 DID, however, radically change the way Catholics speak about Protestantism ("separated brethren," who have a valid baptism, and thus have a real, if imperfect, connection to the Catholic Church). And it more radically changed the way Catholicism regards Judaism (gone are the references to "perfidious Jews," and explicit statements of supercessionism and blood guilt). The SSPX has been very vitriolic in its condemnation of these changes. At an SSPX bookstore in Houston, I have found copies of "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion" and Henry Ford's diatribe based on it, "The International Jew." Bishop Williamson of the SSPX has gotten himself embarrassed because of statements he has made about the Jews.

As to the Assisi meetings, Benedict XVI was never comfortable with some things John Paul II did. Thus the third meeting is a common "pilgrimage," but there will be no joint prayers, so as not to give the wrong impression (http://www.commonwealmagazine.org/blog/?p=15680).

But that's not enough to satisfy the reactionary fringe, or the conspiracy buffs of many churches.
should the church and its members be so rigid as to reject that individual? Wouldn't it be more consistent to allow diversity to exist than to shun anyone who deviates from the dogma? It seems to me that the SDA dogma is too brittle and that many members are intolerant of individual differences that are none of their business.

On one side of my family, the grandparents were adventists and on the other side the great-grandparents were. Clearly, my siblings and I were reared in SDA culture. But today, none of us, nor any of our children, are adventists. All of us attended academies. Two of us attended SDA colleges. Two of us were theology majors. Two of us taught in SDA elementary schools. Two of the three of us are Christians (one Catholic, one Assemblies of God), and the other one (me) is a "nonbeliever" (which does not necessarily mean that I am an atheist--although I am pretty close to being an atheist, I just don't think it is anyone's business what I think about God, and I have no interest in "converting" anyone to atheism).

There really is no place for me in the church. I accept that. But for those who have remained in the church, even though their minds are open to ideas beyond the rigid dogma of the church, I must admire their courage and fortitude, although it may well be a waste of their time and talent. It is a little sad that so many in the church are so intolerant of ambiguity and diversity. No one needs to point out who those people are. They readily self-identify.

Doctorf  

Joe,

Very interesting and enlightening post. Many, whether Catholic, Jewish, SDA etc could not get away from their religion if they tried because of the generational ties with family that have been indoctrinated under one of the above banners. Like you I can't get away from SDA culture if I tried. Its everywhere. My neighbors, plethora of friends and my family throughout 5 generations.

Nathan Schilt  

Joe, you left out a third option: The group can decide to expel the member. I think that's what a lot of fundamentalists think should happen to those who challenge group norms. They represent a minority fringe. I think even most Adventists who conform to traditional standards and beliefs would not agree with JaNe.

Having said that, I don't think membership or equal access to church offices is an entitlement that comes with having been born or baptized into the church. The institutional church qua denomination is really a collection of religious clubs, each of which has considerable de facto flexibility in deciding what standards are important, as well as who's in and who's out. When my parents got divorced back in the mid-50's, my father was excommunicated from the local SDA church. But he moved to Silver Springs, Md., where a small Adventist church immediately accepted him and his new wife on profession of faith. If you came to a university SDA community and joined an Adventist fellowship such as Erv attends, you would no doubt find it highly stimulating and be welcomed with open arms. I personally like diversity within my church, but I certainly don't think it's a moral imperative. Nor would I want to force it on an Adventist community that had a very fundamentalistic sense of identity and mission. If they want to limit their group to folks who will annually commit to the 28 fundamental beliefs and pay a double tithe, isn't that their prerogative?
How many professional societies and mission driven charities have specific standards that must be met in order to remain a member in good standing? Isn't the right of a private society, be it a church, a school, or a club, to be narrow-minded and inconsistent? I don't think that's sad; it's a cause for celebration. Is it sad that Luther parted company with the Roman Catholic Church or that we have so many denominations? Certainly not! The roots of religious liberty grew out of diverse religious beliefs that were mutually intolerant.

Until the reactionary forces in the church persuade some centralized authority to assume the prerogatives of establishing and enforcing criteria for church membership, those who want to silence voices like yours, Doctorfs, Ervs, and maybe even me, once they've gotten rid of you, will be spitting (or something like that) into the wind. In the meantime, I don't mind letting them have their own sandboxes.

Nathan Schilt

Allow me to add, Joe, that I don't think it takes courage and fortitude to stay. It takes courage and fortitude to strike out and find like-minded people to advance a vision and mission that is being stifled by internal quarreling and power struggles. IMO, most malcontents who stay in the church do so because they either just like to fight or they are dependent on the church for employment.

Elaine Nelson

The Church of Intolerance if able to expel all those it finds do not meet their particular standards would, after getting rid of all such heretics, turn and start cannibalizing their own. Those who crave exclusivity will soon have it all alone with no one able to meet their standards.

Kevin Riley

The SDA church is an ideological organisation - therefore it is defined by belief, just like any other religious or political organisation. Beliefs are central, but how many beliefs, and how specific, is up to the group. We are not more or less a religious organisation because we have replaced the pioneers' 2 principles (keeping the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus) by 28 fundamentals. My preference is to keep the defining statements general and as brief as possible (7, 10, or 12 strike me as a good Biblical numbers to aim for) so we can include as many people as possible without destroying our identity and mission. But should we decide to have 144,000 fundamental beliefs, we would still be just as much defined by our beliefs as when we had just a handful.

Joe Erwin

Nathan, thanks for your interesting and thoughtful words. There is an interesting coincidence. My parents divorced in the 1950s. Mom was a teacher in an SDA school. Dad was thrown out of the church. While it may have simply been a matter of church officers siding with Mom, Dad always said he was thrown out for training race horses. Even later in life the two of them disagreed on the cause of the divorce. My best guess is that money problems associated with a devastating
automobile accident was the critical factor. Anyway, some years later, he married a devout Irish Catholic woman. He remained a Christian, but without a church. He made it clear that he did not ever understand why the church had abandoned him or why God had allowed so many terrible things to happen to him. Sadly, for him, he harbored much bitterness and regret. So, yes, one can be expelled.

My sister wanted to be an SDA minister, and excelled in all the coursework that would have qualified her to go to the seminary, but she was denied entry and support because she was a woman. So, she entered Officer Candidate School in the Air Force, married an Air Force Officer, and went back to school for an MLS from a good public college. She became an episcopalian, and later a Catholic. My brother dropped out of academy after two years and never went back. He went into the Air Force married a baptist girl and after an ugly divorce married another baptist girl. Together, they got more and more involved with charismatic pentacostal congregations, especially so after his oldest daughter was murdered by her estranged pentacostal preacher husband. Strange stuff. Our parents are dead. All but one of the aunts and uncles have died. Only one cousin remains in the church.

My first wife was a life long adventist. That marriage did not last long. I have been married to my 2nd wife for 38 years. She was baptised as an infant (episcopalian), but she is not religious, which suits me fine. She is a good person, caring, moral, ethical, honest, and I'm fortunate to have found someone to put up with me.

So, I do not feel that I live in the midst of many adventists. I do go back for academy reunions sometimes, and most of my friends who remained in the church are nice people--as are those who did not. Other than that, I haven't been in an adventist church for more than 35 years, and I really do not miss it much. I do agree that organizations have the right to set and enforce standards. Also, it is clear to me that I do not believe much of what SDAs believe, whether there are 2 or 28 principles.

Even so, I am strangely fascinated with what keeps people in the church and how anyone can stay. So, these conversations help me understand, a little. Thank you are for sharing your perspectives.

Nathan Schilt

This is really interesting, Joe. I would have to say that the same things that kept me in the Church were what caused you to "drift" away - community and family. My intellectual doubts about church beliefs have been trumped by wonderful people committed to Adventism who have blessed my life enormously with their integrity and honesty - my mother, a brother, college professors, thoughtful church communities, and commitment to building faith in my kids.

I don't think God is calling everyone to be an Adventist. But I do think He is calling everyone to relationship with Him in some community of faith. Because I believe He has called me through my life, associations and worldview to Adventism, I need to be faithful to that call, and love what He has called me to, until I hear Him calling me to something else.

My daughter used to ask, "Why be an Adventist? Why not a Buddhist, Hindu, or Catholic?" I told her that she needed to find out what God was calling her to and be faithful to that call. What is wrong headed, in my opinion, is using God's revelation to others, through different faith windows, to remain detached - to relativize, invalidate, or nullify His revelation or call in one's own life.
I have many intellectual reasons for believing in the superiority of God's revelation and incarnation revealed in the Bible. But I know that those reasons would not have been sufficient without flesh and blood Christian SDAs whose love and dedication was palpable in my life. I can't speak for others or universalize God's call. But because I believe He has revealed Himself to me through Jesus Christ, I will not put my soul at peril by relativizing or rationalizing away His call on my life. Besides, I have found life with Him in my SDA faith garden to be pure joy. That, together with the fact that God doesn't seem to be calling me into a different faith community, is what keeps me in the Church.

Trevor Hammond

The reason why there is a perceived 'right wing' within Adventism is because some radicals have decided to move left. Although I admit there are extremists on both sides, the left have erroneously included all of Traditional Adventism as right wing extremists which exposes their own extremist views.

IN MY OPINION - from the way I see things...
They (the Adventist left) lean heavily towards:

- death before sin which is contrary to what the Bible teaches
- wholesale evolutionary belief or a mutated form called theistic evolution
- similar understanding to the way right wing Catholics view the Bible: Catholics say tradition over the Bible, and the Adventist left says Culture and socio-politics over the Bible
- limited inspiration and authority of the Holy Bible
- blatant disregard of Ellen White writings
- accepting homosexual relationships as an alternative, based on socio-political trends, as an equal to a Biblical understanding of marriage
- The 'dess mess' die hard's who still cling to manmade doctrine by making one text and one man bigger than the whole Bible
- the ten commandments are ten options
- the Sabbath is not important and Sunday sacredness is just as good enough
- cheap grace is ok and obedience to God is unimportant, legalistic and not necessary
- that the Advent message to all the world is just a means of increasing numbers by gaining converts who aren't able to think as smartly as those in educated western culture countries
- secular education is the key to spiritual enlightenment NOT the word of God
- the word of God is NOT the word of God
- Jesus was understandibly wrong about the Flood and Creation because he only was able to understand and believe what his culture taught him which was limited knowledge in itself
- there is no Judgement process or event which involves the 'cleansing of the sanctuary' or Investigative Judgement which started on 22 October 1844 as per 2300 year prophecy.
- humanism is a better 'way' than the gospel of Christ
- unity of believers in Christ is misrepresented as unity of sinfulness in Christ - aka cheap grace
- sin isn't the transgression of the law as there is no law in the new testament that is binding on the Christian Church. Seems traffic laws and contitutional laws are more important for the Adventist left wing
- many on the left like to 'portray' themselves as moderates but they are in fact extreme left. It is traditional Adventism that is in the moderate mainstream and have maintained this by not embracing extremist views which the left have undoubtedly subscribed and are 'in need of
nothing' they presume.

♥ T

Kevin Riley

Trevor

The problem with your list is that it does not define a group of SDAs. It may reflect the beliefs of a few on the far left, but most people left-of-centre would not agree with most of what you say defines them. All you have done is list the things you do not like. Traditional Adventism, as it is usually defined, is not the centre. That position is held by conservative and evangelical SDAs, and if you are looking for where the majority of SDAs stand, that is where you should be looking. You have done just what you accuse the left of doing, you have included many conservative SDAs in your category of 'traditional SDA', and most would not want to be there. Most 'traditional SDAs' are found supporting the independent ministries, not the SDA church. Did you read the article on the SDA spectrum in the latest AToday magazine? It might help you understand why 'traditional Adventists' are viewed as the extreme right by most people.

Gailon Arthur Joy

AND YOUR POINT IS???

Fundamental Catholicism is hardly linked realistically to Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists that believe the literal Bible is the Foundation of Faith and look forward to a literal Second Coming to raise the Faithful and only the Faithful to Life Eternal. The belief that one is equivalent to the other is delusional and demonstrates how little some people know of the Truth as defined by the Biblical Message. The nullity thereof is eternal loss...a needless shame.

Gailon Arthur Joy
AURreporter

cb25

Gailon,

I may get moderated for this, but have to ask are you the Gailon of save 3 abn fame?

Came across this while trying to see what drives your attitude here:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/3ABN#cite_note-10

Trevor Hammond

Hey - cb25
Are you like snooping to 'dig up some dirt' on some of us? No need to Sir! Just ask and I'll tell you
my dirt if you wish... I've got plenty. Don't we all?

♥T

cb25

Hi Trevor,

No. I was unimpressed with the attitude/tone of what Gailon writes, but intrigued by the AUReporter title, so combine these two points I tried to find out more. So, no, not snooping for dirt. Was suprised by what I found.

Elaine Nelson

cb25,

Isn't the internet amazing! Read most of the links and discovered a most interesting history. Does smug self-righteousness cover up a lot!

Joe Erwin

First, let me say that I am not trying to change anyone's mind, cause them to doubt their faith, or any of that stuff. I am just a former SDA who left the church and still am a serious, thoughtful, considerate, and, I hope, moral and ethical person. I recently wrote down a list of my beliefs, inspired, I suppose, by Trevor's list.

1. I believe that when one dies, one is dead. Period.

2. I believe that everyone is entitled to respect and due consideration.

3. I believe that due consideration requires objective knowledge and empathetic understanding.

4. I believe that science offers the most reliable, effective, and valid method of obtaining and evaluating objective evidence.

5. I believe that deities and religions and religious texts were created by humans in attempts to understand and explain the world and their experiences in it, and to manipulate and control others.

6. I believe that humans are animals (primates, mammals)--extraordinary animals, but really animals.

7. I believe the earth is very old (over a billion years old), and that the universe may have had no beginning and might have no end; and I believe that primate mammals have existed for more than 60 million years and that the common ancestor of chimpanzees and humans existed about 6 million years ago.

8. I believe that humans are ethically obligated to each other and other residents of our planet to
behave in constructive ways rather than cruel and destructive ways--this obligation exists simply because we have the ability to make such choices, not because any external force orders us to "be good."

9. I believe that people are profoundly diverse in terms of emotionality, cognitive abilities, and cultural experience, and that I have no right to condemn others for believing differently from myself--even so, there are limits to the extent that destructive patterns of behavior can be tolerated, especially if they impinge on the freedom of others.

So, to me, there is no hell and no heaven, and there is no original sin/"fall of man." We are not lost. We do not require salvation. There is no judgement, investigative or otherwise. "Life after death," to the extent that it exists, is through our biological progeny and our legacy of influence.

David Langworthy

Dear Joe Erwin,

As my first post on this site, I add my signature to your statement above. This is how I see it and where evidence has taken me. Well stated, Sir! Best wishes. dl

Ervin Taylor

Joe:

A first class summary. The nine points are well stated and make a lot of sense. Might I just raise a couple of possible provisos dealing with your last paragraph? That there is no original "Fall of Man" or no original sin in the classic sense of the word--that makes sense. I guess it is my agnostic gene kicking in when we talk about no "hell" and "heaven". I agree that the classic ideas about hell and heaven don't seem to work very well. But I'm not sure about enough to be able to be sure about the nature of ultimate reality, i.e., "life after death." If "something" exists "beyond," it certainly would not seem to include carbon based units. I would go with that. However, it seems to me that that is something beyond the human ability to work out with any degree of confidence. We just don't know.

Joe Erwin

David and Erv, thanks for your comments.

I agree with you, Erv, regarding the "not knowing" part. It is important that this list be viewed as a list of personal beliefs, not things I claim to be certain or absolute truth. "So, to me...," believing as I do, I have no confidence that heaven or hell exist, or even that there is any such thing as a "spiritual" dimension. I could be wrong. Many people disagree with me, and many don't.

Even though I think science provides the best methods of discovering and evaluating evidence, it is possible to imagine and believe all sorts of things outside the scope of science. You are correct, I believe, that we do not, and cannot, know for sure. I find that being unable to know for certain
strengthens my belief in alternatives to the unknowable.

Wishing you well....

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Elaine Nelson

The ability to live with ambiguity about those things that we cannot possibly know: what happens after death; a god, or gods; and heaven or hell, is the evidence of a questioning mind; not the fundamentalist. These things cannot be known by objective discovery. They all are in the realm of metaphysical ideas and subject to different interpretations for the many varieties of people who have been taught from birth of ideas that they cherish just as those in a Judeo-Christian culture have very different interpretations of events.

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Bill Cork

If we are going to give lists of what we believe or don't believe, count me as one who is happy to confess, with Catholics, Orthodox Christians, Lutherans, Presbyterians, and many more through the ages:

I believe in God, the Father Almighty,  
   the Maker of heaven and earth,  
   and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord:  
Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost,  
   born of the virgin Mary,  
   suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
   was crucified, dead, and buried;  
He descended into hell.  
The third day He arose again from the dead;  
He ascended into heaven,  
   and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty;  
from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.  
I believe in the Holy Ghost;  
   the holy catholic (universal) church;  
   the communion of saints;  
   the forgiveness of sins;  
   the resurrection of the body;  
   and the life everlasting.

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Kevin Riley

Amen. Just thought it needed that :)

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Ervin Taylor

The Apostles Creed cited above contains 12 very short articles and 111 words. The Adventist "Fundamentals" (I will not call it a Creed to avoid arguments) contains 28 very long articles and
Edwin A. Schwisow

As an adolescent in an Adventist home, I was taught that Adventism as a belief system, culture, and mission was distinctive—unique and one-of-a-kind—and did not obey the sociological rules nor contain the range of thought or practice characteristic of secular or "fallen" church organizations. I heard about the various grades of Catholics, and chalked the diversity up to Catholicism's lengthy sojourn in the land of spiritual Shinar; I noted the varieties of Judaism and identified those variants as weaknesses associated with Judaism's rejection of Christ; I grasped the range of thought within our major political parties and associated the diversity with inconstancies of human beings not unified by a fundamental adherence to unassailable Truth, as I believed it was in Adventism. As a youngster this is the way I saw things. As I read and studied through high school and college, however, I began to notice that ALL organizations follow certain classical patterns of diversity and ritual struggle, including Adventism.

The sooner we recognize how SIMILAR our patterns of sociologically driven interaction are to other groups of like complexity and breadth of thought, the more readily we will be able to identify true aberrations within our community of faith. Today I recognize that it is possible to have a wonderful Christian experience at pretty much all points in the left-to-right range in Adventism—conservative, liberal, and a thousand points of light in-between. The normal, ritual controversies within our organization seem to get out of hand, however, when a person or people determines that theirs is the ideal representation of what it means to be a member of the organization, and seeks to shame, pressure, bribe, cajole, or argue others to join them at that particular locus on the continuum.

As we observe other organizations and note the classic similarities between their interaction and ours, we will begin to accept at least in theory that it's natural to have these kinds of conversations within any vibrant, living organization such as the Adventist Church.

Nathan Schilt

As I get older I am less and less interested in what people claim to believe. How many wars have been waged in the name of love and peace? Liberte, egalite, fraternite! The Goddess of Reason! Workers of the world, unite! How did those beliefs work out? I would rather ask the question: "What is your passion?" Once I see what your passion is and how that impacts the way you live, I will have a much easier time knowing and understanding your beliefs. Professed beliefs are simply the clothes we wear to impress ourselves or a desired audience. They are usually a very poor metric of who we are or how others experience us.

As Ed alludes to, we have morphed as a church - at least in North America and Canada - into something quite different from our professed beliefs and historical subculture. The reality of who we are is so out of phase with the vision and mission proclaimed from headquarters that we are no longer a "body of believers." The landscape of Adventism looks like the land of "Judges" where everyone sees their beliefs and behavior as acceptable, if not normative, for the Church. The tremors we have encountered as a Church are, IMHO, the result of slippage in the alignment of the tectonic plates of Adventism. Whether that's good or bad kind of depends on whether they will continue to shift, where you live, and where you want to be a hundred years from now. The path of liberal Protestantism, which seems to be the route progressives prefer, looks more like a refuge for
endangered species than an entre to vibrant spiritual ecosystems.

Joe Erwin
5 days ago

Your point is well taken, Nathan. I know it was not especially directed at me (it isn't all about me), but I thought perhaps I should mention my passion, which certainly is represented in that list I posted above.

As the son of an elementary school teacher, and a teacher myself (in a one-room SDA school when I was 19), I became fascinated with how people learn. Growing up on a ranch, training dogs and working with my Dad to train horses, my interest in learning, training, and teaching extended beyond humans to all sorts of animals. While I was studying to become a counseling psychologist and psychometrist at University of the Pacific, I discovered comparative and experimental psychology and zoological and psychological studies of animal behavior. After studying a variety of animals from flies and fish and birds to mice and rats, I had an opportunity to study social development of nonhuman primates (while continuing to study normal and abnormal development and learning disabilities in humans). I got stuck on studying human and nonhuman primates, sometimes with direct comparisons. While in graduate school, I found primatology served as a broad interdisciplinary field that touched on anthropology, psychology, genetics, zoology, ecology, health, neurobiology, etc. After several books regarding primates, including a series called *Comparative Primate Biology*, and most recently *Aging in Primates*, I'm thinking (at age 70) of writing an autobiography, probably to be called *A Passion for Primates*. This passion has served me well, taking me to wonderful remote places around the world, and providing a vocation as a zoological curator, field researcher, scientific editor (*National Geographic RESEARCH*, and *American Journal of Primatology*), and interdisciplinary research coordinator (e.g. of the Sulawesi Primate Project, and the Great Ape Aging Project).

Ervin Taylor
5 days ago

Nate suggests that whether one believes that "slippage . . . in the tectonic plates of Adventism" is good or bad depends in part where "you want to be a hundred years from now." Most (all?) of us reading this will be dead a hundred years from now so I'm not quite sure how that variable might work. Perhaps Nate can provide some commentary.

Elaine Nelson
5 days ago

It is fair to say that none of us reading these comments will be around 100 years from now, so is that we should be completely uninterested? How many times have we read that what we do today in the global economic problems that our children and grandchildren will be saddled with the debts we incur today? Is there no concern for the future because we will: all be dead; in hell or heaven, and it really doesn't matter at all?

If that is the case, maybe we should close these blogs, close the church doors, and "eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die." I believe that's in the Bible.
Joe Erwin
It seems to me that life is too short to spend it agonizing over imaginary and unknowable dilemmas. The natural world is wonderfully complex, with plenty of challenges to learn about, experience, and grow into emergent knowledge and understanding. I like the "eat, drink, and be merry" attitude, in moderation, of course. Why not enjoy life and be happy instead of worrying excessively? And, actively addressing problems that one encounters, in constructive ways, itself brings joy and fulfillment. Hard work is even enjoyable (in moderation, of course). But why should we live immersed in an imaginary world when the real world is so interesting?

Nathan Schilt
Of course that's the question, isn't it Joe? Was the world of Christ (The Kingdom) - the world which His followers often fecklessly try to illuminate and inhabit - simply an imaginary world? It is my conviction - and I presume the conviction of virtually all who patronize this website - that the answer to this question is no. The more we look at the real world, whether through the eyes of science, faith, or experience, the more we see evidence of a reality beyond. You too sense that reality beyond, but conclude that religious mythic understandings of that reality can and will, over time, be conquered by expanding human apprehension and analysis, just as they have in the past.

One of the paradoxes you will find in looking at those like me, who seek to be unapologetically and gratefully "immersed in an imaginary world," is that, for all our striving, perfectionism, judgmentalism, and pessimism about human nature, study after study shows us to be the most fulfilled, joyful, healthy, generous, and productive people in the world. And those, like you, who also share those qualities, without need or desire to live in an "imaginary world," are seldom more than one generation removed from those who cherished that "imaginary world" and instilled in you its values.

The "real world" is gambling that those value "genes" can be selectively removed from the "imaginary world," re-engineered, and inserted into "real world" genomes to pave the way for the imagined world of John Lenon. As evidence mounts that this is a really bad gamble, those who are emotionally and economically invested in denying the imaginary world of Christianity keep doubling down. We do indeed, as Erv says, live in interesting times.

Joe Erwin
No, in fact, I do not sense a reality beyond. Quite the contrary. Across the years I have seen less-and-less evidence, and less-and-less need to hypothesize that there is anything "beyond." I have heard the argument that since we do not know about what is beyond, it makes more sense to "believe" than take the chance on burning in hell fire or missing out on heaven. Even when I was a "born again" Christian and true believer adventist, it seemed to me that heaven and hell were very much beside the point. Living a joyful and harmonious life seemed to me to be a sufficient reward in its own right. I'm afraid that "heaven" is for those whose life experiences have been characterized by suffering and deprivation and disappointment. And "hell," I'm confident, is something with which to threaten the children and others who are easily frightened. Perhaps my SDA rearing with the concept of the whole person (no disembodied souls or spirits) has made the notion of a permanent death easier for me to accept. To me, a permanent death is a motivator to make the best possible use of the present life, both to live fully and be constructive. I do not see...
this as a gamble at all.

Nice reference to John Lennon's "Imagine." I am, to some degree, a product of the '40s, '50s, '60s, etc. I was sort of on the edge of hippie-dom, living, as I did then, mostly in northern and central California. As I see it, the mounting evidence is that living in the imaginary world of religion is the tragic waste of time and energy. But, I would not expect those who have made that choice to agree with me or change their minds. As I keep saying, if you can believe, by all means do so; but if one cannot HONESTLY believe, rather than just hedging one's bets, one can make the choice to live a life grounded honestly in tangible empirical evidence, with all the tolerance of ambiguity that requires, rather than to live in a world of rationalization to force evidence into one's artificial cognitive template. I'm sounding intolerant, and I do not wish to be. "Value genes?" In what world does that make any sense at all? I guess I should quit lurking here. It is quite clear that I no longer have any place in or around the church. It would be inconsistent to suggest that others are wasting their time if I participate with them in the process of endless hand-wringing.

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Nathan Schilt

3 days ago

I miscommunicated, Joe, when I said that you too believe in a "reality beyond". What I meant is that you too see and understand the limits in humanity's present ability to apprehend and understand your "real world". You too surely appreciate the paradox that increased learning seems to exponentially expand the scope of human confusion and foolishness. Knowledge and understanding is like a receding, expanding universe that, as we see it more clearly, remains as elusive today in its totality as it was 1,000 years ago. When you see that reality "beyond" you conclude that it simply represents new frontiers in your "real world" that will eventually be settled by future pioneers of the real world, rather than a divine realm that should be posted with artificial religious boundary markers. I, on the other hand see a path with signposts to an eternity that has created me, touched me, and entered my "real world" to guide me to a world beyond.

I accept the negative associations and experiences you have had with SDA Christianity. But I wonder why so many who reject Christianity, like Christopher Hitchens and Richard Dawkins, need to demonize "believers and their beliefs in order to reject Christianity. Ptomaine poisoning doesn't invalidate the reality of what the gourmand experiences. The scientific fraud perpetrated by Phil Jones, Michael Mann, and Co. doesn't lead me to reject the validity of paleoclimatology as a discipline, much less science as an epistemological pathway. Nor does it lead me to reject the notion that CO2 plays a role in climate change.

Many deeply committed Christians agree with you about the nefarious use of Heaven and Hell in Christian teaching. Many, if not most, Christians also share much in common with you about what is good, true, and beautiful. Why judge them by the fringes of the garments they wear? Wouldn't it make more sense to attack Christ Himself? If only you could invalidate that part of the "real world," then it might be easier to reject the world beyond, without which the reality of His life and death would be incomprehensible.

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cb25

3 days ago

Nathan,

Not commenting for Joe, (I appreciate much of what he writes).
But imho you have hit a significant nail "almost" on the head. I have been thinking its about time for a blog on blending the two "extremes" that emerge here. (extreme depends from where one is "looking")

C.S Lewis:

“If ever a myth had become a fact, had been incarnated, it would be just like this. And nothing else in all literature was just like this. Myths were like it in one way. Histories were like it in another. But nothing was simply like it . . . Here and here only in all time the myth must have become fact; the Word, flesh; God, man. This is not “a religion,” nor “a philosophy.” It is the summing up and actuality of them all."

You say: "The more we look at the real world, whether through the eyes of science, faith, or experience, the more we see evidence of a reality beyond."

As I have noted before, an apologetic for faith should be based on what "is", not on what "we don't know" (God of gaps). It is my conviction that the things we see through those things you speak of are part of "what is". Rather than being "conquered, they will in fact become more confirmed.

Why do I argue so strongly against the YEC, absolute authority of Bible etc? Because the very things noted which point to evidence of a reality beyond also highlight other things within reality that don't measure up with the Bible's more concrete assertions about this reality in which we live. eg old earth vs young earth; special creation vs process creation, and the like.

I still think we need an apologetic which can hold "all" these realities together.

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Joe: Thank you for being so candid with your nine points. It intrigues me that you want to spend time on a site that is the very opposite of your fundamental beliefs. However, I wish to comment on your point: "I believe the earth is very old (over a billion years old), and that the universe may have had no beginning and might have no end;"

That is a faith statement. When I say I believe there is a God that is also a faith statement. You cannot prove there is no God. I cannot prove there is a God. Despite the criticisms of Pascal's Wager (see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pascal%27s_Wager) I still believe it makes more sense to believe there is a God and something beyond than not to believe. As Pascal eloquently says those who bet that there is no God will feel very differently if they find there is a God at the end of time. Whereas if there is no God none of us will ever know.

So the big question is still there: How do we decide what faith statements to make since you and I both live by faith when it comes to ultimate reality?

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Elaine Nelson

Reply
Pascal's Wager has been used often but it still makes little difference to many. If there is a god, why should that bother those of us who never believed it? Surprises are abundant in our lives today. OTOH, if there is no god, no problem at all. Either way, no loss either way. If, as some religionists claim, that those who do not believe in a god will be lost anyway, we have lost nothing; and if there is a god and he damned us to hell for not believing, who would want to live with such an ogre?

cb25

3 days ago

Joe,

I for one think you do have a place here...you make many excellent points. Seems to me, among other things, what you say has value in "shocking" some here into awareness that many issues are not easily poked into boxes and labeled "done". Whatever ones perspective there are many loose ends.

Hang around! Hey, I'm not quite where you are, but most would assume I have no place here either!

Cheers

J. David Newman

3 days ago

Joe and cb25, yes please continue to contribute. You really help me to think through again what and why I believe. What fascinates me is that ultimately whether it is Joe or Chris or Elaine or Ron or David we all live by faith when it comes to ultimate realities. The question is simply which faith is most reasonable. When I compare my faith with the faith of the atheist I believe that it takes more faith to believe that life and thinking beings could come from non life and non thinking than to believe that a thinking being originated all of this.

David Langworthy

3 days ago

J. David,

"we all live by faith when it comes to ultimate realities....."

Dealing with ultimate realities is an abstraction. Lets deal with the reality of hear and now. Say you have a suspicious color on your skin and your Dr takes a biopsy. Do you want a Pathologist to look a the biopsy and give a diagnosis by faith, or by his having seen 1000 cases of malignant melanoma and 10000 benign biopsies? Say its cancer. Do you want your surgeon doing a wide excision and regional lymph node excision by faith, or by the best scientific practice model? Say you need chemotherapy and your Oncologist orders chemotherapy. Do you want the nurse to read the order and select the drug by faith, or by rigorous training and standards of care? Say the Nurse needs to start an IV and a bottle of IV fluid in order to give the drug. Should she pick the IV fluid by faith, or should she get the bottle produced by a manufacturer who is held to strict standards of sterility and electrolyte content? Say the hospital room you are in has been cleaned by a house keeping employee who is happy to have their first job. Should they clean your bed and care area by faith, or by strict training through a century of knowledge from lives lost through improper disinfection technique?
We can have 'faith' in the 'ultimate reality' of our choosing. But in this reality science is where the rubber meets the road. This is the reality in which I live.
Respectfully, dl

Elaine Nelson

David L. I completely agree. "Ultimate realities" cannot be abstractions. It is here and now where the rubber meets the road not some unknown world which we have created for ourselves far removed from daily life.

Faith takes us only so far, and in most of life situations as you accurately described (having a pathologist roommate for 60 years, it's all too familiar), faith cannot be used but only the best education, training and experience is sought. Why, in other areas where the same best scientists who are experts in their fields, are ridiculed by those who are very poorly informed and claim to have much better information--straight from the Bible--plus their own interpretation.

If you build a house, do you consult the Bible or a licensed architect and contractor? But if a fundamentalist Christian wishes to know about earth sciences and origins, he consults a book written more than 2000 years ago. Why not return to Hippocrates or Galen, physicians far ahead of their times when the Bible was written, for the best medical advice?

Elaine Nelson

Perhaps believing in a god is not too difficult. It is in claiming how he acts, what he does, what his actions are, or are not, whether he causes events or whether he has "hands off," and more.

This is why George Bernard Shaw said that "God created man and man has ever since returned the favor." Haven't men always created their own gods? All religions claim many things for their gods. Doesn't one's birth have far more effect on determining which god he worships and which religion he has rather than anything else? How much is really our free choice?

David Read

It is premature to compare conservative Adventists to SSPX Catholics, but sometimes, especially after reading too much Spectrum, it can seem like that's where we are headed.

cb25

David Newman,

Thanks for the comment re helping one another to think things through.
:) In my typical fashion I am going to draw attention to a point you made, because, perhaps in your typical fashion, you have bounced off an extreme position to compare yours.

Here's your point: "The question is simply which faith is most reasonable. When I compare my faith with the faith of the atheist I believe that it takes more faith to believe that life and thinking beings could come from non life and non thinking than to believe that a thinking being originated all of this."

When faith is viewed from a Christian perspective, by a Christian, and compared to atheism - of course it is going to look more reasonable.

But, what about we compare a YEC or YLC faith with Theistic evolution? Which faith then looks more reasonable?

ahh...that takes us straight back where we have been bouncing for a while:) I like your use of the word "reasonable". It suggests a faith that reasons through and has basis for its belief. This is slightly tongue in cheek, but do you see my point? Despite all that has been said on various threads, I still don't think YEC and YLC are reasonable faiths because they cannot do justice to a reasonable examination of the data available about our world. (yes David, yourself, Horace, and Trevor to mention a few will disagree:)

Of course, I won't ask you to explain where your thinking Creator came from to create the thinking, (lesser) beings. In reality, there is less faith needed to believe a thinking human could arise from chance than that an Omnipotent God could do so. (saying he has always been is equally a statement of faith)

Cheers

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cb25

Just something to think about following on in part from my last comment. Read it carefully.

If we state that beauty, design and thinking beings (us) cannot become what we are through evolutionary processes, we have no justification, beyond or apart from a statement of faith, to claim God just is, or that he has always been because we make a statement of equal force about the impossibility of God coming to be.

If we state that beauty, design and thinking beings (us) can become what we are through an evolutionary process, we make a statement of equal force that God also could have come to be.

In other words:

Evolution opens the door to the possibility of the coming to be of God, denial of evolution leaves one claiming for God what is denied for ourselves.

Note. I have not made any comment about the origin of life or the source of all matter. That is the next step back, but similar arguments would carry.
J. David Newman
3 days ago

David
You are quite right with your examples. However that is not what I was talking about. Is there a God or is there not? That is not abstract reality. Either position takes faith. One prominent atheist, Anthony Flew, after writing books arguing against there was a God finally changed his mind and came to believe in a God. Now he made clear that this was not the Christian God but he was willing to change his mind because he came to realise that it did not make sense that nothing could produce something. That something had to produce something and he was convinced by the more recent argument from design that there had to be something there and he agreed that it was an intelligent being.

cb25

You don't believe YEC has any validity. Let me stay for the moment on the faith statements that evolutionists have to make which I stated on another blog.

1. When it comes to dating methods it is a faith statement that says that the original material was pure without contamination.
2. It is a faith statement that the rate of decay has never changed.
3. It is a faith statement that the Big Bang could occur
4. It is a faith statement that the chaos from the big bang could produce order
5. It is a faith statement that non life can produce life.

I could go on but these five make my point. That is part of the reason I believe that it takes more faith to believe in the five examples than to believe God created the universe and the earth.

David Langworthy
3 days ago

J. David,
Have a nice day. dl

Elaine Nelson
3 days ago

Faith cannot be based on objective evidence despite all the arguments presented. When one person presents logic and the other brings in faith, all reason flies out the window.

To believe in God takes faith. There is no faith involved if one neither disbelieves in God or honestly says he does not know. One cannot prove or disprove a negative. The burden is on one who says there is a god.

Is it not possible to believe in beauty, as cb25 states, without believing in a god, particularly one that has been both limited and defined by humans? All religions have created their own gods, and usually in their own image. Strange, when no one has seen God. Whose description is the "true" one? The one described in much of the OT as a vengeful, murderous god? The one described by the pagans (all who were not in my religious group) who demanded child sacrifices? Whose god is the one and only god?
Nathan Schilt

Elaine, you say faith cannot be based on objective evidence. Surely you don't mean that. Is there no objective evidence underlying the faith statements regarding catastrophic global warming and the measures that should be taken to avert it? Was there no objective evidence underlying 16th Century faith in the Ptolemaic system? You say, "When one person presents logic and the other brings in faith, all reason flies out the window." Can you not see how dogmatic statements like this are self-discrediting? I could as easily - and truthfully - say the following: When one person presents experience, and the other brings in logic, all reason flies out the window. (Think of Churchill, Solzhenitsyn, Sharansky, and Whittaker Chambers, and their battles with logical totalitarian ideologies. Or think of people starving in Third World countries in the context of logical biofuel arguments.) But it would be a silly statement, because most important questions about which people differ mix and blend faith, logic, science, and reason. And saying something is logical doesn't make it so.

When you recognize that really intelligent Bible thumping fundamentalists agree with you and Mr. Langworthy about empirical science and its practical application, and yet strongly disagree with your conclusions about evolution, maybe you should consider that simplistic analogies aren't really helpful or dispositive; that maybe the disagreement is over who gets to define science and guard its realm.

The story of Galileo, on a deeper level than partisan scientologists wish to admit, was not simply a dispute between faith and science. The Church neither invented nor perfected the Ptolemaic system. Galileo had a telescope that was technologically more advanced than other instruments of his time, and thus he was able to make observations about Venus that no one else up to that time had seen. Those observations, which empirically confirmed the need for a paradigm shift, were initially questioned by other astronomers of the time. But when the "advanced" lenses that helped Galileo to peer more accurately into deep space became widely available, both the Church and its scientists accepted the new paradigm. Acceptance might have come more quickly if Galileo had not gratuitously insulted the Pope by in essence calling him a simpleton. But in the end it was empirical observations made possible by technology - not pure reason, science, or logic - that paved the way for heliocentrism. And it was lack of technology, not blind religious faith that had stood in the way for centuries.

The differences between Creationists and evolutionists are usually not about the existence of deep time or the usefulness of the instruments through which deep time is surveyed. Rather, the difference is over whether scientific technology mandates the inferences and conclusions that its consumers wish to draw from what the instruments can detect and measure. And those inferences, I submit, depend very much on a priori conceptions of sentient beings that have roots outside of science and logic. Where true science has made Biblical understandings of the universe untenable, most intelligent people of faith have readily embraced science without rejecting faith.

I may sound like a literal creationist. But I am not. I think the weight of evidence preponderates in favor of life processes that go back millions of years. Nevertheless, I think it is important to frame Creationist objections and arguments as respectable proponents of those positions would articulate them rather than caricatures of blind obscurantists who might as well believe in a flat earth and bloodletting.
"faith statements regarding global warming" are unnecessary when there is abundant objective evidence already. Why is faith in this picture? Who believes it on faith? When an overwhelming group of scientists confirm the evidence, faith plays no part in those assessments.

Equating personal experience to logic? "Personal" means that is something only experienced by the individual and cannot be translated as meaningful to anyone else. Personally, I do not like modern rock music. This decision was not made logically as it cannot be accepted universally.

If someone is still waiting for Creationist objections and arguments to be considered respectable he will need to come up with far better propositions than have as yet been presented. Feel free to present them, but be prepared to have them discredited if they lack objective substantiation.

About Galileo, the Bible was the source for the church's position on the sun. Galileo challenged it by his discoveries. Any church is most reluctant to change a long held position, Adventism included.

Nathan, I do recognize fundamentalists accept many conclusions of empirical science and are very happy to enjoy the modern world created by its practical application. The problem for them is when this same method of understanding the world produces results that conflict with beliefs which are not approachable or alterable. It's at this point when believers, many who are way more intelligent than I, form a kind of partition or semipermeable membrane in their mind which will only allow non-threatening scientific information to be accepted.

The point I was trying to make, but drove into the ground on turbo power, was only toward the idea of faith being behind all points of view or schools of philosophy. Mr Newman said, "...we all live by faith when it comes to ultimate realities. The question is simply which faith is most reasonable." My education is in methodologic materialism, the natural sciences and medicine. I make no dogmatic assertion of knowledge beyond nature as we find it.

I do not wish to be inflammatory or argumentative even though this is how my post above seemed. Apologies. I appreciate the discussion. Thanks for talking. Its helping me get some dusty shelves in my head cleaned out.

The "faith statements" you give above. As I noted elsewhere, are mixing two questions. *Origin* of all (3, 4, & 5) and *evolution* (1 & 2) of what is.

I'm not a scientist, but (even?) I know there are over a dozen dating methods, many of which don't rely on your "strawman", so even if your statement were true of that one point, it is not the full
story. Those dating methods confirm and self correct one another. Using the dating argument is on 
the level of using the flat earth argument imho.

Your point 2 is wrong. In the face of all the sunrises and sunsets in recorded history (illustration of 
all the data about how our world runs etc etc) it is a faith statement to say decay rates have 
changed.

You are being frustrating.

As a reader on this side of a discussion with you, it seems to me you pick and choose, you avoid 
questions, answer parts of questions, or take points only for the value they offer to your point of 
view. I have had the same feeling from both you, Herb and a couple of others.

Am I missing something. It is the kind of dialogue I would expect if someone is entrenched in a 
position, has too much to lose to answer, cannot answer, knows that an answer would be 
incriminating to their position, or just does not get it... Yes, Ed, I'm being blunt, but I hope 
respectful enough. We need to be more upfront and honest with one another. That also is a level of 
respect.

cb25

J. David Newman

cb 25

the feeling is mutual. you also pick and choose. OK let's leave out 1 and 2. You never answered 
the other ones. Do you agree that 3, 4, 5, are faith statements? I am trying to find some common 
ground when it comes to faith. At the moment it seems to me that you believe that everything has 
a scientific explanation and no faith is needed anywhere when contemplating origins. Am I reading 
you right?

cb25

David Newman,

Do I believe 3-5 are faith statements? Yes.

However, they are mute points because one could insert "not" in each of them and they would be 
no more or less defendable.

eg: "3. It is a faith statement that the Big Bang could not occur"

I did not comment because my "If" points earlier went to their point in the note at the bottom: 
"Note. I have not made any comment about the origin of life or the source of all matter. That is 
the next step back, but similar arguments would carry."
Do I believe that everything has a scientific explanation and no faith is needed anywhere when contemplating origins. NO.

Agnosticism, Atheism, Theism, ALL (imho) take their position regarding ultimate origins by faith.

This is where I cannot stress a point enough. **Origins and Evolution are not the same.**

Discussing YEC and YLC are discussions about Evolution - Not Origins.

If we keep on mixing these two up we will get nowhere.

You are trying to find some common ground when it comes to faith. Great, but let's leave the "faith" component the only place it is required: Origins. Unless one wants to **deny the evidence** for an old earth and old life there is not much faith needed as to how our world and life came to be what it is. **The data is everywhere.**

I suspect that was the point Darrel was making too. This very real world is the reality we live in and it can answer pretty much every question we have about the **how** - evolution. Don't confuse that with the **where** from - origins question.

cb25 2 days ago  Reply

David Newman,

Just got back from Church. The sermon was about Science, creation and spontaneous generation of life!

Now, can you clarify for me first please: "...origins have already taken place". What origins are you speaking of in that point?

cb25 2 days ago  Reply

David Newman,

Just posted a quick question to clarify before I comment...it entered up a few posts...don't know why...sorry.

cb25 2 days ago  Reply

OK....that one did the same.

I am heading out to a social shortly, so I WILL respond to your one point when I get back.

Chris
Elaine Nelson

Judging by the conversations here, there would seem to be a monumental task for a fundamental Adventist to ever convert anyone who has studied philosophy, and is an expert in any of the sciences. Sadly, the only Adventists engaged in such conversations are not educationally qualified in the subject to be taken seriously; and the SDA scientists who are, certainly wish to have no part with it for endangering their membership. The situation at LSU hangs heavy on all those professions.

Joe Erwin

Thanks to those who suggested that I stick around. I'm not quite sure why I do hang around where I am mostly not wanted, but I'm pretty sure it is because I used to be an adventist, and I ceased to be one--largely because I no longer found the system of beliefs made sense in the context of scientific evidence and direct observation. Just as some nonbelievers, even scientists (occasionally), change their minds, so do people who have been adventists or other Christians, change their minds about what they believe--and the latter happens pretty often.

It is too easy and too facile to equate beliefs based on tangible, replicable, empirical evidence (within convincing levels of confidence) with belief because someone or something told you something, e.g., Biblical authority (or any other authority). I don't believe everything I read, in the newspaper or even in scientific journals. In the latter, the conclusions are not always supported by the evidence presented. The details of what happened yesterday or last year or 50 years ago or 2000 years ago or 6000 or 6 million or a billion years ago are difficult to know--more difficult the longer the time span. I do not claim any expertise in cosmology. My scientific expertise is mostly regarding human and nonhuman primates, mostly the behavior and ecology of extant species, but with some understanding of genomics, physiology, health, reproductive biology, etc. Much of this makes sense in terms of tangible evidence from paleobiology. My guess is that we already have greater precision regarding biological relationships from comparative primate genomics than from the fossil record. Each is a window on what actually happened, and the best picture will be one that includes both sets of evidence. Will it include YEC? No, it will not, because the evidence already excludes that hypothesis. As hard as one may try, one cannot find a reasonable way of accommodating YEC.

Does that falsify the existence of God or gods? Not at all. But I agree with Elaine that the burden of proof is on those who claim the existence of a creator/designer. It is probably more sensational to promote atheism or "secular humanism" than to just say "no one knows."

There is simply no question at all that biological change occurs over time, both ontogenically and phylogenetically. That is not a statement of faith. It is a statement of probability and confidence based on an enormous amount of evidence.

I cannot let anyone get off with claiming that "faith" is equivalent for statements based on one book, no matter how remarkable it might be, with statements based based on emerging scientific evidence that is empirically tested and refined. If you believe these are equivalent you can believe anything. Usually, I would state this as follows: "If you can believe that, I'd like to show you some nice property in Florida." That isn't as funny as it used to be....

Anyway, no harm to anyone's faith is intended here. I imagine I would still be SDA if I could believe the 28 principles, or if some of the principles were changed to accommodate evidence. But,
I think we all know that is not going to happen. Live and be well.

David

2 days ago

A significant number of converts to Christianity or Adventism is more by dedicated lives to the lord full kind actions and words than colds doctrines. Also the there is a great number of people that left the church not because of doctrines but because they were treated very poor by their “brothers’

Elaine Nelson

2 days ago

Is there someone here who has an answer for origins that can provide objective evidence?

John Mark

2 days ago

Of course not. For one thing it is pretentious to claim possession of pure objective knowledge. Objective knowledge exists, but we only come into possession of it by our senses, the senses of a human subject, so if we possess it there's always an element of subjectivity. Secondly God does not make himself an object for our scientific observations, so true theology will not be objective. God is absolute unchanging truth, but He is only experienced by the human subjects in a dynamic relationship.

J. David Newman

2 days ago

cb25

I hope you are not getting too tired of me. It takes too long to write things out. If we could talk face to face we could clear up a lot of things in five minutes. You write: "This is where I cannot stress a point enough. Origins and Evolution are not the same. Discussing YEC and YLC are discussions about Evolution - Not Origins. If we keep on mixing these two up we will get nowhere. You are trying to find some common ground when it comes to faith. Great, but let's leave the "faith" component the only place it is required: Origins."

This is where you confuse me. I wrote "5. It is a faith statement that non life can produce life." This is not about origins this is about evolution. Origins has already taken place. So I don't understand what I am mixing up. I am learning that we should discuss only one point at a time so I or you cannot be accused of avoiding the other points. So let's stick with this one. It is a faith statement and it is about evolution if I am reading you right. Yet it is a foundational point in evolution. It seems to me that it is just as reasonable, since there is no scientific evidence, to say that life did not come from non life therefore there is a big doubt for the validity of evolution. Now don't bring in all the other so called evidence. Let's stick with this one point.

Can we agree that this is vital to evolution? And if we do agree then a very foundational plank in the whole evolution argument is based on a faith statement.

cb25

2 days ago

David Newman,
By default a question went up a few...this may too:(

I am heading off to a social, but can you clarify my question above re "origins have already taken place". I need to get what you are saying clearer...)

cb

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Nathan Schilt  
2 days ago  Reply

Elaine - your assertion that the Bible was the primary reason for the geocentric view of the universe in the 16th Century simply doesn't square with history. Was Ptolemy a Christian? Don't think so. Were there any civilizations or peoples that did not believe in a geocentric universe before the 16th Century? It was experience, logic, and reason - not the church - that caused geocentrism to reign supreme in human history for thousands of years before Galileo. And it was the Church's nurturing of curiosity and understanding about the natural world that gave rise to great minds like Copernicus, Kepler, Brahe, and Galileo.

Yes, the Bible confirmed a geocentric understanding of the universe. But other implicit Biblical understandings of the natural world, such as its shape - flat - had been rejected by theologians and philosophers long before the voyages of discovery provided irrefutable evidence that earth was globe-shaped. Most Christians readily accept the information of their own senses and experience, as well as empirical science. But they are often resistant to allowing unverifiable scientististic theories to trump Biblical teachings about the nature of God and man that are confirmed by human experience and reason. It is in this crease of soft science and application of theory where the conflicts between faith and science are most visible.

Your assertion that large doses of faith do not underlie many of the claims that are made in the name of climate science merely confirms the religious nature of your faith in scientific imperialism. I will give you the benefit of the doubt and assume that you know little to nothing about climate science other than the scientific "consensus" reported by Al Gore and the MSM. Even a mini lecture on the historical, actual and projected impacts of CO2 is too much for this forum. But I'd recommend that you become knowledgeable about the science before you go out on a limb and pronounce global warming science to be a faith free zone.

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cb25  
2 days ago  Reply

imho Man made global warming (apart from deforestation) is one of the biggest, collective hoaxes ever foisted on the unthinking public. However, perhaps Elaine is right...there is not much "faith" in that domain, rather people take as fact what is dished up as evidence by the IPCC and other peer reviewed (don't rock our boat) material.

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Elaine Nelson  
2 days ago  Reply

Nathan, I agree, it was already known by much earlier discoverers. But the Church, just as today, was far behind the times and the church had the power to force Galileo to retract, and that was based, as he wrote in his famous letter to the Duchess, that his findings invalidated the BIBLE INTERPRETATION of the sun standing still as written in Joshua.
When has the church ever accepted new scientific discoveries? How far behind the scientific curve is the SDA church today? This is not news, it is the church as the last "kid on the block" to recognize progress.

Your presumption about my understanding of climate change is baseless. In the latest The Week magazine, and in other news reports, Richard Muller, physicist at UC Berkley, a noted skeptic of global warming, previously questioned studies by NASA, NOAA, the the U.K.'s Climatic Research Unit showing the earth heating at a rapid rate, has now confirmed that the earths' land temperature is rising. Muller and his colleagues did their own analysis, using five times the amount of temperature data of previous studies and creating new statistical models to analyze them. Their finding? "GLOBAL WAMRING IS REAL," Muller writes in the Wall Street Journal. He and his team found that land temperatures have risen by 1.8 degrees Fahrenheit since the 1950s--the same conclusion the groups they criticized had reached. They made no statements about whether the warming is due to humans.

J. David Newman
2 days ago

cb25
Yes, I will clarify. Faith is needed both for origins, how the universe began, and faith is also needed for how evolution took place. That is why I posted life coming from non life. That is a faith position. There is no scientific explanation that I am aware of that explains how non life can produce life.

cb25
2 days ago

Hi David N,

OK. I agree on two things:

Faith is needed about how the universe began.
Faith is needed about how life began.

Where we differ is AFTER Life began. What I am saying is that Evolution does not deal with these first two points. Evolution focuses on how life evolves and changes.

It is here I strongly disagree, faith is NOT needed for how evolution took place. This is what I meant above. (some words added to highlight and clarify)

"Unless one wants to deny the evidence for an old earth and old life there is not much faith needed as to how our world and life (which had already begun) came to be what it is. The data is everywhere".

These are the two things I see being mixed up. Origins of universe and life, vs evolution as the study and theory of how that life developed. Denial of the vast data for evolution is what takes faith!
cb25

Now, having stated that let me pick up your point earlier:

"So let's stick with this one. ... since there is no scientific evidence, to say that life did not come from non life therefore there is a big doubt for the validity of evolution...."

This is where you are mixing the two: Life from non life is NOT the focus of evolution, so presence or absence of scientific evidence on THAT point does NOT invalidate evolution.

You ask:

"Can we agree that this is vital to evolution?" The answer: NO. It is not vital to evolution. It is not the focus of evolution nor what evolution sets out to explain.

Thus when you say. "And if we do agree then a very foundational plank in the whole evolution argument is based on a faith statement."

Now do you see where I am coming from? Your foundational plank is taken from the question of How life began and applied to how life developed. This confuses and does not make sense, nor is it a correct way to invalidate evolution.

cb25

its now 11.00 pm. I'll pop back in the morning...:)

J. David Newman

cb25

Excellent, we are making some progress. There are some things we can agree on. However, and there is always a however or a but. You are making your own definition of evolution. Words, of course, only mean what we want them to mean. Most scientists would disagree with you that evolution only takes place after life begins. How many billions of years of evolution did this universe go through with the evolving of the "primal soup" before the right combination of chemicals took place for life to take place?

So, it seems, that we have an issue with definitions. Secondly, we have the faith aspect that the laws, the constants with which we examine the universe have never changed. This is a faith statement although you seem to disagree. Scientists are now discovering that we can challenge this assumption. Yesterday I listened to Science Friday which appears on WAMU radio every Friday. It is hosted by Ira Flato. His guest was Michael Murphey (an Australian scientist) who has just published an article in Physical Review Letters that indicates that they have found a difference in alpha which measures electro magnetism in the universe is different in one part of the universe than in another part. Therefore it is not constant as previously believed. They are publishing for other scientists to check their data. But here is what he then said. "If we are proved right and so far we cannot find any other explanation it will throw the whole basis of physics into turmoil. It will mean that there is another more basic set of fundamental laws that we have not yet discovered."

This to me is very interesting because one of my differences with you and other evolutionists is the...
firmly held belief that the present is the key to the past, that the laws we have now are sufficient to explain the past. Now there is an indication that things may not be as we have assumed.

J. David Newman

It's Sabbath morning and I am off to preach at our two services and I have an evening appointment too so it maybe some time before I get back. Here is a little more detail on the scientist I mentioned previously.

Michael Murphy
QEII Research Fellow
Centre for Astrophysics & Supercomputing
Swinburne University of Technology

Here is the link for the podcast on whether there have been changes in the constants.
http://hw.libsyn.com/p/d/7/2/d72455649c433903/scifri20111104-hr1.mp3?sid=9b61a7d711c359ef0de028de2009d2aa&l_sid=18801&l_eid=&l_mid=2776066

Elaine Nelson

You fellows are having an interesting conversation, but one tidbit was noticed: one research fellow and team have found a difference in alpha which measures electromagnetism in the universe is different in one part of the universe than in another part. Then the instant conclusion: **Therefore it is not constant as previously believed** indicates that when someone is seeking affirmation for a strong belief, it can always be found. One study, one paper cannot be assumed the final statement.

J. David Newman

Elaine, you are right. It will be of great interest to see what the future brings. And if Chris and I agreed on everything one of us would not be necessary.

cb25

David Newman,

Others better qualified should feel free to comment on our too and fro on this one:

You say scientists would disagree with my definition of evolution. Here's what talkorigins points out:

“Give biologists a cell, and they’ll give you the world. But beyond assuming the first cell must have somehow come into existence, how do biologists explain its emergence from the prebiotic world four billion years ago?” …Indeed, it is one thing that we know all the chemical building materials of life, and that the functioning of life can be fully explained by their collaboration in an extremely complex system. Yet it is another thing entirely how, at the origin of life, they could have formed an initial organization by themselves step by step…
I may be a bit arbitrary, but I am making a distinction between pre and postbiotic. You are saying there is an absence of scientific evidence about this step. Fine.

I am saying don't use that "absence" of evidence as an argument against the theory of evolution of postbiotic life to what it is now. That is what confuses things. If there is absence of scientific evidence on how life came from non life...so be it. That says nothing about the presence or absence of evidence about life evolving after it had begun!

You say stick to one topic. Great, but you now bounce of and bring back in "constance". You also fail to address the veracity of my key point. Instead you seem to ignore it by pointing out I am wrong in my definitions.

Here's a copy of what I pointed out earlier about life from non life being a faith statement. You then suggested that if we agree it is a faith statement it casts doubt on evolution:

You:..."And if we do agree then a very foundational plank in the whole evolution argument is based on a faith statement."

Me: Now do you see where I am coming from? Your foundational plank is taken from the question of How life began and applied to how life developed. This confuses and does not make sense, nor is it a correct way to invalidate evolution.

Yes, I should have qualified the last bit as postbiotic evolution.

Bottom line: There are so many converging and correlating lines of evidence that postbiotic life has evolved that very little faith is needed to accept the validity of the theory.

On the other hand: It takes incredible faith to deny these lines of evidence and believe that life was spoken into existence in one week 6k years ago.

J. David Newman

cb25

Very good. I am willing to look at postbiotic evolution. But before I do just consider the implications of what you have agreed when you wrute I" may be a bit arbitrary, but I am making a distinction between pre and postbiotic. You are saying there is an absence of scientific evidence about this step. Fine."

What is happening here is you are using a very old argument. Because life is here it must have come from prebiotic life. When we leave God out of the picture that is the only conclusion we can come to. It is no different that by faith we say there is a God because we are here than by saying by faith we are here because of some prebiotic process (that we have absolutely no idea of how it came about). If I was discussing this with an atheist that is the only way he can explain it. And so far in our discussion God does not enter the picture. You have made it clear that you believe in God. So before we enter the very interesting world of biological evolution it would be helpful to me for you to share where God is in the picture. Is He only at the beginning? Is he involved at certain stages? This is important for me to know because if evolution which the atheist states starts with the big bang is being described in atheist terms this will change how I approach this subject.

Is there a difference between how a Christian approaches this topic and how an atheist approaches
Oh dear...I am using pre and post biotic to try to define things more about your life from non life problem! I don't really care nor think it matters how old or new the term is. If my Greek serves me correctly does not bios mean "life"? Pre life and post life. I'm trying to describe your life from non life point in time.

Remember your point 5?

"5. It is a faith statement that non life can produce life"

I am saying YES I AGREE. I am then saying DO NOT confuse this with, or present it AS being an evidence against a process of evolution AFTER life has begun.

We are sticking to one point. THAT faith statement cannot be used as evidence against "biological" evolution. Evolution of life after it had somehow begun!

How did it begin? I am not getting pulled into that (again) at this point. You and I have both assumed it (life) began. We have agreed that a faith statement is perhaps required about that. Period at this point.

It is not necessary to have a "conclusion" about how it began, to have an informed, a posteriori discussion as to whether the the data available fits the theory of evolution. In fact, it is probably better not to have an assumption about the how life began or what role if any God played etc. When we study the data it should begin giving us hints as to possible answers for all those kind of questions. But to insist we have to have that conclusion before progressing is asking for "proof" of the more difficult thing to "prove", before studying the easier thing to "prove".

Again, you have run after some loose ends in my points and failed to address the arguments I have made.
Since he was an atheist and only naturalist philosophy could guide him he still had some questions about the process. So as we begin this section of our discussion. I repeat my question is everything so clear cut that no assumptions, faith statements, are needed? Are we able to explain how some parts of the body or life needed to be fully formed before they could function, the irreducible complexity issue?

But my key question stands so I don't get blindsided. Yes, or No, we need or do not need to make any assumptions here.

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cb25 1 day ago  Reply

David Newman,

Can I draw your attention to something I said earlier:

"Bottom line: There are so many converging and correlating lines of evidence that postbiotic life has evolved that very little faith is needed to accept the validity of the theory."

Now if I may draw your attention to a point you made:

"since there is no scientific evidence, to say that life did not come from non life therefore there is a big doubt for the validity of evolution."

As noted: I am saying this statement is not true of biological evolution that brings life to what it is today.

My "bottom line" point above addresses your questions. Let me take them point by point:

* Do we need any faith statements? Yes, but they are rendered **insignificant** by all the correlating and confirming lines of evidence as opposed to your "no scientific evidence re life from non life. Kill the straw man."

* Can I show scientifically all mechanisms. (If I were a scientist probably yes). For me? No, but again, **nor should I have to demonstrate a posteriori the validy of one theory over another!** It is not which theory is "perfect" ie no "faith" statements. It is which one is most coherent, logical, and takes best account of the available evidence. Please kill the straw man.

* Are there any assumptions etc needed? Yes. Point above addreses this.

* Are we able to explain irreducible complexity issue? Yes. flagellum, bombardier beetles, human eye etc etc - all can be convincingly demonstrated to be able to form incrementally. Another straw man:)

* Your key question: Do we need to make assumptions? YES. Does the theory still stand up to a posteriori examination? Absolutely.

As noted, the correlating, confirming, and converging lines of evidence leave virtually no other explanation possible.

Certainly, if you take the opposing theory of YEC or YLC and examine it a posteriori with the
same data, you not only need faith statements - you need blind faith. Denial of what we see, what our world is like, what virtually every possible nook and cranny of this planet declare: The world is OLD, Life is OLD.

Of course that takes us back to the old issue of bible authority because the only way the latter theories can stand up is a "God says" - forget the evidence.

"Bottom line: There are so many converging and correlating lines of evidence that life has evolved that very little faith is needed to accept the validity of the theory."

J. David Newman

cb25
You write
Bottom line: There are so many converging and correlating lines of evidence that life has evolved that very little faith is needed to accept the validity of the theory."

That is a very bold statement. And since you believe that the rest of our discussion will probably not be very helpful. Your frame of reference will filter out any evidence I give you to the contrary and my frame of reference will filter out any evidence you present to me. However, lets take a stab at it and see where you get to. Like you I am not an expert in biological evolution. It might be helpful to start by you listing "many converging and correlating lines of evidence." Then I will know where to respond.

J. David Newman

cb25
One more point as we get into this discussion. Definitions are vital. When you state that life has evolved I imagine that you are saying that happened on both the macro and micro level. Don't get into the micro level because I will agree with you. It is the macro level that is the challenge. And my understanding of what macro level means is the change from one family to another, for example dogs becoming cats, or elephants becoming giraffes. I am not talking about change within families, but clear cut transitions. I cannot assume that I understand your meaning for certain words and you cannot assume that you know what I mean by certain words. After all words are only symbols for our thoughts.

Elaine Nelson

Just finished reading on both micro and macroevolution in TalkOrigins. My limited understanding gathered from that is that the ancestors of the horse we know today was once the size of a dog and over the years and environment, gradually developed into the large one we know today--the same biological family, but far different than its ancestors.

Another analogy: if one believes he can fly from L.A. to Paris, but doesn't believe he can fry from San Francisco to L.A. shows how illogical such a position is. How can one accept microevolution and reject macroevolution when the same forces are taking place, the only difference is scale, and time: microevolution can be observed rather quickly; macro, by the very name is based on a much
longer time frame, but the process is the same.

cb25
David N and Elaine,

Elaine: Well said.

David. You and I could list things back and forth till the proverbial "cows come home". I'm really sorry to have dragged you through discussion to this point only to say. There is no point.

Remember the discussion we had about the "perfect" world of Eden, sharks, lions, food chain, summer, winter, migration, the bombadeir beetle - perfectly designed bomb maker in a lovely garden! etc. NOT one of these things fit in the garden. Someone suggested God "front loaded" creation with these things! Seriously?

Those points were never answered.

NO. You and I could go on till the cows are dead:) So...here's my challenge

You and I are on a lay level. Have you read the talkorigins site from end to end? I have almost in its entirety. Also AIG and many many others.

I challenge you to put aside your "creation glasses" for the time being and read talkorigins from end to end. THEN, if you do not see converging, correlating lines of evidence - we will come back here and you can tell me so, and commiserate with me on my mistake.

You can read biologos if you want too, but talkorigins is more scientific and better argued imho.

Please note David, this is not a cop out. We have been there already, and if nothing changes nothing changes so why should this time be any different? I am changing it. Read talkorigins from end to end, we can then discuss with commonality of understanding.

David Langworthy
Hi cb!
Good effort. I appreciate your posts. I was meaning the same thing as your point above when I said...
Have a nice day.
I know I can have a tendency to be critical and sarcastic. The last thing I want to be is the David Read equivalent of the non-believers so I'll mostly take a seat in the bleachers.

I have one question tho. Early last summer as I found this site discussing events at LSU, I contacted Erv Taylor wondering if there was a chat group for former sda non-believers. I don't have a need to debate anyone in my former church nor want to make them sad or upset for my current worldview. But I'm fairly certain there are people like me with unresolved issues from coming of age in this culture. If anyone knows of such a site I'd like to hear about it.
cb25

Hi David L,

mmm. No I don't know of any such, but would also be interested. I just had a wicked chuckle to myself: I reckon there's probably a certain few here who think we are trying to make AT what you're looking for!!

Not so of course. I actually frequented here before I "lost my way":) Now I stay around in the hopes that each little part we play can encourage change for the better in SDA culture. (ahh..yes...better from my perspective of course:)

J. David Newman

b25

I will check out takorigins. I don't know how much is there so it may take awhile. However, with this quote from you I suspect that we have reached the end of our discussion. You say, "Remember the discussion we had about the "perfect" world of Eden, sharks, lions, food chain, summer, winter, migration, the bombadeir beetle - perfectly designed bomb maker in a lovely garden! etc. NOT one of these things fit in the garden. Someone suggested God "front loaded" creation with these things! Seriously?" Then you write, "these points were never answered."

No, they were not answered to your satisfaction because you left God out of the picture. As a Christian I factor sin into the equation. Even if some of us consider the Bible a lesser authority it still talks about sin and how terrible sin is and as a result of sin somewhere and somehow coming into the universe we needed the God of the universe to become human and die on the cross and rise again to save us. All of which is totally unscientific. This illustrates why eventually nature and the Bible have to develop some kind of relationship together. They are not separate trains running on parallel tracks never meeting.

The only conclusion one can draw, if one admits that sin is a reality, is that fundamental laws changed, that the faith conclusion of constancy is not valid. Therefore I do not know what laws operated in Eden. They were different before sin came into the world. Therefore the examples you gave are not valid because they are based on laws as we know them today not the laws that were in existence before sin spoiled our world and our universe. So your example of Eden does not work with me because I have a different view than you have. And of course it goes back to the issue of death and the bible statements that death is an enemy and will one day be destroyed. Which if it is a natural part of evolution why would it be considered an enemy and why would it need to be abolished? If death is fine for the old earth why should we not have it in the new earth.

There was no "summer, winter, migration, bambadeir beelte" in Eden because again you are reading back from today not looking at it as Eden was before sin changed the picture.

And since you will probably not agree with this we are at an impasse. It seems as I asked before that you are taking a purely naturalistic explanation for how this universe came about. Although you seem to accept a God intervention before life began because you agreed those were faith
statements. But you are still using the naturalistic arguments with life too. If it was not for sin and death I would agree with you. But I have not yet found a site, an article, a book, that explains from a Christian viewpoint how sin and death fits into the evolutionary scene. And the reason there is nothing is because it does not fit in. So we have to use a different set of faith statements to understand what is going on.

I just took a quick look at the talkorigins website. I looked at the index, sin and death are absent. Again for the naturalist that is not a problem. For the Christian I believe that is a problem. At least biologos tries to deal with the subject. But since the world view of that site is evolution then everything, including sin and death, must somehow be squeezed into that view. And of course the creationist world view has to make all the scientific data fit that view as well. And it does so by challenging some of the basic assumptions that evolutionists use to support their view.

So, in the end we are back to world views, frames of reference, presuppositions which in another blog was also a cause of much discussion and dislike.

Given what I have said and there is no point going back to this area again it probably means the end of our discussion. But I have learned a lot in this discussion. I know where I have made mistakes in my posting.

If there is a way to resolve the Garden of Eden example that cb gave we can go on.

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Joe Erwin 1 day ago Reply

Cliff, David L., Elaine, Erv, and others.

It seems to me that there has been some progress in this discussion. Distinguishing between origin of life and human origins through evolution makes a big difference.

As far as the origin of life, I don't worry much about it. Clearly life exists now, and at some time very long ago it seems not to have existed. How nonreplicating molecules became replicating molecules, cells, and multicellular organisms is of much less concern to me than how prosimians arose from insectivores, how and when the primate radiation/elaboration occurred, how and where monkey became apes, how the great apes and humans came to be, and what extent primate forms exist currently under what conditions, and how they function, ecologically, and in terms of health and illness. Knowledge continues to emerge on all these issues at a pace that is difficult to keep up with.

As far as I know, no one is trying to claim that cats turn into dogs or elephants into giraffes. Scientists do talk about "common ancestors." In some cases there are fossils that appear to be what a common ancestor would have looked like. When such evidence arises, scientists describe the context where it was found in relation to other finds, and usually propose what they think the evidence means. They may propose this dogmatically or very tenuously or anywhere in between. One can read this description, or, in some cases, even go view and measure the specimen or specimens. One can tentatively accept as reasonable and possible the explanation provided, or one may be quite skeptical about it--or anything in between. One's level of confidence in a scientific explanation certainly does not need to be a "faith statement" in the sense that is required to believe absolutely in some authority.

I appreciate that some people might read Stephen Jay Gould's writings and accept "on faith" that
Gould is regarded by scientists as an inspired spokesman for science, but that certainly is not true. Almost any point he makes would be open to debate by scientists, so quoting him as if one were quoting scripture just doesn't work. For people who grow up quoting scripture or the writings of Mrs. White as authorities to be followed precisely, the way science and scientific writings work is quite a departure.

David L., Cliff, and whoever else might wish, should feel free to contact me directly for off-blog conversation or discussion. Joe Erwin agingapes AT gmail DOT com

David 1 day ago  Reply

Elaine stated " Another analogy: if one believes he can fly from L.A. to Paris, but doesn't believe he can fry from San Francisco to L.A. shows how illogical such a position is. How can one accept microevolution and reject macroevolution when the same forces are taking place, the only difference is scale, and time: microevolution can be observed rather quickly; macro, by the very name is based on a much longer time frame, but the process is the same.

No to fast a better analogy will be "because you can jump a "little pond of water" does not mean that you can jump the the all Atlantic ocean. The ones who are agreeing in this blog all already are convinced of the evolution they are preaching to the own choir.
The evolution is full of imagination, has more creative suppositions that reals facts. to believe the the ancestors of the elephants came from the water and one day that some of the evolve to be manatees....what a crack! get real !!! No way jose.... Just look Marissa Miller that is no way that her ancestors were apes, aging apes or pre apes no way Mike.

David 1 day ago  Reply

I'm a the resort of Miami Beach called Fontainebleau. and i see such beautiful people all over the place, there is no way their ancestor were apes or pre apes to me looks like are descent of Adam and Eve

Elaine Nelson 1 day ago  Reply

The old, tired, worn, and erroneous last word: My ancestors weren't apes. This is the classic answer given by Creationists who cannot read scientific findings that refuse to put God in the picture. Continue to put God wherever desired, but to insert him into science is no less than to insert God into the other sciences: math, physics, astronomy. This reflects the limitation of scientific knowledge as it ceases to be science as soon as supernatural factors are brought in. With God, or supernatural ideas, there are absolutely no limits, all former laws known to man are thrown out the window and such unsubstantiated claims as to complete knowledge of the animal populations in the Garden: their structure, their habits, their diet, their domestication, is all sheer speculation. All this turns off those who are willing to be educated by those who are professionals, not a non-scientist who declares his knowledge is superior to any scientifically-trained individual. This is well demonstrated here: the unwillingness to entertain the possibility of evidence if it does not include God. If God is not the God of nature and chooses to overall those laws he is far too small and mercurial to be dependable and trusted.
Now the polyphasitic Elaine is scholar in evolution

If you wanted to believe that you ancestors are apes you could have all

The other day was a crazy publication that the homo sapiens copulated with neardental, what is next?

"This is well demonstrated here: the unwillingess to entertain the possibility of evidence if it does not include God."

This states my position. Completely.

Perhaps my thoughts have evolved somewhat but I'm been quite honest here when I say that the thought of "Apes Today" has crossed my mind. (Tongue in cheek of course ☺).

David Newman,

There have been some good points made since I last commented, so I'm sure it is not the end of discussion.

However, for me on this point it is. When you have read talkorigins let me know.

One thing that worries me is the drift of a closing line in your last comment:

"I know where I have made mistakes in my posting."

That suggests to me you are here polishing your apologetic rather than seeking to grow in understanding of reality and truth. It's as if you were a defender presenting a case, not a fellow traveller seeking understanding. If either of us or anyone else has that attitude we have even less hope of genuine dialog.
Cheers

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cb25

David N and others,

For anyone who is doing some "homework" or "research" for the possible discussion about converging lines of evidence in/for biological evolution here is (below) a must read link. talkorigins has a copy of this on its site, but it is an older version than the one below.

Maybe someone could write up a blog on the theme that is up for possible further dialog. Dr Taylor, we have kind of hijacked your blog a bit of the last day or so. A dedicated thread could be good?

http://home.entouch.net/dmd/geo.htm

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J. David Newman

Cb25

You write, “For anyone who is doing some "homework" or "research" for the possible discussion about converging lines of evidence in/for biological evolution here is (below) a must read link. talkorigins has a copy of this on its site, but it is an older version than the one below.”

The more I have thought about this the more pointless it seems to me to keep agitating my point of view. I dispute the basis for the “converging lines” and I give my reasons below. Given those reasons there is no basis for an agreement.

Here is where you will not agree with me. On another blog we discussed world views or another description is frame of reference. I stated that I come from a frame of reference that there is a God and that he has spoken through special revelation, the Bible, and through nature. As a Christian I have a different world view than the atheist. I challenge one of the foundational assumptions of evolutionists the one of constancy, that the present is the key to the past. That is an unprovable assumption.

The Bible indicates that there were three times when God changed some of the fundamental laws that govern our system. In Gen 3:17-19 in response to the sin of Adam God said, “Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you. . . “The curse was not just words. It indicated that tilling the ground would be different than it was before. Before it did not produce thorns and thistles.

The second curse came when Cain killed his brother. “ Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand. When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you. Genesis 4:11-12

More changes were taking place. The third curse came at the time of the flood. God sets the rainbow in the sky and promised not to curse this world again. “Never again will I curse the ground because of humans, even though[a] every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood. And never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done.” Genesis 8:21.

Thus we can use present laws to go back only so far. After that we cannot explain what happened
because we do not know what those laws were. The view I am expressing also answers the bigger issues of how sin entered into this world, how evil came about, and why we need a Savior. It also explains all the so called issues with science because they now make sense if we assume changes in the physical laws that govern us.

The evolutionary view cannot explain death, evil, and why we need a Savior. So to me the biblical view makes more logical sense than the evolutionary view when you look at the big picture.

Now I know some will object that Genesis 1-11 is not to be taken literally but to be consistent we must take the death and resurrection of Christ to be not literal as well and using the same science we must understand the promise of a new earth and no more death to be not literal as well. Consistency demands this. If science explains how we got here then the same science tells us what our end will be and it is not pleasant.

I trust that you will still love me with this very contrary opinion and I will love you as well.

Nathan Schilt

Elaine, let me make a couple of comments on your post from a couple of days ago. So many comments have intervened…I am trying very hard to suppress my penchant for sarcasm here. But it seems to me that your eager embrace of what you read in The Week and The WSJ regarding Richard Muller's research and conclusions illustrates perfectly how deeply immersed you are in the faith dimension of scientific thinking. I suspect you could not name a single researcher whose findings dispute those of Muller. Furthermore, what about the 70% of the earth's surface that is not land? What about the troposphere where we should expect lots of warming? What about sea surface temperatures? Are the rises in land temperatures recorded in the past 50 years unprecedented? What if we picked 1998 as our starting point? Wouldn't we see a drop in temperatures? Why pick the last 50 years?

Do you know anything about GCMs, PCs, algorithms and parameters used to create computer models? Could you intelligently discuss positive/negative forcings and how they factor into global warming "science?" Do you know how many times the models have been revised since 1990 because they failed to accurately predict global warming? Do you know how the chaotic elements of climate change are accounted for in modeling, if at all? Do you know anything at all about paleoclimatology - about the criticisms of the work of Keith Briffa, Phil Jones, Michael Mann, et. al.?

You long ago decided what side you are on in the climate science debates. You didn't really need evidence. All you needed was testimonials from those on the right team. You probably swallowed the lies and distortions of "An Inconvenient Truth" with great gusto. You tend to be carried along on most topics by the groupthink of the intellectual herd, and so you subscribe reflexively to the fare that feeds those sentiments. You could not begin to intelligently discuss solar physics, meteorology, climatology, mathematics, or computer modeling. So you accept what you do not understand because it is consistent with your a priori world view. I do much the same. The difference between us lies in my ability to freely admit that most of my beliefs and most of my life is lived by faith - not blind faith - but a faith that is confirmed by experience, scripture, reason, and the wisdom of those who have gone before.

Your religiosity about science is demonstrated not so much by the fact that you believe in warmist
scaremongering as scientific fact, but that you refuse to admit that your belief is firmly rooted in the soil of faith.

As for your contention that the church is always the last to accept new science, those who understand the history of science might disagree. 99.9% of science does not challenge Bible teachings or Church beliefs. We tend to focus on the conflicts. Most buildings do not burn to the ground; most drivers do not get involved in high speed police chases. But news reports concentrate on those that do. How much of the science curriculum at LSU necessitates a belief in natural selection and random mutation? Are physicians who believe in those theories better at diagnosing and curing disease than those who do not?

The truth is that it is scientists - not the church - who have historically provided the greatest resistance to scientific discoveries and evidence. It is the theories about the nature of man and the nature of ultimate reality - not science per se - that define the turf wars between materialists and believers.

cb25

David Newman,

I've read your reasons through several times. Each time, at almost every point you make I find myself saying "but..." There are so many assumptions, indefensible conclusions, circular reasonings and so on, that it is very difficult not to respond to what you say.

However, I agree there is little point from the current perspectives.

I have tried to put myself into your mindset - its very like me about 10 years ago. For me it was a perspective from which it is almost impossible to see beyond ones current world view, and from which it is even more difficult to see how ones own world view might look to an observer.

I am reminded of something Elaine posted and which was picked up by Preston Foster. Here it is:

Elaine - "This is well demonstrated here: the unwillingess to entertain the possibility of evidence if it does not include God."

Preston - "This states my position. Completely."

That does sum it up pretty well. Though I think as I examine my past it is not always "unwillingness", but actually just asking too much.

Anyway, all the best. No doubt there will be better topics from time to time that you and I can have dialog on:

Chris B

J. David Newman

CB25
Thank you. You have summed it up very well. I am not prepared to look at interpretations of the evidence that leaves out God. And that is the challenge because no one has complete objectivity. We all interpret the data out of our experience. A world view without God is incompatible with a world view with God. It will be interesting to see what happens next. But thank you for the dialog which you have conducted with patience and gentleness.

J. David Newman

To Everyone

Thank you for this discussion. Here is the challenge for you to think about. Our interpretation of the past is built on many presuppositions. No one accepts all the presuppositions because some are opposed to others. So how do we decide? We decide on the most basic of levels—is there a God or is there not? If we believe there is a God that helps us decide which presuppositions we will support. If we do not believe in God that helps us decide which presuppositions cannot be valid. And even when we believe in God it still depends on what kind of God we believe in to decide which presuppositions we will accept or reject. This is why we have diversity in our opinions. However, as a Christian I want to make one final plea. God is not so much interested in how much knowledge we have but whether we have entered into a personal relationship with Him. If we have then we are safe for eternity and when we get there we will find out which presuppositions were correct and which were not. Until then I join with you on the journey with the transcendent God who at the same time longs for an imminent relationship with us.

J. David Newman

The Really Last Word

For those of you who might be wondering whether I can keep a balanced approach to selecting articles for Adventist Today let me assure you that while I have certain definite beliefs my editorial philosophy is to allow different sides into the mix. I have published several articles, for example, on Genesis, with which I did not agree but AT is committed to being a place where all sides can dialog and share their convictions. The articles in AT will continue to express various viewpoints. I will, of course, present my ideas, but they do not necessarily represent the consensus of AT. It is only in open dialog that we grow, learn to understand each other better, and in the end may the best ideas win.

Joe Erwin

It really is possible to consider evidence and explanations without declaring for or against God. If one is only willing to entertain explanations that are theocentric, one excludes most scientific evidence and thought. Why not consider the evidence without making some deep commitment one way or the other in terms of what one is considering? One can be deeply and firmly devoted to God and can still examine objective evidence and what others think it means, without accepting what others believe. Of course, that only works for so long. Sometimes people have to change their ways of thinking—but that does not necessarily lead one to reject God.
Elaine Nelson

It really is a waste of time for the dedicated six-day Creationist to converse with someone who presents scientific evidence. All well and good, but the instant it contradicts how the Creationists INTERPRETS the Bible, it is dead in the water.

As Joe has said, most of us began with complete belief in the Bible story of Creation, just as many of us firmly believed that the Bible was God's Word handed down at Sinai. As we progressed in our world view, began to evaluate critically the various new ideas, including how the Bible came to be and the perspectives of men at the time it was written, we discovered that our childlike beliefs did not necessarily meet with our curious minds.

For those who can hold fast to a view and refute all questions with "that's what I believe and nothing will change it," it is an honest opinion that is accepted. There are millions around the world who, likewise, cling to their original beliefs and are able to do so despite compounding evidence to the contrary. The SDA church needs those who are absolutely convinced and stand for their beliefs. For those of us who question, is the church large enough for us?

Preston Foster

Dear Elaine,

Here is a reason to reconsider embracing "our childlike beliefs:"

"And said, Verily I say unto you, Except you be converted, and become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven," Matthew 18:3.

Peace.

Elaine Nelson

Those "childlike beliefs" cannot always be applied in all situations, should they? What about the milk needed by children are insufficient for those who need the meat? One cannot always stay in the playpen and live in the simple life of childhood. Children are not capable of using their minds as do adults. Are we to "grow up" or always remain little children?
Back to the Good Old Days

Submitted Oct 25, 2011
By Lawrence Downing

For several years my wife and I lived in Central Pennsylvania. A drive through near-by areas provided opportunity to observe the Old Order Amish and various branches of the Mennonite groups, including the Black Bumper Mennonites. Members of this sub-group, unlike their Old Order Amish cousins, drive cars — black cars. Everything on the car is black, including the chrome bumpers — earning the label ‘Black Bumper.’ Any other metal is also painted black. Area car dealers specialize in ‘sanctifying’ [my word, not theirs] the new models that come out to assure nothing bright is visible. Black indicates an attitude of humility; bright colors are perceived to be a sign of worldly pride.

In the fields around Bird In Hand, Intercourse, Lancaster and other towns, one can watch the farmer direct his horses and plow down the rows of grain or corn. At harvest time, the horse drawn harvesters bring in the crops. On occasion one could see men swing their scythes and watch as the grain was hand-gathered into sheaves. Time seemed stilled in the Amish community. The men wear black baggy pants with buttons — zippers are forbidden; wide-brimmed black hats, and light blue collarless shirts. Beards are in among the Amish. The women wear long, blue or black dresses with perhaps a wisp of white trim. On a woman’s head, covering her hair, was a small white hat tied tightly round the chin. A few wore large dark colored hats, but these were the exception.

On weekends the roads in Amish Country are jammed with outsiders, tourists, who have come to see for themselves this quaint society, marvel at their industry and marvel over the prosperous farms and tidy towns. There is not doubt the Amish community thrives without our modern conveniences. The Outsiders, as Amish call tourists, also take advantage of Amish cooking traditions. They eat their full from family-style tables. Amish are known for the variety of ways they prepare pork and for shoofly pie.

The Amish are a striking example of the power that is group identity. They have made a decision to withdrawal from the world and its corruptive ways. They maintain a viable community that fulfills their social, political and religious needs.

There is no harm in valuing group identity. However, is a hold to the past, or the perceived past, consistent with what scripture teaches is a disciple’s priority? Are we to follow the voices that call us back to what is proclaimed to be a more pristine and righteous time?

It is instructive to remind ourselves when someone calls us back to a better time that frequently perception and historical reality do not match. This is not to say that the past has no value.

The past does have value and historic events do provide a context to help us understand the present. Ellen White’s statement that we have nothing to fear so long as we do not forget how God has led us in the past is valid today as in yesteryears. However, it is well to remind ourselves that we cannot recapture the past. We also note that accounts of past experiences or events are frequently based more in wishful thinking than reality.

When people tell me about the good old days and wish we could go back I ask, “What period of time would you like to trade for our day.” Answers include: The times of Jesus, or the 1950s, or the early 1900s when our church pioneers lived.
“Great,” I respond. “Let’s go back to Jesus’ time. You have a good chance of being a slave. You will be uneducated and live from hand-to-mouth. You will die before you are 50.”

“You want to go to the 50s? Fine. No antibiotics so you cannot fight many of the germs that afflict us. You’ll have to fight the Korean War. If you are a person of color, get used to the Jim Crow laws.

“Now, you want to live when the pioneers lived? Let’s do it! You will believe you are saved by keeping the Ten Commandments. You will probably be an Arian — you will believe Jesus was a created being and not equal with God the Father. You will believe that the door of mercy is closed to those who did not accept William Miller’s Advent call.”

About this time the person cuts me off. “This is not what I mean. I want the good things that were there in those times, not the bad!”

“Were it so simple. You take the bad with the good. Still want to trade?”

“No, I guess we better stay where we are.” I agree!

Among some Adventists today the call back to those good old times when we really knew who we were and understood our purpose and were confident of what we believed has great appeal. Unfortunately, the siren call arises from a made-up world that exists more in imagination than fact. Read the early Adventist publications and you will find evidence that all was not smooth sailing among the early believers. Church leaders and members had serious disagreements about what they should believe and how they should behave. The arguments over the law in Galatians created significant controversy that pitted church leaders against one another and Ellen White.

Whether Adventists should serve in the Civil War stirred up all manner of heated discussion. One segment of the church concluded that open marriage was a biblically accepted practice. Other groups were religious enthusiasts — we would today call them Holy Rollers or Charismatics. They yelled, rolled on the floor and created public disturbance. The Holy Flesh component believed they could not sin. There was also the fanatic fringe that crawled about on hands and knees and babbled baby talk — in response to their interpretation of the biblical passage that said we are to become like little children. Are these the days and practices the voices call back to? When we call for reformation and a return to those good old days, we might well take care to define what it is we’re opting for and not reach back with blind eyes. What we grasp and hold to may be less desirable than first thought.

Join in the discussion:

William Noel 1 week ago Reply

Lawrence,

Thank you for a thoughtful reminder that the past is not always what we think it was and wishing for it won't satisfy our needs today.

God has not called us to live in the past, but to move forward into the future of a closer relationship with Him where we are guided and empowered by the Holy Spirit to perform ministries that did not exist in the "good old days." So, given the choice of which direction to look, please, don't anyone
tell me about how good it used to be and how bad things are today because I'm enjoying my walk with the Holy Spirit.

Elaine Nelson 1 week ago Reply

Thanks, Lawrence.

This puts it in perspective as I have also heard the same comments, and whether asked or not, the answers you receive are typical. Often, when these wishes are voiced, it is a wish to return to the happy days of childhood: no worries, life is all play, you are fed and cared for by parents. Ask their parents if they would like to have a reprise of those "good old days" and one might hear a different response.

The Amish do not proselytize, and their numbers are increased only through births. Adventists who have been called to make converts, would be just as hampered as the Amish if they continued living in "the old ways." When there is no progress, a people, an institution and a nation soon die.

The call proclaimed at the latest Annual Council sounds much like a call to the old ways--"Return to ideas and thinking of the 19th century. This would be a death knell to the church if it were truly followed.

Horace Butler 1 week ago Reply

The only true "good old days" were those few days in the Garden of Eden, before Adam and Eve sinned.

The call at the Annual Council was the same as that given by Ellen White--a return to primitive Godliness. The Church of Philadelphia, that is, the one that represented the time period prior to and during 1844, was one of only 2 which received no condemnation. That's something to think about. No one is suggesting returning to 19th century thinking in the way that you're presenting it. What they are suggesting is a return to a commitment to present truth, which seems to have fallen by the wayside of late. But I sometimes forget that these concepts are not popular here, since so many reject the SOP, and much of what is contained in the three angels' messages.

William Noel 1 week ago Reply

Horace,

I've lost count over the years of the number of times I have heard calls to "return to primitive Godliness." Unfortunately, the callers typically are advocating a return to their particular concept of "primitive Godliness." Many times they can't even describe it. So, when Ted Wilson calls for it, I have to ask for his definition. So far, I haven't seen much to color inside his general lines.

We can render the whole issue moot and save ourselves a huge amount of argument over definitions by simply returning to the Apostolic model in scripture for how the church was to be first, foremost and always guided and empowered by the Holy Spirit. God is waiting for us to rediscover such empowered vitality.
Could it be safe to say that "primitive Godliness" is what John was speaking about when he heard the Angel say that the "mystery of God should be finished"? Revelation 10:6-7 So what would that mystery be? "God manifest in the flesh." 1 Timothy 3:16 What was lost at the fall, is to be restored thru the plan of salvation, the image of God in man. Colossians 1:27

There is an inherent link to the Apostolic model in all of this. To "rediscover such empowered vitality" envolves being totally honest with ourselves and God when it comes to our relationship to him and each other... until then... we will continue to strive and debate with each over what all of these things mean.

Yes, the Apostolic model involves being honest in our relationships, but that is merely one result of each believer being empowered and directed by the Holy Spirit and the harmony found in the collection of believers (the church) resulting from the role the Holy Spirit plays in each person's life.

No, there weren't any good old days. As for the Amish, I believe they have a place in being part of God's witness in these times. It is not for everyone, but they attempt to preserve a way of life that is simpler and, to them, closer to God. It is an inherited lifestyle and not a bad one. Like all groups, they have a minority of dysfunctional families and people, but in the main they are a happy and honest group. They had a profound witness to the world as they forgave the murderers of their children in the school shootings of a few years ago. My father came from Old Order Mennonites or Black Bumper folk, and they were kindly Christian people.

For me I want to be part of a group that remains relevant and progresses with the truth that is in Jesus. In the last days the Bible says that knowledge shall be increased, and I believe that is spiritual and biblical knowledge as well as secular knowledge. At this time, God has and is giving the church wonderful tools and witnessing methods by which we can glorify Him and know Him better. We are even learning more about taking care of our health and well-being and coping with the stresses of modern-day living. And there are more and more ways to love people all over a shrinking globe.

I think we all need to have an example that reminds us that acquiring 'things' and living a life of ease is not what this life is about. I don't want to live as the Amish do, but I do need to be reminded that this life, and this earth, is not all we will ever have. I do also want to participate in life, and I enjoy the pursuit of knowledge. I just need to remember to do that with and for God.

I must say here that I have had many good experiences growing up in a traditional Adventist home.
with lots and lots of fond memories of a good happy childhood experiences in the home and at church. Whilst they are what they are, just memories, they have influenced our outlook and way of life in an undeniable positive manner, which I think is great. So what's wrong to reminisce the 'good old days'. I think that's just great to be able to 'feel' some of the nostalgia and pleasantries of the past. Maybe others don't have good memories and therefore seek to avoid them: that I will understand. My mom and dad remarkably, never had a fight or used harsh words or language at each other all the years I have known. I suppose that's why my mom and us miss my dad (and my older brother) so much since they were called to rest. Death does have a sting in this life; but the 'death where is your sting' does emerge when one considers the wonderful memories of the 'good ol' days' which death can never take away from us. The good ol' days tell us just that, and more, this side of heaven: yeah death, where is your sting!

♥

Gailon Arthur Joy

The past may have had it's problems but the future will be the test of the Ages!!! Unless we find a way to build Foundations of Faith that the pioneers adopted, we will not get through that most critical and trying of times.

It is easy to see that many "purported adventists" will be our greatest trials and even now ply their venomous and faith destroying ways. Beguiling, but faithless religion is their trademark and their wares and we must beware of the many wolves in sheeps clothing in our very midst.

Your Foundation must be the Bible the Pioneers built THIS CHURCH upon and cling solidly to that Faith regardless of the false messages designed to undermine that Foundation of Faith.

Gailon Arthur Joy
AUReporter

Elaine Nelson

"We have met the enemy and it is us."

Nathan Schilt

As I see it, the problem with going back to the future is that it usually involves an attempted return to a snapshot of a theologically conceived construct which was part of an irretrievable dynamic process. It is much easier to build a hermetically sealed wall around reality as the Amish have done. But we have spent too long in Babylon as a Church to abandon the institutions we have built there and go back to some imagined Eden. Institutional concerns preclude radicalism. Whether they allow room for God's Spirit to lead us into truth for our time remains to be seen.

Vernon P. Wagner

I lived with an LLU professor's family for awhile during med school. In an attempt to go back to basics, the wife dressed in the fashion of EGW. Other than owning a car, the family
could have been Amish. They were dear people, but I was upfront in opposing their antiquainted lifestyle.

I once told the wife she needed to do something about her picture window in the living room. Staring at the window, she asked, "What's wrong with it?" I replied, "It should be stained glass so you could be in church all day." The poor soul almost had a heart attack.