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- **An Emerging Heresy?**: Adventist Today is at the forefront in discussing "The Emergent Church" issue, which has been slowly heating up in Adventism for some time. Is it pantheism recast in angelic saffron? Blogger Adam Hendron weighs in with serious concerns, echoing past blogs by Herb Douglass and Cindy Tutsch. *(to view complete article, click title)*

- **What if?**: What if global climate change is responsible for this year's tragic and unpredictable weather? What if there is a planned program to pluralize America politically; what if growing sin and selfishness lies at the root of the disintegration of the world's economy? Check out the weighty questions with Stephen Foster.... *(to view complete article, click title)*

- **Rattled by the Jewelry**: Educator Melissa Howell sees reheated concerns about the use of jewelry among today's Adventist youth. It's the hottest topic in her class on Bible doctrines. Adventist thought leaders, take note!

*Available to subscribers only, at this time.*
When Doomsday Prophets Had S(an) D(iego) in Their Sights - May 30

Have you ever pondered over the leadership vacuum that likely existed following Ellen White's death in 1915? Was the Adventist Church firmly enough established to no longer need or want her advice and direction. In recent days the Camping followers created significant media attention with their prediction of the end of the world at 6:00 pm on May 21.

The voice of San Diego.org posted an article, generated on the interest of Camping's end-of-world predictions. However, this focused on similar skewed predictions by self-styled Seventh-day Adventist prophet and prophetess in 1925.

"Such was the prediction of a pair of renegade Seventh-day Adventists who turned themselves into a prophet and prophetess of doom. One was a wallpaper-hanger from New York and the other a Hollywood homemaker who liked to claim visions and later tried to kill one of her former supporters.

The 1925 doomsday business began with the prophetess, one Margaret Rowen. She wasn't new to the news. Since 1916, she'd been having visions and claiming to be a successor to Ellen White, a founder of the Seventh-day Adventist Church."

Go to voiceofsandiego.org to read the full article...

Elaine Nelson 4 days ago  Reply

"It declared that there was no evidence that Rowen's visions were of "divine origin."

And what standards did they use to make that determination? What were the evidence accepted for EGW's visions as being of "divine origin"? Do humans determine what is inspired by divinity?

Name:  Email:  

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American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us
Reviewed by Edwin A. Schwisow

American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us, tells us that Adventism has thrived because of its uniquely American flexibility, picking up ideas and doctrines from many sources, adopting some, discarding others, in a form of religious free-enterprise that brought excitement and expectation. (Because the authors do not speculate on the role of inspiration in the creation of the church, this review, as well, will address only observable data.)

The book is based on two large scientific surveys conducted on religion and public life in America. These surveys, known as "Faith Matters," consist of a two-wave panel study, designed and conducted between July 2005 and early 2007. The authors Robert D. Putnam and David E. Campbell are faculty members of Harvard and Notre Dame, respectively.

Like Adventism, Mormonism is seen in the book (and is discussed at some length) as a faith that has "adapted" several times in its rather short life. The LDS organization, 50 years into its existence, turned its back on polygamy; much more recently it repealed its exclusion of black males from the priesthood.

Adventism may have been even more flexible, toning back its early emotional fervor; working hard to shelve its view that Christ was a created being; giving the cold shoulder to advent time-setting; and working arduously (and not always successfully) to retrain its ministers to deliver Christ-focused messages.

Adventist readers may complain that the surveys cited in the book do not specifically break out Adventism, statistically. But the pages that define Adventism as a highly flexible American movement provide value to the Adventist thought leader. (This flexibility may explain, in part, Ellen White’s natural aversion to “conservatism,” against which she writes at some length. Adventist founders apparently believed strongly that faith was progressive and required flexibility as old views were retired and new truths revealed.)

Most of the 700-page book plays to the theme that religion in America today is largely non-denominational and that most Americans are far more loyal to their political parties than to any brand of church.
The book is written in accessible English and provides the inquisitive reader with a great deal of groundbreaking information of profound interest to any Adventist minister, evangelist, strategic planner, or lay thought-leader.
Published by Simon & Schuster, October 2010

Summary: American Grace: How Religion Unites and Divides Us is a blockbuster study that rarely happens more than once a decade in Christianity. Of particular interest to Adventism is the view that the church has prospered, primarily because of its all-American agility. It also shows that denominational labels no longer rally membership to action, as they did 50 years ago.

It suggests that Adventism in its early days thrived by sampling liberally from a great storehouse of available doctrine, selecting and discarding to arrive at “Present Truth.” That Adventism continues to thrive is a tribute to that early flexibility, though influences demanding conservatism may threaten that tradition, today.

Edited and posted by Timo Antero Onjukka 5/31/11

There are no comments.
Emergent Theology and The Omega of Heresies

Submitted May 30, 2011
By Adam Hendron

Ellen White’s 1904 prophecy regarding “the omega of heresies” appears to be fulfilled in today’s Emerging Church movement. This blossoming belief system was just budding in her day, with a new theory that the seer of Seventh-day Adventism identified as the “alpha of deadly heresies.” (Alpha is the first letter of the Greek alphabet; omega is the last.) “The omega will follow,” she said, “and will be received by those who are not willing to heed the warning God has given.”

With chills of foreboding, Mrs. White heard a lecturer: “The subject upon which he was speaking was life, and the relation of God to all living things. In his presentation he cloaked the matter somewhat, but in reality he was presenting scientific theories which are akin to pantheism.”

Pantheism is the idea that God is everything. Emergent theology teaches something akin to this, called panentheism—the idea that God is in everything. “God is enfolded in the world, so he has to be unfolded, and that’s where you get the concept of emergence.” So teaches Emergent leader Jürgen Moltmann, as summarized in the video, “Quantum Leap.”

Jesus says, “If any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him.” Revelation 3:20. But the new theology says Christ is already built into us; we just need to tease him out. “Part of the goodness of Creation is an inherent potential to generate new possibilities so that more and more goodness can emerge.”

While he doesn’t come out and call it “panentheism,” Emergent leader Rob Bell indeed uses scientific theories to cloak this heresy, just as the prophet described. In his “Everything is Spiritual” lecture, Bell sees God in sub-atomic particles. The Mars Hill pastor says quantum physicists are finding that “the universe at its core made up of some sort of relational energy.” All matter, that is, contains some of its Creator.

The Bible says Christ is Creator. It also says that Jesus will make his abode only in those who keeps his words. “Many will depart from the faith,” White warned, “giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils. We have now before us the alpha of this danger. The omega will be of a most startling nature.” Starting it is, to see that only a century later, a foundational tenet of Christianity—the need to invite Jesus into your heart—has been eliminated.

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1 First Selected Messages, p. 200
2 Fifth Manuscript Release, p. 375
3 The Language of the Emerging Church, p. 109
4 Hebrews 1:3, Colossians 1:16-17
5 John 14:23

Join the discussion:

Elaine Nelson 6 days ago Read

What goes around—comes around. Only a few months ago we were cautioned here about the alpha and omega, only to be reminded again. EGW’s interpretation is recycled every few years to ensure that that all who have not
Jesuit Hunter

Elaine, professional heckler by trade?

Adam Hendron

6 days ago Reply

Funny you should write that, Elaine... My devotional reading for this morning contained the text, "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today, and forever."

Kevin Riley

6 days ago Reply

I am not sure that we can jump from that text to the conclusion that the church does not, or should not change. I have no doubt that pantheism will again become a real challenge to the church, but I am not convinced that the emerging church is where the danger will come from. I wonder sometimes just howmuch of the fear of the emergent church coming from conservative Adventism is simply fear of anything that is different.

If people did not fail to find what they are looking for in Adventism, they would not spend time looking outside. Perhaps our effort would be better spent in constructing a better form of Adventism rather than constantly gazing outward in fear.

Adam Hendron

6 days ago Reply

No fear here, Kevin. The prophet gives me confidence. Seems like a lot of anxiety on the other end, though.

Re. your posit: What if people are looking for something in Adventism that doesn’t belong there?

Kevin Riley

5 days ago Reply

But what if people are looking for something in Adventism that should be in all forms of Christianity and not finding it? I believe that is happening, as well as the problem of people looking for what should not be there.

Yes, I have some fear when I look at the state of the church. Both Ellen White and the Bible give me confidence that in the end God wins, but neither promise a smooth ride to that end. It is possible to have faith in God but still be uneasy about people and their actions, and where that may lead them and the church.

Trevor Hammond

6 days ago Reply

Is this not the signs of (Apostate?) Christianity forging a pact with Spiritism and Spiritualism? Many in the West (and the masses influenced by the West) have, due to wholesale Secularisation, embraced Eastern pantheism and it’s derivative pantheism. A popular ‘spin-off’ of this is the concept among Western Secular Culture is that each one must ‘find one’s own path to spirituality’ or ‘god realisation’ which must be searched for from within (very theistic evolution like) and not from without. (I’ve seen this notion expressed on this website by some commentators). Jesus said: "I am the way and the truth and the life." [John 14:6]

At least at the core of Eastern and Middle Eastern religions can be found some absolutes which they subscribe to, at least in theory. In the Emergent Christian radical culture of today which has been swept away by Secularization: "There are no Absolutes - except for that statement of course." (I heard someone say this on the radio the other day)

Neale Donald Walsch, quotes 'God in his New Age book: "You are always a part of God, because you are never apart from God. This is the truth of your being. We are Whole, So now you know the whole truth." "So go ahead! Mix what you call the profane and the profound—so that you can see that there is no difference, and experience All as One." "I Am What I Am: All That Is."

"For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen." (Romans 1:25)

The danger in all of this? "The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons." [1Tim 4:1]

In God we trust?

T

Adam Hendron

6 days ago Reply

Now here’s someone who’s done his homework. None of these rambling rants. And he actually quotes Scripture!
Mr. Hendron seems to subscribe to the idea proposed by the Standish brothers that EGW was the greatest prophet of all. This means that everything she ever wrote was infallible, every prophecy ever made was apocalyptic, non-conditional and inescapable, her reading of events surpasses that of the NT prophets and Jesus. This is 1989/Walton all over again!

His novel interpretation that the Omega apocalyptic is the emergent church is just another attempt at fear mongering heard in Atlanta and conspiracy theory gone mad. I’ve heard all kinds of interpretations of this “Omega apocalyptic”, including one that proposes banishing drums in church because they are a fulfillment of this “prophecy”.

It’s also disturbing when people root for EGW quotations when they can’t substantiate their ideas from the Bible. Can we find an “Omega” apocalyptic in the Bible? That should be our search and not try to force EGW into an inexorable prophet of every detail of the future.

Jesus made it clear that the apocalyptic of the end-times would include the same practices of the pre-flood world: look up Gen. 6 for details. He also said there would be little faith on earth, that hardly applies to our days or to the emergent church. Paul stated that in the last days, there would be widespread apostasy in the family, religious and social world.

We do not need a novel interpretation of a “secret” prophecy by EGW. We do not need to make her into our own little Nostradamus speaking in cryptic terms about the end times. The Bible is plenty clear about it.

“Keep watch.”

I’m not up on the Standish bro’s; never read a book of theirs.

As for EGW’s writings, they’re just as inspired as Scripture. Moreover, the Church obviously needed this latter-day gift of prophecy, or God would not have imparted it (and foretold its appearance, Rev 12:17). Despise not prophesynings.

The panentheism EGW associates with the Omega appears to correspond with what Scripture calls “the lie” in 2 Thess. This is the text referenced in the “Quantum Lie” video (referenced in my article). It is the presumption that unconverted man has God within, as Satan also instigated in the garden. Lighthouse Trails Research has addressed Emergent Panentheism on the basis of Scripture alone. EGW’s writings simply bring the matter into sharper focus. Far from cryptic, they are express revelation.

Regarding Christ’s statement about there being little faith on the earth at time’s end, you’ve inspired my next article, which shall examine this question in depth.

Thanks for writing!

Ellen White’s 1904 prophecy regarding “the omega of heresies” appears to be fulfilled in today’s GYC (General Youth Conference) movement. This blossoming belief system was just budding in her day, with a new theory that the seer of Seventh-day Adventism identified as the “alpha of deadly heresies.” (Alpha is the first letter of the Greek alphabet; omega is the last.) “The omega will follow,” she said, “and will be received by those who are not willing to heed the warning God has given.”

Wrong group. By your fruits you shall know them.

Ellen White’s 1904 prophecy regarding “the omega of heresies” appears to be fulfilled in today’s GYC - Generation of Youth for Christ. By your fruits you shall know them.

I am not a fan of the GYC, but do they really fit the picture of ‘the omega of apostasy’? Perhaps you could list the similarities you see. I am not sure I see pan(en)theism in GYC and more than in most parts of the emergent church.
Elaine Nelson  5 days ago  Reply
Where in the Bible is there a definitive explanation that pantheism or panentheism is the omega of apostasy? While the Bible mentions the first and last of the alphabet, where is it explicitly said to be any doctrine that is in error?

Pat Travis  4 days ago  Reply
Adam,
I have no dog in this fight but your definitions are in error. Pantheism is God is "in all things" and panentheism is "all things are in God." In the latter God would have lost if something was not ultimately a part of Him. How could God destroy anything without destroying part of Himself?
regards,
pat

Elaine Nelson  4 days ago  Reply
Jesuit Hunter: Fearful of using your legitimate name?

Elaine Nelson  4 days ago  Reply
Pat, it seems sufficient for some to raise concerns about the "omega" which is lacking in such a definition in Revelation, and simply follow those who have been certain of its identity.

There are only three verses in the entire Bible that use these terms and they are all in the most symbolic book.

"I am the alpha and omega" (Rev 1:8).

"I am the alpha and omega" (Rev 21:6).

I am the alpha and omega" (Rev 22:13)

Meaning: "I am the beginning and the end."

Since all three are identical statements identifying God as the beginning and end, how did the "omega" become a heresy? If God is both the beginning and the end (the meaning of these Greek letters) why is there such a distortion of these very plain texts? There is never an association with heresy--unless one wishes to claim that belief in God is heresy. How and where did such an unbiblical belief originate?

Elaine Nelson  4 days ago  Reply
John Andrews asks: Can we find an "Omega" apostasy in the Bible? That should be our search and not try to force EGW into an inexorable prophet.

Adam now says it can be found in 2 Thess. Maybe someone should do a biblical search and perhaps there are more theories, as all good conspiracy theories need several sources.

Pat Travis  4 days ago  Reply
Elaine,
I only said I don't have a dog in the fight of what EGW might have meant by "the omega." She was referring to the "living Temple" content of Kellogg in the Alpha.
As you have suggested this is extra biblical nomenclature as "she used it."

Kevin Riley  4 days ago  Reply
I believe the question of panentheism coming into the church is a legitimate worry. Whether that is what Ellen White meant by 'the Omega' of apostasy or not, whether she was inspired or not, whether she has misused biblical language or not, seem like side issues. The emergent movement is a large and somewhat diverse movement. Conservative Christians (and they are not alone in this) have a track record of misunderstanding people who use language differently, as well as being prone to see conspiracies where none exist. So the real question is whether any/some/most/all emergent leaders are teaching panentheism. That question would be relevant if Ellen White had never said anything.

I believe some of the evidence points more to a different approach to the world and the language used to describe that. I have Anglican friends who often use the language of seeing God in all things. They are not pan(en)theists of any sort, they just believe that the Christian should be able to see God's activity in all events and situations. It sounds very much like what some emergent church leaders are saying. My response to much that I have read from
emergent writers is 'yes, but ...' But then, I have the same response to many SDA writers, so that may not mean much.

Pat Travis
Kevin,

You are correct that both pantheism and panentheism are "false descriptions" of God in His relationship to His creation...and "classical" Evangelicals have long recognized it...without the writings of Ellen...in fact that was one of her concerns with Kellogg and how the church would be viewed by Christians of the day.

Kevin Riley
For those who wonder what the emerging church is, and what it believes, the following article is a reasonable introduction. If you have time, the 7 pages of responses also are interesting.


Tom
Oh dear, this blog sets in motion yet another spook chase. The supposed delay in Christ's return seems to feed into a frenzy in some quarters of Adventism the notion for a feverish search for some latest thing to peg as the much dreaded Omega apostasy a la EGW. Sorry if I sound like such a skeptic, but like Elaine, I've been around this horn so many times that these cries of "Wolf" have worn much too thin for me to buy into the latest take on what someone insists is the omega of apostasy.

I remember well Lewis Walton's book "Omega" making the rounds on the chicken little circuit when I first came back to the church in 1980. If memory serves me right, I try to forget books like that, his take on the Omega apostasy was the Ford movement and his New Theology as some called it. the idea peddled in that book was if the alpha apostasy was God is everything, the omega was that God was outside of us and that the great controversy was a cosmic conflict that embraced a struggle between Christ in Satan outside of us and not a war within each of us.

I certainly don't have all the answers, nor do I have time to chase down all the latest takes on what some folks consider the Omega apostasy. EGW was dead on when she said that toward the end there would be every wind of doctrine blowing. All these numerous speculations within our own ranks certainly give evidence of that. Could it be in some respects that in all this finger pointing we should look in the mirror?

William Noel
Enter comment here...

William Noel
Here we go again! Another claim about the "Omega of Apostasies." I've lost count of the number of times I've heard such claims and seen where the result was just more debate that distracted us from doing what God wants us to be doing.

Elaine Nelson
When the church grows stale with perfectionist theology and is so introverted in looking for sins among its own, this is the inevitable result: more searching for reasons for the "Lord delaying His coming."

Where did that idea originate? We mere humans are not in control of God. He will return when He decides, not based on anything we do. We should be about our "Father's business" simply because there are so many hands needed to help those who are hurting all around us. But instead, we are "soul-searching" seeking the last possible sin to eradicate in our lives. Such Puritanical navel-gazing will only result in judgmental attitudes.

People who are busy helping to feed the hungry (there certainly is a desperate need there); and aiding flood and tornado victims will have no time to do "soul-searching."

William Noel
Elaine,

Well said! When I'm busy doing God's work I don't have time to get lost in useless debates and my tolerance for them gets really short in a big hurry.

Ella M Rydzowski
Elaine, I like this note from you—I agree.
"We mere humans are not in control of God. He will return when He decides, not based on anything we do. We should be about our "Father's business" simply because there are so many hands needed to help those who are hurting all around us. But instead, we are "soul-searching" seeking the last possible sin to eradicate in our lives. Such Punitical navel-gazing will always result in judgmental attitudes."

This attitude of worrying about our own salvation comes across as self-centered "navel-gazing" all right. The only conspiracy is that of the adversary/accuser, and he has one for everybody: perfectionism, pantheism, secularism, criticism, all sorts of isms to fit our every need! They can become our idols and identity. And they all fit the biblical "form of religion that denies the power thereof." Faith can change lives and attitudes if practiced.

Brenda

Thank you Adam.
I like your post, short and to the point. I've seen the DVD you recommend some time ago and I agree with you that it explains very well how this pantheistic/panentheistic understanding of God is in the foundation of Emerging theology.
Another important thing mentioned, is that we as Christians don't understand that evolution is not only about origins but about the eschatology as well. Spiritual evolution is where we are supposedly heading and quantum physics (in their understanding) and this emerging worldview where everything is "unfolding" is preparing the way.

Elaine Nelson

Better stay away from any physicists and especially those who are studying quantum physics. One never knows what's behind such studying.

Posting as

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What If...?

Submitted May 27, 2011
By Stephen Foster

In discussing religion, the Bible, and origins, we speculate about things we cannot definitively determine as factual; yet live in a world wherein there are actual, definitive experiences.

Let’s speculate about the world we know by playing a “what if” game.

What if the apparently increasing frequency and intensity of violent weather and earthquakes is an actuality; as opposed to merely a provincial and chronologically limited perception?

What if the seeming increase in violent crime and the apparent disintegration of positive community, moral, or ethical values is a worldwide reality; and actually symptomatic of something?

What if the love of money is indeed the root of all (kinds of) evil; while the economic system that depends on this “love” is the only one that “works”?

What if the daily commercial demonizing of ideological adversaries by well paid corporate media spokespersons, analysts, pundits, correspondents, and “contributors” is having a balkanizing and corrosive effect on society; such that, given the “right” circumstances, intra-societal violence—even warfare—could very easily (again) erupt in the industrialized West, as it has elsewhere?

What if the aforementioned spokespersons, analysts, pundits, correspondents, contributors, and “anchors” were largely of the identical religious training, affiliation, and persuasion; though clearly of widely varying political ideologies?

What if malevolent, terroristic elements of the international community were to acquire nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons (of mass destruction), or the technology or capacity to develop and/or otherwise “control” them; not to mention if there were an ascension to power of the more belligerent and jingoistic elements in the nation states who already have such weaponry?

What if those with a religious motivation or agenda—who seek to obtain political and legislative power for the expressed purpose of (democratically) imposing particular religious beliefs on a Western industrialized society—get it?

What if the U.S. constitutional First Amendment guarantees of freedom of religion were ever circumvented on the grounds that individual states are not bound by federal congressional restrictions?
What are the chances that none of this happens, is real, or is true?

What if any of this happens, or is real, or true? What are we to do then? What’s next? Would this not be worthwhile speculating about?

**Elaine Nelson**

The proper place for speculators is on Wall Street. Only they use money to place their bets.

Good education is the only antidote to avoid being taken in by all sorts of charlatans: business, health, religion, finance and more. The quacks always have a ready audience, as illustrated by Camping’s followers who have yet to be raptured. Financial scams still flourish among the greedy, and conspiracy theories are ongoing, whether of UFOs, birthers, or the cause of tornadoes and earthquakes.

Knowledge is the best antidote; otherwise anyone is fair prey.

**Stephen Foster**

So Elaine, since knowledge is the best antidote against deception, are you saying that indeed it would be good to know whether or not there has been an (unprecedented?) increase in the frequency and intensity of earthquakes, tornadoes, and floods, for example? Would it be good to "know" if we are in a Catch-22, in that the best economic system known to man is one that is premised on man’s greed? Would it be good, from a “knowledge” perspective, to have a back up plan if anti-proliferation efforts regarding WMD eventually fail?

Is it speculation to conclude that galvanizing public opinion by way of propaganda has historically been effective? Is it really speculation to reason that it is practically a mathematical certainty that those who seek political power for the purposes of promoting religious beliefs and practices for the good of the nation will eventually acquire it?

**William Noel**

The only value to be gained from such speculation is to waste our time, assuming the words "waste" and "time" can be used in any positive or beneficial combination.

If there is one thread of value to be drawn from your questions it is to illustrate the false stereotypes on which they are based. To wit, you asked: What if the love of money is indeed the root of all (kinds of) evil; while the economic system that depends on this “love” is the only one that “works”? The concept upon which that question is based assumes that anyone who is in business and making a profit must be doing so because the love of money is paramount in their lives and, as a result, they are evil and no good can come from their business. While I have met a few people whose love of money was paramount, their businesses typically were small and often failed. The vast majority of business owners I know are decent, morally-upright and caring people who enjoy what they are doing and seek to make their communities a better place. Just a few days
ago I visited a business seeking a supply that was needed to help with a project that was part of the ongoing tornado relief effort here in Alabama. When he learned of my purpose he not only gave me what I was prepared to pay for, but implored me to return if I needed anything else and he would give it to me.

Please, do not paint such people with the broad, stereotypical paintbrush that unjustly defames.

Stephen Foster

William Noel,
We never said, or implied, that all or most of us who participate in the private enterprise system “love” money. Many business people are simply trying to honestly provide for themselves, their families, their employees, and their communities by offering various goods and services demanded by the public at reasonable yet profitable rates.
However it is naïve in the extreme to suggest that the dominant motivation in a man-made system of economics that by definition leverages capital to gain more capital is not the often insatiable desire to acquire more money and material possessions than are needful, sometimes (historically) via the exploitation of fellow human beings; otherwise known as greed.
If this system is arguably, if not demonstrably, the most effective and efficient economic system that man has devised; we are between the proverbial rock and hard place.

Elaine Nelson

Even the biblical model for paying tithe is based on "the increase." No define what is the "increase" if not profit?

Stephen, you have been adept at erecting strawmen. The speculative questions are opinionate from the beginning. Such questions in any questionnaire are ultimately of no value because they are biased at the beginning.

William Noel

Steven,
When you say something using stereotypes and buzz words laden with particular political concepts, then say that is not what you were implying, how are we to know what you are talking about? How can we know that you're telling us the truth, or that your question is of value?

Stephen Foster

William Noel,

May I suggest that one way “know what [someone is] talking about… [or to] know that [they are] telling you the truth” is to use the very words that they write or say in ascertaining what it is they are talking about or telling you.
Your response to my “what if” question (which was worded as follows: “What if the love of money is indeed the root of all (kinds of) evil; while the economic system that depends on this “love” is the only one that “works”?) about the apparent catalytic tension between the “greed is good” /love of money mentality and the relatively efficacious economic system of capitalism—which, certainly on some level, is fueled by money and the quest for more of it—was to state that I assumed “that anyone who is in business and making a profit must be doing so because the love of money is paramount in their lives and, as a result, they are evil and no good can come from their business.”

When I responded by arguing the inverse corollary of your observation (that you indeed “have met a few people whose love of money was paramount… [but that] the vast majority of business owners [you] know are decent, morally-upright and caring people” etc.)—that while there are certainly many good and decent businesses and business people, the system in which they operate is nonetheless fueled by the motivation to acquire, leverage, and acquire still more money, yet has arguably been the best system devised—you then say that I initially used “stereotypes and buzz words laden with particular concepts.”

Remember, the question went to ramifications “if” there is a catalytic relationship between the love of money and the effectiveness of the capitalistic economic system. So, may I now ask you, in my “what if” question about greed and capitalism, where exactly are these stereotypes and buzz words to which you refer?

William Noel

4 days ago

Stephen,

You may not have realized it, but your question about the love of money used the same stereotypical argument that has been used by nearly every socialist/communist philosopher over the last 150 years to condemn capitalism. The argument is that greed is essential if capitalism is to succeed, thus it is an evil that must be eradicated from society. Liberal-socialists continue using the argument to justify their actions to use the force of law (and sometimes just force) to take away whatever “the rich” have earned. They justify this so they can redistribute the wealth to the poor, except the first people to be enriched were those in power while the poor received only a minor portion of what was taken.

The argument you presented for discussion is used as justification for breaking the 8th, 9th and 10th commandments (see my article “Social (In)Justice?” in the latest print edition of Adventist Today). That is how someone could question if you knew the meanings of the words you used or if the opinion you presented was based on truth.

There is yet another question that needs to be answered: How will discussion of your question draw people closer to God when it presupposes that a social philosophy that promotes disobedience to God’s law is the answer?

Stephen Foster

4 days ago

William Noel,
That others may have isolated the conceptual flaws of a man-made economic system is immaterial to whether the criticisms themselves have legitimacy. Capitalism is not a theology, nor is it sacrosanct, or beyond reproach.

The original “what if” did not use buzz words or labels (like “socialist/communist” or “liberal/socialist;” or even corporate oligarchy or authoritarian plutocracy for that matter). It simply raised the question of what are the implications, or consequences, if greed does indeed fuel the most efficacious economic system man has devised. It is to say that, if the love of money does drive the capitalist system—and if this is the best we can do—that man made systems are so inherently flawed that ultimate failure is inevitable.

This being the case, we may be left to acknowledge that the claims and promises of the Jesus of the Bible are the best and only hope of mankind. Whether you agree with my line of reasoning or not, I hope this answers your question.

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Ella M Rydzewski  
1 week ago  Reply

What if there was an edit section here like there used to be, and we wouldn't make these unintended mistakes? And why use our complete name?  
Stephen, I appreciate your speculation which is obviously according to church teaching. But what if it happened differently than we thought? What if Harold Camping is right about October (a coincidence with 1844?) What if it is the secular world that champions religious laws? Germany has a Sunday law right now for secular reasons. Now, I have no real opinion on these--I just want to speculate.  
Noel, I assume you read and watch the news. And even if this weren't widespread, it seems to be to those alive now. I think that is the point. Media is making possible today things that were not possible any time in the past. Something is about to happen. For the first time evil and good (the Gospel) can go all over the world, and these possibilities will grow in the future. I really don't consider it a waste of time to prepare for the future, which would lead us to more prayer, Bible study, devotion, caring, and purpose.

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Ella M Rydzewski  
1 week ago  Reply

Elaine,  
Knowledge isn't the same as wisdom.

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Stephen Foster  
1 week ago  Reply

Ella M,  
You will note that I also speculated, or asked, what chance is there that none of this happens, or is real, or true? My view is that there is no chance that NONE of this will happen.

We are as free to speculate about the ramifications of any Adventist teaching being right as we
are about those of any being wrong.

Of course, in my opinion, you are absolutely right; something is about to happen—and knowledge isn't the same as wisdom.

Stephen, I wish I had the time to respond to all your 'what ifs', but I'll just take one.

"What if the U.S. constitutional First Amendment guarantees of freedom of religion were ever circumvented on the grounds that individual states are not bound by federal congressional restrictions?"

Well, you will be relieved to know that the 14th Amendment made the Bill of Rights applicable to the states. The 'Establishment Clause' and the 'Free Exercise Clause' of the First Amendment are binding on the states. Don't let the "States' Rights" people mess with your head, Stephen.

Yeah, I'm aware of the 14th Amendment's provisions; but you should consider that this doesn't make any difference to certain key elements of judicial thought in America. This is from a 2006 article in the Journal of Law & Policy entitled “Justice Scalia and the Religion Clauses” by Eric R. Claeys (which basically critiqued an article previously written by Professor Garrett Epps entitled “Some Animals Are More Equal than Others”), page 352:

Because the First Amendment bars Congress from “making any law respecting” any establishment or “prohibiting” free exercise, it leaves alone state establishments or non-establishments and state regulation of religious exercise.

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Thank God Scalia is not the entire Supreme Court. If he made all the rulings, we would soon be a state no longer with the freedoms we still enjoy.
Regardless of his opinion, as stated above, without a constituional amendment, the first cannot be abrogated. Where is an example of states establishing regulation of religious exercises?

Stephen Foster
4 days ago Reply

Elaine,

Surely, you are fully aware that the Supreme Court’s role is to interpret the Constitution. That is, to determine whether a statute or a lower court ruling is constitutional or not.

In other words, if five (5) members of the Supreme Court say that a law or a ruling is constitutional (no matter what it is), that’s it; there is no need for an amendment, and there is no other place to appeal that judgment.

We have previously pointed out the historical reality that various states have enacted various so-called Blue Laws (in the past), which have been enforced with varying degrees of vigor over time. We now—right now—have a political climate wherein (rhetorically) “the culture” is being fought for and “values” voters are being rhetorically appealed to, to help restore the traditions of the alleged Christian founding of our nation. Prominent current leaders of this movement have already claimed that some natural disasters, specific diseases, and certain acts of terror are examples of God’s judgment on those who have ignored or defied His will. These are undeniable facts, my friend.

It is also a fact that Justice Scalia is the senior member of a bloc of four justices who are ideological and philosophical soul mates on many, actually most, contentious issues. A fifth justice votes with them more often than not, but is demonstrably more of an independent. This is also an undeniable fact.

To ignore a series of undeniable facts might be considered an example of denial.

Elaine Nelson
4 days ago Reply

Stephen, I am keenly aware of constitutional rulings by the Supremes, and the conservative blog that now prevails. And, anything is possible, but that is no the same as probable.

You write that "prominent current leaders....have claimed that natural disasters are God's judgment. Yes, many religious leaders as well as SDAs have also agreed. However, until the religious leaders make constitutional decisions, they have no power other than those who follow them. Such "facts" are still speculative until they have been enacted into law which is why some of us choose not to worry about troubles before they come due--which is a good definition of "worry."

With an ever increasing number of agnostics and atheists there would have to be many more legislators who vote on their personal religious beliefs. Until that possibility, this nation still reveres the first amendment, and we should, too.
Elaine writes:
“However, until the religious leaders make constitutional decisions, they have no power other than those who follow them. Such "facts" are still speculative until they have been enacted into law which is why some of us choose not to worry about troubles before they come due--which is a good definition of ‘worry.’”

As you are aware, the legislative authorities in this nation are accountable to the voters who send them to represent them. The fact that this congress has taken up abortion funding and availability, for example, as a primary concern should clue you to the reality that religious leaders and voters are influential constituents of certain legislators; and that these legislators are fully aware of same.

Of course, the fact that the Supreme Court is NOT accountable to voters is not at all speculative. While it is true that the Supreme Court is not entirely comprised of “Scalías,” it is also true that it does not have to comprise nine “Scalías” in order for it to have the same effect on things that YOU have previously outlined (that “we would soon be a state no longer with the freedoms we still enjoy”). It would only take four others essentially like him; and three, for sure, are already there.

Simply “worrying” about a weather forecast of a hurricane that is now visible on the radar screen is stupid. Ignoring the fact that what appears to be a hurricane is now visible on the radar screen is equally as stupid.

Elaine Nelson

Comparing the POSSIBILITY of the Supremes rulings is far less accurate than hurricane prediction with planes flying in their midst and identifying the wind velocity and path. Even long-time Supreme Court watchers are often caught off guard at their rulings. Only prophets predict, and the accuracy has not been so good lately.

Stephen Foster

Elaine,

Three things are clear, 1) that YOU see the dangers to “the freedoms we still enjoy” from a court full of Scalia-types, and 2) you are invested in believing that this danger is somehow not real, despite the practical reality of the current court make-up (possibly because of your disdain for Adventism and Adventist eschatology), and 3) that I believe these dangers are real harbingers of prophetic import.
The Belief That Bothers Kids the Most...

One of the things I like to do in my class when we first begin the section on SDA Beliefs is to pass out a questionnaire, asking the students 3 questions:

1. Which of the 28 fundamental beliefs do you have the most questions about?
2. Which of the 28 fundamental beliefs seem to personally bother you the most?
3. Which of the 28 fundamental beliefs seem the most relevant and useful in real life?

Of course Ellen White, the sanctuary, and the investigative judgment are always the heavy weights for the first question. The millennium and the end of sin often make the list too. The kids almost always report finding the Sabbath, the health message, and our beliefs on the state of the dead very relevant to real life in question 3. But question number 2 is usually the unpredictable one, and often I get as many answers for that as I have students. However, not last year.

Last year, question 2 was answered identically by a giant majority of the 86 students. Do you want to know which one thing bothered them the most? Jewelry. It was jewelry! You know, I didn’t even list that one, either. It wasn’t an option; it’s not one of the core 28, though of course it’s inferred under lifestyle issues I guess. As I read the results, I kept thinking to myself…jewelry? Really?!

On the one hand, I felt happy that they aren’t personally disturbed to their cores about other things, larger things, things with profound theological implications. On the other hand, I felt discouraged that so many found themselves snared on such a side issue.

These are academy kids, keep in mind. So perhaps they were reacting to the most prevalent rules they seem to collide with on a day-to-day basis. It seems like jewelry is sneaked on, found, and taken almost constantly in the routine rhythms of boarding school life – someone’s always pushing the limits. But to get stuck on this, out of all our beliefs, as something that bothers them the MOST? I was surprised.

So we held a debate on the issue – I let them hash it out because I wanted to hear their thoughts. For a full class period each section, I listened to all of the pros and cons, all of the slinging of Bible texts and sentimental ideas and witnessing plugs, from both sides, and I simply marveled. Actually, their arguments were GOOD. Many were confused about how wearing jewelry is any different from wearing expensive clothes, shoes, ties, and sunglasses. Some struggled with the different standards between churches. And others simply wanted to find a clear verse they could stand behind and hang
their hat – or necklace – on. But in each class, the arguments grew so heated and passionate that I came to see clearly why this is such a problem for teenagers.

In the post-debate aftermath quiet of my classroom, alone with my thoughts, I began to wonder how many kids we lose to silly, petty issues such as jewelry. And that goes for both sides – how many have we lost because we condemned them for wearing it, or made such a huge issue about it instead of focusing on Jesus? How many have we lost because we wore it to church bold-faced, even though our church technically speaks against it? I wondered how much longer this particular subject was going to be an issue in our church.

In the California and Arizona churches I grew up in, many people wore it without a second thought. Fast forward to my college days in Nebraska and Iowa, and I hardly ever saw it, except among my peers. It was almost completely missing from grad school in Michigan. Here in the Seattle area – well, it just depends on the church you choose to attend each week, I suppose.

One of the things I have always loved about the Adventist church is that we can disagree on things, sometimes vehemently, and yet still stay together, still retain the general sense of unity. I’ve read that so many churches have split over the very same issues which we fight over, yet we somehow find a way to agree to disagree and remain as one. I’m proud of us for that. Terribly proud! But I also wonder just how confusing it is to our kids, to find a different flavor of Adventism almost anywhere you go.

Maybe confusing is okay though? “Confusing” has the potential to cause people to throw their hands up in exasperation, true. But then again, maybe if they are presented with a large enough variety of options, they will be forced to learn how to think for themselves. Forced to search their Bibles. Forced to seek their answers personally from God, instead of church people. I guess I really would rather see a generation of young Adventists who have a well-thought out faith, than a generation of identical bleating sheep, earring-clad or not.

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<tr>
<th>Trudy Morgan-Cole</th>
<th>2 days ago</th>
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<tr>
<td>It is the ultimate in silly, petty issues and it's a shame young people see it as a &quot;core belief&quot; of the SDA church.</td>
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<th>Ron Corson</th>
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<td>When I read what you said: &quot;I began to wonder how many kids we lose to silly, petty issues such as jewelry. And that goes for both sides –&quot; I was thinking by both sides perhaps you were going to say how many do we gain by our stance on Jewelry. You did not go that direction but it is something to think about. Does our Puritan stance on Jewelry draw any into our church. It is doubtful it would draw any in and what would it say if it did draw any in?</td>
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<th>Elaine Nelson</th>
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| If we don't listen to our teens we will lose most of them. This comes from someone who has seen
at least three generations attending a 12-grade academy for 50 years. This ridiculous position taken much more significantly in the past has resulted in the larger number of kids who left Adventism than those who stayed by.

Is there any indication that people have been convinced of Adventism because they eschewed jewelry? If God does not look at the outward appearance but the heart, why has Adventism been so insistent on the outward appearance?

Kids have great B.S. meters and more quickly see the inconsistencies in such positions than their parents who may have grown up and simply accepted such restrictions. The costs of enforcing these have been most detrimental to the church and will continue wherever and whenever they are enforced. Experience demonstrates the utter futility of trying to control such insignificant positions.

Ella M Rydzewski

It doesn't appear that things have changed that much concerning priorities since I was in school! I can't believe it either! However, I think there is a great deal of credibility at stake for the church here. That people in some parts of the country think this is a priority does make one question that credibility. I remember reading an article by a prominent former Adventist who had her first questions here--how could a church seemingly put the wearing of jewelry on the same level as immorality, at least that is the way it came through to her.

Teens are also idealists, and when we teach them at home or school that simplicity means not wearing jewelry we can set some up for disillusionment and cause them to be judgemental. The taboo is now illogical, makes no sense to the people we want to reach, and is irrelevant. Like the bicycle craze White spoke about (how come we don't have a rule about them??), the gold rush made an impact on society a hundred years ago and gold was the idol of the times. It was costly, and some other churches condemned jewelry as well. Today it's no different than clothing. I am for letting our youth get beyond this and quit having such rules in our schools that cause confusion and a lack of training in good decisionmaking. Let's get back to what really matters.