New articles about creation/evolution, homosexuality, religious freedom

Special Report from the International Conference on the Bible and Science

Adelina Alexe brings you three articles about

New This Week:

- Are You Peculiar? From Homosexuality to Holiness
  Living by feelings may be keeping you from being all you can be in Christ.
the recent conference affirming the Adventist Church's stance on creation.

**Theologians and Scientists Make the Case for Creation**

**GC President and Vice President Speak Out**

**Participants from Around the World Share Their Reactions**

**Religious Freedom and Anti-discrimination Principles Collide on College Campuses**

Should a Hindu be allowed to lead a Christian student group—or vice versa?
Theologians and Scientists Present the Case for Creation at Adventist Faith and Science Conference

Adelina Alexe

Sunday, August 24, 2014, concluded the 10-day International Conference on the Bible and Science: Affirming Creation, held primarily in Saint George, Utah. The conference brought together approximately 400 attendees from all 13 divisions of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and more than 35 presenters from the fields of religion, biology, paleontology, geology, earth science, chemistry, physics, archaeology, and other sciences.

The participant list included educators, editors, researchers, church administrators, and some doctoral students from Andrews University and Loma Linda University. The planning committee included the General Conference’s Faith and Science Council, the Geoscience Research Institute, the Biblical Research Institute, and the GC Department of Education.

The purpose of the conference was “to bring together Adventist educators to explore the creation through both Bible study and study of the creation itself.” The organizers hoped that “participants will leave better equipped and inspired to teach about the creation in an informed, responsible, and faith-affirming way” (http://fscsda.org/icbs/).

In harmony with the title of the conference, the lectures presented biblical and scientific evidence and arguments for six literal, consecutive, contiguous, 24-hour days of creation.

The Theological Perspective

The presentations of the theologians and biblical scholars converged around two main points:

1. the authority of Scripture in biblical interpretation, and

2. the interconnection of the doctrine of creation with other foundational doctrines accepted by the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary professors Jo Ann and Richard Davidson, two of the main speakers, emphasized the authority of Scripture and upheld the historical-grammatical method of interpretation as the proper hermeneutical method. They offered biblical principles of hermeneutics (in support of which they brought predominantly internal arguments from Scripture) and touched briefly on several non-biblical methods of interpretation. Richard Davidson’s hermeneutical “Decalogue” listed the following principles:

I. Sola Scriptura: By the Bible and the Bible Only

II. Tota Scriptura: By the Totality of Scripture

III. The Analogy of Scripture: The Bible Is Its Own Expositor

IV. Spiritual Things Are Spiritually Discerned

V. Text and Translation

VI. Historical Context
In a multiple-lecture series on the history of hermeneutics, Ed Zinke, past president of the Adventist Theological Society, emphasized the Sola Scriptura principle and the need to test the interpretation of nature through Scripture, given that the knowledge of God in nature is limited and thus “insufficient to prove the moral character of God.”

Through the study of several passages of the New Testament, seminary professor Tom Shepherd showed that the doctrine of creation is inseparably linked with the biblical teachings on anthropology, sin, death, salvation, marriage, Christology, theology, ethics, and eschatology. “If evolution were true,” he stated in his conclusion, then:

- God is not all-powerful.
- God is arbitrary, uncaring.
- We may worship ourselves.
- Christ is not the Creator.
- He is not preeminent; we can ignore Him.
- Humans arose from lower forms of life.
- Humans are not made in the image of God.
- Respect for others is rooted in what they do, not what they are.
- Death preceded sin.
- Death is the means of development.
- The world is progressing upward, not downward.
- Man is progressing and needs no salvation.
- Progress is measured in humanistic terms, not in comparison with Christ.
- Marriage is a contract between people. It can be broken at will.
- Since there is no definite beginning, there is no definite End.
- The world is getting better, not worse. You are a small cog in a great progression toward evolution’s goal.
The Scientific Evidence

The scientific presentations offered empirical evidence pointing to a short chronology of life on earth, a literal six-day creation, and a global flood. The lectures included the following:

- “Yellowstone ‘Fossil Forests,’”
- “Yellowstone and Pseudogenes,”
- “Design and Evolution of Protein Functions,”
- “Trilobite: Enigma of Complexity: Why Evolution Is Not a Candidate,”
- “Comparing the Human and Chimpanzee Genomes: More Difference than Expected,”
- “Challenges in Chemical Evolution to Life,”
- “Paleocurrents: A Window into Geologic History,”
- “Looking for Time in All the Wrong Places: Bioturbation in the Fossil Record,”
- “Radiometric Dating,”
- “Carbon-14 in Fossil Carbon,”
- “Moenkopi/Shinarump Contact and Geological Time,”
- “Coconino Sandstone Injectites,”
- “Lessons from Coconino Sandstone Fossil Tracks,”
- “What Happened to the Dinosaurs?”
- “Fossil Horses: Testing Macroevolution,”
- “More Lessons from Fossil Turtles,”
- “Science and Faith: The Fossil Ape-men,”
- “Sociobiology: Why Do We Behave as We Do?”
- “Darwinism’s Influence on Morality, Media, and Political Discourse.”

Some of these papers are in the process of being published.

In one of her presentations, Suzanne Phillips, professor of biology at Southwestern Adventist University, used scientific discoveries on “junk DNA” as an example of scientific progress refuting previous interpretation of data. Her presentation showed that further understanding of the human genome is more favorable to creationism than evolutionism.

“Junk DNA,” at one point considered a useless part of the DNA (hence its name), was described by evolutionist Richard Dawkins as genes that once did something useful but have now been sidelined and are never transcribed or translated. They might as well not exist, as far as the animal’s welfare is concerned. But as far as the scientist is concerned they very much exist, and they are exactly what we need for an evolutionary clock…. What pseudogenes are useful for is embarrassing creationists. It stretches even their creative
ingenuity to make up a convincing reason why an intelligent designer should have created a pseudogene—a gene that does absolutely nothing and gives every appearance of being a superannuated version of a gene that used to do something—unless he was deliberately setting out to fool us…. It is a remarkable fact that the greater part (95 percent in the case of humans) of the genome might as well not be there, for all the difference it makes (The Greatest Show on Earth, 2009, pp. 332, 333).

However, ENCODE, a research project launched by the U.S. National Human Genome Research Institute in September 2003, turned that wisdom on its head. Based on the work of more than 400 scientists, ENCODE determined that “80 percent of the human genome is now ‘associated with at least one biochemical function’ (2012)” and that “much of this functional non-coding DNA is involved in the regulation of the expression of coding genes,” according to Phillips’ presentation. This demonstrates that “gene regulation is far more complex than was previously believed,” said Phillips.

In harmony with Zinke’s presentations, which pointed to the need to interpret nature through Scripture, Timothy Standish of the Geoscience Research Institute exposed some limitations of Intelligent Design (ID) when it comes to understanding the attributes of God, given that “ID deals only with the question of nature and design, not design and God,” and that it “is not rooted in a specific view of God.”

Intelligent Design, said Standish, is “consistent with Scriptural claims about God’s interaction with the material world,” but it “does not prove specific Scriptural claims true.” Looking at nature alone leaves us with some serious theological issues, particularly regarding the goodness of God—His “competence as a designer when His designs fail” and His “character when designs appear evil.” Standish stated: “ID is half the battle, but a worrying half-truth for Christians unless seeds of biblical truth are sown after the ID plow.”

In another presentation, Standish suggested that when comparing the human genome with the genome of chimpanzees, we need to bear in mind that “sequence can be compared in different ways giving different outcomes, not all differences are created equal, and percentage is a misleading metric.” “The differences . . . are more profound than is commonly understood,” he said.

Leonard Brand, professor of biology and paleontology at Loma Linda University, responded to a quote from Eldredge’s article The Monkey Business: A Scientist Looks at Creationism stating that no creationist “has contributed a single article to any reputable scientific journal” (1982, p. 83) and a quote from Kitcher, Abusing Science: The Case Against Creationism, declaring that “Flood geology . . . does not aim at advancing science—it does not seek to extend the range of phenomena that are open to scientific investigation” (1982, p. 129). Brand suggested that, on the contrary, belief in the “biblical story of creation and the global flood” makes us ask new questions, and “our eyes are opened to think in new ways not open to those who believe in naturalism.” These questions, he said, “must be answered with quality science.”

Throughout the conference, various speakers emphasized the need to be academically honest and not overstate the case for creation without solid evidence. For example, Phillips reminded the audience that scientists are confronted both with evidence that “support[s] the concept of a fiat creation” (such as “sudden appearances, general absence of intermediate forms in the fossil record, evidence of extraordinary events, general lack of evidence for time, and
molecular biology”) and with evidence that “challenge[s] the concept of a fiat creation” (such as “radiometric dating, other dating methods, orderly fossil record”).

The conference included three field trips (to Virgin River Gorge, Zion National Park, and Grand Canyon National Park); student and delegate panels where attendees articulated what creation means to them personally; music provided by various groups; a creation, literature, and the arts evening; and a couple lectures from non-Adventist speakers in which they shared their journey of being a creationist within a predominantly evolutionist academic setting.

The last day brought into focus environmental care, including a biblical case for it and practical ways in which we can exercise responsible dominion. The recently published book Entrusted: Christians and Environmental Care (2013), edited by Stephen Dunbar, James Gibson, and Humberto Rasi, was featured at the conference among other resources.

Throughout the conference, a committee worked on a session statement that affirms a literal reading of Genesis 1 and 2, a literal six-day creation, and a global flood. The statement was voted by the participants and accepted in majority. The entire document can be read here:

http://www.adventistreview.org/assets/public/features
/International_Conference_on_the_Bible_and_Science_Final_Statement.pdf

Seventh-day Adventist Church President Ted N.C. Wilson presented the opening and closing speeches at the International Conference on the Bible and Science: Affirming Creation in Saint George, Utah, August 14-24. His sermons centered on the two points emphasized throughout the conference by various presenters: the authority of Scripture and the interrelation between the doctrine of creation and other doctrines embraced by Seventh-day Adventists.

In his opening address, Wilson stated: “We believe that the biblical creation account in Genesis 1 and 2 was a literal event that took place in six literal, consecutive days recently as opposed to deep time. It was accomplished by God’s authoritative voice and happened when He spoke the world into existence.”

Wilson presented some implications of accepting theistic evolution for the doctrines of the sanctuary, salvation, the second coming, re-creation, and especially the Sabbath, which is “integral to this six-day creation week since it memorializes the literal creation week and provides Seventh-day Adventists with a direct connection to our Creator.” He asserted that “if one does not accept the recent six-day creation understanding, then that person is actually not a ‘Seventh-day’ Adventist, since the seventh-day Sabbath would become absolutely meaningless historically and theologically, and most of our biblically based doctrines centered in Christ and His authoritative voice would become meaningless as well.”

Wilson warned against using the higher critical method of interpretation, which is “self-centered and inspired by the devil” and “puts an individual above the plain approach of the Scriptures and gives inappropriate license to decide what he or she perceives as truth based on the resources and education of the critic.” He emphasized the need to use the historical-biblical method of interpreting Scripture, which “allows the Bible to interpret itself.” Wilson also stated that “both the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy are absolutely reliable and are inspired by the Creator Himself,” and called on the attendees to “rely on the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy as the basis of your understanding of origins.”

Among the quotes from Ellen White included in the speech, Wilson read from Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers, pages 135, 136:

*Human philosophy declares that an indefinite period of time was taken in the creation of the world. Does God state the matter thus? No; He says, ‘It is a sign between Me and the children of Israel forever: for in six days [not six indefinite periods of time; for then there would be no possible way for man to observe the day specified in the fourth commandment] the Lord made heaven and Earth, and on the seventh day He rested, and was refreshed.’ ... The sophistry in regard to the world’s being created in an indefinite period of time is one of Satan’s falsehoods. ... When the Lord declares that He made the world in six days and rested on the seventh day, He means the day of 24 hours, which He*
has marked off by the rising and setting of the sun.

Wilson also quoted from Patriarchs and Prophets, pages 111, 112:

The assumption that the events of the first week required thousands upon thousands of years, strikes directly at the foundation of the fourth commandment. It represents the Creator as commanding men to observe the week of literal days in commemoration of vast, indefinite periods…. It is infidelity in its most insidious and hence most dangerous form…. The Bible recognizes no long ages in which the Earth was slowly evolved from chaos. Of each successive day of creation, the sacred record declares that it consisted of the evening and the morning, like all other days that have followed.

The church president called on teachers and leaders in SDA educational institutions to “hold firmly to a literal recent creation and absolutely reject theistic and general evolutionary theory.” Church employees teaching “theistic or pure evolutionary theory should not even exist in a Seventh-day Adventist school or church pulpit,” he said. Those who do not accept a six-day, recent creation should do “the honorable thing … to resign from their position of trust.”

In his closing speech, Wilson called on “Seventh-day Adventist teachers, educators, pastors, and church employees living in the end of time” to “not reduce our ‘seventh-day’ distinctiveness but rather trumpet it as a wonderful feature of life.” He urged the participants to “proclaim God’s final message in classrooms, pulpits, websites, hallways, media, and in every way and place, explaining that we love and serve a Creator God who has a direct interest in our welfare and is actively working to bring us into a right relationship with Him in preparation for His soon return to take us home.”

GC Vice President Decries “Weed Planters”

Like Wilson, Michael Ryan, a general vice president of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, emphasized the uniqueness of the Seventh-day Adventist message that “marks and defines this church” and pointed to the interconnected nature of Adventist teachings.

“Some may think that we have come to define, adjust, and reshape our creation theology,” said Ryan in his Sabbath sermon. He continued:

No. We have a very well-defined and understood theology on creation…. The definition of our creation theology comes from the Bible…. We believe in creation because God is the one who said how it happened. We accept it by faith. We believe in a short chronology. We believe that God is the creator
of all things. We believe that the world was created in six literal contiguous days. We believe our biblical doctrine of biblical creation is foundational and inseparably linked to the church’s 28 Fundamental Beliefs. We believe that the Sabbath, the miracles of the Bible, the death and resurrection of Jesus our Savior, the first and second resurrection, the re-creation of the new Earth, and a host of other biblical stories, beliefs, and claims are made foolish by denying the first 11 chapters of Genesis…. We believe that the denial of the literal reality of Genesis 1-11 leaves this church with a compromised message and a mission house that is built on sand.

In agreement with the theologians and scientists who presented throughout the 10 days, Ryan called on Seventh-day Adventists to consider the Bible as “irreplaceable … the guide and anchor to all our endeavors and all our conclusions,” because “we are a community of faith, and to allow a little drop of human conjecture in an ocean of God’s great unknown scientific absolutes, to place faith in the spotlight of higher criticism, is the height of human arrogance…. The truths of science can often be temporary, but God’s statements of faith, they are eternal.”

The church vice-president called out the “extreme liberals and extreme conservatives,” who exhibit “exactly the same characteristics: No. 1: They are undyingly critical of the church. No. 2: They want to be the judge of who is going to be in the kingdom. And No. 3: They only want to accept the portions of Scripture and Ellen White that fit the conclusions of their higher criticism.” Ryan called these individuals “liberal and conservative weed planters,” people who “said they were going to work in the vineyard but they never showed up,” whose “self-worth and standing requires a cluster of smug companions who envision themselves as mavericks, liberated thinkers, enlightened beyond faith and the Word.”

Ryan continued:

Criticism is an essential talent if they are to be credible, card-carrying members of the Weed Planters Union. Oh, how thrilled I am that there are none attending this conference. But they have been known to attend Bible and Science conferences…. Of course, these weed planters will quickly tell you they never read Ellen White, and as a matter of fact are now applying their superior intelligence to rendering a qualified opinion on whether God really knew what He was talking about in the Scriptures.

Ryan said he doesn’t find joy in saying this. “I am weeping inside,” he disclosed, as he reminded his colleagues that “eternity is at stake. Time is short. There is a world that is desperately in need of a Savior. This church needs trained members who can give a reason for their faith and whose actions are marked by an uncompromising faith in God’s Word, a life of prayer, and the power of the Holy Spirit.”

The vice-president thanked the participants “on behalf of the world church” for their “faithful service to God’s mission,” for being “giants of faith,” and for “teaching in classrooms around the world and standing though the heavens fall.” In his concluding remarks, Ryan said: “We are a church with a message. We are a church with a mission. And we are a church with a promise—Jesus is coming again. It all stands before us today.”

The transcripts of Ted Wilson’s opening and closing speeches and Michael Ryan’s Sabbath sermon can be found on the webpage of the Adventist Review at the following links:
• Ted Wilson’s opening speech, *God’s Authoritative Voice*, Las Vegas, Nevada, August 14, 2014:
  http://www.adventistreview.org/affirming-creation/%E2%80%98god%E2%80%99s-authoritative-voice%E2%80%99

• Ted Wilson’s closing speech, *God’s Final Message and Your Role*, Saint George, Utah, August 24, 2014:
  http://www.adventistreview.org/affirming-creation/%E2%80%98gods-final-message-and-your-role%E2%80%99

• Michael Ryan’s sermon, *Blessed Is That Teacher*, Saint George, Utah, August 23, 2014:
  http://www.adventistreview.org/affirming-creation/%E2%80%98blessed-is-that-teacher%E2%80%99
Participants Reflect on the Faith and Science Conference

Adelina Alexe

A few participants at the International Conference on the Bible and Science shared their impressions with the readers of The Compass Magazine as answers to the questions below or in free form. We extend them another “thank you” for taking the time to share their reflections with us.

1. Please summarize in a couple sentences your overall impression of the conference.

2. What segments of the conference have been most valuable to you personally or to your group of delegates?

3. What is the importance of a literal understanding of creation for Seventh-day Adventists?

4. How will this conference enhance your contribution to the mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church?

(Photo above: Participants enjoy a few relaxing Sabbath moments at Zion National Park in Utah, August 16, 2014. Photo courtesy of Valentin Filimon.)

1. I would say with all humility—and all to God’s glory—a double amen and am en to the conference. The conference was Holy Spirit-inspired and purpose-driven. I could feel personally the workings of God in each particular presentation, and I believe with all my heart that God was, is, and will always be in such a wonderful, faith-edifying, and faith-reaffirming conference.

2. I was very much blessed every time presenters would make presentations as purely Bible-based and Christ-centered. Rich scientific information about a lot of things like the complexity of cells, rock formations, and dinosaurs reinforced my solid foundation on a young earth which was created by a Creator God. Theologically, my understanding of the Sabbath became more edified. It is not only about cessation of what you normally do each day, but it reveals a GOD who is worthy to be worshiped at all times and a God who created the world in six literal days. Honestly, I also got an interest in studying paleontology and geology in some ways after having been immersed in the presentations. God’s will be done.

3. Personally, the literal understanding of creation among Seventh-day Adventists would strengthen their faith in a Creator God as the Maker of all things, Sustainer of life, Provider of needs, and personal God, who is involved in the affairs of mankind. It will also remind them that humans, though anatomically and physiologically in some ways similar to animals, do belong to the highest kingdom. It restores healthy confidence, it boosts self-esteem, it encourages service to others, it helps in building a productive and Christlike relationship with others, it helps the church to protect the environment, and it reminds them that every person is valuable and precious in the eyes of God. No person should be treated unfairly or unjustly or ridiculed in any way, because they are created in the image of God.

4. As a teacher and counselor, by God’s grace I would always look at my students through the eyes of love. In the context of creation and redemption, every person in my class, in the church, in the community deserves to know that God is a Creator God who brings hope, forgiveness, salvation, transformation, and restoration through Christ Jesus.

– Pastor Ponciano M. Cudiamat
College Professor and Guidance Counselor at Manila Adventist College, Philippines

1. I am a researcher from Technion (Technical Institute in Israel). I never participated in anything like this. I am really impressed by the conference! Inspired event!

2. I met with many of our (Adventist) scientists, specialists in different areas—biology, biochemistry, paleontology. All of them combine their scientific activity with living faith in the God of the Bible, our Creator. For me it has been very useful to meet and to speak with Christian researchers sharing the same point of view as I do. The presentations
related to biology and biochemistry have been extremely interesting for me. Other ones have been also useful. The atmosphere (psychological climate) has been very friendly.

3. For me, creation and salvation are connected very strongly. In the past, our God created the earth and nature. He is a mighty and merciful God. He loves the sinner (me). He demonstrated His love through Christ. Jesus died for me and instead of me. And I know that God is LOVE. Now He makes me righteous. In the other words, HE CREATES the inward man inside me. HE CREATES MY NEW (SPIRITUAL) NATURE. He is mighty enough to do it successfully because in the past He was successful in creating the whole!

4. I think that the conference opens new opportunities for all participants to support our students and children studying in secular universities and help them to have faith in the God of creation, not to be confused by evolutionary theory.

– Dmitry Mologin
Researcher at Technion, Technical Institute in Israel

1. The conference has been very informative and inspiring. The subjects dealt with were relevant to the mission of the SDA Church, especially in light of the challenges faced by many Adventist students operating in the secular environment. However, I do feel that there could have been more international involvement in the presentations.

2. Most valuable to me have been the field trips to Zion National Park and the Grand Canyon. The presentations on geology and genetics were very informative.

3. The importance is that an understanding of creation informs us of our origin and also our destiny. It gives relevance to our existence and elevates the status of mankind from being a mere accident to being a deliberate product of a divine Being.

4. This conference and its subjects inform my preaching and help clarify the reason for the message which this church has been given.

– Michael Hamilton
Sabbath School Director for Trans-European Division, United Kingdom

1. This conference was revealing to me as it is my first participation in an event like this. Knowing the work that the church is doing in search of affirming our faith in something as important as the origin of life has impacted my heart, and I will certainly convey to my church where I am invited to preach the efforts we make as a congregation to go search for truth and affirm our bases.

2. I'm a geologist by training, so all the scientific exhibits that have been filed fed my concern and called my attention. But even the theological papers give the biblical necessary support and open new doors of knowledge and interpretation to the Scriptures, which are the rock upon which our faith is founded.

3. It is absolutely necessary and consistent if we claim to be Seventh-day Adventists. The return of Jesus has no power or substance if we cancel the creative power of God at the beginning of human existence. God comes to re-create the earth and humanity by the sacrifice of Christ. [To deny this truth] is devastating for the gospel and also cancels the message of the three angels declared in the Apocalypse.

4. Having greater knowledge and further contact with the rest of the Adventist world allows us to make new alliances.
and move together as a great people giving hope to the non-Christian world of the soon return of Jesus. In addition we work with research and scientific endeavors at the various levels of the church and at the training level that God calls us to work in the mission, either locally or externally.

– Oliver Vásquez
Geologist, Chile

1. The conference has provided some wonderful affirmation for my belief in God as the Creator and for our Adventist understanding of the biblical account of creation. It has probably been a tad too long and could have been shortened by three days. Unfortunately, at a conference such as this there are always those who want to advance their own perspectives, but hopefully that will not be allowed to detract from a good conference.

2. That we can ask legitimate questions of those who hold evolutionary presuppositions which call into question their theories; that we by faith accept the biblical record of origins, even if we do not have all the answers that are posed by those who have different philosophical presuppositions.

3. The word “literal” does not appear in the creation record. The acceptance of the biblical account of creation is foundational to the message and mission of this Church.

4. The mission of the Church is to make disciples for Jesus Christ. This conference has given us perspectives on the foundational nature of the creative activity of God and shown us that we can follow Him as disciples confidently.

– Anonymous, South Pacific Division

1. The conference was an expression of denominational commitment to advocate our doctrinal beliefs in our educational institutions. In particular, it was committed to teaching both models of origins, while advocating Genesis 1-11 as literal history. This is intended to equip students to face materialist evolutionary thought intelligently, with the capacity to hold their faith in the process.

2. Emphasis on the need to be honest with difficult data while being willing to live with tensions between that data and one’s faith. On the other side, seeing the extent of good research data agreeing with a short chronology view was very encouraging.

3. Genesis 1-3 (especially) as well as the rest of Genesis 1-11 provides the theological and philosophical basis for the rest of Scripture. Who God is, who man is, the nature of reality, sin, redemption, and judgment are all defined in these chapters, and those definitions control the rest of biblical theology. If you alter the meaning of these chapters from their own philosophical and theological worldviews, you will warp the rest of biblical interpretation to a greater or lesser degree depending on the passage in question.

4. Kurt Wise’s presentation poignantly reminded me that academic achievement or credibility is not as important as the salvation of a soul, and thus the need for moral daring and sensitive witness to academics of whatever discipline. We need to operate under the weight of eternal perspectives.

– Stephen Bauer, Ph.D.
Professor of Theology and Ethics at Southern Adventist University, United States

1. The conference has obviously had as a primary objective to emphasize the literal creation in six literal days and in recent history. But the presentations taken as a cluster were not interrelated so well.
2. The presentation of Dr. Taylor about the worldview of Adventist education.

3. The importance of a literal understanding of creation for SDAs relates to the seventh-day Sabbath. Hence, the idea has a direct influence over the obligation of the fourth commandment. In other words, if we have a non-literal creation or evolution mindset, there would be no reason for keeping the Sabbath commandment.

4. Practically, I decided to include in the theology curriculum at the college I teach a course on Science and Religion in order to strengthen the faithfulness to the biblical account and to widen the understanding of how to reach out to people of a different thinking.

– Laurentiu Mot
Professor of New Testament at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Cernica, Romania

1. I think it has been very necessary and valuable. The presentations led me to abandon many doubts and they opened others up. We received a wealth of material and rigorous scientific explanations.

2. The scientific part was amazing. I really enjoyed the presentations, and I learned from all of them (Leonard Brand, Standish, Chadwick, Esperante, Turunen, Suzanne Phillips, etc.).

3. It is important for understanding that God is our Creator and Savior. It gives meaning to the Sabbath and places it on the same level which it will have in the restored new earth.

4. I teach biology in an Adventist school with students ages 15-18. I have acquired much knowledge that helps me continue teaching the courses on creationism and evolution and bring much current information in favor of creationism. Overall, these conferences have been very enriching at the personal and professional level.

– Maria Jose Lopez Chavarrias
Biology Teacher at Sagunto, Spain

1. The conference was very enriching spiritually, academically, and even socially.

2. The trips to Zion National Park and Grand Canyon were most valuable because I was able to see the amazing handwork of the Creator.

3. The literal understanding of creation is important for SDAs because it is the only way of defending the truth from the teachings of evolution by atheistic scientists.

4. This conference will enhance my contribution in understanding of the biblical teachings of creation and the relationship between science and the Bible. This will enable me to share the truth with other members of the church.

– Korso Gude, Ph.D.
Deputy Vice Chancellor for Academics at the University of Eastern Africa, Baraton (Kenya)
It was an oddity and/or irony to be in a conference where the natural scientists were protesting research that attempted to reduce the irreducible complexity of nature to naturalistic materialism and the Andrews University theologians were protesting research that would *not* reduce the irreducible complexity of Scripture to their so-called “Biblicism.” Both perspectives are socially located in the interpreters of former North-Atlantic colonizing descendants. Both are not hermeneutically honest because the presenters are not being transparent about their social location, which conditions their perspectives.

— Anonymous, United States

I liked the conference very much. It is encouraging to see leadership organize such a comprehensive and powerful event affirming creation from both a biblical and scientific perspective. The literal understanding of creation is foundational to every other Christian belief, including the sanctity of both marriage and the family. So much information was crammed into a very small amount of time—I will spend a long time unpacking and utilizing the resources in my ministry. I appreciated the opportunity to visit and fellowship with people from many different countries, and it was encouraging to see the level of piety and faith commitment that we have among the educational leadership in the worldwide SDA church. I had a chance to witness to a person servicing us at the convention for over an hour and look forward to continued contact. The person is looking forward to receiving *The Great Controversy*.

— Larre Kostenko

*District Pastor, Northern California Conference, United States*
Are You Peculiar? From Homosexuality to Holiness

Wayne Blakely

For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. Titus 2:11-14.

Do Christians have the easy road? Some seem to think that because they believe in God, life will be smooth sailing. Actually, those choosing to live according to God’s perfect plan will face many trials and perplexities here on earth. The Christian way will not be popular or free from challenges.

However, we have not known a time in earth’s recent history that is at all reminiscent of the centuries of persecution endured by the Waldenses as they preserved God’s Word. As true believers we should count all adversity in preserving God’s perfect plan a privilege and joy, sharing all that is possible through Jesus Christ because of the cross.

Christians once suffered great physical abuse, ridicule, and even death in their quest to preserve God’s plan for us. Then it seems that the privilege to worship God and follow His ways became commonplace. Personal deviations from God’s Word to us infiltrated life with more and more elements of error—so much so that Christians have settled quite nicely into a world mixed with nonbelievers, failing to appear much different from the world other than a weekly appearance in church.

That is, until recently. In the last couple hundred years we’ve enjoyed prosperity and luxuries never known to man. We turn the TV on and off as we please and disconnect with lives around the world that are in life-threatening peril. We crawl into our comfortable beds and well-heated or air-conditioned homes and just sleep away any troubling condition. We distance ourselves from uncomfortable feelings and live by the ones that pacify our adulterated desires.

Once a week some of us grace the doorway of a local sanctuary. But even churches are undergoing contemporary changes that seem more fashionable or trendy as opposed to standing out as a preservation of God’s original plan for His children to thrive in a world that is not meant to be their home.

Puzzled? Or are you numb to the quandary we seem to be caught up in?

Dear soul, wake up!

Satan can present a counterfeit so closely resembling the truth that it deceives those who are willing to be deceived, who desire to shun the self-denial and sacrifice demanded by the truth; but it is impossible for him to hold under his power one soul who honestly desires, at whatever cost, to know the truth. The Great Controversy, p. 528.

We’re drunk with desire and an insatiable appetite for the unbridled pleasures of the flesh. Lack of self-discipline and adherence to Satan’s deceptions brought on through our “feelings” are robbing us of eternal life with our Creator, who went to great lengths to help us recognize our dire need of Him.
When was the last time you encountered a Christian who confessed to you their deep need of the life-sustaining power offered by our Savior?

What visible public decision have you expressed recently that set you apart from those in your presence, causing you to appear “peculiar” and uncompromising, declaring your faith in the Author of life itself? What sets you apart from this world, which is heavily shadowed by the Prince of Darkness?

You should keep off from Satan’s enchanted ground and not allow your minds to be swayed from allegiance to God. Through Christ you may and should be happy and should acquire habits of self-control. Even your thoughts must be brought into subjection to the will of God and your feelings under the control of reason and religion. Your imagination was not given you to be allowed to run riot and have its own way without any effort at restraint or discipline.

If the thoughts are wrong, the feelings will be wrong, and the thoughts and feelings combined make up the moral character. When you decide that as Christians you are not required to restrain your thoughts and feelings, you are brought under the influence of evil angels and invite their presence and their control. Mind, Character, and Personality, p. 660.

David confessed, “Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me” (Psalm 51:5). You may have struggled with many a sin issue from your youngest years. My struggle began while shaped in the womb by a birth mother who only gave consideration and allowance to having a precious little baby girl. Rage, anguish, turmoil, and abuse resulted upon my arrival as an unwanted bellowing baby boy. Imagine what Satan began to do with that. Imagine how he began to whisper lies and sought to control my “feelings” of desire for another male since a female was refusing and confusing me.

Some of you might say you are sick of the discussion of homosexuality. But by contrast, we have only begun to explore the pent-up dark secrets of deception. As Christians in the Adventist faith, we have ignored this vital conversation for nearly 150 years. With the exposition of truth, hope, and forgiveness, eternal life is made possible by our merciful Father.

Now that we are finally giving light to the discussion of “feelings,” we can begin to see how the enemy has deceived us, using our “feelings” to bring on a host of temptations. We can no longer afford not to become God’s “peculiar” people. We must discover and claim the truth He has lovingly provided us for the salvation of our lives. Please don’t turn a blind eye or cave in to the worldview of “acceptance just the way you are.”

There isn’t a day I didn’t know same-sex attraction. But there was a day that I decided to cave in to my “feelings,” which were out of alignment with God’s Word. Temptation won out, and I gave up the battle and heeded the call of the enemy.

The Lord permits His people to be subjected to the fiery ordeal of temptation, not because He takes pleasure in their distress and affliction, but because this process is essential to their final victory. He could not, consistently with His own glory, shield them from temptation, for the very object of the trial is to prepare them to resist all the allurements of evil. The Great Controversy, p. 528.

For 55 years I listened to the whisperings that confirmed my same-sex attraction, and I allowed the enemy to direct my paths. God would not force me to adhere to His perfect plan. He never said I had to marry or engage in erotic relations with a woman. However, ever present were His explanations about the cost of sin and its influences on humanity today. He promised that I can still choose Him even in my fallen nature.
How? Christ also walked this earth tempted by the evil one, and He offers me the same strength to claim the rich victory He won for me. “For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15).

Today there are campaigns dealing with homosexuality that instruct you to live by your “feelings.” “Be who you are,” they say. Even a film on this topic whose participants and producers claim to be Adventists never asks, “What does Jesus ask of me?” “What is possible through Him?” “What pleases and honors Him?”

Has He forsaken us? Has He left us helpless? Are we without a Redeemer? Or are we put off by the involvement of “human effort”?

Human effort avails nothing without divine power; and without human endeavor, divine effort is with many of no avail. To make God’s grace our own, we must act our part. His grace is given to work in us to will and to do, but never as a substitute for our effort. . . . Those who walk in the path of obedience will encounter many hindrances. Strong, subtle influences may bind them to the world; but the Lord is able to render futile every agency that works for the defeat of His chosen ones; in His strength they may overcome every temptation, conquer every difficulty. God’s Amazing Grace, p. 252.

Dear reader, you are being fought over. You have been purchased with the precious blood of Jesus, who left a perfect heavenly home and came to your aid. Yet, as in the Garden of Eden where the lies were first believed, He will not force you to live in agreement with Him. Humility and self-denial are necessary components to accepting the gift He purchased for you and me.

God allowed me to experience life-severing choices. I pursued self-gratification. I justified my sin. I had suffered rejection from my birth mother and from countless people thereafter, as I certainly didn’t fit the norm of society. Wasn’t I due whatever made me “feel” better? My focus was self-absorbed.

The whole time Jesus offered me a focus on Him. I resisted. I refused. But Romans 8:1 tells me that He continued to love me even as a sinner—but not without hope that I would one day turn an ear toward Him and listen to His promises and allow Him to instill remorse and sorrow for the sin I indulged in. He’s done that for you, too. He never gives up.

I believe that He will not leave behind any heart that would be softened to His call. He alone knows who will respond. He preserves those who will answer.

His mercy and grace are incomparable with anything offered on this tired old earth. You want to know how He won me? He let me know that I had been blaming Him for all that needs to be put on Satan. Satan caused my confusion. Jesus revealed to me that I didn’t know Him. I hadn’t lived to please and agree with Him. I had reveled in bitterness and sought to fix what only Jesus can heal. He is the Great Physician. After contemplating all that He offers, I finally surrendered and submitted my life to Him, choosing all that is possible through Him, not in me. Continued, powerful intercessory prayer by my loved ones aided in this process.

At my baptism just over five years ago, I asked the pastor to read a beautiful passage found in Isaiah 44:22: “I have swept away your offenses like a cloud, your sins like the morning mist. Return to me, for I have redeemed you.”

There are many churches you can attend today that will affirm you for who you are. They will provide you with pabulum. They’ll keep you on a “feel-good” diet and never challenge your relationship with your Creator. Is that what you desire? What will be your statement of defense on the coming Day of Judgment? Can you not see God’s once-in-a-lifetime offer? The breath you receive each day is a precious gift from God and can be snuffed out instantly without notice. Can we afford the idea of living to satisfy our desires, or will we humbly consider His? He knows you—He desires you for all eternity.
Eternal life comes with a price. Jesus suffered for you and is asking if you would suffer for Him so that you might understand in some degree the cost of heaven. Rebellion will not be repeated. It had too high a cost. God is just and fair and rewards our faith. “But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (Hebrews 11:6).

Today I am blessed to testify for Him in a ministry of His, Coming Out Ministries (www.comingoutministries.org). My colleagues and I live to share all that is possible through Jesus. We now dispel ignorance by educating those who are seeking to reach out with God’s redeeming love. We have chosen to become a “peculiar” people, and it is in this that we overcome the enemy. “And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death” (Revelation 12:11).
Religious Freedom and Anti-discrimination Principles Collide on College Campuses

Valmy Karemera

In 2010, the Supreme Court ruled in a 5-4 decision favoring the Hastings College of Law in San Francisco. The court saw no First Amendment violation by the school in its anti-discriminatory policy on the basis of race, religion, national origin, ethnicity, color, age, gender, marital status, citizenship, sexual orientation, or disability. Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, writing for the majority, said “it was constitutionally permissible for public institutions of higher education to require recognized student groups to accept all students who wished to participate in them,” as reported in the New York Times.

This decision may have been the watershed in the survival of campus ministries on secular universities across the nation. Given its theological and doctrinal stance—especially on sexual orientation—InterVarsity Christian Fellowship (IVCF) has now been denied campus access by California State University, America’s largest university system with 450,000 students on 23 campuses. This IVCF struggle comes at the heels of much public discussion that included a New York Times article and a Denver Post editorial.

Although some schools have reversed their policy to allow continuation of freedom of worship and leadership selection, there is a growing fear among many that this could be the “tipping point” in campus ministries. Broadly speaking, every concerned Christian should be alarmed at the growing number of attacks on the Religious Freedom Restoration Act. These attacks have also affected businesses and churches.

From an Adventist perspective, these challenges are slowly fulfilling Bible prophecies. Revelation 13 predicted the erosion of religious freedom that will ultimately lead to persecution with or without prosecution of those who hold to “the Bible and the Bible alone” as the timeless and inerrant guide in matters of theology and moral decisions.

(Photo: Walter Pyramid on the California State Long Beach campus. Photo by Buchanan-Hermit from Wikimedia Commons.)