Is the God of the Old Testament different from the One in the New Testament?

Why Christians should study sociology

Bringing Christianity into courtship

Is the theory of evolution scientific?
Is the God of the Old Testament different from the One in the New Testament?  
The Bible’s portrayal of God is unified and consistent that God is a God of love in both the Old Testament and the New.  
by Greg A. King

Why Christians should study sociology  
It is within relationships, and in particular the group relationship, that reality is best conceptualized, accessed, and constructed.  
by Lionel Matthews

Do we need doctrines?  
Every doctrinal expression must be Christ-centered, otherwise it has neither relevance nor use for the Christian.  
by John M. Fowler

Bringing Christianity into courtship  
Because it involves the intention of marriage and establishment of a permanent relationship, courtship should be entered into with utmost seriousness and care. Here are eight helpful principles.  
by Chimezie A. Omeonu

Is the theory of evolution scientific?  
Science makes many significant discoveries, but in its continual progress, it keeps showing us that things we once were sure of are actually incorrect.  
by Leonard Brand

DEPARTMENTS

EDITORIAL  
Overcoming the hurdles  
by Susana Schulz

PROFILE  
Doris A. Mendoza  
Interview by Hudson E. Kibuuka

SOCIETY  
Dorothy Laguzo  
Interview by Georgia Hodgkin

BOOKS  
Sociology: A Seventh-day Adventist Approach for Students and Teachers  
by Lionel Matthews  
Reviewed by Marcos Paseggi

LOGOS  
A legacy of unfinished business: Lessons from the life of Saul  
by Herb Giebel

ACTION REPORT  
Adventist student convention in Spain  
by Alexandra Mora Angomás
Overcoming the hurdles

I write this as the world is getting ready for the 2012 Olympics in London. Contestants know perfectly well their weaknesses: carelessness at the time of practicing some specific exercises that seemed unnecessary at first sight, improper stretching techniques, a lack of concentration, irregular eating patterns, a desire for taking a break for any possible excuse, and so forth. Everyone knows his or her own weaknesses. Some fight and overcome them; others simply disguise them. Either way, each has personal “hurdles.”

Speaking of hurdles, hurdling as a sport really appeals to me. The sprinter needs to jump over every hurdle with utmost precision, since even brushing one of the hurdles is detrimental to his or her performance. On the other hand, jumping too high makes the runner lose precious tenths of seconds and energy. Contestants need an absolute and perfect command of many different muscles in order to leave behind, one after the other, the hurdles placed between the starting and finishing lines. It is an exploit that makes good use not only of the runners’ legs, but also every body part involved to successfully accomplish the feat.

Student life is very similar to hurdle racing. In my own life I also faced hurdles, even though I have already finished my academic training. Unlike in hurdling, however, our life hurdles are neither the same size nor are painted in bright colors so as to be seen from afar. Our hurdles are those things that in the race of life make us stumble or hesitate. Some people even prefer stopping in their tracks rather than proceeding if they are not sure about their endurance and challenges us to find ways of going over it. Unlike the closed door, however, the hurdle never reaches the ceiling and is not locked. A hurdle is just a hurdle. It still allows for the essential space necessary to jump over it.

In the life of a student, a hurdle can refer to a difficult or unattractive topic, classes or an exam on the Sabbath, a professor whose explanations are difficult to follow, or a teacher whose grading method leaves a lot to be desired. It can also be unexpected family problems, lack of interest, a limited tolerance of frustrations, and even physiological infirmities more related to the chemistry of our bodies. The list is endless, and every student has “a custom-made hurdle.” What is for one a torturous hurdle may be for another a small bump on the road that can be overcome easily. Regardless, hurdles are certainly along the road for everyone to face.

But it should never make a locked door out of a hurdle. The latter tries our resilience and challenges us to find ways of going over it. Unlike the closed door, however, the hurdle never reaches the ceiling and is not locked. A hurdle is just a hurdle. It still allows for the essential space necessary to jump over it.

But it is reassuring to remember that hurdles can be jumped over. Only “locked doors” can block the way toward going forward, and life has far more hurdles than doors.

Even more reassuring is to know that we are not left alone to overcome hurdles. God is on our side — to strengthen, to enable, to overcome, and to move forward. The key question in life is not whether a hurdle along the way will be overcome, but whether we have God’s power, which enables us to be overcomers, hurdle-jumpers. If we do, we can have full assurance that God will never forsake us when we face our hurdles along the way.

No student cherishes only easy and pleasant memories from the times he or she hurdled through academic goals. The path has been always winding, with ups and downs, steep and exhausting slopes, small and big obstacles. Just as athletes reflect on the best strategy to overcome their hurdles and combine different elements to be
successful, we can also reflect on various tools to help us to be successful in our own careers. Here are some essentials for you to reflect on; add any others that you think could apply to your particular situation.

Do not mistake a hurdle for a door. When facing a hurdle, do not give up until you get clear signs that God is showing you a closed door because He has chosen a different path for you.

Single out the hurdles you yourself have placed in your way. Whether they be bad attitudes, harmful habits, weaknesses in your character or any other trait that depends exclusively on you, remember that with God’s help, you can change for the better and be successful.

Examine ways of overcoming the hurdle. Do not settle for the first solution that comes to your mind. That may not be the most effective or pertinent one. Spend time in prayer asking God to bestow His wisdom on you, so you may be able to find alternatives and choose the ones which might account for better outcomes (even if they demand a lot of effort and perseverance on your part).

Make an action plan. It is not enough just to dissect the situation; you must put the idea into concrete action. Depending on how “high” or how “wide” a specific hurdle is, you may be able to jump over it in an instant or you may have to face it repeatedly for weeks or even months. Only God can supply you with the stamina and persistence you need to make your plan become a reality.

Now, did you notice any common factors in the list above? I can see two elements: you and God. Every one of the principles mentioned involves you, through the abilities that God has given you to analyze, draw up plans, and fight. But the most important element in this race is that on your side you have God as your “trainer.” There is no better way of overcoming your hurdles.

In the Olympic race of life, let Paul’s words be our resolution: “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith (2 Timothy 4:7, NKJV), and let our focus be on the great promise: “Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go” (Joshua 1:9, NKJV).

— Susana Schulz

Susana Schulz is the managing editor of Dialogue and has a master’s degree in counseling and guidance (Loma Linda University, California).
Is the God of the Old Testament different from the One in the New Testament?

by Greg A. King

The Bible’s portrayal of God is unified and consistent that God is a God of love in both the Old Testament and the New.

“God is love,” declares the apostle (1 John 4:8). For many centuries, Christians have accorded great importance to this brief declaration. They have understood it to express the primary defining characteristic of God. They have taken this little phrase to highlight who God is at the core of His being, to set forth His foremost quality. And since the Bible affirms the unchanging nature of God (Malachi 3:6), Christians have generally stated that God’s love is on display throughout Scripture — in the Old Testament as well as the New.

The problem

However, not all people agree that the entire Bible portrays a loving God. In his recent best-selling book, militant atheist Richard Dawkins pulls no punches when he asserts, “The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pesticidal, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully.”

To say the least (and much more could be said about Dawkins and his book), Dawkins does not see the Old Testament as describing a God of love. And it’s not just atheists who are challenged by the Old Testament’s description of God. Many casual readers of the Bible, and even a number of Christians, struggle with the Old Testament God. It appears to them, at least on the surface, that the description of God in the Old Testament presents a striking and dramatic contrast with that found in the New. Their impression is that the God of the Old Testament is harsh, vindictive, and punitive, while the New Testament God — as shown in Jesus Christ — reveals Himself as loving, gracious, and merciful.

How should this issue be engaged? Are there some responses that support the orthodox Christian position that the Bible’s portrayal of God is unified and consistent, that God is a God of love in both the Old Testament and the New? Or is the chasm between the descriptions of God in the Old and New Testaments so great and yawning that they cannot be bridged?

We will discuss some points that move the discussion of this challenging issue in a positive direction and provide some help in understanding it. However, first it is appropriate to review several solutions that have been advocated and popularly held but are inadequate or erroneous on the basis of Scripture, even though they may have attracted a wide following.

Unacceptable solutions

One solution, advocated by Marcion in the second century A.D., is simply to state that the God of the Old Testament is different from the God of the New Testament. According to Marcion, the God of the New Testament, the heavenly Father who sent Jesus and whom Jesus preached about, is kind, merciful, and forgiving. By contrast, the Old Testament God, the Creator of the material universe, is a jealous tribal deity whose law demands justice and who punishes people for their sins. In light of this view, it is not surprising that Marcion rejected the entire Old Testament and accepted a limited number of New Testament books that he had edited to favor his perspective.

However, Marcion was correctly judged a heretic and disfellowshipped by the early church, and there are compelling reasons why his perspective must be rejected. First, throughout the New Testament, it is assumed that the God who “so loved the world” (John 3:16, NIV) that He gave His Son to die is the same God as the God of the Old Testament. Additionally,
Jesus Himself is identified as the active Agent in Creation, the One who brought all things into existence (John 1:3, 14), not some evil deity as Marcion contended. It is a telling and decisive point that Jesus never distanced Himself either from the God of the Old Testament or the Old Testament Scriptures. Rather, He saw His life in continuity with and in fulfillment of the Old Testament (Luke 24:27, 44).

Another suggestion that doesn’t go as far as Marcion’s heresy is that the same God is present in the Old and New Testaments but that He has a split personality. That is to say, God dealt with people differently in Old Testament times than in the New Testament era. Those who advocate this solution think that for some reason God chose to act harshly and punitively in His dealings with the Israelites and other nations in the Old Testament, but with the dawn of the New Testament, God’s gentleness and kindness come to the forefront.

This suggestion is developed in a rather elaborate way and given a veneer of sophistication in the theological system known as dispensationalism. Rooted in the nineteenth-century writings of John Darby and popularized in the marginal notes of the Scofield Reference Bible, dispensationalism continues to be a widely-held view among many American Christians. It maintains that God has related to people in different ways through a series of different dispensations or periods of time down through history. For example, Adam and Eve’s time in Eden was the dispensation of innocence, the pre-Flood world was the dispensation of conscience, and the majority of the Old Testament era was the dispensation of law. It also holds that these different dispensations are based on different biblical covenants.

However, dispensationalism, like Marcion’s view, falters on the grounds of the obvious continuity that is seen between God and His dealings in both Testaments. In fact, God declares of Himself, “I the Lord do not change” (Malachi 3:6, NIV).

Helpful solutions

What are some points to consider that might help us understand the Old Testament portrayal of God and bridge the gap that is sometimes thought to exist between the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New Testament as revealed by Jesus?

Firstly, Jesus never distanced Himself from the God of the Old Testament. Never does He make a statement even hinting that His character or teachings are distinct and separate from the Old Testament revelation of God. He certainly distinguished His viewpoint and teachings from Jewish traditional understandings on a variety of topics (Matthew 5:21, 22, 27, 28, 31, 32; 15:1-11), but never did He depart from what the Old Testament reveals about God. To the contrary, it was the Old Testament God who gave Him to the world out of love (John 3:16), and He came as Immanuel, “God with us” (Matthew 1:23, NIV; quoting Isaiah 7:14), as the living embodiment of the Old Testament God. Since Jesus didn’t separate the revelation of God provided by His life from the Old Testament God, as His followers we should not do so either.

Secondly, if one takes Scripture seriously, God is not a one-dimensional deity, with love as His only attribute. Rather, a number of characteristics are attributed to the Divine Person. He is holy, righteous just, faithful, jealous, merciful, gracious, and so on. Quite a long list of biblical attributes could be adduced, and to eliminate aspects of the biblical descriptions of God because they don’t fit in with our concept of a God of love is to engage in reductionism. Such an exercise would leave us with a diminished picture of God that is unfaithful to Scripture. We must let the Bible define the character and ways of God.
instead of deciding what God must be like and then imposing our view onto Scripture.

Thirdly, the New Testament, like the Old, contains some challenging passages when it comes to understanding the character of God. In other words, the God of the New Testament, even as seen in Jesus Christ, is not always a warm, fuzzy God who is gentle in every circumstance. Several biblical passages serve to demonstrate this point. The divine judgment that took the lives of Ananias and Sapphira for lying to the Holy Spirit is certainly a serious punishment (Acts 5:1-11). Some might even view this as a vestige of the harsh Old Testament God, though it is found in the New Testament. The New Testament’s final book speaks of a judgment from God that contains undiluted wrath, a divine anger that is unmixed with mercy (Revelation 14:9-11). Also, Jesus Himself drove the merchants out of the temple with a whip of cords (John 2:13-17) and initially rebuffed the plea of a Canaanite woman for healing for her daughter with what some consider to be a pejorative comment (Matthew 15:21-28). All of this is not to deny that the New Testament God is infinitely gracious and loving; it is simply to note that both Old and New Testaments at times present challenges as we seek to understand the loving ways of God.

Fourthly, is the concept that Christians sometimes refer to as progressive revelation. Progressive revelation refers to the gradual unfolding of truth, to the fact that as we move through Scripture God reveals Himself and His character more and more clearly until we reach the apex of His self-revelation in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ. This is not to say that the revelation of God found in the Old Testament is erroneous and mistaken. It is certainly the case that David, Isaiah, Daniel, and other Old Testament writers received insights about God and communicated them in the pages of Scripture. However, it is an incomplete revelation.

As the Bible indicates, the fullest revelation of God is found in the life of His Son, Jesus Christ. No Old Testament prophet could ever say, as did Jesus, “He who has seen Me has seen the Father” (John 14:9, NASB). Jesus is the only One of whom it could be said, “For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily” (Colossians 2:9, KJV). For that matter, we must remember that as long as we are on this earth, even with the wonderful disclosure of God provided by Jesus, we will still, to use the words of Paul, “see in a mirror dimly” (1 Corinthians 13:12, NASB). Only in eternity will we begin to understand some of the challenges to our understanding of God posed by certain passages in Scripture.

A final point to keep in mind is that our unease and squeamishness about the Old Testament description of God might tell us more about the world in which we live and about us than it does about God. Perhaps our age prefers a God whose affection is indulgent and permissive instead of One whose love is holy and jealous (Exodus 20:5; 34:14). Maybe we desire a Lord who is warm and cozy instead of One who is, as the New Testament declares, “a consuming fire” (Hebrews 12:29, NASB).

The following quotation from C. S. Lewis is a striking indictment of our age: “What would really satisfy us would be a God who said of anything we happened to like doing, ‘What does it matter so long as they satisfy us?’ We want, in fact, not so much a Father in Heaven as a grandfather in heaven — a senile benevolence who, as they say, ‘liked to see young people enjoying themselves,’ and whose plan for the universe was simply that it might be truly said at the end of each day, ‘a good time was had by all.’”

Instead of limiting ourselves to God’s revelation of Himself in only one portion of Scripture, let us follow the example of many faithful Christians, the New Testament apostles, and Jesus Himself. May we recognize the continuity in the Word of God, and plumb the depths of the entirety of the Bible, seeking to understand as completely and fully as possible the One whom to know is life eternal (John 17:3).
Why Christians should study sociology

by Lionel Matthews

It is within relationships, and in particular the group relationship, that reality is best conceptualized, accessed, and constructed.

Some Christians have “deep misgivings about sociology.” The fear is that students who take sociology as a course in college may have their religious conviction “undermined, if not destroyed.” However, in spite of the alleged fear, Christian colleges and universities continue to offer sociology as a course to their students. In light of this, it seems relevant to ask the following questions: Why do professors and students at Christian colleges teach and study sociology? Can the study of sociology facilitate a deeper understanding of the Christian life? Can it serve as a vehicle for building faith?

To understand the reason for offering sociology as an academic discipline at a Christian college/university, we must first understand the broader purpose of the educational enterprise. Educational institutions aim to expose students to a variety of experiences, with the ultimate purpose of preparing them for life. The goal of the education offered, at least from the Christian standpoint, is to equip students with the knowledge, skills, dispositions, and perspectives that will enable them to live meaningfully and fully in this world as a preparation for heaven. Hence, the selection of a curriculum for a Christian school presupposes a careful analysis and grasp of humans’ life activities and need dispositions.

Though positions vary on the qualities that are considered central to a person’s development, and those deemed important but not central, educators generally agree on the wholistic nature of human beings. Despite the varied views advanced on this subject, some basic needs have been determined. Maslow conceives of these in terms of lower- and higher-order needs. He identifies six levels of need, with the physiological being the lowest and self-actualization the highest. Pratt’s classification of philosophical, social, aesthetic, and survival needs is similar to Ellen White’s formulation of the physical, mental, spiritual, and social faculties. Based on these categorized needs, core experiences considered necessary to facilitate a person’s meaningful and optimum development have been identified.

Educational institutions, particularly Christian schools, aim to provide a balanced education. Thus, the various core areas of the curriculum — such as the natural sciences, the social sciences, the arts, and the humanities — take a cue from and are organized in keeping with the needs identified above. The objective is to facilitate the individual student’s optimal development in the way best suited to these needs. As Ellen White has suggested, the process of education is concerned with the wholistic development of the mental, physical, spiritual, and moral faculties, with the ultimate goal being godlikeness of the student. In this regard, where does sociology come in?

The sociological focus

Sociology is concerned with the study of human behavior. As a method of approach and a body of knowledge, sociology differs from other social sciences in that it emphasizes the “groupness” of human behavior. The basic argument advanced in this perspective is that human behavior is strongly contingent upon social norms and values that result from group interaction. This group-based (interpersonal) perspective is somewhat unlike the more individualistic (intrapersonal) emphasis associated with human behavior by some divisions of the social sciences.

Economists, for example, tend to point out the utilitarian nature of human behavior, positing rational choice as the basis of such behavior. They suggest that human beings calculate their choices and negotiate their responses to the various demands of their environment in terms of cost and benefit outcomes. In other words, an individual will most likely carry out and repeat a course of action he or she deems to be beneficial. On the other hand, if that individual does not consider the particular behavior to be beneficial, it will not be carried out, much less be repeated. However, while sociologists do not deny the role of rational choice as a feature of human activities, they do not hold it as the primary motivating force of these activities. Sociologists point to the fact that many human behaviors are carried out without regard to their value. Many people, for example, continue to adhere to social practices (e.g., cigarette smoking or hazing) that are clearly not in their best interest. Yet they are inclined to indulge in these practices, largely...
because of the weight of social expectations.

Emile Durkheim argues for an external locus for human activities. He maintains that social facts which are group-produced and group-sustained phenomena constitute the mainspring of human conduct. In the development of his ideas on the forces that inform human behavior, Durkheim takes issue with the reigning theories of psychology and sociobiology of his time period. While psychology proposes that human behavior is due to psychological factors, such as the will and other characteristics of the mind, sociobiology suggests that biological principles, such as genetic predispositions and hormonal levels, are the real cause of human behavior. Contrary to both of these views, Durkheim argues that the ways in which people relate to the world around them are socially rooted.

For example, Durkheim notes that the ways people fulfill their duties in their jobs and other personal relationships have all been given in the social expectations and established practices of their society. In other words, the ways people relate to their brothers, mothers, or bosses are largely determined by the norms of the society in which they live. In keeping with this Durkheimian logic, sociologists recognize that there is an objective, socially-created reality that provides the impetus for and sustenance of human action and interaction.

However, this group-focused approach to human behavior seems to ignore the biblical view that each human is responsible for his or her actions (2 Corinthians 5:10). While this is true to some extent, it is the contention of this author that the characterization of the sociological perspective as anti-biblical will not hold up upon closer inspection. In fact, the group focus of sociologists in their quest to understand human behavior and society is largely defensible within the biblical view of humans. This point will be articulated toward the end of this article as one of the principal reasons Christians ought to study sociology. But there are at least two other reasons for Christians to understand the human condition from the sociological perspective.

Rationale for the study of sociology

Sociology is a useful tool for Christians because (1) it provides an important account of the self and others, and (2) through it one can obtain a much-needed understanding of the social world. Of course, the position that sociology provides the only or even the best account of the human condition is not taken here. Human beings are far too complex to be reduced to a single disciplinary, perspectival explanation.

The need for Christians to seek an authentic understanding of themselves and others derives in part from God’s command to humans to “be fruitful and multiply” (Genesis 1:28) and to love one another as they love themselves (Matthew 19:19). These injunctions loom even larger when viewed in the light of human beings bearing the image of God (Genesis 1:27). Indeed, to reproduce (multiply) selves created after the image of God and to love one’s self and extend that love to others cannot be attempted on the basis of mere guesswork and uninformed emotions. Thorough and systematic efforts are required. Moreover, it would be enormously difficult for humans made in the image of God to reproduce themselves and truly love themselves and others without an authentic awareness of the self and others. Common-sense understanding would not suffice. Often such understandings display no more than a superficial, impressionistic grasp of the issues. In addition to inspired writings, we must draw upon the accumulated wisdom of the human race for clarity and direction.

Many people take their behavior for granted, seemingly unable to see their behavior within the multi-layered circumstances of their lives. Saddled with an individualistic ethos, most people seem to think of their behavior in terms of their personal qualities, thereby demonstrating a lack of the capacity to grasp the general in the particular, that is, to see themselves within the wider circumstances of their lives. In this they display a notorious innocence regarding the “thereness” component of their behavior. Yet this component seems clearly biblical, in light of the Psalmist’s suggestion that God will take note when He documents the lives of the people that “this man was born there” (Psalm 87:6). The implication here seems to be that God considers the place of a person’s birth and his or her socialization experience to be important to his or her life activities and character formation.

The sociological imagination

C. Wright Mills, who drew upon and extended the Durkheimian notion of social facts, has given us perhaps the most insightful account of the “thereness” approach. Mills advances the notion of the “sociological imagination,” which is critical to understanding that the behavior of humans is guided by the normative demands of their society. He suggests that one who possesses the sociological imagination is able to see how history and biography intersect in their impact upon the lives of people.

Thus, “the sociological imagination enables its possessor to understand the larger historical scene in terms of its meaning for the inner and the external careers of a variety of individuals” and “to grasp history and biography and the relations between the two in society.”13 Accordingly, Mills argues that any social investigation properly carried out will demonstrate a grasp of human conduct as a function of the intersection of history (those broad structural features within a society) and biography (the personal and more immediate circumstances of the lives of individuals).
It is these historical and biographical “thereness” factors that comprise the multi-layered circumstances of people’s lives and against which sociologists seek to understand social behavior. It is also within this perspective that varied patterns of behaviors that Christians manifest across cultural boundaries can be understood. Consider the example of Adventist Christian men in the United States of America and in Northern Cameroon. While these two groups definitively share the same compelling worldview and are constrained by it in significant ways, they differ in some important ways. Adventist men in Northern Cameroon speak French, don Muslim-like robes to worship, and are likely to be married to wives chosen for them by their parents. On the other hand, Adventist men living in the United States speak English, wear a jacket and tie for worship services, and are most likely married to wives of their personal choice. Despite their common beliefs and values, these two groups differ in the ways they enact these beliefs and values, largely because of the social expectations of their respective societies.

The capacity to see people’s behaviors in terms of the circumstances of their lives holds much significance for the practice of Christianity. Perkins has argued that the study of sociology leads to greater analytic clarity. He suggests that this clarity, coupled with the ability to communicate theoretical insights gained from the study of sociology, is invaluable to the realization and development of people’s potential as beings made in the image of God. This awareness is especially important to Christians for the empowerment it affords them to engage systematically in scholarly discourse on the social world. Indeed, discourse on the origin, nature, and change of social patterns must not elude Christians. Christians are called upon “to appraise any new ethos that shapes the culture in which God calls believers to live,” “to demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and to take captive every thought to make it obedient to God” (2 Corinthians 10:5). This implies that Christians ought to be equipped to engage in an offensive against ideas that stand opposed to God. This suggests a “communication among persons who share their differing experiences of reality for the purpose of discovering some ultimate truth.” In the process of the encounter, the tension between opposing views is addressed, giving rise to a new proposition, the synthesis. The principles that guide the process ensure that the best views presented in each of the positions advanced are retained and included in the new adopted position, while those that cannot stand the scrutiny of informed judgment are discounted.

Consistent with this spirit, Christians, in their effort to “demolish” arguments and take every thought captive, are expected to evaluate carefully the submissions of their non-Christian counterparts in order to retain whatever is salvageable therein. This demands that Christians exercise good judgment and display due civility when debating secular ideas. This will ensure that proponents of these ideas are not left to feel dejected or irate at the discounting of their ideas, without the sense of knowing that their works have been properly scrutinized and evaluated before they were thus treated. Fair play would have the secular researcher return like favor to the Christian researcher.

For Christians to effectively engage in the challenge of demolishing arguments and taking ideas captive, making them conducive to the glory of God, they first need to understand the relevant ideas and arguments. Specifically, they must understand the basis of the propositions advanced in the arguments to be demolished or preserved and be able to come up with informed, credible counter-propositions or justifications that result in the generation or adoption of a new, more defensible position. The objective of such an exercise, of course, is not to generate sterile theories that lead to endless strife, but rather, as the apostle Paul suggests in 2 Corinthians, to facilitate thoughtful obedience to God.

Further, this challenge of Paul to Christians to demolish arguments and
take every thought captive suggests that Christians become the thought leaders of their society. This position harmonizes with Jesus’ commission to His followers to be the light and the salt (Matthew 5:13, 17) of the world. The assertion of Jesus in these verses may be construed as having relevance to all dimensions of the human condition, including the social, intellectual, physical, and spiritual. The implication, therefore, is that followers of Christ must be the means through which these dimensions in their operational forms in society are flavored and preserved (the salt effect) and illuminated and explicated (the light effect). In these ways, Christians can demonstrate their faithfulness to their roles as the light and the salt of their society, respectively. True to these roles, Christians will become not only the stabilizing and preservative forces in their society but the meaning generators as well. As meaning generators, Christians will lead out in the creation of new knowledge, providing answers to the many puzzling questions of their society in such areas as health, family life, and religious practice.

However, Christians will remain much challenged if they attempt to meet these functions without a thorough and authentic grasp of the theories and conceptual models that address the social patterns of their society. Heddendorf has charged that “at a time when modern society stagg- ers with the complexity of social life, Christian social thought remains largely naive and uncomprehending of these complexities.” It is largely because of this deficit that Christians by and large have neglected (and in some cases abandoned) their light-bearing (meaning-generating) roles and have contributed by their inaction to the proliferation of secular ideas antagonistic to biblical claims. Where sociology empowers Christians with an understanding of the social world, thereby facilitating the execution of their roles as thought leaders and light bearers of their society, its study is certainly justified.

Thus far, two reasons have been put forth for the necessity of Christians to engage in the study of sociology. The first reason pins the relevance of sociology to the Christian upon the knowledge of self and others it facilitates, thereby increasing the Christian’s capacity for loving and serving others. The second reason suggests that sociology allows for an authentic and thorough grasp of the social world and that, as such, its study places the Christian in a position of empowerment to take every thought captive for the glory of God. Now a third and final reason: the sociological unit of analysis, the group, is an eminently biblical theme.

A biblically-based unit analysis
One of the critical decisions social scientists must make in their research endeavors relates to the unit of analysis. This term refers to the source from which the researcher intends to obtain the data for his or her study. Units of analysis include, but are not limited to, individuals, roles, personality types, institutions, regions, and groups. Kaplan considers units of analysis to be the “locus problem” of the research enterprise. He describes units of analysis as the “ultimate subject matter for inquiry.” Once the unit of analysis is chosen, decisions regarding the research design and the method of analysis are made. While not denying the validity of other sources of data, sociologists have long considered the group the ultimate unit of analysis, and for good reason.

Once chosen, units of analysis are subject to two kinds of fallacies: ecological and individualistic. The individualistic fallacy occurs when the researcher uses data from one level of analysis and extrapolates the findings. For example, suppose a researcher carried out a study to determine the attitude of young adults to abortion and found that young male adults in the Southern counties of the United States where the study was done were more pro-choice than pro-life. Now, the unit of analysis in this study is individual young adults. Findings should therefore be generalized to young adults. However, if the researcher concluded on the basis of her findings that Southern counties were more likely to adopt pro-choice policies than other counties, she would be committing the individualistic fallacy, drawing conclusions about county governments on the basis of individual data. The converse of this example is also possible, where a researcher could have committed the ecological fallacy by lifting data from county administrators, and then generalizing the findings to individual young adults. Both of these fallacies must be avoided, since they lead to a distortion of the facts.

The preferred sociological unit of analysis, the group, remains a firm basis upon which probable conclusions about individuals and other phenomena may be understandably reached. This argument draws on the logic of the systems theory, which posits that the whole is more than the sum of its parts, and that while the parts may be understood in terms of the whole, the opposite is not true. The implication here is that the individual, while limited in his effect upon the group, cannot escape the impact of the group, in particular the family group; in fact, he is deeply influenced by his primary group background.

Therefore, the contention of those who argue that groups have no real existence apart from the individuals who comprise them ignores an important point, much as it seeks to isolate the identity of the individual outside the group context. Durkheim has made that point in insisting that the group is not limited to its constituent members, but becomes a new thing independent of its individual members. Thus, contrary to the views of those who would otherwise argue, groups are real and constitute a fundamental aspect of reality.
The biblical view of the group

The position regarding the fundamental nature of the group is a pervasive biblical theme. This notion comes up early in the biblical account. When God made the first human being, He declared him, along with the rest of His created works, to be “very good” (Genesis 1:31). Soon thereafter, He interjected that it was not good for the man to be alone (Genesis 2:17) and provided Adam a companion, Eve. But what could God mean by saying that the man was good, but yet that it was “not good” for him to be alone? The point of emphasis here is that the human person as a product of God’s creation, given all his or her potential for creative expression, is in an excellent state. However, human beings are not inanimate objects or will-less creatures; rather, they are beings endowed with the capacity for meaningful relationships. They will thus be hopelessly stifled and stagnated without the opportunity to fulfill their need for relationships. In this light, it is not good for human beings to live in isolation, without the benefit of interaction with others.

Many years ago, sociologist Charles Horton Cooley captured the essence of this thought when he noted that “a separate individual is an abstraction unknown to experience.” What Cooley meant is that a developed and actualized individual is inconceivable outside of a group context. Humans do not fare well apart from the group. Indeed, some studies have supported the idea that the actualization of our humanness is difficult to achieve outside of the group context.

One God in three

The group reality must be appreciated not only for its relevance to human development but also for its apparent appropriateness in capturing the divine reality. In spite of its clear monotheistic ring, the biblical account seems uncompromising on the idea of God as a group. While God has been declared to be one God (Deuteronomy 6:4; 1 Timothy 2:5), He has also been presented as a plurality of beings (Matthew 28:19; Ephesians 4:5). These positions on the deity, while they seem to involve a contradiction of terms, become clearer within a wider sweep of Scripture.

Spouses become one flesh at marriage (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:5; Ephesians 5:31), and Jesus prayed for His followers to be one (John 17:21). Paul (1 Corinthians 12) presents the church with its plurality of members as one body, and Matthew (chapter 25) pictures the redeemed of the ages as a bride. Thus, the notion of oneness emerging from groupness seems clearly biblical. Yet, as evidenced by the experience of husbands and wives and of the followers of Christ, this group-based oneness does not translate to fusion of beings or personalities. Neither husbands and wives nor individual Christians are molded into a single entity at the point where oneness between them is reached.

What the notion of a triune (group) God seems to suggest is that the three members of the Godhead become joined in their relationship with each other on the basis of their common purpose, values, and interests. Furnish has suggested that a mystical oneness emerges when people interact in a group context. If this is true of human beings, how much more might it be illustrative of the oneness of the Godhead?

The point underscored by Scripture in the persistent image it portrays of “oneness” being a function of “groupness” is that reality is ultimately relational; it is within relationships, and in particular the group relationship, that reality is best conceptualized, accessed, and constructed. But this view does not sit well in cultures dominated by the Western individualistic notion of human nature, best summarized by the Lockean concept of “ontological individualism,” by which the individual is deemed to be prior to the group, and the group is seen to emerge upon the coming together of individuals, whose existence is independent of the group.

Yet, an “individual-less” collective is not the ideal. The Christian worldview steers clear of this. What seems inescapable, however, is that God in whose image humanity has been created is communal, and humans are in essence social beings – made for God and for each other. That the group is the primary reality is the unyielding contention of the sociologist – and of Scripture, too. It thus seems reasonable to conclude that, if only for its espoused unit of analysis – the group – sociology ought to find some place of importance in the Christian’s scholarly inquiry. But sociology must be studied through the eyes of Christian understanding.

Lionel Matthews (Ph.D., Wayne State University) is associate professor of sociology at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, U.S.A. This article is slightly shortened from the opening chapter of his book Sociology: A Seventh-day Adventist Approach for Students and Teachers (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 2006). Printed by permission of the author and the publisher.

REFERENCES

Do we need doctrines?

by John M. Fowler

Every doctrinal expression must be Christ-centered, otherwise it has neither relevance nor use for the Christian.

Not so long ago, I was visiting a Sabbath School class and took my seat in a corner with the anticipation of calm thinking and reflective listening. Rarely do I get such an opportunity, and usually I end up either teaching the class or becoming an active participant. But on this Sabbath, the situation was different: not too many people, including the teacher, knew me. Hence my anticipation.

But the anticipation of calm and quiet listening vaporized within minutes, and soon the class was in a “war” of words, reminding me of what William Sumner once wrote: “If you want a war, cherish a doctrine.” That Sabbath morning, what should have been a study of the greatest wonder this world has ever known — the incarnation of Jesus — turned into a noisy, at times discourteous, shouting match: What nature did Jesus take? Was it the pre-fall nature or post-fall nature? Could Jesus have sinned? If He could not, how is He an example to us? If He could, how does He become our Savior? And so on.

In the midst of it all, one young college student asked a question that turned the direction of the discussion: Do we need specific doctrines? Is Jesus not enough?

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has 28 fundamental doctrines, ranging from confessing theological particulars to practicing that confession in everyday life. Acceptance of and obedience to these doctrines are considered essential for baptism and fellowship within the Adventist church.

Is doctrine essential to Christian redemptive experience? The question is an important one and deserves careful consideration. We can perhaps approach this issue by raising four questions: What is a doctrine? Is Jesus a person or a doctrine? Is doctrine essential for salvation? Is acceptance of our 28 fundamental beliefs a prerequisite for baptism and acceptance into the Seventh-day Adventist Church?

**What is a doctrine?**

A doctrine is a statement one makes and holds to be true. No religious or philosophic school can exist or begin to function without a core doctrinal system that is accepted by the adherents of that school. To raise the question as to whether a religious body, such as a church, needs doctrine is to ask the obvious. Of course it does. The kind of doctrine it holds defines its nature, mission, and purpose.

Take the idea of God, for example. Many statements can be made about God. One could say that God is the absolute mind, from which all ideas emanate. That is a doctrinal statement. Whether the doctrine is right or not, those who hold that teaching have a certain perception of God that defines their life, mission, and purpose.

Another person could say that God is the ultimate good from which all sense of ethics and aesthetics flow. Those who accept that as their doctrine of God may insist that as long as they do some good in life, to that extent they are participating in the will and the way of God.

Still another person could say that God is an absolute impersonal force, permeating all nature, both animate and inanimate. Those who hold such a belief may look at life as a continual cyclic process, without beginning or end, ever seeking to become part of this absolute force. In this process there is neither birth nor death, neither joy nor pain, neither here nor there.

Someone could deny the existence of God altogether. That too would be a doctrine — the doctrine of atheism. Hundreds of people build their edifice upon such a doctrine and lead a life without any need for recognition of a supreme being.

Then someone else might say that God is a person — infinite in wisdom, love, and power — and that He has chosen to create humanity in His own image. Indeed, this God is so loving that when humanity chose to rebel against Him, His love sought after them in the person of a Son who made the infinite sacrifice of dying on a cross to save them from sin.

The last statement about God is quite different from the previous ones, and those who seriously accept it
would relate to God on a personal basis, accepting His Son as their Savior.

The belief system, the worship practice, the relational structure, the ethical norms flowing out of each of these statements about God would all be quite different. Without considering the rightness or the wrongness of each doctrinal statement, one can easily see the importance of doctrine in anchoring one’s belief, practice, and purpose.

Jesus and doctrine

The moment they take the name of Jesus, some Christians immediately go on the offensive. Jesus is all we need, they say. Don’t confuse us with doctrines. One cannot quarrel with the first part of that statement: Jesus is certainly all we need. The Bible says so: “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

But when it comes to the statement “Don’t confuse us with doctrines,” the problems mount. For example, which Jesus? Is He the prophet that Muslims accept? Is He the great teacher, a good man, one of the many incarnations of the Absolute Force that Hindus would worship? Is He the model person that humanists would project? Or is He the myth that must be rejected in order that the profound moral teachings of the Gospels may emerge as the lofty ideal for humanity?

Immediately you see the need for a definition of Jesus. We must let the Bible define Jesus. He is God. Being God, He took upon Himself human flesh. In that flesh, He bore our sins, died for our sins, rose victorious over sin, ascended to sit on the right hand of the Father to be our high priest, and will soon come again to take us where He is. That is the definition the Bible gives. To make that statement, to confess that belief, is the purpose of the doctrine of Christ. Theologians call it Christology. Without that doctrinal clarification, we won’t know which Jesus we are worshiping.

It’s not a question of Jesus versus doctrine. The issue, rather, is the need for a statement of truth about the person of Jesus so that those who trust in Jesus will know the Person in whom they place their trust.

Doctrinal and salvation

Can one be saved by believing in a doctrine? The answer is obvious. John Wesley once said that “the devils believe, and still remain devils.” Theoretically, knowing Jesus, even the Jesus of the Bible, is not going to save anyone. Knowing that two parts of hydrogen and one part of oxygen make water is not going to save a person dying of thirst. No, they need to drink that water.

So with Jesus. Correctness of knowledge about Him will not save anyone. Salvation is a result of accepting Jesus as our Lord and Savior — coming to Him, placing our lives in His trust, walking as He walked, living as He lived, abiding in Him without any deviation or hesitation. All by His grace and power.

If salvation is accepting Jesus and through His grace overcoming sin, do we need the doctrine of Jesus? Absolutely. For we want to make sure that we go to the right Jesus. In other words, the doctrine of Christ tells us who Jesus is, what He has done, and what kind of relationship He wants to establish with us. After knowing that kind of Jesus, I must make my choice and hand over my life to Him. He gives me salvation, and He leads me through.

Upon my acceptance of Him as my Savior, I am baptized into His body — the fellowship of other believers who have accepted Him before me.

Baptism and the 28 fundamentals

In recent times some Adventists have expressed their discomfort in making acceptance of the 28 fundamental beliefs a prerequisite for baptism. The discomfort largely arises from their dissection of the 28 fundamentals into two parts: the Christian core and the Adventist essentials. They would go so far as to say that baptism into the body of Christ requires only the acceptance of the Christian core. After baptism, the Adventist essentials should be taught to those baptized in order that they might become full-fledged members of the Adventist Church.

I find such dichotomy between baptism into Christ and entry into the Seventh-day Adventist Church untenable. It assumes that the two are different. If we go back to 1844 and accept the stand of our pioneers that in God’s own way and time He raised up a body of people conscious of their commitment to the Jesus of the cross and the Jesus of the eschaton, we would realize that the pioneers made no difference between being the body of Christ and being Seventh-day Adventists. Long before the latter name was coined, the pioneers recognized themselves as the true body of Christ, taking upon themselves that prophetic term “remnant,” defined as those who “keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Revelation 12:17).

The name “Seventh-day Adventist” does not create a body distinct and exclusive from the body of Christ. Rather, it calls for faithfulness to the full teachings and lifestyle involved in the body of Christ. Read again the 28 fundamentals.* Which ones shall we leave aside as of postbaptismal importance, to be taught for entry into the Seventh-day Adventist Church? Which ones shall we consider as Adventist essentials? I would say none. The so-called Adventist particulars in the 28 fundamentals are particulars only to the extent that other churches over the centuries have neglected, ignored, or altered these cardinal truths that were the heritage of the New Testament church. It fell
John M. Fowler (Ed.D., Andrews University) retired recently after 52 years of serving the Adventist Church in various positions, the last being associate director of education at the General Conference. E-mail: fowlerj@gc.adventist.org.

Why Christians ... Continued from page 12

7. Ibid., 13.
9. Durkheim defines social facts as "ways of acting, thinking, and feeling, imposed on the individual, and endowed with a power of coercion, by reason of which they control him." Ibid., 3.
11. Ibid., 9.
17. R.H. Bellah, Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life (Berkeley, California: University of California, 1985), 44.
Bringing Christianity into courtship

by Chimezie A. Omeonu

Because it involves the intention of marriage and establishment of a permanent relationship, courtship should be entered into with utmost seriousness and care. Here are eight helpful principles.

Dating and courtship are two types of relationships young people enter into as they move into their teens and beyond. Casual friendship may mark the relationships of boys and girls, but as they move into mid-teens, their relationship becomes a little more selective, which is what we call dating. Usually in this stage no permanent commitment is made, but as young people grow beyond, they enter into what is known as courtship.

Though there is no universally-acceptable formal sequential order that courtship follows, it is a serious process in which the relationship of a man and a woman enters into an explorative stage, in which the two try to get to know each other, weighing each other’s characteristics, with the possible intention of getting married and establishing a life-long relationship. Because it involves the intention of marriage and establishment of a permanent relationship, courtship should be entered into with utmost seriousness and care, and as Christian young people, with much prayer and commitment to the spiritual and moral aspects of life. The physical must not become dominant during the courtship period.

Ellen White counsels young people about the spiritual seriousness of courtship in these words: “Not one word should be spoken, not one action performed, that you would not be willing the holy angels should look upon and register in the books above. You should have an eye single to the glory of God. The heart should have only pure, sanctified affection, worthy of the followers of Jesus Christ, exalted in its nature, and more heavenly than earthly. Anything different from this is debasing, degrading in courtship; and marriage cannot be holy and honorable in the sight of a pure and holy God, unless it is after the exalted Scriptural principle.”

My studies, personal experience, and counseling with young people have led me to enumerate eight principles that would be helpful in courtship, in order to assure a happy, successful, and lasting marriage relationship. These are listed here not in any particular order of importance, but young people will benefit if they keep them in mind as they enter the difficult stage of courtship on their way to choosing a life partner.

1. Evaluate every behavior. Unfortunately, courtship often tends to be a period of serious “cover-ups.” Each appears at his or her best in terms of manners and disposition in order to entice the other person. Be on guard for any activity — however small, in word or deed — that reflects any pretense. Make sure that the person is absolute in his or her commitment to spiritual priorities and godly standards. Do not take undue or inappropriate behaviors as “one of those things young people do” and blindly move along. Such traits may not be changed later and may even go on in the marriage relationship, when it will be too late for regrets. Better at the early stage of courtship to prayerfully discuss the inappropriate behavior, politely seek a change for the better, and look out for acceptable behavior. Blind impulse can control reason and judgment, Ellen White warns. “Under this bewitching delusion the momentous responsibility felt by every sincere Christian is laid aside, spirituality dies, and the judgment and eternity lose their awful significance.”

2. Discuss in a spirit of love questions that come to your mind. In counseling with graduate students, I usually ask them to write down a list of questions they think are irrelevant to ask the partner they are courting or plan to court. The list usually has question such as: “Are you a virgin?”, “Do you believe and love the Lord?”, “What is your income?”, “Which church do you attend?”. My response is: “You are wrong. Every question or issue that agitates your mind should be asked or settled.” The belief that love is blind or love conquers all things has its limitations. You do not fall into courtship without as complete a knowledge as possible about the other person. While you are not to be too strict or critical, nothing should be taken for granted on the ground that such things do not really matter in our technological age. God’s requirements...
for His children have not changed and will not change (Matthew 5:18, 19). “Love is a precious gift, which we receive from Jesus. Pure and holy affection is not a feeling, but a principle. Those who are actuated by true love are neither unreasonable nor blind. Taught by the Holy Spirit, they love God supremely, and their neighbor as themselves.”

3. True courtship is not infatuation. Often young people get carried away by physical appearances and gestures and emotional surges. The feeling that “we are in love” makes one idolize their partner, leading to infatuation, often followed by overloaded emotional feelings — a tendency that overlooks character defects. Infatuation is not love. Rather, it is a relationship characterized by passion on a physical level; it lacks spiritual maturity and commitment. The courtship period is a time when youth need to have great caution, because they are preparing for one of the most intimate relationships in life. The journey ahead is long, the road is often unknown and rough, and courtship takes time. Hence, this is no time for hasty decisions. A life led by hasty obsession and not by true love leads to a dangerous risk.

4. Let Christian character govern your courtship. Our times are known for spiritual erosion and moral decadence. We see these trends everywhere — in the home, at work, in school, in politics, in government, with the old and the young. This trend of moral and spiritual decay and lack of integrity also affects the foundations and functions of marriage. So it is not surprising that courtship among young people is often lacking in valuing each other. The value one places upon the other is significant in letting Christian character govern courtship and courtship behavior. Courtship is not a time to test out the passions of the physical, but rather it is a time to strengthen one’s character and resist every temptation that will chip away the moral fiber of life. More than physical attraction and appearance, courtship should be characterized by Christ-like character. Even when marriage may be contemplated while the couple is courting, physical appearance should not take precedence. Beauty of character is far more important and should be accorded priority. Physical beauty may fade away, a victim of passing time or an unexpected illness or accident. But there is an inner beauty that a couple should discover, each in the other. Ellen White urges: “It is right to love beauty and to desire it; but God desires us to love and to seek first the highest beauty — that which is imperishable. The choicest productions of human skill possess no beauty that can bear comparison with that beauty of character which in His sight is of ‘great price.’”

5. Avoid sexual relationships. Sex is one of God’s gifts to humans, but it is a gift reserved within the boundaries of marriage. Sexual intercourse outside of marriage is either fornication when done with the unmarried or adultery when done with the married. In either case, it is immoral, about which Paul issues a stern warning: “Flee from sexual immorality” (I Corinthians 6:18 NIV). Neither culture nor modern permissiveness is an excuse to indulge in sex during courtship. Mentally and spiritually draw a line between courtship and sex, and take every care that you do not cross that line. Temptations may come, but it takes Christian character and maturity to resist that temptation. God in His wisdom has given sex as a gift to humans to be entered into only after marriage. Though during courtship there is the tendency for you to appreciate the company of your spouse-to-be, that appreciation should be within the boundaries of biblical conduct. Keep away from late-night parties, vigils, clubs, and entertainment arenas that are known to lure one to evil. Be on guard and never consider yourself a spiritual giant, as many giants have fallen and their records are in the Bible. Also, do not say “I trust myself.” When you trust in “self” instead of trusting in God, the root cause of failure is in the making. No wonder Solomon counseled: “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding” (Proverbs 3:5). Ellen White warns: “Do not see how close you can walk upon the brink of a precipice, and be safe. Avoid the first approach to danger. The soul’s interests cannot be trifled with. Your capital is your character. Cherish it as you would a golden treasure. Moral purity, self-respect, a strong power of resistance, must be firmly and constantly cherished. There should not be one departure from reserve; one act of familiarity, one indiscretion, may jeopardize the soul, in opening the door to temptation, and the power of resistance becomes weakened.”

6. Always speak the truth. In courtship, partners desire and respect honesty and truth from each other. Sometimes the tendency to appear at one’s best may lead one to tell lies or exaggerations to bolster the ego of the other person. There may also be a temptation to be flattering and tell “little lies” to cover up. “Everything Christians do should be as transparent as sunlight,” Ellen White says. Your transparency during courtship will be a source of respect for you during the marriage proper. A partner who tells lies during courtship may not change the behavior in marriage, and by then it will be hard to quit. Hence, speak the truth as it is. A God-fearing partner will appreciate you for telling the truth at all times. He or she will see you as someone to be relied on. Be courageous enough to tell him or her the truth about yourself, your work, your social status, your income, your parental background, your place of birth and cultural background, and your level of educational achievement. For instance, do not tell her that your father is a director of a bank when he
is a local subsistent farmer. Do not tell him you are a virgin when you are not. When lies burst open, there may be a problem of trust in the real marital relationship.

7. **Always be content.** Every society is stratified. We have the masses, the poor, the middle class, the rich, and the aristocrats. There is no society in which all are rich or all are poor. Whatever your position, be content with it and prayerfully work harder to better your lot. For the sake of impressing your partner, do not stress yourself to buy a flashy car or costly wares. Even if you have these things, do not make them objects of focus. You are marrying a person and not their possessions. Let the materials assume secondary importance. While showing appreciation for each other on special days, center that appreciation on love, and not on large gifts at enormous cost. A bloated credit card does not buy love, but a contended heart speaks louder of each other’s care.

8. **Seek God always.** During courtship, you need to seek the face of the Lord, perhaps more than at any other time in your life. Through prayer, be in constant touch with God. This is because you are entering into a relationship that has eternal consequences and that only ends at death. Every step you take, every decision, every correction, every complaint, every settlement of quarrels, every discussion, every desire, every outing, every expenditure for him or her, and every joint activity should be presented to God in prayer for guidance and direction. If you desire intelligent and wise courtship, seek God and His requirements first in your scale of priorities.

Courtship and marriage is a journey that the two involved in should walk along carefully and wisely. If both young people trust in God and make Him first and foremost in all their thoughts, plans, and actions, God will bless that courtship to blossom into a fragrant flower called marriage.

Chimezie A. Omeonu (Ph.D., University of Ibadan) is a professor of educational-counseling psychology and has served as a deputy vice chancellor for academic administration, Babcock University, Nigeria. He is the author of *Marrying for True Marriage: Before You Say I Do, After You Say I Do,* and three other devotional books. His email: dromeonu_032000@yahoo.com.

**REFERENCES:**
4. See Bryan Craig, *Searching for Intimacy in Marriage: The Role That Emotion Plays in Creating Understanding and Connectedness in Marriage* (Silver Spring, Maryland: General Conference Ministerial Association of Seventh-day Adventists, 2004), 52.
7. ------, *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessings* (Mountain View, California: Pacific Press, 1974), 68.
Is the theory of evolution scientific?

by Leonard Brand

Science makes many significant discoveries, but in its continual progress, it keeps showing us that things we once were sure of are actually incorrect.

Is the theory of evolution scientific? The search for an answer involves worldviews, data and its interpretation, as well as other issues. The easy answer is “Yes, it is scientific,” but before we understand what that means, we need to ask what makes any theory scientific.

Science and religion

Science is a process of searching for answers. An idea may be labeled scientific if it can be studied using the scientific method. If we have an idea and would like to know if it is a good one, several approaches can help us decide whether it is correct. First, we can use our own reasoning ability to decide whether we believe the idea to be true. We can also ask God to tell us whether it is true. This approach — asking God or looking for an answer in the Bible — is a religious approach. Finally, we can think of observations or experiments that may help determine whether the idea is correct. This approach is science. Let’s compare these three approaches.

If we just think about it, how do we know our conclusion is correct? We need to compare our thoughts against some kind of standard. If we have no such standard, our thinking is just a wild guess. If we wonder how many teeth a horse has, will it be more helpful to think about how many teeth a horse should have or to open a horse’s mouth and count them? If we do so, we are using science to answer the question.

The scientific method may be described with the following sequence of events. A scientist has an idea, called a hypothesis, and then thinks of observations and experiments that will test the hypothesis. The observations are made, the experiments are conducted, and the results may indicate the hypothesis is false or may support it. Another possible outcome is that the answer will remain unclear, and different observations and experiments will have to be designed to better test the hypothesis. One thing we can be sure of: science will not provide us with absolute proof or disproof. We may think we have proof, but it is always possible that new evidence will change the picture. Only in TV commercials does science provide proof!

I sometimes tell my science students that half of what I am teaching is untrue. However, we’ll have to wait for new scientific discoveries to show us which half is wrong! Some years ago, the scientific evidence indicated there were 10 species of chipmunks in California, but new evidence showed the existence of 13 species. In molecular genetics, a concept once referred to as the central dogma was that each gene on our chromosomes directs the making of a single protein. However, new discoveries have shown the process to be significantly more complicated. The list of such changes in scientific understanding is endless. Science makes many significant discoveries, but in its continual progress, it keeps showing us that things we once were sure of are actually incorrect. We just didn’t have enough evidence at the time to realize that our interpretation was not correct.

There are some ideas for which scientific study cannot offer us an answer, due to their nature. They cannot be tested, no matter how much research is done. For example, when Jesus lived on earth, did He really perform miracles? Try to devise an experiment to test that idea, and you’ll find it simply can’t be done. Jesus’ life on earth was long ago, and we were not there. Some of us are absolutely sure that He did actually perform miracles, but this belief cannot be proved with science. There is more to life and more to knowledge than just science. Science is an excellent way to discover many things, but it’s important to acknowledge the limits of what questions science can answer for us.

Evolution

Now back to our question about the theory of evolution. To give an answer that is not superficial, we need to consider the meaning of the word evolution. One basic definition of biological evolution is change through time. Animals and plants change as their
Microevolution — change within a species of organisms as time passes. A simple example is the beaks of finches on the Galapagos Islands. The climate changed over a period of several years, resulting in changes in the finches' food supply. Individuals with beak sizes that didn't allow the food to fit well had less of chance of survival, and the average size of finch beaks changed to accommodate the available food. Then, as the climate shifted back to its previous condition, the available food also changed and the average finch beak size returned to what it was before the climate shift. This is an example of microevolution — change within a species — which generally occurs through mutations and natural selection.

Another example happens all the time in places like hospitals. For decades we have been using antibiotics to kill bacteria, but a few individual bacteria remain after the antibiotic kills off all the other bacteria. The result is strains of bacteria that are immune to our treatments, and thus very hard to control. This is also microevolution. Microevolution doesn't really make any new types of animals; it just allows species of animals or plants to adapt to changing environmental conditions.

The theory of evolution includes another concept: the evolution of all life forms, through long ages of time, from a common ancestor. This part of evolution says that toads, sparrows, worms, cabbage, palm trees, lobsters, and scientists are all the result of evolution; they evolved through time from a common, one-celled ancestor. We will simply refer to this as descent from a common ancestor.

Can either or both of these ideas about evolution be studied by the methods of science? Yes, they definitely can. Many scientists conduct research on microevolution, observing how creatures change as the environment changes. They use observations and experiments to test hypotheses about these changes. They are studying processes that can be observed and documented. What about the larger changes through time: descent from common ancestors? Can this be studied with the methods of science? Yes, scientists use many types of evidence to develop and test hypotheses about evolution from common ancestors.

Both types of evolution are scientific in the sense that they can be studied with the methods of science. However, there is a difference between them. At least parts of the microevolution process can be observed, but descent of different types of animals from common ancestors in the distant past cannot be observed. Research on common descent does make use of scientific evidence, but it is much more dependent on assumptions in order to interpret that evidence. The most important assumption that is generally accepted by scientists claims there have never been any miracles, any supernatural acts, in all of history. In other words, everything in nature can be explained by the laws of nature that have been discovered. This is the assumption of naturalism, the worldview that doesn’t accept the possibility of creation or intelligent design. Whenever this assumption is made, scientists will always interpret evidence according to the theory of common descent through evolution. The evidence can be interpreted in various ways, but in the naturalistic worldview, the only interpretations that will be accepted are those based on descent of all organisms from a common ancestor through evolution.

Many of us want to know more — not just whether the theory of evolution can be studied with science, but whether or not it is true. Sometimes the term scientific is used in a way that implies that if something is not scientific, it is not true. Since Jesus’ miracles can’t be tested by science, does that mean they are not true? That is not a reasonable conclusion. Science can’t show that Jesus’ miracles happened; neither can it show that they didn’t occur. Science simply has nothing to say about it.

What does this tell us about evolution? Can the assumption of naturalism be tested by the methods of science? If it could, it would no longer be an assumption. The supposition that there were no supernatural acts involved in the origin of life forms (that is, no creation) is a belief about the past. It cannot be tested by observations or experiments. For this reason, the assumption is an arbitrary philosophical choice, not a choice that rests on science. There is considerable evidence that is claimed to support evolution over millions of years, but different worldviews can lead to different interpretations of the evidence. The difference is in the interpretations, and in the assumptions on which those interpretations depend.

Science can provide evidence for us to think about but cannot show us how to understand that evidence.

We do experience some difficulty in explaining some of the evidence in biology and geology according to a biblical view of creation; however, there are also many types of evidence that are difficult to reconcile with the theory of millions of years of evolution. Since we were not there and don’t have all the evidence, science does not have definitive answers to origins, and it is wise to seek God’s answers to these questions.

To illustrate this difference in worldviews and the resulting interpretations, consider this example: worms and scientists have the same biochemical processes occurring in the cells of their bodies. Naturalistic scientists think this indicates they evolved from the same common ancestor, but it could also mean that the same Creator designed both, using the same biochemical mechanism to maintain life in their cells. The difference between those two interpretations, evolution or creation, cannot be tested by the methods of science because they are based on assumptions about what happened in the past.
In the study of microevolution, we can often “open the horse’s mouth and count the teeth.” But when we ask if we evolved from bacteria and worms, we are asking a question about ancient history when no scientist was there to “open the horse’s mouth.” We can ask God for the answer, and in this case it is a spiritually significant question that the Bible does address. The only other option to answer the question is philosophical in nature: we can think about the limited evidence we have and decide, in our own heads, that the assumption of naturalism is correct. Is this a satisfying approach? Does God obey that assumption, or is He amazed at our naivety?

My last name is Brand. My father asked an expert in genealogical study to trace our ancestry, and he traced our history back to some prominent families in England. The problem was that the expert had made a false assumption: the supposition that the last name had been used in a consistent form through time. What he didn’t know was that Grandfather Brandt, a German peasant farmer, named his first half dozen offspring “Brandt,” but on the birth certificates of the last half dozen he named them “Brand.” Arriving at a correct genealogical interpretation of origins depended on knowing that the history of the name had been changed by an intelligent choice. (I assume it was intelligent, but nobody knows why he did it; and yes, there were a dozen.) Our name had not been subject to the typical laws governing the descent of family names. So it is in science: if intelligent choice or creation was involved in the origin of groups of animals and plants, science will not recognize it if the scientists investigating this idea depend on a false assumption about origins.

Conclusion

Is the theory of evolution scientific? Yes, it is scientific in the sense that it can be studied by the methods of science. Does this mean that it is true? Does its status as a scientific theory make it a demonstrated fact? Many books written by scientists stoutly assert that evolution is a fact, as much so as gravity. However, those claims are not realistic if one possesses a proper understanding of the scientific method. Parts of evolution, especially microevolution, are well-documented and seem essentially true, although there may still be much to learn before we understand even that part correctly. This uncertainty is not unique to the study of evolution; in all of science the discovery of new phenomena keeps improving upon or correcting scientific ideas.

Other parts of evolution — for example, its claims about ancient history and the origin of life forms — are in a different category. Science can study these claims and devise hypotheses, but those hypotheses can never be rigorously tested by science. We were not there, and our interpretations of the ancient past are only as good as our assumptions. The claims are not scientific, if by “scientific” we mean they are demonstrated to be true; however, that is not really what the term scientific means.

I suggest that the level of confidence any one person has in the truth of evolutionary history (that is, common descent of all organisms) directly reflects the degree of confidence they have that science is the surest way of finding truth in any topic, and/or the confidence they have in the assumption of naturalism. Our confidence that God has spoken to us in His Word, the Bible, and has given a true history of life on earth is the basis of our Christian worldview. Thus, for many of us, the Word of God is a more reliable guide to understanding ancient history. God was there when life was created, and we were not. In the case of origins, He “counted the horse’s teeth” and told us the answer. Unlike the question of the horses teeth, the Bible does address the topic of origins because it is important for us to know where we came from, why we are here, and where we are going.

The question “Do I know Jesus?” may not seem very scientific, and to some may not be considered relevant to our decision about evolution. However, I submit that it is the most important question of all. Do we give more credence to contemporary scientific interpretations than to God’s Word, or do we know Jesus well enough to have confidence in His communication to us through the Bible?

Leonard Brand (Ph.D. in evolutionary biology, Cornell University) is chairman of the Department of Earth and Biological Sciences, and professor of biology and paleontology at Loma Linda University, Loma Linda, California, U.S.A. This article first appeared as an essay in Understanding Creation: Answers to Questions on Faith and Science, eds. L. James Gibson and Humberto M. Rasi (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 2011). Used by permission.

REFERENCES

Doris A. Mendoza
Dialogue with an Adventist professor of medicine in the Philippines
Interview by Hudson E. Kibuuka

Doris Mendoza is one of four children born to an Aglipayan (Philippine version of Catholicism) father and a Methodist mother. Although she was baptized as an infant in a Catholic church in Manila, Philippines, she was greatly influenced in her growing years by her mother’s religious fervor and devotion, and eventually chose to be a Methodist. From her early years, she was quite studious and absorbed as much as she could from both within the classroom and outside. Her interest in various cultures and religions motivated her to explore the world around her.

Before her medical education and clinical training at the University of the Philippines, she did her premedical studies at Mindanao State University, where she made many Muslim friends and learned about Islam. Her pediatric cardiology specialization and fellowship took her to Kyoto University Hospital in Japan, where she was exposed to Shintoism and Buddhism. Later, as a Mashav-Israel scholar for pediatric cardiology fellowship training in Israel, she learned to appreciate Judaism.

After her education, she spent almost 25 years in the pediatric clinic at St. Paul’s Hospital, a Catholic hospital in Iloilo City, Philippines. During this time, she got an opportunity to join the mentorship and observation program in pediatric heart transplants at the Loma Linda Medical Center and International Heart Institute. At Loma Linda, she was exposed to, and immersed in, the Seventh-day Adventist lifestyle and Sabbath keeping.

A few years later, Dr. Mendoza embraced the Adventist faith. Currently, she is helping to establish the first Adventist Medical College on the campus of Adventist University of the Philippines in Silang, Cavite. While serving this proposed institution as dean elect, she continues to work as a full-time professor of medicine and consultant for pediatrics and pediatric cardiology at the College of Medicine of West Visayas State University and Medical Center in Iloilo City.

Professor Mendoza, when did you become interested in medicine, and what motivated you?

To be a doctor was my dream from childhood. The very first Filipino lady pediatrician, Dr. Fe del Mundo, was my pediatrician throughout my childhood and teen years. As I observed how she took care of her patients, the urge to become a doctor became part of me. She was a very brilliant doctor. She graduated at the top of her class at the premier College of Medicine of the University of the Philippines, at a time when men dominated the medical field. She was so patient, gentle, compassionate, and sweet. She became my role model, and from elementary school I focused my life on becoming a doctor, specifically a pediatrician.

What are your current responsibilities?

After taking the physicians’ licensure examination in 1976, I was assigned to the Philippine province of Iloilo for rural service training. It was a government requirement then to send medical graduates to underserved rural areas for six months, while waiting for the physicians’ licensure exam results. While working there, the dean of the then newly-established West Visayas State University College of Medicine contacted me to join the college as one of the faculty. So straight
after my internship and rural practice, I joined the medical faculty. Although I come from Manila, I accepted the invitation to work far away from home; I have been on the faculty there since 1977, and am happy to have contributed to the growth of the West Visayas State University College of Medicine.

I have worked in different capacities in the college and am currently serving as chair of the Unified Ethics Review Committee of the university. I also serve as a pediatric/pediatric cardiology consultant in the university hospital. After my first year of teaching, I asked to return to the University of the Philippines — Philippine General Hospital Medical Center for Pediatric Residency — but still remained connected to the school. While there I had upgrading, and later I received fellowship and observation opportunities abroad. Currently I hold a rank of professor V in medicine, a top rank in the Philippines educational system. Since our medical college uses a problem-based curriculum, I teach all subjects in the faculty of medicine.

Would you say that there are those who look to you and are influenced to be like you?

I thank the Lord for the privilege of influencing others for good in the past 35 years that I have taught and practiced medicine. When former patients and students come back to visit me now, they bring their children and introduce them as my grandchildren. One indicator that they appreciate my contribution to their medical education and/or state of health is the fact that many of my patients became my medical students and are now my medical colleagues. In fact, many of them became very efficient, conscientious, and compassionate physicians when I myself was a patient with lifethreatening illnesses. Having my previous medical students as my present personal physicians, and being able to entrust my life and survival to the hands of former students, is the most rewarding feeling a teacher could ever have. I consider them “jewels in my crown,” so to speak. It makes my life and teaching career worthwhile.

With a background that includes exposure to many different religious persuasions, how did you end up a Seventh-day Adventist?

My religious journey is a long one. First, I was baptized in the Catholic church as a child. But because of my mother’s commitment to Jesus, her strong spiritual life, and her witness as a Bible woman, I was attracted to the Methodist Church from early childhood. During an evangelistic crusade, at the age of 12, I accepted Jesus Christ as my Savior and Lord, and was baptized. When I moved to Iloilo City, I discovered the Baptist faith, was baptized. When I moved to Iloilo City, I discovered the Baptist faith, and was convinced that immersion was the biblically-prescribed baptism. So for the third time, I was baptized at one of the beautiful beaches of Iloilo. But then came my discovery of Adventism.

As a teacher, I usually come across students from several religious persuasions, but one group of students was rather unique. Every time an examination was scheduled on Saturday, this particular group — the Adventists — would approach the college administration for exemption from taking exams on Saturday. These students would not even attend classes on Sabbath. Being a person of conviction, I was touched by their stand for a religious principle, and always pleaded on their behalf with the college board to grant the exemption, on the grounds that it is a good thing to honor one’s religious beliefs. This was the same scenario practically at every promotion board meeting in the early years of the college, until eventually, the Adventist students won out, and the college finally decided not to conduct classes or give exams on Saturday.

This oft-repeated scenario strongly impacted me. I asked myself, what is it that makes these students so strong in their faith, that they can refuse to take exams, placing their future in such jeopardy? Why were they so staunch in keeping what they believed to be God’s holy day, in contrast to others who didn’t care about keeping Sunday holy and treated it as any ordinary working day? I was truly intrigued and impressed. We did not have the Internet at that time, so I went to the encyclopedia and read about Seventh-day Adventists. I learned a very basic biblical truth: the seventh day is the Sabbath.

Then, you began to keep the Sabbath and joined the Adventist church?

Not so fast. In 2003, I had a cerebrovascular stroke and was bedridden for weeks with severe left-sided weakness. As I was regaining my strength, breast cancer struck me. After surgery, six courses of chemotherapy in six months, and a year of oral maintenance treatment, cancer of the uterus was diagnosed, which required another major surgery, followed by several weeks of radiation treatment. During all this time, my faith stayed firm and my life was anchored resolutely to my Great Physician, the only person who could completely heal me. Bedbound for more than two years, I had time for real communion with God and to do in-depth study of the Bible. One day as I was surfing for good TV programs, I discovered the 3ABN channel, and heard Doug Batchelor, Shawn Boonstra, David Asscherick, and many others. I discovered that these Seventh-day Adventist preachers were presenting the truth according to the Bible, in a way I had never been taught before.

One day, when I was recovering and regaining my immunity, I went to the mall with family, and while others were shopping for different items, I went to the secondhand bookstore. I found a book with a beautiful cover and the title Legacy. As I flipped
through the pages, the first thing that caught my eye was the chapter title on neonatal heart transplants. Being a pediatric cardiologist, I bought the book and took it home but did not read it immediately. When I eventually read it, I discovered that it was about Loma Linda University Medical Center — an Adventist institution. I was excited and read the book all the way through.

After reading it, I e-mailed all the heads of departments listed in the book. After a few weeks they began replying and eventually responded positively to my desire to go on a mentorship program and observe Seventh-day Adventist doctors attending to their patients and performing their duties.

I got a sabbatical from my university and arrived on the Loma Linda campus in December 2006. While I was there, the university chancellor, Richard Hart, invited me to give the morning devotion before the first board meeting for 2007, and I shared my story with all the trustees. I was introduced to Richard Schaefer, the author of Legacy. He said something like this: “So, now I know. You are the reason I have not retired, because something kept holding me back. I had to meet the person who would be brought to Loma Linda through my little book.” The university was fascinated by the story, and we were both interviewed by Loma Linda Broadcasting Network, where I gave my story again to TV viewers.

Dr. Gerald Winslow, one of my mentors and who directed my stay, wanted to baptize me right then, because he knew I was a leader in my church. When I came home from Loma Linda, the university sent me copies of the university newsmagazine Today, featuring the article about me. When this Adventist mother came to my house one day to invite me to a vegetarian cooking lesson, I happily gave her a copy of the article, and she was ecstatic. She had in fact been praying for me all along to find the Bible truth. When the time came to look for a church home, her church was one of the ones I went to. I have been actively involved in that church ever since.

What advice would you give to young Christian professionals in general and Seventh-day Adventists in particular with regard to their stand and relationship to God?

To Adventists, I would say they are in the right church, the true remnant church, and they should never succumb to peer pressure or compromise their faith. God is able to take them through whatever challenges or difficulties they may be facing, including classes or examinations, or any kind of job requirements. Those who are not Seventh-day Adventists, but are Christians, should continue seeking for the truth, and never give up studying the Word of God. When convicted by God’s truth, they should not resist and should not wait for miracles, like mine.

We understand that you might be transitioning from your current position to the Adventist University of the Philippines, which is in the process of establishing a medical college.

It is a big challenge for me. I had plans to retire from teaching at my present medical school in 2015. Suddenly this unexpected invitation from AUP came. I am still coming to terms with this change, and fix my schedules in two different islands and two different colleges, as I am already involved in the preparations for the forthcoming opening of the AUP College of Medicine. Although I will miss my work of 35 years in Iloilo City, I believe that God has led me to this challenge of a new job. I did not seek it, but I believe God wanted me to be in this new medical college for His purpose. Everything will unfold in time. I trust this medical college at AUP will fulfill God’s mission not only in the Philippines but also in other parts of the world.

Do you have any final words?

While still in the Baptist church, I organized revival meetings where we used to have all-night prayer gatherings. One prayer I made was what I would call a “dangerous prayer.” I asked God to do His will in my life, and said something to this effect: “Whatever it takes, Lord, break me into a thousand pieces, and mold me back together again in the image you would like me to become.” This was my dangerous prayer. A few months after that prayer, I fell deathly sick and
PROFILE

Donna Galluzzo
Dialogue with an Adventist home care business executive

Interviewed by Georgia Hodgkin

The announcement came in the mail as a nondescript postcard. Mark Finley, the world-renowned evangelist, was coming to town to hold an evangelistic series on Bible prophecy. That postcard, and the ensuing events, changed Donna Galluzzo’s life for good. Donna was one of seven siblings in a Catholic family. Her mother was a religious person, and when she read the postcard announcement, she was determined to attend Finley’s lectures.

The family was fascinated by what the Bible had to say about the future. After one year of study, some of the family members, including Donna, were baptized. Donna was 16 years old and a sophomore in high school.

When she was ready for college, she chose Atlantic Union College, the closest Adventist school to her home in Meriden, Connecticut, but she later transferred to Loma Linda University (LLU) in California, where she completed a Bachelor of Science in nutrition and dietetics and became a registered dietitian. While working in a hospital setting, Donna obtained a Master of Science in nutrition. Later she moved east to complete a Doctor of Philosophy in nutritional sciences at the University of Connecticut, having obtained the first doctoral fellowship offered by Novo Industri A/S, a European pharmaceutical company.

Since then she has built on her academic foundation, professional values, and Christian commitment to achieve a strong reputation in the business of home care, and remained on the defining edge of her profession. Donna is married and shares with her husband the joyous journey they have travelled, full of twists and turns, and unexpected opportunities and challenges.

One such fork in the road proved critical. Instead of taking the teaching opportunity offered to her upon graduation, Donna chose to go into business temporarily so she could have more flexibility in her schedule to raise their children. The opportunity came in the form of turning around a failing home care business. She not only turned it around, but also made it a successful statewide venture that grew from a handful of employees to more than 1,100 employees. Eventually, she merged that home care agency into one of the largest not-for-profit home care systems in the nation. Today she is known around the country as a dynamic visionary and an effective CEO in the home care industry.

Donna is married to Gianfranco Galluzzo, an attorney, and they have three young adult children — all in college preparing for careers of their own.

Dr. Galluzzo, how did Adventist education impact your career?

During my years at LLU, my philosophy of life, my commitment to God, and my choice of a career began to crystallize. I intentionally chose to live my life on two basic principles — bring honor to my Lord through my work and to live in a state of gratefulness and appreciation. Academically, the Adventist way of life led me to choose nutrition, as it was a relatively young science and research was continuing to unfold. The university’s atmosphere was challenging and wholistic: while it aimed for academic excellence, it dared students to reach for the best in worship and service, in thanksgiving and thanks living. The Adventist-ness at the university challenged students to make significant decisions about major areas of their lives within the parameters of what God would have us do. Unlike most learning centers, LLU, with its Christ-centered core, encouraged me to reflect those ideals in my faith, life, and work.

Along the Loma Linda journey, I was fortunate in having professors who were interested not only in my studies, but also in my life and faith. Among them were two key mentors: Drs. Kathleen Zolber and Georgia Hodgkin. They led by example, giv-
ing me a vision for a bright future and the courage to continue when difficult situations threatened to derail my progress. LLU taught me much more than nutrition, my chosen profession. It taught me to use my career as a tool to create rainbows in the lives of others by reflecting God’s love, much the way a prism produces rainbows on the wall when light shines through it. And while working in the health care field, the Adventist fire that was nurtured at LLU gave me the opportunity to look beyond helping others solely with their physical health. For me, it was about “making man whole — mind, body and spirit.”

■ Following your master’s degree, you earned a doctorate studying lipids (fats). What career did that lead you into?

I was offered the chance to join the teaching faculty at a university. Instead, I chose to go into business temporarily, so I could have some flexibility in my schedule to raise our children. The opportunity came to turn around a failing home care business. It was a decision that changed my professional career to that of being a serial entrepreneur. At first I found myself in unfamiliar terrain, but the prospect of traveling on a new path excited me. Again, mentors proved invaluable — chief among them being my incredibly supportive husband and business colleagues in an organization called Young Presidents Organization. I became like a sponge soaking up the newness of the world of business and was determined to learn from those around me.

Interestingly, God gave me one of my greatest lessons through the actions of my youngest son. To me, problems are really our opportunities. One day, sitting in the office, all I could see were problems. It seemed that all my financial reserves were gone, I didn’t have a clue about which way to turn, and I was discouraged. There were 1,100 employees and thousands of patients depending on the company, and I, as its owner and CEO, was stumped. I went home to cook supper and gave my son a maze to keep him occupied for a good stretch of time. To my dismay, he completed it within minutes. When I asked him how he finished so quickly, he turned the paper upside down and pointed to the end, indicating he started at that point. It was an aha moment for me: be clear about your end-point, and map out your route to the starting point.

■ How has your business and influence grown through the years?

Over the years, and as market opportunities arose, my work branched out from being a home care agency to establishing multiple businesses, including: joint ventures with various hospitals; an outsourced billing organization that processes millions of claims annually; a case management/care transition company that managed over two million lives throughout the continental United States, Alaska, and Hawaii; and a consulting company that assists health care providers with their strategic and operational needs, including areas such as new technologies, mergers, acquisitions, compliance, and innovative educational programs to address market opportunities. In addition, I serve on multiple nonprofit and for-profit boards, both within and outside of health care. Through my work, I have had the privilege of traveling to distant lands and meeting with presidents, queens, princes, the famous, and the influential. But, and much more importantly, this unlikely career path has given me an opportunity to touch the lives of those around me who may be sick or poor or in need.

■ We all have dreams of what our careers will be. What were yours?

Regardless of what I ended up doing, my vision has always been to influence others positively, by reflecting my spiritual and faith philosophy. As a business owner and with that focus, I help establish a corporate culture and have been able to integrate many values and activities, strategically and tactically. Thus I can help my employees develop holistically, including that important dimension of spiritual growth and consciousness. For example, I encourage clusters of employees to meet together to pray or share a devotional thought. Personally, one practice that has outweighed all others is the observance of the Sabbath. For most of my adult life, I have toiled a minimum of sixty hours a week, but the one shining and immovable commitment during all these years has been to remember the Sabbath day. It is a practice that has been paramount to maintaining or, at times, regaining my balance and worldview. It allows me to com-
mit and remember my dedication to honor God with my being and my doing. That, in a way, is the core of my dream.

In your life, you have accomplished much: served many U.S. presidents, brought about changes in U.S. health care, organized first-class home health care, built orphanages and schools around the world, served on the boards of major companies. What does the future hold for you?

I am not sure what the future holds for me, but I know who holds the future. That’s a most important and basic principle in life. If one knows and one is committed to the principle that God holds the future, one can live in the sunshine of that hope. There is nothing to fear, except that we forget what God has done in the past. While I am not sure how God will use my time, talents, and skills, I do know that I want to honor Him in my life and that I want to do it in a way that brings well-being to others. To that end, I continue to be surprised with the people and opportunities that come my way. I do look forward to what God has in store in the future and what He will do to create my history.

What counsel would you give to young people who are still in the valley of decision about their life and career?

Three suggestions. First, make sure that God is the center of your life. A life yielded to God fully and unre- servedly cannot fail; it can only find enormous source of strength. Second, be close to Him in prayer and study of His word. There you find strength and wisdom to live. Third, take the message of the Sabbath seriously, not only as a day of spiritual rest and regeneration, but also as God’s invitation to participate in life with creativity and enthusiasm, humbly encourag- ing others in your sphere of influence to do the same.

Mendoza ...
Continued from page 24

went through a series of medical catastrophes. But God had transformed me into a “wounded healer.”

My advice is: don’t utter a dangerous prayer unless you truly mean it. Praying is a serious business, and therefore always be ready if the Lord answers your prayer the way you asked. It was good that I meant my prayer with all my heart, mind and soul, so God empowered me to over- come the series of trials that befell me. Someday, at the end of life’s journey, I look forward to meeting face-to-face the ultimate “wounded healer,” my beloved Savior who was wounded for my transgressions, and with His stripes I have been healed. Praise be to Him!

Hudson E. Kibuuka (D.Ed., University of South Africa) is an associate director of education, General Conference of Seventh- day Adventists. E-mail: kibuukah@gc.adventist.org.

Dr. Doris A. Mendoza may be con- tacted at docmendz@yahoo.com.
Dr. Lionel Matthews, professor of sociology at Andrews University, has crafted a very readable book that, in spite of its limited length, manages to place in the spotlight an often-overlooked topic in a Christian educational context. It is our take that the author accomplishes his task with flying colors.

The book is divided into six rather succinct chapters, which nevertheless encompass comprehensive topics. In the first one (“Why Christians Should Study Sociology,” which is featured in the essay section), Matthews acknowledges some misconceptions associated with the study of sociology, to advocate the inclusion of the subject as part of a balanced curriculum.

In second chapter, the longest in the book (“Christianity and the Sociological Perspective: Conflict or Confluence?”), Matthews examines the circumstances leading to the development of the science and the major theoretical perspectives that frame the discipline. Then he addresses how these can both pose a threat to and provide support for the Christian (and Seventh-day Adventist) tradition.

In third chapter (“The Church and the Sociological Connection”), Matthews sets out to explain why the church is both a social and a spiritual entity, seeing the Seventh-day Adventist Church specifically as a function of social forces. He proceeds to examine the extent to which this church conforms to a predictable sociological pattern.

In the next chapter (“Faith and Discipline Integration through Sociology”), the author makes a brief review of the various ways that the construct of faith/learning integration has been considered over time, including some ideas and bibliography on the topic. In the second part of the chapter, he applies the theory to biblical references, which underscore various sociological topics that could be examined in a setting where the Bible and faith are seen as a foundational feature of sociological scholarly discussion.

Chapter five (“Integrating Sociology with the Seventh-day Adventist Worldview”) becomes more specific, as the author discusses how the study of sociology informs and influences one’s worldview, and presses further to show how a sociological context can be used to better understand the elements of the Adventist fundamental beliefs that undergird the Adventist worldview.

Finally, Matthews devotes chapter six (“Postmodernism, Adventism, and the Challenge of Integration”) to putting postmodernism in a historical context (that is to say, as evolving or reacting to pre-modernism and modernism). The author then shows how postmodernism can presumably be a challenge but also a sort of ally to the Christian worldview, including examples that may allow for making the Seventh-day Adventist faith more appealing to the postmodern mind.

Undoubtedly, this book has numerous strengths. For one, the author is an experienced teacher, and it shows. Sociology can be read almost as a textbook, nearly free from professional lingo and grandiloquent sociological terms. This makes the book’s claim to be “for students and teachers” quite pertinent.

The strongest points in the book, however, go well beyond mere stylistic or formal considerations. The content of the book has left this reader pleasantly surprised on more than one account. First of all, Matthews never falls into the easy trap of Christian apologetics against key secular sociological concepts per se. In facing the development and current state of affairs of the discipline, he follows a proactive approach that respects the secular take on the subject, even when underlining what is, according to him, the surpassing approach of biblical Christian, and specifically Seventh-day Adventist, positions. In the author’s view, the various past and present currents of sociological thought are nothing but sound opportunities for emphasizing and proclaiming each of them — in Robert Browning’s words, “here you miss, or there exceed the mark” — always taking as a reference the worldview found in the biblical text and the Seventh-day Adventist interpretation. While his task might seem prima facie controversial, Matthews’ candor in dissecting the basic propositions of the main sociological historical currents makes easy the difficult and provides an unending source of enrichment for sociology courses in Seventh-day Adventist colleges and universities. It proves especially relevant when applying this method to our ever-present rendezvous with postmodernism and its practical implications.

When discussing the contributions sociology can make to an Adventist college class in the field, the author does not shy away from including topics that could stir some uneasiness in the ranks of students or teachers less prone to facing religious soft spots and “dark alleys.” For instance, when bringing up the social forces impacting the development of and the institutional and practical orientation of Seventh-day Adventism over time, Matthews finds it thought-provoking to discuss them within the framework.
Majesty: Experiencing Authentic Worship
by A. Joseph Kidder (Hagerstown, Maryland: Review and Herald, 2009; 112 pages; paperback).

Reviewed by Daniel Oscar Plenc

Joseph Kidder, with 30 years of pastoral and teaching experience, approaches his topic with majesty and authenticity. His style is simple, enjoyable, and biblically and spiritually sound. His work is a product of lifelong experience with the Lord in study, prayer, preaching, and worship.


The first chapter sets the tone for the entire work by defining worship as the heartbeat of the believer, something that runs deeper than the visible elements of a worship service. The author is convinced that people need to be trained in this experience with God, and that such experience starts at a personal level before becoming corporate. The author understands the importance of worship and its clear goal, which is to give glory, praise, and thanksgiving to God as part of a relationship with Him.

Kidder justifies the need for understanding and experiencing worship with a claim that worship (a) is a search for God; (b) is focused on God; (c) is aware of God’s holiness; (d) implies our attribution of worth to God; (e) helps us to know ourselves; and (f) results in service to God.

“Worship,” affirms Kidder, “is an encounter with God. It happens when our hearts touch the heart of God” (p. 18). It is an active response as we declare the worth of our God. It is also a personal response to divine revelation, an answer that sinners saved by grace can avow. To support this thesis, Kidder offers three examples taken from the Bible: (a) The call of Isaiah (6:1-8); (b) the encounter of the Samaritan woman with Jesus (John 4:1-26); and (c) the life of the early Christian church (Acts 2:42-47). The author further shows that a common thread in the biblical pattern of worship includes three basic elements as a response to the acts, attributes, and the authority of God: adoration, exaltation, and submission. Out of this discussion, Kidder deals with the questions of how and why to worship, on the basis of a study of Psalm 100. Out of that biblical text, it is affirmed that we are supposed to worship with enthusiasm, gratitude, and joy, since the Lord is God, our salvation, great, powerful, holy, gracious, good, loving, caring, and eternally faithful.

The author further elaborates on other elements that make up authentic worship, such as prayer, the Word of God, praise, and offerings. As part of the worship service, prayer fulfills the role of searching for the presence, the glory, the company, and the power of God. The Word reveals God, and also unveils the purpose of our worship. It is the means for the operation of the Holy Spirit, giving hope, making us free, awaking faith in us and defeating the enemy. Praise is an expression of our admiration for God, which transcends our feelings and circumstances. With the support of the biblical text, Kidder shows why, when, and how we are to praise, and what are the benefits of praising the Lord. Offerings are understood as another essential element in worship, and these include praise, good works, material possessions, and our lives themselves. Within this context, our offerings and tithe are signs of loyalty; they are related to God’s blessings, and reveal our priorities in life.
and the depth of our commitment to God.

Kidder awards his readers with a beautiful ending, sharing a depiction of the church of his dreams: a church on fire for God, led by the Holy Spirit, with members devoted to prayer and experiencing the presence of the Lord. He finds a model of this church in New Testament passages such as Acts 2:42-47. This would be a loving, united, generous, and worshipful church. On the basis of the songs found in Revelation (p. 101), he infers that the emotional key of worship is found in our feeling of admiration for our Creator (Revelation 4), Redeemer (Revelation 5), King (Revelation 11), and Bridegroom (Revelation 19).

Both pastors and worshippers will benefit by this book and its simple but majestic approach to the role of worship in the life of the Christian, both personally and corporately.

Daniel Oscar Plenc (Ph.D., Universidad Adventista del Plata) is professor of theology and the White Estate director at River Plate Adventist University, Argentina. E-mail: ciwdirec@uapar.edu.

Always Prepared

Reviewed by Gerhard Pfandl

This book addresses 20 common questions that Bible-believing Christians encounter repeatedly, primarily at educational institutions. The coeditors have assembled an international group of scholars to provide thoughtful answers to questions about the Bible, God, Jesus, salvation, ethics, prophecy, and world religions.

All contributors believe that the Bible is a reliable document that reveals a wise and powerful God who cares deeply about His creation. According to the introduction, the book “is addressed to Christians interested in the rational arguments that support their personal faith and who wish to communicate them to friends and colleagues in a reasonable manner, while helping to remove obstacles to faith in the mind of nonbelievers” (p. 11). In other words, it is a book of Adventist apologetics targeting educated individuals at high schools, colleges, and universities. It is a companion volume to the book Understanding Creation, which addresses questions of science and faith.

The first three chapters deal with the reliability of the Bible, its inspiration, and archaeological confirmation. Several chapters deal with the nature and character of God. For example, in the chapter “Is the God of the Old Testament Different from the One in the New Testament?” the author, Greg King of Southern Adventist University, shows that (1) it was the God of the Old Testament who gave Jesus to the world out of love; (2) God is not only love, but also Holy, righteous, and just; and (3) the New Testament also shows God’s undiluted wrath unmixed with mercy in Revelation 14:9-11. Hence, he concludes, “only in eternity will we begin to understand some of the challenges to our understanding of God posed by certain passages” (p. 107).

In contrast to the rest of the chapters, which are fairly easily understood, the fourth chapter — “Why Do I Believe in God,” by Clifford Goldstein — and chapter eight — “How Can Miracles Be Possible?” by Kwabena Donkor — are philosophical essays that will challenge many readers. Words such as cosmogony, biophilic, philippic, and nomic are not household words, even for university students.

Chapter five — “Are Faith and Reason Compatible?”, by coeditor Humberto Rasi — deals with the relationship of faith and reason. He explains what the Bible has to say on the topic and comes to the conclusion that for the educated believer, there is no incompatibility between faith and reason, “between the life of faith and the life of the mind” (p. 67).

The heart of the book, in this reviewer’s view, is found in two excellent chapters dealing with Jesus. In chapter 6, William G. Johnsson, former editor of the Adventist Review, provides seven reasons why Jesus was and is unique. He says Jesus is unique because of His positive impact on humanity, because of His birth, His life, His teachings, His claims, His death, and His continuing presence. In Chapter 7, David Marshall, former editor at the Stanborough Press in England, gives a very clear response to the question “Did Jesus really come back to life?” He marshals all the available biblical and historical evidence for the bodily resurrection of Jesus, the most important of which is that “an objective encounter of the disciples with the risen Jesus is the only way we can explain their subsequent behavior and, as a result, the growth of the church” (p. 86). Both authors emphasize the fact that the biblical and historical data support the claims of Scripture that Jesus was who He claimed to be and that He indeed rose from the dead.

Larry Lichtenwalter provides an important chapter addressing the contemporary issue of “what is truth?” Postmodern people no longer believe in absolute truth. “Truth is relative! Truth is whatever I say it is!” These are the

Continued on page 33
A legacy of unfinished business: Lessons from the life of Saul

The choices and actions we take today not only will impact our future, but also the lives of those who come after us.

by Herb Giebel

“I thank my God upon every remembrance of you... being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:3, 6, NKJV).

Tall and handsome, Saul stood out in the crowd (1 Samuel 9:2). At 30, he was chosen king of Israel, and God proposed that he should save His people from the Philistines. Now, at the beginning of what would be his 40th year of reign (Acts 13:21), Prophet Samuel instructed Saul to precede him to Gilgal and wait there for a special worship celebration. After seven days, Samuel would join him to offer sacrifices and offerings (1 Samuel 10:8).

This was a harrowing time. The armies of Israel and Philistines were raging against each other. While Saul was waiting for the arrival of Samuel, his army of 3,000 dwindled to 600. Out of fear, they scattered to caves, holes, rocks, tombs, and cisterns; some even escaped across the Jordan River (1 Samuel 13:1, 6, 15). The Philistine army included 30,000 chariots, 6,000 horseman, and so many infantry that they looked like sand on the seashore (1 Samuel 13:5). Finally, on the seventh day, out of frustration for Samuel’s delay and desperation over nearly losing his whole army, Saul presented a burnt offering, seeking God’s help. But sacrifice is an act only priests are authorized to do. When Samuel showed up, he let Saul know how foolish he had been not to obey God’s instructions! Israel’s kingship would be given to someone who would obey.

Saul was given another opportunity to demonstrate unquestioning faith and obedience to God’s Word and show his worthiness to lead Israel. The Amalekites were the first to attack Israel as they left Egypt. With cowardice and cruelty, they attacked from the rear, killing the weak, the faint and weary, the elderly and the stragglers (Deuteronomy 25:17-18). Amalek had scoffed at the fears of God’s people and made sport of God’s deliverance of Israel from Egypt, boasting that if the Israelites had been their captives, the Israelite God would not have been able to deliver them — after all, their wise men and magicians could perform all those wonders! The Amalekites despised Israel and had taken a vow not to rest until there was not a single Israelite left.

Because of this, God instructed Saul to blot out completely the memory of the Amalekites from under heaven (Exodus 17:14; Deuteronomy 25:19). Saul was given a mission: to lead Israel in a war to exterminate the Amalekites. The Israelites were not to add to their own possessions from the loot, or to get glory for themselves for their success, but were to fulfill the word of the Lord and remove all traces of this people from the earth. The instruction from God through Samuel was: “Now go and attack Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and do not spare them. But kill both man and woman, infant and nursing child, ox and sheep, camel and donkey” (1 Samuel 15:3).

So Saul attacked the Amalekites with 200,000 infantry plus 10,000 military men from Judah who responded to the battle call. The text says the people were utterly destroyed, along with everything that was despised and worthless. However, the best of the animals and all that was good was saved, and King Agag was brought back as a war trophy!

The next morning, Saul set up a victory monument in his own honor at Carmel before moving on to Gilgal. When Samuel caught up with him, Saul proudly greeted Samuel, “God’s blessings on you! I have accomplished God’s plan to the letter!” (1 Sam. 15:13, Message). Samuel then confronted Saul for his disobedience, for doing evil and swooping down on the war loot rather than destroying it all. But Saul insisted that he had obeyed the word of the Lord. The mission was accomplished. The people were utterly
destroyed, and Agag was brought back as a war trophy!

You can read the rest of the story in 1 Samuel 15, seeing how Saul was confused and tried to shun responsibility by blaming the disobedience on the people. Samuel delivered God’s response: “God does not want sacrifice at the expense of obedience. Rebel- lious disobedience is equated with witchcraft and persistent justification of disobedience is like the sin of idolatry. Disobedience for a presumed good cause is still disobedience. The end does not justify the means! Today you have judged yourself. Because you have rejected God by refusing to follow the simple plain instructions he gave you, you have shown yourself to be unworthy of leading God’s people” (1 Samuel 15:52, 53, paraphrase).

A continual threat

Because Saul failed in his mission against the Amalekites, they continued to be a threat to Israel. David had to fight the Amalekites while he was on the run from Saul (1 Samuel 27:8; 30:1-19). It was an Amalekite who claimed to have killed Saul (2 Samuel 1:1, 8, 13). The Amalekites were one of the nations David had to subdue (2 Samuel 8:11-12; 1 Chronicles 18:11), and 500 men from the tribe of Simeon went to Mount Seir to defeat the rest of the Amalekites who had escaped (1 Chronicles 4:43).

Is it possible that Amalekite remnants show up in the book of Esther? Recall Haman, the Agagite? Was he a descendant of the King Agag whom Saul saved as a war trophy? If so, perhaps Haman had some deep-seated feelings against the Israelites, for we see him requesting Ahasuerus to do to the Jews what God had told the Israelites to do to the Amalekites: now, if you have the best interests of your subjects in mind, Haman tells the king, you will give the order to utterly destroy this people group, and not leave any remaining — even as captives or for use as slaves.

Josephus suggests that when the Jews were allowed to defend themselves, 77,800 Amalekites were killed (Josephus 11:6:12)! But the Israelites did not lay hands on the plunder of those they killed (Esther 9:10, 15, 16). After all, taking the booty during the conquest of Canaan and during Saul’s kingship had caused Israel to lose sight of their divine instructions and had resulted in great disaster. Did the Israelites during the time of Esther finish the unfinished business of Saul? If so, then Balaam’s prophecy was finally fulfilled: “Amalek was the first of the nations; but his latter end shall be, that he perish forever” (Numbers 24:20).

Far-reaching results of disobedience

From the story of Saul, we can again see an example of the far-reaching results of one person’s disobedience to the Word of God. As leaders, will we leave behind a legacy of “mission fulfilled,” by living a life of unswerving obedience to God and His Word? Or will we, like Saul, leave behind a legacy of “unfinished business,” by choosing to follow our own judgment rather than God’s explicit command?

Ellen White gives us insight into the life of Saul and helps us see how we may achieve where Saul failed: “When called to the throne, Saul had a humble opinion of his own capabilities, and was willing to be instructed. He was deficient in knowledge and experience and had serious defects of character. But the Lord granted him the Holy Spirit as a guide and helper, and placed him in a position where he could develop the qualities requisite for a ruler of Israel. Had he remained humble, seeking constantly to be guided by divine wisdom, he would have been enabled to discharge the duties of his high position with success and honor. Under the influence of divine grace every good quality would have been gaining strength, while evil tendencies would have lost their power. This is the work which the Lord proposes to do for all who consecrate themselves to Him” (Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 632).

The decision is ours. Will we fulfill the high calling God has for us, and leave behind a legacy of “mission fulfilled”? The choices and actions we take today not only will impact our future, but also the lives of those who come after us. The Holy Spirit is eager to be our guide so that the good work God has begun in us will be brought to completion.

Herb Giebel (DTM&H London School of Tropical Medicine & Hygiene) is director of postgraduate medical education for the West Africa Division, based at the Seventh-day Adventist hospital in Nigeria. E-mail: giebelnet@gmail.com.
slogans of many modern individuals. For Bible-believing Christians, this is unacceptable. The author convincingly answers the question “Are there moral absolutes?” in the affirmative, because the battle for moral truth “lies at the heart of the great controversy between Christ and Satan” (p. 139).

Other questions in the book deal with the state of the dead, the Sabbath, world religions, salvation, and the issue of “why am I a Seventh-day Adventist?”

Merlin Burt, director of the White Estate branch office at Andrews University, concludes the book by answering the question “Who was Ellen White?” The chapter not only provides a brief resume of Ellen White’s life and the contributions she has made as one of the founders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, but also dwells on her love for the Lord and the relationship between the Bible and her writings. “Her first objective,” he says, “was to lead people to the Bible” (p. 215). She affirmed the final authority of Scripture, even though she believed that God had spoken to her in a supernatural way.

As is often the case with books written by several people, some chapters are better than others, and not everyone will be happy with the answers given. Nevertheless, students, professionals, and particularly ministers — who are frequently confronted with arguments about God and the Bible — will find this volume a valuable and helpful resource. Corrections for a second printing should include substituting “this chapter” for “this paper” and “my paper” (p. 49). The design and layout of the book is well done, but a subject index would have enhanced the usefulness of the book.

Gerhard Pfandl (Ph.D., Andrews University) is an associate director of the Biblical Research Institute of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Silver Spring, Maryland, USA. E-mail: pfandlg@gc.adventist.org.

**Adventist Health Study 2**

Do you want to be part of a world renowned research team whose findings not only have appeared in scientific journals but also on the front page and prime time coverage of international media outlets such as National Geographic, CNN, and BBC? Would you like to be engaged in health research while relishing the perfect climate and diverse culture of Southern California? Then join us as a fellow!

**The Adventist Health Study-2**, a longitudinal study of diet and cancer funded by the National Institutes of Health (NIH), is now accepting applications for Postdoctoral Fellows.

This is a unique opportunity for young doctoral graduates to obtain experience, develop skills, and publish research papers on one of the largest cohort studies in North America.

Applicants should meet the following criteria:

- Possess a PhD, DrPH, or MD degree;
- Have previous work and training in epidemiology or biostatistics;
- Relatively recent doctoral graduates (up to 5 years since completion of doctoral training).

Fellowships will be awarded on an annual basis, but with the expectation of a two-year duration; short fellowships for 3 months are also available. International applicants are welcomed, although travel expenses to and from Loma Linda, California, are not available.

To learn more about benefits as well as eligibility requirements, please visit www.llu.edu/public-health/health/postdocs.page.

**Application Deadline:** Oct 1, 2012

Detailed instructions are available on contacting Hanni Bennett (1-909-558-4753; hbennett@llu.edu) or Gary Fraser MD, PhD (gfraser@llu.edu). This is a two-step process. Selected applicants will be invited to participate in the second step.

Adventist Health Studies [www.adventisthealthstudies.org] are long-term studies exploring the links between lifestyle, diet, and disease among Seventh-day Adventists. More than 95,000 church members from the U.S. and Canada are participating in the current study, the AHS-2, conducted by researchers at the Loma Linda University School of Public Health.
The 2011 convention of the Association of Seventh-day Adventist University Students and Graduates of Spain (AEGUAE) met in December in Benicàssim, on the Mediterranean coast of Spain. Students celebrated faith and friendship under the Adventist banner and chose for their latest convention the theme “Love in Times of Brokenness: From Divine Ideal to Postmodern Thought.” Though not a scientific topic, it is a much-needed subject for discussion at a time like this: we focused on how God’s love can bring healing and restoration to all of us, individually and collectively. Accordingly, the notion of love was discussed from God’s original perspective and its corresponding take by contemporary society. Two great thinkers and Adventist affirmers took the lead in presenting the topic: Dr. Víctor Armenteros (academic vice president, River Plate Adventist University, Argentina) and Dr. Carlos Chimpén (professor, University of Extremadura, Spain).

Dr. Armenteros introduced the topic, inviting us to think about how to approach the biblical text in order to create models for our lives — in this case, related to love. On the one hand, Armenteros said, it is important to take into account the archetype — in other words, the ideal pattern God poses in Genesis 1 and 2 regarding love relationships. On the other hand, we need to know the difference between this archetype and a model, which is limited to a specific situation within a specific context. Out of an understanding of these two notions (of archetype and model), we are advised to change our protocol: to focus our attention on the archetype, in the original image, and not on the various models introduced throughout history as answers to specific contexts that clearly cause us to drift away from the primeval ideal. The success of such accomplishment will undoubtedly be reflected in our love relationships — not only with our spouses, but also with our friends and even with God.

Armenteros’ analysis allowed us to discover a personal God, and to find — in the original notion of a couple — an exemplary family structure, where a wholly complementary, equal, autonomous, and full relationship was a reality. A clear contrast exists between gel love, as advocated by society, and sound and true love, as presented in the Bible. The former is rooted in passion, whose referent is relative since it is based on personal opinion, with modified family structures and an idealized notion of growth. The latter is where God is the referent, motivated by love as a principle, and offering a growth that is binding.

Dr. Chimpén addressed the students and graduates present by discussing types of unhealthy love, dissecting some of the ever-present myths regarding love and sex. “Intimacy” was a key word often mentioned in his presentation. Chimpén pointed out that sexual intercourse “is not meant to be an encounter between strangers who allow themselves to become mere instruments, but between people who take each other into account, showing mutual support of and love for each other.” (All of this, of course, is within the context of a marriage commitment between two heterosexual partners.) He went on to explain how love and our way of entering into love relationships plays an important role in the development of identity — thus the importance of asking God to guide us in this particular issue.

The convention was not limited to intellectual discussions alone, but also extended to fellowship and meaningful spiritual activities. As we left the venue to go to various places of study and work, we took with us meaningful challenges to our academic, spiritual, and social responsibilities. Exchanging opinions about love was an instructive — and why not, passionate — exercise, and became a catalyst for personal reflection on the architecture of our relationships. It is a discussion that we — as Christian young people — had better face, since the society we live in is surely imposing it on us.

To help Adventist young people stand rooted in such spiritual perspectives is the goal of AEGUAE. As an example of how the association helps keep that focus, here’s a testimony of one of the young ladies present:

“Through its activities, AEGUAE has prompted me to reflect on how much I still need to work on myself and with other people. It is my prayer and desire to take my lifestyle a step closer to the original model that God planned for me. It is also a challenge to fight against the model of the society surrounding me as I try to keep my convictions as unchangeable as possible, without being negatively affected in their social and personal dimensions.

“I think God is powerful enough to help us so that we may become able to transmit that unique and true love
“I firmly believe that if we strive to understand His great love and to apply it to our lives, God’s message will naturally flow out of our hearts.”

Alexandra Mora Angomás is president of AEGUAE as she pursues a degree at the Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia in English studies and finishes a master’s degree in building techniques and systems at the Universidad Politécnica de Madrid. E-mail: info@aeguae.org.
Some things never change — such as Dialogue’s mission and focus. Other things, though, are updated and enhanced — such as new ways in which you can access Dialogue. We want you to know that Dialogue is now available online, in addition to the regular printed format. The journal can be accessed at: dialogue.adventist.org. At the Dialogue site, you will have the opportunity to read all of the articles, from the very beginning of Dialogue to the present. Additionally, you can read the articles in any of the four languages in which Dialogue is published.

So spread the good news to your friends and colleagues, so they can be a part of Dialogue. We want to Dialogue with everyone, everywhere!

dialogue.adventist.org