The vast majority of Americans profess to believe that God created the heavens and the Earth. About 50 percent hold to a literal seven-day creation, though this theory is excluded from the schools and ridiculed by the media and scientific community. Another 35 percent believe in God-directed evolution. About 10 percent do not believe that God had a hand in it, and another small percentage state that they do not know.

Among scientists, the percentage of believers is less, but even among them, 40 percent believe in a God who answers prayer. Throughout history, almost all humans have believed in a god, whether Babylonian mystics, Baal worshipers, Greek philosophers, human-sacrificing Mayans, or fundamentalist Christians. It is as if it were (to put it in evolutionary terms) selectively bred into us. Atheism has held little attraction for the vast majority.

But perhaps this huge multitude simply longs with all its heart to believe, and “brave new world” atheists are the only ones willing to face the cold hard facts of reality. Are we afraid of the truth? Or do we have a reason (not mere conviction) for the hope within us (1 Peter 3:15)?

Evidences for Theism?

Just how many have fallen for this “irrational, superstitious, nonsense”? Is that how we as Seventh-day Adventist creationists come across? Do we indeed stop thinking when we read our Bibles or darken the doors of the sanctuary? Are we afraid of the truth? Or do we have a reason (not mere conviction) for the hope within us (1 Peter 3:15)?

The Fine Tuning of the Universe

Over the past century, it has become apparent that the universe is finely tuned to the needs of life on Earth. Although several have written on this topic, called the anthropic principle, a recent and easily readable book is “Just Six Numbers,” by Martin J. Rees, which lists six qualities of the universe described by six fundamental physical constants. Each seems to have been honed to the finest of tolerances so that humans might exist.

The most amazing is \( \Omega \) (Omega), the number describing the expansion rate of the universe, or the balance between gravity and outward expansion. This number is accurate to one in a million billion (1,000,000,000,000,000:88)! This is incredible precision. Rees discusses this astonishing finding and how each of the numbers impacts life on our planet. We could not exist without this accuracy.

He does not subscribe to belief in a deity, but his reason for skepticism is telling. He gives no logic for his rejection of this idea, but merely states a preference and begins to speculate about “multi-verses” (other universes besides ours). There is no evidence presented, however, to support the existence of other universes. In fact, he suggests that we are unable to know of them, even if they do exist. So his thinking is based on specula-
tion he chooses to believe and a presupposition that eliminates God.

Aside from Scripture, this fine-tuning is the strongest evidence for God’s existence. Order, elegance, design, and the Big Bang also point to a Creator.

Order and Elegance

There is much order seen in the universe and in living organisms. The laws of physics and life show thoughtful synthesis. But most impressive is the order inherent in the Periodic Table of the Elements. This arrangement of the 92 naturally occurring atoms (along with the several manmade ones) was discovered by Mendeleev in the mid-19th century. As he grouped the families of elements together from lightest to heaviest by examining their shared characteristics, he recognized a repetitive sequence. He then placed them in an order that predicted some that had not yet been discovered. Discovery of these confirmed the table’s validity.

The whole material universe is made of these elements. We humans are made of the same stuff as the stars. The elements’ electron properties allow for the construction of a wonderful array of chemical compounds (as especially seen in the chemistry of life: proteins, DNA, etc), while characteristics of the nucleus allow fusion to release massive amounts of energy, giving light and warmth (the stars burn hydrogen in their nuclear reactors, forming helium and heavier elements).

But these diverse elements with all their amazing combinations and derivations are concocted using three forms of matter: protons, neutrons, and electrons; and three forces: the weak and strong nuclear forces and the electromagnetic force. A few basic laws govern their actions. This is an elegant order. Such beauty and complexity from such simplicity!

During my career as a surgeon, I have seen some who operate with finesse and others who, shall we say, perform with lesser skill. I know the thinking and planning and experience it takes to make an operation look easy. It does not happen by accident. It is deliberate and intentional. And we praise surgeons who devote their lives to perfecting their craft in the service of others.

The elegance and beauty in the order of the very atoms of our being do not give the appearance of the workings of chance, but rather of careful thought and intention, like a well-planned operation. This is strong evidence for a Creator who knew the nature of His medium and used it with grace and skill.

The Big Bang

Although not all would agree with various details of the Big Bang theory, it has been accepted by most cosmologists as a fairly accurate description of the origin of the universe. It has a very interesting feature: a beginning. This theory of origins is consistent with Genesis 1:1. It also argues against an eternal or cyclical universe. This makes atheists uncomfortable. Arthur Eddington, a British physicist and atheist who experimentally confirmed Einstein’s general theory of relativity in 1919, said, “Philosophically, the notion of a beginning to the present order is repugnant to me. I should like to find a genuine loophole.”4 If the universe had a beginning, who initiated it? A Creator outside the universe itself is a logical deduction.

Design

The biological realm shows amazing design. The eye has most often been cited to demonstrate this property of nature. But there are many examples: wings, hands, social structures, etc. Michael Dickinson recently reviewed experiments on insect flight.5

These diverse elements with all their amazing combinations and derivations are concocted using three forms of matter: protons, neutrons, and electrons; and three forces: the weak and strong nuclear forces and the electromagnetic force. A few basic laws govern their actions. This is an elegant order. Such beauty and complexity from such simplicity!

This extremely complex skill is carried out by a creature with the proverbial brain of a fly. Yet these tiny living machines can maneuver like nothing else known to humanity. How did they develop the ability to do these astounding feats? The belief that this could happen by gradual change through natural selection (this is no explanation, mind you, but mere assertion) is a true act of faith.

Skeptics have claimed that the design argument is of itself not strong enough to support belief in the existence of God. I do not hold to this view. As my partner in practice said, “Things just look too good to have happened by chance.” In combination with the order and accuracy seen in the deep realities of the universe, a very strong cognitive position can be taken and defended.

Three Further Points

Some atheists, after listening to these points, have said, “Why doesn’t
God calls us to take a biblical position: We are to warn the world of the near coming of our Lord, admonishing them to return to their Creator and show their allegiance by keeping the seventh day holy as a memorial of a literal six-day creation. Holding this ground requires something more than scientific evidence, for even believing scientists by and large subscribe to an ancient Earth and Darwin’s theory of evolution.

God reveal Himself to us? Why doesn’t He just show Himself (as one suggested) by writing His name in the sky so that we could know? Why isn’t it simple?”

God has revealed Himself in nature and Scripture and has given us minds to see and eyes to read. The example of the Israelites at Sinai warns us (Ex. 32). They saw the smoke and fire and heard God speak, but in 40 days they were worshiping a golden calf. Jesus cautioned those who were looking for a sign (Matt. 12:39) and said that they would not believe even if someone rose from the dead (Luke 16:19–31). Apparently God feels that people must decide on the basis of evidence and the witness of another who writes what he has seen. And who said life would be simple?

Second, some have said, “How can we know which God this creator is? There are many gods. How do you know it is the Christian God who creates?” The implication is that since it is impossible to know, it is of no consequence.

This is shallow thinking. Human beings have explored the atom and sent probes deep into space. Are they unable to search out the most significant Being in the universe? Besides, we can simplify the quest by considering only those gods who claim to be Creator. Even the Phoenician sailors taking Jonah to Tarshish knew that the Creator was of a different order. Let questioners examine the various gods’ claims. I think it will be clear.

And third, some have said, “Well then, who created God, and who created God’s creator, etc.?” This is called an endless regression, and it sidesteps the issue. The question under consideration is whether the universe shows signs of intentional creation or the mere workings of chance. It shows the characteristics of intention by its fine-tuning and design. From our experience in daily life with cause and effect, only one entity we know can be intentional: a mind. Therefore, it is the product of Mind. If we have established this, then we can discuss by what means and where the Mind came from, etc. However, these musings do not change the answer to the primary question: the appearance of intention.

This evidence leads me to believe in a Creator, one who possesses consummate ability. I have excellent evidence for this belief and can stand without shame when called on by my God to do so. I do not fear the purveyors of purposelessness that some in modern science would endorse.

The findings of science support belief in a Creator, but belief in a literal six-day creation is not so clearly sustained. Scripture says, however, that our knowledge of this comes through faith (Heb. 11:3). This, though, does not mean that there is no evidence.

God calls us to take a biblical position: We are to warn the world of the near coming of our Lord, admonishing them to return to their Creator and show their allegiance by keeping the seventh day holy as a memorial of a literal six-day creation. Holding this ground requires something more than scientific evidence, for even believing scientists by and large subscribe to an ancient Earth and Darwin’s theory of evolution. The Catholic Church and most Protestant bodies no longer accept the literal truth of the story in Genesis 1.

Can we defend our position logically?

There are some who hold to various combinations of these two systems (theistic evolution, for example). Any combination will share in the strengths and weaknesses of each and may involve internal contradictions.

Creation: Pro

The Bible supports this theory. Although this may seem elementary, the Bible has great persuasive power, so much so that it has stood, in spite of the assaults of atheists and agnostics, for centuries. As mentioned before, about 50 percent of Americans believe in a literal six-day creation, despite reported scientific evidence against a literal reading of Genesis 1, and even though the media and most scientists reject it. Two pillars of objective reality support the Bible: (1) the changed lives of those who believe, and (2) the fulfillment of prophetic predictions such as those found in Genesis 12, Daniel 2, 7, 9, and those describing the character and work of the Messiah.

Jesus, the disciples, and Paul assumed the truth of this theory. See Matthew 19:4–6; Mark 10:6–9; Acts 17:24; Hebrews 11:3; 2 Peter 3:3–7;
Revelation 4:11 and 14:7. For some Christians and Jews, their endorsement is pivotal.

The story of redemption makes no sense without the stories of Genesis 1–3. In his small book New Testament and Mythology, Rudolph Bultmann noted the close relationship between the story of the Fall and the need for salvation. If there were no Fall, why need there be salvation and atonement? By rejecting a Creation and Fall, Darwin’s theory undermines the doctrine of salvation.

The story gives purpose. In Genesis 1, God works with intention and deliberation to make a world suitable for the crown of creation, humankind. Humans have a role to play, and God has given them a work to do and a place under the Sun. They are the children of the Most High, rather than the offspring of the scum of the Earth. They are legitimate beings, not an accident. God comes at eventide each day to speak to the man and woman. He talks personally to them at the Fall. All this shows more than casual concern. This contrasts starkly with the purposelessness at the foundation of evolutionary theory, where there is only chance and ultimate meaningless. Stories of redemption are present throughout all great literature and have an appeal to all that is good and great in the human spirit.

There is a certain incompatibility between evolutionary theory and the character of God revealed in Scripture. Natural selection ruthlessly culls the infirm and weak, while Jesus stoops to care for the “least of these my brethren” (Matt. 25:40, NKJV). Millions of years of death by an uncaring universe, contrasted with numbered hairs and Heaven’s interest in fallen sparrows.

Notice that these pros are not based on evidence that is strictly scientific in nature. But there is other evidence besides that which can be tested using the scientific method. The claims of God in the Bible are of such a character. God challenges the other gods to tell the future (Isa. 41:21–24). This is evidence that can be checked against history but does not fall under the rules laid down by science. The testimony of a changed life is outside the measurement of science, yet remains a powerful incentive to belief.

Creation: Con

The Creation story in Genesis is not a scientifically stated theory. It is, rather, more like rhythmic prose. It does not lend itself to dissection by using the scientific method, as this technique was not practiced by the ancients. Moses knew nothing of radiometric dating, fossils, sedimentary layers, or pseudogenes. Of course, no one was present at the beginning, so neither theory is demonstrable, nor, in the strictest sense, refutable. (A scientist has to repeat an experiment to tell whether it is true or false.) All arguments on each side are inferences from the data.

There is, however, one statement in the Creation story that can be tested: God said that all the animals and plants would produce after their kind. The theory of evolution disputes this statement, asserting that over long periods of time, a “kind” will gradually change into another: that is, it will become a different kind. Strictly speaking, the fossil record seems to support the creationist view. In other words, few transitional forms are found. Macroevolution has not been demonstrated. Geneticists have been exploring the very edges of the genetic makeup of some kinds to see if they can show where transition into another kind occurs. Yet they come to a boundary they cannot cross.

The Creation theory has minimal explaining power. For example, an occasional whale is caught that has vestigial legs that do not seem to have a specific purpose. Creationists would say that God just made them that way, while evolutionists would postulate that the ancestors of whales must have had useful legs and walked on land. The theory of evolution thus has power to explain something that seems strange and is unaccountable according to the creation theory.

Situations such as this put creationists in a defensive position. There have been some successes here, but the overall impression is a kind of tentativeness and jury-rigging that makes for embarrassment. Michael Behe argues, however, that we cannot plumb all the reasons why a Designer would do what He does and therefore cannot use so-called design flaws or apparent abnormalities to postulate the lack of a Designer.

The Earth appears old. Huge layers of fossil-containing sediment, moving continents, radiometric dating, fossil magnetic imprints, etc., all seem to speak of an ancient Earth. In his book, Origins: Linking Science and Scripture, however, Ariel A. Roth gives an excellent creationist answer to this problem.

Almost no scientists accept a literal six-day Creation as a viable theory. The intellectual elite of the world do not even consider Creation a “real” theory. Even believing while working in an unrelated area of science has caused “banning.”

Evolution: Pro

The theory is accepted as truth by the scientific establishment. There is a broad consensus that there is no other explanation for the facts of biology. Those who accept this theory can avoid conflict with scientific thought and literature. I have not seen a mainstream scientific article defending Creation.

There are many evidences for the great age of the Earth. A long age for
Some might argue that philosophy is irrelevant to this discussion. This is not so. Atheism and materialism are not attractive, in spite of what their proponents say. These theories, when taken to their logical conclusion, embrace a purposeless existence or fatal relativism. The governments with the worst human-rights records have been atheistic (the French Revolution, Communism, and Nazism).

The geologic column suggests progression. Fossils begin as less complex organisms at the deepest layers and become more complex as one ascends to shallower levels. There seems to be a more-or-less orderly progression. It is not smooth, but it does not seem to be random, nor does order progress from more complex to simpler. If geologists could find a dinosaur bone firmly and unmistakably embedded in the Precambrian layer (one of the earliest fossil layers—the dinosaurs are thought to have lived hundreds of millions of years later), it would be strong evidence that both existed at the same time. This would destroy the theory. No one has found such a fossil, though Roth has a good discussion of this issue from a creationist viewpoint.1

Evolution: Con

This theory tends to support materialism and atheism. Richard Dawkins, the prominent British evolutionist, feels it became much easier to be an intellectually fulfilled atheist after Darwin’s theory. Theists who embrace this theory accept a God who is more distant and more peripherally involved in His creation. Atheists will enquire of them, Why do you need God if it all works without Him?

Some might argue that philosophy is irrelevant to this discussion. This is not so. Atheism and materialism are not attractive, in spite of what their proponents say. These theories, when taken to their logical conclusion, embrace a purposeless existence or fatal relativism. The governments with the worst human-rights records have been atheistic (the French Revolution, Communism, and Nazism). Atheists have often accused theists of grave atrocities, not without some justification, but their own hands literally drip with blood. The world has seen no greater and more efficient murderers than atheists in power. The Marxist and Nazi experiments of the 20th century are sobering evidence of the bankruptcy of atheistic social theory.

Evolution has no theory for the origin of life. Much speculation is presented as if it were true, but there is no good theory. Speculation abounds.

A Scientific American article demonstrates this.10 The author argues that certain minerals may have been essential in the formation of life. He suggests one of them, calcite, as a catalyst that would have helped sort the amino acids in the primordial organic soup. But careful thinking shows that this mineral is inadequate for the task. There is no way that more than one protein could form by the chance sorting of amino acids.

A creationist has responded: “What do you get after cooking primordial soup for a billion years? Very old primordial soup.”

There is nothing wrong with speculation. It has opened up vast areas of knowledge unknowable without these flights of imagination. But the above idea has strong arguments against it. However, whenever the popular scientific press reviews new “evidence” on the origin of life—from Stanley Miller’s bell-jar experiments in the 1950s to Hazen’s “Mineral Stars in the Movie of Life” in 2001—there is wild optimism about the “breakthroughs” that have been made. These are uniformly overstated.

There is evidence of design. Darwinians tell us that we are not using our minds when we believe that there is a Creator. But they must deny the use of their senses when viewing the cosmos. The universe and the life on our planet have a purposeful look. They appear as if they were made the way they are for a reason.

Social Darwinism has failed. A few years after Darwin, Herbert Spencer described ideas to harness the theory to improve the human species. If the rule is “survival of the fittest,” why not help survival along with a little cognitive input? Thus we saw the birth of eugenics and the “Super Race.” This thinking was one foundation of Hitler’s social program to exterminate what was considered to be defective races and individuals.

Second Peter 3:3-7 seems to describe the doctrine of uniformitarianism that has been held by many scientists since the beginning of the
I have seen God speak to the most basic human needs through His Word, the Bible. There is a solace there that exists nowhere else. I have also seen that if the church had only adhered firmly to Scripture, much error and many conflicts could have been avoided. This is not an anti-intellectual position, for study of the Bible requires careful thought, and its deepest secrets open only to the diligent seeker.

I have seen how the theory of evolution has shaken the faith of old and young alike in the truth of the Bible. Some recover and rethink their doctrine of the Bible or adjust their view of science. But others are unable to do this and leave the church in body or, if unable to do so, in mind. This theory causes such destruction of faith that I cannot see that it is part of the truth of God.

I therefore give more weight to the evidences for Creationism and set aside those interpretations of science that support Darwin’s theory. I have made a conscious decision to give greater weight to arguments supporting Scripture than to the findings of science that conflict with revelation. I have not ignored science or denied its findings, but accept revelation as a higher, more complete knowledge. This is an informed decision after looking at all the evidence, including that of the scientists and my own experience. There have been days and nights of prayer and struggle.

Both theories have gaps in their science that must be bridged by belief in something that cannot be proved. Creationism has difficulties with the apparent age of the Earth, the continuity of life, and the geologic column. Evolution has problems with the origin of life, the order seen in living things, and the origin of the laws of the universe (molecular laws, etc.). Both are logical if one accepts certain assumptions. Each depends on a leap of faith of some kind. The Bible is up front about this. It confesses that belief in Creation is an act of faith (Heb. 11:3). There is evidence, but faith is required. Many scientists are less transparent, refusing to see that their position also requires a faith that science will in the future be able to answer all the questions of life for which it has no answer now.

For those struggling with science, John, in his first letter, describes Christ as One seen, heard, and touched, that is, scientifically examined. He then writes his thesis on the findings: “God is light and in Him is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5, NKJV).

And what is the conclusion of the skeptics after all their careful research? “The universe that we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil and no good, nothing but pitiless indifference.”

I have chosen a life colored by faith. Habitual faith is a treasure I have fought for. It requires exercise to become strong and to remain healthy. We cannot let the world rob us by its sophisticated arguments and caustic ridicule.

The majority of evolutionists would not be convinced by these arguments, but it is clear that creationists are still using their brains—not as atheists use theirs, but using them nevertheless.

REFERENCES

6 1941.
9 Ibid., pp. 147-175.
Because the book of life has often been the focus of many an Adventist sermon, it is important to know clearly what it means in terms of our salvation.

The Bible mentions several heavenly books in which the experiences and acts of human beings are recorded. Human practices of record keeping employed in Israel and in other ancient Near Eastern countries were being used in the Bible to illustrate heavenly practices or to communicate some specific information concerning them. The purpose of the heavenly records far exceeds the social role of their earthly counterparts in Israelite society. But this subject raises interesting questions with respect to the biblical use of earthly practices to describe heavenly ones.

The Book of Life

It seems to have been common among Israelites to keep records of the names of those who dwelt in their cities. Those records or registers not only served to identify the citizens of a particular city, but were also used as genealogical records (Neh. 7:5; 12:23). In fact, the term register in the Old Testament could designate genealogical records usually kept by families and/or by the city (Ezra 2:62; Neh. 7:64). It appears that those who had no children were identified in the city's register as “childless” (Jer. 22:30, KJV).

Genealogies were important to determine legal rights and social and religious functions. For instance, the descendants of Aaron had a right to the priesthood, and genealogical records identified those who belonged to his family. In the absence of that evidence, some were excluded from the priesthood (Ezra 2:62). The deletion of the name of a criminal from those registers would have been a severe legal punishment. This is precisely what the Lord announced against the false prophets: “They will not belong to the council of my people or be listed in the records of the house of Israel, nor will they enter the land of Israel” (Eze. 13:9, NIV). False prophets would not be part of the people of Israel.

Mention should be made here of the “book of the generations of Adam” in Genesis 5:1, which could be called a “book of life and death” in the sense that it included information about the birth of Adam's descendants and the time when each one died. It is basically a genealogical record of Adam's descendants. The book also includes an important exception to the fatal “birth-death” nexus in the person of Enoch (5:24), who did not experience death.

Isaiah gives to the practice of keeping records of the inhabitants of a city an end-times significance when he announces that in the Messianic kingdom “he who is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem will be called holy—everyone who is recorded among the living in Jerusalem” (4:3, NKJV). According to him, there is an eschatological register containing the names of those who will be citizens of the renewed Jerusalem. One could conclude that the register of a city could be called a “book of life” in the sense that those inscribed there had the right to live in that particular city and to enjoy the privileges and responsibilities associated with their being part of it. The birth lists found in the Old Testament in the form of genealogies seem to provide a proper background for the interpretation of the book of life.

The Heavenly Book of Life

The Bible refers quite often to the existence of a heavenly register in which the names of those who belong to the Lord are recorded. This book is located in heaven (Luke 10:20) and is called “Your [God's] book which You have written” (Ex. 32:32, NKJV), the “book of life” (Ps. 69:28, NIV; Phil. 4:3), and the “book of the Lamb” (Rev. 17:8). It is also referred to as “the book” (Dan. 12:1).
It has been suggested that the idea of a heavenly book of life was not exclusively Israelite. The Sumerian goddess Nungal possessed a “tablet of life.” In a hymn to the god Haia we read, “Grant to prince Rim-Sin a reign all joyous and length of days! On a tablet of life never to be altered place its [the reign’s] names(s)!” The few Sumerian texts where the “tablet of life” is mentioned do not provide enough information to determine its nature and function. The “tablet of life” in those texts appears to be “a tablet where the deeds of an individual are recorded” or a tablet of destiny, and therefore do not provide a good parallel for the book of life in the Old Testament.

There is also an Akkadian text from the time of Esarhaddon (680-669 B.C.), the Neo-Assyrian empire, that mentions a tablet of life: “To the king, my Lord... May all be very very well with the king, my Lord. May Nabu and Marduk bless the king, my Lord. ... On the seventh day is the making of the reckoning of Nabu. In his tablet of life [may he make] the reckoning of the king, my Lord (and) of the sons of my Lord forever.” Again, the text seems to describe a tablet of fates rather than a book of life. What seems to be requested is that the dynasty of the king be firmly established forever in the heavenly records. At the present time we do not seem to have a good ancient Near Eastern parallel for the Old Testament heavenly book of life.

Recording Names in the Book of Life
This discussion of the Old Testament background suggests that the heavenly book of life contains a particular list of names. The question is, Whose names are recorded there? Psalm 69:28 states, “Let [my enemies] be blotted out of the book of the living, and not be written with the righteous” (NKJV). Since in this Psalm the enemies of the psalmist appear to be Israelites, the text implies that only the names of the righteous, those who are part of the people of God, are recorded in His book of life. Particularly important is Psalm 87:6, in which God is described as registering in the book the names of people who serve Him in non-Israelite lands: “The Lord will record, when He registers the peoples: ‘This one was born there’” (NKJV). This appears to be a register of foreigners who worship the Lord and includes the place where each person was actually born. The reference is most probably to the book of life, in which the names of non-Israelites are included as citizens among the people of God.

The New Testament indicates that the book of life contains only the names of those who are citizens of the New Jerusalem. Hebrews identifies those whose names are written in heaven as the “church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven” (Heb. 12:23, NKJV). John writes, “Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life” (Rev. 21:27, NIV). More explicit is Revelation 17:8, where followers of the beast are defined as those “whose names have not been written in the book of life from the creation of the world” (NKJV). On the other hand, Jesus encouraged His disciples to rejoice because their “names are written in heaven” (Luke 10:20, NKJV), and Paul refers to his fellow workers as those “whose names are in the Book of Life” (Phil. 4:3, NKJV). We could conclude that only the names of the righteous are inscribed in the book of life.

Scripture does not describe the process by which names are recorded in the heavenly book of life. Some have found Revelation 17:8 useful when dealing with this particular concern. As mentioned above, there followers of the beast are defined as those “whose names are not written in the Book of Life from the foundation of the world, when they see the beast that was, and is not, and yet is” (NKJV). The implication appears to be that only the names of the servants of God have been written in that book from the foundation of the world. Obviously, the text describes divine foreknowledge—God knows in advance the names of those who will respond positively to the work of the Spirit in their lives and has written their names in the book—but not predestination in the sense of an arbitrary decision fixing the eternal destiny of every human being. The language of divine foreknowledge serves to emphasize the assurance of salvation.
We could conclude that writing down and retaining the names of the righteous in that book is an act of divine forgiving grace. That grace initiates the process and accompanies believers in their journey of faith and commitment to Christ. It is through their constant dependence on it that their names will be preserved in the book of life of the Lamb. They will be acknowledged as loyal citizens of the kingdom of God.

take place when the individual surrenders his or her life to the Lord. This is suggested by the fact that the name of a righteous person could be removed from the divine ledger because of unfaithfulness and sin. That awful possibility excludes the idea of predestination, as defined above. In fact, “the divine foreordination is thus linked with the human readiness to carry the conflict to victory.”

Deleting Names From the Book of Life

The possibility of removing a name from the heavenly book of life is very real. Moses asked the Lord to remove his name from “Your book which You have written” (Ex. 32:32, NKJV). He was asking the Lord to exclude him from being part of His plan if that would make it possible for the Israelites, who had sinned against Him, to be part of it. God’s answer came back: “‘Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book’” (vs. 33, NKJV). Only on account of rebellious sin would a name be removed from that divine register.

The psalmist prayed with respect to enemies, “Let them be blotted out of the book of the living, and not be written with the righteous” (Ps. 69:28, NKJV). As already indicated, the enemies appear to have been among the righteous, but the way they dealt with the psalmist indicated that they were no longer righteous, and consequently the psalmist asked that their names be blotted out of the book of life. Revelation 3:5 reaffirms the regrettable possibility of a righteous person falling from grace and having his or her name removed from the book.

Judgment, Grace, and the Book of Life

It is through a divine act of judgment that names are removed from the book of life. Daniel 7:9, 10, describes a scene of judgment during which heavenly books were opened. Toward the end of the Book of Daniel, the eternal verdict is announced: “‘Every one who is found written in the book’ will be rescued, but the others will experience ‘shame and everlasting contempt’” (12:1, 2, NKJV). Notice that in Daniel 7 the reference is to “books,” in the plural, but in Daniel 12 we have the singular, “the book.” As a result of the judgment, names are preserved in the book of life or removed from it. Interestingly, the first reference to the book of life is found precisely in the context of God’s judicial activity against the sin of Israel (Ex. 32:32). Moses argues his case before the Lord based on the understanding that God’s verdict against a person results in the removal of his or her name from the book of life.

John states that “he who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels” (Rev. 3:5, NKJV). In the judgment, where Christ represents His people and speaks on their behalf, those who overcome will be dressed in white garments and their names will be retained in the book of life. They are acknowledged to be true citizens of the heavenly city, the New Jerusalem (21:27). The implication is that it is possible for believers to fall from grace and consequently to have their names blotted out from the book of life. The book of life is also opened during the judgment of the wicked, after the millennium (20:12). Since their names were “not found written in the Book of Life” (vs. 15, NKJV), they are not recognized as citizens of the kingdom of God.

If sin is the reason for removing a name from the book of life, then natural human sinfulness would make it simply impossible to retain any name in that book (Rom. 3:23). However, Moses was very much aware of the fact that the only way to keep the name of a sinner in the book of life was through God’s atoning work (Ex. 32:31, 32). Revelation 13:8 correlates the writing of names in the book of life with the atoning death of the Lamb of God. We could conclude that writing down and retaining the names of the righteous in that book is an act of divine forgiving grace. That grace initiates the process and accompanies believers in their journey of faith and commitment to Christ. It is through their constant dependence on it that their names will be preserved in the book of life of the Lamb. They will be acknowledged as loyal citizens of the kingdom of God.

The Nature of “Life” in the Book of Life

The nature of the “life” mentioned in the name of the book of life has been debated. The references to that
book in the New Testament clearly indicate that the noun life designates eschatological life, i.e., eternal life in the kingdom of God. It is debatable whether the same meaning or a similar one can be assigned to the references to the book of life in the Old Testament. The tendency among scholars has been to interpret the name of the book as referring to a book in which are inscribed either the names of all living persons or only those of the righteous. Removing the name of a person from that register would then mean that the person’s life will be shortened.

This interpretation is possible but very unlikely. It weakens the significance of Moses’ request to have his name blotted out of God’s book. Why would he make that petition if sooner or later, after all, his name was going to be blotted out of the book—that is to say, he would die? Was he simply asking the Lord to shorten his life, to kill him? What would be the significance of that request? As already suggested, He seemed to have had something more significant in mind. The blotting out of a name from the book is a divine act of judgment that alienates sinners from God once and for all and totally and permanently obliterates the person from the world of the living; it is a divine act of destruction (Deut. 9:14).

According to Psalm 69:28, blotting out a name from the book of life does not mean the person will simply die. It means the person will not be able to enjoy life in the company of the righteous. This same idea is contained in Psalm 87:6. The life mentioned in those passages is not available to the wicked. In fact, they are excluded from it. Therefore, the reference is not to a natural life that at some point will come to an end for both the wicked and the righteous. The name of the book of life seems to express an eschatological hope in the Old Testament.

It is important to observe that “the book of the generations of Adam” (Gen. 5:1, KJV) deals with life in the here and now, but at the same time points to a hope that transcends the present world of life and death. It points to a life that overcomes the power of death and that is enjoyed in the presence of God. The experience of Enoch appears to illustrate what would be the experience of those whose names are recorded in the heavenly book of life. For Enoch “the book of the generations of Adam”—the book of life and death—was in fact a book of life; a life beyond the grasp of death.

There is at least one passage in the Old Testament where the eschatological significance of the book of life is clearly indicated. Daniel 12:1 states that retaining the name in the book of God means enjoying eternal life, that is to say, a life in union with God after the resurrection.

This discussion has some important implications for the nature of eschatological hope in the Old Testament. The references to the book of life in the Old Testament witness to the fact that the Israelite faith included an expectation of a life that will overcome death and be enjoyed in the company of God and the righteous.

**Significance of the Book of Life**

The biblical information concerning the book of life leads to several important conclusions.

First, the nature of the heavenly book of life is unknown to us, but that should not lead us to question its reality. It is obvious that the Bible is using a human social practice—keeping record of the names of those who were citizens of a particular city or group—to help us understand heavenly realities. The social practice illustrated and pointed to something more significant in the heavenly realm. Something happens at the administrative center of the universal government of God when a person becomes a citizen of His kingdom. The liberation of souls from the kingdom of darkness and their incorporation into the kingdom of God is not only celebrated in heaven but also recorded in the book of life.

Second, the reality of the book of life underscores for the people of God the fact that those who belong to Christ are already members of the heavenly city, of the kingdom of God. Their names are already written in the heavenly ledger, and they are considered to be citizens of that kingdom with all the privileges, prerogatives, and responsibilities that entails. The certainty of their heavenly citizenship is so unquestionable that Jesus encourages them to rejoice because their names are already in the book of life. The certainty of that act is also emphasized by insisting that it is God Himself who writes the names in the book and that this
takes place in heaven, out of the reach of human envy and evil powers. Whatever may happen to the name recorded in heaven will be the result of the decision of a loving God.

Third, the decision to record the names of believers in the book of life is not arbitrary or accidental. From the divine perspective, and based on God’s foreknowledge, He inscribed in His book, even before the foundation of the world, the names of those who will believe. This decision was hidden in the divine counsel. What this means is that writing the names of believers in the book of life was not a divine afterthought but part of the divine intention, even before they actually and willingly decided to be members of the city of God. Divine foreknowledge and human freedom do not cancel out each other.

The obvious question is, If God also foreknew those who will fall from grace, why did He include their names in the book of life, knowing He would blot them out later? Possibly because God also determined in advance that the blotting out of the names of apostates will take place during the final judgment in order to show to all intelligent creatures throughout the universe the justice of His decisions. God is more interested in saving people than in condemning them—in writing down their names for salvation than in blotting them out of the book of life.

Fourth, it is possible for the name of a person to be removed from the heavenly book of life. This is obviously based on the fact that God respects human freedom. But believers are fully persuaded that what makes possible the inclusion of their name in that book is at the same time what makes it possible to retain it there, namely, the forgiving grace of God. The names recorded there are those of repentant sinners, and as long as they persevere in faith, retaining a spirit of dependence on and submission to God through Christ’s atoning work, their names will not be blotted out during the judgment. They are indeed citizens of the heavenly kingdom.

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2 Ibid., p. 351.

Theologians should be the humblest of scholars because as finite, imperfect, and sinful beings, they dare to investigate the infinite, perfect, and infallible God! Yet this God has consented to reveal Himself in a written document, the Bible. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, it is a privilege to explore the inspired information.

And an attempt to understand the problem of God and war in the Old Testament is still more daring, even more humbling. Too often a picture of the Almighty is drawn according to simplistic prejudices: an immovable statue, certainly loving, but remaining in His celestial sphere when His reputation is at risk.

How can a loving God permit—or even order—cruel wars? There is dif-

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We can conclude that from the beginning of the history of the Israelites the following principle was established, supported by God’s “mighty acts”: If the Israelites allowed God to take charge of their adversaries, the only action required of God’s people would be to trust and obey.

ficulty in explaining every example, but it is appropriate to try to trace a basic principle. Could it be applied to cases where the principle is not specifically stated or apparent in the context? The reader must decide.

God’s Ideal Plan

Repeatedly, God made clear statements concerning His plan when Israel was confronted with enemies. To recount a few:

Exodus 14. Fearing the Egyptians marching after them, the Israelites reproved their leader. But “Moses answered the people, ‘Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today. . . . The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still’” (vss. 13, 14, NIV).

Exodus 23. God clearly revealed His plans for the conquest of Canaan: “I am sending an angel ahead of you to guard you along the way and to bring you to the place I have prepared. . . . If you listen carefully to what he says and do all that I say, I will be an enemy to your enemies and will oppose those who oppose you. My angel will go ahead of you and bring you into the land of the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hivites and Jebusites, and I will wipe them out. . . . I will send my terror ahead of you and bring you into the land of the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hivites and Jebusites, and I will wipe them out. . . . I will send my terror ahead of you and bring you into the land of the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hivites and Jebusites, and I will wipe them out. . . . I will send my terror ahead of you and bring you into the land of the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hivites and Jebusites, and I will wipe them out. . . . I will send my terror ahead of you and bring you into the land of the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hivites and Jebusites, and I will wipe them out. . . . I will send my terror ahead of you and bring you into the land of the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hivites and Jebusites, and I will wipe them out. . . . I will send my terror ahead of you and bring you into the land of the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hivites and Jebusites, and I will wipe them out. . . . I will send my terror ahead of you and bring you into the land of the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hivites and Jebusites, and I will wipe them out. . . . I will send my terror ahead of you and bring you into the land of the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hivites and Jebusites, and I will wipe them out. . . . I will send my terror ahead of you and bring you into the land of the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hivites and Jebusites, and I will wipe them out. . . . I will send my terror ahead of you and bring you into the land of the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hivites and Jebusites, and I will wipe them out. . . . I will send my terror ahead of you and bring you into the land of the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hivites and Jebusites, and I will wipe them out. . . . I will send my terror ahead of you and bring you into the land of the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hivites and Jebusites, and I will wipe them out. . . . I will send my terror ahead of you and bring you into the land of the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hivites and Jebusites, and I will wipe them out. . . . I will send my terror ahead of you and bring you into the land of the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hivites and Jebusites, and I will wipe them out.

From these texts we can conclude that from the beginning of the history of the Israelites the following principle was established, supported by God’s “mighty acts”: If the Israelites allowed God to take charge of their adversaries, the only action required of God’s people would be to trust and obey.

Further Demonstrations of God’s Battle Strategy

Gideon. Facing the threat of the Midianite army, Gideon gathered together 32,000 men (Judges 7:3). God reduced the number to 300 (vs. 7) with only trumpets, empty jars, and torches as weapons (vs. 16). How did the battle turn out?

The only action God expected from the Israelites: “You must demolish [the gods of the Amorites] and break their sacred stones to pieces” (vs. 24). And the Israelites gave God their trust: “Everything the Lord has said we will do” (24:3).

Deuteronomy 1. Here we have a confirmation of God’s intent in a book beginning with a reminder of Israel’s history: “The Lord your God, who is going before you, will fight for you, as he did for you in Egypt” (vs. 30).

Ellen White confirms this: “The Lord had never commanded them to ‘go up and fight.’ It was not His purpose that they should gain the land by warfare, but by strict obedience to His commands.”

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“The men of Ammon and Moab rose up against the men from Mount Seir to destroy and annihilate them. After they finished slaughtering the men from Seir, they helped to destroy one another” (vs. 23).

Hezekiah. The king was known among his very adversaries as one who trusted in the Lord (2 Kings 18:22; 19:10). Sennacherib attempted to destabilize the people’s trust in God (vs. 29, 30), but it was useless. The result: “That night the angel of the Lord went out and put to death a hundred and eighty-five thousand men in the Assyrian camp” (19:35) without any intervention from Israel!

God promised that if Israel trusted in Him, He would deliver them, and they would not have to do anything. In reality, throughout Israel’s history, when the leaders and the people trusted the Lord, He delivered them. However, God was not responsible for the other situations in which Israel interfered.

When the Israelites Ignored God’s Plan

Wars apparently permitted by God. Israel’s first battle against the Amalekites is one of many examples, but it provides a thoroughgoing case study.

The Bible text is very sobering: “The Amalekites came and attacked the Israelites at Rephidim. Moses said to Joshua, ‘Choose some of our men and go out to fight the Amalekites’” (Ex. 17:8, 9). Let’s look at the background: Ten times in the 10 plagues the almighty hand of God had been revealed, and the people of Israel had only recently left Egypt. They had once again witnessed the almighty hand of God in the spectacular destruction of the Egyptian army in the Red Sea. One would think that they would trust the Lord forever!

A few days after events related to crossing the Red Sea, “the people grumbled against Moses” (15:24) instead of trusting the One who had just recently accomplished such fantastic miracles. But right away “the Lord showed [Moses] a piece of wood. [Moses] threw it into the water, and the water became sweet” (vs. 25). And instead of being offended, as should have been the case, God brought them to Elim “where there were twelve springs and seventy palm trees, and they camped there near the water” (vs. 27)!

How magnificent of God! One would think that this time the Israelites would trust their kind heavenly Father for the rest of their lives! A few days later, however, on their way to Sinai, “the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron.... ‘You have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death’” (16:3).

Again, instead of being offended, God, with His usual graciousness, immediately provided a delicious biscuit that was “white like coriander seed and tasted like wafers made with honey” (16:31) as in Egypt, the Lord offered them quails, which “covered the camp” (vs. 13) for dinner. We can imagine that the Creator certainly did not enjoy doing that, but what wouldn’t He consent to do to win back His dissatisfied children?

Without dwelling too extensively on the new, abusive disregard for God’s program seen when “some of the people went out on the seventh day to gather [manna]” (16:27), despite the command of the Lord to rest on the Sabbath (vs. 30), a comment by Ellen White explains the circumstances of the confrontation with the Amalekites: “[The people of Israel] had not really suffered the pangs of hunger. They had food for the present, but they feared for the future. They could not see how the host of Israel was to subsist, in their long travels through the wilderness, upon the simple food they then had, and in their unbelief they saw their children famishing. The Lord was willing that they should be brought short in their food, and that they should meet with difficulties, that their hearts should turn to Him who had hitherto helped them, that they might believe in Him. He was ready to be to them a present help. If, in their want, they would call upon Him, He would manifest to them tokens of His love and continual care. . . . After this sure promise from God it was criminal unbelief in them to anticipate that they and their children might die with hunger.”

Note the three elements in a quotation that appears later in the article: “[1] Because of their unbelief, [2] God suffered their enemies to make war with them, [3] that He might manifest to His people from whence cometh their strength.”

Stated positively, it might appear like this: [1] If they had trusted God, [2] He would have prevented their enemies from making war with them, and [3] He would have in this way manifested to His people from whence cometh their strength.

God promised that if Israel trusted in Him, He would deliver them, and they would not have to do anything. In reality, throughout Israel’s history, when the leaders and the people trusted the Lord, He delivered them. However, God was not responsible for the other situations in which Israel interfered.
Because of the criminal unbelief and the constant cruel murmurings of the people, God permitted the Amalekites to attack the Israelites at Rephidim. God did not order Joshua to organize the battle; but Moses, as leader of the Israelites, had to take in hand the situation in which they had put themselves.

Following this “criminal unbelief,” and their “wicked murmurings,” the Israelites deserved to be left to themselves. But, God condescended to help them in the very battle that their unbelief toward Him had provoked: “As long as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites were winning, but whenever he lowered his hands, the Amalekites were winning” (17:11).

The Story of Redemption explains that this act of Moses, reaching his hands toward God, “was to teach Israel that while they made God their trust and laid hold upon His strength . . . He would fight for them and subdue their enemies.”

With this illumination of the text, we could paraphrase Exodus 17:8, 9 in the following way: Because of the criminal unbelief and the constant cruel murmurings of the people, God permitted the Amalekites to attack the Israelites at Rephidim. God did not order Joshua to organize the battle; but Moses, as leader of the Israelites, had to take in hand the situation in which they had put themselves.

Joshua was designated as the head of the army. With the miraculous intervention of God, he was able to overcome the Amalekite army “with the sword” (vs. 13). This way of obtaining a victory was totally opposed to God’s plan, since He had promised to do the fighting Himself for the deliverance of His people. In fact, we can imagine the sorrow of this same Joshua when he had to confess in his own writing at the end of his career: “The citizens of Jericho fought against you, as did also the Amorites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hittites, Gergashites, Hivites and Jebusites, but I gave them into your hands. . . . You did not do it with your own sword and bow” (Joshua 24:11, 12).

Wars God Ordered

One specific example of a war that God ordered appears in the Book of Judges: “After the death of Joshua, the Israelites asked the Lord, ‘Who will be the first to go up and fight for us against the Canaanites?’” (1:1).

An explanation of this order of God to make war becomes apparent in the context. In his farewell speech, the old leader reminded them: “You yourselves have seen everything the Lord your God has done to all these nations for your sake; it was the Lord your God who fought for you” (23:3). “The nations I conquered” (vs. 4). “The Lord your God himself will drive them out of your way. He will push them out before you, and you will take possession of their land” (vs. 5). The only contribution the people had to make was to “obey all that is written in the Book of the Law” (vs. 6); “do not associate with these nations” (vs. 7); “hold fast to the Lord” (vs. 8); “love the Lord” (vs. 11).

Assembling the tribes of Israel at Shechem, Joshua had the people renew the covenant (Joshua 24). The patriarch insisted on the action of God: “I [God] sent the hornet ahead of you, which drove them out before you—also the Amorite kings. You did not do it with your own sword and bow” (vs. 12).

But Joshua died (Judges 2:8), and “another generation grew up, who knew neither the Lord nor what he had done for Israel” (vs. 10). (At least they pretended not to know the Lord; although they had been systematically informed and instructed!) They “disobeyed” God (vs. 2). But strangely enough, they “asked the Lord, ‘Who will be the first to go up and fight for us against the Canaanites?’” (1:1).

What should God’s reaction have been? We would expect Him to say, “You act as if you do not know Me. You do not even listen to My voice. You know perfectly well that I promised to take care of the conquest and that you wouldn’t have to fight at all. Joshua and your fathers reminded you of My miraculous interventions, and now you ask, ‘Who will be the first to fight?’ Are you making fun of Me? You offend Me! I am going to abandon you!”

But amazingly, “the Lord answered” (vs. 2). Even when His people broke the relationship, God maintained it as long as He could, consenting to answer a partner who had not even listened to Him in the past. This was the first surprise.

The second surprise: God conformed to the project of the Israelites and—although it completely opposed His project—He ordered a war.

We may react to this in several ways. We might say, “You see, God did take the initiative to order wars.” Or we might say, “God was not consistent. One time He said He would do the fighting, and another time He said Judah should do it.” Or we might say, “Shouldn’t we try to understand God?”

God goes as far as possible to reach His children where they were. “Even if you do not listen,” He seems
to say, “and you ask for the exact opposite of My plan, I shall answer and accompany you in your undertaking. Judah is to go!” Further, we read: “When Judah attacked, the Lord gave the Canaanites and Perizzites into their hands” (vs. 4).

If you were afraid of being misunderstood, you certainly wouldn’t have done that, would you? But God did it. This is the God of the Old Testament. What condescension on God’s part to our level of thinking!

My wife, Gisela, was studying voice at the Music Conservatory in Basel, Switzerland. Realizing the perversity of the opera—with its gorgeous music, beautiful voices, and grand orchestras presenting immorality, crimes, and lies—she opted for oratorios and lieder [songs]. Her teacher, an opera prima donna, suggested that the best way to observe the application of her technique would be for the students to attend the concerts where she was performing. With a little embarrassment, Gisela told her father she would attend the concerts exclusively for professional reasons.

Her highly moral preacher-father was perplexed. But he felt that if he forbade his 18-year-old daughter, who was in a critical stage of personality development, to attend the opera, it might break the fine relationship of loving trust they had developed through the years. And besides, she would go anyway! So he not only let her go, but also gave her the money for the tickets.

One evening, after attending a couple of concerts, as she was listening to and watching another glorious opera performance filled with adultery, her eyes turned to the ceiling, from which a huge chandelier was hanging. Suddenly the thought flashed into her mind: What if the chain holding the chandelier would break and the chandelier would fall and kill me? Would people (and the Lord) have to say, “She died willfully contemplating adultery in the opera house”?

During intermission, pretending she was not feeling well, she rushed home. Approaching the house, she was surprised to see light in her father’s study, because he was usually absent every night of the week, either holding evangelistic meetings or giving Bible studies. But that night he was at home.

As she entered the house, her father met her and asked if the performance was already finished. She answered no and explained her abrupt decision to leave the opera house, never to return again.

“We are glad you came to this decision all by yourself, Gisela,” her father said. “Each time you went to the opera, I cancelled the scheduled Bible study, and your mother and I prayed for you.”

God acted in the same way toward His children in the Old Testament! When they insisted on going their own way in life in general—or in wars in particular—He let them go, sometimes even adding His blessing! Unexpected from a pure and holy God? Or wise pedagogy in the face of stubbornness and pride! And so often He did win them back by maintaining His love relationship with them and allowing the free choice of His people.

Unfortunately, the Israelites overdid it. Having caught Adoni-Bezek, they “cut off his thumbs and big toes” (vs. 6). This, of course, was not according to God’s plan. What a disgraceful testimony of the so-called people of God!

The Book of Judges should not be considered as the ideal book of God’s philosophy! The last sentence in the book, a sober definition of this period in Israel’s history, declares: “In those days . . . everyone did as he saw fit” (21:25). An atheistic anarchy!

But at the very center of the book—could it be the central message?—we read the following statement: “the Lord . . . could bear Israel’s misery no longer” (10:16). What a God!

The ideal plan of God: The Lord will fight for you. Just trust and obey, and He will deliver you.

The fulfillment in history: When the leaders and the people trusted God, He delivered them.

When God’s plan was not respected: God, as far as possible, accompanied His wayward children in the hope of winning them back, even when they made a decision that was the opposite of His will.

In considering the attitude of God in these complicated problems of war, we are left with an example of a Master Teacher. And thus He extended His love to its extremity in order to reach His erring people, as low as they were, to bring them back to His caring guidance.

What a risk, and so easily misunderstood! Instead of being shocked, let us bow in wonder before this most gracious and flexible God. This is the God of the Old Testament! □

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7 Ibid., p. 133.
WHY A STATEMENT OF BELIEFS?

A statement of beliefs offers some challenges—and some opportunities—for a church seeking to offer its membership a way to consider their place in the theological world.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual presents a summary of doctrinal beliefs "especially prepared for the instruction of candidates for baptism." This underscores that Seventh-day Adventists subscribe to a set of teachings that sets them apart from other Christian denominations. The use of this set of doctrines for the instruction of baptismal candidates reminds one of the classical creeds of Christendom. It appears that early Christian confessions of faith were employed in part for the instruction and baptism of new converts.

In this particular sense, the Adventist statement of doctrines appears to take on the character of a creed. Yet, throughout the development of their statements of fundamental beliefs, Seventh-day Adventists have insists that they have no creed but the Bible.

Their reluctance to subscribe to a creed seems to be based on the tendency of creeds to lead to authoritarianism, calcification of beliefs, and the stifling of fresh searches for biblical understanding and truth. Apparently, this is why the church prefers the use of the title “Statement of Fundamental Beliefs.”

The Enlightenment of the 17th century introduced its own depreciation of creeds, though based on different concerns. The aversion to authority and disaffection with Protestant scholasticism introduced a radical subjectivism that remains a defining characteristic of our times. Today there is a decided contempt for officially defined systems of doctrine. Contemporary aversion to systems of doctrine goes beyond the historic creeds of Christendom to include confessions of faith and statements of beliefs of more recent vintage.

Among the reasons for the decline in confidence in creeds, confessions, and statements of beliefs are the following: (a) belief in the subjective nature of truth in the post-Enlightenment climate, (b) the stress on orthopraxis over orthodoxy, (c) the appeal to cultural relativism, and (d) a revised concept of revelation as an ongoing reality that evolves and matures.

What may be said in favor of a statement of fundamental beliefs in the context of the contemporary penchant for subjective truth? The analysis of the nature of a statement of fundamental beliefs involves three issues: its formal essence, its material connection to the Scriptures, and its efficiency, i.e., what makes it what it is.

The Role of the Statement of Fundamental Beliefs

In discussing the role of the statement of fundamental beliefs, a couple of general distinctions must be made. First, a simple distinction could be made between those who value such a document and those who oppose it as unnecessary. The latter might argue: “If we have the Bible, why do we need a statement of fundamental beliefs?” Second, a more subtle distinction could be made between those who see the development as a necessary process and those who see it in less absolutist terms as legitimate and valuable. Those in the first category may seek to ensure the continuation of the development of such statements in every situation. The latter may question its continuing validity or seek to clarify how an earlier statement of beliefs may function in a contemporary situation.

The Formal Essence of a Statement of Fundamental Beliefs

Technically, the issue of essence relates to the formal cause of a statement of fundamental beliefs. The reference made earlier concerning a statement of fundamental beliefs as an instrument of instruction speaks to this essential, formal nature of the document.

One of the primary things that may be said about a statement of fundamental beliefs is that it is a set of doctrines or teachings. The focus is not on teaching as an activity but on teachings as in a system of beliefs,
The use of a statement of fundamental beliefs as instruction implies some measure of sameness with regard to belief within the group. In other words, a statement of fundamental beliefs reflects a group’s corporate faith-consciousness. It is a consensus document that mirrors the belief commitments the group regards as essential to its identity and mission.

This statement ought to be understood in the context of the newly developing group’s experience with “established religion” and its creeds. The reference to the propositions as not “having any authority with our people” or not being “a system of faith” may be read as reflecting the new group’s disdain for creeds and systems of belief in established churches. Thus, Ellen G. White wrote: “Though the Reformation gave the Scriptures to all, yet the selfsame principle which was maintained by Rome prevents multitudes in Protestant churches from searching the Bible for themselves. They are taught to accept its teachings as interpreted by the church; and there are thousands who dare receive nothing, however plainly revealed in Scripture, that is contrary to their creed, or the established teaching of their church.”

This observation on consensus is not distinctive for Christian communities; secular communities also develop statements of commitment as a symbol of their life together. We must qualify the consensus in a Christian statement of beliefs as a symbol of community life.

Though a statement of fundamental beliefs reveals an underlying consensus, what is portrayed is not mere “group prejudice.” The underlying consensus reflects a consensus on “truth.” This point is of pivotal importance in considering the role of the statement of fundamental beliefs in the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Presently, two views are detrimental to defining and formalizing truth the way a statement of fundamental belief does. On the one hand, the view is fairly widespread in contemporary theology that its task is a second-order, reflective enterprise that focuses on the Christian faith to clarify the particular idea of God peculiar to the Christian community. The postmodern version of this idea commonly takes for granted that different Christian communities, and indeed religions, reflect particular ideas of God in those particular communities. The question
Comment on the role of the statement of fundamental beliefs in the Seventh-day Adventist Church must require clarification of the relationship between the statement of beliefs and the question of truth. In other words, does the statement of beliefs represent the church’s consensus on truth, or is it an in-house understanding of reality?

of Truth is not directly addressed in these formulations of the theological task. Furthermore, this view presupposes an understanding of revelation not as propositional, but as an encounter between God and humanity in which no content as such is communicated.

On the other hand, it has been argued that “a ‘true’ doctrinal statement . . . can, it may be admitted, never lose its truth, but it can lose its relevance.” The validity of this argument is based on the premise that the logic of doctrinal statements means that their meaning is connected to a total worldview of God and His relation to the world. Therefore, a change of worldview could render a doctrine no longer relevant.

Comment on the role of the statement of fundamental beliefs in the Seventh-day Adventist Church must require clarification of the relationship between the statement of beliefs and the question of truth. In other words, does the statement of beliefs represent the church’s consensus on truth, or is it an in-house understanding of reality? Is there any such thing as “the truth” at all? The position taken on these questions has profound implications for valuation of the statement of fundamental beliefs.

In addressing this question, some take the critical view that diversity in doctrine inheres in the Bible itself. From this perspective, it is pointless, for example, to talk about a uniform teaching in the New Testament, let alone in a subsequent confessional document. Of course, not only does this view run contrary to Tertullian’s view that there was an orthodox doctrine that Jesus taught the apostles, which they in turn passed on, and that heresy represents a departure from orthodox doctrine summarized in creedal confessions, but it also runs against Scripture’s admonition to keep the faith delivered (1 John 2:23, 24; 2 Thess. 3:6).

From the Seventh-day Adventist perspective, however, from the very beginning, a definite conception of truth underpinned the formulation of a statement of fundamental beliefs. James White’s 1853 response to a query from an official of the Seventh Day Baptist Central Association is seen as a precursor to the current Seventh-day Adventist Statement of Fundamental Beliefs. In response to the query about the faith of Seventh-day Adventists, White wrote: “As a people we are brought together from divisions of the Advent body and from various denominations, holding different views on some subjects; yet, thank Heaven, the Sabbath is a mighty platform on which we can all stand united. And while standing here, with the aid of no other creed than the Word of God, and bound together by the bonds of love—love for the truth, love for each other, and love for a perishing world—which is stronger than death,’ all party feelings are lost. We are united in these great subjects: Christ’s immediate, personal second Advent, and the observance of all of the commandments of God, and the faith of his Son Jesus Christ, as necessary to a readiness for his Advent.”

One of the significant observations about this “proto” statement of fundamental beliefs is that although the believers held different views on some subjects, love for the truth led them to a consensus on certain fundamental topics.

In James White’s comment cited above, he also spoke of a threefold love that drove the unity of the Millerite group. The pursuit of the truth was not a mere scholastic enterprise, but one based in mission, expressed here as love for one another and love for a perishing world. This is an important aspect of the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of the statement of fundamental beliefs that should distinguish it from authoritarian creedalism, which Seventh-day Adventists have traditionally rejected.

Every point made so far about the formal essence of the statement of fundamental beliefs—that it implies content, reflects a consensus on truth, and is based in a context of mission—requires a material grounding. In other words, having a consensus on truth is one thing, but to ask for the nature and source of the truth is a completely different matter. The critical point here is that the content, the truth, and the mission-context of the statement of fundamental beliefs must have a material referent.

Fundamental Beliefs and Scripture

The Seventh-day Adventist understanding of the statement of fundamental beliefs presupposes a dynamic relationship with Holy Scripture. Not only does the church see its statement of fundamental beliefs as grounded in the Bible, but it explicitly and purposefully subordinates the statement of beliefs to the Bible by giving the Bible magisterial
A bright light will be reflected to the world; new truths, received and acted upon, will bind us in strong bonds to Jesus. The Bible, and the Bible alone, is to be our creed, the sole bond of union; all who bow to this Holy Word will be in harmony. Our own views and ideas must not control our efforts. Man is fallible, but God’s Word is infallible.”

“When God’s Word is studied, comprehended, and obeyed, a bright light will be reflected to the world; new truths, received and acted upon, will bind us in strong bonds to Jesus. The Bible, and the Bible alone, is to be our creed, the sole bond of union; all who bow to this Holy Word will be in harmony. Our own views and ideas must not control our efforts. Man is fallible, but God’s Word is infallible.”

for which a creed may be found wanting. It seems clear from these statements that Adventists’ resistance to a creed taking the place of the Bible arises from the realization that only the Bible as God’s inspired word, and not a creed, albeit a sound one, is able to address expressed concerns.

The notion of “No creed but the Bible” is certainly not unique to Seventh-day Adventists, but their perspective on the idea is to emphasize the need to go to the Bible for new vistas on truth, as well as to help them be “individual Christians.”

Despite the foregoing, Seventh-day Adventists have also emphasized the need for correct doctrine and truth, as expressed in their adoption of a statement of fundamental beliefs. This is not designed in any way to diminish the role of Scripture in the life of the Adventist community of faith. Indeed, the very fact of the adoption of a statement of fundamental beliefs suggests two things pertaining to their stand on Scripture.

On one hand, contrary to the sentiment behind one use of “No creed but the Bible,” which scorns responsible reflection on Scripture, the Seventh-day Adventist Statement of Fundamental Beliefs in no way takes away from the supremacy of the Bible. Rather, the fact that the church has taken a definite stand on certain biblical fundamental beliefs reflects its responsible commitment to the sola scriptura principle and its continuing trust in the Bible as the inspired Word of God.

On the other hand, the church’s adoption of a statement of fundamental beliefs that derives from the Bible demonstrates a contrary approach behind an equally popular slogan, “No creed but Christ.” This tends to emphasize the subjective element of the Christian religion over its objective, cognitive, and doctrinal aspects. Whereas the slogan “No creed but the Bible” sometimes re-
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The historical roots of interest here relate specifically to the faith community’s perception of God’s action in their midst and in their history.

Efficiency of the Statement of Fundamental Beliefs

In the word *creed* there is already a suggestion of authority shared by the statement of fundamental beliefs, as a creed-like document. The range of views on the authority of a statement of fundamental beliefs may be broad and sometimes raise difficult questions, but its power will rarely be denied. The question is, In what does the authority and power reside? An understanding of what invests it with authority is helpful in determining its role in the church.

One of the sources of the power of a statement of fundamental beliefs is that it is partly rooted in history. The historical roots of interest here relate specifically to the faith community’s perception of God’s action in their midst and in their history. Such were the confessions and declaratory affirmations of Israel about God’s activity in history (Deut. 6:4; 5; 26:5–9) which it is believed form the basis of Christian creeds.

The power of a statement of fundamental beliefs as a reflection of its rootedness in the history of the faith community is manifested in the fact that once they come into being, “they begin to shape history also.”

Creeds, confessions, and statements of belief shape history by providing context for future theological decisions as well as defining denominational practice.

This raises the question of tradition in doctrinal definition. It is important to distinguish tradition as the teaching and practice of a church from tradition as defined, for example, by the decrees of the Council of Trent (1545–1563). No denomination can exist without tradition in the former sense. Whereas the former may be a helpful, even an unavoidable and indispensable theological resource, the latter has been rejected by Protestants as contrary to the *sola scriptura* principle. Even within an acceptable view of tradition, care ought to be taken to avoid a “rule of faith” sense of tradition in which the church’s interpretation of Scripture equates with Scripture. Using the statement of fundamental beliefs as a theological resource in the sense of tradition defined above does indeed shape history, but the church should be constantly vigilant to guard against the temptation to equate tradition with Scripture.

Among Seventh-day Adventists, for example, the events prior and subsequent to 1844 were instrumental in their “creedal” development, which in turn informed and continues to inform Adventist theology, worship, and mission today. For Adventists this rootedness in history shapes their philosophy of history and their place in it along cosmic lines in what is generally known as the Great Controversy. In that sense, the statement of fundamental beliefs is not any mere collection of biblical truths. It represents, rather, “present truth” in the context of the Seventh-day Adventist philosophy of history.

The relation between a statement of beliefs and history, however, ought to be dialectical. Though they shape history, in the sense of Adventists’ understanding, they ought to be judged by history—the history of the faith community. As the expression of how the faith community understands God’s Word, the statement of fundamental beliefs is examined, clarified, and confirmed in the history of the community. The community’s historical reflection and clarification is an attempt to reflect more accurately God’s will expressed in Scripture. Thus we are returned to the ultimate source of the authority of the statements of fundamental beliefs, namely, the Bible. The statement of fundamental beliefs is really the church’s reading and reception of Scripture, and it is truly authoritative to the extent that it accurately depicts the message of Scripture.

Historical rootedness, however, is not the only source of the power of a statement of fundamental beliefs. Indeed, it is not the most significant source of its authority. The faith community ascribes authority to the statement mainly because as the community sees in it an expression of God’s activity among them, they find
Christ’s promise regarding the Holy Spirit fulfilled among them (John 16:13). In this sense the statement of beliefs is regarded as one of the results of the work of the Spirit. The consensus expressed in the statement is seen as Spirit-directed. To say that the statement is a Spirit-guided consensus is to acknowledge an attitude of openness to the Spirit’s further leading in doctrinal expression.

The Usefulness of a Statement of Beliefs and Creeds

Considering this discussion thus far, then, a statement of fundamental beliefs may be defined as a faith community’s Spirit-directed consensus on the truth at any one time, based on its interpretation of inspired Scripture, which then defines the community’s identity and mission. What possible value does such a statement have for the Seventh-day Adventist Church?

The nature of a statement of beliefs as the community’s reading of Scripture points to one of its key roles: as an indicator of the community’s concern for hermeneutics. By putting out a statement of beliefs, the community is declaring that “this is the way we read Scripture.”

Speaking about Adventists’ reading of Scripture, Ellen G. White has drawn attention to the centrality of the sanctuary by observing that “It opened to view a complete system of truth.”

In this way, the statement not only declares the interpretational stance of the community in the past, but also provides a guide for present interpretational efforts. At a time in the history of theology, and even in the Seventh-day Adventist Church itself, when things appear uncertain and changing, the methodological value of a statement of beliefs in providing theological identity cannot be underestimated.

It should be evident that in fulfilling the foregoing role, the statement begins to function as a “rule.” Anti-creedalism takes some of its objections from this role of officially defined doctrinal systems. Edward Farley, for example, argues that we should refuse “to make anything human and historical a timeless absolute, dwelling above the flow of contexts and situations. . . . [Indeed] one refuses to give this status . . . to one’s denomination, to one’s confessions, to one’s heritage, even to one’s Scripture.”

For him, this stance is a positive expression of the conviction that God’s presence and truth come through human, but historical and fallible vessels. Farley’s assessment is even more radical: “If we need certainty about salvation, modernism would direct that to God and God alone, not to the vessels that deliver it.” If our analysis of the nature of a statement of beliefs is correct, then there are two divergent, but equally inappropriate attitudes: “If we desist from divinizing the creed, neither do we depreciate its intrinsic worth and relevance.”

Similarly, the statement of beliefs should be viewed as a “rule that is ruled,” but nonetheless a rule. The indispensability of biblical interpretation means that at any time the role of Scripture will be as interpreted. To the extent that a statement of beliefs represents what has been dubbed “the precipitate of the religious consciousness of mighty men and times,” a record of the “central convictions” of earlier generations, it deserves a wider utilization in the church. Individual explorative interpretations, as important as they are, may not, without some risk, treat officially defined doctrinal systems lightly. We should not be unaware that, as in the case of Farley, some voices of “anti-creedalism” may result from a loss of confidence in Scripture’s authority or uniqueness due to its inspiration. Equally, such positions may be the result of a loss of confidence in human ability to know the truth.

On the other hand, a statement of beliefs is still a rule that is ruled. This has always been the cornerstone of the Seventh-day Adventist apprehension about creeds. However closely the statement purports to represent biblical teaching, the sola scriptura principle should be maintained. Scripture is the ultimate court of appeal. In the eventuality of appeal, the critical issue becomes the science of hermeneutics. This is why a broad-based community effort in establishing hermeneutical principles before-
In assessing a statement of beliefs, the central question is this: Is the question of heresy still appropriate? If the answer is yes, then it seems that, despite potential for abuse, the critical role of officially defined systems of doctrine cannot be avoided. The biblical perspective is quite clear, for the Bible places a high priority on maintaining sound teaching and on avoiding heresy.

hand is indispensable to the community’s theological health. The General Conference Committee of the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s action in voting a document on “Methods of Bible Study” at the 1986 Annual Council in Rio de Janeiro should be evaluated in this context.

The Statement of Beliefs and the “Critical” Task

Closely related to the role of the statement of fundamental beliefs as an indicator of the community’s hermeneutical concern is its role in the detection of doctrinal error. Traditionally, the rise of heresy was one of the reasons for creeds. The statement of beliefs provides a standard by which to judge new teachings arising in the church. Of all the roles that a statement of beliefs may play, this attracts the greatest fear and concern. The history of the Christian Church is filled with inquisitions and persecutions on the basis of creedal formulations. Fear of the critical use of a statement of beliefs is well-founded.

Still, in assessing a statement of beliefs, the central question is this: Is the question of heresy still appropriate? If the answer is yes, then it seems that, despite potential for abuse, the critical role of officially defined systems of doctrine cannot be avoided. The biblical perspective is quite clear, for the Bible places a high priority on maintaining sound teaching and on avoiding heresy (1 Cor. 11:2; Gal. 1:8; 1 Tim. 1:3; 6:3; 2 Tim. 1:13).

Understandingly, contemporary anti-creedal concerns often embody a certain degree of ambivalence. Though the value to the faith community of theological self-definition is applauded, apprehension is entertained about what may happen to those whose theological convictions may fall short of what is officially and consensually defined. Some have detected an irony in the situation: “A creed can be appropriately ‘authoritative’ in the sense of representing the church family as a whole and expressing its theological consensus. A church needs to define itself theologically; this is a matter not only of identity, but also of ‘truth in advertising.’ . . . But—and here is the irony—. . . as soon as we produce a statement of belief . . . some people will use the statement to judge others, and to try to exclude from the community those who don’t measure up.”

The real question is whether there is an irony here in that the acts of judging and excluding are unexpected results of the act of theological self-definition in formulating a statement of beliefs. In other words, does theological self-definition in formulating a statement of fundamental beliefs necessarily involve the judging and exclusion of those who do not accept the terms of self-identification? Historically, with regard to creeds, the answer appears to have been yes. “The task of the creed was to defend the Church against heresy. The creed has the negative role of shutting the heretic out and setting the boundaries within which authentic Christian theology and life can take place.” It appears that formally, judging and exclusion may belong functionally to a statement of beliefs. It is in its nature to exclude and judge, at least intellectually.

This conclusion, however, needs to be nuanced.

First, it has been shown that the Adventist use of the slogan “no creed but the Bible” expresses a desire that even a sound statement of beliefs should not interfere with the believer’s continuing interaction with Scripture as the source of new insights as well as the guarantor of “individual Christianity.” In providing this critical role, therefore, the statement of beliefs must be seen primarily as the locus of the community’s consensus without stifling the need to go back to the Bible in the “critical” process.

Second, there are a few possible conditions under which theological variation with a statement of beliefs may not necessarily lead to personal exclusion: (a) One could make a case for a distinction in a statement between common and essential features so that one could disagree on a common feature without being a heretic. This distinction has been made in other contexts. The issue in this situation revolves around the legitimacy of making such a distinction in the context of a statement of beliefs. (b) It may be possible to argue that one ought not to become the subject of exclusionary action the moment one’s theological reflection yields something contrary to consensus in the statement of fundamental beliefs. In the interest of encouraging creative thinking and forestalling the danger that the pioneers perceived in creeds as “setting the stakes, and barring the way to all future development,” theo-
logical difference from the statement of fundamental beliefs ought not to lead to exclusion unless the circumstances surrounding the variance go to the very condition of endangering the existence of the community. Such could be the case in which, for example, a “new light” is peddled in a manner that threatens the unity of the community of faith.

The point is that a statement of fundamental beliefs has a legitimate juridical role in settling doctrinal disputes as well as even possibly avoiding them. Whether this role always leads to exclusion raises questions beyond this basic point. But the significance of the statement of beliefs in fulfilling this juridical role needs to be underlined. The questions are: In our postmodern context, does the church subscribe to belief in the truth? Is this question still a legitimate one?

At this point, these issues have little to do with the expression of our doctrines in the 28 fundamental beliefs. It is a formal one about the other side of the question about heresy. It appears the answer is positive, for the fact that the church opens itself up for future redefinition and clarification of truth does not mean that it may not express itself defensively on questions of truth at any one time. To take such a stance would amount to a virtual “agnosticism” that would undermine the very existence of the church.

### Statement of Beliefs: Church Unity and Mission

The negative role of a statement of beliefs in detecting heresy necessarily highlights its positive role in promoting unity. This role of officially defined doctrines is noted as its constitutional use. The relationship between heresy and unity is clear because heresy denotes schism or faction (1 Cor. 11:19; Gal. 5:20), and Paul’s use of the adjective ἀριστερικός (Titus 3:10) characterizes the heretic as divisive or factious. The absence of heresy, then, is conducive to the promotion of unity. Stated positively, the statement of fundamental beliefs serves as a rallying point for those who make the same confession of the truth.

Of course, the total unity of the church goes beyond theological concerns to include matters that may be more appropriately described as ecclesiological, as well as even cultural and sociological. Nevertheless, dependence of denominational unity on doctrine cannot be denied, since theological matters usually create separate denominations in the first place. Herein lies the importance of affirming the statement of fundamental beliefs. It is one of the strong evidences of the unity of the church. Since the document is put together on the basis of definite historical, hermeneutical, and methodological presuppositions, affirming such a document signals not only a unity and continuity with the faith community’s historic past, but with its present theological and missiological goals.

Important as theological unity is, achieving that goal is not an end in itself. As mentioned before, there is a connection between the biblical concept of teaching and ethics. The ethical dimension of biblical doctrine/teaching is connected to preaching as the means by which people are brought to faith in Jesus and instructed in the ethical principles and obligations of the Christian life. Thus, the role of a statement of belief in preserving the church’s theological unity is significant because that unity contributes to the promotion of the mission of the church. Clearly, community effort is better performed in an atmosphere of homogenous faith. “God is leading out a people to stand in perfect unity upon the platform of eternal truth. Christ gave Himself to the world that He might ‘purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.’ This refining process is designed to purge the church from all unrighteousness and the spirit of discord and contention, that they may build up instead of tear down, and concentrate their energies on the great work before them.”

The statement of beliefs not only unifies the church for mission, but also is itself a witness to those outside the church. It appears that this role of the statement is what motivates some of our churches to print the statement of fundamental beliefs at the back of their regular worship programs. The statement, as a document, performs this function in a number of ways: It clearly outlines and expounds on the fundamental assertions of the faith; it witnesses to the unity and systematic nature of the faith; and it demonstrates the rational, objective biblical content of the truth as believed in the community. It does all these things in such a systematic, yet concise way that what the community believes is made readily clear to those who stand outside the community of faith. In this
At a popular level within the community of faith, the statement of beliefs is an invaluable pedagogical aid. It has often been noted that the sheer volume of the Bible presents challenges of comprehension for many believers. The statement of beliefs, by compiling, systematizing, and summarizing biblical teaching on many subjects, makes it easier for the church to fulfill its instructional mandate within the faith community.

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Yet it is important to observe that its pedagogical role should not eclipse the role of Scripture, in which case it would begin to smack of creedalism. In this regard it is worth drawing attention to the format of the statement of fundamental beliefs as presented, for example, in the Church Manual. At the end of each statement is a list of Bible texts that serves as an invitation to a personal, biblical exploration of the particular doctrine. In a unique sense, the statement of beliefs in performing its pedagogical role functions as a sign pointing to the Bible.

With particular reference to the use of statements of beliefs for children and new believers, Philip Schaff comments: “In the form of Catechisms they are of especial use in the instruction of children, and facilitate a solid and substantial religious education, in distinction from spasmodic and superficial excitement.” The value of a statement in facilitating biblical education is premised on the fact that a growing understanding of the Bible comes with reading it, systematizing it, and applying it. The statement of fundamental beliefs, as a distilled exposition of biblical themes as understood by the faith community, facilitates education in Scripture.

Statement of Beliefs and Baptism

On the basis of Romans 10:9, 10, E. Glenn Hinson connects the creed as a confessional statement with the new believer’s covenant initiation into the family of God. In Hinson’s view, it is natural that the first step toward Christianity would entail a confession of some kind, however rudimentary. His conclusion is that the confession that Jesus is Lord, and the belief that God raised Him from the dead (verse 9), “represent[s] in an external and visible way the making of an inward covenant: ‘For man believes with his heart and so is justified, and he confesses with his lips and so is saved.’” It is this connection, Hinson says, between confession and the personal covenant-making process that made creeds a sine qua non of initiation rites in the early church. Thus, the creed played a critical role in the convert’s total cognitive and affective commitment.

The significance of this role of a statement of beliefs goes back to the analysis of it as teaching. One implication was that content is of the essence of a statement of beliefs. The use of a statement of beliefs as a means of incorporation into the body of Christ is an indication of how the Seventh-day Adventist Church understands the nature of the Christian life and experience. The Christian life flourishes mainly through the Word and not in a sacramental manner. A proper use of the statement of fundamental beliefs offers a powerful avenue for personal incorporation into and private appropriation of the ethos of the faith community.

The role of the statement of beliefs in the baptismal rites of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is recognized by the Church Manual. The 16th edition requires those who are being baptized or received into fellowship by profession of faith to affirm publicly acceptance of the doctrinal beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Although the practice of incorporation into the body may vary, connection between belief and incorporation into the body of Christ is, in principle, acknowledged. In-
Indeed, as noted before, the manual gives the impression that the statement of beliefs was primarily prepared for baptismal instruction.

**Other Uses of a Statement of Fundamental Beliefs**

A few other uses may be derived from a statement of beliefs, such as for homiletical and liturgical purposes. Thus, some Seventh-day Adventist ministers have developed preaching schedules around the fundamental beliefs of the church. The purpose has always been to set forth in the church the truths that are held together in the community, and thereby to ground the people of God in the truth. Similarly, portions of a statement may be incorporated into the worship of the church as “affirmations of faith.”

Is the Statement of Fundamental Beliefs infallible? Both the analysis and the church’s official pronouncements show that it is not infallible. But what does that mean for the Statement of Fundamental Beliefs in the life of the church?

This discussion of the usefulness of a statement of fundamental beliefs has not presupposed its infallibility, which is not a necessary requirement for the usefulness of a statement of beliefs. Consequently, the issue around the status of a statement of beliefs with respect to infallibility is perhaps not fundamentally about usefulness. It appears that the issue concerns the possibility of error in the statement: What if the statement is wrong or inaccurate in some parts?

It should be kept in mind that, theologically, every allegation of error regarding a point in the statement of fundamental beliefs represents a difference of interpretation between the church’s consensus position in the statement and the position of those making the allegation. Whether the statement actually contains error is an evaluation that will have to be made on the principles of interpretation and theological effort. Formally, however, the consensual nature of the statement of beliefs would appear to require that amendments, clarifications, redefinitions, etc., ought to be pursued consensually. Care should be exercised so as not to give the impression that the Statement of Fundamental Beliefs as we have it now is actually erroneous since the question about “what if” really has to do with potentialities.

**In Summary**

A statement of beliefs clearly serves a useful role, but it is not without shortcomings. Primarily, the resistance among Adventists to a creed replacing the Bible resides in its inability to facilitate “individual Christianity” as well as its tendency to block further biblical insights. Indeed a litany of objections about creeds may also be true of a statement of beliefs.

It is objected that statements of belief obstruct the free interpretation of the Bible and the progress of theology; that they interfere with the liberty of conscience and the right of private judgment; that they engender hypocrisy, intolerance, and bigotry; that they produce division and distraction; that they perpetuate religious animosity and the curse of sectarianism; that by the law of reaction, they produce dogmatic indifference, skepticism, and infidelity.

Schaff’s observation on these objections is on target: “The creeds, as such, are no more responsible for abuses than the Scriptures themselves, of which they profess to be merely a summary or an exposition.”

History shows that both creedal and non-creedal churches are equally exposed to division and controversy. The reality seems to be that the Statement of Fundamental Beliefs, although imperfect, is an indispensable instrument of the church as it seeks to accomplish its mission in an imperfect world.

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Yitzhak Rabin wanted to linger, to relish the moment. More than 100,000 supporters had gathered in the Kings of Israel Square in central Tel Aviv on a Saturday night for an upbeat Peace Now rally, celebrating peace with songs and speeches. The enthusiastic crown waved large banners and balloons.

The 73-year-old prime minister passionately exhorted the crowd to go forward down the road of peace to which he had committed Israel in September 1993. Rabin was clearly exhilarated and buoyed by the outpouring of support and affection. It was one of those rare moments that this battle-hardened warrior, now a soldier of peace, was seen to smile openly and enjoy himself. It was his final glory. Only minutes after the rally ended, two bullets smashed into Rabin. One ruptured his spleen; the other severed major arteries in his chest and shattered his spinal cord. At 11:15 p.m., Eitan Haber, the prime minister’s chief of staff, emerged from the hospital to scream for all the world to hear: “Rabin is dead!”

Our stunned world heard that scream. But reactions were different. Some broke down in tears and anguish. Others rushed out into the streets to dance and celebrate. Sobs and laughter! Once again, our world was confronted with the torturous quest for peace between warring human beings. We were reminded how divided our human family truly is. How quickly we reach for weapons to defend our ideas, to get our own way, destroy someone we have learned to hate, or get even with someone who has hurt us.

Rabin’s assassination forced us to explain the logic of why an assassin slays a man who has abandoned the methods of war, precisely because he has abandoned those methods. Rabin the soldier had become a man of peace. His perspective on resolving differences had radically changed. He was no longer choosing the weapons of war, but the methods of peace.

The Apostle Paul was familiar with the kind of weapons or methods we are apt to choose in the interpersonal conflicts we face: “Though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does” and that “the weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world” (2 Cor. 10:3, 4, NIV).

What kind of war did Paul have in mind? I used to think that this passage was speaking about the church’s battle against the kingdom of darkness, or more specifically the individual Christian’s struggle with some temptation—especially things of the mind, since Paul went on to assert that we can bring every thought captive to the obedience of Christ (vs. 5). That was always a good one for a young man dealing with matters of purity. There is some truth, no doubt, to these interpretations, but the context has to do with interpersonal conflicts. Paul was concerned with the strife between people who see things differently, or whose relationship has deteriorated.

Actually, this was a very personal thing, as Paul was defending himself against criticisms and slander that had been hurled nastily toward him and his ministry. Deeply wounded, he felt that he could not ignore these personal attacks. But if he responded to them, he had to do so in a proper way. The Living Bible has caught Paul’s point the clearest: “I plead gently, as Christ himself would do. Yet some of you are saying, ‘Paul’s letters are bold enough when he is far away, but when he gets here he will be afraid to raise his voice!’ I hope I won’t need to show you when I come how harsh and rough I can be, I don’t want to carry out my present plans against some of you who seem to think my deeds and words are merely those of an ordinary man. It is true that I am an ordinary, weak human being, but I don’t use human plans and methods to win by battles. I use God’s mighty weapons” (2 Cor. 10:1-4).

Interpersonal conflicts. Deteriorating relationships. Paul knew what it was all about. We experience it every day of our lives. Our passage calls it war. We don’t often think of it in such radical terms. Human beings clashing in mind and spirit and heart. Wanting things differently. Jockeying for control. The battlefield on which our interpersonal wars are fought is in our homes, our marriages, our churches, the workplace, across the theological landscape. It happens wherever human beings are in contact with one another—even church members, church leaders, and church theologians.

One of the cries the international community heard from the Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina during the Balkan War was for the arms embargo to be lifted so they could defend themselves against Serbian aggression. “Just give us the guns, and we’ll take care of ourselves,” they
cried. Whenever and wherever human beings clash, there is a reaching for weapons. Where there is war, there are weapons.

Paul recognized that there can be strategic choices between weapons. Some weapons, he tells us, are what he calls “sarkika weapons” (vss. 3, 4). These are weapons of the flesh, human weapons. The kind of weapons most people naturally reach for when relationships begin to deteriorate. Paul knew firsthand what those kinds of weapons were like. Stones. Whips. Fists. Swords. Clubs. Words. With the Corinthians, those weapons were some pretty nasty things. Like criticism of his lousy preaching, sarcasm about his supposed vacillating personality, insinuations about his ulterior motives, comments about his funny looks.

Each wounded Paul. To paraphrase their harshly critical words: “Sure, he writes tough letters, but when he’s here with you, he’s a wimp! He’s like a barking dog that runs when you get near him” (vs. 1). There was nothing subtle about their accusations: They were charging Paul with cowardice. And there’s more: “Don’t bother about his letters,” some said. “He sounds big, but it’s all noise. When he gets here, you will see that there is nothing great about him, and you have never heard a worse preacher!” (vs. 10, TLB).

Can you imagine how Paul felt when he heard these things and how much he might have wanted to tell those guys off?

What kinds of weapons do we use to win our interpersonal struggles? Physical force, manipulation, social pressure, gossip and rumor, words of condemnation, name-calling, physical abuse, money, withholding sex, teasing, silence, shaming, shunning, hard-ball politics, one-upmanship, grinding our opponents into the ground with our words so they are left with no dignity, labeling them? These are the kinds of things that crush and sting and discourage and wound deeply. They are more destructive than bullets and bombs.

Worldly weapons are impressive, but Paul says there are more powerful weapons in the Christian’s arsenal. They are weapons in keeping with the meekness and gentleness of Christ. As we have already read from the Living Bible, “I don’t use human plans and methods to win my battles. I use God’s mighty weapons.” Paul’s aim was to be compassionate, gentle, mild. He sought to be honest and open (2 Cor. 1:13; 4:2). He sought to be patient and kind (6:6). He made sure he wronged no one, corrupted no one, didn’t take advantage of anyone (7:2). He overcame opposition at Corinth and elsewhere through the spiritual means of intercessory prayer, tearful admonition by his presence and pen, and a character that mirrored the grace and kindness of Christ.

“Bless those who persecute you,” Paul wrote elsewhere, “bless and do not curse. . . . Do not repay anyone evil for evil. . . . If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live in peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends. . . . ‘If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.’ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Rom. 12:14-21, NIV). Peter affirmed this kind of attitude when he wrote: “All of you should be of one mind. Sympathize with each other. Love each other as brothers and sisters. Be tenderhearted, and keep a humble attitude. Don’t repay evil for evil. Don’t retaliate with insults when people insult you. Instead, pay them back with a blessing. That is what God has called you to do, and he will bless you for it” (1 Peter 3:8-10, NLT).

The weapons we choose reflect whether we have brought every thought of our own captive to Christ. If we use carnal weapons, we have not brought our thoughts captive to Christ. We have not been touched by His meekness and lowliness.

During the Peace Now rally in downtown Tel Aviv, Yitzhak Rabin tucked a leaflet with the lyrics to the song Shir Ha-Shalom, the Song of Peace, into his breast pocket. Caught up in the spirit of the moment, he sang that song along with the 100,000 who had gathered to celebrate peace and support him. When those two bullets ripped into his flesh, the massive bleeding that resulted drenched the leaflet in blood. Referring to the Song of Peace, Shimon Peres said, “He put this song in his pocket, and the bullet went through this song. But the song of peace ringing in our ears will not end.”

For Yitzak Rabin, the wages of peacemaking appear simply to be death. But perhaps, as many of us are hoping, a peacemaker’s death can partner peace.

That is the way of Jesus! He was crucified in weakness (2 Cor. 13:4). While being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously (1 Peter 2:23). “He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; Like a lamb he was led to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearsers is silent, so he did not open his mouth” (Isa. 53:7, NIV). The wages of peacemaking?—death that partners peace.

Love doesn’t always win, but it never loses! So should we be in all of our dealings, especially in very personal realms like theology and life.

REFERENCES
2 Time (November 13, 1995), p. 56.
3 Ibid., p. 64.
man who has dedicated more than 50 years of his life to arguing—and strongly at that—against any God at all!

That Flew’s change of mind (if not yet heart) resulted from some of the recent evidence that has emerged from the realm of science is particularly encouraging and noteworthy for us as Adventists. It demonstrates that even a world-class thinker and scholar, like Flew, is able to see the evidences of “intelligent design” woven into the world of nature. This also illustrates the beauty and truth of the biblical statement: “‘When He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth’” (John 16:13, NKJV).

Homing Christians: Work of the Holy Spirit

As a boy in Singapore, I raised homing pigeons. Worshipers there would buy pigeons at the pet store and then release them as thank offerings to the gods. I sold one of my birds to the same pet shop three times because of this religious practice. On the third time my pigeon returned to the home loft, a message written in Sanskrit to the gods was attached to its foot.

Jim Tucker mentions that research has shown that homing pigeons navigate by sensitivity to the Earth’s magnetic field, by observing the Sun, and by recognizing familiar landmarks as they near home.9 By acting on their drive to return home, and by following the critical signage available to them, homing pigeons return long distances to their nesting sites. By the grace of God, let us be homing Christians—individuals who actually trust and follow the promptings of the Holy Spirit, the counsels of God’s Word, and His messenger in order to return to our everlasting home loft with the Creator.

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2 Ibid., p. 38.
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid., p. 39.
5 Ibid.
6 Ibid.
7 Ibid., p. 40.
8 Ibid.

WORKSTATION TWO

Gary B. Swanson

On Columbus Day 1992, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) began a 10-year search for extraterrestrial intelligence (SETI). So far, apparently, there has been no answer. We’re still on hold!

Since 1960, NASA has made 50 such attempts, but previous radio searches had sampled only a thin slice of the cosmos. The SETI project, however, linked existing radio telescopes around the world with newly developed computer programs that were capable of scanning 15 million frequency channels a second. That was 10,000 times more frequencies than the previous 50 attempts combined—and at 300 times the sensitivity.

Soon after scientists initiated such an extensive a program, they began to worry about what they should do if they succeeded. What should we do if someone out there actually receives our signal and sends back an answer? What do we say next? How do we communicate with a species from another planet? In the event that we ever do hear back from outer space, some have suggested that we should take a cue from how we are presently communicating with other species from this planet. With this in mind, inter-species communication psychologist Francine Patterson, who taught Koko, an adult lowland gorilla, how to communicate with American Sign Language, asked Koko, “What would you say to someone who didn’t know anything about gorillas or people?”

After little hesitation, Koko, who has the vocabulary of a six- or seven-year-old deaf child, signed back, “Koko good” and “People frown sometimes.”

In charitable honesty, Koko has put her finger on something important. The fact is that members of the *Homo sapiens* species are not perfect, and apparently it doesn’t take a team of psychologists to recognize this. A gorilla can see that we have some problems. By and large, we’re un-
happy. We frown.
And that is a shame. We are an unhappy species. Should we tell the rest of the universe that we allow others of our very own kind to starve to death every day? That we focus an inordinate amount of our intelligence and resources on the development of weapons that could literally wipe out our entire species and many more besides? That we think so little of ourselves that we surgically discard thousands of our own unborn young?

Some scientists, considering the possibility of communicating with extraterrestrial life forms, are genuinely worried that if we tell creatures on other worlds what we're truly like, they are very likely to have the intelligence, technology, and compassion to put us out of our misery. The writers of science fiction have actually explored this distressing scenario many times. Even C. S. Lewis, in his space trilogy, betrayed grave concern about the possibility of human space travel. With his Christian worldview of the depravity of humankind, he could see no point in sharing this kind of information with whoever or whatever is "out there."

But now, of course, we find ourselves in a potentially nonfictional situation. Real scientists are using real instrumentation to communicate a real message.

Certainly sin has made this Earth a less than ideal place to live. And unfortunately, humanity is looking for solutions to our problems everywhere but in the right place. More than two centuries ago, Thomas Jefferson wrote in the United States Declaration of Independence that all are entitled to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." But what is happiness, and how can we achieve it?

To work out a definition of happiness, it may be necessary first to explain what happiness isn't.

It isn't the same as fun. "Fun is what we experience during an act," writes Dennis Prager. "Happiness is what we experience after an act..." Understanding and accepting that true happiness has nothing to do with fun is one of the most liberating realizations we can ever come to."

Furthermore, it isn't synonymous with success. There are simply too many successful people among us who are terribly unhappy. We cannot observe their dissatisfaction without concluding that success seldom fulfills humankind's pursuit of happiness.

And it isn't avoiding what makes you miserable. If this were true, then truly money could buy happiness. The more money you have, the more you could distance yourself from what makes you miserable. But the existence of so many wealthy yet unhappy people on this Earth suggests that money can't make unhappiness go away.

The fact is, "we are happiest," writes Frederick Turner, "when we are striving not for happiness but, say, for artistic perfection, or for the purest service to other persons, or for knowledge."

This is what Jesus meant when, after washing the disciples' feet and pointing them to a life of service to others, He said, "'If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them'" (John 13:17, KJV). And the Bible actually offers several very practical conditions for happiness:

1. **Trust in God.** "Those who trust the Lord," wrote Solomon, "will be happy" (Prov. 16:20, NLT). This from a man who learned the hard way that success and wealth weren't the answer. The world's happiest people are those who realize their own human weakness and are able to put their wholehearted trust in God's infinitely loving care.

2. **Wisdom of God.** Solomon at last freely acknowledged from whom his wisdom came and he exclaimed, "Happy is the man who finds wisdom" (3:13, NKJV). The real danger here—and it leads to unhappiness—is to forget the true source of human intelligence and intellectual accomplishment.

3. **Hope in God.** When the disciples learned that Jesus had been resurrected, they realized for the first time that He had provided a way of escape from the world's misery and unhappiness. After He'd risen from the grave, Jesus appeared to His disciples and "showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord" (John 20:20, NIV).

We have an assurance that God loved us enough to send His Son to this Earth to set things right—so we never need to frown again. "Grace to you," the apostle Paul wrote, "and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father" (Gal. 1:3, 4, NKJV). This is a message that we can communicate with confidence to the rest of the cosmos—as if the other universal inhabitants out there didn't already know!

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