Understanding of the relationship between Scripture and the writings of Ellen White is key to understanding her ministry.

As Seventh-day Adventists, we consider ourselves to be the “remnant” in Revelation 12:17 (KJV). In harmony with the characteristics of that remnant, we will have the “testimony of Jesus,” which the apostle John identifies as the “spirit of prophecy” (19:10, KJV).

Not having been born into a Seventh-day Adventist home, I was shocked when at age 16, I first heard that Adventists believed Ellen G. White to be a genuine manifestation of that spirit of prophecy. And as I soon discovered, she was often quoted in Adventist pulpits.

My father, a Baptist, attended a Seventh-day Adventist church only twice, and both times came away asking, “Who is this Ellen White? Why don’t they use the Bible?” He never became an Adventist. That was in the 1950s. Times have changed, and the locus of Adventist preaching has gravitated more solidly to the Bible, but we still do well to remind ourselves of the relationship her writings should have to Scripture.

What was Ellen White’s view of Scripture? Did she believe her writings to be equal to or even superior to the Bible? Did she understand them to be an indispensable addition to the Bible?

To understand the answers to those questions correctly, it is imperative that we understand her view of revelation and inspiration.

Ellen White’s Understanding of Revelation and Inspiration

The introduction to The Great Controversy and pages 15 to 23 of Selected Messages, Book 1, contain the clearest statements Ellen White wrote to aid our understanding of how God communicates divine truth. Though she did not believe that God dictated His messages word for word to His specially chosen messengers (except on rare occasions), she would have firmly rejected the contemporary “encounter” view that holds that no divine messages were communicated to the prophets and that the Bible therefore contains no absolute, normative truth. Though she did not believe that every individual word chosen was inspired (i.e., “God-breathed”), she did believe that the prophets were inspired. “Inspiration,” she wrote, “acts not on the man’s words or his expressions but on the man himself, who, under the influence of the Holy Ghost, is imbued with thoughts.”

She explained, “The writers of the Bible had to express their ideas in human language. It was written by human men.” Thus she believed that the “writers of the Bible were God’s penmen, not His pen.” And to clarify further she added, “the words receive the impress of the individual mind. The divine mind is diffused. The divine mind and will is combined with the human mind and will; thus the utterances of the man are the word of God.” The messages of the prophets, whether written or oral, were overshadowed and imbued, she believed, by the guiding ministry of the Holy Spirit. Thus she could declare, “I take the Bible just as it is, as the Inspired Word. I believe its utterances in an entire Bible.”

Mrs. White acknowledged that there are mistakes in the Bible, but assured, “All the mistakes will not cause trouble to one soul, or cause any feet to stumble, that would not manufacture difficulties from the plainest revealed truth.” It was her position that the essential truths of Scripture had been providentially preserved intact for all time. Thus, while acknowledging the presence of mistakes, she could declare, “In His Word, God has committed to men the knowledge necessary for salvation. The Holy Scriptures are to be accepted as an authoritative, infallible revelation of His will. They are...
Though we believe that the Bible is an “infallible revelation of His will,” and is the “standard,” unlike most other denominations we do not believe that the genuine gift of prophecy ceased with the death of John the Revelator. Since our inception as a denomination, we have believed that Ellen White was another in the long line of prophet-messengers who—though not canonical and different in purpose and function—were as inspired as their prophetic forebears.

Pioneer Views of the Lesser and Greater Lights

As early as 1847, James White, while holding to a prima scriptura view, confirmed that God would continue to utilize the gift of prophecy. “The Bible,” he explained, “is a perfect and complete revelation. It is our only rule of faith and practice. But this is no reason why God may not show the past, present, and future fulfillment of his word, in these last days, by dreams and visions, according to Peter’s testimony. True visions are given to lead us to God, and His Written Word; but those that are given for a new rule of faith and practice, separate from the Bible, cannot be from God, and should be rejected.”

The same year the church was organized, Uriah Smith took issue with the sola scriptura position that many were using to repudiate any post-biblical manifestation of the prophetic gift. He wrote, “The Protestant principle, of ‘the Bible and the Bible alone,’ is of itself good and true; and we stand upon it as firmly as anyone can; but when reiterated in connection with outspoken denunciations of the visions, it has specious appearance for evil. . . . When we claim to stand on the Bible and Bible alone, we bind ourselves to receive, unequivocally and fully, all that the Bible teaches.”

Under the title “Our Use of the Visions of Sr. White,” J. N. Andrews, as editor of the Advent Review and Sabbath Herald, wrote in 1870, “The work of the Holy Spirit may be divided into two parts: First, that which is designed simply to convert and to sanctify the persons affected by it. Second, that which is for the purpose of opening the truth of God, and of correcting error, and of reproving and rebuking secret sins. This part of the work is wrought by what the Scriptures term Spiritual Gifts. These exist, not for the especial good of the person to whose trust they are committed, but for the benefit of the whole body of the church.”

The understanding of the early leaders of the church was paralleled by Ellen White in her statement at the close of her first book in 1851: “I recommend to you, dear reader, the Word of God as the rule of your faith and practice. By that Word we are to be judged. God has, in that Word, promised to give visions in the ‘last days;’ not for a new rule of faith, but for the comfort of His people, and to correct those who err from Bible truth.”

In those early views are enumerated several of the principal purposes for the writings of Ellen White. James White identified perhaps the two most important ones: First, to lead us to God, and second, to lead us to the Word. Uriah Smith identified three others—clarifying and explaining the Bible, correcting error, and reproving and rebuking secret sins. In that initial written description, Ellen White added two more—for the comforting and consoling of His people, and to bring those back who wander from Bible truth. Those seven purposes alone would justify the value of, and explain the enduring interest in, the writings of Ellen White.

Metaphors for Understanding

To aid understanding of the purposes for which God has communicated through Ellen White to His people in this late hour of human history, and to more clearly perceive the relationship of her writings to the Bible, six metaphors prove helpful:

1. Greater Light/Lesser Light. The
Ellen White explained, “The Lord has sent his people much instruction, line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little, and there a little. Little heed is given to the Bible, and the Lord has given a lesser light to lead men and women to the greater light.” Thus she draws attention to two important realities: The Word of God is sorely neglected, and her writings were given to draw all back to it.

first of these metaphors comes from the Book of Genesis: “God made two great lights: the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night” (1:16, NKJV). Ellen White used this passage to create one of the most apt metaphors for understanding the value and purpose of her works.

By 1902, the church’s educational institutions were deeply in debt, and Mrs. White had decided to dedicate the proceeds from the sale of Christ’s Object Lessons to the reduction of the debt. In a published letter, she urged all church members to help in this missionary venture, assuring them the proceeds from the sale of Mrs. White had decided to dedicate institutions were deeply in debt, and the value and purpose of her works.

In a statement the meaning of which cannot be misunderstood, she declared, “The Bible is the only rule of faith and doctrine. And there is nothing more calculated to energize the mind, and strengthen the intellect, than the study of the word of God. . . . If God’s word were studied as it should be, men would have a breadth of mind, a nobility of character, and a stability of purpose, that is rarely seen in these times. Thousands of men who minister in the pulpit are lacking in essential qualities of mind and character, because they do not apply themselves to the study of the Scriptures. They are content with a superficial knowledge of the truths that are full of rich depths of meaning; and they prefer to go on, losing much in every way, rather than to search diligently for the hidden treasure.”

2. Earlier Light/Later Light. The Bible, written by some 40 writers, the first of whom wrote more than 3,000 years ago, has been God’s supreme revelation of His will and purpose universally and across time. In contrast, God called a modern prophet near the end of time to call people back to that earlier light. Thus she is that later light, reflecting and amplifying the earlier light.

3. Testor/Testee. Every nation of the world has national standards of measurement, establishing a recognized norm to which all other measurements are compared. Though the working standards may be indistinguishable from the national standard, they are never used to test the national standard, but are always tested by it. In the same way, while the beauty, veracity, and relevance of the writings of Ellen White may be indistinguishable from the Bible, they are always and only the “working standard” to be tested by the Word.

4. National Map/State Map. Recognizing that Ellen White wrote far more than is found in the Bible, the metaphor of the “National Map/State Map” is particularly relevant. There are maps that cover everything, from the entire world, emphasizing the major characteristics of the planet, to local maps that cover a very small geographical area but do so in great detail. She was told, “Your testimony . . . is to come down to the minutiae of life, keeping the feeble faith from dying, and pressing home upon believers the necessity of shining as lights in the world.” The Bible portrays the great themes of God and His plan, and fundamental principles for Christian living, but in her writings God helps clarify for us the minutiae.

5. Field/Lens. According to Denton Rebok, a well-known North American Adventist minister and a lifelong student of Ellen White’s writings, Ellen White believed that Mrs. S. M. I. Henry had, in her metaphor of the “Field/Lens” captured “as clearly and as accurately as anyone could ever put into words,” the relationship of her writings to the Bible. Mrs. Henry said that the writings of Ellen White were like a lens and telescope through which we can look at the Bible, and are “subject to all telescopic conditions and limitations.”

“Clouds,” she explained, “may intervene between it and a heaven full of stars,—clouds of unbelief, of contention; Satan may blow tempests all about it; it may be blurred by the breath of our own selfishness; the dust of superstition may gather upon it. . . . If the lens is mistaken for the field we can receive but a very narrow conception of the most magnificent spectacle with which the heavens ever invited our gaze, but in its proper office as a medium of enlarged and clearer vision, as a telescope, the testimony has a wonderfully beautiful and
They are not the orbs of truth, but they do lead the eye to heaven, palpitating with countless glories of the mysterious living word of God. “The written testimonies are not to be regarded as the full, complete part of that view, Ellen White wrote, for they have the original book of directions, ‘that original book of directions, says they, ‘and that is enough for us. We stand upon that, and that alone; we want nothing of you. Who now heed that original book of directions? those who reject the pilot, or those who receive him, as that book instructs them? Judge ye.’”

Ellen White as Interpreter of Scripture

In most areas of church and personal life we, as a church, have acknowledged and valued the presence of a God-given “harbor pilot” for these troubled and challenging times. Through her writings Ellen White continues to exalt the Word and call all back to the study of it. The principles and truths of Scripture are clarified and simplified through her coming down to the minutiae. A call to godly living and renouncing of sin is a note sounded faithfully throughout her writings. In books like Steps to Christ and The Desire of Ages she provides hope, consolation, and heavenly solutions for the human dilemma. And she has much to teach regarding our understanding of final events, Christ’s second coming, and the preparation needed to meet them. Though she died almost a century ago, she is still regarded by most Seventh-day Adventists as a genuine prophet-messenger of God who has proved beyond doubt the fruit of her life and labor.

There is, however, an aspect of her ministry that merits especially careful investigation: her role as interpreter of Scripture. Raoul Dederen notes three salient features of her in this role. First, “As interpreter of the Bible, Ellen White’s most characteristic role was that of an evangelist—not an exegete, nor a theologian, as such, but a preacher and an evangelist. . . . She was in the typical prophetic attitude, primarily desirous to press the text into service for the immediate objective, that of the spiritual quickening of her hearers or readers.”

Second, “she never fails to emphasize the relevancy of the passage to her readers, and the importance of a proper response to the Word of God.” Third, he notes a “conspicuous feature. . . the amazing ease with which biblical quotations and allusions come from her pen. . . . Her mind was thoroughly impregnated with the Scriptures.”

Since her writings were so immersed in the Word, it is not surprising that A. T. Jones, in 1894, should have described her as an “infallible” interpreter of the Bible, even going so far as to state that the best way to study the Bible was “through them.” Though other modern self-proclaimed prophets cast themselves as the necessary looking glass through which to rightly interpret Scripture, Ellen White categorically rejected such a role. She emphatically declared that her writings are never to be put ahead of the Bible.

However, she recalled how, in her early ministry, “the power of God would come” over her and she “was enabled clearly to define what is truth and what is error.” On several other occasions she confirmed that what she wrote was accurate and correct. “There is one straight chain of truth, without one heretical sentence, in which I have written.” The testimonies, she asserted, “never contradict His Word.”

The conclusion is unavoidable: Ellen White must have believed that when she made statements regarding doctrine, as well as any other topic, her statements were biblically and doctrinally sound. If that is true, why then did she oppose the use of her writings to determine doctrinal correctness?

In 1910, when the church leaders were divided over the meaning of the word daily in Daniel 8, S. N. Haskell insisted that they should come to an understand-
Though it is true that Ellen White’s writings are primarily formative, not normative, because they speak in subservience to the authority of Scripture, that is not to say that God did not, on occasion, use her to correct doctrinal errors. At critical junctures in our denomination’s history, she was used by God to alter doctrinal views significantly.

ing of the term as judged by the writings of Ellen White.

She responded: “I entreat of Elders H, I, J, and others of our leading brethren, that they make no reference to my writings to sustain their views of ‘the daily’ . . . I cannot consent that any of my writings shall be taken as settling this matter. . . . I have had no instruction on the point under discussion.”

It is important to note that she did not want any of her writings to be used in settling this doctrinal controversy. While it is reasonable to assume that what she had written was correct, she was, nevertheless, not presenting a theological or exegetical explanation.

Reflecting on this controversy, W. C. White felt he understood the reason for his mother’s position. “Some of the brethren,” he wrote, “are much surprised and disappointed because Mother does not write something decisive that will settle the question as to what is the ‘daily’ and thus bring an end to the present disagreement. At times I have hoped for this, but as I have seen that God has not seen fit to settle the matter by a revelation [through] His messenger, I have come more and more to believe that it was the will of God that a thorough study should be made of the Bible and history, till a clear understanding of the truth was gained.”

It is reasonable to draw a number of conclusions from the experience with the “daily”:

• Ellen White consistently refused to be the arbiter of truth. No doctrinal position was to be determined and defended on the basis of “Ellen White says.”

• She wanted all to “wrestle” with the Scripture.

• Using her as final arbiter would inevitably lead to biblical illiteracy.

• In order to have any lasting credibility with our own church members, let alone with Christians of other faiths, all our doctrines must be based solely and completely on the Bible.

Though it is true that Ellen White’s writings are primarily formative, not normative, because they speak in subservience to the authority of Scripture, that is not to say that God did not, on occasion, use her to correct doctrinal errors. At critical junctures in our denomination’s history, she was used by God to alter doctrinal views significantly. Regarding the late 1840s, she wrote: “At that time one error after another pressed in upon us; ministers and doctors brought in new doctrines. We would search the Scriptures with much prayer, and the Holy Spirit would bring the truth to our minds. . . . The power of God would come upon me, and I was enabled clearly to define what is truth and what is error.”

In 1898, to counteract the semi-arianism of Uriah Smith, she stated unequivocally, “In Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived. . . . The divinity of Christ is the believer’s assurance of eternal life.”

At the General Conference session of 1901, she publicly refuted the “Holy Flesh” fanaticism that had been embraced by the conference leadership and workers in Indiana. In response to their belief that each must acquire a state of physical sinlessness as an essential preparation for translation, she wrote, “The teaching given in regard to what is termed ‘holy flesh’ is an error. All may now obtain holy hearts, but it is not correct to claim in this life to have holy flesh. . . . No human being on the earth has holy flesh. It is an impossibility.”

In 1903, when the leadership and the church began to anguish over Dr. John Harvey Kellogg’s espousal of pantheism, she wrote, “In the book Living Temple there is presented the alpha of deadly heresies.”

And in 1905, in response to A. F. Ballenger’s views on the sanctuary that denied the fulfillment of prophecy in 1844 and repudiated the heavenly ministry of Christ in the investigative judgment, she was categorical: “When the power of God testifies as to what is truth, that truth is to stand forever as the truth. No after suppositions contrary to the light God has given are to be entertained. Men will arise with interpretations of Scripture which are to them truth, but which are not truth.”

While God wants His people earnestly to wrestle with the Word in the continuous quest for truth, when some arose who instead misapplied the Word, He acted through His prophet to distinguish for all the line between truth and error.

“The fact that Mrs. White’s own particular calling and vocation was that of a prophet suggests that her role is not merely devotional or pastoral, nor yet exegetical or theological, but prophetic. Although her ministry exhibits elements of all these other roles, it is apart from them, distinct. Prophetic authority is authority to bring God’s message to bear on the root problems of human
existence, to search out human perversity, and highlight human potential in Christ. A prophet may argue theologically, may offer devotional reflection, and may minister pastorally to God’s people, but his message is usually more disturbing than a pastor’s, more challenging than a devotional writer’s, more gripping than a theological formulation, and more relevant than an exegetical exposition.”

Seventh-day Adventists continue to investigate, broaden, and deepen their understanding of the gift of prophecy and its multi-faceted treasure of heavenly guidance through the life, labors, and writings of Ellen White. But the study and use of her writings come with a call for discretion: “In public labor do not make prominent, and quote that which Sister White has written, as authority to sustain your positions. . . . Bring your evidences, clear and plain, from the Word of God. . . . Let none be educated to look to Sister White, but to the mighty God, who gives in -

If as Seventh-day Adventists we believe all that the Bible teaches, and if we believe all that Ellen White teaches, we will cherish and exalt supremely the Word of God.

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The boat containing evolution’s most precious cargo seems to be leaking.

During the past decade, a fresh, enlightening breeze has been blowing into every corner of the house that Darwin built. The enterprise promoting this sea change, known as Intelligent Design (ID), began to cohere in the mid-1990s.

Lehigh University biochemist Michael Behe published his book Darwin’s Black Box, in which he convincingly showed that many biological structures display “irreducible complexity.” Structures like vision cascades, cellular cilia, bacterial flagella, and other “molecular machines” require many complex and coordinated molecular working parts. Behe combed the literature in search of evolutionary scenarios involving many small steps, to account for the origin of such structures, but found them few and far between, and totally inadequate. For biological machines to work, all—or most—of the molecular parts are needed at once. The complexity cannot be reduced to some much simpler state. Individual component proteins, or small selections of them, do not function at all. Hence the Darwinian mechanism cannot build the observed complexity by gradual selection of increasingly efficient precursors. Irreducibly complex mechanical and electronic machines offer a pertinent analogy and are known to be the products of intelligent minds taking advantage of natural laws. Conse

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How is it possible to decide if something has been designed or if the design is only apparent? An important step was taken by mathematician and philosopher William Dembski, who established criteria for detecting design. Dembski drew attention to the fact that detecting design is already a well-established scientific activity in fields such as forensic science, archaeology, and cryptology.

Frequently, Behe argued that biological machines are powerful evidence of intelligent design in biology.

At about the same time, Berkeley law professor Phillip Johnson applied his relentless logic in his book *Darwin on Trial* to show that the full diversity of Darwinian evolution is not supported by compelling factual evidence from paleontology or by empirical data from biology. Most important, Johnson highlighted the fact that the main support for Darwinian theory derives from its philosophical assumptions. Evolutionists see science as essentially materialist and based on philosophical naturalism. Only chance and the laws of nature are admitted as acceptable explanatory tools. Any interpretation departing from this narrow arena will automatically be rejected as non-scientific or—worse still—as superstition.

But how is it possible to decide if something has been designed or if the design is only apparent? An important step was taken by mathematician and philosopher William Dembski, who established criteria for detecting design. Dembski described a general method he called “specified complexity” for identifying design and distinguishing it from the effects of natural causes. He demonstrated that systems exhibiting high complexity combined with “specification” are always produced by intelligent agents. To be “specified,” an object or event must correspond to an independent pattern or dynamic sequence. An example of specification would be a dart board with a bull’s eye in the center. The bull’s eye is the specified target. Randomly throwing darts is unlikely to result in hitting a bull’s eye. There is something special about hitting a bull’s eye in a board on a wall that is very different from throwing darts, then drawing a bull’s eye around them wherever they hit. The difference is that the bull’s eye is specified. It turns out that nature—and particularly biology—is equivalent to a long series of bull’s eyes that have all been hit by darts. When something has the property of specified complexity, it is logical and rational to conclude it was designed.

Dembski, Stephen Meyer, and others have applied the specified complexity criterion to biological phenomena and find good agreement with Behe’s conclusion that their origin implies intelligent design. It is especially significant that the ID criterion enables data from across a spectrum of scientific areas to be rationalized. Physicists have discovered that the existence of life in the universe depends on a highly improbable balance of fundamental factors, often referred to as the “fine tuning of the universe” or “anthropic coincidences.” Application of the specified design criterion to this cosmic enigma also signals intelligent design as the most likely cause.

It is apparent that this is a fresh, logical, and rational way of thinking, which enables design to be detected independently of any philosophical or religious beliefs. Objective thinkers will welcome this as a way of shedding light on some of science’s most perplexing impasses. In practice, ID is growing in influence among scientists and philosophers who are willing to consider design as a third fundamental cause along with chance and natural law. On the other hand, the old school of materialists, who hold that only chance and necessity are admissible causes, oppose ID with every means their powerful establishment positions give them.

Richard Dawkins and Jerry Coyne are long-time members of this vintage group and are adamantly opposed to ID. No surprises there! The intolerant tone of the article written by Dawkins and Coyne, “One Side Can Be Wrong,” which appeared in the *Guardian* on September 1, 2005, shows that an emotional and ideological attachment to their worldview has led them deeply into wrong territory. For them, evolution should brook no rivals. Origins research is one of the softest sciences, so proponents particularly need to cultivate an impartial and objective attitude.

One label Dawkins and Coyne immediately stick on ID is: “There is nothing new about ID. It is simply creationism camouflaged with a new name.”

The major players in ID science emphatically reject this assertion.
Proponents of ID regard it as a scientific research program that investigates the effects of intelligent causes. ID advocates such as Behe and Dembski are not young-Earth creationists and do not reject evolution.

Dembski intends to use ID to re-examine design as a way of remaining true to science. Meyer observed that rather than focusing on which naturalistic explanation is most reasonable for the origins of life on Earth, we should be looking at what actually caused life. The specified complexity criterion for detecting design makes no appeal to sacred books and is independent of all religious authority.

Phillip Johnson remarked that “Our objective is not to impose a solution, but to open the most important areas of intellectual inquiry to fresh thinking.” Of course, ID research has important implications for creationism, but support for creationism is not its objective. ID advocates accept evolution, but they doubt that it can do everything that Darwinists claim. Their purpose is to follow the evidence wherever it leads. This statement has become a slogan of ID advocates and is entirely in harmony with the open-minded attitude with which any scientific investigation should be pursued. It is important to understand that ID is not a claim that miracles occur. Rather, it seeks to establish whether design is an actual feature of the universe that cannot be duplicated by the effects of natural law and chance.

Early in their article, Dawkins and Coyne say, “So, why are we so sure that intelligent design is not a real scientific theory, worthy of ‘both sides’ treatment? Isn’t that just our personal opinion? It is an opinion shared by the vast majority of professional biologists. . . . If ID really were a scientific theory, positive evidence for it, gathered through research, would fill peer-reviewed scientific journals. This doesn’t happen. It isn’t that editors refuse to publish ID research.”

As already mentioned, for material naturalists, “real science” admits only chance and necessity as valid causes. Dawkins and the majority of his evolutionary peers automatically rule out ID on these philosophical grounds and consider it a waste of time to evaluate the evidence.

The majority of professional biologists work in institutions dedicated to evolution and its sister disciplines. Many institutes are specifically named “Evolutionary Biology” or some variant of this. The research funding, the livelihoods, the careers, the professional reputations of all these scientists depend on adherence to evolutionary orthodoxy. Objectivity on foundational questions of origins is not an option for them in these circumstances.

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Evolutionists assert that the large steps to really new structures (macroevolution) are just an accumulation of smaller steps. It is very significant, however, that even after all this time, verifiable laboratory evidence is completely absent, the fossil record presents major problems, and only fanciful scenarios are on offer. The point ID scientists are making is that the time has now come to examine alternative explanations in which design is evaluated alongside natural causes.

Dawkins and Coyne’s belief that it is fine for evolutionists to appeal directly to the public, but wrong for those who disagree with them, is deeply revealing of their ultra-partisan approach.

According to Dawkins and Coyne, ID scientists make unreasonable demands for evidence: “One side [evolution] is required to produce evidence, every step of the way. The other side is never required to produce one iota of evidence, but is deemed to have won automatically, the moment the first side encounters a difficulty—the sort of difficulty that all sciences encounter every day, and go to work to solve, with relish.”

For more than a century, evolutionary scientists have been promising that laboratory science will someday discover a quantifiable mechanism for evolutionary change. Scientifically rigorous explanations have also been promised for: how life originated; how the genetic code and new genetic information could arise; how complex biological organs like eyes, cilia, etc. originated; how new biological species developed from ancestral forms and why the fossil record does not show the “innumerable transitional forms” Darwin expected.

ID scientists do not denigrate the huge progress that biologists have made in understanding how smaller changes have come about, how new varieties of animals and plants are produced, i.e., microevolution in general. Evolutionists assert that the large steps to really new structures (macroevolution) are just an accumulation of smaller steps. It is very significant, however, that even after all this time, verifiable laboratory evidence is completely absent, the fossil record presents major problems, and only fanciful scenarios are on offer. The point ID scientists are making is that the time has now come to examine alternative explanations in which design is evaluated alongside natural causes.

This claim is seriously at odds with considered opinion in the scientific literature emanating from specialists in paleontology. For example, Tom Kemp says, “The observed fossil pattern is invariably not compatible with a gradualistic evolutionary process.”

Even evolutionist icon Stephen Gould admitted: “The history of most fossil species includes two features particularly inconsistent with gradualism: 1. Stasis. Most species exhibit no directional change during their tenure on earth. They appear in the fossil record looking pretty much the same as when they disappear, morphological change is usually limited and directionless; 2. Sudden appearance. In any local area, a species does not arise gradually by the steady transformation of its ancestors; it appears all at once and ‘fully formed.’”

The fossil record does not supply evidence for macroevolution. What is more, if the fossil record were truly as portrayed by Dawkins and Coyne, there would have been no need for the “punctuated equilibria” hypothesis to have been formulated to try and explain the universal gaps.

Dawkins and Coyne keep up their courage by suggesting: “Not a single authentic fossil has ever been found in the ‘wrong’ place in the evolutionary sequence. Such an anachronistic
fossil, if one were ever unearthed, would blow evolution out of the water. As the great biologist J. B. S. Haldane growled, when asked what might disprove evolution: ‘Fossil rabbits in the pre-Cambrian present any threat to evolution. Evolutionary palaeontologists know such fossils are impossible and therefore they always classify them either as intrusive, i.e., buried at a later date by human or natural means, or they are labeled frauds. Sufficient doubt to discredit the find can always be raised.

For a recent example, consider the report by Bennett, Huddart, et al., of fossil human footprints in volcanic ash near Puebla, Mexico, dated to 40,000 years by a variety of techniques including radiocarbon analysis, which challenged evolutionary views about the timing of human entry into the Americas. No surprise that it was rapidly followed by a rebuttal from Renne, et al. re-dating the footprints by a gigantic leap to 1.3 million years and redefining them as “markings” caused by erosion. Although many anachronistic fossils have been found, evolution routinely shrugs them off.

Dawkins and Coyne assure us that “in fact, the bacterial flagellum is certainly not too complex to have evolved, nor is any other living structure that has ever been carefully studied. Biologists have located plausible series of intermediates, using ingredients to be found elsewhere in living systems.”

This is largely wishful thinking.

* Bones of Contention. 

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What is meant by “located”? Does this mean located in the fossil record, located in laboratories, or located in the imagination? When it comes to explaining the origin of the bacterial flagellum, and similarly complex, information-rich biological organelles, evolutionary ingenuity has found little to offer, as recourse to biochemistry textbooks and journals has demonstrated. Of course, a few, short “plausible series of intermediates” for these organelles may be “located” in imaginary scenarios regarded even by their originators as incomplete and highly tentative. Scientific imagination knows no limits! But the broad picture of this area of evolution is noteworthy for the scarcity of ideas and their insubstantial character.

The oft-repeated dictum “evolution is fact” has become a password ritually affirmed by orthodox Darwinians. Even distinguished academics like Dawkins and Coyne cling to this shaky prop: “The weight of the evidence has become so heavy that opposition to the fact of evolution is laughable to all who are acquainted with even a fraction of the published data. Evolution is a fact: as much a fact as plate tectonics or the heliocentric solar system.”

The trouble is, the word *evolution* has become too ambiguous in its meaning. In many contexts, *evolution* means simply change, and who would deny change in the natural world? There is indeed a large volume of evidence that microevolution happens. This is not in dispute; but neither is this the process ID scientists are addressing.

All the evidence favoring evolution is of the “finch beak” kind: small variations within a known species or closely related group of species. Fossil sequences of trilobites showing size gradations are well known, as are the
laboratory experiments developing fruit flies with divergent morphology. The problem is that this kind of evidence does little to advance knowledge of how trilobites or fruit flies came into existence in the first place. That evolution was supposed to be about the origin of species has become lost in a maze of trivia.

For about 150 years, science has striven mightily to explain the origins of everything in terms of only chance, allied with the laws of nature. Dawkins and Coyne offer nothing new, just the same unsubstantiated assertions and unfulfilled promises that have led origins science into decades of sterile wandering. Origins science seems gripped in a mesmeric addiction to games of chance. It is now time to check into design rehab. Their article shows that Dawkins and Coyne are still in full denial. The prime objective of the ID enterprise is to establish design as a basic cause, along with chance and natural law, and hence to advance understanding of how complex biological and other structures originated. There are hopeful signs that a new generation is recognizing this as a logically sound, rational, and reasonable program.

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BY JO ANN DAVIDSON *

WORLD RELIGIONS AND THE VEGETARIAN DIET

Going meatless is a cultural phenomenon that appears in many major faith traditions throughout history.

Throughout history, many faith traditions have perceived a relationship between the physical and the spiritual nature of a human being. In their discussion of this relationship, these traditions have shown some curious similarities and striking differences in the various links between diet and religion.

Hinduism
The complex system of Hinduism has proved to be very resilient. It has absorbed elements of various other religions over thousands of years and yet maintained its distinctive character. Hindus believe in many gods, reincarnation, and karma (understood as how one’s actions in previous lives morally affect the current cycle of existence).

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Regarding diet, Hinduism today differs from what is known of its oldest forms. During the Vedic pe-

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period in India (after about 2000 B.C.), Hindus ate meat and sacrificed animals extensively. Conception of an afterlife included a “heaven,” where those who had acquired enough merit through the presentation of sacrificial gifts were likely to go.

Vegetarianism emerged gradually in Hinduism. Around the seventh century B.C., some Hindu sages began to advocate a meatless diet, though they were probably a minority. A major upheaval around the sixth century B.C. in India deeply affected Hinduism. This led to the formation of the Buddhist and the Jain religions, both of which put increased emphasis on the sanctity of all life, including animal life.

In the third century B.C., the Indian King Asoka converted to Buddhism, and Buddhism became the official religion. Asoka himself gave up most, if not all, meat consumption. Eating flesh meat was almost entirely done away with at the royal court, and the killing of some kinds of animals was prohibited entirely. It is said that Asoka was converted to Buddhism after viewing the carnage that resulted from one of the great battles of the day.

Economic factors also affected meat consumption. It was becoming more and more expensive to produce meat because of the pressure that overgrazing and deforestation were placing on the land. Some of Asoka’s decrees, such as restrictions on forest-cutting, demonstrate an early sensitivity to the relationship between ecology and human life only now slowly emerging in modern Western thinking.

After about 1000 B.C., meat-eating apparently was widely restricted. The Upanishads of this period were the first Hindu scriptures to mention doctrines suggestive of reincarnation. And other selections of writings stated that one could eat meat only when the animal was sacrificed ritually.

Hindu vegetarianism received its strongest advance from the Krishna cult, from whom reverence for the sacred cow originated and persists to this day. The followers of Krishna, who began propagating their view in the first few centuries A.D., were strict vegetarians, and Hinduism came more and more under their influence.

From the third century A.D. onward, restrictions on the use of beef increased. In the fourth century, the Law of Manu again restricted meat-eating to sacrificial occasions. The life of Krishna was recorded in the Bhagwat Purana during the fifth century. Upper castes in India resisted the trend toward vegetarianism, and it seems that they continued to eat beef as late as the ninth or 10th century. After the translation of the Bhagwat Purana into Hindi (15th century A.D.), no orthodox Hindu would kill a cow or eat beef. Though the orthodox followers of Krishna’s teaching undoubtedly were vegetarian, not all Hindus practice this restriction.

Though many Hindus today and in the past have eaten meat, there is nevertheless a strong vegetarian tradition within Hinduism. Today it is generally motivated from issues connected with reincarnation.

Buddhism and Hinduism have many similarities. Both originated in India and both believe in karma and reincarnation. Buddhists reject the idea of the self or soul, however, believing it to be an illusion brought about by one’s attachment to worldly things. The Buddha taught that life is a stream of becoming, in which no permanent self endures. Individuals are composites of perception, feeling, volition, intelligence, and form, all subject to the law of karma.

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In reincarnation, an animal may have to go through eons of existences before finally accumulating enough good *karma* to be reborn as a human. However, animals can eventually achieve salvation. In fact, there are many stories of the prior existences of the Buddha, often as an animal.

Theravada Buddhist monks beg for food and are to accept what they are given. To receive some foods but to reject others signifies an attachment to the world, a trait that monks are supposed to suppress. Certain principles regarding flesh foods are also operant. No monk can kill an animal or accept meat specially slaughtered for him. Moreover, certain kinds of meat cannot be eaten even if they had died natural deaths. The Buddha also clearly enjoined monks to abstain from killing animals, so that all creatures of whatever kind could live. In most Theravada countries today, though, lay Buddhists regularly eat meat.

In the Mahayana Buddhist tradition, the monks do not beg for food at all. They prepare their own food, which they buy, grow, or collect as rent. The Mahayana monks in China were strict vegetarians in ancient times and remain so today. In China, all animal foods, onions, and alcohol were either forbidden or customarily avoided. This included the use of animal products in dress with a prohibition on the use of silk or leather (not observed in Theravada Buddhism). However, dietary abstinence from meat was an ancient Chinese tradition that apparently predated the arrival of Buddhism.

Not only are Mahayana Buddhist monks vegetarian, but so are many Buddhist lay believers in China. People other than monks take a lay Buddhist ordination of from one to five vows. Almost everyone takes the first vow, which prohibits killing any sentient creature. This is usually interpreted to mean or imply vegetarianism. However, there is disagreement on this point. Some argue that the injunction against taking the life of sentient creatures means only that one should not personally slaughter animals or eat an animal expressly killed for personal benefit.

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Even though it is meritorious to abstain from meat, not all Buddhists refrain. Yet there is a very strong tradition of vegetarianism in Buddhism, since the Buddha commanded his followers not to kill animals. The violation of slaughtering animals for food and the restless craving for flesh meats reveal modes in which humans enslave themselves to suffering. The ethical doctrine of *ahimsa*, or non-injury to living beings, shared by both Hindu and Buddhist religious traditions, derives from the conviction that violence to creatures, whose forms and identities through reincarnation are fluid, has consequences for *karma*. Motivation for the meatless diet does not seem to emerge from ecological issues or concern for the physical health of the Buddhist. Mahayana affirmation of spiritual potential in all sentient life, coupled with the Theravadin emphasis on compassion and *karma*, gave rise to the centrality of the meatless diet in Buddhist thinking.

**Jainism**

The Jain religion came into existence around the sixth century B.C., about the same time as Buddhism. Jainism shares several beliefs with Hinduism and Buddhism, including reincarnation, *karma*, and nonviolence.

According to the Jains, the entire universe is alive. One should abstain, as much as is possible, from violence toward any living creature. Everything, including rocks and stones as well as plants and animals, is in some sense alive. The idea of *ahimsa*, or nonviolence, is heavily stressed by the Jains, having far-reaching implications for them.

There are five types of beings in the Jain universe, each having one through five senses. These are grouped accordingly, ranging from the five-sensed beings (human beings, infernal beings [inhabitants of hell, or the lower regions], and some animals) down to the one-sensed beings, or nigodas (vegetable bodies, earth bodies, water bodies, fire bodies, and wind bodies), possessing only the sense of touch.

Though it is worse to cause harm to a higher being than to a lower being, the Jains carry the doctrine of *ahimsa* to its ultimate. Ideally, one should not harm any kind of being. This can be accomplished only by the Jain monks, who do as little as possible and are supported in this by the lay community. The path to salvation involves purifying the soul of its contaminations with matter. As long as the soul is enmeshed in matter, violence is inevitable, as countless nigodas would be destroyed even in the simple act of taking a walk.
Dietary restraints are thus very prominent for the Jains. Meat, alcohol, honey, or any of the five kinds of figs are forbidden. The single-sensed nigodas are especially present wherever sweetness or fermentation is involved. Thus, consuming honey or alcohol brings untold millions of these nigodas to an untimely and violent death. However, since this does not involve violence against higher beings, Jains may on occasion consume medicine with honey or wine in it, but they may never consume meat. Even meat from an animal that has died a natural death contains innumerable nigodas and must be absolutely avoided.

Jains are decidedly ascetic. Their vegetarianism arises from the necessity of purifying the soul of its attachments to and contamination from matter. The ultimate objective is denial of the body and purification of the soul, as a necessary step to win the soul’s release from matter.

Islam

Originating in the divine revelation to Muhammad in early seventh-century Arabia, the Koran speaks of a single God who is creator and sustainer of the universe. To Him belongs all that exists on earth and in heaven. Islamic theology traditionally has focused on religious questions regarding God’s nature, His relationship to His creation, human destiny, and the laws that govern community life. Issues involving the relationship of humans to other forms of life, such as animals and the natural world, are treated indirectly for the most part.

Yet God is clearly implied as ruling all of creation, not just human beings. Non-injury to life-forms and compassion for all living things are rarely explicitly mentioned. However, a sense of the generous beauty and abundance of the Earth pervades Islamic texts. All things belong to God and should be treated accordingly. Sacred places in which humans are forbidden to slay animals except in self-defense play a pre-eminent role in Muslim culture. The existence of these sacred sites where slaughter is forbidden suggests a spiritual aversion to the violence inherent in killing animals, even when its occasional necessity is recognized.

For Muslims, meat that is acceptable to eat is called chalal, the flesh of “clean” animals that have been properly slaughtered. Scavenger animals, for example, are forbidden as food. It is also taught that animal sacrifice indebts humans to those creatures whose suffering transfigures their own. That an animal could be surrogate for another implies Islam’s conception of the commonality of all creaturehood.

Judaism

Among present-day Jews, only a minority eat no meat. It is recognized, however, that the Hebrew Bible records in Genesis that the first diet of humankind was vegetarian. Even the animals did not eat meat:

“God said, ‘See, I have given you every herb that yields seed which is on the face of all the earth, and every tree whose fruit yields seed; to you it shall be for food. Also, to every beast of the earth, to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, in which there is life, I have given every green herb for food’; and it was so. Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good” (Gen. 1:29-31, NKJV).

Jewish writers have noted that immediately after giving these dietary laws, God saw that everything He had made was “very good” (Gen. 1:31, NKJV), implying inclusion of even the vegetarian diet. After the Flood, however, meat consumption was permitted: “‘Everything that lives and moves will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything. But you must not eat meat that has its lifeblood still in it’” (9:3, 4, NIV).

Some vegetarians have argued that this passage actually supports vegetarianism, since it is impossible to drain the blood entirely from the animal. Others have quoted only the phrase “You must not eat the flesh” out of context. Both the Ebionites in the first century A.D., and the Society of Bible Christians in the 19th century, argued that blood could never be entirely drained from the animal.

Parallel passages in Deuteronomy (12:23, 24, 27, 28) imply that the injunction against eating blood is fulfilled if a person pours the blood “out on the ground like water” (vs. 16, NIV). Talmudic commentators agree that Adam was not permitted to eat flesh. But after the Flood, eating meat was permitted.

Upon their settlement in Canaan, the Israelites were also permitted the use of animal food, but under careful restrictions, which
Jewish writers describe the considerable evidence in the Hebrew Bible that God’s ultimate hope is for a world in which no animals are killed, even by other animals. This portrays a world that, in respect to diet, is like the Garden of Eden. Through the prophets God promises a world where even the now-carnivorous animals will again be vegetarian.

tended to lessen the evil results. The use of swine’s flesh and other unclean animals was prohibited. Of the clean meats permitted, the eating of the fat and the blood was strictly forbidden. Only healthy animals could be used for food. No creature that had died of itself, or from which the blood had not been carefully drained, could be eaten.

Some Jewish writers argue that the original meat-free diet was the one God intended for all human-kind. Permission to eat meat was granted by God only after it became apparent that humans were going to go their own way regardless of what God told them. One Jewish author observes: “Only after man proved unfit for the high moral standard set at the beginning was meat made part of the humans’ diet.” Accordingly, while it would not be a violation of the law to eat meat, it would be morally superior to abstain.

Jewish writers also describe the considerable evidence in the Hebrew Bible that God’s ultimate hope is for a world in which no animals are killed, even by other animals. This portrays a world that, in respect to diet, is like the Garden of Eden. Through the prophets God promises a world where even the now-carnivorous animals will again be vegetarian: “They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord” (Isa. 11:9, NKJV). This prophecy is repeated in Isaiah 65:25.

Many Jewish materials also note that animals are regularly included in God’s solicitude in the Hebrew Bible:

1. In Exodus, animals, as well as humans, are included in the observance of the Sabbath (20:10; 23:12). The Sabbath commandment in the Decalogue (20:8-10) along with Exodus 23:12 and Deuteronomy 5:12-14 are used by some to reason that animals must be free to roam on the Sabbath day and enjoy the beauties of nature. The fact that animals are even mentioned in the Decalogue expresses the importance of compassion for animals in Judaism.

2. God’s covenants include animals. A striking example of this is in Hosea: “I will also make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field, the birds of the sky, and the creeping things of the ground. And I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land, and will make them lie down in safety” (2:18, NASB).

This is not the first reference to God’s covenants with animals. The much-earlier Noahic covenant made after the Flood did the same: “I establish My covenant with you and with your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you: the birds, the cattle, and every beast of the earth with you, of all that go out of the ark, every beast of the earth. Thus I establish My covenant with you: Never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood” (Gen. 9:9-11, NKJV). And when speaking to Jonah, God also included animals in His description of His mercy toward the city of Nineveh (Jonah 4:11).

3. Humans also have an obligation to relieve the suffering of animals. “A righteous man cares for the needs of his animal” (Prov. 12:10, NIV). Deuteronomy 22:4 enjoins a person to assist a fellow-countryman’s ass or ox lying in the road. In Exodus 23:5, this obligation is extended to the ass or ox of even an enemy.

4. Exodus 21:28-32 expresses the idea that animals, along with humans, are held responsible for their actions.

5. The Psalmist writes of God’s “compassion on all he has made” (145:9, NIV) and that God provides food for both humans and animals (104:24-30).

6. In Proverbs, the ant is praised for its industriousness (6:6-8). Rock-badgers, locusts, ants, and lizards are said to be “extremely wise” (30:28, NIV).

7. Human beings and animals suffer a common fate. “Man’s fate is like that of the animals; the same fate awaits them both: As one dies, so dies the other. All have the same breath; man has no advantage over the animal. Everything is meaningless. All go to the same place; all come from dust, and to dust all return” (Eccl. 3:19, 20, NIV).

Several Talmudic commentators conclude that one can infer from these and other passages that relieving the suffering of an animal is a biblical law. It is apparent that ani-
animals are entitled to consideration, even if they are to be used for farm work or to be slaughtered. Even the process of slaughter itself is carefully regulated. The procedures are dealt with in the Talmud.

Presently, Jewish vegetarians argue that the compassion for all living things mandated by a reverence for God’s creation is most obviously expressed in kashrut (kosher) dietary laws. Many commentators claim that kosher prohibition against killing all but certain kinds of animals, and even then only in a humane manner, is a codification of the divine concession to human-kind’s bloodlust. It is a systematized attempt to wean the appetite until one attains the spiritual maturity to forgo flesh foods entirely. But kashrut is not only a remnant of the original divine intention. It is also one obvious way to integrate the holy into the basic human act of eating. It has been suggested that God provided many laws and regulations related to the consumption of meat as a reprimand, and also as a reminder that animals’ lives are being destroyed—in the hope that this would eventually lead people back to vegetarianism in the messianic period.

In light of these claims, present Jewish vegetarian writers argue that a meatless diet is a logical extension of the Judaic spiritual tradition. Rabbi Kook, the first chief rabbi of the newly formed nation of Israel, even argued that returning to a non-violent diet is one of the necessary conditions for the Messiah’s coming. He maintained that if this is so, as the prophet Isaiah said (11:6, 7), then a diet that approximates the ideal of peaceful harmony among all creatures does indeed make straight the way for the Lord.

Jewish writings point out that the Old Testament often implies a meatless diet. In the Song of Songs, the divine bounty is mentioned in terms of fruits, vegetables, vines, and nuts. The Book of Deuteronomy also contains descriptions typical of the Torah’s positive depiction of the non-meat diet: “For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land—a land with streams and pools of water, with springs flowing in the valleys and hills; a land with wheat and barley, vines and fig trees, pomegranates, olive oil and honey; a land where bread will not be scarce and you will lack nothing. . . . I will send rain on your land in its season, both autumn and spring rains, so that you may gather in your grain, new wine and oil” (Deut. 8:7-9; 11:14)

The Essenes, a prominent group within Judaism during Jesus’ time, connected sacrifices and meat-eating. Josephus states that the Essenes made no animal sacrifices and adds that they lived in the same way that the Pythagoreans did among the Greeks, being vegetarian. Philo states that they did not kill animals for food. Porphyry also writes that meat was forbidden for the Essenes.

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Jewish vegetarians argue that compassion for all living things mandated by a reverence for God’s creation is most obviously expressed in kashrut (kosher) dietary laws. Many commentators claim that kosher prohibition against killing all but certain kinds of animals, and even then only in a humane manner, is a codification of the divine concession to human-kind’s bloodlust. It is a systematized attempt to wean the appetite until one attains the spiritual maturity to forgo flesh foods entirely. But kashrut is not only a remnant of the original divine intention. It is also one obvious way to integrate the holy into the basic human act of eating. It has been suggested that God provided many laws and regulations related to the consumption of meat as a reprimand, and also as a reminder that animals’ lives are being destroyed—in the hope that this would eventually lead people back to vegetarianism in the messianic period.

In light of these claims, present Jewish vegetarian writers argue that a meatless diet is a logical extension of the Judaic spiritual tradition. Rabbi Kook, the first chief rabbi of the newly formed nation of Israel, even argued that returning to a non-violent diet is one of the necessary conditions for the Messiah’s coming. He maintained that if this is so, as the prophet Isaiah said (11:6, 7), then a diet that approximates the ideal of peaceful harmony among all creatures does indeed make straight the way for the Lord.

Jewish writings point out that the Old Testament often implies a meatless diet. In the Song of Songs, the divine bounty is mentioned in terms of fruits, vegetables, vines, and nuts. The Book of Deuteronomy also contains descriptions typical of the Torah’s positive depiction of the non-meat diet: “For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land—a land with streams and pools of water, with springs flowing in the valleys and hills; a land with wheat and barley, vines and fig trees, pomegranates, olive oil and honey; a land where bread will not be scarce and you will lack nothing. . . . I will send rain on your land in its season, both autumn and spring rains, so that you may gather in your grain, new wine and oil” (Deut. 8:7-9; 11:14)

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The modern Jewish vegetarian movement arose in the 19th century with the publication of Aaron Frankel’s book Thou Shalt Not Kill, or the Torah of Vegetarianism. Rabbi M. Kosowsky, who was not a vegetarian, stated that vegetarianism was “the highest pinnacle of ethical achievement.”

Christianity

The Christian tradition is linked with and informed by the many concepts of Judaism on diet, due to the inclusion of the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament into the Christian canon. The religion of both the Old and New Testaments is not a religion of asceticism, such as in Buddhism and Hinduism, where by refusing to eat and drink one avoids being contaminated by matter and thus can draw closer to God. “The God of the Bible defines Himself as the God of life. And in fact, eating and drinking are often linked with worship. The Bible also prescribes, both explicitly and implicitly, a special diet in tune with the God of creation, the God of life.”
Some Christian writers cite Peter's vision as evidence that the Old Testament stipulations between clean and unclean meats are now superseded, yet Peter clearly understood that the meaning of the vision had nothing to do with diet, but was instructing him in cultural issues. God's response to Peter is crucial. God never asks Peter to eat the unclean animals, but to stop calling the clean animals koinos, defiled by their association with the unclean.

In the history of the Christian Church, though the meatless diet has never been demanded of its adherents, many have chosen it:

- James the Just, the brother of Jesus and first head of the church in Jerusalem after the death and ascension of Jesus, was a vegetarian. Both Hegesippus and Augustine testify that James was even raised as a vegetarian.
- Both Athanasius and his opponent Arius were strict vegetarians. In fact, many early church fathers were vegetarian, including Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Tertullian, Heronimus, Boniface, and John Chrysostom.
- Basilii the Great, in the fourth century, was a vegetarian who discussed the morality of eating meat.
- Many monasteries, both ancient and modern, have practiced vegetarianism. Boniface (672-754) wrote to Pope Zacharias that he had begun a monastery that followed the rules of strict abstinence, whose monks do not eat meat or enjoy wine or other intoxicating drinks.
- In the modern era, John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist Church, extolled the virtues of the meatless diet: "Thanks be to God: since I gave up flesh and wine, I have been delivered from all physical ills."


Issues of continuity/discontinuity with Judaism are regularly discussed in the Christian tradition. Some argue that the Jewish distinctions between clean and unclean meat are no longer binding today in the Christian era.

It is important to note that with regard to diet, however, Israel's dietary stipulations were God ordained: "The food laws are seen in the Pentateuch as a product of God's revelation and not as an invention of a priestly school or other special group of people in Israel."

The distinction between clean and unclean meats is plainly evident in the early chapters of Genesis—long before the Jewish nation was in existence. And later, when the clean/unclean principle is again highlighted in Leviticus 11, at the end of the discussion there is the keyword "holy" (kodesh).

The scope of the dietary laws is not only the human body, but the whole human personality as an inseparable entity. This is in complete accord with the fundamental conception of Judaism, which always strives at a unity of matter and mind, body, and soul.

In the New Testament, Jesus Himself calls for the same complete commitment to God of mind, soul, and strength (Mark 12:33).

Presently, some Christian writers cite Peter’s vision as evidence that the Old Testament stipulations between clean and unclean meats are now superseded, yet Peter clearly understood that the meaning of the vision had nothing to do with diet, but was instructing him in cultural issues. God’s response to Peter is crucial. God never asks Peter to eat the unclean animals, but to stop calling the clean animals koinos, defiled by their association with the unclean.

Some modern versions have mistakenly translated the word koinos as “unclean” in several New Testament passages, but it simply does not mean “unclean.” For example, in Romans 14:14, 20, Paul does not say that no foods are unclean. He says that no food is koinos, “common,” defiled by association with the unclean. Paul is rejecting the current Judaic principle of defilement by association, and not the law of clean and unclean foods. To be faithful to the apostle Peter’s understanding of his vision, it cannot be used to argue against the divine stipulations of clean/unclean meat.

Perhaps the largest and most significant group of Christian vegetarians today is found within the Seventh-day Adventist tradition. This Protestant denomination recommends vegetarianism to their members, of whom nearly one-half do not eat meat. Those who do choose to eat meat are careful to observe the clean/unclean distinction. Because
of their dietary practices, Seventh-day Adventists have frequently been the object of scientific studies involving the relationship of diet to health. Published results have consistently found that Adventists live longer and enjoy better health than the rest of the population in the United States.

Ellen White, one of the founders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, wrote expansively on the importance of the diet given by God in the Garden of Eden and discusses many issues involved in eating meat:

“Not an ounce of flesh meat should enter our stomachs. The eating of flesh is unnatural. We are to return to God’s original purpose in the creation of man.

“Is it not time that all should aim to dispense with flesh foods? How can those who are seeking to become pure, refined, and holy, that they may have the companionship of heavenly angels, continue to use as food anything that has so harmful an effect on soul and body? How can they take the life of God’s creatures that they may consume the flesh as a luxury? Let them, rather, return to the wholesome and delicious food given to man in the beginning, and themselves practice, and teach their children to practice, mercy toward the dumb creatures that God has made and has placed under our dominion.”

White was also sensitive to the grave problem of diseased animals:

“Flesh was never the best food; but its use is now doubly objectionable, since disease in animals is so rapidly increasing. . . . Could you know just the nature of the meat you eat, could you see the animals when living from which the flesh is taken when dead, you would turn with loathing from your flesh meats. The very animals whose flesh you eat, are frequently so diseased that, if left alone, they would die of themselves; but while the breath of life is in them, they are killed and brought to market. You take directly into your system . . . poison of the worst kind, and yet you realize it not.”

The treatment of animals raised for slaughter also concerned White:

“Think of the cruelty to animals that meat-eating involves, and its effect on those who inflict and those who behold it. How it destroys the tenderness with which we should regard these creatures of God!”

“Those who use flesh foods little know what they are eating. Often if they could see the animals when living and know the quality of the meat they eat, they would turn from it with loathing.”

White viewed diet holistically, discussing how the physical and the spiritual natures are affected by what is eaten. She observed that diet is eaten. She observed that diet is:

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White viewed diet holistically, discussing how the physical and the spiritual natures are affected by what is eaten. She observed that diet is linked not only to health, but also to holiness, recalling the Old Testament principle: “The intellectual, the moral, and the physical powers are depreciated by the habitual use of flesh meats. Meat eating deranges the system, beclouds the intellect, and blunts the moral sensibilities. . . . Your safest course is to let meat alone. . . . The mortality caused by meat eating is not discerned; if it were, we would hear no more arguments and excuses in favor of the indulgence of the appetite for dead flesh. We have plenty of good things to satisfy hunger without bringing corpses upon our table to compose our bill of fare.”

“The moral evils of a flesh diet are not less marked than are the physical ills. Flesh food is injurious to health, and whatever affects the body has a corresponding effect on the mind and the soul.”

White exhorts the development of healthful eating habits motivated by the desire to glorify God in our bodies and to preserve physical and spiritual health. The major world religions manifest dietary concerns, but the diet proposed in the Judeo-Christian tradition is the most holistic, involving ethical, ecological, eschatological, and spiritual issues. Vegetarianism, based on the scriptural principles found also within Judaism, markedly yields even present benefits.

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10. Ibid., p. 383.
11. Ibid., p. 388.
Ellen White’s definition of science was fundamentally different from that in common use today.

The issue of Creation and evolution has more far-reaching implications for the Seventh-day Adventist Church than the Desmond Ford issue had in the 1980s. What is at stake is much more than simply a conflict that can be easily tucked away as a clash between faith and science that otherwise has relatively little impact on the rest of what we believe.

The doctrine of Creation is so prominent in the Bible and in the writings of Ellen White—and it is so intimately connected with other fundamental beliefs—that a change in this point inevitably would affect other foundational teachings of the Bible that we as Adventists uphold. Thus, Creation recently has been termed “the Sine Qua Non of Adventism.” It is “an article of faith on which the Seventh-day Adventist Church stands or falls.”

Ellen G. White’s statements on Creation and related issues inevitably raise important questions. From its inception, the Adventist Church has maintained that Ellen White was inspired in the same manner and to the same degree as biblical prophets. Adventists, however, do not believe that her writings are “another Bible.” A recent book on the fundamental beliefs of the Adventist Church, published by the ministerial association of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, unambiguously states: “The writings of Ellen White are not a substitute for Scripture. They cannot be placed on the same level. The Holy Scriptures stand alone—the unique standard by which her and all other writings must be judged and to which they must be subject.” This is also expressed in the official Fundamental Belief No. 18, entitled “The Gift of Prophecy,” which states that the writings of Ellen G. White “also make clear that the Bible is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested.” At the same time, Fundamental Belief No. 18 affirms that “her writings are a continuing and authoritative source of truth which provide for the church comfort, guidance, instruction, and correction.” Therefore, her statements on Creation and the origin of life raise crucial questions on important topics such as the nature and scope of inspiration, the relationship between the writings of Ellen G. White and the Bible, proper hermeneutics, and the authority of inspired writings as opposed to science.

These issues and their implications are crucial not only for our understanding of Ellen G. White and her statements on Creation and evolution but also for our understanding of the biblical position of Creation and related issues.

Ellen G. White Affirms Creation

There is no need to spend much time recounting that Ellen G. White did believe in Creation and affirmed it time and again. Yet it is helpful to briefly remind ourselves of a few aspects that were affirmed by Ellen G. White with regard to Creation.

Ellen White affirmed a supernatural Creation. According to her, Creation was not the result of natural causes. Rather, in Creation, the agency of a personal God is manifest. “The earth came forth from the hand of its Maker.” For Ellen White, all things were created by God. To her, the power to create was the prerogative of God alone. Creation belongs to God, and human beings belong to God by Creation. Hence, the creation of Adam and Eve did not take place through impersonal factors in nature but through “the agency of a personal God.” Thus, humanity was the crowning act in God’s creation, not of Satan.

Ellen White affirmed a creation in six literal, historically consecutive 24-hour days. The days of Creation were not “vast, indefinite periods, covering thousands or even millions of years.” To her “each successive day of Creation . . . consisted of the evening and morning, like all other days that have followed.” The days of Creation were real 24-hour days, as we know them today. She “was shown that the first week, in which God performed the work of creation in six days and rested on the seventh day, was just like every other week.” Thus the seventh 24-
hour day of Creation week forms the basis of the institution of the Sabbath day at the beginning of the world. The Sabbath was instituted at the close of Creation week. Therefore, the Sabbath is as old as the world itself and is a memorial of Creation and a commemoration of Creation for all humankind. Ellen White wrote: “Just how God accomplished the work of creation in six literal days he has never revealed to mortals. His creative works are just as incomprehensible as his existence.”

**Ellen White affirmed a recent Creation.** In contrast to very long periods of time for the development of life on this Earth, she clearly rejected millions of years as would be “required for the evolution of the earth from chaos.”

Neither did she propose indefinite periods of time since the beginning of Creation. Instead, for her, the age of the Earth was to be measured within a short chronology of a few thousand years. She clearly connected a short chronology with the reliability of the biblical record and warned that those who try to “account for God’s creative works upon natural principles . . . are upon a boundless ocean of uncertainty.” She stated: “I have been shown that without Bible history, geology can prove nothing.” She asserted that “the time of [fossils’] existence, and how long a period these things have been in the earth, are only to be understood by Bible history.”

Thus, in contrast to very long ages as proposed by evolutionary theory and in contrast the so-called active “gap or ruin-and-restoration theory,” in which matter and life were supposedly created eons ago and multiple cataclysms and creations took place over a very long time period, Ellen White supported a recent creation of life and humans.

**Creation Ex Nihilo**

Another aspect that Ellen White connected with God’s supernatural Creation was the idea that pre-existing matter was not needed for Creation. “In the creation of the earth, God was not indebted to pre-existing matter. ‘He spake, and it was; . . . He commanded, and it stood fast.’ Psalm 33:9. All things, material or spiritual, stood up before the Lord Jehovah at His voice and were created for His own purpose. The heavens and all the host of them, the earth and all things therein, came into existence by the breath of His mouth.” She thus affirmed what the writer of the Epistle of Hebrews stated under inspiration: “‘Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.’ Heb. 11:3.” To her, “the theory that God did not create matter when He brought the world into existence is without foundation. In the formation of our world, God was not indebted to pre-existing matter.”

Ellen White affirmed the historical reliability of Scripture and understood the events described in the Bible as actual historical happenings, including God’s creation of the Earth in seven literal days, a global flood, and God’s miracles. Given the clear affirmation of a Creation *ex nihilo* in these statements, Ellen White did not support the existence of life forms on Earth before the six-day creation. She upheld a high view of Scripture, in which all Scripture is believed to be inspired by God and therefore provides a trustworthy and reliable account of His involvement in this world. This raises the question of her relationship to natural science.

**Ellen White and Science**

While Ellen White clearly affirmed a literal understanding of the biblical Creation account, she was not antagonistic toward natural science. The words *science* and *sciences* occur frequently in her writings. She used the word *science* in a variety of ways. Frequently, she used it in its root meaning of “knowledge” (from the Latin scientia): “the science of salvation,” “the science of the Bible,” “the science of Christianity,” or “the science of cooking.” When the apostle Paul visited Athens, he met “logic with logic, science [knowledge] with science, philosophy with philosophy.”

She also used the word *science* to describe physiology, which she called “the science of life,” “the science of human life,” or “the science of health.” It was especially in the area of health and medicine that Ellen White appreciated the findings of medical science, encouraging Adventists to enter these fields. She referred to the work of medical missionaries as “scientific work.”

It was the study of nature, however, that she called “natural science.” She believed that “[n]atural science is
A harmonious relationship between Scripture and science can occur, however, if science is integrated into faith in such a way that Scripture is retained as the superior and ultimate authority. Ellen White wrote in 1894: “Science, so-called, human reasoning, and poetry, cannot be passed on as of equal authority with revelation.”

Ellen White’s understanding of the relationship between Scripture and science is the confidence that they can be in harmony.

For Ellen White, nature and the Bible have the same author, and therefore one can expect harmony between them. The revealed Word of God and the natural world will be in agreement for “[a]ll truth, whether in nature or in revelation, is consistent with itself in all its manifestations.” Thus, for Ellen G. White there was indeed a friendship between faith and science—but not in the sense that God brought into being a creation that evolved according to evolutionary processes for billions of years. To her, atheistic, evolutionary theories were incompatible with biblical faith. To connect these ideas with biblical Creation would be a wrong attempt to bring natural science and Scripture into harmony.

Conflict Between Science and Scripture
Ellen White was keenly aware that such harmony is not possible when modern science is conducted independent of any explanation of God and even in opposition to God’s Word. “I have been warned,” she wrote, “that henceforth we shall have a constant contest. Science, so-called, and religion will be placed in opposition to each other, because finite men do not comprehend the power and the greatness of God.”

This science, falsely so called, is based on conceptions and theories of humans to the exclusion of the wisdom of God as revealed in His written Word. She warned that “when professedly scientific men treat upon these subjects from a merely human point of view, they will assuredly come to wrong conclusions. . . . The greatest minds, if not guided by the word of God in their research, become bewildered in their attempts to trace the relations of science and revelation.”

For her, “one of the greatest evils that attends the quest for knowledge, the investigations of science, is the disposition to exalt human reasoning above its true value and its proper sphere. Many attempt to judge of the Creator and His works by their own imperfect knowledge of science.” When natural causes are the sole explanation for what took place in Creation and the subsequent history of this Earth, “science, falsely so-called, has been exalted above God.” She opposed a naturalistic worldview of science that excludes God from scientific enterprise.

The Integration of Science Into Faith
A harmonious relationship between Scripture and science can occur, however, if science is integrated into faith in such a way that Scripture is retained as the superior and ultimate authority. Ellen White wrote in 1894: “Science, so-called, human reasoning, and poetry, cannot be passed on as of equal authority with revelation.” In her book The Ministry of Healing she wrote: “Only that which He sees fit to reveal can we comprehend of Him. Reason must acknowledge an authority superior to itself. Heart and intellect must bow to the great I AM.” Elsewhere she wrote: “Many professed ministers of the gospel do not accept the whole Bible as the inspired word. One wise man rejects one portion; another questions another part. They set up their judgment as superior to the word; and the Scripture which they do teach rests upon their own authenticity. Its divine authority is destroyed.”

In contrast to “so-called” science, Ellen G. White believed that “true science” is in harmony with Scripture. It has been correctly pointed out that “the platform from which Ellen White considered the natural sciences was the Bible. She had
absolute confidence in Scripture and believed that everything, including scientific theories, had to be measured by the Word of God. For Ellen White, “the Bible is not to be tested by men’s ideas of science, but science is to be brought to the test of the unerring standard.”

This means that she integrated natural science into faith. The integration of science into faith implies that faith—or Scripture—has priority over science.

It seems that Ellen White was well aware of the theory of evolution that was firmly entrenched in the scientific community at the beginning of the 20th century, particularly in regard to geology, which had developed the most detailed account of evolutionary thought and the need of long ages. Therefore she seemed to mention especially the science of geology in connection with the issues in Creation and evolution. “Geology has been thought to contradict the literal interpretation of the Mosaic record of the creation. Millions of years, it is claimed, were required for the evolution of the earth from chaos; and in order to accommodate the Bible to this supposed revelation of science, the days of creation are assumed to have been vast, indefinite periods, covering thousands or even millions of years. Such a conclusion is wholly uncalled for. The Bible record is in harmony with itself and with the teaching of nature.”

It should be remembered that though nature and science have God as their author, neither Scripture nor Ellen White attribute the quality of inspiration to nature or science. The Bible is God’s inspired book. Nature/science is not. Nature is God’s creation and came into existence through God’s special design. As such it reveals something about God, its Creator. But nature and science are not inspired. Furthermore, nature as it presently exists is affected by sin and therefore might render an ambiguous perspective that needs the clear and trustworthy revelation of God’s inspired Word on the origins of life on this Earth. Though Ellen G. White frequently used the phrase “the book of nature” to speak of God’s creation as revealing something about God’s love and power, she clearly differentiated and distinguished “the book of nature” from the “pages of inspiration,” thus indicating that to her the Bible was the final authority.

Implications and Prospects for the Adventist Church

On the basis of the priority and superiority of Scripture, some remarkable possibilities open up to the believing scientist and theologian. As paleontologist and biologist Leonard Brand has said: “One who accepts the Bible as a reliable record of events is not hampered by that worldview, as many would claim, but actually has an advantage. Most scientist are only familiar with one basic understanding of earth history and do not actively ask critical questions of their paradigm.” In other words, faith does not prevent the believer from thinking. It rather enables the believer to think properly—according to God’s revealed will and thus to search for creative new solutions that are in harmony with God’s Word.

Thus, rather than adapting biblical ideas to the latest outlook in science, Scripture can have a unique input on science by asking questions that could function as a source of impetus in developing new strategies of scientific research. Wolfhart Pannenberg’s remarkable words deserve to be taken seriously: “The theologian must not be too quick to adapt theological ideas and language to the latest outlook in the sciences, especially where such adaptation requires substantial readjustment of traditional doctrine. The theological vision of the world can also function as a challenge to science and as a source of inspiration in developing new strategies of research.” Such a perspective opens up new windows of opportunities for fresh investigation of origins on the basis of Scripture.

To Ellen White, being a Seventh-day Adventist meant, among other things, affirming a recent, literal Creation in six consecutive, 24-hour days. In dealing with the complex issues of Creation, we have to remember that our faith cannot be based on science as our final authority, but must be based on God’s Word—even when we have questions without answers. As Leonard Brand has aptly stated:
Can a God who uses an evolutionary process as His method of Creation really be worshiped and adored as good and loving? Does a God who causes the suffering and death of countless billions of organisms and life forms—even extinction of entire species—share the same values and the goodness with which He is constantly revealed in the Bible?

“The God of the Bible is the greatest scholar of all time, and Scripture deals in the highest levels of scholarship, not just in comforting inspirational themes. (When God arranged to have Genesis written, He knew vastly more about radiometric dating than we will ever know.)” If God “knows much more than we do about earth history, and if we know Him and trust His Word we can benefit from the insights in Scripture.”

To dismiss inspired statements made in Scripture and by Ellen G. White as irrelevant, outdated, or incompatible with a naturalistic understanding of Creation raises a number of important questions with serious consequences.

Is the Bible indeed the final norm and ultimate authority in professing Fundamental Belief No. 1? Can biblical statements about salvation be trusted if they are dependent upon historical events (like the historicity of Adam at Creation and Jesus Christ as the second Adam)?

What role do the writings of Ellen G. White play for Adventists? Can we still maintain that her writings are “a continuing and authoritative source of truth which provide for the church comfort, guidance, instruction, and correction” and also “make clear that the Bible is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested” as Fundamental Belief No. 18 states? Are there degrees of divine inspiration?

Furthermore, can a God who uses an evolutionary process as His method of Creation really be worshiped and adored as good and loving? Does a God who causes the suffering and death of countless billions of organisms and life forms—even the extinction of entire species—share the same values and the goodness with which He is constantly revealed in the Bible? Aren’t the goodness and love of God fundamental to His nature and His desire to save a world that is lost?

Does the way Christian scientists and theologians do science and theology erode or enrich our faith in God’s supernatural Creation? How can we engage in science and theology and pass on our findings in such a way that this engagement enriches our faith?

These are some questions that deserve to be taken seriously, and the answer we will give to them will have consequences far beyond the issue of Creation versus evolution. It will impact many other fundamental beliefs and ultimately impact our mission and growth.

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6 Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 44.
7 Christ’s Object Lessons, p. 362.
8 Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 264.
9 The Ministry of Healing, p. 415.
10 Education, p. 128.
11 Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 112.
13 Ibid., p. 93.
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The Koran claims that Islam is the same religion given to Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. It alleges that God reveals truth in stages, so it claims to be a “fuller explanation” of Scripture. As such it is “scripture,” a message for all the world.

The fuller explanation is about God. Inspired angels declared that God is one God. So the Koran proclaims the one God called Allah. Jesus’ ministry on earth, His death for all humanity, and His post-ascension intercessory ministry are replaced by presenting Him as only a human prophet. By contrast, Muhammad is said to be the final prophet who came to give this fuller revelation of God, allegedly fuller than Christ’s revelation. The Koran claims that Jesus predicted that Muhammad would come after Him. It says Muhammad is a “beautiful pattern [of conduct] for any one whose hope is in God and the Final Day.” His life is claimed to be a model for those desirous of obtaining the good goal of eternity—a reward rather than a redemption.

Christ is not God. The Koran says God is “too high” for any partners (like Christ and the Holy Spirit). In fact, God curses those who think Christ is the Son of God—there is

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only one God. It is blasphemy to say God had a son, and those saying it will receive “the severest penalty.” They will go to hell. In the meantime, Satan’s authority is over them.

The Koran demotes Jesus to one of the prophets. It claims He did not die on the cross; it only looked as if He did. Islam claims that Jesus was taken to God and is silent about the resurrection and fight the anti-Christ.

Prophet Muhammad, Jesus will return to Earth in the end-time to complete His prophetic ministry and fight the anti-Christ.

Yahiya Emerick, author and practicing Islamic believer, claims that “according to the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad, Jesus will speak to the Christians and Jews of the world and convert them to Islam. He will succeed in breaking the worship of the cross and stop the eating of pork. . . . Jesus will be the spiritual head of a transnational government of peace.” This will last for 40 years, during which time Jesus will marry, have children, die, and be buried in Medina next to the grave of the prophet Muhammad.

God and Muhammad. According to the Koran, judgment is a summons to God and His apostle Muhammad. “It is such as obey God and His Apostle, and fear God and do right, that will win [in the end].” The exhortation is, “establish regular prayer and give regular charity; and obey the Apostle; that ye may receive mercy.” In that Day of Judgment, God “will call to them, and say: ‘Where are My ‘partners?’ Whom you imagined [to be such]?” Yet “We shall reward them.” Note the plural “we,” which appears often. This seems to be God and Muhammad, for often God and His apostle are mentioned together, but at other times it may be a plural used of the one God, for it is used even for Old Testament times.

Salvation by works. Salvation in Islam is not a gift. It has to be earned through vigorous works. The Koran says, “Do good; for God loveth those who do good.” Charity “will remove from you some of your [stains of] evil.” Those who believe, and do deeds of righteousness, and establish regular prayers and regular charity, will have their reward with their Lord.” “He will be their Friend, because they practised [righteousness].” A person can “abound in merit.” Every person “gets every good that it earns, and it suffers every ill that it earns.” Those who believe, and suffer exile and strive with might and main, in God’s cause, with their goods and their persons, have the highest rank in the sight of God: they are the people who will achieve [salvation].

Either the Garden or hell will reward each person. One has to merit entrance into either. “One Day every soul will come up struggling for itself, and every soul will be recompensed [fully] for all its actions, and none will be unjustly dealt with.” “Those who do wish for the [things of] the Hereafter, and strive therefore with all due striving, and have Faith, they are the ones whose striving is acceptable, [to God].” Reward is in direct relation to endeavor. “Then those whose balance [of good deeds] is heavy, they will attain salvation: but those whose balance is light, will be those who have lost their souls; in Hell will they abide.”

The Koran says, “Enter ye the Garden, because of [the good] which ye did [in the world].” The focus is on reward, not redemption. Hell is mentioned repeatedly throughout the Koran and often with the most lurid details. Although the reward is a Garden with streams running beneath it, and that is often mentioned, too, the fear of an eternal hell would be stimulus enough to cause devotees to try to save themselves. The Koran says, “Save yourselves and your families from a Fire.”

Hell. The Day of Judgment is often referred to throughout the Koran. God is “strict in punishment,” for “severe is His chastisement.” God says, “I will punish them with terrible agony in this world and in the hereafter, nor will they have anyone to help.” In hell, “as often as their skins are roasted through, we shall change them for fresh skins, that they may taste the Penalty.” In the flames there will be nothing but “the heaving of sighs and sob.” There will be great thirst in hell. But all they have is “boiling fetid water.” “Indeed ye shall drink like diseased camels raging with thirst!” Focusing on one sufferer, the Koran says, “In gulps will he sip it, but never will he be near swallowing it down his throat: death will come to him from every quarter, yet will he not die: and in front of him will be a chastisement unrelenting.” That unrelenting punishment for all in hell is described as follows. “In the midst of boiling hot water will they wander round!” The inhabitants of hell are engulfed in flames. God says, “Every time it shows abatement, we shall increase for them the fierceness of the Fire.” (Note the plural we again.) “For them will be cut out a garment of Fire: over their heads will be poured out boiling water. With it will be scalded what is within their bodies, as well as [their] skins. In addition there will be maces of iron [to punish] them. Every time they wish to get away therefrom, from anguish, they will be forced back therein, and [it will be said], ‘Taste ye the penalty of burning!’” Those in hell will cry to God to get out to work deeds of righteousness. But He tells them they must suffer for their past deeds, for there is no helper for wrongdoers.
The so-called fuller understanding of Scripture in the Koran does not live up to its claim. When Christ came to reveal the Father, He said, “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9, NIV). He did so as the God-man among humans. His ministry was an outpouring of God’s love to humans, and His death was the only way they could be saved. Christ taught that God so loved the world that He sent Him to be the Savior (John 3:16). To reject this revelation of God is not a fuller revelation of God, but an attempt to hide the truth about God.

The gift of salvation is denied, for according to Islam, Christ did not die, and salvation can be gained only through a rigorous system of works. All the time devotees are focused on what they have to do for God rather than on what God has done for them. Rather than a fuller revelation of God, there is a revelation of one who is unlike God. His demands are heavy, with five times of prayer each day and other works to earn, or merit, heaven. Believers are constantly reminded of hell in the Koran. The horrors of that place and the unfairness of an eternal punishment for not doing enough good works reveal God as a tyrant.

The fact that some in hell want to come out to do good deeds may suggest that they are not merely rebels, for such would curse God. To them, God shows no compassion, only a seeming delight in increasing and prolonging the torture. The Moslem view of hell without Calvary gives such a distorted picture of God that the resulting system of human works for salvation is a counterfeit replacement for God’s gift of salvation. The Koran never says Allah is love.

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4 Qur’an 24.51–52, cf. 47.33.
5 Qur’an 24.56.
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7 Qur’an 39.7.
8 Qur’an, 2.195.
9 Qur’an 2.271.
10 Qur’an 2.277.
11 Qur’an 6.127.
12 Qur’an 11.3.
13 Qur’an 2.286.
14 Qur’an 9.20.
15 Qur’an 16.111.
16 Qur’an 17.19.
17 Qur’an 20.15.
18 Qur’an 23.102.
19 Qur’an 16.32.
21 Qur’an 2.196; 2.211; 3.11; 4.2; 5.98.
22 Qur’an 11.102.
23 Qur’an 3.56.
24 Qur’an 4.56.
25 Qur’an 11.106. 21.100.
26 Qur’an 56.53.
27 Qur’an 14.16, 17.
28 Qur’an 17.97.
29 Qur’an 22.19-22.

“Luke famously described the citizens of Athens as ‘spending their time in nothing but telling or hearing something new.’ Imagine what he would have said about the denizens of advanced consumer capitalism, for whom the pursuit of novelty has become a veritable patriotic obligation. We spend our time not so much telling or hearing, as buying and selling, a new kind of everything under the sun” (Andy Crouch, in Books and Culture).

“As with the skirt of her mantle the dark of the sunset wipes out the day, so with her sleep the night makes a man fresh for the new day’s journey. If it were not for sleep, the world would not go on. To feel the mystery of day and night, to gaze into the far receding spaces of their marvel, is more than to know all the facts of science and all the combinations of chemistry.

“A little wonder is worth tons of knowledge in truly knowing what the universe means” (George Mac-
you have been told them by someone you think trustworthy. Ninety-nine per cent of the things you believe are believed on authority” (C. S. Lewis, Mere Christianity).

“The various layers of rock that we see over Earth’s surface can sometimes be compared to the layers of a wedding cake that lie neatly one above the other. One can think of the geologic column as a slice through all the tiers of the cake. The slice gives the order and type of all the layers. Similarly, the geologic column is a representation of the order of the layers of rock we find on Earth’s surface, together with the type of each layer” (Ariel A. Roth, “Climbing Up and Down Through the Geologic Column,” in Let the Earth Speak).

“I once won an argument with a heathen friend of mine who—after I had whacked away his last scrap of defense, after I had successfully cut off every possible escape route that he could use, after I had backed him into an inescapable corner and hit him with a great inarguable truth—blew me away by simply saying, ‘I do not want to be a Christian. I don’t want your Jesus Christ.’ There was no argument left to be had or won. Faith is a matter of the will as much as it is of the intellect. I wanted to believe in Jesus. My friend wanted to believe in himself. In spite of how convincing my reason was, my reason was not compelling” (Rich Mullins, The World as I Remember It: Through the Eyes of a Ragamuffin).

“At some centuries’ distance, we see clearly that the most secular societies have in their turn given birth to monstrousities and that atheistic totalitarianism has undoubtedly surpassed all revealed religions in horror” (Bernard Cottret, Calvin: A Biography).

“Evangelistically oriented worship can interfere with a congregation’s reverential praise of God. An emphasis on evangelistic worship can lead to liturgical techniques designed to entice and convert rather than worship” (Quentin J. Schultze, High-Tech Worship).

“Imagine accident upon coincidence upon freak, heightened by mysterious phenomena of order and replication, and there you have it. That natural process should have produced complicated animals who exist in vast aggregations is conceivable. But, I submit, that they should be suited to living happily—in vast aggregations or in farming villages or as hermits on tops of mountains—is a stroke of thinking so remarkable in a supposedly nontheological context that it takes my breath away” (Marilynne Robinson, The Death of Adam).
down on the roof. Then he opened his own ruler and laid it alongside mine—carefully lining up all the increments.

Expletive.

“These rulers say the same,” he exclaimed. “Now get the *&)@#! down there and cut me that board right—or don’t bother coming back up here at all or back to work tomorrow!”

You can imagine the care I took measuring and cutting that board for a third time. My reputation as a productive worker—my job—was on the line. It was just a rough-cut pine board that no one would likely ever see again—mere fractions of an inch in play. I was just a teenager. It was just a summer job. But it was an important measurement!

Scripture’s last book reminds us of how taking proper measure of things can make the difference of eternity: “the dragon was enraged with the woman, and went off to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus” (Rev. 12:17, NASB). This is one of the most important texts in John’s Apocalypse. It appears in the apex of Revelation’s chiastic structure and theological center. It’s a verse that outlines in a nutshell the basic players and the basic issues of the final crisis of the Great Controversy. Two players: the dragon and the rest (or remnant) of the woman’s offspring.

Revelation 12 depicts the dragon’s relentless pursuit of God’s faithful people. The dragon has been making war with the people of God throughout history, but without success. So now, as the end approaches (following the 1260 years), the dragon goes away to muster all the help he can. He’s not running away from the battle; he is simply regrouping for the final conflict. In chapter 13, we read how the dragon calls up a monster from the sea and a monster from the land. They are the dragon’s allies at the end of Earth’s history.

But Revelation 12 also gives measure of the incredible resolve of those who genuinely love and follow God and Jesus Christ: They “keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus” (12:17, NASB, italics supplied), a measure echoed later in 14:12. We’re quick to use this passage to outline the qualities of God’s people and then apply it to our Adventist Church—to claim remnant status. Our evangelists use it to help listeners take measure of the end-time issues and know what church God is calling them to.

I don’t disagree, but I wonder if that’s enough? I yearn for something deeper than a quick list of attributes that we can so easily apply to ourselves and then use in leading people to Christ. What does this passage say about the real nature of God’s last-day people?

Here is a generation of God’s people who are not only used as a measure against all others (our traditional approach), but a final generation who themselves are taking moral and spiritual measure of everything around them by God’s standard of measure (covenant commands and the testimony of Jesus). But, even more important, they are a generation who allow themselves to be measured by the very divine standard they use. They keep the commandments of God and hold the testimony of Jesus Christ.

They are biblically measured—prophetically measured. Everything in their life is by the Book—Scripture as a whole, the Ten Commandments in particular, and a worldview prophetic vision that places the everlasting gospel in the urgency of an apocalyptic context (14:6-13). There is insufficient space here to trace the subtle progression in Revelation of more general terms like “the word of God and the testimony of Jesus” (1:2, 9; 3:10; 6:9) to more specific and poignant terms as “the commandments of God and the testimony of Jesus” (12:17; 14:12), but the latter’s occurrence in the book’s chiastic apex lets us know that though every generation of God’s people were confronted with the priority of Scripture and the gospel, the final generation will be confronted with Scripture’s concrete commands and the eternal gospel set in an apocalyptic context (see Rev. 12:17; 14:6-13; 19:10; 22:6-10). This generation will place their own selves against these divine standards and surrender themselves to them accordingly.

Every measurement has some standard by which there is assessment. When they “keep the commandments of God,” it means those commandments are significant enough to gauge their life by and to be used as a rule to measure the things that the dragon and contemporary culture hurls in their face. When they “hold the testimony of Jesus,” it means that they understand how prophecy places the gospel in an urgent apocalyptic context that demands personal response.

Here is a generation who have measured truths from Scripture and prophecy and have determined their validity, a generation that then turn around and measure themselves by these very truths. It is a generation that only after doing so, measuring truth and self by such truth, measure everything they hear and all others by them as well.

But don’t we already do these things?

I wonder!

We are quick to use this passage to prove our remnant status, but how about our remnant nature, our remnant essence, our remnant core as biblically measured people or a biblically measured person? How
often do we use this passage to measure our own hearts, our own inner private worlds of thought and feeling, choices and values?

We apply these measures against all others to show they are part of fallen Babylon, but how often do we measure ourselves by them? Scripture? The Commandments? The prophetic vision of things given to us by Daniel and Revelation and that have been affirmed, mirrored, made morally and spiritually practical and vivid in the writings of Ellen White? We are not to take the text and use it to measure others. We are to use the text to measure ourselves first and foremost.

The phrase “by the book” is an idiom. It means doing something strictly according to the rules or established guidelines—properly, correctly, without variance. It can mean doing something to be so measured, biblically, prophetically: faith, patience, self-surrender (Rev. 14:12). Contemporary humanity wants to be set free from the doctrinal and ethical absolutes of Scripture. Our postmodern contemporary society doesn’t value structure or concrete behavior. It would consider itself free from the moral, spiritual, doctrinal implications of this critical passage in Scripture’s last book. But like measuring and cutting that rough-cut pine board for a third time, something critical is on the line—not just a summer job—eternity. No mere fractions of an inch are at play, rather the grand moral and spiritual truths for life today and our witness to the world.

Are you so measured?
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Are you so measured?
bacteria resonates with the story in the Book of Genesis in which God confused the language of those who were building the Tower of Babel.

At that time, seemingly exasperated, He stepped in to prevent the completion of the city and tower that were being erected in direct defiance of His covenant with the survivors of the Flood to “fill the earth” (Gen. 9:1, NKJV). You don’t go about filling the Earth by mobilizing in one place and designing a strategy to protect yourself against an event that God had promised He wouldn’t repeat anyway. Yet that was the plan.

So God intervened in this effort by confusing their speech and thus “scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they ceased building the city” (Gen. 11:8, NKJV). Neat solution.

The parallels for our time are unmistakable. We’re still ignoring God’s promises and grasping at hopeless ways to save ourselves. Every false religion, every human philosophy, is nothing more than a variation on the Babel theme: to save ourselves by our own efforts.

And we are, in a sense, even today living in a cosmic Petri dish. As the beings on this Earth who have brought upon ourselves the disastrous path that human history has taken, we are being observed with rapt attention. “In this speck of a world the whole heavenly universe manifests the greatest interest, for Christ has paid an infinite price for the souls of its inhabitants.” The rest of the universe is intently watching our pathetic blue glow and wondering how it will all come to an end.

And God’s offering of this “infinite price” was nothing less than astonishing. God, the ultimate scientist, literally injected Himself into the Petri dish and became a bacterium.

C. S. Lewis has described this jarring image as the “irreverent doctrine.” That God should lower Himself to this level is beyond human imagination. Even to think about it seems almost a sacrilege. Yet this is what He did.

“What is beyond all space and time,” Lewis wrote, “what is uncreated, eternal, came into nature, into human nature, descended into His own universe, and rose again, bringing nature up with Him.”

Of all the unfathomable mysteries of the universe, the Incarnation has to be one of the greatest. First, how could something like this—permanently “clothing” divinity in the form of humanity—be accomplished? Second, why would He do it?

We know more about the “why” than we’ll probably ever know about the “how.”

Simply put, the most immediate answer to why God would do such a thing is that He loves us, and this was the only way to save us. No amount of tower building could ever accomplish that.

If it could ever be said that God was impulsive, this would have to be it. In giving up His own Son to save us, He was operating under an impulse of love. “This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us” (1 John 3:16, NIV).

But beyond the mere salvation of our species, there is also the goal of demonstrating God’s character to the watching universe. This issue is what is known to theologians and philosophers as theodicy: “A vindication of God’s goodness and justice in the face of the existence of evil.”

Ultimately, of course, God does not have to vindicate Himself to anyone anywhere. If He truly did have to prove Himself, then whoever it is He’d be proving Himself to would be superior to Him. There is no such thing as a court of public opinion before which God must defend Himself.

It’s far more a matter that when all is said and done, when Christ returns and establishes His everlasting kingdom, when sin has been blotted out finally and irrevocably, then everything will make eminently good sense to anyone who wishes to consider the meaning of it all. The only possible response will be, “Why, yes, of course!”

So in the meantime, while we await the final chapters in God’s vast metanarrative, our role as Christians is to communicate to the world His love and His promise and His hope.

“The inhabitants of the heavenly universe expect the followers of Christ to shine as lights in the world.” And as we shine, if we surrender ourselves to the power that is available through God, it will amount to far more than a mere blue glow.

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