

Letters from Readers

To the board of editors of SPECTRUM: The article on the wedding ring (Spring-Summer, 1974) implied that it is the cause of considerable controversy, that not wearing one had caused embarrassment to many people, and that it may be an obstacle to more successful evangelism. Reference is also made to certain Spirit of Prophecy statements.

I believe that principles presented in the writings of Ellen White should not be taken lightly. There are basic reasons for these counsels which we would do well to consider. I make bold to share with the readers of this magazine some conclusions that I have reached based on my study and experience.

First, is the wedding ring jewelry? And if so, should it be treated in harmony with the clear statements regarding adornment? No doubt some wedding rings should be so classified. But probably the majority are not. They are just simple gold bands.

Second, is there any reason, then, why I, as a minister, should not perform a ring ceremony? My answer has always been, "Yes, there is." Here are some of my reasons:

Marriage should be a solemn, heaven-blessed union of two lives. If such is the case, the minister correctly declares, "What God hath joined together, let no man put asunder." If it is God who joins a man and woman in holy matrimony, what right does any minister have to say, "...with this *ring* I thee wed?" Candidates preparing for baptism, when asked which commandment such a statement brings into question, invariably tell me, "Why, the first..." Conscientiously, I cannot be a part of such a ceremony.

It will be argued that the ring is only a *symbol*. I ask, is it a God-given symbol? What is its origin? Its history is ancient, pagan in origin, and later associated with the vestal virgins of questionable reputation in ancient Greece. The custom found its way into the Catholic church along with other relics of pagan practice. Here are a few of these relics listed by Cardinal New-

man: "...incense, lamps and candles... holy water... sacerdotal vestments, the tonsure, *the ring in marriage*... images at a later date... are all of pagan origin and sanctified by their adoption into the church."¹

Surely, God does not need the assistance of paganism to provide a *symbol* of this sacred union. No, the wedding ring is not jewelry. It has a past even more tarnished than this. It has come to us through the same channel as Sunday worship, which we reject as counterfeit, since it takes glory from our God as Creator. How can we consistently reject one pagan-given custom, and then accept the other?

With this background, let us examine again the Spirit of Prophecy statement regarding the wedding ring. "Some have a burden, feeling that ministers' wives should wear the marriage band. *All this is unnecessary.*" She further states that true Christian character and proper modest conduct will make ladies "secure anywhere." And adds that if this disregard of custom "occasions remarks, it is no good reason for adopting it." "I feel *deeply* over this *leavening process*" which is "conformity to custom and fashion." Then she states, "...not one penny should be spent" for this circlet of gold. Her clear instruction to our missionaries is, "...the wearing of a wedding ring will not increase their influence one jot or tittle."²

From personal experience I know this to be true. We have lived in many places for many years where the wedding ring is "custom." Today, not even hotel managers bother to look, for they have found that a ring may be worn by anyone, married or not, and many times is.

I have not found the wedding ring to be a big hurdle to soul winning, nor do I present this subject to new candidates with "dread" as was implied in the recent article. Nor have I seen any evidence that in lands where it is customary to wear a wedding ring and where it is not discussed with candidates for baptism, that the winning of souls is made easier. The reaction of new members joining us and finding that the truths they have accepted are not always prac-

ticed by the members—this is a major hurdle to successful soul winning.

Inspiration expresses concern and calls this practice “a leavening process” and “conformity to the world’s customs and fashions,” —something that is not needed. God is consistent. He does not need any pagan practices to symbolize anything. His truth is based on unchanging principles, in a changing world. I know of no case where this custom ever held a marriage together. Do you?

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1. *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, pp. 359, 360. (Italics mine)

2. Ellen White, *Testimonies to Ministers*, pp. 160, 161. (Italics mine)

To the board of editors of SPECTRUM: The articles in the two double issues of SPECTRUM (volume 6) are sincerely appreciated for their forthright account of serious problems with fundamentalist theology that should have been resolved long ago. I applaud and thank the many writers for putting their views on the line so clearly. I am with them all of the way.

I am firmly convinced that the Church must reexamine her established doctrines relating to all of the sciences that are now being disputed, and update them as necessary if the Church is to grow as it should in an intellectual culture.

Untenable doctrinal positions foster varying degrees of spiritual confusion in the thinking of many individuals; lessen their confidence in the leadership of the Church; and inevitably weaken their faith. This is because outdated positions not only in themselves produce stumbling blocks on the pathway toward a strong faith, but tragically, they often cast doubt on related and properly stated positions.

Arthur J. Peterson
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To the board of editors of SPECTRUM: Although Richard and Stephen Ritland would probably like everyone to believe that their article “The fossil forests of the Yellowstone region” (SPECTRUM, Vol. 6, Nos. 1 and 2) is

the final answer, anyone informed at all on this controversial issue should realize that it is only the introductory first chapter. The Ritlands appear to be trying to tell us that the interpretation of trees in position of growth has been so completely verified as to immediately mark any dissenter an ignoramus. This amounts to smooth politics but poor science. After six years of research on Yellowstone’s fossil forests, I can state categorically that the picture is not as clear as they have tried to paint. Alternate interpretations are not only possible, but almost seem to be demanded due to the accumulating weight of evidence. The Ritlands have done us all a great service, however, by so clearly stating the problem. I am encouraged by this move because as someone has said, “A problem well stated is already half solved.”

SPECTRUM is a journal established (in part) “to look without prejudice at all sides of a subject” with an effort to “ensure accurate scholarship.” In regard to the Yellowstone fossil forests, it has not yet met these objectives.

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To the board of editors of SPECTRUM: “The Fossil Forests of the Yellowstone Region,” by Richard M. Ritland and Stephen L. Ritland, will be evaluated by many in the scientific community of our church as the most significant article yet to appear in SPECTRUM. The straightforward nature of the evidence and its well-documented, lucid presentation cannot fail to impress the thoughtful reader, even one lacking formal scientific training. The presence of more than forty levels of fossil stumps in their original position of growth, bearing unmistakable evidence of sequential cycles of reforestation and destruction by volcanic action, point directly toward an obvious conclusion: Forms of life have been present on our planet far longer than 6000 years. This conclusion is further substantiated by the presence of thousands of feet of fossil-bearing strata beneath the fossil forests. It is also strongly supported by numerous other converging lines of evidence so abundant, so diverse and so reliable that our church must no longer ignore, evade, or discredit them.

As the authors eloquently admonish, we must

carefully distinguish between scientific speculation and scientific fact. The quality of the evidence in support of a long chronology of life approaches that which demonstrates the Copernican model of the solar system. Indeed, Galileo, in his contest with the Inquisition, had less certain data. Seventh-day Adventist scientists of our Geoscience Research Institute, men of integrity and ability, have carefully explored numerous leads in an attempt to interpret the evidence in support of our traditional understanding of Genesis. Although they have presented valuable data bearing on such subjects as the highly improbable nature of the spontaneous generation of life, or some inconsistencies in classical geological time scales, they have not uncovered a shred of evidence to support a short chronology. Rather, they have been obliged in all honesty to present strong evidence, including that from the fossil forests, for a long one. The rafting theory, an attempt to compress the fossil forest data into a short time span, is shown to be untenable.

This evidence for a long chronology perplexes many Seventh-day Adventists because of its seeming threat to a number of truths we cherish—the doctrine of God as Creator, the dignity of the origin of man, the foundation of the Sabbath, and the inspiration of the Bible and of Ellen White. Those of us with scientific training may feel this conflict even more keenly than others; we cannot with integrity dismiss either the evidence or the inspired record.

It is, of course, self-evident that truth cannot contradict itself. The contradiction is apparent only because of the incompleteness of our

understanding. Such apparent contradictions are common during a learning process and provide a healthy stimulus to it. For example, physicists at the turn of the century were in considerable disagreement over the results of photoelectric effect experiments which seemed to contradict the well-established wave theory of light. The conflict resulted in intense and careful investigation leading to the conclusion that light does indeed exhibit both a particle and a wave nature. The history of science is replete with such controversies and resulting growth spurts of knowledge. One of the truly unique contributions of our church to theology, the doctrine of the sanctuary, was born after the anguish and travail of 1844. Our present dilemma concerning creationism can also lead to a growth experience. We must examine not only the scientific evidence but also our understanding of the Bible to discover whether we have misread Genesis as our spiritual forefathers misread Daniel.

I believe we have virtually exhausted the possibilities of fitting the scientific evidence into our traditional chronology and must accept the “responsibility of facing the issues and the hard decisions that the times demand of conservative Christians.” In our review of Genesis, for example, we must avoid overliteralization. We must remember that excessively literal interpretations of such texts as Ps. 93:1 or Eccl. 1:4, 5 contributed to the opposition by the established church in Galileo’s day to his view of the Copernican model of the solar system.

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