

SEPTUIM

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The
Apocalypse

Post-
modernism
&
Religious
Faith

Growing
Up
Adventist

Creation
Part II

¹⁸I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If any adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. ¹⁹And if anyone takes words away from the words of the prophecy of this book, God will take away his share in the city and in the things described in this book. ²⁰He who testifies to these things¹⁷ says, "Yes, I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. ²¹The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all of you. Amen. ✕

SPECTRUM

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SPECTRUM is a journal established to encourage Seventh-day Adventist participation in the discussion of contemporary issues from a Christian viewpoint, to look without prejudice at all sides of a subject, to evaluate the merits of diverse views, and to foster Christian intellectual and cultural growth. Although effort is made to ensure accurate scholarship and discriminating judgment, the statements of fact are the responsibility of contributors, and the views individual authors express are not necessarily those of the editorial staff as a whole or as individuals.

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Editorial Correspondence

Direct all correspondence and letters to the editor to:

SPECTRUM

P.O. Box 619047

Roseville, CA 95661-9047

TEL: (916) 774-1080

FAX: (916) 791-4938

BonnieDwyer@compuserve.com

(Letters to the editor may be edited for publication.)

About the Cover:

The digital collage, created in Adobe Photoshop, uses more than twenty layers of colors, photographs, drawings, and patterns. The final effect is a fragmented interpretation of Christianity, revealing the basic elements of our belief that have become muddled in the chaos of postmodernism.

About the Artist:

Milbert Mariano recently completed his studies for a masters of fine art at the Academy of Art in San Francisco. He currently works for Pacific Union College as an assistant professor of art and is a graphic designer for the college's public relations department.

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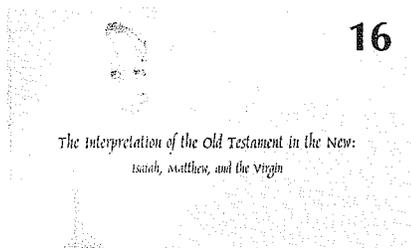
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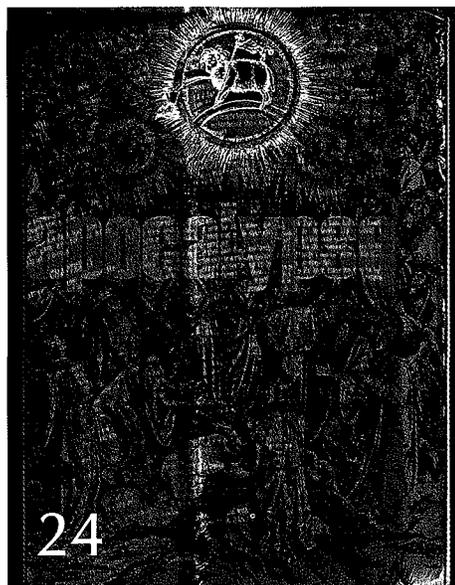
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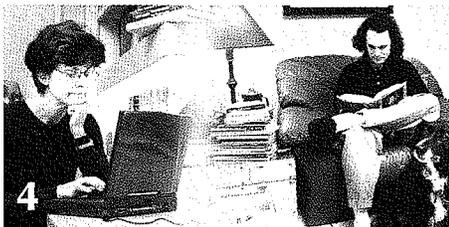
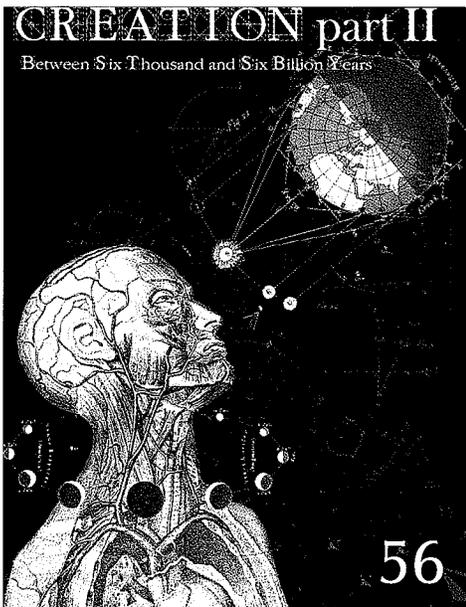
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Influences

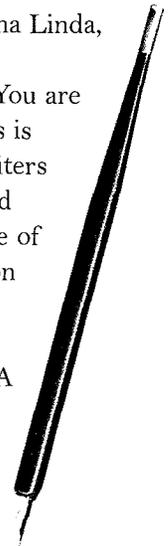
Have you ever analyzed your life the way historians evaluate civilizations and determined the watershed influences in your thinking?

The question came to mind when HarperSanFrancisco published its list of the 100 most spiritual books in the past century. Its nominations ranged from Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *The Cost of Discipleship* to Robert Pirsig's *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*. Literary quality as well as spiritual insight were qualifying factors. Some of my favorite writers were there—C. S. Lewis, Abraham Joshua Heschel, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Dag Hammarskjold, and Paul Tillich—but many were not. As I tried to isolate whom I would put on such a list I was confounded. To connect a specific book to specific action and thereby qualify it as spiritually significant was difficult. Perhaps it was not one voice, but the chorus that was influential? Or was it just reading in general? Discussing the list with friends led from books to people. Maybe it was people that had been most influential in my spiritual life. Spoken words rather than written ones. Although some of the Adventists that came to my mind had written books, it was hearing them that had made an impact: William Loveless, Jack Provonsha, James Londis, Richard Rice. To me they were/are voices of reason. Places were significant, too. One could not live and go to school in Takoma Park or Loma Linda, as I did, and not have been influenced by the surrounding Adventist culture.

Perhaps the significance of this exercise is in its enticing, defining quality. You are what you read. Taking culture in one's hand, so to speak, and analyzing its effects is helpful in knowing just who one is. In this issue we have gathered a group of writers to help you do just that. In true Adventist style—balancing physical, spiritual and mental aspects—we analyze adventure experiences, biblical texts, and the culture of postmodernism, noting shifts in Adventist thinking about apocalypse and creation along the way.

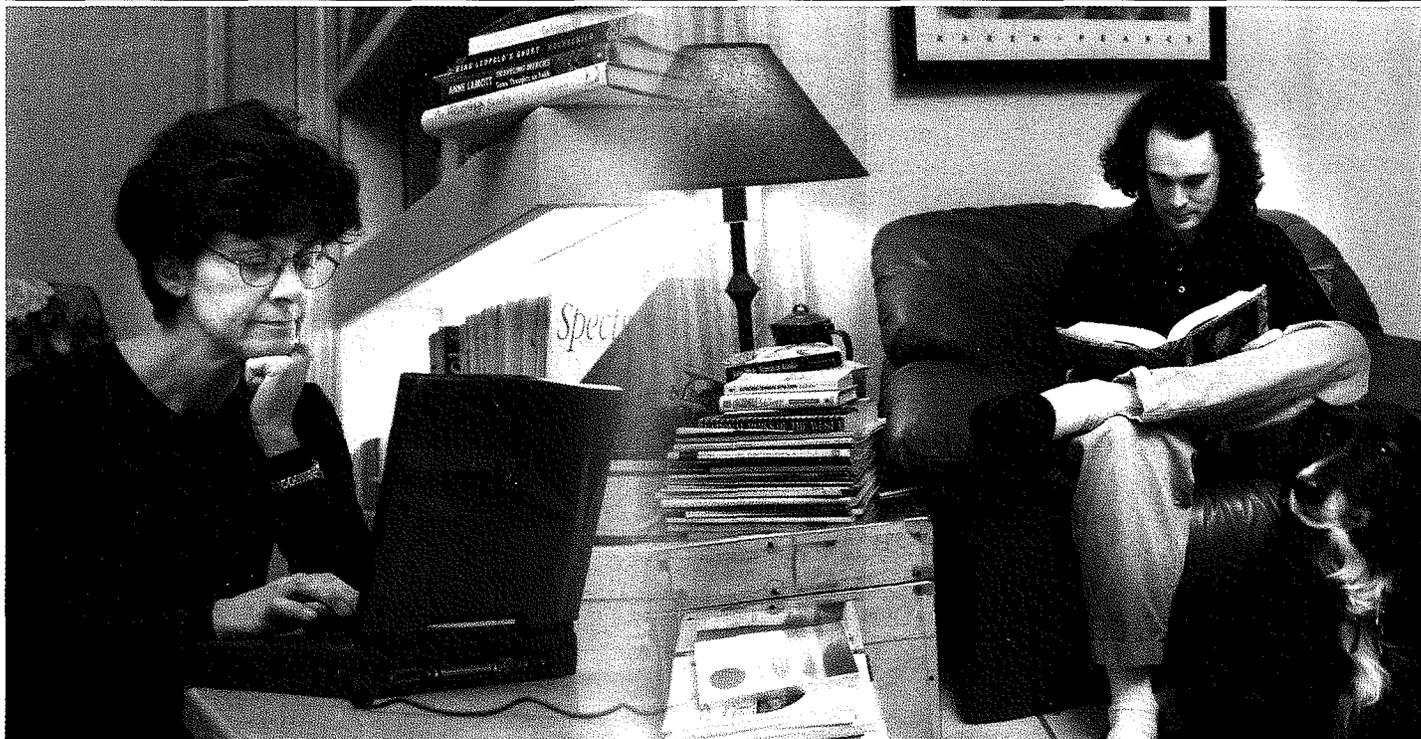
Now we are curious about what you would put on your list of the most spiritually significant books. Write or e-mail us at P. O. Box 619047, Roseville, CA 95661 or BonnieDwyer@Compuserve.com.

Bonnie Dwyer
Editor



Secular & Theory Religious Faith

How to Think Christian in a Postmodern Society



Photos by Thomas Osborn

By Daniel Reynaud

Introduction: The Need for an Adventist Understanding

Scientific advances in astronomy during and after the Renaissance led to radical changes in the way people understood the universe and the place of our world in it. The shift involved more than going from a flat-earth model to one that placed a globe on the edges of the universe. It also signified a major theological shift, one that was contested at the time by entrenched power groups within the Church as being fundamentally opposed to Scripture. Such opposition was not warranted, and it soon became evident that these secular theories did not contradict faith. Quite the opposite: they enhanced our understanding of the nature of the conflict in the universe. The change demonstrated that Christianity could be positively affected by advances in secular learning.

A similar situation exists today with postmodernism's impact on Christian faith. While postmodernism is

fading as a cutting-edge academic ideology, its impact on our society and culture will long remain. In particular, its tolerant relativism has permeated the media and become part of our value system, fostering for example the development of multiculturalism and the religious toleration that is a feature of Western society. While young Adventists who have grown up in a postmodern society are comfortable with a postmodern faith, older generations of Seventh-day Adventists find aspects of postmodernism quite threatening.

These issues were highlighted for me when I began postgraduate studies in media at a secular university, at the same time I began to investigate the practical implications of contemporary literary theory for teaching English. It became clear to me very quickly that aspects of postmodernism were undeniably true, but they conflicted with aspects of my Adventist upbringing. This posed a radical and threatening challenge: how much of my faith was valid? Shortly after, I met one of my former students, a brilliant scholar whose faith was in tatters after several years studying linguistics and modern literary theory at the university. Her schizophrenic talk about contemporary theory and faith juxtaposed incompatible dogmas of Adventist faith alongside the freethinking attitudes of postmodernism. She was a very confused and cynical young lady, trapped between simple faith in her heart and sophisticated doubt in her head. Seeing her dilemma, and facing one of my own, I began to research a practical answer to the problems I faced.

It is an issue that has attracted much attention of late in Christian circles, with a variety of responses. Some liberal theologians have adopted postmodernism almost entirely, creating a radically altered faith that treats the Bible as merely a culture-biased text from which modern thinkers can create their own paradigms of belief.¹ I find this unacceptable, replacing a God-centered and revealed faith with one of human invention, and all too often human convenience. Other Christian responses are characterized by a defensive and fearful tone that is too ready to criticize the new without giving enough consideration as to whether recent secular ideas have anything to reveal. But it is not secularism or other religions per se that we should fear, for virtually no philosophy without a grain of truth has gained currency. And, as Christians have long recognized, all truth is God's truth, even when it comes wrapped in secular philosophies complete with human mistakes. It would be reckless and unwise of us to discard postmodernism entirely without giving it a fair hearing, lest we discard some gems with the dross.

Whereas some Christian books dealing with these issues have very useful points of view, they are often still overly afraid of postmodernism, defensive about issues that they need not be, and frequently fail to acknowledge ways in which postmodernism can provide useful insights for the Christian. One example is *The Death of Truth*, in which writer after writer mixes valid criticism with unnecessary attacks on postmodernist ideas that have a certain truth of their own. The chapter titled "Evangelical Imperatives" is perhaps the most balanced.²

Yet the impact of contemporary theories need not be negative. Indeed, they are often valuable to the Christian, enhancing faith and giving a better understanding of God and his revelation. Christianity has been most effective when it uses compatible contemporary belief as an entry point for its unique claims. A number of Christian commentators have found in postmodernism aspects that have made the gospel more relevant and practical than ever. Valuable discussions are included in such books as *Christian Apologetics and the Postmodern World*, with some excellent material showing how postmodernism can revitalize and energize evangelism,³ and in *Truth is Stranger Than It Used to Be*, with a fruitful exposition on how postmodernism can enrich our understanding of the Bible and uplift Jesus.⁴ Literary theory need not pose a threat to Christianity. As more than one critic has noted, literature and literary theory are closely connected with religion, because all are concerned with insight into the human condition and issues of textual interpretation.⁵ We would do well to note ways in which literary criticism can enhance our understanding of the Bible.

The purpose of this paper is to outline a Seventh-day Adventist worldview in the light of literary theories and the work of other Christian scholars, with particular reference to the interpretation of the Bible. A glance at the development of literary theory will give a context in which to understand traditional Christian thought and the challenges of literary theory.

Traditional Literary Criticism

It is possible to argue that literary theory has gone through three broad phases of development, each with its particular characteristics and implications.⁶ The oldest school of literary thought is the traditional author-centered approach. It argues that because the author generated the meaning of the text, the meaning resides in the author. Its approach is to study the

author's life for clues about the meaning of the text. The author wrote down (universal) truth and the reader's task is to discover the truth.⁷

By adapting the language of Roland Barthes⁸ we can construe the determinant of meaning as a god-like figure, the authority on meaning and truth for, after all, whoever determines meaning acts as God for that particular event or text. There is also, in the very real sense of the word, a displacement by recent theories of the centrality of God in defining meaning. The use of the term "God" in this context may be disturbing, but it is meant to be, for the various literary theories have profound implications for our understanding of God, inspiration, and the Bible. The traditional school of literary interpretation could be summarized like this:

Author is God

This school of thought has a long Christian tradition, felt to this day in Adventist circles. It is the basis of fundamentalist views of the Bible, and usually accompanies a belief in verbal inspiration. Many have felt most comfortable with it, conforming best with the idea that God is the author of the Bible. Under this theory, the Christian's task is simply to read what the Bible says, and then to accept that as God's word, true, universal, and unchangeable. The attraction of such a position lies in its simplicity, in assuming that the Bible is transparent. It also reflects the anti-intellectualism common to the English nonconformist tradition (to which Adventism in part belongs) in its insistence on the ability of the common person to understand the Bible without special training.

The strength of this position is in recognizing the divine inspiration of the Bible, and in affirming the right of the individual to read and interpret it. For the most part, this holds true. Many parts of the Bible are transparent in their meaning and can be understood by the ordinary reader. But a major problem is that the Bible can be, and is, interpreted differently by various groups, with each claiming it is right, that it has *the* Truth. Each group naturally says it is merely passing on God's view. However, even the most literal interpreter has some parts of the Bible that he or she does not interpret literally. Whether it is the abandonment of the Levitical code, or a reconciliation of the many surface contradictions in the Bible, or an attempt to annul the Pauline restrictions on women in church, it must be done. Fundamentalists of course provide some justification for reinterpreting these passages, but the fact remains that they feel obliged to explain away the

apparently transparent meaning. In doing so they transgress their own code for understanding the Word of God.

This dilemma has always dogged traditional Christian Biblical interpretation. It stems, of course, from a mistaken belief in verbal inspiration, a view that many Adventists hold despite the church's early declaration affirming inspiration of thoughts rather than words. That Ellen G. White and her son W. C. White further denied verbal inspiration of either her writings or of the Bible seems to have escaped many Adventists.⁹ The dilemma is further compounded by a failure to recognize the part played by the human authors of the Bible, who phrased the inspired ideas they received from God within the language and cultural context of their day, a fact more easily understood through textual approaches to the Bible.

Textual Approaches

The second school of literary criticism said that meaning was best understood not in the life of the author, but in the text itself and its context. Subdivided into Formalists, Structuralists, Semioticians, and Marxists, some textual critics even argued that regardless of who the individual author was, meaning was generated by larger and deeper structures that underpinned human existence. They studied the characteristic qualities of tales and the social conditions that produced them, noting that regardless of author, stories shared common underlying structural features.¹⁰

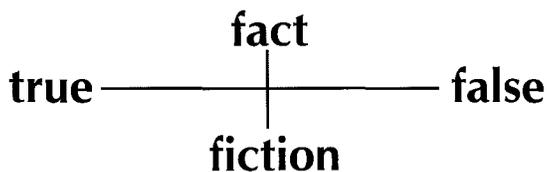
This school could be summarized like this:

Text is God

The textual school of thought has helped reveal the human dimension in the creation of the Bible, unraveling various sources from which the existing text of, for example, the Pentateuch was compiled, and identifying the literary genres within which biblical writers worked. This school's findings are widely accepted in Christian academic circles. Valuable as it is though, it poses some problems for traditional Christian thought. In finding diverse sources for books, or in suggesting that others are more mythic than historical, it tends to undermine faith in the divine inspiration of the Bible. If indeed the Bible or parts of it have been compiled and edited from myths¹¹ and oral traditions, not all of them Hebrew in origin, then how can Christians claim it is the Word of God?

The work of scholars such as Walter J. Ong and Jack Goody¹² on the differences between oral and chirographic, or written, cultures sheds some light on this dilemma. Their key findings include the tendency for oral cultures to define meaning contextually through narrative or proverb (as opposed to the abstract definitions of written cultures), to possess an integrated worldview fusing the spiritual and material worlds (where scientific written cultures separate the spheres), and to define the universe mythically (rather than historically and scientifically). In particular, Ong and Goody argue that historical thinking as we understand it is only possible in a written culture, which allows facts to be collected, scrutinized, and queried. They see oral cultures as ones of faith in which beliefs are not questioned, whereas chirographic cultures are marked by scepticism, requiring things to be proved before they are believed. Other scholarship confirms the findings of Ong and Goody, noting that the notion of realism was hazy in the English language until very recently and that the distinction between news and fiction is less than three hundred years old. In fact, the differentiation of the two began with the development of regular newspapers, themselves made possible by the printing press.¹³

A written culture has the potential to categorize information two ways. On one spectrum we can oppose truth and falsehood, and on another distinguish between fact and fiction.



We can identify things that are facts and true, for example the law of gravity. On the other hand we might label Superman a fiction, which is false. Literature provides many examples of fictions that are true, stories that have never literally occurred yet represent truth. One might point to the psychological insights of the works of Tolstoy or Jane Austen as examples. It is also possible to identify facts that are false, things whose existence is a fact, but that represent a moral falsehood. The popularity of racist ideas or of the continuing popular fascination with the dark side of Nazism as exhibited in best-selling books on the SS provides contemporary examples. While the terms “fact,” “truth,” “fiction,” and “false” are not completely separated in written cultures, we can still make these distinctions—ones that have already been made by some Adventist scholars in order to help make sense of other literary

questions, especially over Ellen G. White’s attitude toward fiction.¹⁴

There are some who argue convincingly that the introduction of a fact-fiction axis has been harmful to Christianity. Some Christian scholars have attacked the Western tradition of objectivism, claiming that the obsession with factuality often prevents our engagement with truth on a personal level, and calling for a reintegration of knowledge with faith and obedience. These scholars insist that knowledge of facts without practice is in fact ignorance, for knowledge can never really be separated from truth. Facts do not exist outside of relationship, and true relationship is found in Jesus. Significantly, he claimed to be the Truth, rather than merely having it. If this is so, then facts and knowledge can never be separated from relationship.¹⁵ In effect, these scholars are critical of operating on the fact-fiction axis, calling on Christians to return to the true-false axis alone—a view that, incidentally and ironically, receives much support from postmodernism, which itself is critical of the false objectivity of the Western academic tradition.

It is interesting that oral cultures are not usually concerned about facts as externally verifiable, objective data. The notion of factuality as distinct from truth is hazy, and there is a strong tendency to overlook historicity in favor of myth.¹⁶ In effect, the thinking of these cultures is best characterized by only one axis: the true-false axis. Therefore all true fictions are treated in precisely the same manner as true facts—they are usually indistinguishable; similarly, false facts are treated in the same manner as false fictions. Anything that reveals truth is treated as truthful, whether historical or not. To a written culture this presents a potential problem. We may insist on the historicity of stories originally valued for their truthfulness, imposing on them a dimension not under consideration at the time. But if the stories can be demonstrated to be unfactual, faith in the truthfulness of the collection tends to be seriously damaged.

The Bible, while composed by members of a literate nation and displaying some of the qualities of chirographic thought processes, also bears many of the hallmarks of oral thinking, for the written word was still in very limited circulation at the Bible’s creation. In particular, the literature of the Old Testament is colored by the concrete nature of the limited Hebrew vocabulary. Consequently, the Old Testament’s dominant literary forms are narrative, proverb, and poetry characteristic of oral literary forms, and the relatively small sections of abstract reasoning and logic tend to be

couched in poetic imagery and narrative forms. The Old Testament is also marked by an integrated worldview in which the gods interact with the human world and cause all natural phenomena. This does not detract from its literary depth or brilliance, for an oral-based literature is in no way inferior to chirographic literature, but it can leave the Bible open to misinterpretation by modern minds, who may decode it according to chirographic rather than oral codes. Recent challenges to the factuality of elements of the Biblical account have disturbed many Christians. Of course, like too many Christians of the Renaissance era, we could rant and rail against heresy in science and scholarship, but we risk embarrassment, not to mention the damage done to God's name, if time shows the challenges to be right.

Alternately, if we keep in mind that the Bible writers were interested in truth, not factuality, then there need be no question over its truthfulness, and the issue ceases to be a problem. Furthermore, neither Ellen G. White nor her son saw the Bible as an absolute authority on history, the Scriptures described in W. C. White's words as having "disagreements and discrepancies." But none of this detracted from the Bible's ability to reveal the way of salvation.¹⁷ Should science or archaeology demonstrate that our belief in the factuality of elements of Bible stories is misplaced, we have lost nothing, and gained a clearer understanding of God's truth. Such has been the case often in the past, when theologians have resisted scientific insight as contradicting the Word, only later to find that there was in fact only a failure on their part to understand the Bible rightly.

When we consider literary genre, the problem recedes even further. A recognition of the imaginative elements in some stories and parables and of the hyperbole characteristic of both Bible prose and poetry helps us understand the theme even more clearly without needing to take every element literally, and without damaging our faith in its inspiration. It is critically important that we decode literature according to the codes by which it was created, if we wish to understand what it meant to the original readers, and for this reason we should be wary of moving outside of the true-false axis when engaging in Biblical criticism. For example, the factuality of the story of Jonah has been questioned by scholarship, which points out details in the story incompatible with all our knowledge of the ancient world.¹⁸ But, among other things, the book is a satire, a powerful attack on racial and religious prejudice, in which all the heathen display more godliness than the supposedly Godly prophet. Even animals such as great fish, cattle, and worms are

more obedient than Jonah! This is a truth that remains true, applicable to good church-going people of all ages, whether one feels the story is factual or fictional. It need not lead to a loss of faith in the Bible.

Postmodernism

The most recent school of thought, growing out of developments in textual criticism that were labeled "modernism," has questioned the authority of authors and texts in determining meaning. Postmodernist theories such as deconstructionism and reader-response have helped us recognize that language is polysemic and unstable—that signifiers do not have either fixed or single meanings. In revealing the multiple signification of texts, they identify the reader as the place where meaning is generated. Without a reader, argues the postmodernist, there is no text. Each reader produces her own construct of meaning, which is not inherent in a text. Each reader produces a meaning differing in some way from every other reader; furthermore, each reader produces a different reading during each successive reading of a text. Here there is no universal truth. Each reader constructs her own truth, according to her set of experiences and the parameters of the text.¹⁹ Postmodernists reject meta-narrative—stories that claim to explain the world—for in their eyes meta-narrative makes certain constructed meanings appear natural, suggesting a universal ethic, which inevitably condemns those who do not belong to it. The Bible, for example, as a meta-narrative favors Jews and Christians and proclaims the damnation of nonbelievers, an attitude that history has sadly revealed to be common among those supposedly God's people.

By denying the existence of universal truth originating either from God or from common human experience, postmodernism deconstructs the very foundations of Christianity, removing the authority of the Bible as the revealed Word of God and reducing it merely to a series of constructs made by individual readers. All external authority is denied, the concept of universal truth is exposed as merely social convention, and all significance is reduced to the level of the individual.

This school could be summarized like this:

Reader is God

This view presents the greatest contemporary challenge to the Christian. Ignoring for a moment the self-deconstructing nature of postmodernist theories

(postmodernists absolutely and universally deny the absolute and universal), we must concede that they reveal a truth about language and texts. It is true that people read texts differently and construct meanings that vary from individual to individual, or within an individual when revisiting a text. This is because language is open to variable interpretation, words shift in meaning over time, and because people bring different experiences to texts. As we have noted, this is especially evident in the history of Christianity, in which the bewildering diversity of Christian denominations, each insisting that it is right, provides further evidence for the postmodernist assertions that texts do not have single, fixed meanings.

Postmodernists leave the Church in a dilemma, for they deny the tenets of the Christian faith. The consequences are that doctrine ceases to exist, faith is individualized, and the evangelical character of Adventism must be dropped. The imperative to evangelize comes from the belief that Jesus is the only way to salvation, but postmodernism denies the exclusive universality of truth.

There is an alternative to the either-or conflict between traditional Christian belief and postmodernist thought. The postmodernist challenges to divine inspiration need not make them a threat to faith. A Christian context can turn them into an invaluable resource. Their relativist ideas are undeniably true when applied to humanity, providing an excellent explanation of the human world. It is true that we are relative beings, imperfect, incapable of grasping the universal, always understanding and expressing it in incomplete, imperfect terms.

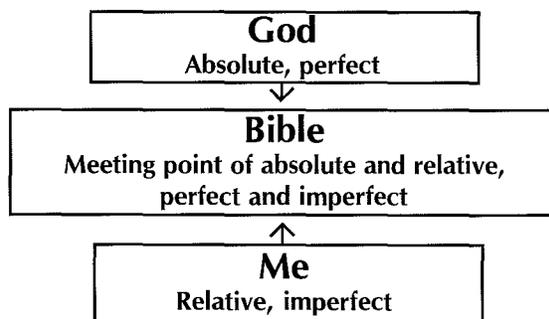
The failings of the theories are in trying to make themselves universal—a tension that we have already noted. We must recognize their limitations—rather than offering a universal model for approaching texts, they provide only a partial explanation of the process of generating meaning. Meanings and texts are not as slippery as postmodernists sometimes seem to indicate.²⁰ While language is polysemic, its conventions are stable enough to allow humans often to achieve significant consensus on meaning. Cultural and literary contexts contribute a pool of common codes that constrain the meanings of texts. Genres help readers determine the nature of meaning: some, like poetry or apocalyptic, invite multiple significations; others, like scientific papers, strive to eliminate alternative interpretations. Authors are involved in shaping meaning by their choice of genre and their skill in manipulating language.

A Christian Model

Postmodernism accurately describes the temporal, relative human state—a condition that Christianity agrees with. But Christianity goes further, saying that there is an absolute, an omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent God who, by his very nature, is beyond our finite comprehension. It is natural therefore, that postmodernist thinking is often unable to perceive him. Its error is in declaring that therefore there is no infinite truth. Recognizing our limited state, God did what we were incapable of doing: he revealed himself to us through the Bible, as the author-centered approach affirms. In order to explain himself to limited and relative creatures, he adopted their terms and frames of reference. Christians have long understood that God is anthropomorphized in the Bible. He creates pictures of himself—necessarily limited—which are accessible to relative beings. The Bible itself makes this clear. Ezekiel (1:26-28), Daniel (10:5-6), and Revelation (1:13-16) all describe God in metaphoric terms, for literal human language is inadequate. 1 Corinthians 13:13 reminds us that we see God indistinctly, but later will see him clearly; that now we know in part, but later will fully know, even as we are fully known. The Bible is therefore not a *complete* picture of God, but it is a *sufficient* one. It reveals enough about him for us to know and trust him, to develop a saving relationship with him.

The point is made even more clearly in the incarnation of Christ. God recognized that the Old Testament was an incomplete revelation of his character, hence the fuller revelation of God in the person of Jesus (Heb. 1:1-3). Even then, he adopted the guise of humanity, shrouding divinity in a form that was accessible to us. The consequence was that many refused or were unable to recognize who he was (John 7:40-44, 14:8). In a similar manner, though less perfect than Jesus, the Bible is divine insight wrapped in limited human thought and language.

The model of this world view would look like this:



This model helps us see that while God is absolute, our grasp of him is always limited. This means that we have some things right and some things wrong. We also have large areas of ignorance, and even what we know is only partial. Recognizing the absoluteness of God and our relative understanding of his will can save Adventism from two errors that have dogged the Christian Church throughout its history.

First, this recognition is a powerful preventative against dogmatism, pride, and a persecuting attitude toward those who differ from us. The sad legacy of Christian intolerance and persecution of infidels and other Christians has too often been based on an author-centered approach to the Bible. People who believe this naturally believe that their understanding of the Bible is the unmediated Word of God. They fail entirely to perceive that between God's revelation and their own ideas is both the filter of a human Bible writer and the reader's own imperfect, limited, and fallible understanding. And, as some have shown, the Bible is unlike other meta-narratives in that it is very sensitive to suffering and posits a God equally outside of all human cultures.²¹ His interest extends to all people in all cultures in all time. The nature of the Biblical narrative, therefore, also argues against human spiritual arrogance, rather suggesting tolerance and peace.

Second, recognition of God's absoluteness and our relative understanding provides a secure base from which to face challenges to our faith. Christians have often reacted to challenges to their treasured beliefs by either attacking the change or abandoning their faith. Neither is healthy. The failure of Christianity to accept scientific discoveries that overturned an earth-centered view of the universe cost the early modern church considerable credibility. On the other hand, many have lost their faith in God because one of their cherished beliefs was demonstrated to be no longer true. This model allows us to avoid both extremes, for the problem in both cases can be seen to reside in us, not the Word of God or even science. New truth that contradicts old beliefs reminds us that we understood the old only in part, or incorrectly. It is not God who is inadequate; it is our understanding of him. With this understanding, new information can be welcomed without threatening our faith.

This also helps us to recognize the nature of the inspiration of the Bible. In the language of Ellen G. White, it is "a union of the divine and the human."²² It is the revelation of the Eternal and Absolute through the temporal and limited understanding and language of

relative human beings. As the textual critics remind us, writers wrote within a cultural perspective that was often woven into the fabric of their message. For example, the difference in perspective of 1 Samuel 24:1 and 1 Chronicles 21:1 partly reflects the fact that the first writer wrote at a time before a theology of Satan had been developed. Hence, all human actions were considered to be prompted by God. This tendency to ascribe all motivation—good and evil—to God can be seen in other parts of the Old Testament, with Pharaoh for instance during the ten plagues of Egypt (Exod. 9:12, 10:1, 19, 27, etc.).

It is worth considering two other helps to understanding the Bible aright: that of the Holy Spirit and of the collective wisdom of the Church. The Holy Spirit was promised to us to lead us into all truth, which assures us of divine assistance in interpreting the Bible. The caution of course is that experience shows us that many people, even good people, have misinterpreted Scripture. The failing is not in the Spirit, but in human limitations of understanding, in failure to follow it, and in arrogance in assuming that our understandings are God's intentions, in part or in whole. The Church's collective will has similar strengths and weaknesses. The counsel of the Church can prevent extremism and heresy, but can also fail to respond positively to new light, as witnessed in the successive reform movements in Protestantism as each previous movement refused to grow further. In effect, these two guides share the strengths and weaknesses of the model proposed above: the divine element is reliable, but we are apt at times to confuse this with the fallible human element.

The emphasis on the weaknesses and relativity of our ability to know God can make some feel insecure. But while all human knowledge is fallible, all knowledge is not equally worthless.²³ We can do better than random chance in making spiritual choices. The many paths to knowing God—through the Bible, prayer, illumination of the Holy Spirit, guidance of spiritual mentors, providence, and so on—collectively provide some certainty that we are in fact on the path of truth, even though individually each path is open to misinterpretation.

As the Bible reveals, the genius of God is in accomplishing his divine purposes without violating the will and freedom of fallible and often uncooperative human beings. The human element of the Bible never prevents God from revealing his true nature to us. However, it does require that we be wise in interpreting his book. Recognizing that it is the Word of God expressed in human terms, we need to be careful to

distinguish between its divine precepts and their human expression. Otherwise we are likely to take as absolutes some of the relative and very human statements in the Bible that have disturbed Christians throughout the ages.

Contemporary theory confirms what the Bible says about the fallen and limited human condition. It further affirms our need of external divine intervention, as our own efforts are inevitably flawed, incomplete, and introspective. It helps us trust God more completely, while being less certain of our own righteousness and infallibility. It also strengthens our dependence on the Word of God as the only sure guide of God's will, being the product of his divine intervention into our world. While we may hold firmly to our understanding of God, we simultaneously acknowledge that a better, clearer picture is just around the corner. Should this image disrupt some of our preconceptions, the problem lies with us, not with God or his revelation.

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10. See, for example, Selden, *Reader's Guide*; and Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, on Formalism, Marxism, and Structuralism.
11. I use the word myth in the literary sense, not as an untrue story but as any story that explains origins and meaning.
12. Their work is neatly summarized in Abdul JanMohammed's article, "Sophisticated Primitivism," *Ariel* 15 (Oct. 1984): 22-27.
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Daniel Reynaud is senior lecturer in the faculty of arts at Avondale College. He has a Ph.D. in history and has published two books: *The Bible as Literature* (London: Minerva Press, 1996), and *Media Values: Christian Perspectives on the Mass Media* (Cooranbong: Avondale Academic Press, 1999).
daniel.reynaud@avondale.edu.au

Sense **Or** Nonsense

School of Medicine/Dentistry Commencement
Loma Linda University
May 30, 1999

By Alvin L. Kwiram

I want to talk with you today about the explosive growth of knowledge, and how we react to it. New knowledge can be very painful. It can make your worldview obsolete. It can make you retract things you once said were true. It can force you to discard the work of a lifetime. Because this process can be so painful, many people react in one of two classic ways: Either they say the new stuff is wrong, or they say we can't know anything at all. Neither contributes to human understanding. Both contribute to human misery.

Within this context, I would like to tell you a story about a recent discovery that poses an intriguing question. Just five years ago, a group of geologists from the United States and Turkey made a remarkable discovery during a survey of the Black Sea. They were taking core samples of the seafloor to determine whether any radioactive material from the Chernobyl disaster (in the Ukraine) was finding its way into the sediments of the Black Sea. What they discovered instead was that the seafloor was covered in its shallower part by a uniform layer of sediment about three feet thick.

The surprise was that this uniform layer covered sand dunes, old river channels, and other terrestrial features. This meant that a significant portion of today's Black Sea was once dry land. Moreover, it meant that the water must have risen very rapidly, or else the persistent wave action at the steadily encroaching shoreline would have destroyed surface features such as sand dunes.

How did they explain their astonishing observations? To answer this question I have to say a word about the ice ages. During the last ice age, vast quantities of water were tied up in glaciers. All of Canada and much of Europe and Russia were covered by a sheet of ice thousands of feet thick. Consequently, the level of the oceans was much lower than it is today. But, as global temperatures rose, the ice began to melt; the oceans began to rise.

It is estimated that the world's oceans rose four to five hundred feet. However, prior to this epic meltdown, the Black Sea and the Mediterranean were not connected by the Bosphorus Strait as they are today. Indeed, the level of the Black Sea was much lower than it is today, and the Danube River and the Dnieper, the Bug and the Dniester emptied into the Black Sea hundreds of kilometers from the present shoreline.

But as the Mediterranean continued its steady rise, the day came when water began to carve a channel through the land bridge between the Mediterranean and the Black Sea near the present-day city of Istanbul.

The trickle became a cataract, and water began to pour through with unimaginable power. It is estimated that the flux of water approached that of a thousand Niagaras.

The Black Sea began to rise. Each day it rose six to eight inches, advancing a mile or more every day at the northwestern shore of the Black Sea. This relentless torrent continued to pour into the Black Sea for over a year. When the water levels more or less equalized, the Black Sea had risen by well over three hundred feet.

Let me put this in perspective. The Black Sea is very large. It is larger than all of the Great Lakes combined. If you were to keep it at its present latitude but shift it to the Northwest United States, it would stretch from the Pacific Ocean to Montana, and from roughly Northern California to the Canadian border. The area that had once been dry land, but today is covered by water, corresponds roughly to an area stretching north-south from the Mexican border to San Francisco, and east-west from the Pacific to a line connecting Sacramento, Loma Linda, and the Salton Sea.

If a flood like that were to hit California next year, it would make an impression on us. Apparently it made an impression on the many people who lived around the Black Sea at that time. How do we know? Archaeological evidence suggests that the Black Sea population was dispersed in a mass migration that fanned out in all directions. It reached northward up through Hungary and Poland to Germany, and even as far as Paris; southward throughout the Aegean, and possibly into Egypt; eastward toward India and maybe even as far as China.

The geologists involved in the research, William Ryan and Walter Pitman, tell the story in their recent

book entitled *Noah's Flood*.¹ Did the event they describe have anything to do with the story of Noah's Flood as described in the Bible? What about other ancient flood stories, such as the Gilgamesh Epic?

More importantly, how will we react to these discoveries? One classic response is simply to decide that Ryan and Pitman are wrong. But before we choose that course, let me outline one example that should give us pause.

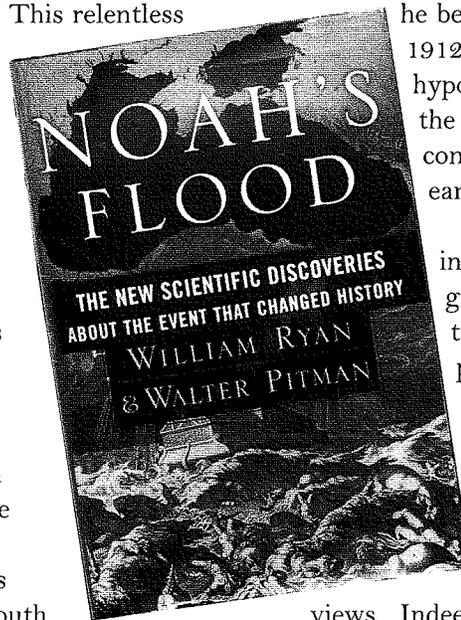
Alfred Wegener, the son of an evangelical preacher, studied astronomy and geophysics in Germany. In 1910, at the age of 30, Wegener had a flash of insight. He noted the striking similarity between the shape of the African and South American coastlines, and wondered if they might once upon a time have been part of the same landmass. The more he reflected on the evidence—including the fossil record and geological formations on the two continents—the more convinced he became that he was onto something. In 1912, he outlined his groundbreaking hypothesis to the public: the position of the continents, he declared, is not fixed; continents drift on the surface of the earth.

Although some scientists were intrigued by Wegener's hypothesis, the general response was outright rejection. "Continents don't move. That's preposterous! After all, we're talking about 'terra firma.'" Ironically, as more evidence accumulated in support of Wegener's thesis, the voices of opposition grew louder. When Wegener died in 1930, the tide was clearly running against his

views. Indeed, as late as 1950 a noted geologist argued that the idea of continental drift had fallen into disfavor.

Today we know that Wegener was right. The clincher came in the mid-1960s, when magnetic measurements of the ocean floor revealed that the plates are steadily being pushed apart by magma welling up from the interior of the earth. The record of magnetization frozen into the solidified magma is like a giant, slow-motion tape recording. The evidence was unequivocal.

Almost overnight, the attitudes of the geological community changed. Finally geologists could provide consistent explanations for a number of long-standing and fundamental questions. They could now explain how mountain ranges formed, how earthquakes are generated, how islands such as the Hawaiian chain are



formed, and so on. This transformation in the thinking of the geological community was revolutionary. But this revolution *could* have happened 50 years sooner. Why didn't it?

The answer is complicated, but it can certainly be argued that a significant factor was that the minds of many were simply not open to the evidence. Geologists just couldn't seem to bring themselves to believe that continents could move. Even though Wegener's hypothesis made good sense, they couldn't break free of their mental shackles. They just couldn't

seem to see the obvious. Some would say that they refused to see the obvious. Their motto might have read: "I'll see it when I believe it."

The other classic response to new evidence is somewhat more obscure. It is characterized by elaborate sophistry that takes us to the opposite pole of the epistemological compass. With this strategy, one simply takes the position that nothing can be known with certainty. This approach has an ancient pedigree and echoes across the centuries in Pontius Pilate's memorable words, "What is truth?" This response is alive and well even today as promulgated in the postmodernist school of thought. What the

postmodernists, especially those of the French school, have been promoting since the 1960s is the notion that human understanding in general, and science in particular, are relative—that one's interpretation of reality depends entirely on one's cultural context. Stated differently, they would claim that there is no objective reality, only virtual reality, if you will.

Postmodernists started with a premise that one can appreciate and even applaud. Namely, that our approach to any given problem is always influenced by our background and context. But the elevation of that premise to a position of primacy, and the assertion that, therefore, there is no fixed point of reference, or objective reality, turns the very basis of their argument on its head and invalidates the very terms of their epistemology.

Alan Sokal, the physicist, recently exposed the intellectual nakedness of this group of literati with his celebrated and devastating spoof of postmodernism. I can't take time to elaborate on his hoax, or to give examples of some of the obscure, even absurd positions advanced by some postmodernists. Instead, I refer those interested to the recent book, *Fashionable Nonsense*, by Sokal and Jean Bricmont, in which a number of revealing case studies are presented and dissected.²

The two examples I have sketched illustrate the two classic reactions to new knowledge that I outlined

at the beginning. I presented them for two reasons. First, I want to challenge you. For the first time in history, the time constant for knowledge turnover is much shorter than our life span. Indeed, it is even shorter than the years we spend in formal schooling.

The second reason is to remind ourselves that advances in understanding do not come cheaply. All too often those who propose new ideas are ridiculed, vilified, and even ostracized. Unfortunately, bad ideas can stick around for a distressingly long time—hundreds or even thousands of years. Consider slavery, or, the historical and continuing inequality of women in many parts of the world. The field of science is replete with examples. In 1996, the pope

officially declared that the earth revolves around the sun. It took a mere three hundred years for one of the most intellectually sophisticated religious bodies in the world to acknowledge that Copernicus and Galileo had been right.

Those who are unable to cope with this explosion of knowledge will also tend to react with the only tools that they have. Either they will retreat into the familiar mental structures they learned as children, or they will give up any attempt to define a rational framework for human behavior. The former response is characteristic of fundamentalism, which is once again sweeping over societies around the world, and represents a retreat from (un)common sense; the latter can be characterized by postmodernism's less informed offspring and represents an embrace of nonsense.



"Human progress has never been advanced without changing someone's mind."

Your task is to avoid both extremes. We should not fall into the same trap as those who systematically opposed the idea of continental drift. We should be willing to let the weight of the evidence influence our established belief system. It should not take three hundred years to accept the scientific fact of planetary motion.

On the other hand, you must defend the underlying scientific foundations on which the entire modern superstructure of our knowledge-based society is built. There IS an objective reality. But this approach has to be defended, lest the “fashionable nonsense” discussed by Sokal and Bricmont gain the ascendancy. And don’t dismiss that possibility as unrealistic. Remember, astrology still has its devotees, as does channeling, crystal therapy, psychokinesis, and the like. The list is distressingly long, and those who eschew knowledge are the unwitting victims of such obfuscation.

By contrast, the inquiring mind that explores and tests the limits and ramifications of new knowledge—despite the pain—often discovers entirely new levels of understanding and insight. What heretofore had been a fractured image of disconnected elements suddenly snaps into focus to reveal a picture of clarity, elegance, and beauty. A new intellectual day dawns. A new level of abstraction (or in Ernst Mach’s terms, “a new economy of thought”) is achieved.

In summary, I urge each one of you to take responsibility to defend the rational process. Read books—serious books that tackle the issues of the day. Form discussion groups to grapple with the important questions. Communicate your views in understandable and understanding ways to the community in which you serve. Speak out against demagoguery, fashionable nonsense, and groupthink.

This will not always be easy. The task I recommend to you is not designed for personal gain; but it is part of a proud tradition that spans the millennia. It keeps faith with those who have gone before and have spoken prophetically so that we today are not worshipping idols of wood and stone, or ideologies set in

concrete. And it keeps faith with generations yet unborn.

Be prepared to change your mind. Human progress has never been advanced without changing someone’s mind. So, consider the notion that maybe South America is really floating westward. Toy with the possibility that maybe the Black Sea was the epicenter for the enduring story of the Great Flood. Imagine the unimaginable.

After all, this is the information age. This is the age in which we have discovered an entirely new life form that does not depend on sunlight for life. This is the age when we are discovering that other stars like our own sun are also surrounded by planets that may harbor life. This is the age when we can take a single cell from your body and reconstruct an identical genetic doppelgänger. This is the age in which we will be tossed to and fro on an ocean of knowledge that is rising inexorably from a thousand Niagaras of discovery. This is an age for bold exploration, for creativity, for exciting discovery.

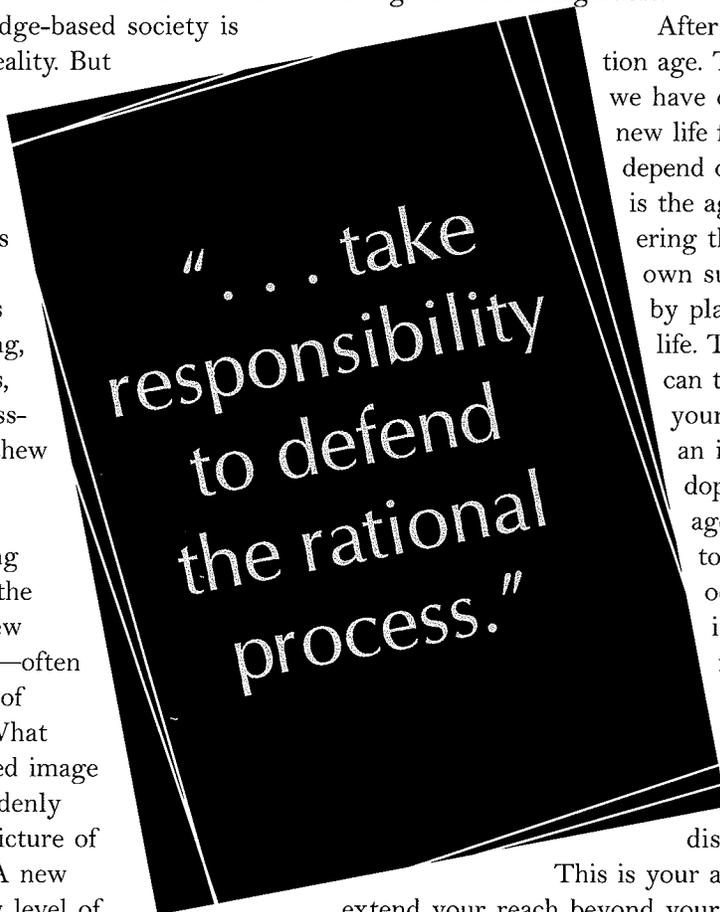
This is your age. I invite you to extend your reach beyond your grasp for daily bread, and join forces with those who labor to dispel ignorance and superstition and who seek to cultivate unfettered understanding and civilizing civility.

Notes and References

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Alvin L. Kwiram is vice provost for research at the University of Washington. He received his Ph.D. from Caltech. One of the founders of AAF, his fundamental concern continues to be scientific literacy in the Church. akwiram@home.com



“Look, the virgin
shall conceive
and bear a son,
and they shall
name him

‘Emmanuel,
which means,
‘God is
with us.’”
(Matt. 1:23)

The Interpretation of the Old Testament in the New: Isaiah, Matthew, and the Virgin

By Warren C. Trenchard and Larry G. Herr

Among the first things that even casual readers of the New Testament observe is that its writers were well acquainted with the Jewish Scriptures and quoted from them extensively. Careful readers will also note that these writers often interpreted the scriptural texts in ways that deviated radically from their obvious meanings in the original Old Testament settings.

What should we make of this phenomenon? Does the interpretation of an Old Testament text given by a New Testament writer become normative or take precedence over the meaning of that text in its original setting? Can modern interpreters of the Old Testament effectively use the same exegetical methods as the writers of the New Testament?

These are the issues we shall consider in this article. However, rather than dealing with them abstractly, we shall study a particular case. This example involves the well-known quotation and interpretation of Isaiah 7:14 in Matthew 1:23:

Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel. (Isa. 7:14)

“Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,” which means, “God is with us.” (Matt. 1:23)¹

This is one of the most revered pair of texts in the Christian Bible. The Old Testament prophecy was written by a prophet who is, to many people, the favorite prophet of all, largely because of this and other similar prophecies that are accepted as messianic. The New Testament passage forms the basis of the cherished doctrine of the virginal conception of Jesus that, for many, proves his supernatural nature. Because Matthew clearly refers to Mary and Jesus, Christians around the world and through the ages have taken the passage from Isaiah to refer to Mary and Jesus, as well.

We shall examine Isaiah 7:13-14 in the light of its literary and historical contexts, showing that it refers to Isaiah's own time. We shall also demonstrate that Matthew used and interpreted the text to mean something quite different by reading the text in a particular way and by employing methods of biblical interpretation current among Jews and Christians in his time.

The overall historical context of Isaiah seven is the Syro-Ephraimite War, dated in the middle of the eighth century B.C.² The war pitted the Syrian (Aramean) nation of Damascus and Israel, whose main tribe was Ephraim, against Judah. The great Assyrian superpower was knocking on the doors of the small nations in the area of Palestine, seeking ways to subject them—especially the Aramean kingdoms of Damascus, Israel, Judah, and Philistia—because they stood in the way of Assyria's march to Egypt, Assyria's ultimate goal. In order to counter this pressure it was necessary for the Palestinian nations to form periodic coalitions against Assyria. A similar alliance had already been effective in 853 B.C., when they stopped Assyria at the Battle of Qarqar, in northern Syria.

Whereas Damascus and Israel were already committed to the coalition, Judah was slow to join. Isaiah and his religious faction within the royal court strongly argued that the king should leave the defense of the nation in the hands of God, whereas the secular faction, whom King Ahaz seemed to favor, pushed for an alliance with Assyria itself. After all, had not Israel and Damascus been greater enemies to Judah in the immediate past than Assyria (1 Kings 14:30; 15:16, for instance)? Now would be a good time for Judah to get rid of Israel and Damascus, and in so doing curry the favor of Assyria.

For this reason, Damascus and Israel besieged Jerusalem (2 Kings 16:5). The siege weakened Judah significantly, so that Edom could successfully rebel and Judah lost control of the southeastern portions of its small empire. This development convinced Ahaz of his need for Assyria's protection from the two kingdoms on

his northern border, so he sent ambassadors to King Tiglath-Pileser of Assyria formally asking for aid and gilding the request with gifts.

Isaiah seven is set in the context of Ahaz considering whether to make this request. Isaiah strongly argued that Ahaz should place his trust in Yahweh, the personal name of Israel's god, not Tiglath-Pileser. Although Isaiah made the argument as a religious appeal, his advice also made geopolitical sense because Assyria, if called in by Judah, could use the invitation to defeat Damascus and Israel. Assyria would then move its own occupation close to Judah, making the latter a vassal in the process.

Isaiah seven begins by quoting 2 Kings 16:5 (or vice versa) to set the stage politically and chronologically, then shifts in verse three to the religious concern and Isaiah's involvement. Isaiah gave his counsel and prophecy of future events in verses three to nine, including a statement in verse eight that within 65 years the troublesome nations of Damascus and Israel would no longer exist.³

Apparently, Ahaz did not accept Isaiah's advice. After all, what wise king would bank on a 65-year prophecy to formulate his foreign policy? Isaiah apparently realized this weak link in his argument and recommended that Ahaz put Yahweh to the test. Isaiah suggested that Ahaz ask anything he wanted so that Yahweh could prove that the long-term prophecy would indeed come to pass. Ahaz demurred, probably not wanting to deal with the vagaries of religious promises and apparently preferring the practicalities of realpolitik (verses 11 and 12).

But Isaiah was not done, and he formally announced a sign anyway: "Then Isaiah said: 'Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary mortals, that you weary my God also?'" (verse 13) Isaiah began his announcement of the sign—which ultimately proved the truth of the long-range prophecy—with a familiar prophetic command to "Hear." The announcement carried with it the force of the beginning of Israel's religious creed, probably recited each time a sacrifice was offered (Deut. 6:4-5). The word "hear" signified to ancient Judah an important and formal prophetic announcement.

The message was not addressed to Ahaz, but to the whole government or court. The "House of David" was the formal ancient name of Judah, as is now known from two monumental inscriptions written by foreign rulers.⁴ The intended audience was thus a group of people, probably the king's court, a fact underscored by use of second person plural pronouns throughout verses

thirteen and fourteen. We do not see it in the English pronoun “you,” but Isaiah was addressing more than one person. His use of the pronoun “my” with “God” emphasized his close relationship with God and thus the certainty of the message.

At this point we should emphasize that the sign was intended to show the court of Ahaz that Isaiah’s long-range prophecy would come true. Isaiah needed to convince his audience that his message was so certain they should change their political policy and reject the help of Assyria *immediately*. There was no time to wait for prophecies that would take time. The sign must therefore be immediately provable and must be something that could be confirmed at the moment, or very soon thereafter. Isaiah was saying, “Okay, if you do not believe my long-range prophecy, here is something happening right now that neither you nor I at this moment can prove. However, in a few minutes, if you do some checking, you can see that it is true. If it is, know that the long-range prophecy is also true!”

Verse fourteen contains many lexical and grammatical elements that need explanation, for they have been misinterpreted consistently and mistranslated by generations of Bible commentators and translators under the influence of Matthew’s use of the text. Although Isaiah has used the personal name of Israel’s God, Yahweh,⁵ throughout the chapter so far, the book now switches to *’adonay*,⁶ translated as “Lord” with upper and lower case letters. While most uses of *’adon* refer to God, in many occurrences of the word—which servants and wives also used in reference to their lords and husbands—the reference is to a king or master as a title of respect.⁷ In spite of this, most readers automatically understand “lord” to refer to God.

Because Isaiah used the divine form *’adonay* here, it is clear that he—or at least the Masoretes who vocalized the consonants this way⁸—intended for God to be involved in giving the sign. In fact, exegetes universally assume the sign giver to be God alone.⁹ However, we propose that Isaiah intended an ambiguous, double meaning, referring to both God and the king. The irony of the situation in this story makes the inclusion of the king as an unwitting sign giver attractive enough to suggest this new reading. Accordingly, King Ahaz had refused to ask Yahweh for a sign, so, instead of coming directly from God, the sign would come from the king himself. Apparently, the sign would somehow be produced by the king, a twist of Ahaz’s antireligious policy that no doubt left later readers with a wry grin of satisfaction. For, although Ahaz did not want to hear Isaiah’s sign at all, Ahaz was going to get it anyway and,

moreover, be the producer of it willy-nilly! Again the pronoun “you” is plural, so it was Ahaz who would give the sign to members of the court. Ultimately, Yahweh, the Lord, gave his sign, but he produced it through Ahaz, the lord.

Then comes the famous passage, which we translate, “Behold, the young woman is pregnant, is bearing a son, and shall call his name Immanuel” (verse 14b). There is a definite article with “young woman,” indicating that it was not just any woman or some woman in the future, but a definite young woman, apparently recognizable to Isaiah’s immediate audience. Because it was Ahaz who, albeit unwillingly, gave the sign, the young woman was most likely associated with him in some way, perhaps as one of his wives in the harem.

The translation “young woman,” as opposed to “virgin,” reflects the reality of the Hebrew vocabulary. The word used in Isaiah is *’almah*, which refers to a post-adolescent young woman whether married or not, and therefore whether a virgin or not. The word carries no nuance about her sexual or marital status. The Hebrew word, which is normally translated “virgin” (*betulah*), refers to an unmarried woman who is a virgin by virtue of her single status. This word is not used in Isaiah 7:14. While many twentieth-century versions¹⁰ of the Bible accurately reflect the Hebrew *’almah*, the King James Version (KJV) and some other translations¹¹ use the word “virgin” here, clearly because of the way Matthew cites the text in his narrative of Jesus’ birth, as we shall see below. Suffice it to say here that Isaiah did not intend to convey any idea of virginity in his reference to the woman in this text, notwithstanding any later use that others would give it.

The text continues with a progression of three future verbs in many English translations,¹² but the Hebrew verbs are not in the same “tense.”¹³ The first of our three words is not a verb at all, but a predicate adjective modifying “young woman.” Normal translation technique is to add the verb “to be” in connecting the words. Thus, the best translation should be “the young woman is pregnant.”¹⁴ It is very unlikely that Isaiah meant this phrase to refer to a future time. The pregnancy was thus already a given fact and the royal court most likely knew about it. The second verb is a participle and can be translated in almost any English tense the context demands, including the present tense, as we have chosen to do.¹⁵ This was so because, in order for this sign to be of any use, it had to be confirmable at that time or very soon thereafter. In other words, it seems that this birth was taking place at that very time. Part of the new information Isaiah gave was that the

child would be a boy. But this was nothing remarkable and did not constitute the sign because Isaiah would have had a 50 percent chance of being correct. The sign needed to be much more unpredictable.

The real sign is the next clause, which occurs in a converted perfect tense (see note 13). In other words, in English it should be translated in the future tense, “and shall call his name Immanuel.” Isaiah was telling the court, “Go check with the pregnant woman who is, at this moment, bearing a son. When she gives him a name, you will find that she has named him Immanuel.” No one in the room could have known that. It would be, therefore, an important test of Isaiah’s credibility.¹⁶

The name Immanuel is a typical Israelite sentence name. It is not frequent, like Jeremiah or Nehemiah, but it has the typical two parts. (1) Most biblical names carried a name or title of God. The element *'el* in so many names like Daniel, Samuel, and Elisha is the word for “God.” The -iah endings of names, like Hezekiah and Isaiah, as well as the Jeho- beginning, as in Jehoshaphat or Jehoshua (Joshua), are shortened versions of Yahweh. Names could also contain kinship-based words as titles for God, like *'ab* (“father”) in Abraham. In the case of Immanuel, it is clear that the divine (theophoric) element is *'el*, meaning “God.” (2) The first element, *'immanu*, is a prepositional phrase meaning “with us.” The complete name thus means, “God is with us.” To the ancient Israelites the name did not mean “God has become us,” as future Christians wishing to express the miracle of the incarnation would see it. Rather, to Isaiah’s audience, the name had a meaning intimately tied in with their Old Testament salvation theology: “God is with us to deliver and protect us.” As such, the meaning had a direct bearing on Judah’s present situation and Isaiah’s counsel: “Trust in God to deliver.”

For Isaiah, therefore, the name had no cosmic meaning of God becoming human, but was simply a reasonably common Israelite sentence name that fit Isaiah’s message, although, ironically, he was not the one naming the child. This coincidence of the meaning of the name and Isaiah’s message would have undoubtedly lent significance to the sign.

Verses that follow the fourteenth explain how, if Judah would trust in God, it would prosper, just like the child eats curds and honey—foods symbolizing plenty—when he is twelve years old (verse 15).¹⁷ This was because both Damascus and Israel would be destroyed by that time and trouble Judah no more.

Assyria under Tiglath-Pileser destroyed Damascus and most of Israel in 733–34 B.C. and completely destroyed Israel. Shalmaneser V and Sargon II deported

the Israelites to Assyria in 721 B.C. Our story is not dated precisely in the text, but when we overlap the reigns of Ahaz (including his coregency) and Pekah, we are limited to a three- to four-year span, 735–731 B.C. Because Damascus had not yet been destroyed in this story, it must have occurred early during that period, 735 or 734 B.C. Indeed, the fall of Damascus at that time must have been directly related to Ahaz’s request for an alliance. Tiglath-Pileser took Judah’s request as an invitation to become involved in the region and was successful.

Perhaps the best estimated date for the birth of Immanuel is 734 B.C. Within twelve years Damascus fell (733) and Samaria began to fall (722, with complete destruction in 721). Isaiah’s long-range prophecy proved correct, but his sign of the birth of Immanuel should have already told Judah that in 734. Immanuel was therefore a normal human child born of a normal mother who was probably wedded to Ahaz himself.

It seems clear that in verse fourteen Isaiah announced that the court of Ahaz would receive a sign that Yahweh intended to arrange the defeat of Judah’s enemies, even though Ahaz had refused such a sign. This sign would involve the conception and birth of a male child to a particular young woman, possibly with Ahaz as the father, and especially the woman’s naming of the child Immanuel—a typical Israelite name.¹⁸ All aspects of this account and the prediction it contains dealt exclusively with the time of Ahaz and the events that immediately followed.

How, then, is it possible that this text appears in the Gospel of Matthew as a prophecy of the virginal conception of Jesus by Mary? The answer to this question involves several elements. The first has to do with the type of the Old Testament text that Matthew used.

Matthew 1:23 quotes Isaiah 7:14b in accordance with a Greek translation of the Old Testament known as the Septuagint (LXX)—not according to the Masoretic Text (MT), a Hebrew text that later became standardized.¹⁹ In the LXX, Isaiah 7:14 reads: “Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the virgin shall conceive and shall bear a son and you shall call his name Immanuel.”

This reading differs from the Hebrew²⁰ in three ways: (1) it uses the word for “virgin” instead of “young woman,” (2) it presents all three verbs in the future tense instead of the mixed “tenses” of the Hebrew, and (3) it gives the final verb in the second person singular instead of the third person feminine singular of the Hebrew.

The LXX usually translates the word *'almah*

("young woman"), found in the Hebrew of Isaiah 7:14, with *neanis*, a word that means "girl, maiden."²¹ However, in Isaiah 7:14 the LXX uses *parthenos*²² ("virgin") for 'almah, but, like the Hebrew, includes the definite article. Normally, the LXX uses *parthenos* to translate *betulah*,²³ the regular Hebrew word for "virgin," as noted above. The only other instance of the LXX using *parthenos* for 'almah is in Genesis 24:43, where the reference is to a young woman whom Abraham's servant prayed would offer him water. This turned out to be Rebekah, an unmarried woman and, presumably, also a virgin. Matthew found the word *parthenos* in the LXX text of Isaiah 7:14b and easily decided to use the text as a fulfillment citation relating to the virginal conception of Jesus.

Despite the LXX's use of *parthenos* in Isaiah 7:14, there is nothing in the text or its context to suggest that the translator intended to convey the notion that the woman would become pregnant by any extraordinary means. Rather, she was simply becoming pregnant with her first sexual experience. Furthermore, the child that she would bear would be her first. It is also possible that the translator used the word *parthenos* in the more general sense of "young woman," and thus equal to 'almah/*neanis*.²⁴ It is clear that, however he intended the word to be read, the translator did not envision a virginal conception.

The LXX also differs from the MT in Isaiah 7:14b in the tenses of the three verbs. Whereas the MT includes the ideas of conception, birth, and naming in "tenses" that suggest present, present, and future, respectively—as discussed above—all three verbs in the LXX are in the future tense. The three acts are to occur in the future. However, fulfillment was not required in the distant future. In fact, the LXX follows the MT in understanding this to be a sign concerning events about to occur. The translator did not see this as a prophecy concerning some distant time. Clearly, the future perspective of the LXX's rendition of this text is important to Matthew. Only when read in this way could it serve his purpose as a fulfillment citation.

The third difference between the MT and the LXX of Isaiah 7:14b concerns the pronominal subject of the final verb. The unvocalized Hebrew verb *qr't* could be understood as a second person masculine singular, "you shall call," and this was how the LXX translator took it.²⁵ However, the verb is an old third person feminine form that means "she shall call," continuing the third feminine pronominal subject of all three verbs. The LXX implies that the person Isaiah addressed, presumably Ahaz, would name the child Immanuel. In this case,

the child's mother would most certainly have been a member of the royal harem and not some young woman in the distant future.

That Matthew quoted Isaiah 7:14b according to the LXX is clear from the fact that his reading follows the LXX against the MT in the first two distinct LXX readings discussed above: he included *parthenos* and had all three verbs in the future tense. Of course, this is the only reading that would make sense as a prophecy of the virginal conception of Jesus by Mary. This was clearly why Matthew included it. However, he departed from both the MT ("she shall call") and the LXX ("you [sg] shall call") in his form of the third verb. Matthew reads "they shall call."²⁶

Clearly, neither the reading of the MT nor that of the LXX would work for Matthew as a prophecy referring to the designation of Jesus as "Immanuel." First, for Matthew it was neither the woman (MT) nor the person addressed by the prophet (LXX) who named Mary's son. Instead, Matthew 1:21, 25 indicates that the angel told Joseph he was to name the child and that he did so. Second, Matthew reports that the child was to be called "Jesus,"²⁷ the name by which he was actually known, according to all the ancient sources. There is no record, even in Matthew, that he was ever called by the name Immanuel.

Matthew handled this problem by reading the last verb in Isaiah 7:14b as a third person plural—"they shall call [his name Immanuel]." This enabled Matthew to avoid the limitations of the MT and LXX. Presumably, he understood the text to imply that others outside the immediate family would think of²⁸ Jesus as Immanuel, which Matthew interpreted to mean "God is with us."²⁹ Matthew took Immanuel to be more of a title or designation than a name. This was one of the ways that Matthew himself apparently understood Jesus.³⁰

Is this a case of blatant textual alteration by Matthew, or was he following a text of Isaiah available to him but no longer to us? While we can never answer this question with certainty, we should note that there is a Hebrew textual tradition that may lie behind Matthew's reading. This is reflected in 1QIs^a, a manuscript of Isaiah from Qumran, that reads *qr'* "[his name] shall be called,"³¹ the equivalent of Matthew's impersonal "they shall call [his name]." Unless Matthew used a form of the LXX no longer extant,³² he either inserted a convenient variant reading from the Hebrew tradition or created a Greek reading to fit his purpose.

Before leaving this consideration of the LXX reading of Isaiah 7:14 and its use by Matthew, we must note that, despite the LXX's vocabulary and grammati-

cal differences from the Hebrew, its literary context and story line are identical to the Hebrew. In each version, the sign is given to the prophet's contemporaries and conveys the same meaning to them. Furthermore, the LXX's use of the word *parthenos* to translate 'almah does not imply a virginal conception. Thus, Matthew's greatest departure from the LXX was in applying the words of Isaiah to the situation involving Mary's virginal conception of Jesus.⁵³

To the modern reader, Matthew's interpretation of Isaiah 7:14 in disregard of the text's literary and historical contexts seems indefensible. However, such an interpretation was not unusual in his time and place. Jews in first-century Palestine read their Scriptures in a variety of ways, all of which the writers of the New Testament used as well.⁵⁴ Matthew's approach is very much like at least one of these: peshet interpretation.

Peshet interpretation within Jewish practice is almost exclusively associated with biblical exegesis in the sectarian literature found at or near Qumran, i.e., the Dead Sea Scrolls. The Aramaic word *peshet* ("interpretation") occurs at the beginning of most exegetical statements that follow the quotation of biblical texts with the meaning, "the interpretation of this is." The unique characteristic of this type of exegesis is that the interpretations deal exclusively with the times, places, and circumstances of the interpreters. Unlike midrashic interpretation, in which the original meaning of the text is left intact despite its contemporary relevance, peshet interpretation disregards any original setting and declares the text to have only a contemporary meaning. In particular, the Qumran interpreters understood the biblical materials to be concerned with prophecies of their sectarian group, its leaders and opponents, and the issues with which they were concerned.

Like the practitioners of midrashic interpretation, those who employed the peshet method also manipulated the form of the biblical text with which they worked. This involved both textual alteration and the fortuitous selection of the desired reading from among various versions of the text.

It is with peshet interpretation that we find Matthew most comfortable. The Jewish Scriptures for him not only pointed typologically and analogically to Jesus—as it did for all New Testament writers—but also contained "prophecies" whose fulfillment lay solely in Jesus and the events of his life and ministry. Matthew uniquely included at least eleven of these "prophecies" with a peshet-like formula that declares their fulfillment in some event or detail associated with Jesus.⁵⁵ Furthermore, as in the case of Matthew's citation of Isaiah

7:14b, he drew on different textual forms that variously read like the MT, the LXX, or other textual traditions. Sometimes we cannot identify his source.

Matthew quoted Isaiah 7:14b and interpreted it in peshet fashion by declaring that this prophecy was fulfilled⁵⁶ in the experience of Mary's virginal conception of Jesus and his designation as Immanuel. Not only did Matthew disregard the original literary and historical contexts of this material from Isaiah, but he also chose from among at least two textual forms to achieve his purpose. He would have been quite at home with the exegetes at Qumran.

We have examined a well-known case in which a New Testament writer cited a text from the Old Testament and found that this writer interpreted the text in a way that deviated radically from its obvious meaning in the original setting. We return to our initial questions.

What should we make of this phenomenon? First, we should accept it as fact. New Testament writers often quoted from the Old Testament without regard for its original historical or literary context and sometimes conveniently selected from among different forms of the texts they cited or altered those texts to suit their purposes. Second, we should not filter this observation through a preconceived notion of how inspiration works but should allow this discovery to shape our understanding of inspiration. Third, we should not be negatively critical of the New Testament writers, who were merely following practices well known to their contemporaries and followed by them. Fourth, we should try to understand the New Testament writers' approach within the context of their theological and hermeneutical worlds.

Does the interpretation of an Old Testament text given by a New Testament writer become normative or take precedence over the meaning of that text in its original setting? No. The meaning of an Old Testament text is determined by the intention of the Old Testament writer as exhibited in the vocabulary, grammar, theology, politics, etc., of the writer in particular literary and historical contexts. The citation of such a text by a New Testament writer has no effect on the original meaning. When a New Testament writer cited an Old Testament text, that text became part of the literary and theological output of the New Testament writer and should be interpreted as part of the new context, no matter how far from the original the writer may have moved. To understand the meaning of any biblical material we should study it in its own setting regardless of how later inspired works may cite and interpret it.

Can modern interpreters of the Old Testament

effectively use the same exegetical methods as the writers of the New Testament? Theoretically, this may be possible. In fact, some people today self-consciously try to use the same methods with biblical texts. However, the principles by which people interpret texts (hermeneutics) are not just a set of rules isolated from social and temporal contexts. To communicate effectively the meaning of a text an interpreter must hold in common with the reader at least some of the principles for interpretation. Such principles change over time and from place to place and from one social group to another. These changes make hermeneutics a relative discipline. If we are to communicate the meaning of biblical texts effectively today, we must employ the principles of interpretation current in our time and place. The methods of the first century will not work effectively today in most Western cultures as means to persuade today's readers, any more than the reverse.

To let the Bible be its own interpreter does not mean to superimpose on Old Testament texts the meanings ascribed to them by the inspired New Testament writers who cited them. Rather, it means to let the interpretation of such texts emerge from the texts themselves.

Notes and References

1. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from the Bible are taken from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV). For consistency, we use the spelling "Immanuel," except where rendered "Emmanuel" within quotation marks, as here.

2. Compare Isaiah 7 to 2 Kings 16.

3. The number 65 is perplexing because, as we shall see, later in the chapter Isaiah acknowledges that it will be a much shorter time to their demise. It may be that the 65 years includes the importation of the alien nations into the old territory of Israel or the demise of Israel in exile.

4. See the Moabite Mesha Inscription and the Aramean Dan Inscription. Andre Lemaire, "House of David Restored in Moabite Inscription," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 20, no. 3 (May/June 1994): 30-37.

5. Represented in most English versions by the word "LORD," with all capital letters.

6. This is a form of the word 'adon ("lord") that literally means "my lord." In distinction to 'adoniy, which has the same consonants and also means "my lord," 'adonay is used only for God.

7. Most of the 64 uses of 'adon in Isaiah refer to God. However, Isaiah also used the word to mean a hard master (19:4), a master of a slave (24:2), other gods or rulers (26:13); and kings (three times for Hezekiah and four times for Sennacherib). Cf. Ps. 110:1.

8. The Masoretes were Jewish scholars who inserted vowel signs, accents, and marginal notes into the standard Hebrew consonantal text between the fifth and tenth centuries A.D. Before the Masoretes vocalized the word "lord" in Isaiah 7:14, the text had only the ambiguous consonants 'dny, which

could be understood as either 'adonay (God) or 'adoniy (the king).

9. This appears to be the interpretation of the translators of the Septuagint (LXX), which uses *kyrios* ("Lord") without qualification for both the divine in the human/divine contrast in verse thirteen and the sign giver in verse fourteen. Many Hebrew manuscripts of Isaiah—including at least one from Qumran—read *yahweh* instead of 'adonay here, suggesting that the Jews who produced them took this to mean God. Furthermore, the context also seems to support this view. In verse eleven, Yahweh invites Ahaz (identified in verse ten) to ask *yahweh 'eloheyka* ("Yahweh your God") to give him a sign. The declaration in verse fourteen that 'adonay would give a sign—despite Ahaz's objection (verse twelve)—implies that Yahweh (called 'adonay *yahweh* in seven) is the sign giver. Finally, the reference to 'adonay ("my Lord") in verse fourteen immediately following 'elohay ("my God") in verse thirteen suggests that both refer to God.

10. For example, the New Jerusalem Bible (NJB), the Jewish Publication Society version—1978 (JPS), and the NRSV read "the young woman," an accurate reflection of *ha'alimah* with the definite article (cf. "the maiden" in the Jerusalem Bible [JB] and the New World Translation [NWT]); the New English Bible (NEB), the Revised English Bible (REB), the American Translation (Smith-Goodspeed), Moffatt, Today's English Version (TEV), and the Revised Standard Version (RSV) read "a young woman" (cf. "a maiden" in Four Prophets [Phillips]).

11. For example, the Revised Version (RV), the American Standard Version (ASV), the Modern Reader's Bible (Moulton), the New American Standard Bible (NASB), and the Contemporary English Version (CEV) read "a virgin"; Berkeley, Beck, the New International Version (NIV), the King James II Version (KJII), the New American Bible (NAB), and the New Century Version (NCV) read "the virgin" (= LXX, Syriac Peshitta, and Matthew).

12. For example, KJV, RV, ASV, RSV, NASB, NIV, Berkeley, KJII, Phillips, NAB, NC, Beck, and NWT. Cf. LXX.

13. Hebrew verbs are not quite as easy to classify as this sentence may imply. Hebrew tenses are not true tenses because they do not indicate true time references such as present, past, and future, etc., although they are used many times with clear time references. For instance, the perfect tense in Hebrew is usually translated in the past, but it can also be used to indicate present situations, or sometimes even future ones. There are only two primary tenses in Hebrew, perfect and imperfect. As stated above, the perfect is usually used with reference to past time, whereas the imperfect refers to the future most of the time. There is no present tense. Instead, either of the two tenses may be used; or, as is often done, the participle can be employed: this is a common usage in the prophets. Another way to express past and future time references, especially in prose narratives, is with the consecutive, or converted, verb. This is done by adding a prefix in the form of the conjunction "and" to the verb, which is why so many Old Testament sentences begin with the word "and."

14. Cf. NRSV, NEB, REB, JB, NJB, JPS, TEV, Moffatt, Smith-Goodspeed, CEV, and Moulton.

15. Cf. Moulton. NWT has the strange combination of future and present for the first two ideas, "The maiden herself will actually become pregnant, and she is giving birth to a son."

16. Genesis 16:11 contains the same progression of ideas as Isaiah 7:14, involving the opening interjection, the predicate adjective *harah* with a present meaning, the verbs *yalad* and *qara*, and the closing identity of the promised male

child. There an angel tells Hagar, "Look, you are pregnant and shall bear a son and shall call his name Ishmael." The parallel to Isaiah 7:14b is obvious. Cf. Judges 13:5, 7 for similar uses of the opening interjection, the predicate adjective *harah* (here with a future meaning), and the verb *yalad* in an angel's address to Manoah and in her report to her husband. Isaiah apparently used a common oracular formula for the announcement of promised births.

17. The traditional age when young Jewish males are supposed to know how to tell good from bad.

18. We know nothing about the identity of the promised male child other than that he was to be named Immanuel. There is no supporting evidence for the ancient Jewish tradition that this child was Ahaz's son Hezekiah or for the view that he was one of Isaiah's sons.

19. Not surprising in a setting in which various versions of the Jewish Scriptures circulated, Matthew cites the Old Testament from several different sources, including text forms like the MT and the LXX, other Hebrew and Greek versions, and maybe even his own translations or emendations.

20. For the essence of the Hebrew, see the citation from the NRSV at the beginning of this article.

21. See Exodus 2:8; Psalms 67(68):25; Canticle of Canticles 1:3; 6:7(8). It is also used in some other early Greek translations of the Old Testament in Isaiah 7:14, namely Aquila (c. A.D. 130), Theodotion (second century A.D.), and Symmachus (late second century A.D.). Euripides uses *neanis* for "a young married woman" (*Andromache*, 192). In Proverbs 24:54 (30:19), the LXX translates 'almah with *neotes*, which means "a youth."

22. In Greek literature the word *parthenos* is used exclusively for females, except in the strange reference to males found in Revelation 14:4.

23. Among the numerous examples in the LXX are the following from Isaiah: 23:4; 37:22; 47:1; 62:5.

24. In wider Greek usage, the word *parthenos* meant "maiden, girl." It was even used to signify unmarried women who were not virgins, e.g., *Iliad*, 2.514; Pindarus, *Pythian*, 3.34; Sophocles, *Trachiniae*, 1219; Aristophanes, *Nubes*, 530.

25. The translator may also have been influenced by the Greek of Genesis 16:11, which reads "you shall call (*kaleseis*) his name."

26. It is unlikely that Matthew departed from the LXX in reading *en gastri hexei* (literally "she will have in the womb")—the idiom for conception. While LXX AS (cf. Rahlfs, Göttingen) has this reading, the similar idiom *en gastri hepsetai* (literally "she will receive in the womb") is found in LXX B and most of the Fathers. Matthew also used the first idiom, *en gastri echō*, in 1:18, probably under the influence of the citation from Isaiah. Cf. 24:19, although there he may simply have followed Mark. Both idioms are well represented throughout the LXX as translations of the Hebrew *harah* ("to conceive, be pregnant"). See, e.g., 2 Samuel 11:5, which contains both idioms in the LXX as translations of the repeated Hebrew *harah*. The LXX of Isaiah uses the *echō* form in 40:11 (there is no comparable expression in the Hebrew) and the *lambanō* form in 8:3; 26:18. On one hand, Christian scribes may have harmonized the LXX of Isaiah 7:14 to Matthew 1:23 (*echō*) or scribes may have harmonized Isaiah 7:14 to 8:3 and 26:18 (*lambanō*). Since this would be a minor discontinuity between Isaiah and Matthew compared to that created by their differences in representing the third verb—which Christian scribes did not harmonize—we prefer to take *en gastri hexei* as the original LXX reading of Isaiah 7:14.

27. Jesus is the Greek word used for the Hebrew name Jehoshua (Joshua), which means "Yahweh is salvation" or

"Yahweh saves" (cf. Matt. 1:21). The Aramaic equivalent is Jeshua.

28. For Matthew, this would have had more the meaning of "call" rather than "name," in the sense of how Jesus would be known by others.

29. Matthew apparently drew this interpretation from Isaiah 8:10.

30. The idea of the presence of God in the person of Jesus appears to be an important theme in the Gospel of Matthew, as displayed in the inclusion formed by 1:23 and 28:20.

31. Taken to be *qora'*, a qal passive (what some grammarians used to call pu'al).

32. The reading "they shall call" is not found as a variant in the LXX tradition.

33. Of course, this is not the only place where Matthew ignored the literary context of his fulfillment citations (e.g., see Matt. 2:15 [Hos. 11:1]; 2:17 [Jer. 31:15]; 13:14 [Isa. 6:9-10]), nor is he the only New Testament writer to engage in such a practice (e.g., see John 13:18 [Ps. 41:9]; 19:24 [Ps. 22:18]; Acts 1:16, 20 [Ps. 69:25; 109:8]).

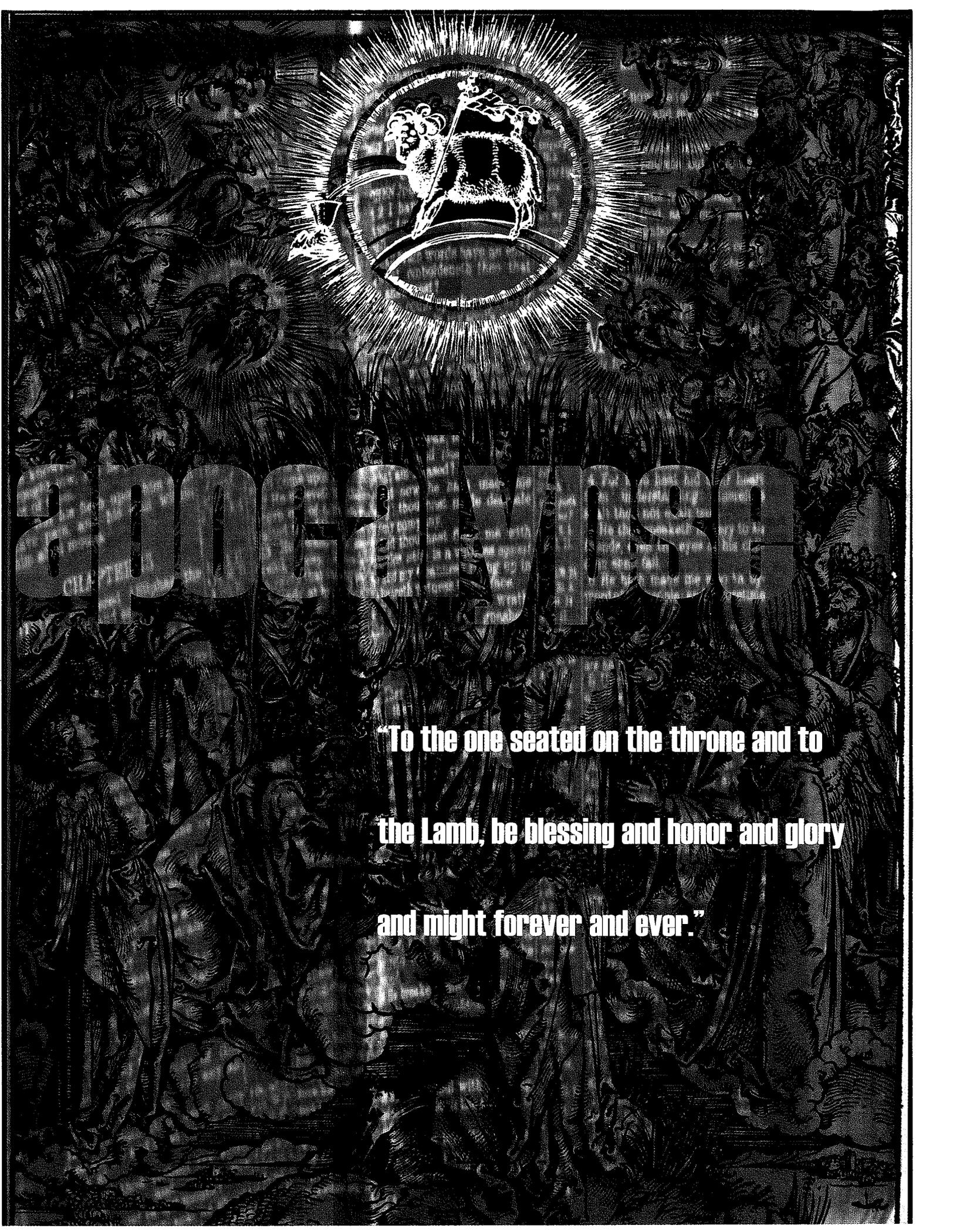
34. It is common to classify the types of Jewish exegesis of the Old Testament during the first century as literalistic, midrashic, pesher, and allegorical. See Richard Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1975), 28-50.

35. For example, "This was to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah" (Matt. 12:17), after which Matthew cites Isaiah 42:1-4. Note similar fulfillment formulas in 1:22; 2:15, 17, 23; 4:14; 8:17; 13:14 (cf. John 12:39-40), 35; 21:4; 27:9. Except as noted, these formulas and the citations they introduce are unique to Matthew among the Gospels. At least six of the eleven citations include quotations from Isaiah. In two additional cases, Matthew has a fulfillment formula without citing any Old Testament text: 26:54, 56. For the latter, cf. Mark 14:49. Matthew included one citation—also from Isaiah—with an implied fulfillment even though he did not use a fulfillment formula: 3:3 (cf. Mark 1:2-3; Luke 3:4-6; John 1:23). For a similar situation, see 2:5-6. Finally, we may note that, for Matthew, the essence of Jesus' relationship to the Jewish Scriptures was not one of contradiction or supplanting, but of fulfillment, i.e., these Scriptures found their fulfillment in him. This ultimate pesher interpretation is summarized in 5:17: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill."

36. The citation formula is in Matthew 1:22: "all this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet."

Larry G. Herr is professor of religious studies at Canadian University College. He received his Ph.D. from Harvard University.
lherr@cauc.ab.ca

Warren C. Trenchard is professor of New Testament and interim vice president for academic administration at La Sierra University. He received his Ph.D. in New Testament and Early Christian Literature from the University of Chicago.
WTrencha@LaSierra.edu



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**"To the one seated on the throne and to
the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory
and might forever and ever."**

Fear Not:

Apocalypse Now Means Something Very Different

By Doug Morgan and Bonnie Dwyer

The prophecy charts are gone. Beasts are no longer the main point. There is no discussion about when certain events will take place. The emphasis in Adventist interpretation of the Apocalypse has shifted from the future to the present, from prediction to poetry, from fear to joy. This shift has been building for years and was conspicuous at meetings of the Adventist Society for Religious Studies in November 1999, as scholars from Adventist colleges and universities gathered in Boston to discuss the Apocalypse.

With each presentation, the significance of the meeting became more apparent. Sometimes *who* says something is as important as *what* they say. The presentations at this conference were made by mainstream Adventists who either relegated the historicist approach—with its emphasis on forecasting events—to a secondary level, or directly challenged its credibility. By the end, some in attendance said a landmark shift in Adventist interpretation of the Apocalypse had been voiced.

In his presidential address at the opening, Roy Adams, associate editor of the *Adventist Review*, turned not to Uriah Smith, Roy Allan Anderson, or even Ellen White in his statement on the contemporary significance of the Apocalypse. Instead, Adams looked to a commentary by South African minister and activist Allen Boesak, who, in the context of the struggle against apartheid, saw justice for the oppressed as the central theme of Revelation. Adams did not attack the historicist method, but his references to it were limiting, relativizing. Adams warned about relying “too heavily on the historicist method of interpretation” and of ignoring “the text’s original meaning.” He noted that, from John the Revelator’s perspective, history was fast catapulting to an end, “regardless of any historicist reading of the text today.”

Adams’s main point was to ask, “Why is Revelation significant today?” Not because its forecasts are being fulfilled, he inferred, but because it offers a message of “comfort and protest,” to borrow from the title of Boesak’s

commentary.

The next day, Jon Paulien, a Revelation scholar and professor of New Testament interpretation at Andrews University's Theological Seminary, gave a historical overview of Revelation's interpretation and traced back to the 1950s the fragmentation of the traditional Adventist consensus on the historicist reading. Paulien called for the formation of a new Adventist "center" for interpreting the book. "The traditional Adventist hermeneutic cannot do the job," he declared. According to Paulien, the "center" must be grounded in solid exegesis, which for him clearly means something other than the traditional approach. "The way I study Revelation is radically different from the methods of the previous generation, and from what the pioneers did," he affirmed.

Hans K. LaRondelle, retired professor at the Theological Seminary, also talked about the difference between biblical exegesis and historical applications of prophecy. Reflecting on his journey of discovery, he said, "There is a fundamental difference between biblical exegesis and our historical applications of prophecy, or those of the historicist school." Concerning the two-witnesses theology of Revelation 11—which points to the Old Testament prophetic message and the New Testament apostolic witness—LaRondelle commented that "this all-permeating truth in Revelation . . . became obscured in Adventism when some began to bolster the authority of the Spirit of Prophecy in Ellen White by an innovative appeal to Revelation 12:17." This discovery has led LaRondelle to give up the view that White was an infallible interpreter of Scripture.

Fear Not

In a vesper devotional, Donn Leathermann, professor of religion at Southern Adventist University, addressed the fear that most young Adventists have of the end of time, despite being convinced that they have a saving relationship with Christ. Citing surveys conducted by colleague Norman Gulley at SAU, Leathermann said that students do not want to go through the time of trouble, which they view as only the beginning of difficult times. Leathermann identified a persecuted-minority, fortress mentality at the root of this fear and challenged Adventists to insure that the message of Revelation is one of hope rather than fear. To Leathermann, the main point is that we are on the winning side when we align ourselves with Christ. "Fear not," he rhythmically repeated to a chorus of "Amens."

He, too, seemed to speak in a revisionist mode and spirit, though he did not address traditional Adventist interpretations of specific apocalyptic symbols.

Right or Left Brain Interpretations of Revelation

Fritz Guy, professor of theology at La Sierra University's School of Religion (and formerly associate dean of Andrews University's Theological Seminary), spoke about "increasing recognition that the book of Revelation is a right-brain composition to which many people have insisted on giving a left-brain interpretation. It is not a piece of encryption to be decoded, but a song of hope by which to be captivated, an epic poem by which to be inspired and energized." Such recognition, he said, means that "our hope can sit more lightly on interpretations and applications of specific periods of time, whether half an hour, or forty-two months, or a thousand years."

Whereas Guy saw John's book as poetry, others at the conference wanted that poetry put to song. Pointing to the freedom songs in Revelation chapters four to seven, Charles Scriven, president of Columbia Union College, said, "The heavenly worshipers sing the fundamental affirmation of the biblical community: that God is the beginning and the end of all things, the maker of heaven and earth. . . . Whereas both pagan myth and secular ideology conceive a universe that is essentially violent—an amalgam of chaos, fatality, and conflict brought about by violent gods or happenstance—the gospel conceives a good creation, a universe whose maker is worthy to be praised. If conflict has intruded, it is still an intrusion: it was not there to begin. Instead of assuming, then, that violence is inherent and inevitable, the gospel assumes the 'ontological priority of peace'; it envisions, in other words, an 'overall providential design' conducive to harmony and joy."

Others in attendance also talked about music that the Apocalypse inspired. The Artist (formerly known as Prince) and Bob Marley figured prominently in separate presentations. In another, Kendra Haloviak, assistant professor of religion at Columbia Union College, said, "By including hymns, the writer of Revelation creates a unique, unstable situation where different times and spaces are in dialogue with each other. The readers' real historical time-space is introduced into the apocalyptic narrative. The future-transcendent collides with the present-earthly."

Stories of Courage and Forgiveness

The conference ended with a Sabbath morning liturgical service that featured several stories of individuals who, through the strength of God, have triumphed over such current-day beasts as the U.S. tobacco industry, apartheid in South Africa, and drug cartels in South America. Sculptures that represented the seven churches of the Apocalypse set the stage at the front of the round chapel at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where the attendees gathered.

And there was singing.

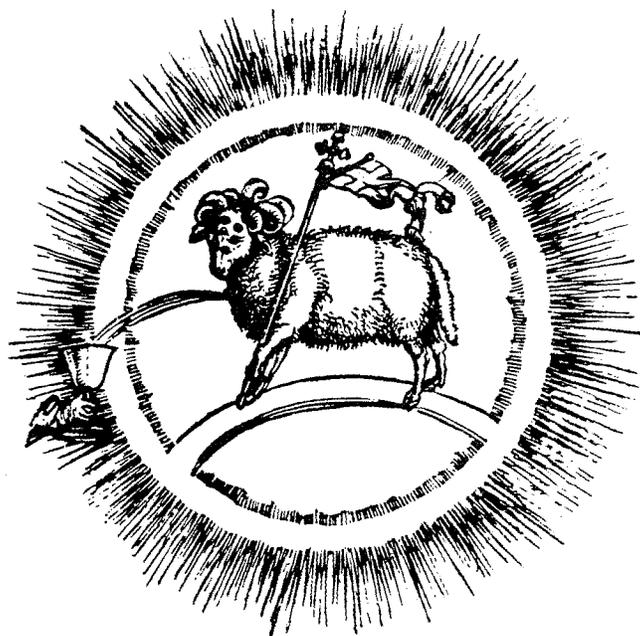
“The experience of singing sparks our moral imaginations so that we leave this place enthusiastically considering ways the vision can be lived out in our particular churches and schools and neighborhoods,” said Haloviak. “When we sing, we enter a great dialogue of words, stories, time-space locations. We join our voices in a most amazing conversation, which is also a song.”

*After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count,
From every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing
Before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches
In their hands. They cried out in a loud voice, saying,
Salvation belongs to our God
Who is seated on the throne,
And to the Lamb!
And all the angels stood around the throne
and around the elders
And the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces
before the throne and worshiped God, singing,
Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom
And thanksgiving and honor
And power and might
Be to our God forever and ever! Amen!*

(Rev. 7: 9-12)

Doug Morgan is associate professor of church history and chairman of the department of history and political science at Columbia Union College. His Ph.D. in church history is from the University of Chicago.
dmorgan@cuc.edu

Bonnie Dwyer is editor of *Spectrum*.
BonnieDwyer@compuserve.com



Summarizing the Shift

Guy seemed to sum up the shift in Adventist theology. According to him, “We are not, and cannot be, Adventist in exactly the same way as were our spiritual and theological great-great-grandparents a century and a half ago. That is, the Advent hope does not and cannot mean for us exactly what it meant for them. Our world is different—technologically, culturally, religiously, and so are its inhabitants—including us.”

Guy imagined a conversation with Uriah Smith. “For our generation of Adventists, as for his,” Guy would explain, “the Advent hope envisions an actual, objective coming of God again to our world. And then I would say further that as we enter the twenty-first century, our hope is historically realistic, scripturally responsible, spiritually positive, theologically modest, and existentially valuable. . . .”

“This then, is how we are Adventist as we enter the twenty-first century—not in exactly the same way that our Adventist foreparents were, but authentically, passionately, and (in our best moments) radiantly Adventist nevertheless—living in joy and not in fear, in love and not in competition, in generosity and not in acquisitiveness. Our Advent hope does not predict the future, but looks forward to it eagerly (which is spiritually much more important); for it knows that the future is, in the most profound sense, God’s future, that what is coming is the activity and presence of God, and that in everything God will be working for good.”



Freedom songs:

The Apocalypse of John the Revelator and the Atonement of Christ

By Charles Scriven

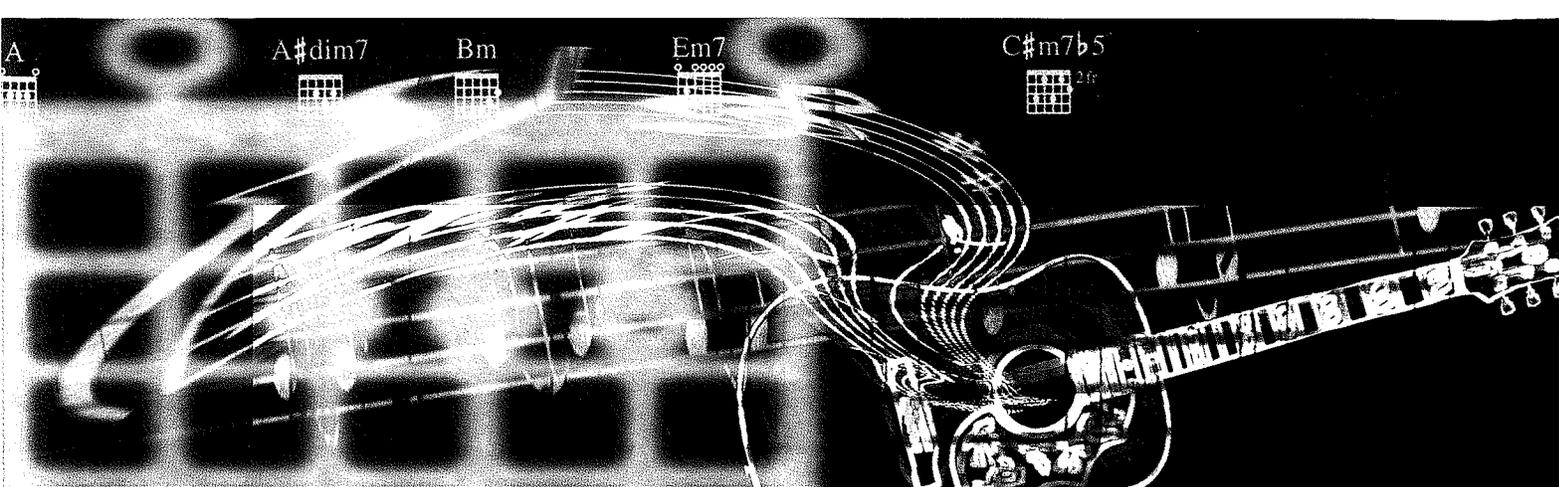
*Follow, poet, follow right
to the bottom of the night,
With your unconstraining voice
Still persuade us to rejoice
—W. H. Auden¹*

The first followers of Christ rose up under “the shadow and the frown of Caesar.” When they could achieve prosperity through silent collaboration, they mainly did so, finding Roman cities congenial to a faith that was soft and unobtrusive.² But the most alert and visionary in their number recognized the lineaments of evil empire: the avarice and duplicity, the sophistication and high culture, the contempt for life, the spurious peace. John’s Apocalypse gives voice to the visionary viewpoint. Here poetry confronts unexpurgated fact. It addresses conflict; it foments awareness of injustice and oppression. Yet the rage that flows easily from such awareness neither fizzles into resignation nor explodes into violence; it resolves instead into joyful, revolutionary song. A dream springs alive, and the kingdom of evil seems neither benign nor invincible. The faithful of God receive new stamina and ardor for marching onto the field of conflict under a new banner and a new strategy.

That banner, and that strategy, is the cross. It is the blood atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is the redeeming action of the Lion who is the Lamb. In chapters four to seven, John explores all this in his account of a vision that begins, “After this I looked, and there in heaven a door stood open” (4:1). In retelling what he sees, John first of all discredits Caesar’s power and authority. Then he upholds Christ as liberator, and declares his sacrificial death the key to victory. Finally, he makes the work of Christ the work of the Church: blood atonement is the founding of a new people who keep Christ’s will and way alive until conflict ends and peace—true peace, the divine shalom—begins.

John’s speech about God offended Roman authorities and led to his exile on the island of Patmos. There, John tells us, he was caught up one day in dream. He saw the risen Lord with eyes “like a flame of fire” and heard from his mouth words like “a sharp, two-edged sword.” Dazzled, he “fell at his feet as though dead.” The Lord put his hand on him and said, “Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last” (1:10, 14, 16). Then the Lord told him the conditions and prospects of seven churches that John loved in seven Asian cities (chapters 2 and 3).

Now John peers into the dwelling place of God; around God’s throne is a rainbow, and along with the rainbow twenty-four elders and a ring of living creatures, all immersed in flashing light and thundering sound. The four



living creatures sing the first of the freedom songs—that is what I will call them—recorded in chapters four to seven:

*Holy, holy, holy,
The Lord God the Almighty, who was and is and
is to come.* (4:8)

Then the twenty-four elders chime in with the second of the freedom songs:

*You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive
glory and honor and power, for you created all
things, and by your will they existed and were
created.* (4:11)

These songs declare the basis for the work of Christ. The heavenly worshipers sing *the* fundamental affirmation of the biblical community: that God is the beginning and end of all things, the maker of heaven and earth. Thus no past or present power, nor any that looms ahead, can frustrate the will of the One whom Christians praise and heed. Whereas both pagan myth and secular ideology conceive a universe that is *essentially violent*—an amalgam of chaos, fatality, and conflict brought about by violent gods or happenstance—the gospel conceives a good creation, a universe whose maker is worthy to be praised. If conflict has intruded, it is still an intrusion: it was not there to begin. Instead of assuming, then, that violence is inherent and inevitable, the gospel assumes the “ontological priority of peace”; it envisions, in other words, an “overall providential design” conducive to harmony and joy.⁹

If this is the most fundamental affirmation of faith, it is also, perhaps, the most outrageous. With nature red in tooth and claw, and humanity so often inhumane, it is easy to doubt or dismiss. Yet belief in God as Creator is the key to overcoming resigned or violent rage. So when John, in the midst of evil empire, hears the heavenly creation songs, he hears the drum-beat of hope. Caesar, for all his pomp and power, cannot

be the last word, nor can his deceits, his corrupt sophistication, his ruthless peace. The God who is the first word is also the last, and all who long for harmony and joy may take heart and take action. With God as Creator, it makes sense to dream; it makes sense to attempt bold transformations of the fallen world.

After the two freedom songs that celebrate divine creation, John sees a scroll in God’s right hand that contains the secrets of the universe. He longs to know these secrets, but the scroll is shut with seven seals, and no one can open it. John breaks into tears. Then an elder points to someone he calls “the Lion of the tribe of Judah” (5:5). This Lion “has conquered,” the elder says, and he can open the scroll. When John looks again the Lion is a Lamb, “standing as if it had been slaughtered” (5:6). Now, at the sight of this strange conqueror—though bloodied to death, he still stands tall—the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fill the throne room with sung praise.

*You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals,
for you were slaughtered and by your blood
you ransomed for God saints from every tribe
and language and people and nation;
you have made them to be a kingdom and priests
serving our God and they will reign on earth.”*
(5:9, 10)

Again, this is a freedom song. For the heavenly choir, the death of Christ is a means of ransom; it is the price paid for liberation of a people who themselves become mediators of divine blessing and who themselves stand tall at the end, victors over evil empire. Although in popular piety the death of Christ satisfies the divine demand for punishment of sin,⁴ here that is not at all the case. Here the death of Christ confronts evil power and meets human need. The song’s ransom metaphor evokes the experience of emancipation for slaves and prisoners of war, and the point is that the Lamb, by means both strange and courageous, defies and subverts the forces responsible for human bondage.

Whatever limits or destroys a child of God meets with resistance, and finally defeat, at the hands of the Christ who sheds blood for humanity.

How can exposure to slaughter be a strategy for conquest of evil? How can a defenseless Lamb vanquish his adversaries like a Lion? John's greeting to the seven churches provides one clue. "Grace to you and peace," he says as the Apocalypse begins, not only from God but also "from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the first-born of the dead, the ruler of the kings of the earth" (1:4, 5). Here the death of Christ finds a context: his resurrection, to be sure, and his destiny as conqueror, but also his *life*. Mere death is not the point, and mere death could not effect the ransom. Death as the capstone of faithful life—death as the cost of the radical compassion and peacemaking portrayed in the Lamb's life story—could effect the ransom. According to the testimony of the first Christians, it did.

But still, how? The second clue is that the freedom song expresses the sense that the Lamb is *worthy*. In his compassion and peacemaking, Jesus adopted the practice of service to all and violence to none. Thus he averted, in a phrase from Martin Luther King, the "descending spiral" of coercive violence; he engaged the evil powers without *becoming* (and *begetting*) what he was trying to defeat.⁵ Not only, then, did he accost evil, he discredited evil. He exposed it and made of it, as Paul would later say, "a public example."⁶ Through his defiant, yet noncoercive love, Jesus embodied an alternative both to the indifference that leaves evil uncontested, and to the violent resistance that contests it all too superficially. Even if it cost him his own life, he determined, in language Mahatma Gandhi would one day use, to actually *be* the change he wished see in the world.⁷ His strategy would be persuasion, not coercion. His worthiness—his admirable example and its arresting consequences—would baffle and finally exhaust the evil powers.

The freedom song next declares that those ransomed for new life through the death of the Lamb become a new people. Drawn from every tribe and

language, they become a "kingdom," a community of "priests" who serve God now and will one day "reign on earth." Popular piety, aping modernity's obsession with the individual, overuses the singular in both its praise of God and its exposition of the gospel. The Apocalypse, on the other hand, thinks mostly in the plural, and imagines the *shared life* of those who benefit from Christ's atonement. The ransomed link themselves as one, a kind of "anti-kingdom to the Roman empire."⁸ Together, they become mediators of divine blessing and, in the end, victors over evil power.

Now John hears the angels join the heavenly choir in another hymn to the slaughtered Lamb; then he hears every creature, every voice in the universe, fuse into climactic affirmation:

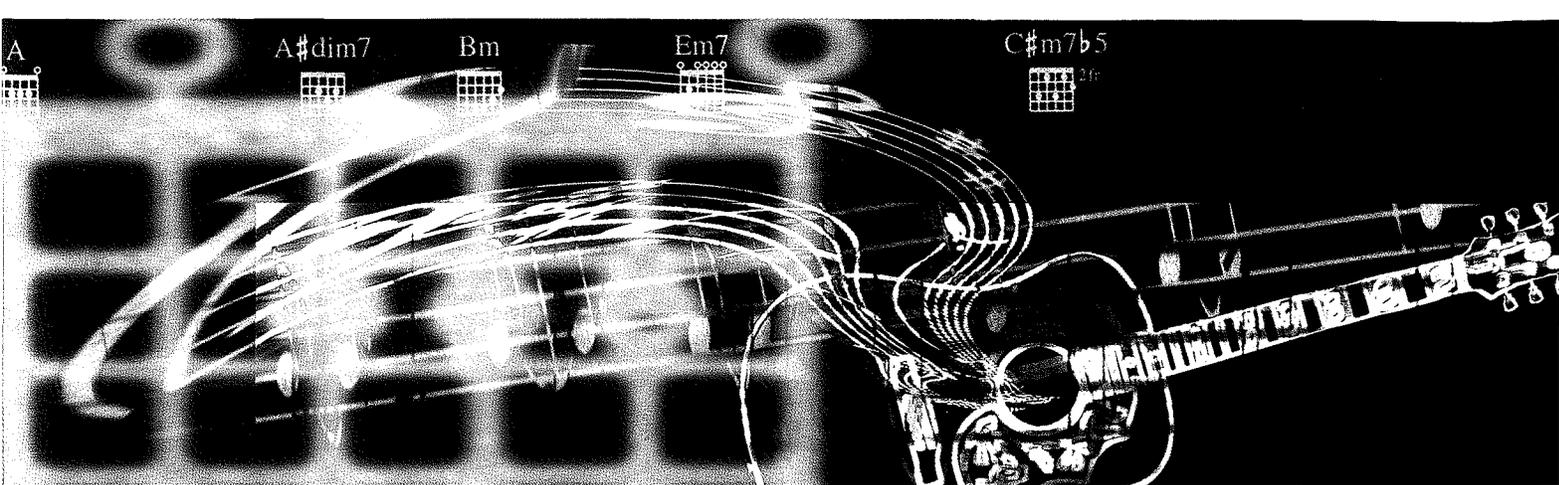
To the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever." (5:13)

Here, against the orthodoxy of the ages, the singers identify *God* with nonviolent love; they identify *God* with the Lamb who journeyed to Jerusalem and faced in that great city the consequences of boundless compassion.

Worship, as commentator Leonard Thompson puts it, declares "what is truly real and therefore what is true."⁹ Apocalyptic worship establishes the truth of the cross, a truth that subverts kings and emperors and ascribes "blessing and honor and glory and might" to the God of the Lamb. It makes the Creator and Redeemer one, and certifies that "painful embodiment of forgiving love—even to the point of Gethsemane"¹⁰ is what achieves lasting liberation, is the one best and the one God-ordained strategy for permanent peace.

The truth of apocalyptic worship is by no means mindless optimism. In chapter six, John's vision represents human history through images that come into view as the Lamb opens the scroll that contains the secrets of the universe. The breaking of the first four seals exposes four cavaliers who evoke the evils of

"You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slaughtered and by your blood you ransomed for God saints from every tribe and language and people and nation; you have made them to be a kingdom and priests serving our God and they will reign on earth." (5:9, 10)



military conquest, lost peace, economic upheaval, and death by violence, famine, and pestilence.¹¹ When the Lamb opens the fifth seal, the souls of those who, like the Lamb, have been “slaughtered” for their loyalty to God (6:9), enter the picture; these martyrs symbolize persecution. Then, with the opening of the sixth seal, still more images of natural catastrophe appear. So if the Apocalypse imagines the way to permanent peace, it also acknowledges the setbacks, the atrocities, the terror. It even acknowledges the spiritual agony that comes into play: John hears the suffering faithful, as impatient as Habakkuk, wondering “how long” the ordeal must go on (6:10).

If the suffering faithful have no illusions about adversity in human history, neither do they withdraw into the false spirituality of escape. As the image of the slaughtered martyrs already implies, they take the risk of involvement rather than wringing their hands on the sidelines: their hope is as engaged and courageous as the Lamb’s. Chapter seven even suggests that the faithful approach their mission with the focus and discipline of an army; they are the “one hundred forty-four thousand” (7:1-8; cf. 14:1-5, 12), those who know, that is, that following the Lamb and obeying the commandments of God means readiness for battle.¹²

Now John sees another multitude, as diverse as all humanity, standing before God and the Lamb, “robed in white” (7:9). They give voice to their grateful adoration, as do the angels. Then one of the elders approaches John to say (7:13), “Who are these, robed in white, and where have they come from?” John returns the question, and the elder himself provides the answer: “These are they who have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (7:14).

As perspective on the work of Christ, this is truly striking. It turns out that the faithful may resemble the Lamb even to the point of blood atonement. Some spill their own blood in the field of conflict, their loyalty tested even unto death. They thus share, to the *n*th

degree, in “the agony, the tribulation, and the patience” of Christ, and so have a share in his “redemptive action.” They experience, in a word, what Jesus experienced, and like him they become the victors for it, and their white robes signify that victory.¹³

All this sheds light on the first song to the Lamb that John hears in his vision. There the “slaughtered” Lamb is said to have “ransomed” a new people, from every tribe and language, to be a priestly kingdom for God (5:9, 10). They become, that is, mediators of divine blessing, and now it is clear that their work fully resembles the work of Christ. They throw themselves, as he did, into the “ordeal” (7:14) of history, refusing either to fall into lockstep with imperial evil or to withdraw into complacent private piety. They meet human need through service to all and violence to none. They embrace, by means the Lamb pioneered, all that is good; they resist all that is evil. They themselves participate, in other words, in the ransoming work of Christ. They become liberators; they suffer death, if need be, on behalf of others.

John Howard Yoder wrote: “The confessing people of God is the new world on its way.”¹⁴ John the Revelator certainly sees the new people of God as *being* the change that is needed, and he certainly holds out the prospect of the new world on its way. It’s no wonder that now, at the climax of his vision, he soars again into poetry. Seeing the ransomed of the Lord before the throne, worshiping God, he imagines their future like a blazing prophet:

*They will hunger no more, and thirst no more;
the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat;
for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd,
and he will guide them to springs of the water of life,
and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”* (7:16, 17)

This is the freedom to which all the freedom songs look forward. Yet here freedom surpasses mere emancipation from powers that limit or destroy: it becomes the

divine shalom, the sweeping wholeness of life that, after all, is the whole point of God's atoning work. Here John, building on Ezekiel, foresees the day when the bloodied Lamb, now resurrected and enthroned, is the people's shepherd, and the long-venerated "covenant of peace" finds fulfillment in shared prosperity.¹⁵

All this John sees through the open door of heaven. The Creator puts Caesar in his place. The Lamb ransoms a people to perform a ransoming work themselves. All creatures, confident and glad, celebrate before God. In chapters four to seven, John's vision is no puzzle for sleuths and debaters, no calendar for the merely curious. It is food for the praying imagination. It is a summons to atonement and peacemaking. It is the song that stifles rage and resignation and gives birth to generosity and joy.

For the Apocalypse, atonement is liberation achieved under the banner and strategy of the cross. The point is not punitive and the means neither violent nor abusive.¹⁶ Nor is the agent Christ alone. Here Jesus is the *representative* man, the man who, in ransoming the victimized and making peace instead of conflict, realizes what everyone can have a share in.¹⁷ When Martin Luther King preached the 1963 funeral for two girls killed in a Montgomery, Alabama, church bombing, he said their "innocent blood may well serve as the redemptive force that will bring new light to this dark city."¹⁸ In holding that "unmerited" human suffering can have an effect like Christ's, King was faithful to the apocalyptic vision. Here evil is overcome by goodness and violence by nonviolence, and here the faithful share both in the payment of the price and the winning of the victory. Here the Church, like the Church's Lord, performs a priestly function and is "the bearer of reconciliation."¹⁹ Here the disciples' story *is* the Jesus story.

These are points that Adventist thinking, captive, perhaps, to the spirit of modernity, has often missed. Almost nothing of John's vision comes through in the (highly individualistic) dispute over the theology of the cross that racked the Adventist Church during the 1970s and 1980s.²⁰ During the 1960s, many Church leaders

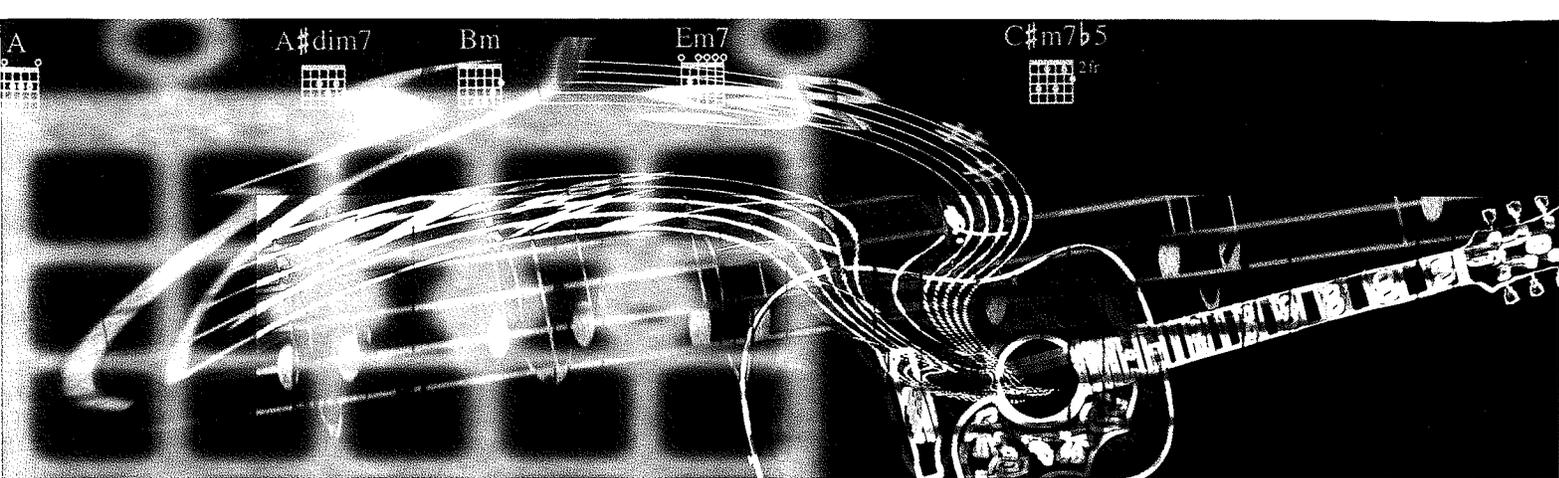
were aloof to the civil rights movement; in 1965, for example, F. D. Nichol, editor of the *Review and Herald*, criticized clergy for participation in freedom marches.²¹

Still, hints of openness to John's vision of atonement appear both in the older and more recent history of Adventism. Ellen White long ago evoked the conflict image with her talk of the "great controversy," and spoke of the "*Redeemer*" (my italics) "enlisting" his followers in redemptive service; their calling, she said, is to be "co-workers with Christ." Between the 1960s and the outbreak of the disagreement concerning the cross, Gottfried Osterwal proposed that the "church's mission" is to "participate in God's own mission." In 1983, Bert Beach affirmed the ransoming work of the faithful with his argument that the "Christian Church is the peace-making link between the first and second advents."²²

What has yet to emerge in popular Adventism, however, is the perspective that John's vision addresses the praying imagination *today* as it confront the evils of *today*. When the South African pastor Allan Boesak was contending with apartheid, he came to see that "John, in describing his own time, is describing the times in which we live."²³ That same perspective—the sense that "the cliché called Rome is never quite finished with"²⁴ and that John's vision has no single referent—might have blunted Adventist complicity, not only with Jim Crow in North America, but also with Nazi terror in Europe and tribal genocide in Africa. In any case, it could now generate new devotion to Christ, new insight into the ransoming work of the Church, new stamina and ardor for the *present* field of conflict.

No one would call this easy. Yet according to the faith inscribed in John's Apocalypse, Christ's atoning work, despite setbacks, atrocities, and terror, achieves victory in the end. Of Jesus it has been said, indeed, that killing him was like trying to destroy a dandelion seed-head by blowing on it. The faithfulness of those who follow Jesus' pioneering footsteps is also seed. It is the seed of peace for all humanity.

**"They will hunger no more, and thirst no more;
the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat;
for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd,
and he will guide them to springs of the water of life,
and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes." (7:16, 17)**



Notes and References

1. W. H. Auden, "In Memory of W. B. Yeats," in *Selected Poems* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), sect. 3, stanza 7.
2. The quoted phrase is from Daniel Berrigan, "War in Heaven, Peace on Earth," *Spirituality Today* 40 (spring 1988): 42. Leonard Thompson has argued influentially that toward the end of the first century, most Christians in Roman cities were living "quietly, peacefully, and prosperously." See, e.g., *Revelation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 22.
3. John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 22, 364. All scriptural quotations are taken from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible.
4. I have expressed strong reservations about this popular understanding in "God's Justice, Yes; Penal Substitution, No," *Spectrum* 22 (Oct. 1993): 31-38. For groundbreaking analysis of the ransom metaphor, see Eugene Teselle, "The Cross as Ransom," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 4, no. 2 (1996): 147-70.
5. Martin Luther King Jr., *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), 62, quoted in Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 202.
6. This is the language Paul, looking back on Jesus' life, used in Colossians. 2:15.
7. Mahatma Gandhi, as is well known, embraced Jesus' strategy of nonviolence. One source for his familiar remark is Albert Gore, *Earth in the Balance* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1992), 14. Compare the level of "worthiness" we ascribe to freedom fighters who kill for the cause: Lenin, Castro, and Mao. Or (more troubling) think: George Washington.
8. Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza uses this phrase in her exposition of Revelation 5, 9, and 10, in *The Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgment* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 75.
9. Thompson, *The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 70.
10. L. Gregory Jones, *Embodying Forgiveness* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1995), 293.
11. Scholars differ on the significance of the white horse and its rider, some thinking that the Messiah is symbolized here. I accept the view of David Barr, in *Tales of the End: A Narrative Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Santa Rosa, Calif.: Polebridge, 1998), 82; and David E. Aune, in *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 5B, *Revelation 6-16* (Dallas: Word Books, 1998), 393-95, that the first cavalier represents military conquest.
12. In Revelation 14, the celibacy of the one hundred forty-four thousand connotes holy warfare. See Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 443-47.
13. The quotes come from Paul S. Minear, *I Saw a New*

Earth (Washington, D.C.: Corpus Books, 1968), 79. "White signifies victory (not necessarily purity)," according to Barr, *Tales of the End*, 9.

14. Yoder, *The Royal Priesthood: Essays Ecclesiological and Ecumenical* (Scottsdale, Penn.: Herald Press, 1998), 373.

15. Revelation 7:15-17 alludes to Ezekial 34 and 37:24-27, with its imagery of the Good Shepherd and its portrayal of God's promises as a "covenant of peace." Similar shepherd imagery occurs, e.g., in Psalms 23 and Isaiah. 40:11. These verses also allude to Isaiah. 25:8 and 49:10. I have further explored the themes of peace and peacemaking in "The Peacemaking Remnant: Dreaming a Grander Dream," *Spectrum* 27 (summer 1999): 67-73.

16. See Darby Kathleen Ray, *Deceiving the Devil: Atonement, Abuse, and Ransom* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1998), for an excellent effort to rehabilitate Atonement doctrine from feminist criticism that orthodoxy makes the Father an abusive parent.

17. On the idea of Jesus as the "representative," not the "substitute," consult, e.g., Colin Gunton, *The Actuality of Atonement* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1989); and S. W. Sykes, *Sacrifice and Redemption: Durham Essays in Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). Here recall Hebrews 12:1, 2, where Jesus is the "pioneer" of the faith we embody.

18. James M. Washington, ed., *I Have a Dream: Writings and Speeches that Changed the World* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), 116.

19. Yoder, *Royal Priesthood*, 2.

20. I refer to the controversy surrounding Desmond Ford.

21. Nichol, "Unity in the Faith," *Review and Herald*, Apr. 29, 1965, 12. Nichol expressed "sympathetic concern" for the "underprivileged," but he upheld "personal evangelism" against the "social gospel" and suggested that freedom marches contradicted the "noncombatant attitude."

22. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1988), and *Testimonies for the Church*, 9 vols. (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1948), 3:382, 391; Osterwal, *Mission Possible* (Nashville: Southern Publishing Association, 1972), 69; Beach, "Adventists and Disarmament," *Adventist Review*, Apr. 21, 1983, 5.

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Charles Scriven is president of Columbia Union College. He has served as co-editor of *Spectrum*, pastor of Sligo SDA Church, and professor at Walla Walla College. He is the author of *The Transformation of Culture: Social Ethics After H. Richard Niebuhr* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1988).

president@cuc.edu

Go the Seven Churches, Write . . .

By Charles H. Tidwell Jr.

1. South Lancaster — Christmas

"I know your deeds, your hard work . . . yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love"

The square brick building is vaguely New England with bland alcoves, arched ceiling, corner windows framing only pines and sky — no distractions for these serious faces whose hard work built this place to pray. They soon replaced the architect's framework cross hanging behind the pulpit with a drab pipe organ.

At Christmas, wreaths and boughs, ribbons and lights line the alcoves; advent candles flicker; banners proclaim "Peace on Earth," "Goodwill," "Rejoice"; children sing as angels, shepherds, mother. The cross is still missing but at Christmas the Child returns.

2. Lowville

"I know your afflictions and your poverty"

it's tiny
hardly seating sixty
hidden by the towering Methodist church next door

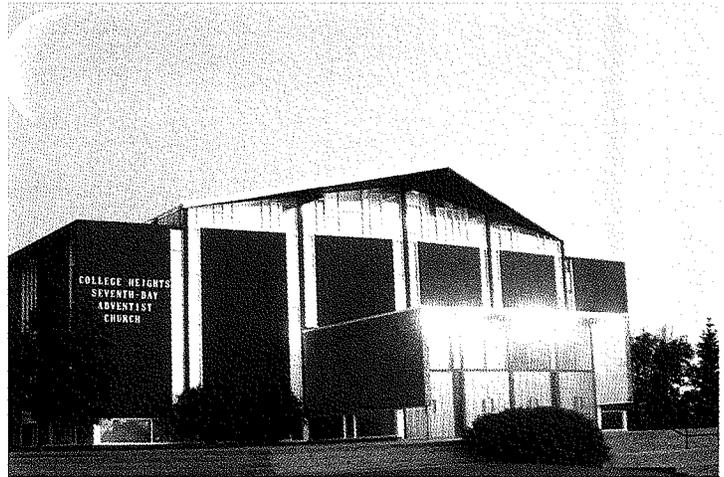
even the short steeple,
making sure that all who drive past
know it's not a community center,
is an afterthought

the youngest male
is fifty-five
leading each week a dozen or so
gray or bald
barely kneeling before two flags
and an open Bible
praying fervently for the absent ill

3. Central Alberta, Canada

"To him who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna"

Standing outside the church on this fall Sabbath,
I can't help notice the fields of wheat and barley
interspersed with canola, oats, and alfalfa



College Heights Church, Alberta, Canada: Jerry Livadny

stretching in every direction to the horizon
and even beyond — east through Saskatchewan
and Manitoba, south through Montana and Wyoming,
a harvest almost beyond imagination.

In spring the fields are filled with harrows and seeders.
In summer, irrigation wheels like immense insects
brood over the growing grain. And now combines
scour the fields while railway cars wait at every siding.
Inside, I faintly hear the familiar hymn:
"Far and near the fields are teaming."
But the church never plants, never waters, never reaps.

4. Hong Kong Chapel

"I know . . . that you are now doing more than you did at first"

Filipina maids, in Sabbath finery,
arrive early, crowding the front rows,
chattering with friends missed for a week.

(It's been refurbished. Peeling paint, water . . .

Chinese old folks from the retirement villa
hobble in and huddle in the middle,
patiently waiting for the translator.

. . . stains are gone. Chill winter winds no longer . . .

Malaysian, Thai, and Korean students
arrive on time, sing loudly from the back.

. . . whistle through warped, rusted frames. . .

Faculty in white shirts or tailored dress
lead from the platform or stand watch in back.

... Graffiti on pews has been sanded out ...

Local students in T-shirts and designer jeans
trickle in from battling slow bus routes
to fill the empty rows as the sermon starts.

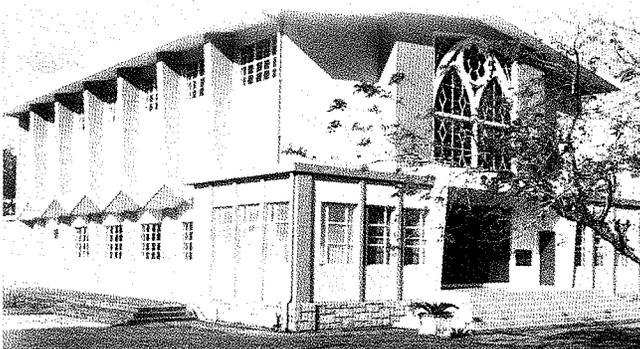
... and attendance doubled in a few years.)

A truly pan-Asian church with youth and age:
so many strands yet so little unity,
each suspicious, each jealous of the other.

5. Singapore

"You have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead! Wake up!"

The lofty ceiling echoes
with murmured prayers and melodies.
Then the fiery sermon bursts forth
proclaiming — go forth to all nations.



Hong Kong Adventist College Chapel: Charles Tidwell

Above the dozens of bowed black heads
floats a glistening dove, opalescent
in the midst of red-orange flames,
hovering above a blue-green sea:
the emblem of peace for a hurried world.

But it's just a stained glass dove,
stained glass flames, stained glass sea.
And the fervent words which fill the room
are never heard by the thousands who pass
the fenced-in church on Ballister Road.

6. Chiang Mai, Thailand

"I know that you have little strength"

After 50 kilometers of narrow roads
past coconut palms and paddy fields,

we parked in a dusty lot beside the church.
Startled by dozens of sandals and slippers
neatly paired on the sidewalk and steps,
we slipped off our shoes, padded up the steep steps
to worship in stocking feet that Sabbath among new-found friends.

We returned that afternoon past temples and shrines,
past villages with a spirit house in the corner of every yard,
past shorn monks in saffron-red robes,
past tourists traps— elephant baths,
paper umbrella stands, silver shops—
into a bustling city with markets and shops,
hotels and guest houses, nightclubs and bars
hawking beer and souvenirs, sex and drugs for the tourist trade.

What can a friendly barefoot Christian do?

7. Berrien Springs — Easter Sabbath

*"You say 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth,
and do not need a thing'"*

This Adventist cathedral
is vibrant with sound.
Banners, blue and purple and gold,
give thanks for enduring love.
Hosannah!

Chorus, trombones, trumpets,
silver pipes reverberate.
Hanging bronze lamps,
Paneled roof and rafters tremble.
Sing Hallelujah!

Two thousand voices harmonize,
anthems resound
shaking Gothic gold-glass windows
rattling rainbow, clouds, and stained-glass King.
Joyful, joyful, we adore you!

This clear-eyed people,
generations of the young and wise
clothed in Sabbath best,
need nothing more
in this sound-rich sanctuary.
Christ the Lord is risen today!

Charles H. Tidwell Jr. is the director of off-campus programs for the School of Business at Andrews University. Besides administrative work, he also teaches intercultural communications and is adjunct professor of English. He has lived in Hong Kong, Canada, and Massachusetts.
tidwell@andrews.edu

Growing up Adventist -



Photos for collage by Thomas Osborn

Nothing I Learned in *Kindergarten* Makes Any Sense

By Richard Rice

I envy people who achieve financial success with one book. I envy people even more who achieve financial success with one clever book title. Take, for example, *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus*.¹ That title is all it took. In fact, that title is all there is. Does anyone seriously think that John Gray's writings actually add anything to that clever phrase? (Personally, I think the title is an exaggeration. There are times when my wife and I are lots farther apart than Mars and Venus.) Then there's Robert Fulghum's whimsical title, *All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten*.² The rest is history. People evidently line up to buy his books and hear him give readings.

Whether or not you accept Fulghum's view of things, however—and I obviously have some reservations—he raises a question that we all ask sooner or later. What shall I do with my childhood? Nobody seems to know. Is childhood something to return to? Is it something we should hang on to? Or is childhood something we should try to escape? Like somebody said once, your childhood is what you spend the rest of your life trying to get over.

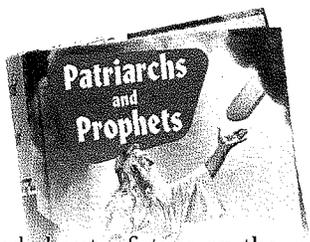
Like Fulghum, a lot of people sentimentalize their early years, especially if they were happy ones. I'll always remember the kindergarten I attended in Princess Anne, Maryland, during my father's first year of medical practice. It was right down the street from the house where we rented a second-story apartment. Mrs. Webster was the teacher. We learned to listen quietly when she read stories, to take turns, and to hold hands when we took walks. I also learned to stay out of the bathroom when there were girls in it. Mrs. Webster made a big deal out of that.

One day I learned how far politeness and courtesy could take you. Mrs. Webster was going to pick one of us to hold the flag while everyone recited the Pledge of Allegiance. The other kids all danced and shouted for the privilege. I looked at the foolishness around me and decided to set myself apart from the rabble. So I raised my hand quietly and affected a look of respectful expectation. Naturally, I got to hold the flag. As a bonus Mrs. Webster described the superiority of my deportment in glowing terms to the others.

I must have carried that attitude with me into grade school, because while teachers were generally pleased with me over the years, my classmates sometimes weren't. One in particular wanted to beat me up around fourth grade or so, and he reiterated the threat on a daily basis. Tom, as we'll call him—since that was his name—didn't have the same luck with school and teachers that I did, and he was determined to take out his frustration on me. I think I can understand why. I must have been insufferable to someone like him. I managed to avoid a showdown, although there were a few close calls, and in time we became pretty good friends. But my kindergarten experience had let me down. Being nice to teachers doesn't cut any ice with your schoolmates. In fact, it works against you.

I was also introduced to serious music about the time I was in kindergarten. I distinctly remember sitting at the piano with the grade one book by Czerny or Schirmer or somebody, with my mother, my first piano teacher, close beside—too close for comfort. There were tears running down my cheeks as I thought of other kids outside playing ball or hide-and-seek, while I was laboriously trying to get my fingers to behave in very unnatural ways. But mother was insistent. Someday I would thank her, she said. Besides, she wasn't pushing me to be a concert artist or anything like that. She only wanted me to be able to play for my own enjoyment. What she really meant, of course, was that she wanted me to play for her enjoyment.

In time, I grew to love music. In fact, I became so fond of it I would have been happy to devote my life to it. I drew courage from another kindergarten certainty. You can do anything you really want to do. You can be anything you really want to be. All it takes is hard work, the determination to be the best. That's the great leveler. And so I worked hard. I took more lessons, from better and better teachers, costing my parents more and more money. And I



fantasized about a future on the concert stage or the recital hall. There was only one problem: no talent. No matter how hard I worked, my playing never got beyond barely passable. Finally, my freshman year in college a merciful professor gave me one of the lowest grades I ever got for one semester hour of piano. God had spoken, and the message was clear. I put you on earth for some other purpose than playing the piano.

In areas like music and athletics, the difference between talent and un-talent emerges with ruthless clarity. Kids who can't run fast, or throw hard, or sing sweetly, or play beautifully see more gifted colleagues rise easily to heights they could never reach with all the effort in the world. Another kindergarten platitude crumbles. Hard work doesn't always even things out. There are some places personal effort just won't take you.

If you've seen the play *Amadeus*, you know Antonio Salieri's incredulity that God had given such talent to Mozart—someone who seemed so unworthy. Beside the sublimity of Mozart's music, Salieri saw his own tiresome, bombastic efforts in all their ugliness. He realized that a lifetime of labor would never achieve the beauty that radiated from just one of the compositions that flowed effortlessly from Mozart's pen. God seems to be utterly indiscriminate in the way he distributes his gifts.

I grew up in a religious home. So kindergarten took on other dimensions, too. It meant going to a specific children's division at Sabbath School each week. There were cradle roll (this was before the invention of tiny tots), kindergarten, primary, juniors, and so on. The big development in kindergarten was that you didn't have to have your parents with you. You were on your own in a significant social setting for the first time in your life. You heard a lot of stories—many of them Bible stories—and learned a lot of memory verses. You also sang a lot of songs, including "Happy, Happy Home." "With mommy in the family, daddy in the family . . .," you get the picture.

The most important verse was "with Jesus in the family, happy, happy home." I thought Jesus was in our family. We certainly invited him to be. But my father had tremendous problems anyway. There were some mysterious absences, some late night arguments, and my parents divorced when I was eleven. The certainties of kindergarten seemed to melt away in the heat of life's tough experiences. Families with Jesus in them, I discovered, don't always avoid heartache.

And so it goes. In many ways, growing up is a

matter of coming to terms with the certainties of early life. And none of the certainties are more important than the religious ones. If you had a religious upbringing, you know what I mean. Religion has a way of painting the world in black and white contrasts. There's right and wrong, truth and error, saints and sinners, the remnant and Babylon, and ultimately heaven and hell—all very sharply delineated. But the clarity of that vision doesn't last forever. The world is much more complicated. And your outlook inevitably changes. The certainties fade. Black and white blend into various shades of gray. Nothing seems as clear-cut as it used to be.

The loss of certainty can be sad and painful. More than a century ago, Matthew Arnold portrayed its emptiness in his famous poem, "Dover Beach."

The Sea of Faith

Was once . . . at the full

But now I only hear its melancholy, long withdrawing roar,

Retreating to the breath

Of the night wind . . .

The world which seems

To lie before us like a land of dreams,

So various, so beautiful, so new,

Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,

Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain

And we are here as on a darkling plain

Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,

Where ignorant armies clash by night."³³

Not a reassuring picture, to say the least.

The certainties of childhood fade for several reasons. One is the sheer passage of time. As the years go by, things that once seemed so important just lose their significance.

Another, as we have seen, is that life inevitably brings challenges. As the questions become more and more complicated, the answers with which we grew up seem less and less adequate. In spite of Fulghum's insights—and there are many of them—the rules of the playground don't always translate to the classroom or the boardroom. New challenges require new approaches.

Another factor that applies particularly to those of us who have spent years in school is the effect of academic life. Scholars are trained to scrutinize, to insist on adequate evidence, to ferret out logical inconsistencies and weak arguments. We are naturally suspicious of claims that go beyond our experience. Scholars are trained skeptics. Our professional motto is "show me." Where's your evidence? If you can't prove it, you



shouldn't believe it! It's not hard to see the effects of this approach on religion. If trust is the natural disposition of childhood, doubt is our disposition as adults. Academic training cultivates an ethic of suspicion, if not unbelief.

So what should we do if nothing we learned in kindergarten makes any sense? How can we recover or maintain a religious sensitivity when we've become highly trained in the art of doubt? How can we live by faith, by trust, once we've learned to put every aspect of life through the fire of critical reflection, as the spokesmen of my alma mater were fond of putting it?

Here are some suggestions.

1. Be faithful to what you do know. The fact we don't know everything doesn't mean we don't know anything. In his devotional classic, *A Diary of Private Prayer*, John Baillie offers these words to help us when shadows fall across the bright path of childhood:

When the way seems dark before me, give me grace to walk trustingly.

When much is obscure to me, let me be all the more faithful to the little that I can clearly see. When the distant scene is clouded, let me rejoice that at least the next step is plain.

When what thou art is most hidden from my eyes, let me still hold fast to what thou dost command.

When insight falters, let obedience stand firm.

What I lack in faith let me repay in love.

And if still I cannot find thee, O God, then let me search my heart and know whether it is not rather I who am blind than thou who art obscure, and I who am fleeing from thee rather than thou from me.⁴

2. Find the path of service. When the door of faith is closed, says Adventist philosopher James Londis, the door of service may be open. When the Gospel according to Matthew describes the last judgment, it emphasizes what people do rather than what they believe. When the king commends those on his right hand, he says nothing about the purity of their doctrines, or the majesty of their ecclesiastical institutions. Instead, he mentions their acts of faithful service, their attention to the simple, obvious needs of other people. We can live as Jesus did, with love and care for those around us—whether or not our universe is entirely ordered—and all our beliefs make perfect sense.

3. Remember that faith is more than belief. We often have the idea that belief is the first step in any spiritual development. We have to have a system of clearly defined doctrines in place before we can find our

way spiritually. But that is not the case. Knowledge is just part of the picture, and not necessarily the first part.

4. Go easy on your childhood teachers. One of the things that sometimes prevents people from drawing strength from their early years is the discovery that their parents or teachers were wrong, occasionally dead wrong, and people grow indignant. How could parents and teachers believe some of that stuff? And how could they teach it with such self-confidence, such finality? I recently came across the book *Kaddish*, by Leon Wieseltier, a journalist living in Georgetown, D.C.⁵ He was a non-observant Jew who nevertheless decided when his father died in 1996 to follow the traditional ritual of mourning and say kaddish for his father during the year following his death. The book recounts the experiences Wieseltier had worshiping in the prescribed manner and studying to find out what his words and actions meant, in accordance with the masters of Talmudic law.

It was a deeply moving journey. Toward the end of the book, Wieseltier asks this provocative question. "The theology and the cosmology and the eschatology that are implied by the kaddish: is all this truth? I do not believe that it is," he replies. "Still, I have no patience with people who treat it as nonsense. And I do not regret for a moment that I was taught to believe it. When they taught me what they believed to be the truth, they taught me to believe that there is truth. They spared me the dizziness of my contemporaries."⁶

It is a gift to have teachers who care deeply for their students and who care deeply about the truth, even when we discover that we now inhabit a somewhat different world. In the concluding pages of his volume on *The Age of Faith*, Will Durant makes this comment about the Gothic cathedral: "one must forgive much to an age that loved so conscientiously the symbols of its faith and the work of its hands."⁷ In a similar way, we should forgive much to people who tried so hard to set our feet on the path to the celestial city.

5. Seek fellowship. The great journeys are seldom taken alone. And the journey of the spirit is no solitary quest. According to a story I once heard, some young people asked Blaise Pascal what they could do to develop their faith. The great thinker told them to go to the place where believers go. "Do what they do," he said. "Sing when they sing. Kneel when they kneel." You will find that faith can grow in the company of faith. Our model of authentic humanity is typically the isolated

individual searching bravely for knowledge, determined to find it on his own, ignoring religious tradition and religious organization. But the path of faith is not a solitary journey. It brings us into the company of faithful souls present and past, whose experience can strengthen and encourage us and whose deep convictions can guide us to our own.

Some people feel that a religious community is essentially a group of people who share the very same beliefs. Accordingly, if your views differ from the established pattern, then you need to move out on your own. Work things out for yourself. Find another group whose views are closer to yours. But there are other ways to think of community. A community is not just the end of the quest, nor is it just the beginning. It is the ideal environment in which all our questing takes place.

6. Make some distinctions between more and less important beliefs. People seem to have an all-or-nothing approach to religious ideas. One response is to keep them at any cost. The opposite response is to reject them all if you find a flaw anywhere.

I suggest another response: sort them out. Some things pass, but other things last. OK, not everything we thought was true turns out to be so. But that doesn't mean nothing we believed is true. Nor does it mean that we were wrong for believing it.

We must be ready to change our ideas, respectful of the old, but open to the new. Jaroslav Pelikan opens his magisterial multivolume study of the history of Christian thought by distinguishing between tradition and traditionalism. "Tradition," he says, "is the living faith of the dead; traditionalism is the dead faith of the living."⁸ There is a right way and a wrong way to look at the past.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus asserted that some things will last till heaven and earth pass away. In the very same sermon he told his listeners to give up some of their cherished, time-honored beliefs. "You have heard that it was said," he repeatedly intoned, "but I say to you . . ." (e.g., Matt. 5:21-22, RSV). Jesus was neither an iconoclast nor a traditionalist. He knew the past could be a drag on progress. But he also knew it was the foundation for the future.

In the greatest chapter in all his letters, Paul acknowledged that some very important things can pass away. But we can live with that because there are even more important things that don't pass away: tongues, knowledge, prophecy—important gifts of the Spirit. Hard to understand what life would be like without them; but none of them lasts forever. "So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love" (1 Cor. 13:13, RSV).

A good friend of mine went through a terribly difficult time several years ago. He lost his job. He was forced out of denominational employment for reasons that were largely political. He had to make a major career change, leaving work for which he was supremely gifted and thoroughly educated. He moved in a completely different direction.

On a visit to the West Coast once he told me about a remarkable change in his thinking. "Several months ago," he said, "I went through a very dark time. I poured out my bitterness to God and blamed him for everything wrong in my life. And then something happened. I developed a new appreciation for the plain, basic truths of the Christian gospel. Jesus loves me. I am a child of God. Nothing can keep us apart. A miracle happened, he said. The clouds lifted, and peace filled my heart." When you separate what is essential from what is merely important, wonderful things can happen.

So, when what we learned in kindergarten makes little sense, let's be sure that the Center of the universe is the center of our lives. And let's remember the most important lesson of all—the first song many of us sang: "Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so."

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Richard Rice is professor of religion at Loma Linda University. His Ph.D. in systematic theology is from the University of Chicago. His latest book, written with Clark Pinnock and others, is *The Openness of God* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity Press, 1994).
Rrice@rel.llu.edu



The Kettings in Thailand

What I Have Learned As a Missionary's Kid

By Ginger Ketting

I found myself slipping into one of my other identities recently while in San Francisco's Chinatown. Every time I met an older Chinese person, I ducked my head in deference, almost scuttling by when there was a narrow passageway to maneuver. At the Lucky Creation Restaurant, I spoke respectfully to the older lady behind the counter, apologizing humbly that my friends were not yet there, and asking if I might sit at a table and wait. Again, I found my eyes glancing downward and my body language speaking Chinese. Gone was the straight Western posture, the direct eye

contact, the I-am-dignified-and-here-to-be-served attitude that I generally use when conducting business in the United States. A part of me stood aside mentally and observed the transformation with amusement and interest while the rest of me thought and acted on its own, dictated by surroundings. My upbringing as a missionary kid (MK) had kicked in once again; I am a cultural chameleon.

The transformation takes place automatically, no matter where I go. In Finland, my American friendliness and smile disappear while in public places. Who smiles at strangers in Finland, anyway? Only Americans who don't know how to discriminate between people they know or don't know, and who tell strangers far too much about themselves far too quickly. In the company of Russian friends, I find the topics of conversation turning to art, literature, and music—things that many of my American acquaintances don't talk about. The words “my darling” and “all my love” flow easily with my Russian best friend, but I would never express my friendship in such words with those who are American or Finnish. My persona changes again when I encounter Malaysians or Singaporeans—around whom I grew up—even if they've lived in the United States for a while. I am almost overcome by an irresistible urge to greet them with, “Waaaah! So nice to see you again, lah! So long time since we see each other, aah?” Southeast Asian English has such a friendly guttural lilt to it, the sound of “home” to me.

Even within the United States, my training as a cultural chameleon training comes in handy. I remember feeling at a complete loss my freshman year in a U.S. college because all the girls seemed to discuss were guys, cars, and clothes; all the guys seemed to talk about were girls, cars, and sports. I wasn't knowledgeable in any of those topics, but I could have talked knowledgeably about refugees in Southeast Asia, or about racial tensions in my home country of Malaysia, or about interesting medical cases that my parents were seeing in the mission hospital where they worked. But none of this interested my peers. For years, I made it a point to spend time catching up on American television, music, and popular culture to establish a common base for understanding comments and culture around me.



Finding a personal identity and learning to cope independently within one's culture is a major task of adolescence and young adulthood, one that most former MKs find themselves negotiating years longer than the general population. To make it even more difficult, MKs usually give off no verbal cues (accents) or visual clues (skin color) to let others know they are different and have passed through experiences different from others. People normally tolerant and understanding of immigrants and foreigners may react to “returned” MKs with strange comments, odd glances, or blank stares when the returnees unthinkingly make comments or demonstrate approaches and attitudes perfectly appropriate in other cultures. Missionary kids are, essentially, invisible foreigners.

Since coming to the United States nearly twenty years ago, I have heard some interesting legends about MKs: they're social misfits, they go wild when suddenly freed from parental and boarding school restrictions, they're stuck up and can't deal with basic chores (like making beds and washing clothes). On the surface, the legends can be supported with the names of people we know. However, there's much more to the phenomenon of MKs. I have learned this as an MK myself and

through personal research of the subject.

A small but significant body of literature has accumulated over recent years that deals with adjustment and identity issues in the children of missionaries. Much of this research arises out of initial work done approximately 40 years ago by Ruth Useem, a sociologist at Michigan State University. Useem pioneered in the studies of returning children of overseas workers—referred to as Third Culture Kids (TCKs)—including children of missionaries, businessmen, and military employees.¹ In recent years, research specifically focused on MKs has found momentum and voice in the International Conference on Missionary Kids (ICMK), which has convened at intervals in various countries for the purpose of addressing the needs of MKs and issues that surround them. Much of the published material on missionary kids has originated in presentations given at ICMKs. David C. Pollock, a researcher and regular speaker on MK issues at ICMKs, is the executive director of Interaction, an organization that conducts seminars for TCKs and publishes a quarterly journal entitled *Interact*, which is devoted to MK education and care.

While recently giving a presentation about MK research to a group of Adventist MKs and their families, I was taken aback to look into my audience and see tears brimming in the eyes of several listeners who, for the first time, realized that there was an explanation for their personalities and approaches to life, as well as for the hurt, loneliness, and homelessness that they had experienced so deeply. MKs and their spouses spoke of being thankful for a “handle” to understand some of the dynamics in their lives.

The “handle” that emerges from recent research—which is summarized in the following section—suggests that the nature of growing up as an MK can be ambivalent, but I believe that the increasingly multicultural Adventist Church would do well to pay special heed to their experiences as it enters the twenty-first century.

Missionary Kids and Three-Dimensional Knowledge

Others have seen television reports and read newspapers and books, but MKs have been there, seeing firsthand the lives of people in other countries and experiencing the challenges of moving between various cultural settings. This experience makes MKs uniquely suited to serve as “cultural bridges” in the context of mission, diplomacy, or business. Pollock has referred to

MKs as “culture brokers” in an increasingly multicultural world.² MKs seem to intuitively recognize the possibilities for using this bank of cultural knowledge. I have seen MKs enter the field of international business, pastor multicultural congregations, teach in classrooms, and serve within health care contexts where cultural diversity is rich and demanding. MKs have found themselves explaining cultural mannerisms and customs on behalf of immigrants who would otherwise be judged negatively.

“Home Is Wherever I Am”

Useem and other researchers have noted that “the reported experiences of Third Culture Kids suggest that they cope rather than adjust, and, as one student of multicultural persons describes them, they become both ‘a part of’ and ‘apart from’ whatever situations they are in.” Pollock has noted that TCKs have the same needs as any human beings, but that their needs are more complex because of their mobility and experience in other cultures.³ The opportunities to live in other cultures and to travel are assets that make MKs valuable additions to organizations (and often, scintillating conversationalists and storytellers). However, although the cultural knowledge of an MK may enrich his or her ability to communicate across cultural lines, it can also translate into arrogance and impatience for those with less experience or knowledge.

Then there is the most loaded of all questions for MKs: “Where is home?” Many MKs find the concept of “home” difficult to define. To their parents, “home” was the country they left behind when they committed themselves to mission service. “Home” for an MK may have changed several times while parents transferred from one mission appointment to another, or as they fled one country because of political unrest and resettled in another. As one MK has remarked, “Home is wherever I am.”

Always a Residue of Pain

A great deal of research has been done about the “culture shock” of the MK who returns to his or her homeland. Areas of adjustment include taking responsibility, getting a job for the first time, and learning the values and cultural ways of conducting relationships. MKs accustomed to small family-like groups in mission schools often find adjustment to American dating relationships frightening. In addition, they find Ameri-

cans more affluent, materialistic, and wasteful.⁴ Research by K. A. F. Jordan focuses on the adaptation of Third Culture Kids as they enter college in the United States, noting that they do not fully adapt to their new setting; rather, they make “integrative adjustments.” Likewise, E. M. Stringham has found that family dynamics following reentry are characterized by declines in family cohesiveness, increased dependence of wives on their husbands for emotional support, and “interpersonal tensions consequent to children’s adaptations to their home culture.” Furthermore, children adopted home culture values more quickly than did their parents.⁵

Seeking Security in Relationships

Mobility makes the life of an MK even more complex. Instead of attaching to a place, MKs tend to seek rootedness in relationships. Yet, as an MK, I have found myself dealing with confusion and sometimes revulsion at the cultural ways of relationships in the United States. Why does someone ask me, “How are you doing?” then continue without waiting for an answer? When someone says, “We’ll have to get together for lunch sometime,” why are they taken aback when I suggest a specific day? Doesn’t anyone ever mean anything friendly in this country? And what about dating? which works differently in the United States—and with a great deal more pressure and stress—than where I come from. I’ve had a few people back off after I said something “weird.” How can I know when I might sabotage myself at the beginning of a friendship with an innocent but culturally incorrect comment? Are new friendships really worth the effort anyway when I have not finished grieving the loss of old friends from MK boarding school? What if I enter a college setting? Won’t I just have to say goodbye again in a short time?

There are many reasons for MKs to feel insecure in relationships.

Coping with Loneliness

Loneliness is inevitable with MKs. It is impossible to say goodbye to a large group of friends and family, to begin anew in a new culture, and not feel isolated and lonely. Loneliness for family can create some unusual ways of thinking and coping. It’s not unusual for an MK in college to considering “stopping out” to go back and be with family for a while, or conversely, to put on a backpack and start traveling the world. Researchers

have noticed that some MKs tend to join cult-like organizations in search of a close family unit with strong structures like those on mission stations.⁶

The pain of separation abides in the lives of MKs. It can work several ways. MKs may create deep friendships almost immediately, almost as if they’re grabbing quickly for relationships, afraid that they might lose time building connections before saying goodbye. Grief from separations can also eventually affect their willingness to create new relationships, making it safer for them to simply build surface acquaintances, expecting to move on sometime. In some cases, there may also be a sense that moving away is an option or an “out” if relationships aren’t satisfying; if I don’t find what I’m looking for here, nothing can make me stay and make it work.

Adjusting to One’s “Home” Culture

The immediate issue with which MKs deal is one of fitting into a new culture. It seems that MKs, who are skilled at taking characteristics of other cultures, would use the same skills to adjust to a “homeland.” However, adapting to the “home” culture doesn’t seem to happen so easily for returning missionaries. With whom does an MK fit in after returning? In one study of MKs, only 7 percent of those studied reported feeling “at home” in the United States, whereas 74 percent said that they felt most comfortable with “internationally oriented people” who have lived overseas.⁷ I personally remember seeking out Asian students or other former missionaries during the first few years after moving to the United States for college, feeling most comfortable with the topics, foods, and camaraderie shared in those groups.

Latent Adolescent Rebellion

J. Powell has noted that a “latent rebellion” can be seen among MKs in response to cultural pressures. According to Powell, “In counseling adult MKs in their thirties and even early forties I’ve seen them express a tremendous surge of anger at the church, at the missionary community, or sometimes at specific people.”⁸ What feeds this anger? One factor might be that MKs have always stood out as representatives of an alien culture, nation, and religious group. After growing up with a large degree of independence and social status that puts them in the society of businessmen, diplomats, and politicians, MKs find it difficult to adjust to being individuals who don’t stand out in the crowd.

Uncertain Identities

MKs must also deal with creating their own identity in a world whose cultural contexts continually change. The typically adolescent developmental questions of “Who am I?” “Where do I fit in?” and “How am I significant in this world?” take on a different flavor and are processed differently as the MK moves during adolescence to a new country and culture. In my own research, I compared identity formation in MKs to that of immigrants and individuals who had grown up in one culture their entire lives. I found that adult MKs—even in their thirties—were much more unwilling to commit to an identity in the areas of politics, ideology, career, and relationships than those who had remained geographically stable. For example, one can ask MKs if they are committed to a certain type of friend, political or spiritual ideology, or career and get the answers “No,” or “It depends.” When asked, “It depends on what?” an MK will typically answer, “It depends on where I am,” or “on whom I am with.”⁹

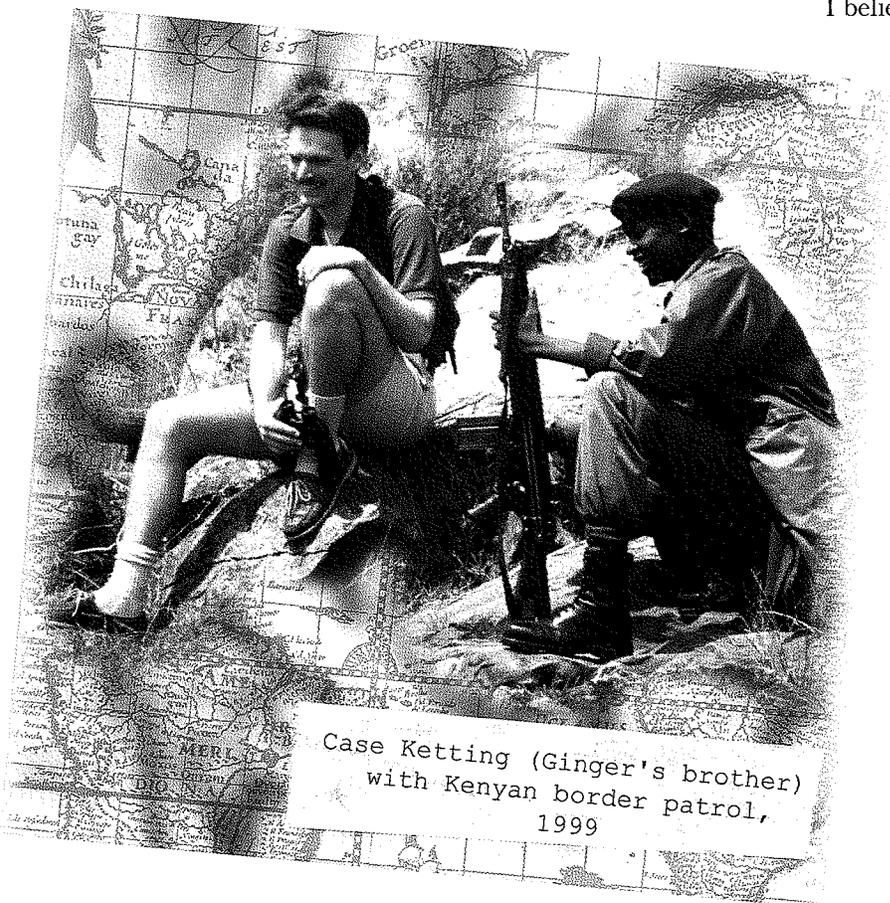
Adventism is currently in a state of flux. Not only is the Church growing faster and larger outside North

America, its face within North America is also changing. The challenges of “Why can’t we all just get along?” have only just begun now that the era of colonial Adventism is over. How can an increasingly diverse and multicultural church body communicate effectively when culture so often gets in the way? Is there a way of isolating a transcendent form of Adventism, unaffected by cultural norms and practices, that will unite people across cultural and national lines? I don’t think so. I think that culture will continue to make our lives colorful, lively, and challenging. We must continue to be astute observers of which parts of our religion are cultural add-ons, and which parts are Truth with a capital “T.”

Despite its complexity and ambivalence, however, the experience of the MK can help. Writing about issues that affect MKs, Ted Ward has stated, “One of my propositions is that the missionary kid of the nineties will be the prototype of the Christian of the twenty-first century.”¹⁰ MKs have acquired their personal “three-dimensional” knowledge because of experiences in their formative years. Could MKs, adept from childhood at being “cultural chameleons,” teach lessons about how Adventism and culture interact, and provide a glimpse of the Adventist of the next generation? I believe so.

I believe that MKs can give us clues as to the “look” of the future Adventist. MKs have seen the world and been in contact with people of many cultures. They know how to move in and out of various cultures and usually know the characteristics of at least several peoples and countries. The same can be said about the Adventist of the future as the world becomes more accessible through travel and modern communications. MKs tend to move often, becoming people who are at home anywhere, yet often don’t know how to answer the question, “Where is home?” The loneliness and unresolved grief experienced by MKs having to say goodbye repeatedly is the heritage of any Adventist young person who must move often.¹¹

Many strengths in MKs will also show up in Adventists of the future, particularly among those capable of negotiating leadership roles. MKs generally have what one of my students calls a “built-in cheese-o-meter.” In other words, they can spot a passing cultural approach at a distance



Case Ketting (Ginger's brother)
with Kenyan border patrol,
1999

and know whether it will work across diverse situations. MKs know whether or not to panic about new approaches or customs in the Church and to evaluate them in terms of the last great apostasy.¹² This “cheese-o-meter” provides a sense of stability and a secure identity in the life of most MKs. Hopefully, Adventists of the future will have enough culturally diverse experiences to pick up on this skill as well; if so, our Church as a body will benefit.

MKs also have the strength of having learned to value other countries and cultures. They have seen firsthand the heights and depths of life in various cultures, the strengths and weaknesses of systems and societies. My MK friends and I have seen people living in garbage dumps and filthy streets, people for whom health care is not even a wistful dream. We have personally lived through riots and wars, evacuations and shellings, benevolent and not-so-benevolent governments. We have seen that life can be very cheap and death very near. We have also seen goodness and kindness in people who don’t even know Christ. We have found that societies that don’t rush so fast are a good thing. We have seen that bigger is not necessarily better. And we have considered a picture of Christ that comes wrapped in brown skin and dark eyes, speaking a language other than English.

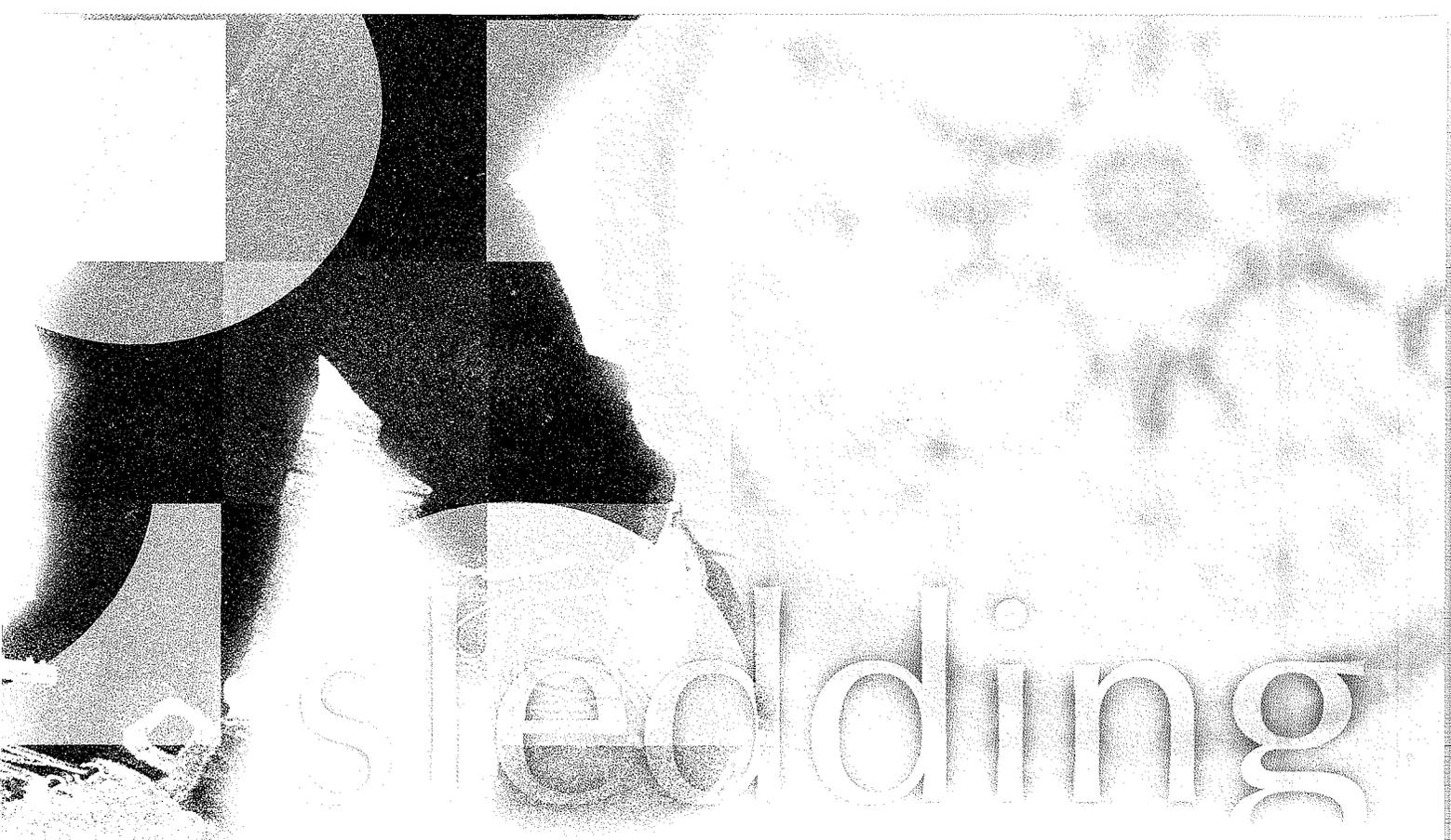
Seeing and understanding a three-dimensional world puts an MK in the interesting position of being able to weather cultural challenges that would put a born-and-raised-in-one-place person up on the ear. A typical MK does not assume that what works in one culture will transfer to another, although she may resort to the known as a starting point in the absence of other options. In a new environment, she has learned to head for the corner of a new room or find a new vantage point; to observe first, then to take on customs and ways of communication, as needed, to fit in. She can explain how cultural issues can affect communication or contribute to interpersonal or interchurch friction. She has also developed flexibility as a way of life because she has learned from youth that one must always be willing to adapt.

I believe that any leader in the Adventist Church of the next generation must understand cultural issues in order to be effective. The Church will need cultural chameleons in the future, Adventists who recognize the strength of culture, know its power over their lives and spiritual beliefs, yet who can also stand aside from culture often enough to keep seeking the unity inherent in that idealistic and ever-elusive transcendent Christianity.

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9. G. Ketting, “Identity Status Following a Cross-Cultural Move During Adolescence” (Ph.D. diss., Claremont Graduate School, 1997).
10. Ward, “The MK’s Advantage: Three Cultural Contexts,” in Bowers, *Raising Resilient MKs*.
11. And yet, doesn’t it perpetuate that great Adventist motivator and comforter, which states that “my home is in heaven, and that is just around the corner”?
12. I have not lost a moment of sleep over celebration churches or praise music, nor have I worried about dress or Sabbath recreational issues. These are all chalk-uppable to cultural dynamics.

Ginger Ketting is an associate professor of education at Pacific Union College. She is an alumna of Walla Walla College and Loma Linda University, and received her Ph.D. in education from the Claremont Graduate School. Born in Bangkok, she has lived in Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Finland, and the Philippines.
gketting@puc.edu



By Gary Gilbert

Roy Benton, my second cousin, and I have a tradition—now four years old—of climbing New Hampshire’s Mt. Washington during the winter. Our tradition has a unique twist: we carry plastic sleds up the mountain to speed our trip down. The snow-packed, eight-mile auto road to the summit, with its 11 percent grade, offers the best sledding we have ever experienced.

Mt. Washington impresses a person with its weather rather than its altitude. At 6,300 feet, the summit is only slightly higher than Denver. A road and cog railway climb up the gentlest slopes, but these are open only during a brief summer season. Even then, they close on days when high winds and freezing rain prevail.

Harsh weather results from an elbow of the jet stream that bumps down from Canada and scrapes the mountain top. On any winter day, chance dictates a 40 percent probability that wind gusts on the summit will surpass the 80 mile-per-hour hurricane-force threshold. The winds convert winter cold into heat-sucking conditions that compare to Antarctica.

Severe weather and the accessibility of Mt. Washington—a fit mountaineer can climb from Pinkham Notch to the summit in four and one-half hours—mean that many people have climbed in the winter. Unfortunately, many have died. Over the past century the only North American mountain to claim more lives than Mt. Washington has been Mt. McKinley, the tallest in North America at 29,000 feet.

On the morning of our ascent a temperature of 5 degrees Fahrenheit, gusts of 50 miles per hour, and fresh snow indicated that the easiest route up the mountain might present an impasse. But we had both climbed on colder days and in stronger wind.

Inside the Pinkham Notch Lodge we reviewed the recent weather report from Mt. Washington's weather station, entered our planned ascent and descent routes into the climbing log, then headed out into the white, blowing mountain world.

Lion Head Winter Trail

12:30 P.M.

After 75 minutes of steady hiking we reached the junction where the Lion Head Winter Trail leaves the main trail to climb above tree line. We strapped crampons onto our boots and climbed directly up a mountainside as steep as a ladder. We had to kick away new snow to find the steps of our ladder, steps that alternated among tree roots, ice patches, and rock. The rock was worst because our crampon points shuddered and slid rather than poked and gripped.

Powdery snow swished against our nylon pants above gaiters. Two hundred feet above, wind roared over a ridge and loose snow blew in a blotchy white screen against the gray sky. We stepped off the trail into the powder and removed our packs to get warmer clothes.

Minutes later, stocking-like balaclavas covered our heads and necks, leaving only our eyes exposed. Goggles covered our eyes; hats covered the balaclavas; fleece jackets, then Gortex anoraks covered our shirts. Slowly, I started up the trail feeling warm breath recoil from the balaclava over my mouth.

Two climbers descended past us, covered in bright nylon, lifting their goggles as they emerged from the strongest wind. Their expressions were flat and they shook their heads to indicate that wind had turned them back before they reached the top. Roy and I agreed to stop at Lion Head, a rock outcropping with boulders large enough to shield us partially from the wind, and reassess the conditions and our preparation. Then we hiked up the snow ramp into the wind.

I took three steps on ice, then six steps through drifted snow that reached my knees. Roy hiked seven yards ahead, but, whether the distance had been four or one hundred yards, we could not have talked because of the wind's noise. Although my thin balaclava broke the force of the wind, my face grew colder by the minute. Eight climbers appeared, one-by-one, as they rounded the boulders of Lion Head hiking down the trail. The leader stopped to exchange information. The wind was

too strong, he said; they had turned around at the Alpine Garden Trail. In the final one hundred yards to Lion Head I reconciled myself to turning back.

"My face is cold," I told Roy as we crouched between two boulders. My chilled cheeks made speech difficult and the words sounded funny.

"I don't think I should keep going."

"I have an extra, expedition-weight balaclava in my pack," he said. "Do you want to try it?"

I nodded. After a couple minutes I removed my balaclava and pulled the thicker one over my head. In moments, my face was warm.

"Do you feel alright? Do you want to keep going or would you rather go down?" Roy asked.

"I feel OK. Let's climb to the Alpine Garden Trail and see how conditions are."

On the right side of us was Huntington Ravine, a series of frozen waterfalls, rock cliffs, and steep ice slopes dropped into the clouds.

Nobody chooses to go down that side. To our left, Tuckerman Ravine, famed as the steepest downhill ski area in North America, hid in wind-blown snow.

On a warm spring day two thousand skiers climb steps kicked into a 45-degree slope. The bravest ski down the head wall, skirting rock drop-offs, protruding scrub trees, and a crevasse. A climbing descent of the face can be managed under good conditions. Today fifteen inches of power snow covered it and avalanche danger was extreme.

The sign at the trail junction pointed straight up the Lion Head Trail to the summit; to the right stood the Alpine Garden Trail.

"Let's go that way." I pointed between the two trails. The wind would hit us at an angle rather than thrust directly into our faces and the tangential wind might not have dropped such deep snow drifts.

"If it gets too tough to go up we can traverse until we get to the auto road."

A twenty-foot ribbon of road winds from base to summit. We were sure we could find it, even in a white-out. We wouldn't get lost.

Near the Summit of Mt. Washington

2:30 P.M.

As we climbed into the blowing snow, I sighted a route along patches of exposed bush limbs. My watch

said 2:30. We neared the summit, having made excellent time. Thirty minutes remained until our “turn-around time.”

“My legs are tiring,” I shouted to Roy. “It must be from cross-country skiing yesterday.”

“Do you want to turn around?”

“No. But I may have to climb slower.”

The slope steepened; when we walked on glazed ice we held our ice axes deliberately, ready to drive in the points if we began to accelerate down the glistening surface. The force of the wind slowly rose and a white blanket of cloud and snow closed in.

Suddenly, everything became white-gray: no distinct sky, snow, or ice. I held my arm forward and saw a dark extension, the only nonwhite thing in view. When I turned around, Roy’s gray form was a few steps behind me, isolated in a white expanse. I stepped forward without deliberating.

The white world was eerie. We would descend, I decided, as soon as we found the auto road. Climbing to the top did not appeal to me under these conditions.

The wind pushed harder. I leaned forward, but could not push hard enough. I reeled backward, turned, and dropped onto my hands, driving the head of my ax into the ice. The wind whipped me around the point like a boat at its mooring. I pulled my knees beneath me, then pushed the steel crampon spikes into the ice. With one hand on the ice and the other on my ax, I finally steadied myself against the gale. These were not the 50 mile-per-hour gusts that the weather station had reported when we left the bottom, but 80 to 90 mile-per-hour hurricane-force blasts.

I didn’t know how to go forward or backward. A rhythmic thumping sounded, the drone of the diesel generator powering the weather station at the top. I realized we were a few hundred yards from the summit. Roy was down on his hands and feet, too, moving slowly, crab-like across the ice.

The wind gusted. He flipped over, landing against a rock. The wind whipped off my hood and, with my mittens on, I could not put it back on. Fear traveled from my arms into my chest. No longer were we in control. If we crouched and waited for the gusting wind to subside, we would become dangerously cold within minutes. In an hour, we would become sluggish, our thinking impaired. My neck hurt when I tried to look up; the balaclava, stiff with frozen breath, had frozen to my neck. We had to get out of the wind, quickly. The weather station stood only yards away, heated and inhabited, but it was directly upwind and we could not move in that direction.

I crouched on the ice next to Roy, yelling, my face an inch from his ear. He couldn’t hear. We crouched lower as the wind threatened to roll us over the rock that protected us. Roy put his face next to my ear. I heard his voice, but could not understand him. He pointed with his ax down the mountain to our left. I nodded. He lunged down the slope, leaning far to his left into the wind. The white closed in and I was alone, shuddering against the bellowing wind.

“Mountaineers die this way,” I thought.

Then I thought about Jonathan, my six year old. That morning, he had held my hand and asked if he could come with me.

“And can I carry an ice ax . . . and get crampons?” He had smiled up at me eagerly.

Now I shook my head vigorously, rejecting the thought of little Jonathan in this icy blast and trying to focus on climbing. Guessing at the direction, I thrust myself into the wind and staggered down the slope.

I glimpsed Roy, crouching into the wind, waiting for me. We plunged downhill almost running, then crouching as the gusts arose. The clouds thinned briefly and I saw that we faced the afternoon sun. The direction did not seem right.

Half a mile below the summit our boots sank into drifted snow deeper than our knees. Suddenly, between passing clouds, a landscape emerged. The mountain face angled down into the forest, continued into a gully, then became a valley, which disappeared around a ridge to the north.

To our left stood another ridge and another mountain. On our right, perhaps a mile away, the mountain face ended in yet another ridge, and we could only guess what lay beyond it. Then, the clouds wrapped around the mountain again and the landscape disappeared into swirling gray. Nowhere had we seen the auto road or any landmark that instilled confidence. We were lost.

We considered two different options for the couple of daylight hours that remained. We could hike uphill to the north through drifted snow, certain that we would eventually get back to the Lion Head Trail. If we ran out of daylight and stayed above tree line after dark our clothing would not be warm enough to ensure survival throughout the night.

The second option was to descend directly into the forest below, where we could find shelter from the wind. There we could bivouac and find our way out in the morning, possibly over a trail in the gully that might lead us to Highway 16. To us, descent into the forest offered more certainty of survival.

We took long strides in the deep snow toward the trees. Our backpacks held one extra layer of fleece clothing, one Power Bar, two peanut butter and banana sandwiches, two apples, and one thermos of hot chocolate. We lacked tents and sleeping bags. Roy had a flashlight, but he did not know how long the batteries would last.

The soft snow reached our knees, then our thighs. Our boots often broke through the crust and we sank until the snow reached our waists or chests. At dusk, we had entered the woods. I was ravenously hungry and my legs were tired, but I was comfortably warm.

"We could dig a snow cave here and bivouac until morning," I offered. "At first light we could climb back up and traverse until we find the Lion Head Trail. Alternately, we can keep going and hope to find a trail."

"I'd kind of like to keep going and see if we can find a trail," Roy countered. "But I can stay here if you want."

We decided to push on, but first I poured cocoa into the thermos cup and we watched as white steam rose in the fading light. In spite of our hunger, we decided to save the sandwiches and half the cocoa; we might still face twelve long hours of cold tonight, more the next day, maybe even more later on. Still, we did not feel frightened. We were warm, dry, and in excellent physical condition. Neither of us had bivouacked in conditions this severe, but we knew that it could be done and had read about how to do it.

Two years before, Sandi, my wife, had insisted that I carry a cellular phone during a winter climb of Mt. Washington. I had laughed but carried it anyway. Now I wished for that phone, though not to summon help. Not only were we ignorant of our location, fresh snow and the strong wind would have made it impossible for rescuers to reach us. What I really wanted was to call her at the Pinkham Notch Lodge and tell her that we were in good spirits, although she probably wouldn't see us until tomorrow morning.

Gully on Mt. Washington

6:30 P.M.

The sky cleared to pale blue before dusk, then stars blinked into view. Starlight cast the evergreens as black masses and the snow as endless, undulating gray. Where the trees were thick, we broke through snow chest deep. Sometimes we pushed through thick branches, at other times we lowered ourselves over the

edges of boulders. I stumbled as my crampon caught a branch, then dove four feet—headfirst into the snow. My head far below the surface, I rolled and scrambled to find a foundation. Then I raised my head above the powder. Except for my eyes, snow covered me entirely and I came up chuckling.

Within an hour I began to feel uneasy. I dreaded a night with no rest or sleep and felt tired. Reaching a frozen stream was a small triumph. It marked progress and indicated that we had reached the bottom of the gully. Far more important, the snow crust over the frozen stream supported our weight. In effect, the stream became a path. We could walk at a medium pace. Rapid progress seemed certain and I began to think that we might rejoin anxious families by midnight.

The sound of water stopped me. Roy and I cautioned each other about the danger of breaking through the ice. Our boots and socks, polypropylene underwear, polyester layers, and nylon shells resisted the cold only when dry. If our clothes were wet, our situation would become much, much worse.

For 50 yards we skirted the stream, keeping distance between the two of us and slowing our speed. We returned to the stream in spite of the gurgling water beneath the ice because progress through the chest-deep snow was so slow. We determined to stay at the edge so that if the ice broke we could fall onto rock or mud rather than into the water.

Pinkham Notch Lodge

7 P.M.

An hour after the planned rendezvous time, Sandi and Cynthia, Roy's friend, were concerned but not surprised that we had not returned.

They sat in the cafeteria. Sandi picked up a crossword puzzle. A few tables away, a group of diners chatted as they finished their meal, then got up to leave. As they passed, Cynthia asked one if he had climbed that day.

"No, he responded. "And you?"

"We're waiting for some climbers to come down off the mountain," Cynthia replied.

A look of concern flashed across the diners' faces, and, as if choreographed, they turned toward large glass window. Gusting winds hurled flurries of fine snow in wild loops beneath the exterior light. The

lodge shuddered under the wind's force.

"You mean they're still out on the trail?"

"Yes. We expect them back any time."

The look of concern stayed. "Are you worried about them?" His low tone failed to mask incredulity.

"Yes, but they've been out this late before. We expect them by 8 o'clock."

Sandi and Cynthia looked at each other. Each knew what the other was thinking. Worry must be avoided. Another gust pounded the building, and the party turned its eyes, without thinking, to the parking lot as a sedan pulled in.

"They could drive in at any time," said Cynthia.

At 8 P.M., she found the head ranger and asked about filing a missing persons report. By 10 o'clock, he had alerted members of the Mt. Washington search and rescue organizations. A search party would set out at 6:30 the next morning. Meanwhile, the families could stay at Pinkham Notch Hostel.

Gully Above Great Gulf Trail

Approximately 9 P.M.

A boulder the size of a car blocked our travel along the stream's left bank, and thick evergreens formed a wall on the slope above. Flat, even snow extended from the boulder into the middle of the stream. Roy and I guessed that the flat expanse covered a pool, a treacherous place to walk. We decided to cross upstream to reach better terrain. The 25-foot-wide stream had large bumps, which suggested rocks beneath. I probed with my ax. Halfway across—just as I lifted one boot—the ice cracked. Then it tilted and I dropped, thigh-deep, into flowing water.

"Oh no!" I yelled.

I concentrated, lifted my knee onto the ice, and pushed. The ice broke, dropping me back into the water. Water trickled into my socks and filled my boots. I swung my ax as far from the edge as I could and sank the tip deep into the ice. Then, using the ax as a handle, I pulled myself onto the fragile ice and rolled from my belly onto my back.

"Gary! I'm still in the water!"

I turned and saw Roy's dark form fifteen feet away. Only then did I realize that he had also fallen into the stream. I scrambled over the rocks, anchored my crampon tips in the ice, wedged my ax against a stone, and held out my hand. Roy pulled and slid onto the ice.

"My God!" I said. "What have we gotten ourselves into?"

One minute earlier I had been confident about survival. Now, dread crept into me. Wouldn't our warmth seep away within minutes? What form would our trouble take? Would sleepiness—a symptom typical of hypothermia—engulf us? No shivering or shaking, just sleepiness and fatigue. Would we give in to the urge and lie down in the snow for a nap . . . our last one? Would our feet hurt, then become numb while microscopic crystals of ice formed, first in the skin, then in our veins?

I pictured my family preparing for church, not expecting ever to see me again. Then I saw myself shuffling through hospital halls with plastic prostheses in place of frostbitten feet. I imagined myself hobbling along in running shoes, searching for a balanced stride, testing the spring in my feet despite loss of my toes. But my thoughts passed quickly.

"We can't afford to do that again!" I warned.

"We've got to stay warm. I'm not sure how we're going to do it. My boots are full of water. Are yours?"

I could not see Roy's face, nor he, mine. Balaclavas covered them both.

Our first impulse led us up the steep bank, away from the stream. We climbed into the thick evergreens, scrambling slowly uphill against flexed branches into snow chest deep. My heart pounded.

"Roy, I think we should dig a snow cave. That's what the wilderness books say. Look where I'm scraping with my ice ax. There's a lot of room, the snow is at least three feet deep under the crust."

The evergreens' drooping branches grew too close together to allow one big cave, so Roy and I hacked away separately. My cave soon extended four feet. I had to climb in headfirst to pull the snow out. Soon it was seven feet long. Amazingly, the work kept us warm, though our pants were wet and our feet ached.

Pinkham Notch Hostel

10:30 P.M.

The telephone interrupted Sandi and Cynthia as they prepared for bed. Rescuers called, first to confirm our route, secondly to ask questions. "How much mountaineering experience do they have? What other equipment do they have? What were they wearing? Did

they have sleeping bags? Are the men in good physical condition?"

Gully Above Great Gulf Trail

Approximately 11:30 P.M.

Roy's flashlight illuminated clothing in our packs. Fleece and Gortex pants and a pile jacket remained in mine; Roy still had a fleece jacket and Gortex pants. Snow, which had drifted into my backpack, mixed with the pants, jacket, and thermos. The water bottles had frozen, so there was no drinking water. When Roy began to unlace his boots to drain water, the laces were frozen and resisted. He struggled for five minutes before his fingers went numb with cold. It took five to ten minutes to warm them inside his gloves before he could try again, but he quit after three tries.

The ice was simply too hard. In spite of the snow and moisture in my pants, I felt warm after putting on the extra layers of cloth. In fact, I was almost cozy. I slid my plastic sled into the cave and used it to keep me off the snow. I maneuvered both of my feet into my empty pack, then slipped into the cave.

I rested my head on the back of the sled and closed my eyes. Stillness. My legs felt heavy, my shoulders tired. I yawned. A few minutes later, coolness passed from my left toes into my calf. Then it went into my left knee. My eyes were still closed, but the spreading coolness quelled the urge to sleep. Soon, I felt cool in my arms.

"Roy, I'm getting cold too fast. I don't think snow caves will work." Immediately, I climbed out and began running in place while slapping my hands together.

Roy had not crawled into his cave. He stood a yard from me. Both of us were on flattened, packed patches of snow surrounded by spruce boughs and powder deeper than our chests. The snow caves were empty, gray holes in the flashlight beam. My boots crunched in place. More than an hour had passed since we had clambered out of the stream. Our toes moved, our minds worked, and our legs pumped in place. The water had drained from our polypropylene underwear and polyester pile, so our pants were damp rather than sopping. The dread that had seized both of us when we had climbed out of the stream had given way to weary determination.

"This is going to be a long night," I said.

"Yeah. I don't think I want to know what time it is." Roy marched in place thoughtfully for a couple minutes. "How much would you be willing to pay if a helicopter could fly in and pick us up right now? I'd give a thousand dollars without thinking very long."

"Man, I'd pay ten thousand. Even more. I would shoulder a pretty big mortgage on the house to be out of this."

"Yeah, I'm not sure I'd go that high. But I think that's the difference between an Adventist teacher's salary and a doctor's salary. I want out of this pretty badly."

Roy reflected for a few minutes while we marched in place. "I remember you talking about miracles in the car this morning," he said. "This could be a good time for a miracle. . . . Maybe God could make the night shorter. He lengthened a day for Joshua." Roy chuckled. "He even ran time backward for Hezekiah. Remember when the shadow went backward on the sundial?"

"Yeah. That's how the story reads, doesn't it? I guess it's not asking so much for him to shorten tonight a few hours. He could just make up for those extra hours he gave Joshua. It would straighten out the bookkeeping deficit in his time log."

Both of us were silent. We didn't expect a miracle. Not a short night. Not a warm breeze. Not an angel bringing dry socks, a tent, and a stove. The world would turn at its usual rate.

Roy and I are academics. Our impulse is to dissect the meaning of the word "miracle," not to anticipate personal miracles. We hoped only that God would fling bread crumbs in our direction, or maybe just small pieces of luck. Maybe enough luck to stumble onto a trail that must pass along this gully. Or maybe enough fortitude to stave off lethargy and think clearly. And if these bits of luck come when we want them, is that a miracle? Are these the stuff of prayers? Neither of us had the conviction to develop the proposal for a shorter night into a formal, specific petition delivered after "Our Father in heaven. . . ."

Roy began to sing, "If you're happy and you know it clap your hands. . . ." I joined in, nylon mitts and gloves slapped together. "If you're happy and you know it stomp your feet. . . ." Boots crunched in the snow. Next we sang "Climb, climb up sunshine mountain, faces all aglow. . . ." We sang other activity songs—fresh in our memories because of our children, but they might have been chosen solely on the basis of strong memories. The songs asserted confidence and activity while we were uneasy and inactive. They hinted that misery would end in joy. Like naughty children, we had

produced our own trouble by venturing into formidable weather. But, like a naughty child back in Sabbath School after “time out,” I felt that if I just sang the songs vigorously, stayed in my seat, and didn’t push the chair of the next boy, maybe everything would be alright.

We tired of singing and marched in place without talking. At 1:05 A.M., the last swallow of cocoa glowed briefly inside us. It was still warm. We decided to set out through the snow drifts in the general, downhill direction of the gully, hoping that the push through the snow would keep us warm.

I looked back at our little packed snow platforms and felt anxious as I sank into the first snow drift and pushed into the black space. In two or three hours, I had gained confidence in the place, some sense of safety in this tiny spruce alcove protected from the gusts of wind.

“Dear God,” I murmured without reflection, “Help us to get out of this alive!”

Pinkham Notch Hostel

11:30 P.M.

Standing beside the bunks in the darkened room, Sandi wondered if Roy and I had almost reached the auto road. She decided to check. Cynthia agreed to stay with the sleeping children. Sandi drove the van three miles to the entrance of the road and parked with the motor running. She switched the headlights to high, hoping that the beams might guide us to warmth and rest. Gusts of wind shook the parked van side to side, and Sandi shivered thinking of the cold outside. Finally, at 11:45, she backed out onto Highway 16 and drove back to the hostel.

Gully Above Great Gulf Trail

Approximately 2 A.M.

Warmth engulfed us. Hiking through snow drifts and pushing branches aside generated body heat. Roy and I slowed our pace to avoid sweating. With each step, I pulled up and pushed down with all my toes, trying to enhance the flow of blood in my feet. Both of us could feel the water sloshing in our boots, so there was no

frostbite. Our progress, marked by landmarks on the gully banks, was snail-like. We clambered out of drifts, pushed under branches, and took tentative steps on the crusted snow . . . again, and again, and again. My thighs ached each time I stepped onto a rock or the crust.

We had to cross the stream. A fallen tree gave us a handgrip and we placed my sled over the longest expanse of ice. This time, there was no cracking sound, only the thump, thump, thump of my heart.

On the western bank we found a sign. “Reforestation Area. Do Not Camp or Build Fires,” it warned in the flashlight’s beam. The sign implied that a trail was hidden nearby, under the snow. When hunger gnawed in my belly—for the fourth time—Roy and I shared the Power Bar. Afterward I looked at my watch. It was 4:56 A.M.

“That’s surprising how fast the time has passed. I thought it was only 3 A.M. Dawn will come in half an hour,” I said.

A slight purple hue spread across the streak of sky that covered our gully. The grays of the snow and the black of spruce boughs became more distinct. Suddenly, I stopped, disbelieving the track that swooped down the western bank and followed the stream. It was a snowshoe trail, packed by hikers since the recent snowfall.

“A trail, Roy! We can really hike now.”

My watch said 5:26. We had traveled approximately two miles down the gully between 5 P.M. and 5 A.M. We began to hike briskly. For a time, I quit worrying about pacing ourselves. If we just hiked far enough and fast enough we should be able to get out today. Sandi would be so relieved to see us. . . . Jonathan and Eugene would hug me. . . . I pictured food spread out before me: fried potatoes, waffles with strawberries, poached eggs, everything in the breakfast buffet at the

Pinkham Notch Hostel

6 A.M.

Pinkham Notch Lodge.

Sandi awoke startled, surprised that she had slept. Eugene rubbed his eyes and asked, “Did Daddy come back yet?”

“No, Sweetie, not yet.”

Sandi, Cynthia, and the children pulled on jackets and hurried to the lodge. In the basement, the search and rescue party stuffed radios, parkas, thermoses, and

warming packets into their backpacks. Sandi introduced herself, then listened while the eight men discussed the weather, snow, physical condition of Roy and me, and probable mishaps that had delayed us.

Shortly before the rescuers hiked up the trail, Sandi overheard the head ranger talking with one of the rescuers, “. . . then we can use the Snow Cat to bring the bodies out. . . .” The words stunned her. She ran into the restroom sobbing, washed her face with cold water, then filled a handful of tissue with fresh tears.

“Oh God,” she whispered, “help them to come out alive.”

Eyes red, she went out to the dining room to see if the children would work with her on a crossword puzzle.

At 7:15 A.M., the rescuers clung to the Snow Cat as it chugged up the trail. Riding would save them an hour of hiking, and the extra energy could be used for searching.

The wind flexed the trees in the cloudless morn-

Great Gulf Trail

8 A.M.

ing. Only rarely did sunbeams brush our parkas deep in the gully. The first gully joined a second, then a third; the stream grew wider and noisier. By 8:30, we had hiked three hours on the snowshoe trail. We could not see any familiar landmarks. Would we eat anything by noon? My head felt light and I was hungry. I flopped onto my sled beside the trail and felt the gloom rise inside.

Oh, for a thermos of coffee or cocoa—even water. The water in my boots had quit sloshing. I couldn’t move my toes up and down; the wet socks had frozen. One-by-one, I wiggled my toes. Each hurt, indicating that they weren’t completely frozen. I pushed myself up and began to hike. With sudden inspiration, I tried to raise our spirits with humor.

“Roy, we had better get out of here today,” I said. “Otherwise, you’re going to have to pay another day’s rental on that ice ax and those crampons.”

Roy laughed.

The stream grew to a river with sparkling white islands. Snow floats spun, tipped, and banged against them. Above us stood spruce branches, deep green under sparkling white layers. Shafts of sunlight highlighted the boughs and penetrated the green river.

“Under other circumstances this would really be

beautiful,” Roy said.

I nodded.

“But beauty has a harsh edge,” I thought, half expecting to see a frozen deer.

“Sleigh bells ring, are you listening. . . .” Roy broke out singing “Winter Wonderland” while I trudged ahead silently.

Again, I flopped down on my sled. Roy broke his last frozen peanut butter and banana sandwich in two and handed me half.

I declined: “It’s your sandwich. I ate mine yesterday.”

“Come on,” he said. “Think of it as a sacrament.”

Which sacrament? I didn’t ask, but accepted.

We crossed two bridges and passed through three trail junctions. The junction signs told us the name of the trail and that we were hiking toward Highway 16, but did not tell us the distance. Still, we pieced together our approximate location. During the whiteout, we had crossed the auto road and now we were hiking on its far side down the Great Gulf Trail. At 10:30, we reached a parking lot.

“Thank God,” I murmured.

We flagged down a passing car and rode four miles to the Pinkham Notch Lodge.

Pinkham Notch Lodge

11 A.M.

As Roy and I walked from the car to the lodge, Sandi and Cynthia ran to meet us. Tears glistened on Sandi’s cheeks as she threw her arm around my neck and kissed my cheek.

The head ranger held the door open and directed us into the cafeteria.

“Sit down,” he said watching intently. “Are you all right?”

Roy and I nodded.

Melrose, Massachusetts

Sabbath, March 13, 1999

The events of the night on the mountain were jumbled in my mind. I could not stop thinking about

them. Why did we get lost? What had we done wrong after getting lost? What had we done right? Had we been lucky or unlucky? What was the meaning of our survival?

To my surprise, I felt nostalgia for the long hike down Mt. Washington. What, exactly, did I miss? Not the cold. Not the pain in my feet. Not the gnawing in my stomach. Not the dread of disaster after we fell into the stream.

I missed the intensity, clarity of purpose, and comradeship with my cousin. My memory of those 24 hours on Mt. Washington were bold and distinct. The objective—survival—was precise and consuming, the effort maximal, and the joy in the eyes of Sandi, Eugene, and Jonathan when we arrived intact, was grand.

On Sabbath afternoon, Roy and I talked by phone, trying to understand what had happened. We reviewed our plans, the weather, our disorientation, our decisions. We talked briefly about my frostbitten, blistered toes and the worse things that could have happened.

We also talked about why we survived. Was our survival the product of chance, choices, and conditions? Or had a miracle occurred? The night on Mt. Washington seemed short—shorter than other nights when I have stayed awake to drive a car or care for a patient. Maybe God had shortened the night of March 7, 1999. But a shortened night implies acceleration of the earth's rotation, and my well-honed skepticism prevented me from taking that possibility seriously.

Perhaps the miracle was one of insight. The descent from Mt. Washington reminded me of the centrality of Sandi and my sons. It showed me how my life is shaped, in part, by power beyond my control. Both Roy and I discovered that we could find strength and comfort in our Adventist religious tradition. Now I realize that, in addition to my well-developed reflex for skepticism, I carry a reflex for personal prayer. Perhaps survival itself qualifies for inclusion in the category of personal miracles.

The Boston Temple

Sabbath, March 20, 11:15 A.M.

Twenty-three children seated themselves on the carpet in front of the pews. Eugene wore my balaclava,

goggles, hat, and Gortex anorak to illustrate a mountaineer's preparation for severe cold. Jonathan crouched on toes and hands to show how Roy and I had crouched in the 90 mile-per-hour wind gusts; I flipped him over on his back to illustrate how the wind had flipped us. I told the children of falling into the stream, digging the snow caves, and singing the children's songs to ward off the cold and the long dark night. We wanted the night to pass quickly so we could be out of the cold. We remembered that long, long ago Joshua told his children that God had made a very important day longer than the other days. The day was longer so that Joshua and the Israelites could win a battle. We had hoped that God would do just the opposite for us, make the cold night shorter.

And he had.

Gary Gilbert is assistant professor of medicine at Harvard Medical School. He has a research lab in the West Roxburg Veterans Administration Hospital. Gilbert received his M.D. from Loma Linda University. Gilbert practices biochemistry and running in Massachusetts and skis, climbs, and sleds in New Hampshire. ggilbert@massmed.org

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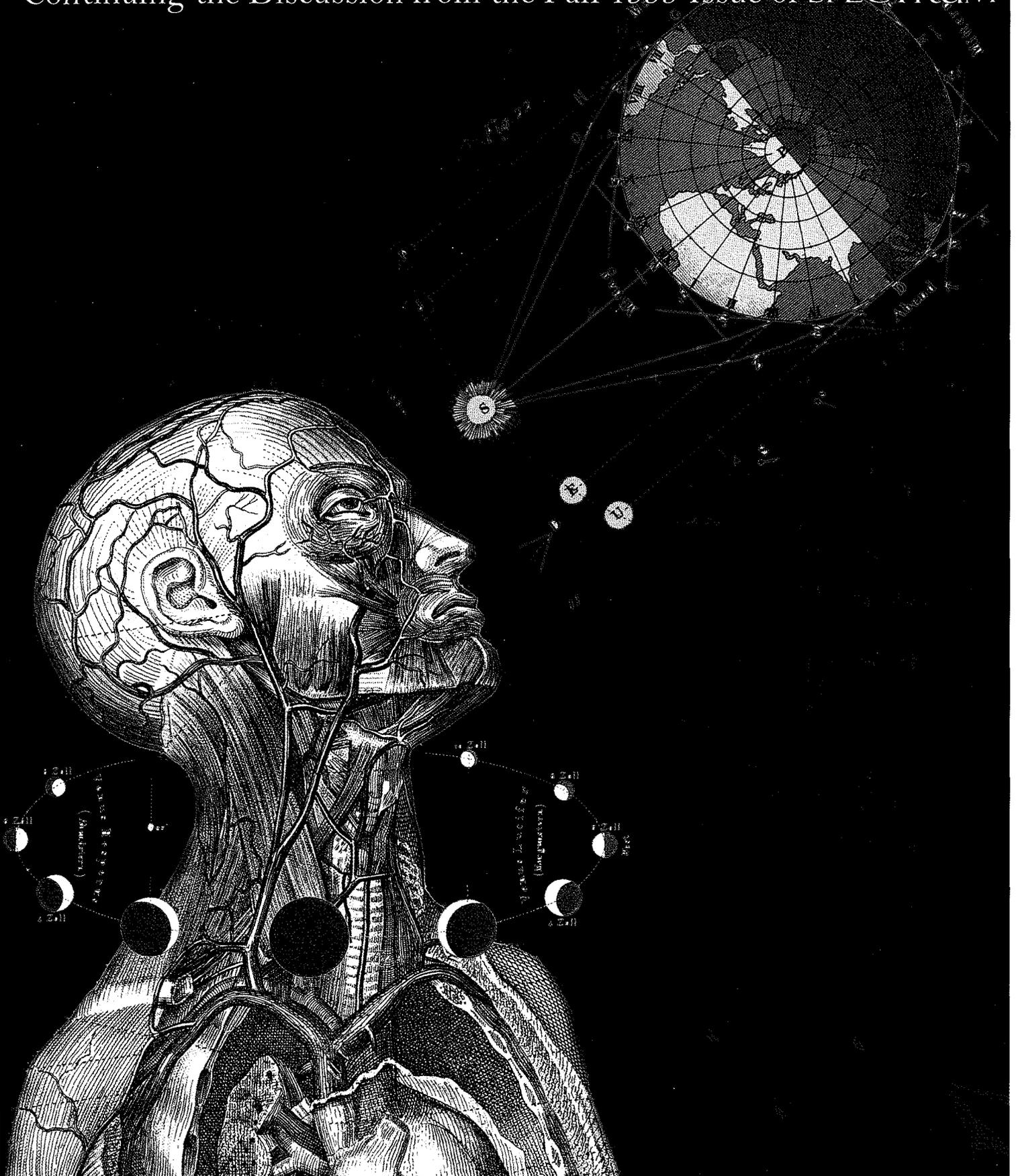
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CREATION part II

Continuing the Discussion from the Fall 1999 Issue of SPECTRUM



The Meaning and Relevance of Creation

By Langdon Gilkey

What I have to say about Creation may not represent at all the viewpoint of many Adventists. I hope that those who disagree will not be offended by my remarks as I present my interpretation of a matter of great importance to all of us: the nature and implications of God's creation of our world and of ourselves.

The meaning and relevance of Creation has a great deal to do with the relation of our common religious faith to contemporary science, and I will try to spell out the interesting complexity of that relation. This intimate relation of Creation to science is, I know, of vast importance to the Adventist community, centered as it is on a strong faith in the divine establishment of our world on the one hand and on the development and utility of present-day science on the other, especially with regard to medicine. Thus, how we are to understand in some coherent way both Creation and contemporary science is a crucial theological problem for you as well as for me.

Creation and Science at Little Rock

Our general subject, then, is the book of Genesis; my special topic is the present relevance of this opening book of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures. I shall, moreover, limit my remarks even further and concentrate on

the first two chapters: the magnificent hymn to origins, or as we like to call it, the Creation.

Though these chapters of Genesis represent a fairly obscure and enigmatic text from the ancient world of the so-called Near East in the eighth to fifth centuries B.C.E., they are in a number of ways very relevant to us—to our religion, our personal piety, and our theology. Even more, they are significant for the deepest assumptions or presuppositions of our wider, secular cultural life in the West. Not least, they have provided important bases for the enterprise of modern science. Most surprisingly, in the last decades they have become central also to our present legal and political existence. It is with this latter political and legal relevance that I wish to begin.

When Genesis appears in our present consciousness or the news, it probably connotes issues inspired by the creationists, arguments in which a certain interpretation of Genesis is pitted against almost all of modern science. The creationists are Christian fundamentalists; that is, they hold every proposition of Scripture to be literally true and to contain authentic—divinely revealed—scientific and historical knowledge. Thus they insist that the universe and all that is in it began as Genesis appears to have described it: roughly six to ten thousand years ago, with its present astronomical structure intact; with its present forms of human, animal, fish, and plant life; and with all its major geological changes to be ascribed to divine intervention—for example, the Flood of Noah. In short, the creationists dispute almost every fundamental theory about nature and its history in the entire spectrum of the contemporary sciences: big bang cosmology, physics, astronomy, and geology, as well as evolutionary biology, though they tend wrongly to blame all of this on Charles Darwin.

Strangely, their leaders are scientists with doctorates from respectable universities who argue that they can prove their case “scientifically.” This understanding of origins they term “creation science,” to them, the

only valid science because it is not based on atheism, as they view the rest of modern science. They lost the federal court case in 1981 in Little Rock, Arkansas; a creationist law had stipulated that creation science be given “equal time” in all the schools of the state. We won the case by showing that their “science” was not science at all but religion, and thus counter to the First Amendment if taught as science in the schools. Most teachers of science in Arkansas said they would not teach either version if forced to give each “equal weight.” Teachers, they said, could never prove they had given each of these “alternatives” equal emphasis, and

thus each science teacher would be continually vulnerable to prosecution. Thus, in effect, no science would have been taught in Arkansas had the law gone through.

The creationists have by no means disappeared, however. In fact, since 1981 they have gained significant power over local school boards, textbook publishers, and of course state and national politics. As one leader told me in 1985, “When we do take over control of the Republican Party in the 1990s, this will be the science taught in our public schools.” Changes in the makeup of the U.S. Supreme Court might well undo the creationists’ defeat at Little Rock; then, as a scientific and technological nation, the United States ironically would have voluntarily saddled itself with an educational system designed

precisely to subvert science!

The trial was brought against creationists by main churches and synagogues of Little Rock: they, not the American Civil Liberties Union, were the initial plaintiffs in the case. In effect they said, “We are happy to defend science, but we are even more interested in defending our right to interpret our beliefs as we see fit. And we wish to defend that right against the power and authority of the legislature of Arkansas, which in this law has defined for all of us the meaning of the doctrine of Creation in literalistic terms. We believe in Creation and in the meaning of the doctrine in Genesis, but we do not accept the creationists’ literal interpretation of either. The state has in this case ruled for the creationists’ interpretation of our communities’ common text.

**“... theology must
confine its claims to
concepts based only
on the Christian
community’s
experience.”**

Hence we are bringing this case to court.” As is evident, this trial was not about the age and history of the universe, but about the First Amendment, the so-called separation of church and state.

How the Controversy Came About

How is it that the main Christian churches and the Reformed and Conservative Jewish communities have come to interpret Genesis in a way compatible with modern science while the creationists have not? What is the difference between a fundamentalist or literalistic interpretation of Scripture and a modern or “liberal” one, and how did this important difference come about?

These are interesting questions, especially because before the modern period (say before, roughly, 1750) Christian theologians and Jewish scholars regularly interpreted Genesis in a literal as well as “theological” way. As the trial made clear, the leadership of most churches and synagogues and the vast majority of seminaries and biblical scholars do not currently regard the early chapters of Genesis as sources for knowledge on scientific questions such as the age of the universe or the processes of its development, nor do they regard its historical accounts as ipso facto authoritative. Rather, they look for the religious and theological meanings of these chapters of Scripture.

It is my view that the major causes of this shift of hermeneutic, or mode of interpretation, were developments in modern science, especially in geology at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries. Interestingly, Galilean astronomy and Newtonian physics, despite their clear astronomical and cosmological implications, had not particularly disturbed the widespread historical authority of the Mosaic account of origins. Physics and astronomy were then not primarily historical sciences, and many leading scientists in the seventeenth century—in physics, chemistry, and biology—were also Christian clergy who

accepted—as did almost everyone else—a literal reading of the Mosaic account.

But geology, from its very beginnings in the late-eighteenth century, was a historical science: it traced the history of the earth. When in the 1790s James Hutton began to uncover the long history of the earth’s surface, he said, “I see no signs of a beginning.” It was plain at once that six thousand years were not enough; even more, it was clear that the earth had not always exhibited its present pleasant and habitable rolling hills, gentle valleys, lakes, and oceans. Besides all this, bones began to appear in West Virginia, in

Ohio, and then in Russia, bones of species horrifyingly immense and strange, probably extinct, and hence from a vastly different age—creatures Adam had assuredly not named in Eden, nor Noah ushered into the Ark.

Rembrandt Peale and his sons collected some of these bones and made a fortune exhibiting them in an astounded Europe, defying anyone, as he said, “to find these creatures on our present globe. The bones exist; the creatures do not.” Finally, it is said, that the thigh bone of a giant sloth was brought to Thomas Jefferson around 1801. He reportedly exclaimed, “What a cow!” and later wrote, “Such is the economy of nature, that no instance can be produced of her having permitted any one race

of her animals to become extinct,” showing he had a very tidy eighteenth-century mind and not a messy nineteenth-century one. Jefferson sent Meriwether Lewis and William Clark westward in part to find these creatures. At that point there was taking place a sea change—a paradigm shift—in understanding nature’s past and our past.¹

It is therefore no surprise that theologians—at least those in close touch with the cultural, and especially the scientific, world of their time—were beginning to rethink how to understand not only the Mosaic account but also their own basic religious truths, their doctrines, and even the scriptural sources of these doctrines—what kind of truths they in fact had. Thus, in the 1820s, we find Friedrich Schleiermacher saying

**“The message of
Genesis . . . is that
God . . . has founded
or established all
things, all creatures:
inorganic, organic,
and human.”**

that theology must confine its claims to concepts based only on the Christian community's experience. For this reason religious truth has limits; it does not, he said, communicate information about scientific matters, about historical events, or even about "philosophical speculations." What it can articulate on these issues is that we are absolutely dependent on God as the Absolute Cause of ourselves and our world, an experience communicated to us through our experience of the order of the world's process. This we know through our experience of ourselves.² To me, the influence of classical science, as well as of the new geology, is very evident here.

Most subsequent theology has agreed with this. Theological words and categories have changed a good deal since Schleiermacher, but his point about the limits of theology and the dependence of theology on the community's experience has not. Now as then theology understands itself as being able to witness to God and to God's activity. This witness is based on the community's common experience of God's presence in its history, a presence evident in the events of the Covenant, judgment, and promise as seen by the prophets—and later, for the Christian community, in the events of Jesus' life and death. That presence, or "encounter" as some put it, was received in faith and responded to by witness to others. In turn, that witness, based on the community's experience, has been written down in Scripture. It is a witness to the presence and activity of God, an activity that works through the ongoing order of the world and the strange, even unique, always novel events of history, and not outside of them. But that witness is also human, reflecting as well as transforming the thought forms of its time and cultural context—as do preaching and theology themselves. Hence, just as the Hebrew community understood its own life and the history in which it lived as established and preserved by God, the sovereign Lord of history, so correspondingly they saw the origin of the entire world as the work of the same God who had rescued, preserved, and loved

them. They understood this deeply religious and important truth in the thought forms of their time. Thus resulted the book of Genesis, a tradition of witness lodged in the oral tradition, the poetry and the prose of seventh- and sixth-century Hebrew faith.

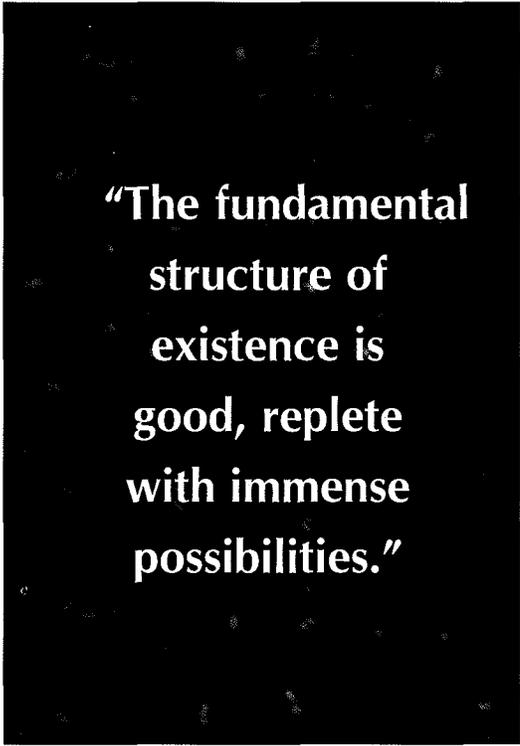
Modern readings of Genesis—whether in liturgy, devotion, theology, or scholarship—thus look for the religious meanings of each narrative, each command, each psalm, meanings for Hebrew faith and for us. That is, the readings seek for "the Word within the words," the religious message there, and not for what Genesis may say about astronomy, geology, biology, or botany.

As each generation in the Christian and Jewish communities has discovered, that message can be as lively, exciting, and healing as it ever was.

These meanings are expressed through symbols, that is, in analogies, metaphors, concepts, or words taken from ordinary experience and applied to God: the presence of God, the creative work of God, and the purposes and intentions of God; power, order, life, love, and care; Creation, judgment and forgiveness, demand and mercy. Thus, while the words and narratives of Scripture and theology—in praise, in celebration, in repentance and gratitude, and in reflection—refer to what transcends the human, to God, nonetheless these words are human words, parts of human

language, and so their meanings are relative to time and place. Among other things, the words also thus reflect the religious ideas and traditions of the peoples who preceded the Hebrews and surrounded them. As William Temple said, there are truths of revelation, truths witnessing to revelation, "but they are not themselves directly revealed."³

This is the understanding of Genesis that the churches and synagogues of Little Rock wished to defend, an understanding of which the legislature of Arkansas had not the slightest idea. It is also the understanding of Genesis that finds itself fully compatible with contemporary science—a not unimportant issue for any religious community like this one, which recognizes, uses, celebrates, and contributes to medical science.



"The fundamental structure of existence is good, replete with immense possibilities."

The Message of Genesis

What, then, is this message in Genesis, the Word in the words, and how is it related to us?

The message of Genesis, at least in the first two chapters, is that God, the God of the Covenant, of the priestly tradition, and of prophetic faith, has founded or established all things, all creatures: inorganic, organic, and human. Further, God has set humans here in a habitable and fruitful world to live a meaningful and cooperative life and to multiply a life of work and of love, a life in turn under the watchful care of God. Things did not, to be sure, turn out as they were intended, as chapters three and four, along with the subsequent history, make very clear. Nonetheless, theology, Christian or Jewish, can never speak of human nature as evil or basically evil.

The fundamental structure of existence is good, replete with immense possibilities, and God is continually filled with mercy for our waywardness; thus can there be hope for the future. This is the main point, repeated throughout the account: the goodness, care, and mercy of God, and the goodness of the world that God has created, despite its ambiguity, pain, and suffering—and mortality. The main point is thoroughly Hebrew, although many of the images and models through which this is said derive from other traditions. It is a unique vision because, I believe, of the uniqueness of the God of the Covenant, of the priesthood, and of prophecy—for it was in that relatively later religious context that this text about the beginning was recited and then written.

We have noted that Genesis is a text from the ancient world and so reflects that world in many of its concepts. It is, therefore, a narrative or “myth” strange to us—as the trial in Arkansas clearly revealed. But in important ways it is not so strange. The reason is that, perhaps supremely among the biblical texts, it has formed us and our view of the world in which we live. It has, first of all, provided the most fundamental, that is,

“ontological” presuppositions for the common religious heritage of Judaism and Christianity. All of the central theological concepts and beliefs of these two traditions assume this view of the world, of ourselves in it, and of our history—namely, as created and preserved by the power, the order, and the love of God, the God of the Covenant, of the Torah, and of the prophets. Whatever the secularity of our present in the West, it is clear that these two religious traditions have shaped even our secular existence in many fundamental ways. Western cultural life has had two major sources from the ancient world: Hellenic or classical on the one hand, and Hebraic

on the other. Hence many—though not all—of our assumptions about our existence stem from this crucial part of the Hebrew inheritance.

First, and of primary importance, is the theme, repeated in the Creation account, that women and men were created in the image of God. As a consequence, they are, whatever their race, power, status, gender, or talents, of inestimable value—an aspect of our common tradition that is itself of inestimable value. Though it has taken an excruciatingly long time for the clear implications of these words to work their way fully into our common life, these Hebrew (not Hellenic) words are the source of what is probably the most creative element in our cultural life: belief in the equality and value of every human being before God and one

another.

More surprisingly, our notions of time, and so of history, and hence of the prospects of life in history and in history’s communities, are dependent on the interpretation of Creation as set forth in Genesis. Time itself, said Augustine, interpreting Genesis, is a creation of God; it is a creature like us, and thus also under God’s power and care.⁴ There is, therefore, no Tyche or Fortuna—no blind, remorseless Fate—determining God’s purposes, for God is sovereign over all creatures. Accordingly, there is no Fate determining our existence either, even of the least of us. We are all in the hands of God and of our own freedom—though the latter, as Augustine knew, can get us individually and socially into serious trouble. Hence an impersonal Fate or Destiny,

“... our notion of time, and so of history ... are dependent on the interpretation of creation as set forth in Genesis.”

ruling over even the gods, fear of which haunted the late classical world, was banished, and even astrology has been refashioned in this light.

Further, for Genesis, time apparently had a beginning and runs its course irreversibly from its beginning at Creation to its end in God's promises. Because of the biblical inheritance, therefore, time is linear for the West; it is not cyclical, returning upon itself endlessly and meaninglessly—as it was in Hellenic or classical culture. Correlative to the biblical conception of God as dynamic and temporally active, and so related, is the notion of a linear time filled with unrepeatable and unique moments, a sequence headed toward its fulfillment under God. Our modern sense of time—secular or religious—is thoroughly dependent on this biblical vision of a linear sequence headed toward fulfillment, and not on the endless temporal cycles of the classical world. Clearly the Enlightenment, post-Enlightenment, and American belief in progress—which is not biblical (recall the Fall)—and the material dialectic of Marxism, both have their roots here. They are visions or “myths” of linear, developing time, each seeing history as headed toward its own fulfillment—very different from one another and their common Hebrew source.

Even more surprisingly, contemporary scientific cosmology also has its roots in the Hebrew tradition and Scripture. This cosmology sees natural process as a linear temporal sequence filled with unrepeatable, unique events, a process extending over immense stretches of time. We are told that it began with the Big Bang, that it proceeded through the galactic transformations modern astronomy traces, that it issued further in deep changes in geological structure, and that it culminated in those evolutionary mutations in life forms that contemporary biology describes.

In many fundamental ways we are all—secular or Christian—children of Genesis who understand our natural world in a variety of ways shaped by this old Hebrew text. For it was precisely this contemporary scientific cosmology of development—along with the

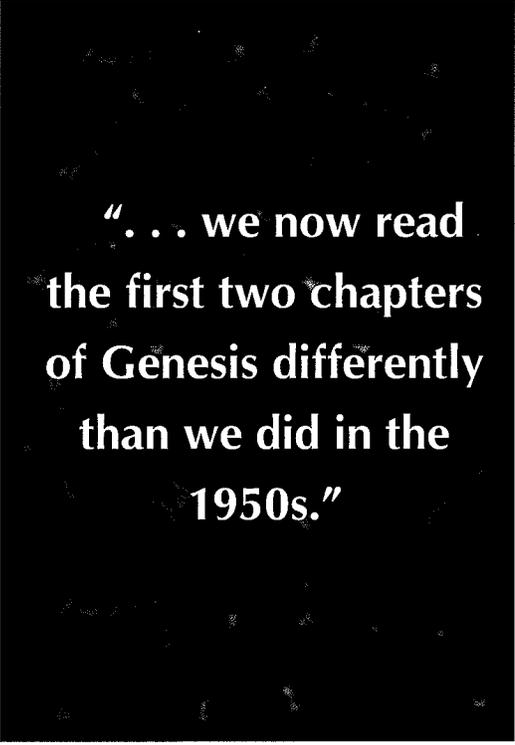
churches and synagogues of Little Rock—that was pitted against the creationists. Despite the fact, therefore, that neither the creationists nor their scientific opponents were aware of this point, each side in Arkansas was in its own way dependent on Genesis.

Finally, as the Genesis account makes very clear, all of creation is “good” because made by a caring God. Thus there is, and there can be, nothing essentially evil—an evil, so to speak, built into things as part of their intrinsic nature—and so irremovable and unredeemable, a necessary aspect of temporal and worldly existence. On the contrary, each part of reality has

possibilities for good—even, to Augustine's Hellenistic consternation, matter and the body, both of which, as he had to admit, God had created and therefore, despite appearances, must be good. Again, it has taken a long time for these implications too to realize themselves. But slowly they have helped to establish an empirical science of earthly material motion, that is, modern science, a new understanding and celebration of the body and its sensual life, and an inherent confidence that there are always possibilities of new beginnings latent in almost any historical or social situation. Changing natural processes, order, spontaneity, and life; novelty, and, especially, our real but relative freedom are the characteristics of a world created by a caring God. Surprisingly these characteristics form the

essential structures of our contemporary scientific cosmology. Note: these are aspects as fundamental to the new postmodern vision as they have been to those of us older dwellers of the twentieth century.

The biblical view, informed by Genesis, is by no means rosy or over optimistic. There is, after all, the Fall and its consequences of injustice, conflict, violence, and suffering—as well as hypocrisy. This true symbol or “myth” of the Fall should have warned us of that which our modern culture had ignored but which has been repeatedly validated: namely, that every historical development gives new possibilities for evil as it opens up new opportunities for good. Nonetheless, it remains the case that the goodness of creation in its essential nature—that is, in its inherent possibilities—means that



**“... we now read
the first two chapters
of Genesis differently
than we did in the
1950s.”**

there is always in history, whatever the grim actualities of our present, the chance for renewal, for new beginnings.

Recent Developments

This interpretation, which stems from theologies of the early and middle parts of the twentieth century, has since been very much debated. To me, it represents the heart of the long traditional influence of these chapters on the religious self-understanding of the Christian and Jewish communities and on our wider cultural life. Nonetheless, it remains only one of many present scholarly readings.

Moreover, it is appropriate to mention two places where this interpretation from the 1930s to the 1950s seems now to be really lacking, though considering the relativity of all things historical, this is hardly surprising. First, although it can be said that an earlier generation believed firmly in equality, the rise of gender consciousness since the 1960s has made all of us much more aware of the tone of male dominance that seems to permeate these accounts of our creation and certainly most subsequent theological and scholarly interpretations of them. Surprisingly, this imbalance is worse in chapter two

(where Eve is created out of Adam's rib or side) than in chapter one (where God creates male and female at the same time). One can, I believe, claim legitimately that all movements of liberation since the 1950s and 1960s represent long-term effects of the *imago Dei*; but there is little doubt that the accounts themselves—the rib, the role of helpmeet, and so on—have (as the Southern Baptists have so elegantly manifested to us) been a large part of the problem of the subordination of women as well as the ultimate source of the answer.

Second, there is the status and role of nature, also a matter of a new and sharper consciousness on the part of all of us, a consciousness, let us recall, that has been with us only since the late 1960s and the early 1970s. I do not think it fair to blame all our exploitation of and

indifference to nature on our Biblical heritage, as does Lynn White Jr.⁵ A humanist culture also centers its values on human beings and their needs, as John Dewey showed. Arguably, moreover, the scientific viewpoint tends to objectify (make manipulatable objects out of) the natural processes that science studies. Thus science as well as Christian desacralization has helped to strip nature of its intrinsic value. Surely the development of technological power has only increased these tendencies. In modern technological culture the age-old human domination of nature has threatened to become extravagantly exploitative, capable in the end of destroying the fertility of the earth, and is in fact “demonic.” Hence, technology has provided effective instruments for the infinite and ruthless greed—what Buddhists term “Desire”—that has driven modern life even more relentlessly than it did in ancient life. Perhaps this is what a wise Genesis meant in speaking of human wrongdoing as corrupting and polluting the earth.

Still, with these necessary caveats, let me say that a close and aware rereading of these chapters shows that the critique of the biblical tradition on ecological grounds—that it has ignored the value and integrity of nature—is well taken indeed.⁶ The whole of Scripture, not least our two chapters, is centered on God and God's doings; nonetheless, like the first and second commandments of Jesus,⁷ it is also centered on the

human, on the relation of God to women and men and on the relations of men and women to one another. In that sense it is, while dramatically theistic, also humanist—it reveres and so dignifies the human. We have already noted the very great benefits accruing from that emphasis on the value of the human.

However, there is always a dark side to all good things on earth, including religion and—even more surprising—humanism. This is a side that has also become plain to our generation. That is, that nature is here strikingly ignored if not demeaned. Karl Barth was right when he approvingly said that in Scripture nature is essentially a backdrop—or, better, the mere stage on which the drama between God and human beings is played out. Although Barth was right in this general

“... God has created nature also as an image of God: a mirror of God's mystery, power, order, and life.”

assessment, there are wonderful passages in the Psalms and Job, especially, in which nature is portrayed—shall I say?—as also made in the image of God. By that I mean that nature is celebrated as manifesting God's power and order as well as God's care, where the infinity and immensity of God are disclosed to us, and so where God's glory is plainly set forth. Still, these are, let us admit, subordinate themes.

Above all, that repeated divine injunction, or, better, command, to exercise dominion over nature and its creatures, in fact to subdue them, clearly spells out the subordination of nature to our human interests in ways that offend our contemporary convictions. Of course, we must recall with some empathy that ancient cultures were then themselves just moving out of their own religious, moral, and social self-understanding as subordinate to nature's patterns and powers. They were becoming for the first time conscious of the human as unique and of the social community as markedly different from the natural processes around them. One finds this consciousness clearly set forth in the distinction between nature and art, nature and polis, in Greek thought, just as it is clearly present in Hebrew understanding, as we have just noted. At this point, one might say, humans could only barely and precariously secure their own existence over against nature's gigantic threats to everything on which they depended.

Because of technology, industrialism, and science, we now know of no such precarious existence day-by-day with regard to nature; rather it is history that terrifies us. We have subdued nature and established almost total human dominion over it. Only once in a while does nature surprise and dominate us. Dominion over nature has, let us note, been the aim of humans since the beginning, explicitly since Francis Bacon spoke of knowledge as power—the power to effect what we want. Like all apparently good things, this new dominion through knowledge has now revealed itself as also a vast potentiality for destruction—destruction of nature, and, as a consequence, destruction of ourselves. Nature has now come under the dominion of history, of our wills, and so under the dominion of the waywardness as well as the creativity of human freedom, a terrifying transition indeed! Hence we now read the first two chapters of Genesis differently than we (and my generation) did in the 1950s. In modern existence, dominion over nature has in truth become the subjection, exploitation, and destruction of nature by our intentions, by our freedom; it is an example, therefore, of human sin, that is, of inordinate greed and pride, and thus a fit occasion for repentance and reform.

In sum, to me an even deeper amendment of these chapters is essential. God has, to be sure, created women and men in the divine image. But also, if we take the Psalms and Job seriously, God has created nature also as an image or mirror of God: a mirror of God's mystery, power, order, and life. Creation means, therefore, not only the infinite glory of God and the goodness of life, but also the intrinsic value of nature. Above all, nature and nature's processes are a mirror of the divine union of life with death, that is, of the power everywhere patterned in natural process with which God brings new life constantly out of death. This praise of nature as God's creation in God's image might have been said, but was not, in the first two chapters of Scripture. Let us proceed to say it now.

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2. See Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1828).
3. Temple, *Nature, Man, and God* (London: Macmillan, 1934), 317.
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5. White, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," *Science*, Mar. 10, 1967, 1203-7.
6. I repeated the following critique of this inheritance at an ecological conference some years ago when I was on the same platform with Carl Sagan. After my talk, he shook my hand warmly and said—he was a very charming man—"I'm so glad to hear someone from religion criticizing religion!" I thanked him, and said I would be equally glad to hear someone from science criticizing science. He said, "Humph!" and walked away.
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Langdon Gilkey is Shailer Matthews Professor Emeritus of Theology at the University of Chicago Divinity School, where he taught from 1963 to 1989. This article is condensed from a presentation of his at Loma Linda, California, on September 25, 1999, as part of a weekend seminar on Divine Creation.

Shifting Views

of the Past:

Adventists and the Historical Sciences

By James L. Hayward

Traditional ideas are never static. . . . They are transformed by the urge of critical reason, by the vivid evidence of emotional experience, and by the cold certainties of scientific perception. One fact is certain, you cannot keep them still. No generation can merely reproduce its ancestors.¹

Adventist scientists are shifting away from traditional views on the topic of origins. This shift was presaged during the 1940s and 1950s by general acceptance of significant aspects of (1) Darwinian evolution, (2) the geological column, and (3) radiometric dating. All had been targets of George McCready Price's vitriolic pen during the first half of the twentieth century. Surprisingly, acceptance occurred, not because of agitation by the Church's liberals, but largely as a consequence of the efforts of several of its more conservative science educators.²

Darwinian Evolution

Toward the end of the twentieth century, Adventist biologists were embarrassed by aspects of their fundamentalist heritage and looked for ways to build bridges with their profession. Creationists, said Loma Linda's Leonard Brand, "perhaps beginning with George McCready Price," had "developed some bad habits when speaking on the subject of evolution." Although a conservative creationist himself, Brand could agree with other scientists "on microevolution, speciation, and some macroevolution." As he saw it, the "limits of evolutionary change are not easy to define."³

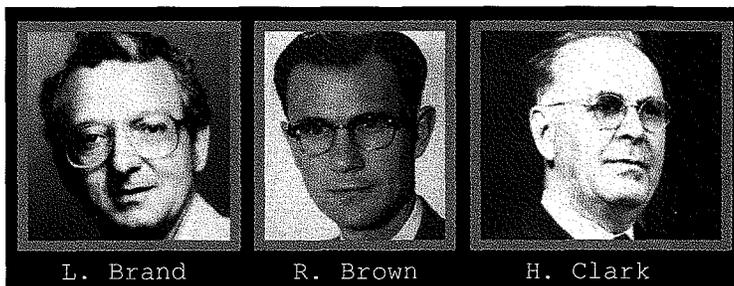
The shift away from Price's anti-Darwinian views actually began as early as 1940. In that year, Harold W. Clark's *Genes and Genesis* appeared. According to Clark,

The fixed, definitely bounded categories into which all individuals can be grouped exist only in the imagination of those individuals who still fondly believe such a convenient system possible. The fact is that there exists every conceivable gradation between the different groups of organisms. . . . A considerable amount of change from the original condition of the earth must be conceded in order to explain these findings in nature. . . . The survival of the fittest is a real phenomenon every field naturalist must reckon with. . . . A thoughtful consideration of the problems of distribution of plants and animals emphasizes the reality of the struggle for existence, the survival of the fittest, and natural selection.

Clark, a professor of biology at Pacific Union College, disavowed philosophical evolutionism and hoped his views would "clear the way for a fuller and deeper appreciation of the perfect harmony between the book of Revelation and the book of nature." But his sentiments represented anything but traditional Adventist fare.⁴

Other Adventists began to assume Clark's more progressive stance. In 1947, Emmanuel Missionary College's Frank Lewis Marsh noted that "Many species (modern) are being built up and have been built right under our eyes today. . . . If there ever was a group of scientists sold on the idea of descent with change (within limits) it is special creationists." In 1969, Harold G. Coffin, of the Geoscience Research Institute, opened the door to even higher levels of evolution, suggesting that change "may have been on the order level with some insects; and it may have been on the phylum level with the Acanthocephala, which are entirely parasitic."⁵

By the 1990s, Adventist biologists were discussing the evolution of human biology and behavior. At Walla Walla College, a course in sociobiology was taught that focused on the evolution of both animal and human behavior. Biologists at Loma Linda University argued that although man "has a measure of free will," his "character reflects generations of natural selection." At Harvard University, an Adventist physician expressed sadness over his new-found conviction "that humans



and chimps share a common ancestor."⁶

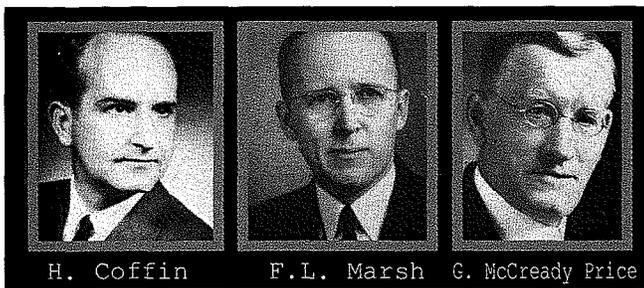
Some, like Brand, continued to defend Price's geological notions of a young earth and a worldwide flood. But in the area of their primary expertise, Adventist biologists held views only vaguely reminiscent of Price's anti-Darwinian apologies.⁷

The Geological Column

During the 1990s, visitors to the interpretive center at Fossil Butte National Monument, Wyoming, could view a short video on the geological history of the region. The video featured work by two researchers, Chicago Field Museum's Lance Grande and Loma Linda University's Paul Buchheim. While they expressed some differences of opinion, both geologists agreed that the Fossil Butte strata had been deposited over significant periods in a large lake during the Eocene Epoch. There was no hint of Price's Flood geology in the Adventist's comments.⁸

Buchheim represented a new generation of geologists and paleontologists within the Church—university trained, erudite, published in the finest journals. Most were happy to examine narrowly defined topics like the Fossil Butte strata. The grand theorizing, or "flood modeling," that typified Adventist apologists during the first 75 years of the twentieth century remained popular among only a small cadre of individuals, commonly biologists by training. Significantly, all Adventist geologists accepted the reality of the geological column—with its sequence of fossilized life forms—which, according to Price, represented a fallacious theory "of Satanic origin."⁹

The shift from Price's geological views has been well documented and will not be detailed here. Suffice it to say that, once again, it was Price's former student and erstwhile friend, Clark, who was responsible for catalyzing the shift. Clark became a believer in the reality of the geological column during an extended visit to the oil fields of Oklahoma and Texas in 1938. Additional



study convinced him of two other cornerstones of historical geology: overthrusts and the Ice Age. His revisionary ideas were self-published in *The New Diluvialism*, a volume that earned him Price's harshest condemnation.¹⁰

Clark continued to believe that the Genesis Flood played a large role in the stratification of the earth, but his acceptance of the geological column was revolutionary. Fellow Adventist science educators were convinced by his logic, and his views soon came to represent the new orthodoxy.¹¹

Radiometric Dating

In a 1999 *Spectrum* article, Richard J. Bottomley, an Adventist geophysicist from Alberta, showed how "basically simple" it is "to get a rock to tell you how old it is." After reviewing the principles of radiometric dating and potential problems with this methodology, he concluded confidently "that the ages we get from rocks are reliable, and, as you already know, many of them are extremely ancient."¹²

Bottomley's conclusion was at odds with Price's views, specifically, and with traditional Adventist views, generally. As far as Price was concerned, "this radioactive method is full of fallacies, of slipshod methods, and of sheer charlatany. And no one who has any regard for solid, scientifically proved results, will ever lose any sleep because of the announced results thus obtained." Price dismissed the entire notion of dating rocks as unworthy of discussion.¹³

The shift in Adventist views on the topic of radiometric dating began during the 1940s, influenced by members of the Deluge Geology Society, a predominantly Adventist creationist organization in southern California. More extensive discussion of radiometric dating and its implications continued into the 1950s, primarily through the influence of Walla Walla College physicist Robert H. Brown. Based on his confidence in the principles of nuclear physics, Brown believed that

the inorganic material of the universe had been created billions of years ago; but based on his reading of Scripture, he held firmly to the position that life had been around for only about six thousand years.¹⁴

Brown's views did not remain unopposed. Marsh and others feared that if fossils were found together with old rocks, the fossils would be considered as old as the rocks. After citing several examples from the literature of this type of pairing, Marsh saw there would need to be a "parting of the ways between belief in an inspired Bible literally read and in the accuracy of the [radiometric] timeclocks." According to Marsh,

Adventists are peculiarly fortunate in having the Spirit of Prophecy to make clear to them that the dates figured out by James Ussher could not be many hundreds of years amiss from the actual dates. . . . [This is] accurate enough knowledge to enable us to judge deductively the reliability of the radioactive time clock datings.

His confidence in the scientific accuracy of Ellen G. White's writings and his belief "that the Bible means literally just what it literally says" prohibited Marsh from entertaining any evidence that "the raw materials of our earth are an hour older than the first day of Creation Week."¹⁵

Brand, although suspicious of the assumptions of radiometric dating, took a somewhat different tack from Marsh and admitted that this technique posed a significant problem for young-earth creationists. Rather than closing the door to the scientific evidence, Brand proposed instead "that some new fundamental scientific principles are yet to be discovered that will explain these data."¹⁶

Despite some reservations, Brown's confidence in the legitimacy of radiometric dating—at least as applied to inorganic materials—came to be shared by many Adventist scientists over the years, especially physicists.

Facing the New Millennium

By 1999, significant numbers of Adventist scientists accepted (1) the possibility of rather large-scale evolutionary change among organisms; (2) the reality of the sequence of fossils in the geological column; and/or (3) the implication from radiometric dating that the earth, and possibly life, is billions of years old. Joint acceptance of all three of these propositions would mean a significant paradigm shift in Adventist per-

spectives about the past.

It would be a mistake to assume that the shifts in thinking highlighted here have been universal—a number of Adventist scientists continue to hold very traditional views regarding the past. Likewise, avant garde thinking in one area in no way guarantees progressiveness in other areas. Not uncommonly, Adventist academicians hold more liberal views in areas of their own specialty. Brand's recent book, *Faith, Reason, and Earth History*, provides a fascinating example of this. But it is clear that many Adventist scientists now express more interest in the views of people like John Polkinghorne, the Anglican physicist, than in those of Henry Morris, the Baptist Flood geologist.¹⁷

If anything conclusive can be said about the progression of Adventist views on earth history, it is that pluralism has characterized and continues to characterize the process. An instructive example of this pluralism is provided by the wide range of opinion among Adventists on the origin and nature of dinosaurs.¹⁸ Diversity of opinion should not be surprising, given the high value that Seventh-day Adventists have traditionally placed on scholarship and advanced education.

Charles Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection, the winnowing of variants by environmental contingencies, purports to explain how populations of organisms undergo adaptive shifts. With some irony perhaps, Darwin's theory may also explain how variant Adventist views on earth history have experienced, and, in the new millennium, will continue to experience adaptive shifts in response to the growth of knowledge.

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James L. Hayward is professor of biology at Andrews University, where he does research in paleobiology and community ecology. He is author of *The Creation/Evolution Controversy: An Annotated Bibliography* (Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 1998) and editor of AAF's forthcoming volume, *Creation Reconsidered*.
hayward@andrews.edu

Making a Stand:

Official Statements Bring Out the Best and the Worst of the Church

By Aubyn Fulton

Two official statements adopted at the 1999 Annual Council of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in October capture the Church at its best and worst. It is refreshing to be reminded that the Church can be thoughtful and respect diversity while giving meaningful moral guidance and leadership. However, it is depressing to be reminded that the Church can also be simplistic and dogmatic, ignoring both biblical and human complexity to reaffirm standard moral clichés that ring hollow.

With approval of four new official statements the Church now has official positions on everything from assault weapons (against) to women (in favor—though the Church will not fully ordain them). The precise status and function of these statements is not clear; apparently, there is no official statement on official statements. Still, perhaps it is significant that the complete list and full text of all 44 official statements can be found on the Church's official website <<http://www.adventist.org>> just beneath its 27 Fundamental Beliefs in a section entitled "About Seventh-day Adventists."

The four most recent statements deal with birth control, homosexuality, religious minorities, and the religious significance of the year 2000. The first of these two involve controversial and intimate issues and raise interesting questions about both the role of these statements and the Church as a redemptive community.

An interesting ambivalence has apparently developed among Seventh-day Adventists in recent decades: Despite traditional suspicion of hierarchical creeds, a desire seems to be growing for definitive statements of orthodoxy. This ambivalence is reflected in the Church's 27 Fundamental Beliefs. Entitled on the Church's website—in creedal fashion—"What We Believe," the 27 Fundamental Beliefs begin with a brief preamble that Seventh-day Adventists "accept the Bible as their only creed." The possibility is not explicitly addressed that no such document would be needed if this preamble were actually true. One might be forgiven for assuming that the official statements passed at Annual Council or General Conference sessions are in some way part of this latent creedal tradition within the Church.

The title "Official Statement" itself seems to imply that the statements are normative, with an implicit or

explicit disciplinary or purification function. (“Here is what Adventists believe; if you are a *real* Adventist, you should believe this, too, or get out of the church.”) Yet the statements lack any visible teeth—no stated consequence for deviation, no indication in any collateral document this writer has identified that continued church membership or denominational employment depends on submission to them. Instead, recent conversations with members of the General Conference Executive Committee suggest that a pair of these new official statements serve at least two other functions: descriptive (public relations) and advisory (pastoral).

General Conference Communication Director Ray Dabrowski has emphasized the public relations function. “The Church is often asked by the media what its position is on socially

prominent issues. It is important for the Church to have an answer to the question ‘what is it that you believe?’ on these kinds of matters.” The criterion for assessing any such statement has little to do with the practical effect it might have on people struggling with the issue addressed, much less the quality of the biblical exegesis or interpretation behind it. The issue is simply this: Does the statement accurately reflect the position of either a majority of church members or their duly elected representatives meeting in official session? Because the birth control and homosexuality statements *were* adopted at Annual Council, there can be no doubt that, whatever their content, both statements accurately reflect the position of the Church’s representative body.

The pastoral function of the statement on homosexuality has been emphasized by Selma Chajj, a psychologist and lay member of the 330-person Executive Committee that approved both statements. “My perception is that there are many people who just do not know what to do about homosexuality in the church. Pastors and local churches are asking for guidance in working with their homosexual members.”

In the press release that accompanied the statement on birth control, General Vice President Leo Ranzolin echoed Chajj regarding function: “It is appropriate for the Church to give guidance and some orientation to Christian married couples coming from a wide variety of backgrounds and cultures as to aspects of birth control.” As for success fulfilling this pastoral

function, the two statements appear to differ markedly, though this assessment is admittedly subjective and complex and will be explored at greater length below.

Formally titled “Birth Control: A Seventh-day Adventist Statement of Consensus” (see pages 73–74), the birth control statement is in many ways a refreshing model of how to offer genuine moral guidance on complex and controversial issues while still recognizing diversity and subtle complexities. In the statement’s preamble, Allan Handysides, the Church’s health director and chair of the committee that wrote the document,

“This is not a statement of dogma. We are not assuming the authority to dictate, but to provide guidelines for those who want to know where we stand.” —Allan Handysides

insists “This is not a statement of dogma. We are not assuming the authority to dictate, but to provide guidelines for those who want to know where we stand.” The statement largely succeeds in creating a moral context within which couples can make responsible reproductive decisions. This context is woven from raw materials often thought to be natural to people on opposite ideological extremes. For example, the statement notes as related concerns increased temptation for sexual promiscuity due to free access to contraception, as well as the potential for patriarchal oppression of women inherent in limited access to contraception.

The statement avoids narrow, rigid proclamations about what constitutes acceptable expressions of sexuality and instead identifies useful biblical principles of stewardship and responsibility. While recognizing the importance of procreation, the statement takes the stand that marital sexuality has fundamental purposes in addition to reproduction. This is welcome clarification for those who may still struggle with nineteenth-century notions that the pursuit of consensual sexual pleasure even between married couples is something vaguely sinful, or at least unseemly.

Point number five, where the statement identifies appropriate methods of birth control, contains the meat of the statement. The statement deems as morally acceptable birth control methods that merely prevent conception because it views sexual intercourse as much for pleasure as for procreation and childbearing as a

choice, not an obligation. The statement respectfully notes the views of some that any interference with a fertilized egg is immoral, but manages to convey the message that responsible Christians can use birth control pills and IUDs morally. The paragraph concludes with an assertion that abortion “is not morally acceptable for purposes of birth control.” There is less here than meets the eye, however, because every abortion results in the control or termination of a birth. This rather vague (perhaps intentionally so) construction is open to several interpretations. Perhaps it represents an attempt to condemn casual abortions and abdication of reproductive responsibility before engaging in intercourse.

The attempt to create a document that respects the full range of responsible Christian positions while still offering useful moral guidance is not entirely successful. For instance, sandwiched between two sentences that note the sinfulness of intercourse outside of marriage is another that mentions the usefulness of some birth control methods to reduce the risks of sexually transmitted diseases and pregnancy in nonmarital sexual relationships. The paragraph in which this interesting

“Here is a claim to report in 277 words the clear biblical position on a topic as complex and difficult as homosexuality, without so much as a hint that sincere, Bible loving, God-fearing Christians can interpret matters differently.”

triad occurs bears the title “Misuses of Birth Control,” yet the intended implication of the middle sentence is not clear. One can imagine half the committee reading the sentence with approval and the other half with disapproval. Apparently, not all differences can be split.

In many ways, the “Seventh-day Adventist Position Statement on Homosexuality” (see page 74) could not differ more from the Church’s statement on birth control. Absent is any disclaimer as to the former’s dogmatic nature or its attempts to dictate to others. Absent, too, is a tone of respect for a full range of Christian perspectives, or recognition of related complexities and subtleties. The document lacks evidence of underlying redemptive and pastoral concern to provide

the Church with a meaningful moral context within which to hold sincere ethical conversations.

Perhaps one reason for the difference is the statement’s origin. The statement on homosexuality did not originate in the Christian View of Human Life Committee, despite a sentence in the official press release that implied the contrary. Reports suggest that this particular committee, which authored the statement on birth control, is characterized by careful attention to relevant scholarship and science, pastoral concern for the Church community, and a commitment to respect the full spectrum of a diverse membership.

The statement on homosexuality actually originated in the Public and Official Statements Committee, a body whose mission is to initiate, prepare, and evaluate official public statements on behalf of the General Conference. According to two different members of the Executive Committee, the Public and Official Statements Committee is more concerned with the public relations function of official statements than with their pastoral function.

The brief statement on homosexuality concludes, “Adventists are opposed to homosexual practices and

relationships.” There is little to criticize if those words are taken simply as a press release that summarizes the view of the Church expressed through its representatives at Annual Council. Unfortunately, however, the statement pretends to fill another, normative function and refuses to fill a pastoral function that

seems to be needed desperately. In these more important senses, the statement must be viewed as a resounding failure.

Normative pretensions can be detected in repeated claims within the document itself and in an accompanying press release that the statement expresses “The Scriptural view about homosexuality” (press release). This is not simply a public relations statement that describes what the Annual Council of the Seventh-day Adventist Church voted in regard to homosexuality during the fall of 1999. Here is a claim to report in 277 words the clear biblical position on a topic as complex and difficult as homosexuality, without so much as a hint that sincere, Bible loving, God-fearing Christians can interpret matters differently.

The results are unsettling. For example, the official statement uses familiar texts like Leviticus 20:7-21, Romans 1:24-27, and 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 to condemn homosexuality, but fails to mention any of the complexities involved in their interpretation. Thus, it ignores verses from the same chapter in Leviticus that condemn to death any man who reviles his father and mother (20:9) or that require any man who has sexual intercourse with a woman during her menstrual cycle to be "cut off from the people" (20:18). All this despite any possible help these texts might give for a meaningful interpretation of Levitical purity codes. Furthermore, the statement does not even hint at the well-known difficulty finding an appropriate English equivalent for the Greek word *arsenokoitai* in 1 Corinthians 6:9, which the New International Version translates as "homosexual offenders" but the Revised Standard Version renders as "sexual perverts." Not least among the statement's shortcomings is the fact that it also ignores the troubling possibility that the New Testament world may not have even known a category that corresponds to modern understandings of homosexuality as a state of predominant sexual attraction to the same sex.¹

An official statement of the Church—whatever its function—is probably not the place for extended biblical exegesis, and the items noted above do not necessarily demonstrate that the statement's conclusion is erroneous. Still, these deficiencies *are* sufficient to demonstrate the failure of any statement that pretends to report the clear, simple, biblical position on homosexuality without acknowledging some room for different interpretations. This fault is particularly troubling because it raises the possibility that the statement may unintentionally promote attacks on homosexuals as well as those who emphasize and respect the role of interpretation in matters related to the Bible.

Besides failing to articulate a defensible normative view of homosexuality, the statement does not provide genuine pastoral guidance. No matter how many times one repeats variations on the theme of "love the sinner, hate the sin," it is difficult to communicate true compassion when an integral part of a person's core identity is rejected. (Try to detect compassion in the following words: "We love Adventists, but we hate, and are disgusted by, any religious behavior, and any intent or desire to pray or worship. They can be part of our community as long as they pretend not to love or believe in God.") The official statement on homosexuality could have identified a few core biblical values and priorities to help guide sexual decision making among all Christians—gay or straight—rather than rushing to an

overly simplistic conclusion that severely limits genuine conversation about morality and homosexuality.

By all accounts, two motivators for this statement were the growing visibility of gay members in local churches and the struggle of pastors and church boards to respond in ways that are redemptive and have moral integrity. It is hard to see how a simple "we're against it" can be of much help if it ignores complex biblical evidence as well as growing scientific data regarding the biological basis for a great deal of sexual orientation and resistance to change that orientation.

The Annual Council adopted its statement on homosexuality on October 3, 1999. Almost a year to the day before—on October 7, 1998—an openly gay 21-year-old college student named Matthew Shepard was found tied to a fence, his hands bound beneath him, blood streaming from one of his ears. Shepard never regained consciousness and died five days later. Perhaps the official statement's repeated expressions of compassion for homosexuals would have rung more sincere had the document also included condemnation of antihomosexual violence in all forms as strong as its condemnation of homosexual behavior.

The Annual Council would have risked much had it approved a statement on homosexuality as thoughtful and ethically demanding as the one it passed on birth control. Approval would have required a fundamental shift in thinking, away from a focus on public relations in defense of traditional orthodoxy toward a pastoral focus on the struggle that we all share—whatever our sexual orientation—to embrace our sexuality with genuine ethical and moral integrity. Clearly many at the top levels of leadership in the Church have this pastoral concern. According to one member of the Executive Committee who spoke at the Autumn Council in favor of a more nuanced and compassionate statement, a large number of fellow council members expressed their support in private. Sadly, however, no one spoke out on the floor.

One cannot be surprised that the Church in official session chose not to issue a statement that normalized homosexual relationships. One *can* be disappointed that, at the last Annual Council in the second millennium of our Lord, the Church did not find courage to draw a circle large enough to include heterosexual and homosexual members in redemptive conversation and community.

Notes and References

1. L. W. Countryman, *Dirt, Greed, and Sex* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 118.

Birth Control: A Seventh-day Adventist Statement of Consensus

<http://www.adventist.org/beliefs/main_stat44.htm>

Scientific technologies today permit greater control of human fertility and reproduction than was formerly possible. These technologies make possible sexual intercourse with the expectation of pregnancy and childbirth greatly reduced. Christian married couples have a potential for fertility control that has created many questions with wide-ranging religious, medical, social, and political implications. Opportunities and benefits exist as a result of the new capabilities, as do challenges and drawbacks. A number of moral issues must be considered. Christians who ultimately must make their own personal choices on these issues must be informed in order to make sound decisions based on biblical principles.

Among the issues to be considered is the question of the appropriateness of human intervention in the natural biological processes of human reproduction. If any intervention is appropriate, then additional questions regarding what, when, and how must be addressed. Other related concerns include:

- * likelihood of increased sexual immorality which the availability and use of birth control methods may promote;
- * gender dominance issues related to the sexual privileges and prerogatives of both women and men;
- * social issues, including the right of a society to encroach upon personal freedom in the interest of the society at large and the burden of economic and educational support for the disadvantaged; and
- * stewardship issues related to population growth and the use of natural resources.

A statement of moral considerations regarding birth control must be set in the broader context of biblical teachings about sexuality, marriage, parenthood, and the value of children—and an understanding of the interconnectedness between these issues. With an awareness of the diversity of opinion within the Church, the following biblically based principles are set forth to educate and to guide in decision making.

1. Responsible stewardship. God created human beings in His own image, male and female, with capacities to think and to make decisions (Isa. 1:18; Josh. 24:15; Deut. 30:15–20). God gave human beings dominion over the earth (Gen. 1:26, 28).

This dominion requires overseeing and caring for nature. Christian stewardship also requires taking responsibility for human procreation. Sexuality, as one of the aspects of human nature over which the individual has stewardship, is to be expressed in harmony with God's will (Exod. 20:14; Gen. 39:9; Lev. 20:10–21; 1 Cor. 6:12–20).

2. Procreative purpose. The perpetuation of the human family is one of God's purposes for human sexuality (Gen. 1:28). Though it may be inferred that marriages are generally intended to yield offspring, Scripture never presents procreation as an obligation of every couple in order to please God. However, divine revelation places a high value on children and expresses the joy to be found in parenting (Matt. 19:14; Ps. 127:3). Bearing and rearing children help parents to understand God and to develop compassion, caring, humility, and unselfishness (Ps. 103:13; Luke 11:13).

3. Unifying purpose. Sexuality serves a unifying purpose in marriage that is God-ordained and distinguishable from the procreative purpose (Gen. 2:24). Sexuality in marriage is intended to include joy, pleasure, and delight (Eccl. 9:9; Prov. 5:18, 19; Song of Sol. 4:16–5:1). God intends that couples may have ongoing sexual communion apart from procreation (1 Cor. 7:3–5), a communion that forges strong bonds and protects a marriage partner from an inappropriate relationship with someone other than his or her spouse (Prov. 5:15–20; Song of Sol. 8:6, 7). In God's design, sexual intimacy is not only for the purpose of conception. Scripture does not prohibit married couples from enjoying the delights of conjugal relations while taking measures to prevent pregnancy.

4. Freedom to choose. In creation—and again through the redemption of Christ—God has given human beings freedom of choice, and He asks them to use their freedom responsibly (Gal. 5:1, 13). In the divine plan, husband and wife constitute a distinct family unit, having both the freedom and the responsibility to share in making determinations about their family (Gen. 2:24). Married partners should be considerate of each other in making decisions about birth control, being willing to consider the needs of the other as well as one's own (Phil. 2:4). For those who choose to bear children, the procreative choice is not without limits. Several factors must inform their choice, including the ability to provide for the needs of children (1 Tim. 5:8); the physical, emotional, and spiritual health of the mother and other care givers (3 John 2; 1 Cor. 6:19; Phil. 2:4; Eph. 5:25); the social and political circumstances into which children will be born (Matt. 24:19); and the quality of life

and the global resources available. We are stewards of God's creation and therefore must look beyond our own happiness and desires to consider the needs of others (Phil. 2:4).

5. Appropriate methods of birth control. Moral decision making about the choice and use of the various birth control agents must stem from an understanding of their probable effects on physical and emotional health, the manner in which the various agents operate, and the financial expenditure involved. A variety of methods of birth control—including barrier methods, spermicides, and sterilization—prevent conception and are morally acceptable. Some other birth-control methods¹ may prevent the release of the egg (ovulation), may prevent the union of egg and sperm (fertilization), or may prevent attachment of the already fertilized egg (implantation). Because of uncertainty about how they will function in any given instance, they may be morally suspect for people who believe that protectable human life begins at fertilization. However, since the majority of fertilized ova naturally fail to implant or are lost after implantation, even when birth control methods are not being used, hormonal methods of birth control and IUDs, which represent a similar process, may be viewed as morally acceptable. Abortion, the intentional termination of an established pregnancy, is not morally acceptable for purposes of birth control.

6. Misuse of birth control. Though the increased ability to manage fertility and protect against sexually transmitted disease may be useful to many married couples, birth control can be misused. For example, those who would engage in premarital and extramarital sexual relations may more readily indulge in such behaviors because of the availability of birth control methods. The use of such methods to protect sex outside of marriage may reduce the risks of sexually transmitted diseases and/or pregnancy. Sex outside of marriage, however, is both harmful and immoral, whether or not these risks have been diminished.

7. A redemptive approach. The availability of birth-control methods makes education about sexuality and morality even more imperative. Less effort should be put forth in condemnation and more in education and redemptive approaches that seek to allow each individual to be persuaded by the deep movings of the Holy Spirit.

Editorial Note by the Committee

1. Some current examples of these methods include intrauterine devices (IUDs), hormone pills (including the "morning-after pill"), injections, or implants. Questions about these methods should be referred to a medical professional.

Seventh-day Adventist Position Statement on Homosexuality

http://www.adventist.org/beliefs/main_stat46.htm.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church recognizes that every human being is valuable in the sight of God, and we seek to minister to all men and women in the spirit of Jesus. We also believe that by God's grace and through the encouragement of the community of faith, an individual may live in harmony with the principles of God's Word.

Seventh-day Adventists believe that sexual intimacy belongs only within the marital relationship of a man and a woman. This was the design established by God at creation. The Scriptures declare: "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh" (Gen. 2:24, NIV). Throughout Scripture this heterosexual pattern is affirmed. The Bible makes no accommodation for homosexual activity or relationships. Sexual acts outside the circle of a heterosexual marriage are forbidden (Lev. 20:7-21; Rom. 1:24-27; 1 Cor. 6:9-11). Jesus Christ reaffirmed the divine creation intent: "Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator "made them male and female," and said, "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh?" So they are no longer two, but one" (Matt. 19:4-6, NIV). For these reasons Adventists are opposed to homosexual practices and relationships.

Seventh-day Adventists endeavor to follow the instruction and example of Jesus. He affirmed the dignity of all human beings and reached out compassionately to persons and families suffering the consequences of sin. He offered caring ministry and words of solace to struggling people, while differentiating His love for sinners from His clear teaching about sinful practices.

Aubyn Fulton is a licensed psychologist and a professor of psychology at Pacific Union College. He has a Ph.D. in clinical psychology and an M.A. in theology from Fuller Theological Seminary. His most recent publication was "Religious Orientation, Antihomosexual Sentiment and Fundamentalism," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* (March 1999).
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James L. Hayward

CONTRIBUTORS:

Milo V. Anderson

Richard J. Bottomley

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Glenn E. Coe

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Fritz Guy

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Frederick E. J. Harder

P. E. Hare

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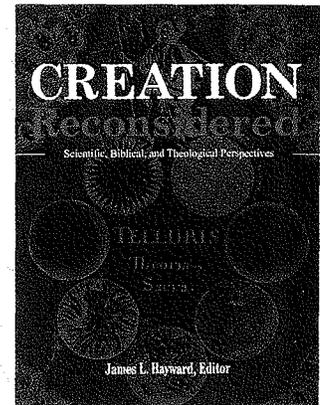
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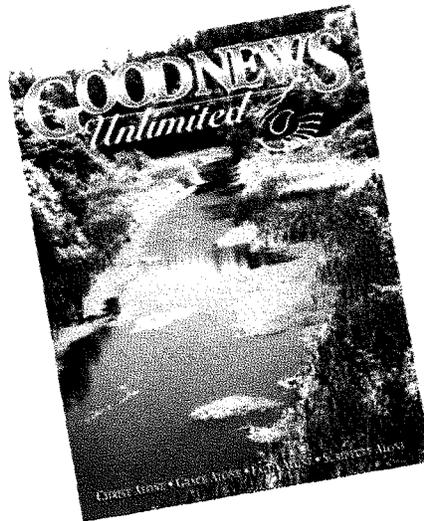


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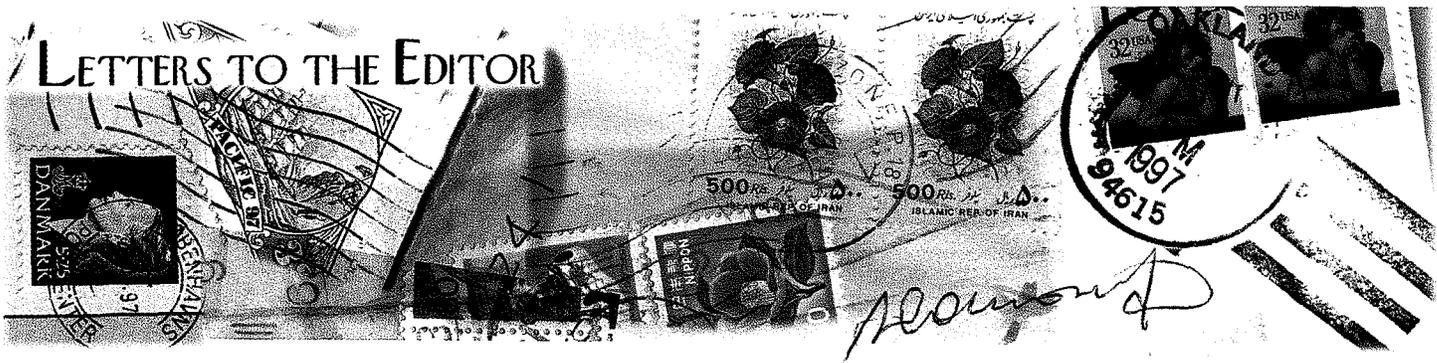
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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Age Dating of Rocks

Richard Bottomley's article, "Age Dating of Rocks" (*Spectrum*, autumn 1999), a chapter from the forthcoming book *Creation Reconsidered*, represents a well-explained introduction to radiometric dating. The second figure in the article gives an especially impressive view of an almost linear and extended time relationship between radiometric dates and part of the fossiliferous stratigraphic sequence of our earth. Readers of *Spectrum* may find it profitable to consider additional dimensions to the radiometric dating scenario. Specifically questions of: (1) variability in dates, (2) selection of data, and (3) the influence of the biblical Flood.

(1) There is little question that one can get great variability in expected radiometric dates. Some Quaternary basalts thought to be less than 1.6 million years old at the top of the Grand Canyon have dated as old as 1,340 and 2,600 million years,¹ while basalts within the bottom layers of the Grand Canyon date younger, at only 781 to 1,090 million years.² Another unexpected example is a date of 34 million years³ for a Precambrian granite in New Mexico that should be at least 570 million years old, according to standard geological interpretations. More than twenty years ago, a list of over three hundred published radiometric dates near or more than 20 percent different from the expected dates was published,⁴ and in 1999 a monograph dealing with anomalies in radiometric dating referenced nearly five hundred articles from the scientific literature.⁵ It would not be difficult to extract from the many radiometric dates a sequence that would present just the opposite of the relationship illustrated on page 47 of Bottomley's article; i.e., the dates would get younger as one goes down through the geologic layers. But I suspect that this might be an exercise in futility that would represent mainly selection of data. However, many dates are considered unreliable by specialists in the field. The prestigious Geological Society (London), prepared a chronology of the geological record somewhat similar to the one published in *Spectrum*. The authors of a major section of this chronology comment:

A large number of age determinations on rocks of Carboniferous to Triassic age have been published. In this review, the radiometric data available in nearly 500 separate articles have been examined by the senior author (S. C. Forster) and, following application of the above criteria, only 45 dated items (Fig. 1) have been accepted from this voluminous literature as suitable for time-scale purposes.⁶

A recent (1998) article by a leading geochronologist, entitled "Geochronology Comes of Age,"⁷ emphasizes some of the recent changes that have gone on in refining radiometric dating techniques. However, the paradigm of a long geologic time scale was established long before geochronology had "come of age." The influence of the geochronology before this should be recognized, and we can expect more changes. There is often the scientific aura of "we have been wrong in the past, but this time we have it right" with radiometric dating.

(2) While there are many anomalous radiometric dates, many of them agree with the generally accepted geological timescale. An important question is: How much selection of data is represented in the hundreds of thousands of dates found in the scientific literature? Selection of data is sometimes freely acknowledged. One investigator states: "In conventional interpretation of K-Ar age data, it is common to discard ages which are substantially too high or too low compared with the rest of the group or with other available data such as the geological time scale."⁸ Another researcher states: "In general, dates in the 'correct ballpark' are assumed to be correct and are published, but those in disagreement with other data are seldom published nor are discrepancies fully explained."⁹

We don't know just how significant these selection factors are, but they are definitely present.

(3) It may be that the variability and selection of dates mentioned above reflects mainly small changes, and that there may be a real trend in radiometric dates toward older dates with depth of sediment. However, this trend may not reflect real time. It may reflect factors associated with the activity of the worldwide flood described in the Bible. Notable are suggestions of:

(a) Incorporation of ancient dating material from the matter of an ancient empty earth that existed here before the recent creation of life described in the Bible.¹⁰ (b) The effect of hydrostatic pressure of the flood waters on the escape of radiometric decay products. (c) The effect of degassing of earth's mantle during the Flood. (d) Cooling effects on molten rock material associated with the Flood. For further discussion and references see the chapter entitled "Time Questions" in the book *Origins: Linking Science and Scripture*.¹¹

It is becoming increasingly apparent that for a century and a half science has led us down the pathway of an evolutionary theory that is becoming more and more implausible. Is science also misleading us down an erroneous time pathway? This may be the case. On the other hand, the newer trends in geological interpretations toward rapid catastrophic geological events are providing increasing credence for the biblical model of origins.

Ariel A. Roth

Loma Linda, California

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11. Ariel A. Roth, *Origins: Linking Science and Scripture* (Hagerstown Md.: Review and Herald, 1998).

Richard Bottomley replies:

I understand from personal experience the discomfort caused by the implications of long ages for life on earth. However, our discomfiture does not give us license to ignore or minimize the data and its implications.

If we are to witness to the generation we are in, we must deal honestly with the real world as it exists, and we must be fair in dealing with data that does not fit our preconceptions. If one person in 100 dies in an organ transplant operation, would you only inform potential recipients about that one failure? Would you conclude that organ transplants are not effective?

Radioactive dating is solid and the data is compelling. As with any field of science, there are anomalies and experimental scatter but the picture is nowhere as bleak as the above interpretation would lead you to believe. As for disputes in academic journals, scientists regularly debate, redefine, and revise research techniques and conclusions. They do not have the short-time creationists' advantage of knowing complete truth before they look at the physical evidence. Instead, there is a professional commitment to progressive truth. It is not always a quick or easy process, but so far we have not found a better, more reliable route to truth about the physical world.

Short-time creationists too often are satisfied with expressing astonishment and dismay that there are any errors or unresolved issues in age-dating techniques. But the real challenge is to face boldly the overwhelming quantity of data from diverse sources that planet earth and life on planet earth do not fit a short-time model. Belief in a Creator God is independent of how he chose to create. I believe it is fine to believe in an earth that is six thousand years old because Ellen White says so. I believe it is also fine to believe in an earth that is 4.5 billion years old because God's second book says so. There is room in our church family for different perspectives of God. But it is not OK to say the earth is six thousand years old because science says so. It does not. Not even close.

The Afterlife of Friends

(via email to author Juli Miller)

I was awe inspired and wept (I'm a grown man) over your article [*Spectrum*, autumn 1999] mainly about your friend Linda and your incredible relationship despite adversity. I continue to have faith in the human race when I read your article.

Bob Brinsmead

I was injured at work two years ago and am permanently disabled. I have faced and understand a lot of what was written. Thanks for sharing. I face a reunion of classmates from academy next Sabbath and I am more prepared.

Coleen Doran

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Let's Start Taking Genesis Literally!

FROM
AAF

How old is the universe? Scripture does not say. How old is planet earth? Scripture does not say. How long has there been life on planet earth? Scripture does not say. How long has there been human life on planet earth? Scripture does not say. How long have human and nonhuman life on planet earth been infected by sin? Scripture does not say.

With respect to the idea of Creation, Scripture is not interested in chronology. We can therefore say about the beginning of all things what Jesus said about the end of all things: no one but God knows the day and the hour.

Instead of trying to make Genesis answer our chronological questions, the time has come for us to *start* taking it literally. We should read nothing into its account that is not there. We should read nothing out of it that is there. We should accept it in its contexts just as it is. We should read Scripture's creation stories as they were intended to be read, allowing those narratives to answer the questions they address instead of ones that may be on our minds.

Genesis declares, for example, that God made Eve out of one of Adam's ribs. We should take that statement literally, learning from that aspect of the narrative precisely what it teaches, nothing more and nothing less. The text allows no uncertainty about what that lesson is. Before it talks about Adam's rib, the narrative declares that "for Adam there was not found an help meet for him" (2:20, KJV). It does not say that Adam had no assistant (a "helpmeet"), but that he had no partner (a "help meet for him"). In this sentence, the word "meet" is an adjective, not a noun. It does not name Eve's role but signals her status as one who "corresponded to" or "mirrored" Adam as no other being could. After God sculptured Eve from Adam's rib, Adam declared "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man" (2:23, KJV).

As the Genesis account itself makes clear, this part of the story is not a chronology of gender differentiation. It is a moral manifesto about the proper relationships between Man and Woman. In contrast to some other creation narratives, it declares in terms too vivid to overlook and too clear to misunderstand that Man and Woman are identical in substance and equal in value: "bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh." Therefore, there is no ethical justification for treating one or the other as though he or she were fundamentally different or inferior. As the Genesis story itself indicates, this is the meaning of its message.

The time has come for us to *start* taking this lesson, and others like it in the Genesis narratives, literally. The time has come for us to *start* living in harmony with what the idea of Creation truly teaches.

Moral and chronological claims can be confirmed or disconfirmed. In both cases, much depends on an assertion's consistency and coherence. Much also depends upon the correspondence between the claim and the empirical evidence to which we have access. But perhaps the most important measure of ethical claims is the test of consequences. In the long run and for most people and other living things, is life better or worse when we arrange our lives in harmony with the moral assertion?

In the case we have just considered, what are the pragmatic outcomes of relating to men and women as though they are identical in substance and equal in value? How do these results compare with the outcomes of living in harmony with competing creation narratives? If these results are positive, this aspect of the Genesis account is probably true. If they are negative, it is probably false.

Those of us who are Jewish, Christian, or Islamic, those of us who look to Scripture for moral guidance, would do well to *start* putting this matter and others like it to a test. We would do well to *start* taking Genesis literally. What do we have to lose?

David R. Larson

President of The Association of Adventist Forums

NOTE: These remarks are drawn from a longer presentation of the same title by the same author made at a conference in Loma Linda, California, September 24 and 25, 1999, entitled "Divine Creation." Video recordings of the entire conference, including this presentation, are available for \$35.00, tax, shipping, and handling included, from *Adventist Today*, P.O. Box 8026, Riverside, CA 92515-8026. Telephone: (800) 236-3641.

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Chapters wishing to be acknowledged in this list, please contact the
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AAF San Diego Chapter Meeting January 15, 2000

David Larson and Bonnie Dwyer
"AAF/*Spectrum*-2000 and Beyond"
3 p.m.
Tierra Santa Church Sanctuary
11260 Clairemont Messa Blvd.

Longo Lecture Series Pacific Union College

February 24, 2000

Phillip E. Johnson, U.C. Berkeley
7:30 p.m.
Dauphinee Chapel

Paul J. Landa Memorial Lectures La Sierra University

February 26, 2000

Mark A. Noll
7:30 p.m.
La Sierra University Church

Annual Report

BUDGET OVERVIEW JULY 1999 through JUNE 2000

| Income | |
|------------------------|-------------------|
| AAF Membership Income | 96,024.96 |
| Advertising Income | 1,725.00 |
| Contributions Income | 84,525.00 |
| Investment Income | 2,300.04 |
| Miscellaneous Income | 4,140.00 |
| Total Income | 188,715.00 |
| Expenses | |
| AAF Membership Expense | 12,499.96 |
| Payroll Expenses | 89,706.15 |
| <i>Spectrum</i> | 48,000.00 |
| Taxes | 1,500.00 |
| Travel & Ent. | 3,000.00 |
| Office Expense | 21,899.96 |
| Other | 9,900.00 |
| Total Expenses | 186,506.07 |
| Net Income | 2,208.93 |

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For HMS and Mabel

Almost Sabbath. In the tiled kitchen, soft hands work the small sharp knife to split ripe fruit into a bowl. She hums. She's the one in the family who hums, doesn't sing open-mouthed, at sundown worship when Grandpa's booming bass carries the rest of our voices to taste the sweet vowels of *Day is Dying in the West! Heaven is Touching Earth with Rest* and when we reach the intervals, arching higher with *Holy, Ho-ly, Ho-o-oly!* we find the center of a gathering deepness, cleansing shadow of Sabbath embracing us altogether, and we link hands in a circle of prayer. Grandpa prays last, in the voice you hear from the pulpit, the radio, voice spiraling into your ears to coil around your heart and hold it, still as God's voice, or grace. Later, the light she left on over the sink will guide us through the dark house, to the kitchen again, to fruit salad, warm bread, and another kind of grace that was also ours for the taking.

By Pat Cason



Photo by Thomas Osborn

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