# SPECTRUM

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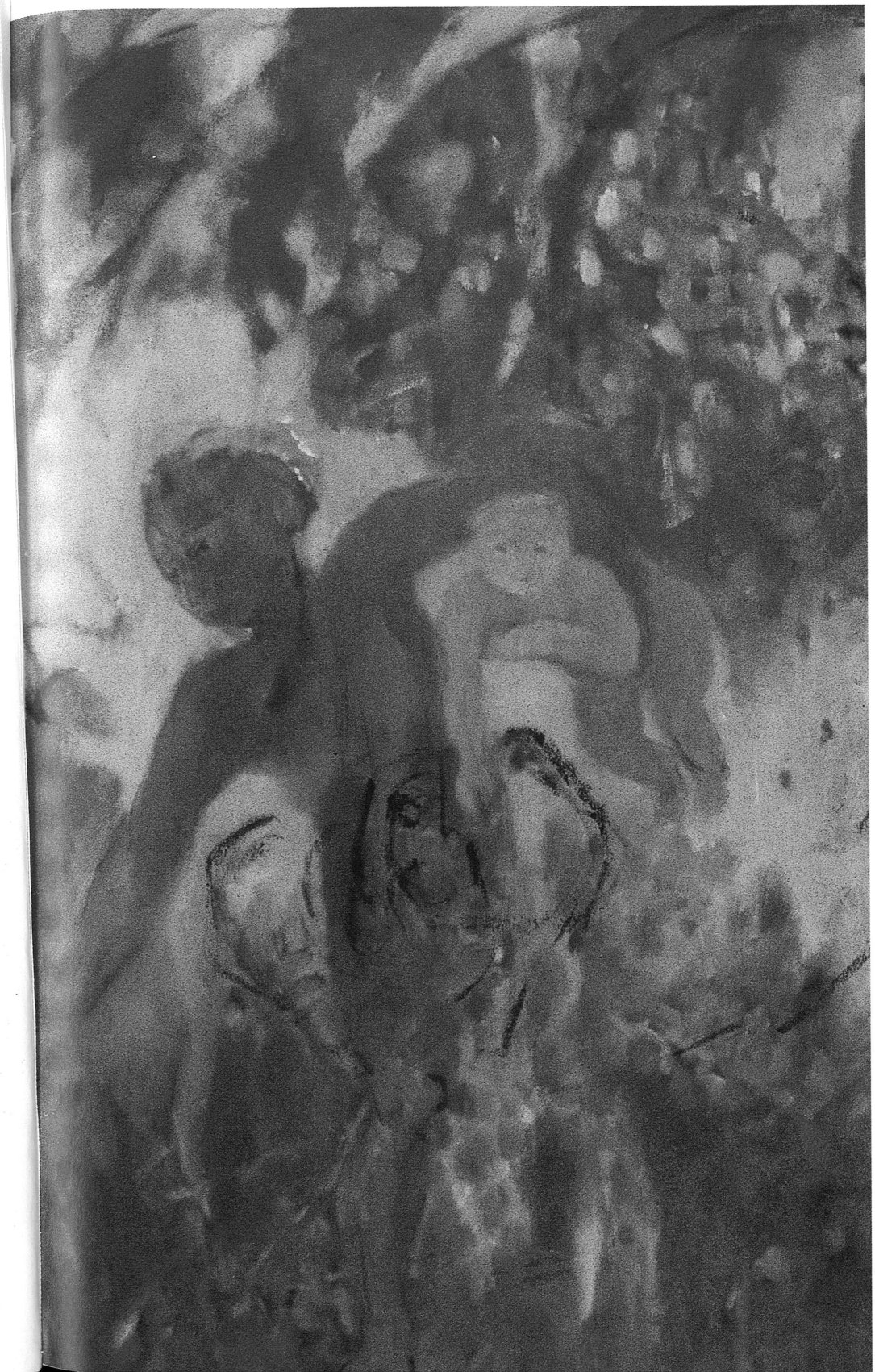

## In the Church and Out of the Closet

## The Myth of Vegetarianism

## An Interview with Nancey Murphy

## Are We Guardians of Truth or Seekers of Truth?

## The Embarrassing Voice of Prophecy

## Church as a Scientific Experiment

Center for Adventist Research
Andrews University
Berrien Springs, Michigan

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# SPECTRUM

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## About the Cover

*Beginnings with Fadings*, a 2003 oil on canvas, tries to grasp and tap into the mystery of the cycle of life. There is the juxtaposition of the beginning of life with the deterioration, vanishing, fading of life, as a third figure is trying to navigate through these aspects simultaneously. The patterns, layered visual textures, and rich colors try to capture this complexity and evoke a somewhat chaotic atmosphere.

## About the Artist

Lisie S. Orjuela regularly exhibits her paintings in New Haven, Connecticut. A graduate of Andrews University (B.F.A.) and New York University (M.A.), she is intrigued by the inner world, also known as the soul or the spirit. Her paintings integrate and weave together thoughts, feelings, and experiences. Her work may be viewed at www.lisieorjuela.com.

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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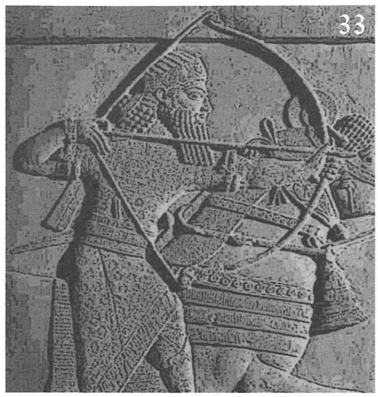

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# Coming to Terms with Our Stories and Our Myths—and Knowing the Difference

Within the galaxy of Adventist stories, some get told more than others—the miracles, the tales of pioneers and institutions, the dramatic individual conversion stories—all can be counted on to inspire.

But what about the other stories? What are we to do with those that break our hearts? Those in which we might just be villains instead of heroes? Are these not stories to be passed on?

"This is not a story to pass on" is a phrase from Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved* about the slave Sethe, so scarred by her mistreatment that she killed her infant daughter to prevent the child from experiencing horrors similar to her own. In his book *Embodying Forgiveness*, L. Gregory Jones examines the phrase and Morrison's story, as well as Simon Wiesenthal's remarks in *The Sunflower* about a Nazi asking forgiveness of a Jew. His conclusion about the importance of such stories is at the heart of this issue of *Spectrum*.

Says Jones, "One decisive means by which we can fail to acknowledge our need for forgiveness is a desire to "pass" on stories of our own sin and evil—whether that for which we are directly culpable or that for which we are indirectly complicit." He concludes that, "we cannot afford to 'pass' on these stories and on a truthful rendering of our own stories, because it is only from engaging them that we will be enabled to sustain a truthful hope for our own forgiveness and reconciliation with God and with one another" (297).

It is in that spirit that we engage with stories from the Adventist gay community. Debates about the origins and issues of homosexuality are for another time. This is an opportunity to meet the people and to listen to their experience.

Marilyn Glaim and Keith Lockhart look at another kind of Adventist story—myth—and help us literally minded people understand their value. Tim Dunston applies that value to examining the creation myths of the ancient world.

And what does the Bible have to say about such stories? Jean Sheldon provides an answer as she demonstrates the value of the conversations between the Bible stories. She deftly demonstrates that, as Jones says, "God's story cannot be told as a simple narrative but must be able to encompass the reversals in the story of Israel and the Church and, more determinatively, the transfiguring fidelity of God's promise that in Christ God was and is 'reconciling the world to himself.' Such reconciliation comes only through an engagement with the past and the present in all of their joys and griefs, healings and woundings, friendships and betrayals" (298).

All of which reminds me of a comment I heard from my friend Wayne Judd after the telling of a particularly poignant anecdote: There is no theology—only story.

Bonnie Dwyer
Editor

## Kindness Takes a Bow

*By Bonnie Dwyer*

Can you laugh at the genocide speaker?" That was the question one Massachusetts high school student had after listening to Carl Wilkins speak about the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, because Wilkins included humorous moments as well as horrific ones in his description of the event.

Wilkins was an Adventist Development and Relief Agency employee who stayed in Rwanda when all other Americans were evacuated, and consequently was able to save the lives of many children in the orphanage near his home. The Public Broadcasting Service special, *Ghosts of Rwanda*, featured his story, and because it did many high schools and colleges across the United States have invited him to speak. Response to his presentation varies, Wilkins told the people who honored him at the Adventist Alumni Achievement Awards banquet in February.

There was one boy who brought dead silence to a Maryland classroom when he asked, "Who cares about some dumb _____ country in Africa?"

In Massachusetts, the student who wondered if he could laugh was the same one who worried about the effect the genocide presentation would have on the rest of his day at school. "It's hard to go from this class to what comes next," he told Wilkins in a letter. "Perspective isn't always such a good thing."

Wilkins, however, left the student hopeful, kind-of restored his faith in humanity, the student's letter of appreciation said.

"Start small," Wilkins tells students. "Do what you think is right, is kind."

Stories of kindness and goodness filled the day. *Christianity Today* editor David Neff spoke about the personal attention he had received from his teachers in Adventist schools and their significance in his life.

Artist James McClellan accepted

### Alumni Awards Foundation 2006 Honorees

#### Excellence in Teaching

Phillip Binkley
*Band*
Loma Linda Academy

Gordon Davis
*Science, Physical Education*
Walker Memorial Academy

Kay Kierstead
*English*
Kingsway College

Amy Miller
*Math, Science*
Newbury Park Academy

Stan Miller
*Math*
Minnetonka Christian Academy

Jacques Patterson
*Chemistry, Biology*
Greater New York Academy

Donald Slocum
*History*
Shenandoah Valley Academy

Steve Walls
*English*
Monterey Bay Academy

Jeff Youker
*Chemistry, Biology, History*
El Dorado Adventist School

#### Excellence in Leadership

Roo McKenzie
*Head Principal*
Loma Linda Academy

#### Academy Awards

*First Place*
Upper Columbia Academy
Washington

*Second Place*
Highland View Academy
Maryland

*Third Place*
Highland Academy
Tennessee

#### Outstanding Alumni Achievement

David Neff
James McClellan
Carl Wilkins

the alumni award in the same spirit that he teaches, with all honor going to God. Drawing, painting, and teaching are his reasons to be, he told the audience. "I consider it a sacred privilege to be a teacher," he said, "and a sacred responsibility to paint."

Earlier in the day, Southern Adventist University president Gordon Bietz spoke about the need for nice Christians. The most important problem of our time is how we get along with each other, Bietz said. Adventist education exists to create community in a world of individualism.

The master of ceremonies for the evening told jokes and said he had been working on more award ideas for the foundation. He suggested giving out Golden Linkett awards. When he showed organizers the idea they told him, no, it wasn't Oscar, not even a Oscar Meyer.

The thank-you speeches that the awardees gave were not Oscarish, either. Although the honorees did mention the people who had supported them in various ways, their lists were not as long as those that dominate in Hollywood thank-you speeches.

There was also a different tone to the introductory speeches. La Sierra University president Lawrence Geraty introduced David Neff and noted that he was one of the signers of the Evangelical Call to Address Global Warming that had made the news that week because of its political significance in challenging the current presidential administration of the United States.

Union College president David Smith introduced Jim McClellan and said that he is a remarkable teacher and an amazing man of God.

Kathy Profitt called Carl Wilkins a Christian profile in courage, an American hero, a man who was willing to lay down his life for his friends in Rwanda.

Certainly in the cases of these three men, Adventist education had created nice Christians. Kindness took a bow.

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Bonnie Dwyer is editor of *Spectrum*.

## Ship Linked to Joseph Bates, Adventist Pioneer, Found in San Francisco

***February 13, 2006*** **Silver Spring, Maryland, United States .... [Mark A. Kellner/ANN]**

The nearly-intact hull of the *Candace*, a 188-year-old, 100-foot-long, three-masted barkentine ship that once carried Seventh-day Adventist pioneer Capt. Joseph Bates on a memorable journey from Peru to Boston, has been found buried under a site for a new high-rise building in San Francisco, California.

Bates was a sea captain, but did not command the ship. He was a passenger and became a friend of Captain F. Burtody, who sailed the vessel from the port of Callao, near Lima, Peru, in November of 1823. He later became a pioneering member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and, in fact, is credited with introducing the concept of the Biblical, seventh-day Sabbath, to Ellen and James White and other early Adventists.

"None but those who experience these feelings can tell the thrill that fills every soul, from the captain to the cabin-boy, when the order is given to 'weigh anchor for home,' Bates wrote in his autobiography. "New life, with energy and strength, seems to actuate all on board."

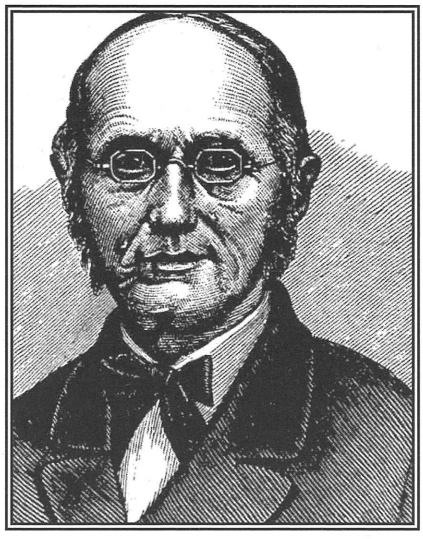
The ship was found in what are apparently the remains of a salvage business run in the late 1800s by Charles Hare. Among other tasks, the Hare firm dismantled old ships, but the *Candace* was not totally dismantled before its remains were buried under new construction in the city, which also sustained a cataclysmic earthquake in 1906.

Plans call for the hull to be a main exhibit at the anticipated Museum of the City of San Francisco, which is expected to open in 2008 in the former U.S. Mint building.

Bates, in his autobiography, wrote of the trials and struggles of the voyage. Both he and Capt. Bertoudy tried to give up chewing tobacco; only Bates succeeded. Bates also said he tried to lose a habit of foul language. The ship ran into a heavy storm on the way to Boston, but sustained no damage.

Finally, after about three months at sea, they were anchored at Boston harbor.

"Fifty-five miles by stage, and I was once more at home," Bates wrote. "A little blue-eyed girl of [16] months, whom I had never seen, was here waiting with her mother to greet me, and welcome me once more to our comfortable and joyous fire-side. As I had been absent from home over two years, I designed to enjoy the society of my family and friends for a little season." He soon went to sea again, however.



*Joseph Bates*

# BIBLE STORIES

Discussed: good and evil, Tower of Babel, Sabbath, serpent, Epic of Gilgamesh, prisoners of war, childbirth, restlessness, Robert Alter

# Listening to the Conversations of Biblical Text

*By Jean Sheldon*

From the early decades of their discipline, biblical theologians have tended to look at Bible texts deductively, from outside of them, instead of inductively, from within them. Consequently, most Old Testament theologies fail to be all inclusive of the texts. At the same time, biblical theologies often reflect an external myopia, and thus the lack of perception of Israel's unique theological contributions. These can better be seen if diligently compared and especially contrasted with contemporary or even chronologically prior literatures among those of nearby ancient cultures.

Furthermore, most biblical theologies do not appear to resolve the many theological tensions in the Old Testament, particularly those that face us squarely at this time of both widespread tolerance and increased tendencies toward violence and oppression. Because of these dissatisfactions, I propose a new method of biblical theology that is not systematic or highly structured but rather moves along the texts as they ebb and flow. The best way I can depict this is metaphorically, as conversation.

In my reading, I have come to view the canonical Hebrew Bible as a multifaceted discussion, not a monologue or even a mere dialogue (between human and divine voices). The voices of the Bible are many: the prophetic voices that adapt to time and place; the legal voices of civil, moral, and cultic cases; the voice of wisdom that questions; the voices of "the others"—aliens, outsiders, enemies; the voices of oral tradition, the narrators, and final editors; and finally, most important of all, the reader's, whose voice dominates the text, pulling past, upbringing, education, and personal preferences into it.

As a result, the conversation is anything but an idealistic, carefully worded statement about God and his people. At times, the prophetic voice seems to reach a new height of idealism ("he has shown you, O human, what is good..."), but far more frequently it descends rapidly down to the murky reality of a world trapped in sin ("can a leopard change its spots?"). If we are truly to understand the Bible, and the God within it, we must allow the human and the divine their rightful places in the text—in real, difficult situations, not in utopia.

The purpose of this study is to engage readers with part of the Old Testament conversation, part of it—chiefly Genesis 1:1–11:9—because of time constraints. The guides in ferreting out the various voices include Robert Alter's use of rhetorical analysis and the application of contrastive comparative method.[1]

The first highlights the authors'/editors' carefully nuanced literary voices, whereas the second enlarges the conversation to include several of the many voices from the ancient Near East.[2]

Let the conversation begin.

## The Conversation of Creation

The preamble to the canonical Hebrew Bible begins with a subtle literary allusion to cosmic uneasiness: *tohu wabohu* (willy-nilly), which typifies the darkness that covers the deep. Yet even there the divine interacts with these cosmic mythopoeic images, as a wind from God moves back and forth over the watery expanse.[3]

Into the restlessness, God speaks and nature responds by coming into existence. When humans are created, the speaking changes to conversation: "Let us make human in our image and according to our likeness." The context suggests that God separates humans from the rest of the animals into his image and then splits that image into two separate parts—male and female.

Conversation is not, therefore, part of nonhuman life forms; rather, God's conversation with himself governs only the creation of humans. Though God commands all of these various types to "be fruitful and multiply" (Gen. 1:22, 28), the literary implication is that only one has the ability to converse in humble parity with the Creator: humankind.

This theme—of creation as speech—is the framework for Genesis 1:1–11:9. In the Tower of Babel story, the same kind of conversational wording is used for human invention: "Come, let us make bricks;...let us build ourselves a city, and a tower,...and let us make a name for ourselves" (Gen. 11:3, 4 NRSV). To put it another way, if a creator could speak life into existence, could humans speak and by their words shape new realities for themselves?

When God speaks things into existence, a relationship is already beginning between God and the world. Creation in and of itself, however, is not enough. God looks at almost every element on earth and sees that it is good. This provides the start of the second theme: good (and evil).[4] Carried through chapter 9, this theme may best be stated as a question: "Is it good?"

Since humankind is created in God's image, the foregone conclusion is that humans will, like God, choose to create.

However, there is a difficulty: that of the absence of a divine pronouncement of "good" regarding the creation of humans.[5] Two other elements of creation also do not receive this pronouncement: darkness and waters (firmament and seas). These two easily fit within the framework of chaos elements, but what would deprive humankind of the assessment that it was good? Unlike all other elements of creation, humans are created in the divine image. When Elohim (P) creates, he acts freely of his own choice.[6]

To speak and create, therefore, is to choose. God is not subject to some other power. The trajectory to monotheism provides the singular presence above which there is no other.[7] Therefore, the Creator of the Hebrew Bible is free to choose. When he speaks, the natural elements respond to his choice. When it comes to the creation of humans, however, God does not speak to the earth as he does when creating animals, but says, "Let us make...."

Since humankind is created in God's image, the foregone conclusion is that humans will, like God, choose to create. They will choose what they create, when they create it, and how they will create it. Furthermore, what they create will continue to change

them. Their existence defies closure; as creatures that choose their own realities, they are an unfinished aspect of creation.[8] And so the question remains: are they good or evil?

This power of choice is reinforced by the role given to humanity. The human is made to rule over the rest of creation. He is not ordered into existence but is made to order.[9] The dominion granted humans sets them apart from creation and puts them on par with one another. Neither was to rule over the other, nor were they to submit to the rest of creation.

The splitting of the divine image into male and female, then, is not a division between good and evil, but a suggested implication that good is dependant upon a balance of nondominant, nonhierarchical relationships between male and female partners with a dominant relationship between them both and the natural world. The theme is alluded to in a different way in the JE story. Yahweh decides that it is "not good" for man to be alone and makes "a helper for him like his counterpart."[10] The wording is decidedly one of equality.[11]

This need for a relationship, the extension of conversation, with another like oneself is foundational to maintaining the image of God. The resulting union is described by two important terms—*cling to* (*dbq*) and *one flesh.* The former is used for the close attachment of one's skin to the rest of one's body (see Job 19:20). The theme, then, of JE is not separation, but intimacy. Anything that comes to split apart the union or lifts one higher than the other is the agonizing flaying of the "one fleshliness."

When the two stories are put together, the resulting combination is that of chosen loyalty, intimacy, and complementation. Only domination by one over the other or chosen separation can change the picture. In the priestly creation, then, separation is good and not only sets boundaries between chaos and order, but also creates organization of a universe in which function and purpose do not suggest dominance that seeks to control.

In priestly texts, separation is the foundation of holiness. In terms of creation, this theme is unique, since the Babylonians preferred mixtures in their creation stories.[12] The combined traditions of Genesis suggest that humans are not mixtures but rather separate beings. Human and divine, humans "sculpted" in the image of God and made from clay are not living until Yahweh breathes into them the divine breath.

The denouement of separation, however, is not found here, but in Sabbath. The only aspect in the priestly story clearly sanctified ("set apart for holiness") is not an object of creation but rather a pause in time of the Creator upon completion of his artistry:

> And the heavens and the earth and all their hosts were finished.
> And God finished on the seventh day his work which he had made.
> And he ceased the seventh day from all his work which he had made.
> And God blessed the seventh day and set it apart as holy
> because on it he ceased from all his work which God separated to make. (Gen. 2:1–3)[13]

In Sabbath, the themes of conversation come together: creation, the goodness of that creation, divine cessation from work, and separation-holiness. If, at this point, we listen to the voices of ancient Mesopotamia, the uniqueness of this conceptual arrangement is profound.

In one of the Babylonian traditions, in an effort to pacify the rebel gods, humans are created to be a substitute workforce to relieve the overworked gods of their load. Indeed, the conception prevailed throughout most periods that humans were destined to be slaves of the gods. By contrast, the priestly creation portrays the divine work, not as hard labor (*ṣb'*) or servitude (*'bd*), but as creative handiwork (*ml'kh*).[14]

This indicates a kind of work that conveys meaning. Sabbath, then, stands for meaningful exchange—not merely Elohim's words, but his creative actions as well. In this sense, human creation, in the image of God, ordained to rule over the natural world, would model the divine maker by pausing in its creation with meaningful conversation. A day of ceasing to work would provide the time for rest, reflection, discussion, and harmony.

In contrast to a substitute workforce, priestly humans quell no revolt, but are the crowning act of creation. In JE, humans—even their slaves and work animals—rest on Sabbath with God.[15] The point is clear: in a relationship unmarked by domination, Yahweh has no slaves, for slaves never can rest, especially with their master.

In contrast, the Babylonians must build Marduk's

temple so that he and the other gods can rest. Lullu-man will never join him in relief from the daily toil of taking care of his needs. Indeed, according to Bernard F. Batto, in Babylonian thought, sleep or rest was "a motif of divine sovereignty."[16] Yahweh, in comparison, invites all creation to Sabbath rest.[17]

In the priestly creation, therefore, the sanctification of the Sabbath is a crowning denouement of the most important creation message: all humans are to be "a kingdom of priests, a holy people" (Exod. 19:6), able to converse with God.

## A Trickster Joins the Conversation

The JE creation story leads us gradually toward the first dialogue in Genesis with foreshadowings of its treacherous nature: humans are created from the ground to labor the soil, a suggestion of the curse in Genesis 3. In addition, Yahweh does not speak as Elohim does, but his first words to the man are a command: "You shall not...."

The command is explicit and firm. The man can eat of any tree in the Garden, but he is not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil because if he does he will die. These words significantly change the outlook on the creation, for they shift the reader from the pronouncements of good only in the P creation to an inclusion of good and evil.

The context makes it clear just what "evil" is. If creation of life is "good" and eating of this tree will bring death, the knowledge of good and evil is the experience of life and death.

This command—given only to the man before the woman is created—foreshadows a trauma that will flay their fleshly oneness.[18] The reader, however, is unprepared for the medium through which the conversation about good and evil will take place: a serpent.

In the ancient East, the serpent, or even the dragon, was not always viewed as evil.[19] However, during the Akkadian periods, particularly in the latter part, the dragon, as a symbol of the storm god, came to belch fire and to represent kingly power.[20] In the encounter with the woman, the serpent is neither fully hostile nor conquered.

A creature of choice, the snake symbolizes royalty. His life in a tree forms a paradox with the eagle of Etana, who lived with its young in the top of the poplar tree, whereas the serpent inhabited the base with its offspring. In Etana, the eagle is the wise one; in the Garden of Eden, the serpent is the wisest of all the creatures Yahweh has made. In the myth, the eagle devours the serpent's progeny and, because of the serpent's pleas to Shamash, is banished to a pit, to have its wings clipped by the serpent.

While there, after its wings grow back, the eagle becomes the deliverer of the childless human known as Etana. On the eagle's back, Etana is borne to the heavens, where before the gods he is apparently (the text is broken off) granted his request for children.[21] The irony, of course, is that the slayer of the serpent's children becomes a savior of humanity.[22] In the Eden story, the serpent is the destroyer of humanity, whereas the woman's offspring becomes humanity's savior.

The Epic of Gilgamesh also connects the royal serpent with a king's request for immortality that leads him to seek Utnapishtim, the Babylonian Noah, whom the gods have given immortality. Utnapishtim grants Gilgamesh a plant that, if he gets it home with him, will effectuate his immortality. Before he makes it back, the serpent robs him of the plant.[23]

Whereas the Babylonian serpent keeps humans from immortality, the Edenic serpent robs them of it by claiming that they will have it if they will do opposite to God's instructions. In this first of dialogues of Genesis 1–11, the serpent introduces the concept of immortality as the reversal of creation.

With his words, he tears down the basis of the first humans' relationship with God: (1) the ability to know for certain God's will ("Has God said...?"), a constant Babylonian uncertainty; (2) a deliberate ambiguity (has God said, you shall not eat of any or of all the trees?); (3) the ability to know for certain exactly what God has said; (4) the presentation of an incestuous, uninvited intrusion between the relationship by an outsider who has a "different viewpoint"; (5) a direct contradiction of what God has said ("you shall not surely die"); (6) a false promise of a new experience, a reality created solely by words without a basis in substance ("you shall be like god(s) knowing good and evil").

Conversations change dramatically when one of the voices ceases to be forthright. In Genesis 3, the serpent uses crafty speech. The word *subtle* (RSV) is the first of the frame of this pericope because it suggests a mixture; the concluding thought is that God knows a mixture of good and evil.

To be sly, cunning, crafty, or tricky is to mix truth and nontruth in such a way as to lead someone to a different reality than the one they are in. Such a "mixing" of language and meaning, truth and nontruth is the opposite of the priestly creation order in which separation of chaos and order are a central feature.

By the time the first woman finishes the conversation, she has come to perceive that (1) God does not say what he means; (2) he does not mean what he says; and (3) believing and obeying what the serpent says instead can create a whole new reality for her: she would become like God knowing good and evil.

Without asking questions of her enchanting conversationalist, Eve accepts the gift of fruit from his hands. This fruit, she believes, is magical: it has supernatural qualities to change her internally from the outside in, to give her the wisdom of the gods and to enable her to know good and evil. This construct is reminiscent of the kings of "cosmic rebellion": the King of Babylon in First Isaiah and the Prince of Tyre (Ezek. 28).

The first king seeks ascendancy to the ancient Near Eastern assembly of the great gods (Isa. 14:13–14); the second corrupts "his wisdom for the sake of his beauty" (Ezek. 28:17)—the exchange of the internal for the external. The heart of the human-to-god complex is that in their attempt to become divine, humans seek power and economic prosperity instead of true wisdom, and in turn they devalue their true internal worth, as made in the divine image.

The woman's belief in the serpent's words leads her to take the fruit, and then the original creation plan is reversed. The original layout was of human equality under God and over animals, with plants being maintained as food for both animals and humans. Now the woman has listened to (that is, obeyed) an animal (over whom she was to rule), and as a result she has eaten a plant divinely commanded not to be eaten or death would ensue. As a result of listening to the serpent's "wisdom," the woman has entered a new reality, in which the promise of reaching divinity is shattered by the realization of nakedness. This nakedness is not merely the result of eating "forbidden fruit," but of listening to false wisdom.

GOD
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MALE AND FEMALE
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ANIMALS
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PLANTS
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GROUND

Depending on their intent (the speaker), their meaning (the listener), and their genuine basis in reality (the truth), words have the ability to create either wholeness and peace (verily, the image of God: human beings...shall live by every word that proceeds by Lord's mouth [Deut. 8:3]) or nakedness and shame. Words based on actions of human harmony have power to create enduring bonds of trust among people.

However, words without substance, such as lies and deception, strip people of their dignity and self-respect while promising eternal life of unending personal fulfillment. Such words completely leave the woman vulnerably naked of a true reality: the serpent, with the most artful cunning, assumes that she has not yet become "like God knowing good and evil." Thus, with a word, she who with the man was created in the image of God has been stripped of that image.

As a result of listening to the serpent's "wisdom," the woman has entered a new reality, in which the promise of reaching divinity is shattered by the realization of nakedness.

As a result, reality has completely changed for the fruit eaters. A top-to-bottom unraveling of relationships takes place in creation. The woman gives to the man; who can refuse a gift when that is all humans have known up to this time (when creation economy is that of giving and receiving and giving again)? But the gift is destined to split apart the one-fleshliness of the couple's union.

The absence of the male voice from the dialogue at the tree of knowledge suggests an unfair conversation. According to the Hebrew text, the man was "with her," yet he does not speak. Voiceless individuals in the Hebrew Bible are seen as victims of abuse.[24] Just as it is deemed "not good" by God in the JE creation story that man should be alone, so it is "not good" by inference that woman should have to deal with a trickster alone.

Nevertheless, this situation highlights the equally uneven absence of the woman in the command not to eat of the tree of knowledge. Has the man failed to tell her? Was this his role to do so? The text does not answer this problem, yet it purports that such an unequal dialogue not only puts the woman at a severe disadvantage, it also creates an even greater opportunity for dia-

logue to end and two monologues to take place instead. Between the serpent and the woman, however, there seems to be a free-flowing exchange. What could possibly go wrong?

The answer is very simple: one voice dominates and controls. It asks questions that trip the listener; it spews out contradictions. Conversation is not taking place at all because the intent of the serpent is not to communicate honest opinions or truth with words understood readily to his audience, but rather to persuade the woman to do something that her creator has stated will lead to death.

Persuasion with empty words creates new realities for people in which they become the victims of the persuader's control. When control is the object, all conversation ceases. When words are used chiefly to control the listener, the words are deprived of their truest meaning. The resulting manipulation, lies, and deception form the heart of verbal violence.

This reversal of creation is further established when, in the Taggeist, their Creator calls to them, "Where are you?"[25] Embarrassed over their transition from a simple reality of innocence (naked but not ashamed) to that of denudedness, they attempt to hide. The sexual connotations cannot be overlooked: to be simple in innocence is to be able to enjoy the demands of a physical union without loss of personhood; to be denuded is to be stripped by another of one's sense of wholeness and personal control. Once this takes place, real conversation has ended and manipulation has become dominant.

By receiving the serpent's words and ingesting them like food into their minds, the first humans shift their perceptions of themselves and of God from a relationship devoid of violence to one soon to be characterized by terms that denote managerial force. A new reality has dawned.

## A Foursome Conversation

The next conversation involves four voices: God, the man, the woman, and the serpent. God calls to the man and the woman, "Where are you?" When the truth finally comes out—they hid because they were naked—the divine response to the man's excuses for hiding reveals that some part of the conversation between the woman and the serpent was left out: "Who told you you were naked?" (Gen. 3:11).

The term *told* (*ngd*), or *reported*, belongs to the sphere of divination, prophecy, and the like. Did the magical fruit they ate give them this information? Or did the serpent? The narrator has already stated that they were naked from the day of their creation, but, he adds, "they were not ashamed" (Gen. 2:25). These words highlight the possibility that the serpent's voice has stripped them of their lack of shame; otherwise they would not feel the need to hide.

In the ancient Near East, nakedness was a symbol of death. The body that came out of the womb—wrinkled red, covered with blood, and decidedly devoid of clothing—often returned to the dust (earth womb) the same way (see Job 1:21). Furthermore, the ancient Near Eastern peoples were familiar with the sight of many bodies strung naked along the desert floor between Palestine and Assyria/Babylon.

After a war, prisoners were handcuffed naked to the prisoner ahead and behind. They would be dragged and goaded along across miles of hot dirt, deprived of adequate food, water, and rest, only to perish, their bodies kicked out of line and left to lie on the dust. The bodies would darken in the hot sun beside the bleached bones of prior victims, whose families could not afford the trek to recover them.[26] The concept of *dust-to-dust* was very real in that context.

The metaphoric setting, then, may be that of prisoners of war who were seized to serve as slaves for the conquering nation. Since the image of war is present in the third chapter of Genesis, we can suppose that the JE writer saw the interchange between the serpent and the woman as the stripping of human autonomy and dignity and the transference from P's creation order to its reverse, ultimately leading to death.[27] This is outlined in the divine responses to each conversant.

The once-silent man blames the woman and infers that she was not a "good gift" from God, but a pawned object who led him into his current state of mind. Yahweh does not judge him immediately, but turns instead to the woman, who rightfully but also irresponsibly blames the serpent for tricking her. The first curse falls, without allowing the perpetrator room for speech—not on the woman or the man, but on the serpent.

Yahweh does not curse those who fall into deception and trickery. Nor is he eager to pronounce a curse on people. One of the outstanding features of curses in the Hebrew Bible is that, unlike those of the ancient Near East in general, the biblical curse is never accomplished by God, but rather by some other mysterious

force. Although the curse shall not come without cause, its cause was never admitted to be God.[28]

In ancient Near Eastern thought, a curse or a blessing was understood to create new realities on whom the blessing or curse was placed. A person's words were considered to possess power to do what was said. The first curse in this segment of "firsts" is placed on the serpent.

> Because you have done/made this,
> you are cursed
> more than all the beasts and creatures of the field.
> On your belly you shall go
> And dust you shall eat
> All the days of your life.
> Long-standing enmity I will put
> Between you and the woman,
> Between your progeny and her progeny.
> He shall crush you, the [cunning] head
> While you shall crush him [at] the heel.[29]

The play on the words—*cunning* (*'arûm*), *cursed* (*'ārûr*), and *naked* (*ārôm*)—suggests an emphasis on the concept that the nakedness of the first man and woman left them vulnerable to cunning; their surrender to that cunning brought a curse and left them open to death, which nakedness in the ancient Near East represented.

Just as the serpent is demoted from supremely wise to utterly degraded, so the woman continues the rest of the reversal of creation order: she will find herself a victim of pain in childbirth. The very role for which women have been esteemed (or undervalued, if nonproducing) will cause her intense pain

Furthermore, she will find man dominating her. The image evoked by *mšl* may be that of comparing two halves with each other rather than allowing them equal complementation as a whole unit. No motive clause is established for this loss of equality; its absence is unique to the woman but not to the man. She therefore is suffering the inherent consequences of succumbing to the serpent's cunning.

Because the man listened to the voice of the woman and disobeyed God's command, he is now to complete the reversal of creation order. Because of him, the other curses rest upon the ground or soil and only indirectly on him who was made from it. From now on, he will do the work for which men the world over have been valued—through hard toil, which will bring sweat to his brow. The thorns and thistles will multiply and threaten his sustenance, and thus human life, until finally he succumbs to the ground.

The ultimate dominating factor, then, will be his origin, the *'adĕmâ*. The *'adĕmâ* plays a major role from Genesis 2 onward, as if to underline the emphasis on the effects on the earth from sin. As the womb of humanity, it also serves as its grave.

Thus, the reverse order of creation turns the ground into the force that dominates due to the surrender of human dignity and will to a plant, which is imagined to possess magical powers to create wisdom, and the woman will be subjugated to the man because she listened to an animal.[30]

GROUND
↓
PLANTS
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ANIMALS
↓
MAN
↓
WOMAN
↓
GOD

The narrator does not inform us of God's role in all of this except in one place: God promises to put enmity between the woman and the serpent in an ultimate battle in which the woman's progeny will crush the cunning head of the serpent with its wisdom, and the serpent will crush only her Achilles' heel, perhaps a symbol of her having walked toward false wisdom.

False wisdom is the desire for supremacy. Such a desire changes the way we use words, and the way we use words, in turn, changes the way we see reality. All of this ultimately affects our choices for or against eternal life. The woman was promised to be like god knowing good and evil. Yet in that promise lurked a problem—that godlikeness involved both good and evil. Does God really know evil? And from which end—the perpetrator or the victim?

## Conclusion

For this reason, the conversation of biblical theology cannot afford to stop with Genesis 3, or even Genesis 11. Perhaps this question, more than any other, can serve as one of the greater theological themes of the Old Testament. Its answer cannot be found in any one part, but rather in the whole and in the persistent reading and study of it.

The Old Testament conversation continues into one of the most unique features of the Hebrew Bible:

humans are allowed to question God and even to demand answers from the Almighty, and God responds without fearing their outspokenness. Indeed, the longest dialogue in the Old Testament is the argument between God and Moses at the burning bush. Yet the prophetic testimony increasingly becomes a monologue with only occasional requests for or incorporation of dialogue from the people in Micah or Jeremiah.

Nevertheless, hidden in the prophetic narratives, the priestly laws, and the prophetic speeches lies conversation. Actions respond to words, words to actions, words to words, and actions to actions. The result is a symphony with recurring fugal themes suggesting that Yahweh is always adapting to meet the responses of the people and, at the same time, especially when in conversation (comparison) with the ancient Near East, attempting to draw them to a slightly different, more truthful, and particularly meaningful way to do things.

The P story of creation begins with positive voices of joy and hope; the JE stories of creation and the serpent descend downward toward doom, interfaced with one note of joy to the woman regarding her offspring's victory. Both voices, the pessimistic and the optimistic, are found in almost any genuine conversation.

Thus, biblical theology as conversation is not a mere ideological chat or open-ended interchange; rather, the actions and statements, counteractions and counterstatements that make up the Hebrew Bible engage the reader in the pursuit of understanding and meaning. To recover the meaning of the text, one must hear its voices, pursue their truths—negative and positive—and then attempt to understand them. The entire conversation is truth.

We must keep listening to the voices of those who contribute to the conversation to understand the sending of the first couple from the Garden toward death lest they live forever with the knowledge of good and evil. We must follow the conversation through the entire Bible before we can determine to what extent God knows both good and evil.

## Notes and References

1. Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981).

2. Due to the limitations of a single article, this study should be considered a work in progress.

3. The Hebrew term *rûah* can mean "wind," "breath," or "spirit." For an understanding of what is meant by the word *mythopoesis*, see Bernard F. Batto, *Slaying the Dragon: Mythmaking in the Biblical Tradition* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox, 1992), 12–17.

4. The theme of creation spanned Genesis 1:1–11:9, whereas the theme of good and evil seems to stop with chapter 9.

5. This was suggested by Prof. Jacob Milgrom of the University of California, Berkeley, in his seminar in Leviticus, fall 1987.

6. The priestly creation story (P) is thought to be Genesis 1:1–2a, whereas the Yahwist-Elohist (JE) creation is Genesis 2:4b–25. I have used these designations primarily for convenience in comparing the two very different creation stories.

7. For an overview of Hebrew monotheism, see Mark S. Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism: Israel's Polytheistic Background and the Ugaritic Texts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

8. A point that Milgrom's seminar on Leviticus touched.

9. One of the verbs (*kbš*) used to depict this reflects a major voice in the Old Testament: it is violent and is applied to forcing someone into slavery and rape; the other (*rdh*) is milder and suggests the roaming of a shepherd with a flock. This verb means essentially "to rule."

10. For this choice for *kĕnegdô*, see Gerhard F. Hasel, "Man and Woman in Genesis 1–3," in *The Role of Women in the Church* (Washington, D.C.: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1984; repub. Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press, 1995), 16. Ludwig Hoehler and Walter Baumgartnr, eds., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994– ), 2:666 suggests either "that which is opposite, or that which corresponds."

11. Note that *'ēzer* is used of God and his relationship with Israel (see Exod. 18:4; Deut. 33:7, 26, 29). This point is made well by Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapters 1–17* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1990), 175–76.

12. In Babylonian tradition, Ti'amat (salt water) and Apsû (fresh water) commingle to create progeny (*En El* I:1–10). Human beings are created from a mixture of clay and the divine blood of a slain god (*Atr* I:iv.223–v.243).

13. "Separated to make" is more sensible than the tautologous "created to make" for *bārā' 'elohîm la'ăsôt.*

14. This word is from the same root as *ml'k.*

15. By JE here, I refer to the Decalogue (Exod. 20:1–21).

16. "The Sleeping God: An Ancient Near Eastern Motif of Divine Sovereignty," *Biblica* 68 (1987): 153-77; cited in Batto, *Slaying*, 30n.

17. This is distinctly a concept of JE; see Exodus 20:8–11.

18. Flaying was a punishment executed on rebel vassal governors or kings by the Assyrians. H. W. Saggs, *Everyday Life in Babylonia and Assyria* (London: B. T. Batsford, 1965), 109; Barbara Nevling Porter, *Trees, Kings, and Politics: Studies in Assyrian Iconography* (OBO 197; Fribourg: Academic Press; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2003), 87.

19. Alberto R. W. Green, *The Storm-God in the Ancient Near*

*East* (BJS 8; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 28–30.

20. Ibid., 81–87; and 116–20.

21. For a translation and notes on this story, see J. V. Kinnier Wilson, *The Legend of Etana: A New Edition* (Warminster, Eng. Aris and Phillips, 1985). For the cuneiform text, see Jamie R. Novotny with Simo Parpola, *The Standard Babylonian Etana Epic* (SAACT 2; Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2001).

22. The ancient mind had little concept of eternal life. One lived on in one's descendants; consequently, barrenness was considered a terrible calamity.

23. There are several translations of this myth. For example, see Alexander Heidel, *The Gilgamesh Epic and Old Testament Parallels* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949).

24. See Jean Sheldon, "The Exaltation of Hagar and Manoah's Wife: God Challenges Society," presented at Women of the Word, Berrien Springs, Mich., Oct. 14, 2004; and idem, "Reading the Bad in Our Story: A Prerequisite to Redemption (A Study of Judges 19–21)," paper presented Nov. 21, 1997, at the annual Adventist Society for Religious Studies Meeting, San Francisco.

25. It may be possible that the *ruah hayyôm* connotes the cool time of day (perhaps either morning or evening), when the western breeze can turn the tide in the toils in vineyard, orchard, or field. This time of day provides the appropriate ambience for conversation; in the morning, this often took place in terms of cases at the city gate; in the evening, it is possible that parties and family gatherings were found. See the book of Ruth as an example of speaking of Taggeist.

26. The ultimate disgrace in ancient cultures was to remain unburied. For example, see 1 Sam. 31:8–13; and 2 Kings 9:25–37.

27. In regard to the image of war, the word *šûp* in Gen. 3:15 is certainly a war term.

28. An excellent example of this contrast is found in Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic School* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1992), 129n. See also S. Gevirtz, *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, I, 750, cited in ibid.

29. For help on this difficult poetry, I have relied on U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis; Part I: From Adam to Noah*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes, Hebrew University, 1961), 161.

30. In support of this perception is Paul's perception of the results of divine wrath in Rom. 1:18–32.

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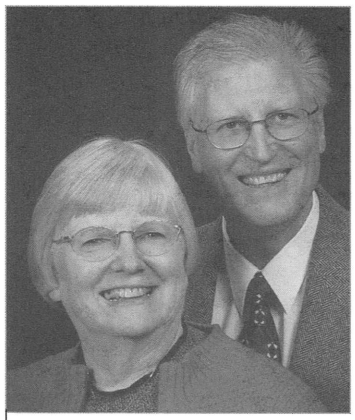
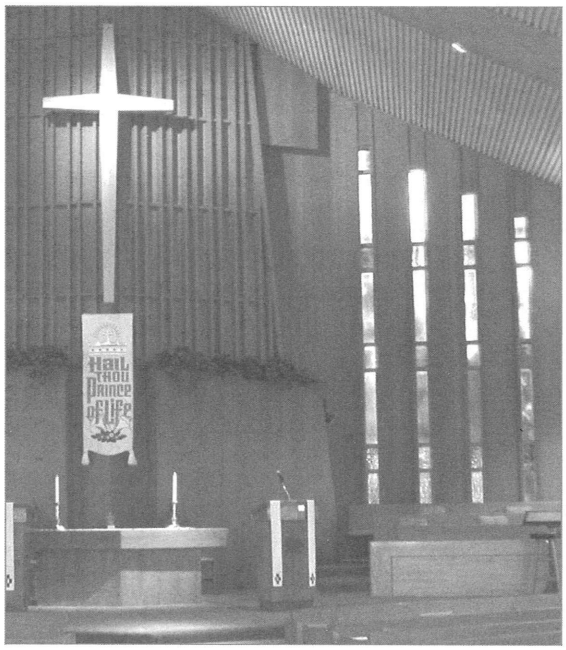
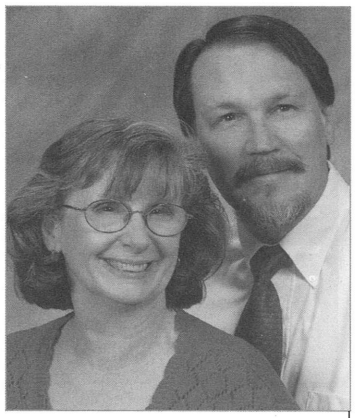


TWO CONGREGATIONS
ONE HOLY CHURCH



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Pastor Rick & Nancy Kuykendall
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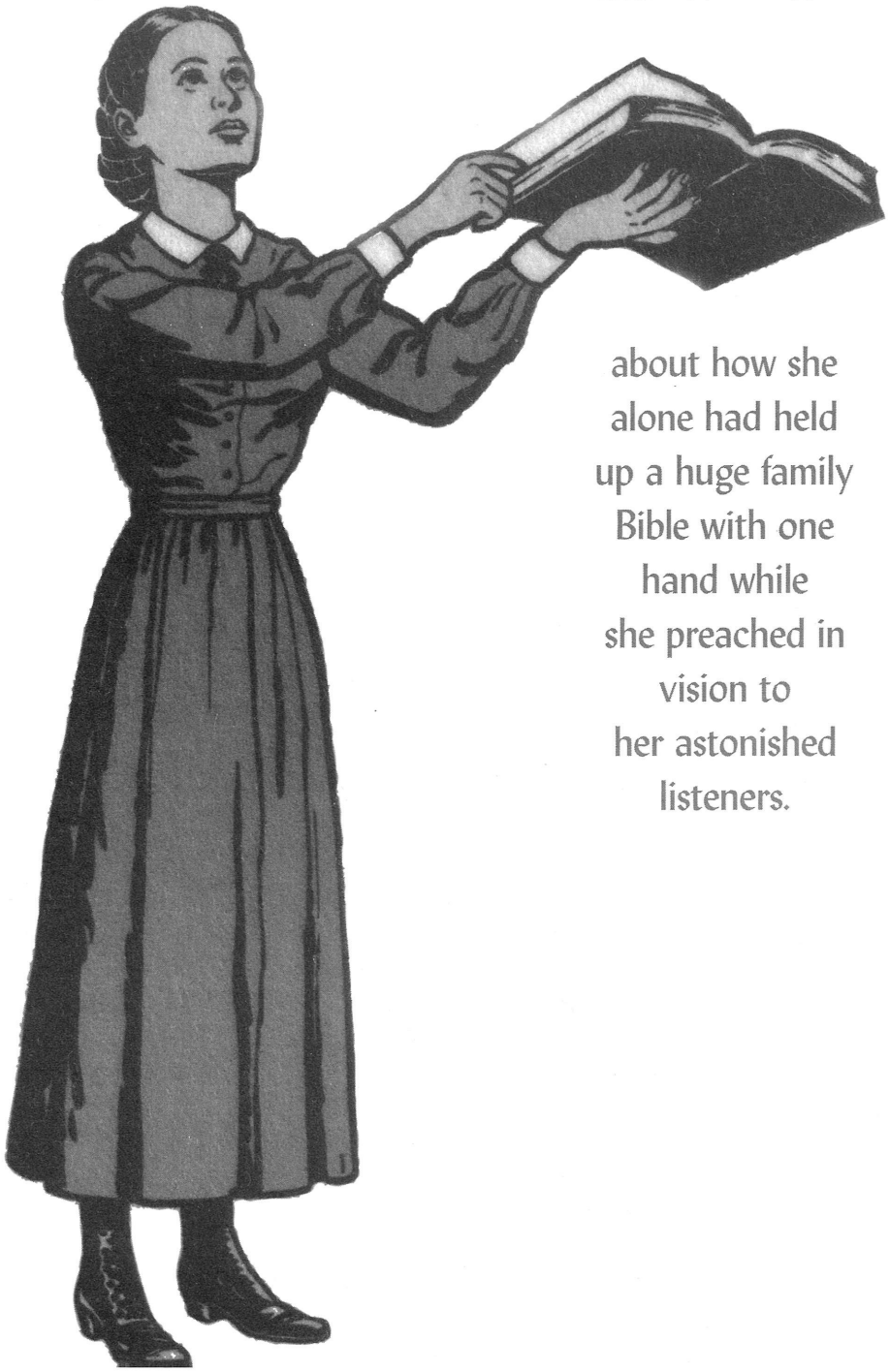

about how she
alone had held
up a huge family
Bible with one
hand while
she preached in
vision to
her astonished
listeners.

Discussed: "Jimmy and the Jam Jars," wild horse, Homer's epics, sacrifices, libations, *Our Little Friend*, Pip Pip, Abraham and Isaac, respect, loyalty, war movies

# Cherishing the Myths Among Us

*By Marilyn Glaim*

I grew up in a home where we had family worship every day, and at every family worship my father prayed aloud for his church and his family. He asked God's blessings on each one of us by name while he prayed for our extended family members as a group of loved ones who had "not yet accepted this truth." These relatives were strict, church-going Protestants, but they did not belong to the church in which my father and mother had raised their children "in the truth." Thus, my earliest and most long-lasting memories are those that divided us from people who worshiped God but who lived in error.

In Sabbath School and at church each week, I heard the same message. We possessed the truth. We owed it to ourselves and those not "in this truth" to share it with anyone who would listen, and if they didn't want to listen, we were to try to find a way to make them do so. This seemed like an awesome responsibility to me; in fact, I remember sometimes thinking that I wished I hadn't been born into such a demanding legacy, and then I wouldn't have to try to convert those relatives who saw us as merely strange for having departed from their perfectly satisfactory religion.

Because my parents were so concerned about keeping us safely within the true church, they made sure that we learned the stories that would keep us there. Though we were a working-class family without money to spend on extras, Mom and Dad subscribed to all the church papers, bought any

new Adventist story books available at each year's local camp meeting, and made sure we stayed in church school, where we would hear only the true stories of the Church.

My parents fully subscribed to the importance of having us hear, read, and study the truth every moment of every day. Had they been aware of such stories as C. S. Lewis's *Narnia* books or Tolkein's *Lord of the Rings Trilogy*, they would have looked at them as, at best, distortions of the truth and, at worst, outright lies.

And so the Adventist stories were impressed on my mind through *Our Little Friend*; Arthur S. Maxwell's *Uncle Arthur's Bedtime Stories*; his series, *The Children's Hour*; and through the many mission stories by Adventist greats such as Josephine Cunnington Edwards and Eric B. Hare. I heard and read the stories again and again as I waited for new books, and some of them remain in my mind almost as the echo of old friends talking with me.

The Uncle Arthur books, which came complete with a "Lesson Index," have become a permanent part of my psyche. Winnie is the little girl who played darts with her brothers on Sabbath, and as a result fell down a well. She spent weeks in a hospital recovering from her injuries, all the while absorbing the lesson of Sabbath keeping (Maxwell, *Children's Hour* 2:31–35).

Jimmy, of "Jimmy and the Jam Jars," is forever fixed in my mind as the little boy who climbed up on the cupboards to get some of the fresh strawberry jam his mother had told him to stay away from, and he pulled both cupboard and jam down on top of himself. I knew for sure that disobedience was a sin to be punished instantly. And I learned that Mother was always right, even when she was a little bit wrong. After all, Mother had left Jimmy alone for much longer than she had promised, but she was the one who came home to punish him for getting into her freshly made jam (Maxwell, *Bedtime Stories*, 18:15–18).

If these stories weren't enough to demonstrate the importance of perfect obedience, Eric B. Hare's "Pip Pip," told on a recording complete with sound effects, warned of imminent death for wrongdoing. Pip Pip was the tiny chick who willfully strayed away from Mama Hen. The big bad snake had been watching Pip Pip, and one day Snake swallowed him whole.

As Pip Pip disappears into the mouth of the snake and goes down his throat, the ever-fainter sound of "pip, pip, pip, pip," imitated perfectly by Hare, sends shivers of dread down the spine of every listening child.

In my childhood, I had seen Hare in person on the camp meeting circuit. My children heard his mesmerizing voice on records, and for children today, Pacific Press has released a new CD version of his stories. Pip Pip can terrify another generation of would-be miscreants (Story 8).

We also heard reverently told stories about Ellen G. White—about how she alone had held up a huge family Bible with one hand while she preached in vision to her astonished listeners. To impress the impossibility of humans doing such a thing on their own, we were sometimes invited in Sabbath School to pick up such a Bible with two hands and hold it aloft for one short minute—ah the deliciousness of failure—as the point of the story was driven home: only a prophet whose hand was held aloft by God could accomplish such a feat.

In the 1970s, when my husband and I had children in Kindergarten Sabbath School and we dutifully took our turn leading the class, we received in the mail a large lesson plan with felts to be used with these four- and five-year-olds. The large sheets of felts contained dozens of stamped-on pictures that featured the life of Ellen White.

I remember the long hours we spent cutting out pictures, but the one I most clearly remember is the buggy pulled by a wildly prancing horse. In the accompanying story, the horse is quieted by a single touch from White as she steps safely into the carriage she had been warned not to go near.

The Adventist version of the Old Testament tales blends in with those other stories, partly because they also appeared in the same sets of books. Four books in the five-volume set of the original *Children's Hour* ended with a series of Bible stories told in a way that convinced me these people were just like me except that they happened to sleep in tents and wear robes. I was well into my adult years before I understood the violent tribalism of the Old Testament stories.

The story most deeply etched into my mind is the story of Abraham and Isaac. I never associate it with reading the Bible. To me, it is pure Uncle Arthur, complete with its brightly colored, full-page picture of a very Anglo Isaac with sandy hair and a sparkling white robe patiently standing near a large pile of stones and sticks. He holds his father's hands while the white-haired man tells him that the pile will be his place of death because the Lord has commanded it to be so.

The story horrified and obsessed me, and whenev-

er my father asked what I wanted to hear at bedtime, I demanded the story of Isaac. As small as I was, I could see the pained expression on his face, but I had to hear the story again and again as I tried to absorb its horrible significance: children must attain perfect obedience even if it meant submitting to being sacrificed by their father (Maxwell, *Children's Hour* 2:15–23).

As a teacher of literature, including the mythology of the Greeks and Romans, I have spent years pondering the importance of stories and the significance of mythology. Every cultural group through the ages has had its stories—its mythology—that help to teach the culture and the ways of thinking and behaving within that culture, and it is stories, much more than theology or doctrine, that hold the culture together, or that, once the culture has passed into history, help us understand the culture.

As Philip Pullman, British author of the wildly popular fantasy trilogy, *His Dark Materials*, points out, "'Thou shalt not' might reach the head, but it takes 'Once upon a time' to reach the heart" (quoted in Miller, 54). I know from the stories I learned as a child and from the literature I teach today, that this statement has been true down through the ages.

The ancient Greeks used stories to inculcate beliefs and behavior while they passed the long evenings around the campfire. By the fifth-century classical era, they attended outdoor theaters during the winter and spring festivals that honored the gods and goddesses. These festivals featured several days of tragedies and a day of comedy, and attendance was both for pleasure and religious observance. Many of the dramas grew out of characters introduced in Homer's epics from approximately the eighth to seventh centuries B.C.E.

Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are above all stories that "reach the heart," but they also taught the standards of respect for the gods and loyalty to the community. The *Iliad* focuses on the last year of the ten-year siege of Troy by the Greeks, supposedly for the purpose of winning back Greek honor by recapturing Helen, once wife of Menaleus, one of the Greek kings. Of course, along the way to regaining Helen, these Greek tribes also planned to defeat the Trojans, slaughter soldiers, take captives and valuables, and destroy the city.

The *Iliad* is filled with violent encounters that rival today's most riveting war movies. Throughout the scenes of violence are woven the stories of men whose jealousies over battle prizes, honors, and women cause almost as much strife within armies as between enemies, and throughout the human stories the overriding story is human relationships with the gods. Every

Because my parents were so concerned about keeping us safely within the true church, they made sure that we learned the stories that would keep us there.

human activity is punctuated with sacrifices, libations, and prayers to the gods and goddesses. Great care must be taken not to appear to favor one of the heavenly beings over another; otherwise, the wrath of the offended god could come down on both person and group.

While ancient listeners must have sat spellbound, waiting for the outcome of individual battles, the resolutions of personal vendettas, the playing out of great love stories, they were learning the lessons behind the story. Always worship the gods, but do so with great caution and well-balanced respect. Be loyal to your community. Fight bravely if you're a soldier. Never give up. Die honorably in battle. Be loyal, beautiful, and respectful if you're a woman. Grudges between friends take away from the good of the community. They destroy relationships and use up resources that could better be spent fighting the enemy.

One of the relatively minor heroes of *The Iliad* emerges as the sole hero of *The Odyssey*. Odysseus leaves Troy victorious, and in a trip filled with excitement, danger, and a romantic dalliance with a goddess along the way, he spends ten years making a trip that should have taken a few months at most. In his travels, he learns that he should be wise rather than tricky, he needs to trust implicitly in his patron goddess, Athena, and he must always entertain strangers with respect, because they might be a god or goddess in disguise.

For female listeners, there is the beautiful Penelope, who has come to epitomize the faithful wife as she waits through ten years of war and another ten of the wanderings of Odysseus, not knowing if he is even alive. She is besieged by suitors during her twenty years of waiting, but is rewarded for her perfect love when Odysseus comes home to kill the suitors and claim her and his palace.

The later Greeks watched the old stories in play form. Agamemnon, the Greek king, had angered Achilles at Troy by stealing his war prize. He returns home to a faithless wife, Clytemnestra, who has taken his brother as lover and king to revenge the sacrifice of their daughter so that Agamemnon could have favorable winds to take him to Troy. Clytemnestra murders Agamemnon. Her children murder her. The lesson is driven home: men should not sacrifice their children, but wives must never, never rebel against their husbands. Violent death can be the only reward.

Having conquered the Greeks, the Romans absorbed their stories, making them their own by substituting Roman names. The most powerful god of the Greeks, Zeus, becomes Juno in Roman mythology. He is a powerful, scheming, revengeful, and philandering god. The greatest reteller of the Greek stories in Roman form is Ovid, who collected the stories in his *Metamorphosis*. These tales, although highly entertaining, serve the purpose of warning against greed, envy, faithlessness, incest, and failure to thank the gods who give favors to humans.

My parents fully subscribed to the importance of having us hear, read, and study the truth every moment of every day.

Today, it is all too easy for us to point out that these stories are mere myths—a word we often use to mean lies, which we differentiate from our own "true" stories. And yet, as I have read the body of myths of the Greeks and the Romans, as well as many of the myths from Africa, Asia, the Americas, and the rest of the world, I am impressed that they have a common purpose: although they are meant to entertain, just as I was entertained by the stories of my childhood, they are also meant to instruct in the rules of worshiping divine beings and respecting fellow humans.

They were meant to keep their listeners "in the truth," and to enforce communal standards. They still have much to tell us about who we are and about the nature of our relationship with our own God and his created beings. They bring us closer to the people who came before us and who strove for goodness in an often harsh and unpredictable world.

Joseph Campbell, the most noted mythologist of the twentieth century and writer of the four-volume set, *The Masks of God*, which details myths from virtually every culture in the world, said that the more he discovered the world's stories, the more he came to believe the truth in all of them:

> A spiritual man, he found in the literature of faith those principles common to the human spirit....He wanted to know what it means that God assumes such different masks in different cultures, yet how it is that comparable stories can be found in these

> divergent traditions—stories of creation, of virgin births, incarnations, death and resurrection, second comings, and judgment days. He liked the insight of the Hindu scripture: "Truth is one; the sages call it by many names." All our names and images for God are masks, he said, signifying the ultimate reality that by definition transcends language and art. A myth is a mask of God, too—a metaphor for what lies behind the visible world. However the mystic traditions differ, he said, they are in accord in calling us to a deeper awareness of the very act of living itself. (Moyers xvii)

Although we see our own stories as true, Campbell would have seen them as part of the great mythic tradition. So what are we to do as we age and look back on the way the stories of our own childhood were told to us? Perhaps they seem simplistic or filled with cultural ethocentrism. Perhaps they don't seem quite as literally true to us today as when we were children.

Does this mean we scoff at them, or do we try to develop a keener understanding of their meaning for our lives. I examine the stories I heard as child, and although I understand them differently now than I did then, like Joseph Campbell, I find in them "a deeper awareness of the very act of living itself," and so those stories are a part of my personal mythology.

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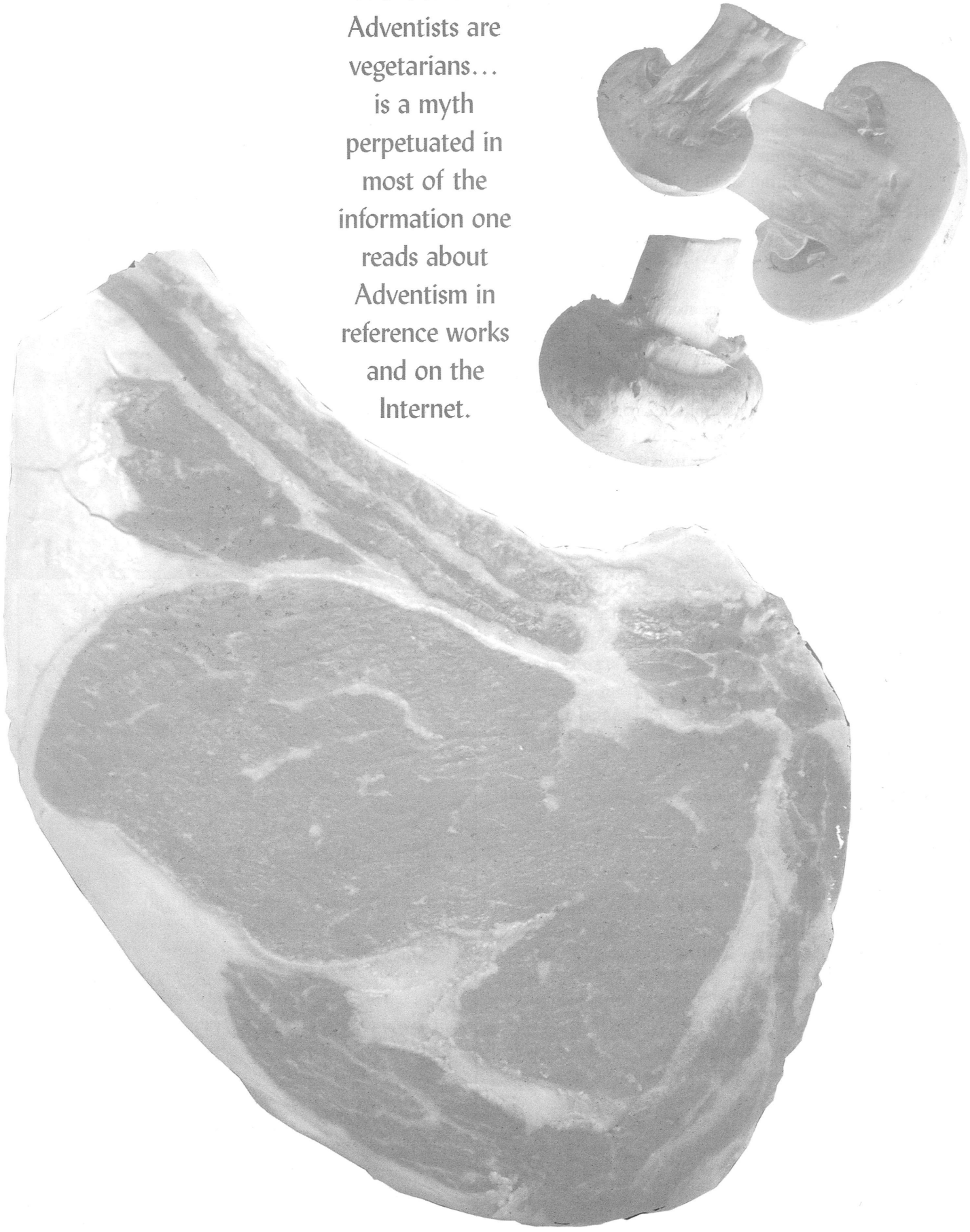
SPECTRUM

The idea that Adventists are vegetarians... is a myth perpetuated in most of the information one reads about Adventism in reference works and on the Internet.



Discussed: Flesh pots, smoked halibut, Mrs. Kellogg, A. G. Daniels, T. A. Van Gundy, mortality studies, carnivores, Gary Fraser

# The Myth of Vegetarianism

*By Keith Lockhart*

In Andy Nash's entertaining memoir of his Adventist upbringing in the 1970s, he recounts the story of a church potluck attended one Sabbath by a non-Adventist family. Anxious to make a contribution, the visitors rushed off to the local Kentucky Fried Chicken and returned with a large bucket of drumsticks that they placed on the buffet table.

The church members, uncertain as to how they should react, at first passed over the chicken and headed for that standard fare of the Adventist potluck, the Special K Loaf. Then the pastor of the congregation coolly approached the bucket and helped himself to a juicy drumstick. A hush descended over the hall, we are told, "not unlike the silence just before an avalanche." Then, as one, the church members descended in a frenzy on the fried chicken.[1]

An embroidered tale perhaps, but one that brings to the fore an enduring misconception about the Church: the idea that Adventists are vegetarians. It is a myth perpetuated in most of the information one reads about Adventism in reference works and on the Internet. The entry on Adventism in the current *Encyclopedia of Christianity* states that Adventists "embrace vegetarianism."[2] An article on the Church posted on the Religious Movements Web site says that "a large proportion" of Adventists practice vegetarianism, and CNN's interactive Web food pages simply state that Seventh-day Adventists "are vegetarians."[3]

It is not surprising that non-Adventist sources say this kind of thing since this is an image the Church is keen to foster. In a book on the Adventist lifestyle prepared for new believers by the denomination in 1987, prospective members are informed that "many Adventists choose to be vegetarians."[4] A new member writing to the *Adventist Review* in 2003 was certainly under the impression that "most Adventists are vegetarians," whereas the pro-Adventist SDA Today.net declares that the "majority of Adventists are vegetarians."[5] The image is further reinforced by the fact that only vegetarian food is served in the cafeterias of church institutions, except in hospitals that may cater to non-Adventist patients.

Even a passing look at Adventist history reveals that vegetarianism as a lifestyle choice has never actually taken hold in Adventism.

Yet even a passing look at Adventist history reveals that vegetarianism as a lifestyle choice has never actually taken hold in Adventism. Reviewing the progress of health reform in the denomination up to 1891, John Harvey Kellogg reported that vegetarianism among church members was practically nonexistent. Indeed, Adventists had come to the perverse conclusion, as far as he was concerned, that "good beef steak was necessary for good health." Furthermore, camp meeting food stands included "dried beef, smoked halibut,...codfish, smoked herring," and "sundry coils of sausage." Among "the families of the denomination," he gloomily concluded, "there are probably to be found few indeed who do not daily gather about the flesh pots."[6]

Battle Creek Sanitarium, however, which Kellogg ran, also served meat. A sanitarium menu dated in 1888 shows beef steak and roast lamb among the options.[7] Ellen White, who introduced vegetarianism into the denomination with her health visions, had herself continued to eat deer, duck, chicken, oysters, and herring.[8]

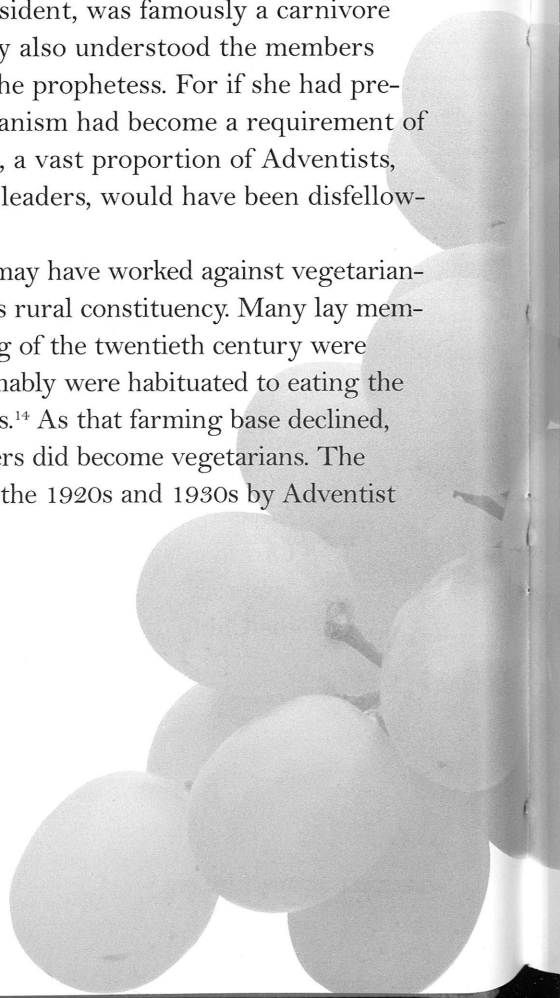
There was a final effort in the last decade of the nineteenth-century to convert Adventists to vegetarianism, led principally by Kellogg. In the early 1890s, he eliminated flesh foods from the sanitarium menu, and in 1894 Ellen White at last gave up meat.[9] But most Adventists did not go down the same road, among them Kellogg's wife.

As superintendent of "an experimental kitchen and a school of cookery" at Battle Creek Sanitarium, Mrs. Kellogg published a general cookbook in the early 1890s.[10] Despite some introductory remarks about animal food being "by no means necessary for the proper maintenance of life or vigorous health," a huge section of the book was devoted to the selection, preservation, and preparation of meats. Recipes were offered for beef, mutton, poultry, game, fish, and shellfish such as lobster and crab.[11]

Mrs. Kellogg specifically omitted pork, prior to the Church as a whole prohibiting the use of all "unclean" flesh after S. N. Haskell became the first Adventist to expound the Levitical dietary laws in 1903.[12] But the case for full vegetarianism was lost for good later in the decade when Kellogg, who might have swung the Church around, was expelled from the denomination in 1907, and when the General Conference president, A. G. Daniells, successfully ruled against Mrs. White's belated wish to make vegetarianism a test of fellowship in 1908.[13]

It was not just the fact that Daniells, the Church's longest-serving president, was famously a carnivore himself. He probably also understood the members rather better than the prophetess. For if she had prevailed, and vegetarianism had become a requirement of church membership, a vast proportion of Adventists, including some top leaders, would have been disfellowshipped at a stroke.

One thing that may have worked against vegetarianism was Adventism's rural constituency. Many lay members at the beginning of the twentieth century were farmers, who presumably were habituated to eating the meat of farm animals.[14] As that farming base declined, more church members did become vegetarians. The trend was helped in the 1920s and 1930s by Adventist



entrepreneurs such as T. A. Van Gundy, who developed new lines of soy-based products, and Jethro Kloss, author of the famous vegetarian book, *Back to Eden.*[15]

From the 1940s, Adventist manufacturers like Loma Linda Foods and Worthington Foods started developing meat analogues that may also have enabled some Adventists to wean themselves off meat.[16] However, a survey conducted in 1958 among pupils who attended Adventist schools in California found that only 27 percent followed a vegetarian diet. When the children were asked to pick out their favorite food from a selection of several different meat and non-meat dishes, most chose fried chicken. The lowest number opted for vegeburgers.[17]

In the 1990s, Monte Sahlin's research consistently showed that only about 28 percent of church members always practiced vegetarianism, and only 27 percent thought "a great deal" of emphasis should be placed on it.[18] A health survey of delegates at the General Conference session of 2000 produced a figure of 30 percent vegetarian, still a very low proportion considering that the individuals who attend the event are almost entirely administrators, ministers, and other employees—in other words, those most committed to the denomination.[19] Among the Church's ethnic minorities, vegetarians are even scarcer.[20] Only 7 percent of Adventism's adult Hispanic membership abstain from meat.[21]

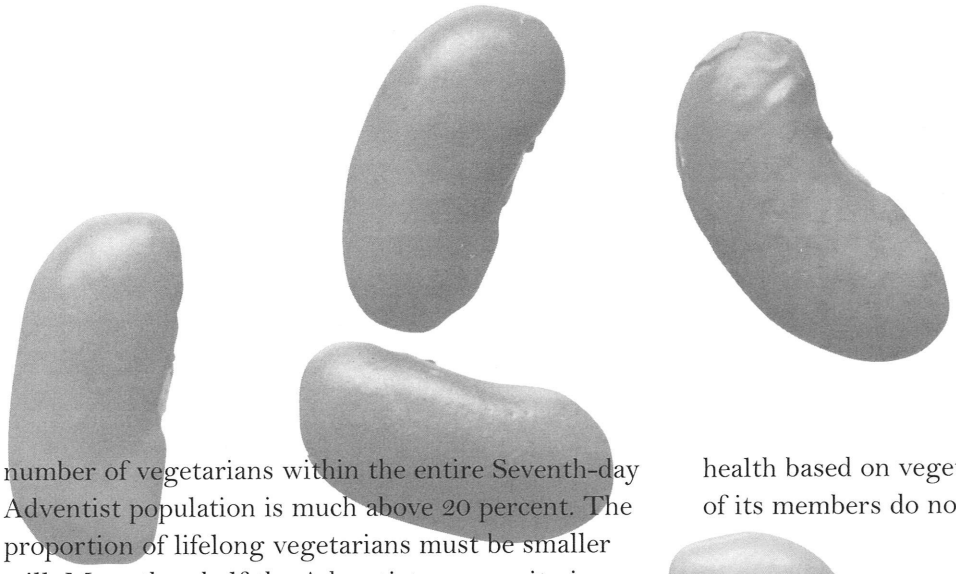
The only surveys that appear to contradict these findings are the Adventist Mortality Study (AMS), which tracked Adventists in the 1960s, and the Adventist Health Study (AHS), which did the same during the 1970s and 80s. They each give a figure of around 50 percent vegetarian for the membership.[22]

However, this includes many occasional carnivores, and the number of those who never ate meat was much lower—less than 30 percent.[23] But even this proportion probably overestimates the number of vegetarians within the Adventist population as a whole, for both studies were conducted among well-educated, white volunteers in California. A well-educated non-Hispanic white Adventist is more likely to be a vegetarian than a less well-educated white Adventist, or a black or Hispanic Adventist of any educational level.

In addition, it is likely (though difficult to demonstrate from existing data) that volunteers for the Seventh-day Adventist health surveys are more likely to be vegetarians than those who do not participate, and possible that vegetarianism may be more common among Adventists in California than elsewhere.

The results of the mortality and health studies, which reflect the Adventist lifestyles of the 1960s and 1970s, are therefore in line with those of more recent surveys in suggesting that the number of vegetarians is under 30 percent. However, given that church-run surveys usually include only the 60 percent or so of the membership in regular contact with the denomination, the proportion of vegetarians within the total Adventist population is probably actually lower.

In fact, there is little reason to suppose that the



number of vegetarians within the entire Seventh-day Adventist population is much above 20 percent. The proportion of lifelong vegetarians must be smaller still. More than half the Adventist community is composed of converts, and even if lifelong members are more likely to be vegetarian than are converts, this would still suggest that the number of lifelong vegetarians in Adventism may be little more than about one in ten.

Since the results of the AMS and AHS started to be released the impression has grown, both inside and outside the denomination, that Adventists live longer than average members of the general population, and that this is due largely to church members' vegetarian lifestyles. The recent feature on Adventist longevity in *National Geographic*, which quoted from the Adventist Health Study, is the latest report that makes the association.[24]

Vegetarianism may indeed be good for you, but given that the participants in these studies are unrepresentative of the Adventist membership, and that so few Adventists are vegetarians in any case, it is, as Gary Fraser's recent book on the subject has indicated, very difficult to demonstrate a causal link between Adventists' apparent greater longevity and the absence of meat in the diet.[25]

The truth is that Adventists do not embrace vegetarianism, and have never really done so. Very few church members are vegetarian. Adventism is a world of carnivores in which at least 70 to 80 percent are meat eaters. The Church only eats vegetarian food in public. It projects to the outside world an image of health based on vegetarianism, while the vast majority of its members do not practice it.

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7. See Fig. 18 in Patsy Gerstner, "The Temple of Health: A Pictorial History of The Battle Creek Sanitarium," special issue, *Caduceus: A Humanities Journal for Medicine and the Health Sciences* 12:2 (1996): 17.

8. Instances of the prophetess eating these foods are documented in Roger W. Coon, *Ellen White and Vegetarianism: Did She Practice What She Preached?* (Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press, 1986), which offers an explanation of her behavior.

9. Gerstner, "Temple of Health," 17, and Ronald L. Numbers, *Prophetess of Health: Ellen G. White and the Origins of Seventh-day Adventist Health Reform*, rev. ed. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992), 172.

10. Mrs. E. E. Kellogg, *Science in the Kitchen* (Chicago: Modern Medicine, 1893), 3.

11. Ibid., 391, 389–416, 392.

12. See Ron Graybill, "The Development of Adventist Thinking on Clean and Unclean Meats" (E. G. White Estate pamphlet, 1981), 5. It should be noted, however, that although the Church appears to have adopted these laws from early in the last century, and that Adventists have followed them much better than they have vegetarianism in general, they were not put into the denomination's fundamental beliefs in 1980.

13. On the latter, see Numbers, *Prophetess of Health*, 173–74.

14. Adventists were still disproportionately involved in agriculture in some parts of the United States in the 1930s. See Walter R. Goldschmidt, "Class Denominationalism in Rural California Churches," *American Journal of Sociology* 49, no. 4 (1944): 348–55.

15. See Karen Iacobbo and Michael Iacobbo, *Vegetarian America: A History* (Wesport: Praeger, 2004), 157.

16. Information on Loma Linda Foods can be found in the *SDA Encyclopedia*. There is also a useful online vegetarian history at the Soyfoods Center Web site at <http://www.thesoydailyclub.com/SFC/historyofsoybean.asp>, which discusses Loma Linda and Worthington Foods in a chapter devoted to Adventism.

17. Irma Bachmann Vyhmeister, "A Survey of Children's Food Attitudes and Habits in Five Southern California Seventh-day Adventist Schools" (Master's Thesis, College of Medical Evangelists School of Graduate Studies, 1958), 57, 14, and Fig. 4.

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23. See Table 2, Phillips, "Role of Life-style and Dietary Habits," 3514; and Fraser, *Diet, Life Expectancy, and Chronic Disease*, 12.

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**Keith Lockhart has just completed, with Malcolm Bull, the second edition of their book, *Seeking a Sanctuary: Seventh-day Adventism and the American Dream*. It will be published by Indiana University Press in the fall of 2006.**

The Church...projects to the outside world an image of health based on vegetarianism, while the vast majority of its members do not practice it.

Discussed: spin doctors, philosophy, liberals, conservatives, generalizations, arrogance, evangelism, dancing, binary thinking, sin management, friendship

# Are We Guardians of Truth or Seekers of Truth?

*By Chris Blake*

Of the many fundamental divisions in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, perhaps none is as practically meaningful as the difference between Guardians of Truth and Seekers of Truth.

Guardians serve God and fear him. Seekers serve God and enjoy him.

Guardians talk of historic truths. Seekers live out present truth.

Guardians emphasize performance. Seekers emphasize participation.

Guardians consider early Adventists guardians. Seekers consider early Adventists seekers.

Guardians interpret literally. Seekers recognize irony, audience, symbolism, and context.

Guardians believe the Church is an organization. Seekers believe the Church is a force.

Guardians defend the truth. Seekers feed on it.

Lamentably, modern society too often undervalues truth and honesty. If we are not committed to Truth as true north, spin doctors do their damnably effective work and our spiritual compasses spin continually. These doctors appear in the form of friends, parents, teachers, pastors, administrators, commentators, entertainers, and a thousand other insistent voices. Paul Tillich observes, "The passion for truth is silenced by answers which have the weight of undisputed authority."[1]

The essence of Guardians of Truth (GOT) is the oft-heard maxim, "We have the truth." Truth and its offspring are treated as a quantifiable, objective package to be tightly gripped with both hands. *There, we have it.* Guardians propel in me the unnerving feeling that their efforts to ensure orthodoxy on campuses and church boards will lead to truth squads, legalism, creedalism, and members fleeing. Buying into their philosophy, we become hard and brittle and dated and narrow enough to fit easily upon the shelf on aisle 7.

The nature of truth, however, is that it cannot be possessed, because once it is *that* it can be sold or bartered or placed cautiously in a napkin or a safe-deposit box. Truth is not found on the commodities market. We cannot visit our truth portfolio. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6) alongside "Abide in me, and I in you" (John 15:4). We can't own the truth any more than we can own Jesus. The truth owns us. We abide in truth. The truth inhabits us. The truth immerses us.

Guardians believe everyone should learn from us. Seekers believe we can learn from everyone.

Guardians approach church as a citadel. Seekers approach church as a hospital.

Guardians talk. Seekers talk, too. They also listen.

Remembering the Great Disappointment, Guardians don't want to get it wrong again. Remembering Calvary, Seekers don't want to disappoint Jesus.

Guardians warn of a future Time of Trouble. Seekers warn of anything that is based in fear.

Guardians often point to glaciers. Seekers often point to galaxies.

Guardians cover their ears for purity. Seekers dance for joy (though not very well).

Truth is air rushing and water surging through our very lungs and vessels. We can experience air and water, but we cannot *have* them. We gulp them in and still seek them. In the long run, we all must breathe unborrowed air, six times a minute inhaling oxygenated fresh nourishment. Living water cannot be bottled.

Seekers of Truth could be SOT ("They are drunk with new wine," from Acts 2), but are perhaps best characterized as SOUGHT (Seekers Of Undeniably Good, Healthful Truth). The parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son involve Seekers. Matthew 25's parable of the talents exalts creative Seeker risk taking. Seeker stories abound in the New Testament: Nicodemus, the woman at the well, the blind man of John 9, the centurion and his servant, Zacchaeus, Peter on the water, Paul in prison, Mary's anointing, and scores more.

This distinction goes beyond political conservatives and liberals, for one discovers conservatives who are at heart Seekers and liberals who are in practice Guardians. On a philosophical level, the division reflects the current worldwide debate over the relative merits of safety versus freedom—evidenced in the United States of America's Patriot Act—with eye-opening repercussions.

Guardians defer to tradition. Seekers refer to an untraditional carpenter.

Guardians stand for the status quo. Seekers stand for those on the margins ("guarding the edges").

Guardians are immovable. Seekers are irrepressible.

To GOT, God is imminent. To SOUGHT, God is immanent.

Guardians seek conformity, affirmation, and predictability. Seekers guard hope, compassion, and vitality.

GOT assess effective evangelism as information transmission. SOUGHT assess effective evangelism as nonmanipulative dialogue.

For Guardians, the gospel is validation. For Seekers, the gospel is freedom.

Admittedly, whether the construct is guardians and seekers, sheep and goats, wise and foolish, or sacred and secular, binary thinking runs risks. Nuances become hidden; the potential for misapplication escalates. Note: The intent of this catalogue of twenty-eight is to enlighten and even inspire.

Both GOT and SOUGHT camps harbor committed Christians. Both carry accumulated penchants, motivations, and aptitudes. And we can all find ourselves deep in the other camp depending on the issue or circumstance. Still, we see differences emerge in myriad ways.

For GOT, the Christian life is mainly sin management. For SOUGHT, the Christian life is mainly inclusive friendships.

Guardians confuse tastes with morals. Seekers confuse saints with forgiven sinners.

Guardians define who is worthy to belong. Seekers refuse to allow others to define them outside the Church.

Guardians prescribe and proscribe. Seekers say "whosoever will."

Guardians are quick to count decisions. Seekers aim at creating disciples.

To Guardians, it's all about salvation. To Seekers, it's all about love.

Guardians see life in terms of "us" and "them." Knowing we're all in this together, Seekers don't view even Guardians as "them."

Of course, epigrammatic generalizations can lead to arrogance, polarization, and hostility. At times. Seekers need to have glaciers pointed out and historic truths recalled. Balance is mandatory.

However, after thirty years as a Christian, I find myself asking of my fellow believers which fundamental question we live by: "Got Jesus on aisle 7?" or "Sought Jesus with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength?"

In the end, our choice of question will determine our church's direction. Anne Mellor muses that Mary Shelley's Frankenstein is "a book about what happens when a man tries to have a baby without a woman."[2] What title would describe a denomination's attempts to have a redemptive existence without a Seeker vision?

All disciples of Jesus need to fashion a salutary life view that is based in reality, both seen and unseen. Within that reality we cannot own gifts of truth or life—they arrive from Another and return to Another—and this is the humbling Truth that sets us free.

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Discussed: *Sojourners* magazine, prophetic voices, Martin Luther King, Jr., budgets as moral documents, Habakkuk, Adventist atavists, literalistic fetishism, personal and public hope, Adventism of progress

# That Embarrassing Voice of Prophecy

*By Alexander Carpenter*

This recent Martin Luther King Jr. weekend, I attended a conference in Washington D.C. titled "Politics and Spirituality: Toward a Public Integrity." The Center for Action and Contemplation and *Sojourners* magazine organized the event, and about eighteen hundred people came to listen to the prophetic voices of pastor Jim Wallis; Richard Rohr, a priest; journalist E. J. Dionne; and writer Anne Lamott. That's right, prophetic voices. And frankly, that embarrassed me.

It was not the speakers; they inspired just fine. Both the speeches and the people with whom I spoke recalled the old evangelical and mainstream Protestant and Catholic traditions of treating religion as both a personal and public virtue. Not the current far-right obsession with enforcing private morality on the nation, but the old-time progressive Christian mission to preach deliverance to the captives and feed the hungry.

Jim Wallis, the editor of *Sojourners* and a graduate of Trinity Evangelical Seminary, suggested that he is an evangelical born in the wrong century. He pointed out that it was Charles Finney, the great nineteenth-century evangelist, who invented the altar call, and right after the saved came forward they were encouraged to sign up for the abolitionist cause. In addition, Finney founded Oberlin, the first college to give women more choices for their future. (Where are those pro-choice evangelicals now?)

I wasn't embarrassed either when people invoked the names of great prophets such as Martin Luther King Jr., Dorothy Day, Franz Jaegerstaetter, Simone Weil, Black Elk, Oscar Romero, and Mother Jones. Nor was I embarrassed when, on Monday, we marched through the streets of the district and gathered on the lawn in front of Congress.

And I wasn't embarrassed when Jim Wallis prophesied that if Martin Luther King Jr. were still alive, "he would be speaking in this place about the invisible misery of poverty,...about the agony and the arrogance of our war in Iraq. He would be speaking of a nation seduced by materialism, blinded by its militarism, finding security in all the wrong places and becoming more and more insecure every day."

In fact, I had to agree that the religious right has dominated the moral discourse of America far too long and that budgets are moral documents, too. "Yeah," I thought, "budgets *do* reveal

a country's priorities and its earmarks show us who really has our leader's ears."

So what embarrassed me? Well, when was the last time you heard someone with a solid liberal arts education speak glowingly about the gift of prophecy? That is, someone who isn't paid to do so. Well, this group—very reverend Episcopalians, Princeton Seminary students, bearded Middlebury College students, Fuller evangelicals, and young Jesuit workers—believed in the gift of prophecy; and it was I who struggled to share the word.

"Prophet!" It still sticks in my barely ecumenical craw. Isn't that our doctrine? In fact, number eighteen uses Ellen White (the only prophet named) to justify our remnant security, and, in return, anyone who still doesn't care about plagiarism or history gets "comfort, guidance, instruction, and correction."

So, why did *they* use the term *prophetic*, and as a synonym for progressive, no less? As has been pointed out by many scholars, including Abraham Heschel, the tradition of biblical prophecy grew out of Israel's class inequalities. From about 850 B.C.E., the kings fought foreign wars or tried to keep from being invaded, while the rich got richer and the poor got poorer and the priests just burned lambs and colluded with those in power.

In this context, prophets like Habakkuk stood up and spoke strong, even political words:

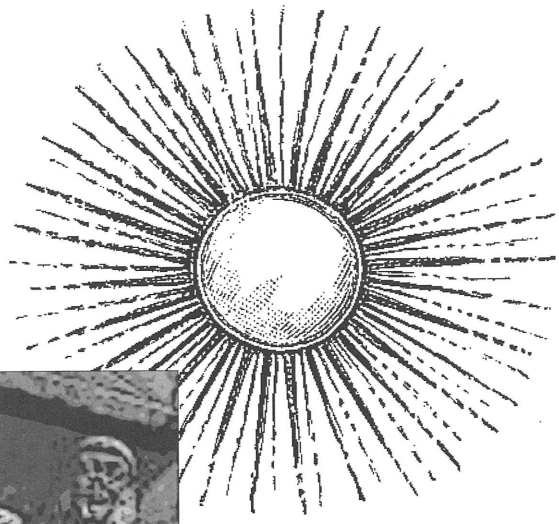
> Because you plundered many nations
> All surviving peoples shall plunder you—
> For crimes against men and wrongs against lands,
> Against cities and all their inhabitants.
> Ah, you who have acquired gains
> To the detriment of your own houses,
> Who have destroyed many peoples
> In order to set your nest on high
> To escape disaster!
> You have plotted shame for your own house,
> And guilt for yourself...
> Ah, you who have built a town with crime,
> And established a city with infamy,
> So that peoples have had to toil without profit,
> And nations weary themselves for naught!
>
> (2:8–13)[1]

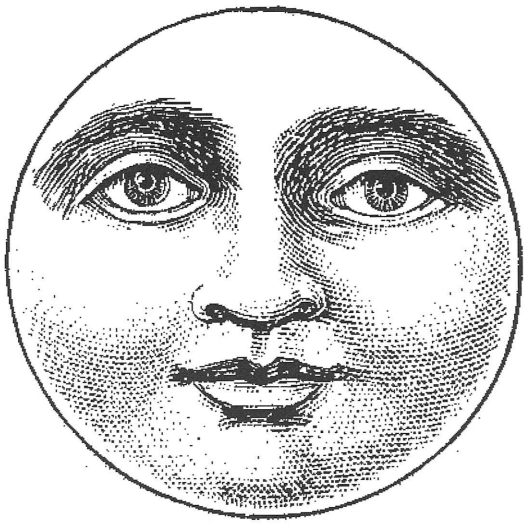
Not long afterward, Babylon invaded.

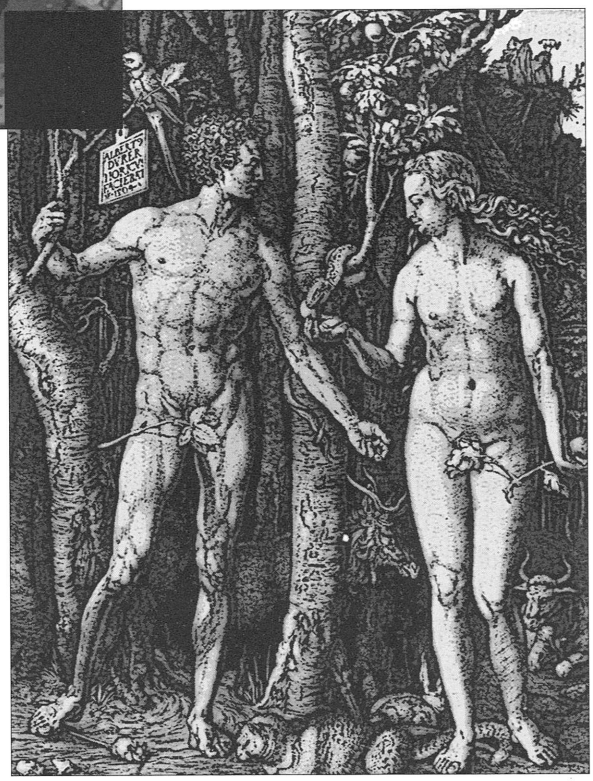
Now, I don't have enough faith to believe that God controlled human freedom, causing some people to kill other people to prove some point about being good. But I do believe that some prophets, as seers, like Martin Luther King Jr., can see beyond our myopic, bourgeois eyes, and envision a better future. As Jim Wallis and Tony Campolo both point out, there are two thousand verses about poor people in the Bible and not a single one about permanent tax cuts for the extremely wealthy. In fact, if I recall, Jesus encouraged even Peter to pay his fair share, too.

Continuing the prophetic tradition, Ellen White preached against slavery, encouraged the great Adventist health tradition, sent her son on the *Morning Star* to work with minorities, joined the women's movement of her day, and encouraged the internationalization of Adventism and uplifting the poor.

*Continued on page 76...*







# CREATION STORIES

Discussed: Marduk, Elohim, Tiamat, Dr. Frankenstein, Coronos, Zeus, primeval order, physics, submission, hope, power, love

# As It Was

*By Tim Dunston*

Imagine that last week in your Sabbath School class the leader started with these words: "In the beginning, Marduk created the heavens and the earth." How would you respond? Would you open your Bible to Genesis just to make sure it said what you thought it said? Would you raise your hand? Each of us I'm sure would react in a different way, but what I can't imagine is that everyone would decide to remain silent and not say anything at all.

Yet this is exactly how Genesis deals with that same situation. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. That is all that the creation story has to say about pre-creation history: In the beginning, God. Period. Creative license was not something that the God of Genesis earned; it was something he had, by definition.

The editors of the Pentateuch left us two great stories of the beginning of the world. In chapter one, the story of Elohim is told: he creates the world, all its life, all its boundaries, just by the power and command of his voice. This command is not so much a command as it is an invitation: Let there be...and there was.

In chapter two, we read about YHWH and his more hands-on approach to creation; if chapter one pictures the glory of God as transcendence, chapter two focuses on the glory of God's immanence. So close is YHWH to human beings, so connected; not only are we created in his image, we are formed physically by his hands, we are given his breath to breathe as he creates a living soul in the likeness of the divine.

The book of Genesis, particularly the creation story, bears a message of great importance. This message was soon forgotten, or at least overlooked by early Israel. Even today, we often turn a blind eye to the most significant message of the book: its silence.

# Creation Stories from the Fertile Crescent

Creation stories of the Mediterranean world carried great significance because they were often used to establish the supremacy of one God among many others. Marduk, the patron god of Babylon, was once just one god among many others. But not after the Enuma Elish was written.

> The long Babylonian creation epic 'Enuma elish...narrates a chain of events beginning with the very first separation of order out of chaos and culminating in the creation of the specific cosmos known to the ancient Babylonians. As the gods are born within the commingled waters of their primeval parents, Apsu [father of the gods] and Tiamat [mother of the gods],...[the restlessness of the new children] disturbs Apsu. Over Tiamat's protests, he plans to kill them; but the clever Ea [one of Tiamat and Apsu's children] learns of his plan and kills Apsu instead. Now Tiamat is furious, she produces an army of monsters to avenge her husband and to wrest lordship from the younger generation. The terrified gods turn to Ea's son Marduk for help. Marduk agrees to face Tiamat, but demands supremacy over them as compensation.[1]
>
> The council of the gods tests Marduk's powers by having him make a garment disappear and then reappear. After Marduk passes the test, the council enthrones him as high king and commissions him to fight Tiamat. With the authority and power of the council, Marduk assembles his weapons, the four winds as well as the seven winds of destruction. He rides in his chariot of clouds with the weapons of the storm to confront Tiamat. After entangling Tiamat in a net, Marduk unleashes the Evil Wind to inflate Tiamat. When she is incapacitated by the wind, Marduk kills her with an arrow through her heart and takes captive the other gods and monsters who were her allies. After smashing Tiamat's head with a club, Marduk divides her corpse, using half to create the earth and the other half to create the sky, which is complete with bars to keep the chaotic waters from escaping. The tablet ends with Marduk establishing dwelling places for his allies.[2]

At this point, I would like to turn to the text of the Enuma Elish. We join the scene in the middle of the fourth tablet.

> He released the arrow, it tore her belly,
> It cut through her insides, splitting the heart.
> Having thus subdued her, he extinguished her life.
> He cast down her carcass to stand upon it....
>
> And turned back to Tiamat whom he had bound.
> The lord trod on the legs of Tiamat,
> With his unsparing mace he crushed her skull.
> When the arteries of her blood he had severed,
> The North Wind bore it to places undisclosed.
> On seeing this, his fathers were joyful and jubilant,
> They brought gifts of homage to him.
> Then the lord paused to view her dead body,
> That he might divide the form and do artful works.
> He split her like a shellfish into two parts:
> Half of her he set up as a covering for heaven,
> Pulled down the bar and posted guards.
> He bade them to allow not her waters to escape.[3]

This is the heroic epic of Marduk and how he brought the earth into being. The story goes on to tell how he creates humans. Needing flesh and bone to make them, he kills one of his fellow gods and uses the god's body as flesh and bone and blood for the human race.

Marduk creates only in the wake of great violence. I would like to suggest two reasons for this. First, he had to convince the other gods that he was worthy for the task, and secondly, he needed the raw material for his "artful works." Marduk is the Dr. Frankenstein of

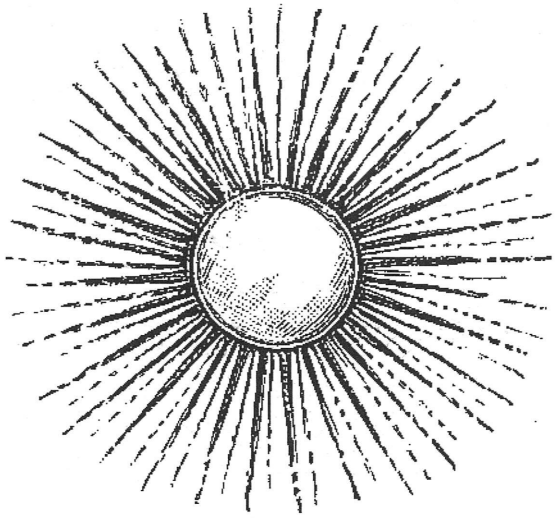
## Creation stories of the Mediterranean world carried great significance because they were often used to establish the supremacy of one God among many others.

Mesopotamia, building his creation from the corpses of the dead. He destroys the old in order to establish the new, because he cannot create any other way.

The Greek creation epic is very different, but worth looking at as well. In the Greek creation myth, Zeus must overthrow his father Cronos in order to establish his own rule: We join the scene in the middle of the story.

> Cronos married his sister and became King of the Titans. They had five children but Cronos had been warned that one of them would kill him; so, he swallowed each one as it was born. To save her sixth child, Rhea tricked Cronos into swallowing a stone wrapped in baby's clothing and hid the child among some lesser nature goddesses called nymphs who brought him up safely. This child was Zeus. When he grew up, Zeus returned home in disguise and slipped a potion into Cronos' drink, making him choke. The children he had swallowed were coughed out, whole and safe. A fierce battle then took place. Zeus freed the Cyclops who made thunderbolts for him to hurl. They also made a forked trident for Poseidon, and a helmet that made its wearer invisible for Pluto. But, most of the Titans and giants sided with Cronos. After a terrible struggle the younger gods were victorious. The Titans were banished: one of them, Atlas, was made to hold up the heavens as punishment. [And] Zeus became ruler of the sky and king of all the gods."[4]

These two creation narratives establish the power and glory of Marduk and Zeus by telling of their heroic deeds, telling how they were powerful enough to overthrow the primeval rule, and by demonstrating their power to deceive and to destroy. It is through their destructive prowess that they create. And it is because of their destructive power that they are worshipped.

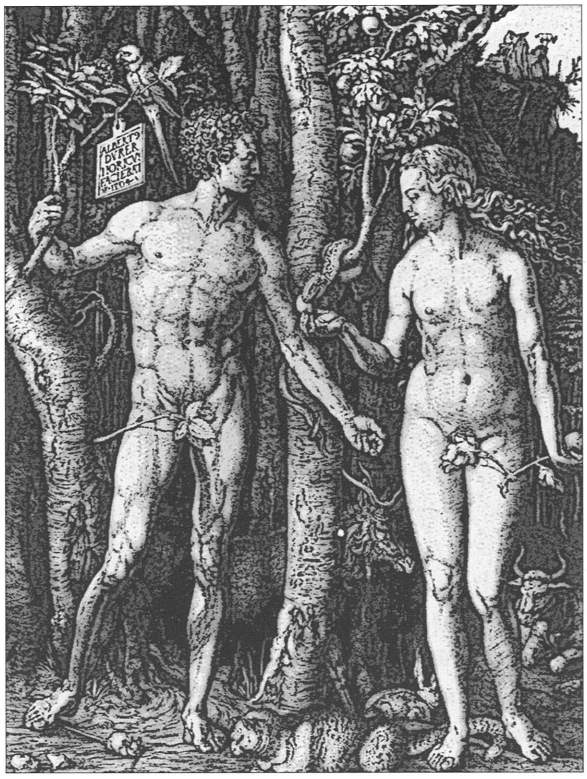


The difference between these creation stories and the Genesis account is astronomical. Normally, when Genesis is compared with other creation narratives it is to show the similarities. Here are excerpts of the first two chapters, and in light of what you have just read, look for the differences, in particular the glaring absence of a primeval victory for God.

> **1:1** In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. **2** Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

We are all familiar with what comes next. God creates the world and its creatures in five days, human beings come on the sixth day, and he deems the creation good. That is the first chapter of Genesis. The story is told again in the second chapter.

Our God is not a God who destroys in order to create.



**2:1** Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. **2** By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. **3** And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done. **4** This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created. When the LORD God made the earth and the heavens **7** the LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being. **18** The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." But for Adam no suitable helper was found. **21** So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. **22** Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. **25** The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.

Where is the violence? Where is the heroic overcoming? Where is the struggle of the new God against a primeval order? On all these topics, Genesis is deliberately silent. The only place in the Genesis account where God uses pre-existing matter for creation is with the creation of Eve. Even in this, God closes Adam's wound with flesh. He does not destroy Adam, he simply puts him to sleep. What results is more like surgery than rampant destruction.

Our God is not a God who destroys in order to create. The composite story we get from the first two chapters of Genesis is diametrically opposed to the other creation myths of Mesopotamia. Zeus sets up his kingdom, metaphorically on the dead bodies of the previous rulers. Marduk, in comparison, sets up his kingdom, very literally on the carcass of his foe. He splits her up the middle and makes the sky and the earth. Violence is the very foundation for life in the Enuma Elish.

Our God is so different. At the outset of each testament of Scripture, we are given a beautiful vision of God's character and of his plan for a chosen people, a people who will be like him, creators, creating from the vast storehouses of love, not violence. And, yes, we stray from this example. It is only a few books after Genesis that we see the rampant violence of Canaan's conquest, and the bloody aftermath of judges and kings.

Where is the violence? Where is the heroic overcoming?
Where is the struggle of the new God against a primeval order?
On all these topics, Genesis is deliberately silent.

It is not that long after Jesus' message of submission and love that Christianity loses itself in indulgences and inquisitions and crusades. Somehow in the centuries after Jesus' death his message of love and self sacrifice was forgotten.

In the "Efficacy of Prayer," an essay in *The World's*

*Last Night*, C. S. Lewis wrestles with this very problem. Speaking of God, he says this:

> For he seems to do nothing of himself which he can possibly delegate to his creatures. He commands us to do slowly and blunderingly what he could do perfectly and in the twinkling of an eye. He allows us to neglect what he would have us do, or even to fail....We are not mere recipients or spectators. We are either privileged to share in the game, or compelled to collaborate in the work, "to wield our little tridents." Is this amazing process simply creation going on before our eyes? This is how (no light matter) God makes something—, indeed makes gods—out of nothing.

For some reason, it is important to God to let us do things, to let us have free will, to let us create things imperfectly over long periods that he could do perfectly in an instant. It is important to God that we emulate him, even if we never achieve a shadow of what he is, it is important to him that we try.

I have often heard it said that God created the world ex nihilo. And at this point in the article you may be running in to the same difficulty I did when I was writing it. If God created something out of nothing, how are we supposed to create like he did?

It's a simple answer really. God didn't create the world from nothing. God created the world from the vast storehouses of his being. In a word: love. He spoke love, and the laws of physics came into order. He spoke love, and matter filled the void. He spoke love and the chemistry of matter sorted itself into life. He spoke, and the first humans appeared before him in his image. And as it was, so it is.

As our creator created, so should we create. Create with love. Create love in the darkness of the void. Light a spark in the midst of the darkness. Create not through domination, not through deception, but through the strength of submission and through the power of hope. We do not conquer the darkness of the deep, we do not overcome it by power, we outlast it—we outshine it—with the everlasting creation of love. It is the unbreakable, unfathomable power of the God we serve.

As Paul says, there is no distance, no power on heaven or earth that is stronger than love. It must be the initiator of our creating; if it is not, we use our energy to destroy. By definition, destructive power can only substitute one evil for another. When we create for the purpose of blessing our creation, when our creative ability flows naturally from the small warehouse of our love, creating by nature objects of love, free and unpossessed—when we can say as an invitation: Let there be love....then we begin to create as we were created: in the image of our God.

When we do that, we wield our little tridents in a seemingly infinite void, and, believe it or not, that is good.

## Notes and References


1. "Mesopotamian Cosmology," in the Web site Myths of the Creation of the World, <http://alexm.here.ur/mirrors/www.enteract.com/jwalz/Eliade/055.html>, accessed February 3, 2006.

2. Dennis Bratcher, "The Enuma Elish: 'When On High...': The Mesopotamian/Babylonian Creation Myth," Web site of the CRI/Voice Institute, <http://www.cresourcei.org/enumaelish.html>, accessed February 3, 2006.

3. Ibid.

4. "The Creation of the World," see URL <http://www.hellenism.net/cgi-bin/display_article.html?a=52&s=28>.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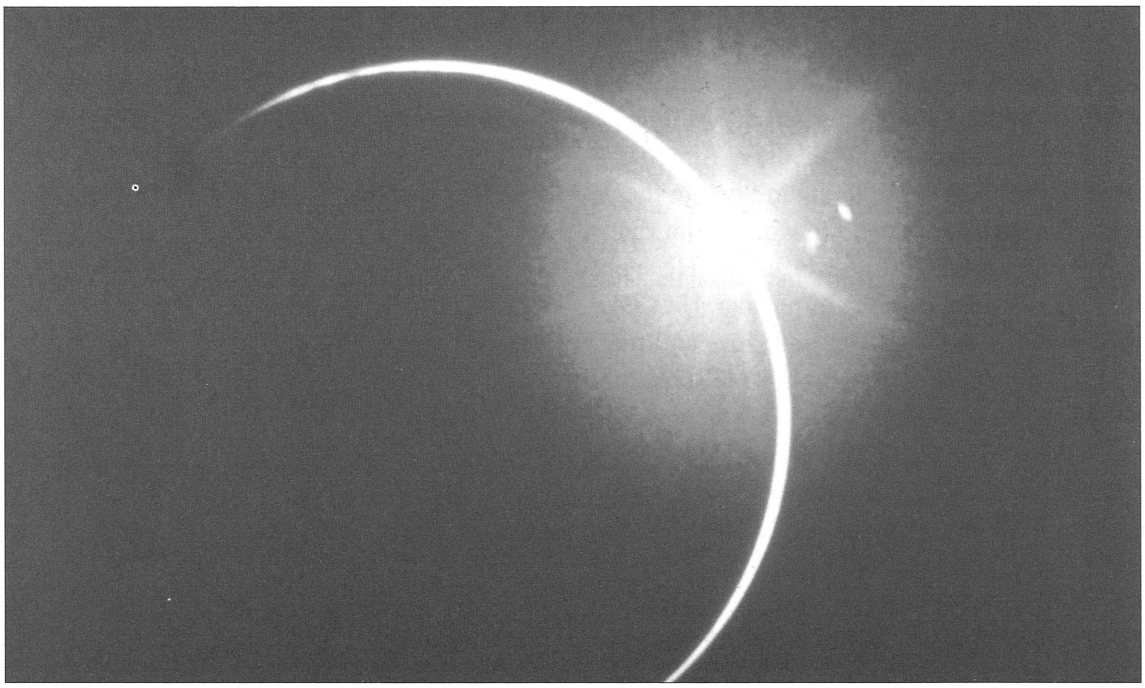
**Tim Dunston graduated from Walla Walla College in 2004 with majors in religion and music.**

Discussed: public schools, religious liberty, *Adventist Review*, prions, kinetics, hypocrisy, children, responsibility

# Good Religion, Bad Science

*By Andrew Hoehn*

Adventism by and large supports the idea that intelligent design is a viable scientific theory. Furthermore, many Adventists support the cause that intelligent design be taught in public school. But these Adventists fail to see that intelligent design requires religious belief, and that teaching any religious belief in public schools erodes our own religious liberties.



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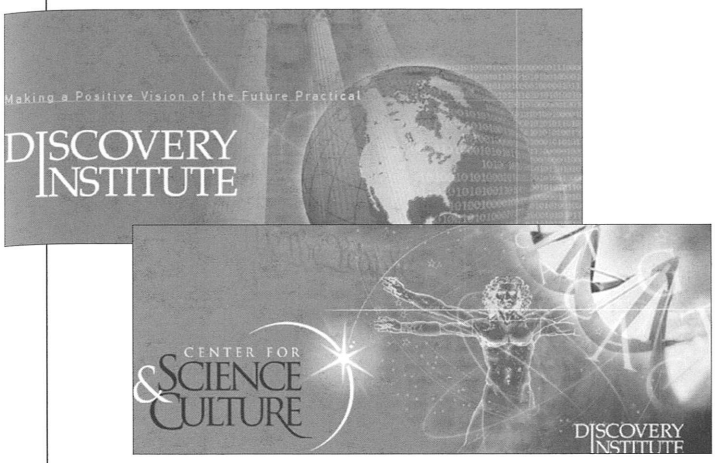
# Resources on the Intelligent Design Debate

The Discovery Institute <www.discovery.org>

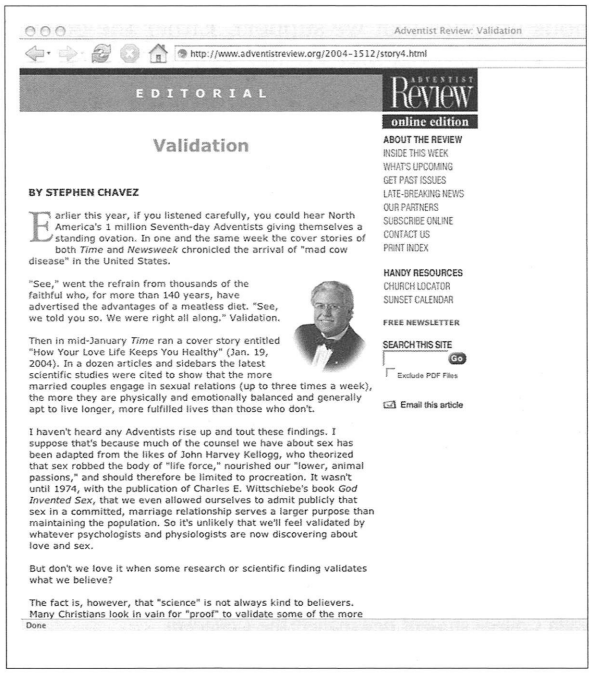
*The most active organization in propagating intelligent design as valid scientific thought.*




"Validation" <www.adventistreview.org/2004-1512/story4.html>

By Stephen Chavez

*An article by the managing editor of the* Adventist Review *that argues we shouldn't try to reconcile our religious belief with science.*



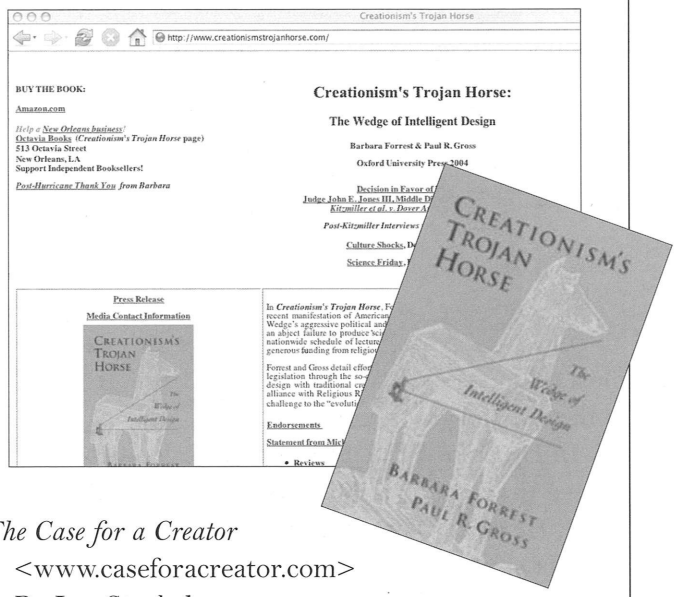

*Creationism's Trojan Horse*

<www.creationismstrojanhorse.com>

By Barbara Forrest and Paul R. Gross

New York: Oxford University Press, 2004

*Barbara Forrest was a key witness in the December Pennsylvania intelligent design trial, and* Creationism's Trojan Horse *was quoted in Judge Jones's decision.*



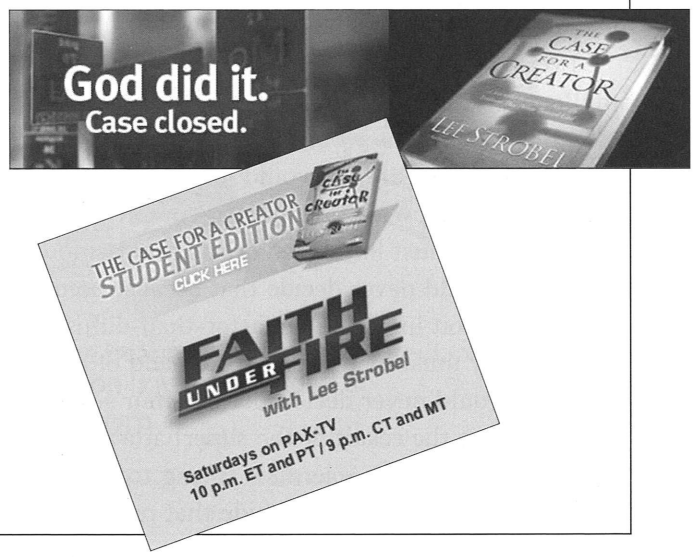

*The Case for a Creator*

<www.caseforacreator.com>

By Lee Strobel

Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2004

*A journalist chronicles his conversion from atheism, based on scientific evidence for a creator. One of* Christianity Today's *books of the year for 2005.*



The *Adventist Review* has not been outspoken on the topic of intelligent design, but the few articles and editorials it has published on the topic have been in support of intelligent design as scientific fact. One of *Christianity Today*'s books of the year this year was the *Case for a Creator*, an apologetic for intelligent design. The idea that our creationist religious principles have scientific backing has caught hold of the Christian consciousness.

Intelligent design in its most simple form is the belief that the universe is too complex a thing to have happened by evolutionary principles, and therefore must have been created by a designer. Although this agrees with the religious perspectives of Christians, and in fact most religions, there is very little support for this idea in the scientific community at large.

In December, U.S. District Judge John E. Jones III agreed that intelligent design is based on religious belief. He ruled that the Dover Pennsylvania School District should not be allowed to teach intelligent design in its schools.

It makes sense for Christians to believe in intelligent design on a religious level. We may not be sure exactly where God came into the creation process—if he spoke the world into being in six literal days about six thousand years ago, or if he was involved much earlier in the process—and we should be comfortable believing that.

From a scientific perspective, if the argument for intelligent design was attributed to other areas of science, the conclusions would be laughable.

A medical researcher would never say "the prions that cause mad cow disease are too complex to understand, so they must have been created miraculously." A chemist would never decide that because some enzymes exhibit inexplicable faster-than-diffusion kinetics, they must be moved by the hand of a god. A zoologist would never decide that a lemur's capacity for jumping is the result of the supernatural.

In that same vein, scientists trying to discover the origins of life should never decide that parts of their field of study are too complex for us to understand and must be attributed to a god. There's no reason that those scientists couldn't hold intelligent design as a religious view, but they should never let it guide their scientific inquiry. Intelligent design is good religion, but bad science.

Although believing in intelligent design is in no way harmful to the average individual, the danger of intelligent design comes when it is held as pure science; for then religion disguised as science can be taught in public schools.

Here is an area in which Adventist history should serve us well. We have a long tradition of demonizing the political efforts of the Catholic Church, marking Sunday laws as one of the signs of the times, and generally defending ourselves from any governmental practice that infringes on our religious liberties. But we forget about rendering unto Caesar when it comes to the Ten Commandments in courthouses, nativities on the lawn of city hall, or creationism in schools.

It is hypocritical for us to pick and choose the religious liberties that we support. Either the government can propagate religious belief, or it can't.

It is hypocritical for us to pick and choose the religious liberties that we support. Either the government can propagate religious belief, or it can't. It is our responsibility to support the separation of religion and government whether or not we agree with the religious views being offered by the government. In doing so, we leave ourselves with the responsibility of the religious education of our children, and free ourselves from the obligation of government-enforced religious practices.

Adventists should not be fighting to put intelligent design in schools. We should instead be fighting to keep religion in our own hands, and out of the government's.

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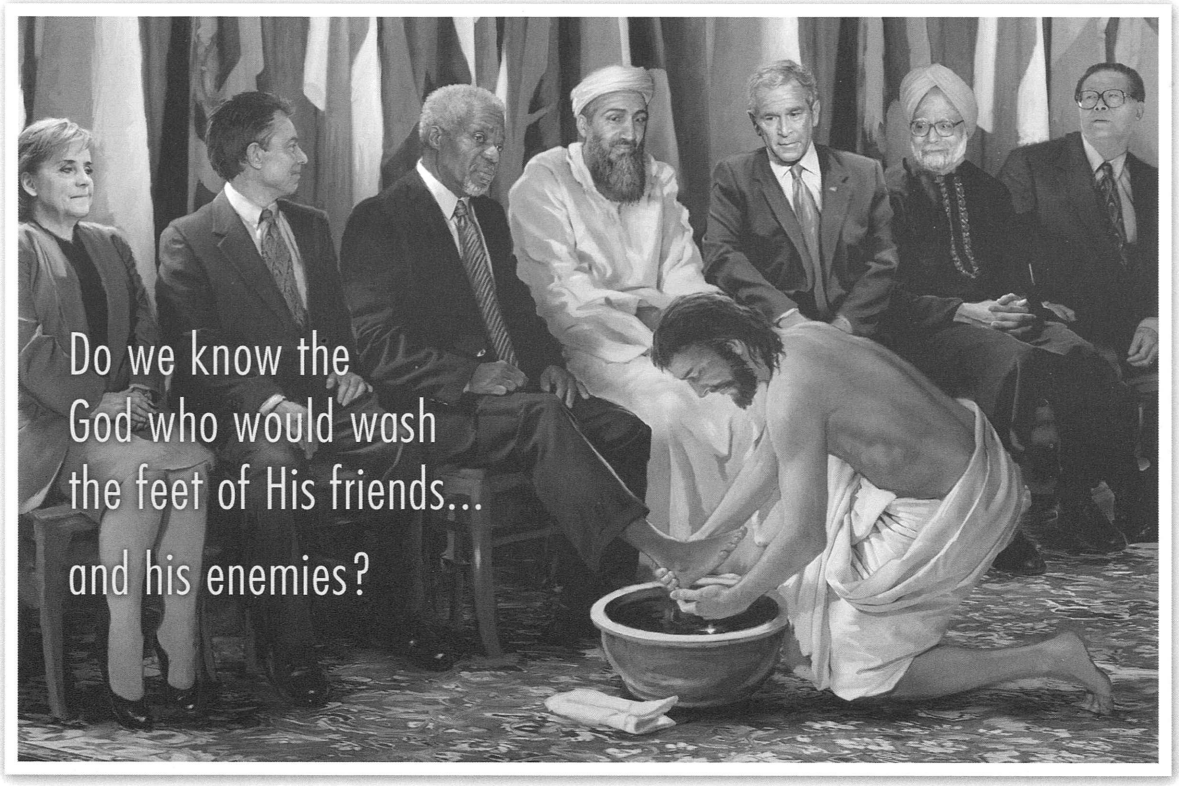
A senior English major at Walla Walla College, Andrew Hoehn is editor in chief of the college's student newspaper, the *Collegian*.

This article first appeared in the January 5, 2006, issue of the Walla Walla College student newspaper, the *Collegian*.

# The Good News Tour 2006 Convention

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You are invited to a historic conference passionately focused on the unfathomable love of God displayed before the universe in the life and character of Jesus. Experience two joyful days of spiritual renewal for your heart and mind.

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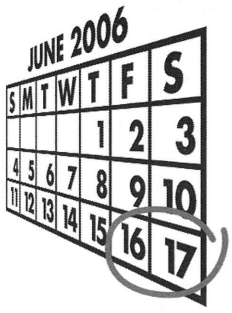
Gifted speakers (left to right) Ty Gibson, Tim Jennings, Marco Belmonte, Manuel Silva, Alden Thompson, and Brad Cole will inspire and challenge you.




A very special value rate package for meals and lodging on the beautiful University of Redlands campus has been arranged. Space is limited so early registration is recommended at

www.goodnewstour.com

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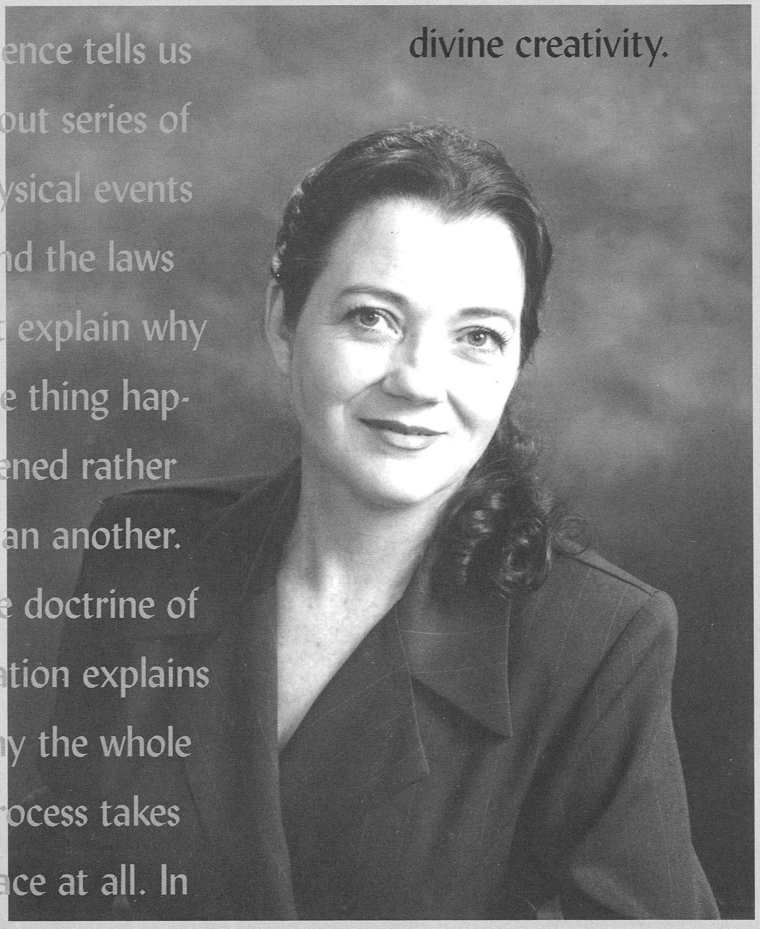
What scripture has to say about the natural world is always said for the purpose of teaching right relations with God and with the community.

Science tells us about series of physical events and the laws that explain why one thing happened rather than another. The doctrine of creation explains why the whole process takes place at all. In addition, it tells us what God's purposes are for it and that it is essentially good.

Evolutionary biology per se does not need God, but theologians interpret the evolutionary process as a manifestation of divine creativity.



Discussed: mind, body, soul, scientific investigation, linguistic resources, philosopher's job, human embryo, Alzheimer's disease, human dignity, Darwin, intelligent design

# Nature's God

## *Nancey Murphy on Religion and Science*

### *By the Editors of the* Christian Century

*With advanced degrees in theology and the philosophy of science, Nancey Murphy has specialized in the relationship between Christian thought and scientific knowledge. Her book* Theology in the Age of Scientific Reasoning *(1990) won the American Academy of Religion award for excellence and a Templeton Prize as an outstanding book in science and theology. Her other books include* Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism *(1996) and (with George F. R. Ellis)* On the Moral Nature of the Universe: Theology, Cosmology, and Ethics *(1996). She has coedited several volumes, including* Whatever Happened to the Soul? Scientific and Theological Portraits of Human Nature *(1998). Ordained in the Church of the Brethren, Murphy has taught at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena since 1989. We talked to her about Darwin, suffering, the soul and the origins of the cosmos.*

**One common way of thinking about the relation of religion and science is to say that these are two different kinds of investigations that talk about different things: science tells us how the world is, religion tells us why it is that way or what it means. Or: science tells us about God. Does this division make sense?**

Separating religion and science into two noninteracting spheres has been a common strategy since the 18th century to avoid conflict between religion and science. While religion (or theology) and science do have different aims and employ different sorts of language, this strategy ultimately fails.

Consider, for example, the issue of human nature. Throughout much of their history Christians have understood humans dualistically as a combination of two parts, body and soul. Developments in the cognitive neurosciences are increasingly making it clear that the brain performs all the functions once attributed to the soul, so the division breaks down. If theologians attempt to maintain the division by saying only things that are immune from scientific investigation (saying, for example, that when we speak of the soul we only mean to emphasize the value or meaning of human life), then theology becomes uninteresting and irrelevant.

**James Gustafson has suggested (in *An Examined Faith*) that theologians can 1) ignore scientific accounts of the world; 2) attack them on the basis of a more authoritative theological perspective; 3) interpret them from a theological perspective; or 4) revise their theology in light of scientific**

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**accounts—or some combination thereof. Can you describe your own vocation in view of such options?**

Attacking science is entirely inappropriate. However, much of what the general population regards as science is not science itself but scientists' interpretations of science. It is very much the business of theologians to take issue with inappropriate interpretations. An obvious example is the claim that because science does not need to invoke God in its explanations this shows that God does not exist

A more subtle issue is the way science draws upon the limited human linguistic resources of the culture in which it develops. Theologians, because they are aware of a long history of cultural-linguistic developments, are sometimes in a position to point out limitations in scientists' assumptions, limitations due to their limited conceptual resources.

For example, modern physics assumes the self-sufficiency of matter. Christians (and people of other faiths) understand matter to be continuously dependent on the sustaining activity of God. In that perspective, which reflects a different concept of the nature of matter, scientific accounts of what happens are essentially incomplete, though valid within their own context.

Both of the above examples are instances of theological reinterpretation of science. Evolutionary biology per se does not need God, but theologians interpret the evolutionary process as a manifestation of divine creativity. Physicists assume the conservation of matter and energy, but theologians interpret this regularity as a manifestation of God's faithfulness.

Theology does sometimes need to be revised in light of science. For example, cosmology, astronomy, geology and evolutionary biology have together called for rejecting the ancient idea of a Golden Age followed by a historic fall that changed the processes of nature.

The options you offer fail to note that both science and theology intersect with philosophy. Because I am a philosopher myself, most of my work is centered here. In fact, the examination of conceptual resources for understanding human nature or for understanding matter and so on is precisely the philosopher's job. Nearly all of the traditional concerns of philosophy have a bearing on theology and science.

My work has focused on epistemology (how is theological knowledge like or different from scientific knowledge?), philosophy of language (do science and theology use the same kind of language?) and ethics (can science support ethical conclusions apart from a doctrine of God?).

**Could you point to any aspect of modern science that has significantly altered your own way of thinking about God, the Christian story or the Christian life?**

A current interest of mine is how a physicalist anthropology (that is, a nondualist account of human being) affects one's understanding of spiritual practices. It has been fascinating for me to realize how much our relationship with God is a bodily affair: kneeling before God, for example, or being moved to tears.

I have also been working on the question of how a physicalist anthropology might affect the whole of systematic theology.

**As you've pointed out, science has made it extremely hard to posit something like the soul that exists independent of the body, or a mind that exists independent of physical processes in the brain. Some would say the dualistic view was never a biblical view to begin with, though it has long been part of Christian tradition. Do you agree?**

I follow New Testament scholar James Dunn in holding that the biblical authors were not interested in cataloguing the metaphysical parts of a human being—body, soul, spirit, mind. Their interest was in relationships. The words that later Christians have translated with Greek philosophical terms and then understood as referring to parts of the self originally were used to designate aspects of human life. For example, *spirit* refers not to an immaterial something but to our capacity to be in relationship with God, to be moved by God's Spirit.

It is widely agreed that the Hebrew Bible presents a holistic account of human nature, somewhat akin to contemporary physicalism. The New Testament authors certainly knew various theories of human nature, including dualism, but it was not their purpose to teach about this issue.

**Soul language is often invoked when people contemplate the status of a human embryo or fetus, or speak about someone with Alzheimer's disease. It's a way of saying: there is something here that goes beyond physical reality and deserves respect. Do you think human dignity can be preserved without invoking soul language or something similar?**

Much of Christian thinking about the preservation of human life takes a strange detour. We know that Jesus taught us to value all people. His ethic is unusual in the specific focus that he puts on two

groups: our enemies and those we consider to be "least of these" (Matt. 25:46). So regarding the most vulnerable of people, we know as Christians that we need to protect them—and then we invoke the concept of the soul to explain why. But why not just say "because Jesus commands it"?

There may have been a reason in the past to invoke the concept of soul for this purpose. In a culture that was not Christian but did accept dualism, soul language could be used apologetically to argue for protection of the vulnerable. The attempt to use it now for ethical arguments in the public arena simply adds another obstacle, since most secular folk do not believe we have souls (and some don't even know what the word is supposed to mean).

**"Because Jesus commands it" is very much an intra-Christian directive, and in that respect it might be said to constitute an obstacle in public argument. In general, do you think Christian ethics should understand itself in a community-oriented way, and not emphasize an "apologetic" dimension in making its claims?**

I follow Stanley Hauerwas very closely here: we have to use the language and warrants specific to our own tradition in order to understand our own moral calling. But this does not mean that those outside the Christian tradition cannot understand what we say and see in our ideals a better way of life.

**One hundred and fifty years after Darwin, his theory of evolution remains contested in American Christianity and in American public life. How do you assess this fact, and how would you respond to parents or educators who want creationism also taught in their schools?**

When I first discovered that there are still Christians who reject evolutionary theory (having grown up in the Catholic school system, I did not encounter this as a child), I thought of it as a harmless expression of ignorance. More recently, though, I've come to see it as tragic. Vast numbers of young people are taught that evolution and Christianity can't both be true. They get a good science education in college, recognize the truth of the evolutionary picture, and then believe that they have to reject their faith.

Another change in perspective for me was to recognize that antievolutionism is not always a product of ignorance, but can be a response to the ways evolutionary theory is taken to sponsor various forms of immorality, social disintegration and so forth. The "immorality" that current antievolutionists have in mind is a rejection of "traditional" family values. I'm not familiar with the arguments, but I believe that they involve claiming that if evolutionary theory is true, then we are nothing but animals.

In addressing parents who want creationism taught in the schools, I would first try to disabuse them of the idea that evolutionary theory is bad science, and then attempt the more subtle task of explaining the differences between a scientific account of origins and a theological account. On this point, the distinction between science and theology we discussed earlier is valid. Science tells us about series of physical events and the laws that explain why one thing happened rather than another. The doctrine of creation explains why the whole process takes place at all. In addition, it tells us what God's purposes are for it and that it is essentially good. The details in the two creation stories are clues about the proper ordering of human life, such as our relation to the other animals.

I leave it to the scientists to get into the details of why ID fails scientifically. The more significant failure is its misunderstanding of divine action.

**The "intelligent design" movement, which points to organisms allegedly so complex they could not have arisen through the process of natural selection, has been part of the recent attack on Darwinism. How do you assess ID? Does it offer a significant critique of evolutionary theory? Does it have any significant theological implications?**

The intelligent-design movement has the unfortunate effect of promoting the view that science and Christian teaching are incompatible. I leave it to the scientists to get into the details of why ID fails scientifically. The more significant failure is its misunderstanding of divine action.

Christians have traditionally understood God to act in

*"My reason nourishes my faith and my faith my reason."*
*—Norman Cousins*

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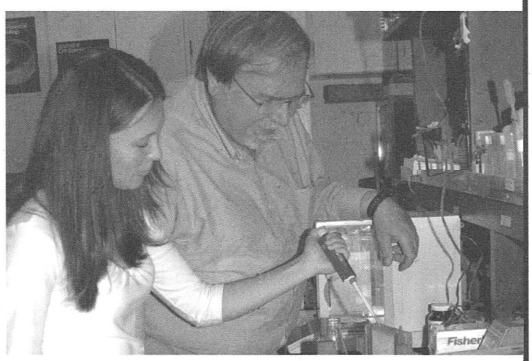


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at least two ways: by performing special acts (special providence, signs, miracles) and by constantly upholding all natural processes. The ID movement assumes that God works only in the first way. Therefore, to show that God has acted, the ID movement believes one has to identify an event in which no natural process is involved. This is their point in trying to argue that particular events in the evolutionary process cannot be explained scientifically.

**The recent criticism of Darwin seems directed at some scientists' inclination to extrapolate from the theory of evolution the conclusion that everything about humans must be shaped by an adaptive, evolutionary logic. Is such a criticism helpful? And is that part of what theology does—critique overblown claims that may emerge from science?**

Theologians certainly have a stake in criticizing overblown claims for evolutionary psychology, but so does everyone else. Sophisticated biologists recognize that culture is at least as significant as biology in shaping human behavior. The assumption that biology is the sole factor shaping human life is one instance of reductionism.

I think of the sciences as forming a hierarchy moving from physics at the bottom, through chemistry, biology, psychology, to the social sciences. Each science studies more complex organizations of matter: atoms, molecules, biochemicals, cells, tissues, organisms, societies. One striking assumption of the modem era has been that all causation is bottom-up—that is, the behavior of the (simpler) parts entirely controls the behavior of the whole. This is true in some systems: a clock is designed so that its behavior is strictly governed by the behavior of its parts. But this is not true of most complex systems; in complex systems the whole has reciprocal effects on its parts.

Humans, at the level of whole organisms, are certainly affected by their biological parts, including their inherited DNA, but the whole organism also has effects on the parts (for example, learning something changes neural connections). In addition, the societies that humans live in have effects on individuals and in turn on their biology.

People with theological interests were in the forefront of the critiques of reductionism, but now scientists of all sorts and philosophers are also equally engaged.

**Recent studies of the cosmos have led to the notion of an "anthropic principle"—the notion that earth seems to have been fine-tuned to produce human life. Tiny changes in the power of gravity,**

**say, or in the weight of neutrons would have rendered life impossible. Is all this theologically significant? Does it add anything to the 18th-century "argument from design," according to which, as the existence of a watch points to the existence of a watchmaker, the existence of a carefully designed world points to the existence of a designer God?**

The apparent fine-tuning certainly raises the question of design, and it may turn out to be a more appropriate place to look for design than in the functionality of organisms and their parts (as in the design arguments of the 18th and 19th centuries) because it does not rely on finding gaps in the order of natural causes. The verdict is still out on whether it provides any evidence for God.

An alternative explanation is provided by the various "multiverse" hypotheses. In an effort to explain the Big Bang, some cosmologists argue that our universe formed somewhat like a bubble out of a vast universe of similar bubbles. If this is the case, each universe could have different fundamental constants. And in that case, eventually there would be one or more universes with the right numbers for life.

Although I have written about using the fine-tuning argument on behalf of a sort of design argument, I'm actually hoping that there is a multiverse. It seems so much more in keeping with our notions of God's power and creativity to think that he would create all possible universes.

**The existence of a multiverse with many universes would seem to raise to a yet higher dimension what we already sense is the lonely place humans have in the cosmos—and the sense that human life is a kind of random occurrence amid God's extravagant creative activity. Do you have that response at all? Does that reality have theological implications for understanding God and God's relation to humans?**

There's a different way to look at it. If we find out that it takes an entire multiverse in order to produce intelligent life, then all the more can we say with the psalmist, "What are humans beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?" Of course, it is only from scripture that we know about our special place in God's purposes; nature could never reveal this.

**What are your goals in teaching people preparing for ministry, who are not going to be professional theologians engaged with science? What do you most want seminarians to know about the relation of religion and science?**

Many of my students will be teachers and pastors in conservative Protestant churches, so I think it is important for them to know that they gain nothing and lose much by putting faith and science in opposition. I also want them to appreciate the way scientific knowledge amplifies our understanding of creation, and thereby our wonder and reverence for God.

Of course, it is only from scripture that we know about our special place in God's purposes; nature could never reveal this.

This point has to be qualified, of course, by recognizing that the natural world is a source of pain as well as beauty. So reflections on nature must always include the problem of suffering.

After the tsunami last year I read accounts reflecting on the likely responses to the event by adherents of different faiths. I was startled to see that all of the responses were anthropomorphic—that is, they asked, "Why would God do this to us?" None reflected an appreciation of the fact that plain old natural processes were the cause.

A current project for me is the problem of suffering—both animal pain and human suffering at the hands of nature. The issue of cosmological fine-tuning is quite relevant to this problem. The laws of nature had to be almost exactly as they are for us to exist, which means that for us to exist nature also had to have the capacity to inflict damage on our bodies.

I would also like seminarians to recognize the apologetic value of a faith that is well informed. It is common to expect pastors to be sophisticated with respect to literature and the arts. Scientific literacy is equally critical. The ability to provide a theological interpretation of science is as important for pastors as it is for academic theologians.

**Are you saying that we couldn't have the physical order we have in this world without also having the level of disorder we have (assuming the tsunami can be properly called "disorder")? Is this another way of saying what the Enlightenment philosophers**

**once maintained—that we live in "the best of all possible worlds"? Granting that the tsunami was caused by proximate causes, not directly by God, isn't God still somewhere behind the proximate causes?**

Yes, geologists can explain why a planet without this recycling of its crust could not support life as we know it. God does not (intentionally) cause tsunamis, but causes there to be a world in which the destruction of life is an unwanted but necessary by-product of the conditions that allow for human life.

**One of the problematic scripture texts for many people living in a world of different religions and worldviews is John 14:6, in which Jesus says, "No one comes to the Father except through me." How would you comment on that text? Does it have relevance to your professional work as a theologian who reflects on science?**

Most of the scholars I know who work on theology and science are either mainline Protestants or Catholics. I belong to the Church of the Brethren, one of the heirs of the Radical Reformation, which puts primary emphasis on doing God's work in this world.

In a book I wrote with George Ellis, an applied mathematician and Quaker activist (*On the Moral Nature of the Universe*), we began with the evidence for cosmological fine-tuning, and then argued that the best explanation for this fine-tuning is not a bare theism but rather a God understood in terms of the self-sacrifice of Jesus. This concept of God is needed to make sense of the fact that Jesus is "the way, the truth, and the life" in the sense that the salvation of the human race (in this eon) is dependent on taking up his all-inclusive, enemy-loving way of life. Only this response will stop the downward spiral of hatred, violence and oppression.

The emphasis on salvation in this life is not to deny the afterlife, but it should turn our focus away from speculation on who does and does not "make it in" at the end.

**Are you suggesting that the natural world in some way reflects, in a demonstrable way, Jesus' self-giving character, which reflects God's self-giving character? Do you mean this in a roughly analogous way? It's hard to know what, say, "enemy loving" looks like in the natural world.**

You could never get directly from the natural world to Jesus' ethic, but in light of Jesus we can look at the natural world and see analogies. One analogy is seen in the view—held by most liberal theologians—that God's action does not violate the laws of nature. Actually, because I don't give "laws" the ontological status that many do, I would speak not of violating the laws of nature but of violating the nature of creatures. God creates beings with their own powers and propensities, and does not violate their basic natures in interacting with them, That restraint by God is analogous to Jesus' self-emptying.

Because that is how God relates to creatures, I would not take the story of God causing Balaam's ass to speak (in Numbers 22) to have any historical content. It is a violation of the nature of a donkey to make it speak.

To take another example: Opponents of Christianity sometimes use the violence of predation to argue either that there is no God or else that God has created an unnecessarily cruel world. Science can tell us, though, that predation is necessary in order for us to be here. Then we can join with the 16th-century Anabaptists in seeing the suffering of beasts of burden and animals of prey as a participation in the drama of God's creation and redemption. This was called "the gospel of all creatures."

**If you were asked to preach a sermon and you could choose any biblical text, which would it be?**

The first thing I would say is, "I don't believe I have a calling to preach, so please ask someone else."

I have in fact hunted for texts that will support a theology-and-science sermon. What I have concluded is that what scripture has to say about the natural world is always said for the purpose of teaching right relations with God and with the community. Nature itself is not of much interest to the biblical writers. So sermons based on such texts may start with some reflections inspired by science, but if they are true to the text they are likely to end up speaking of the worship of God and of justice and of peace with our neighbors. For example, Isaiah writes: "For thus says the Lord, who created the heavens (he is God!), who formed the earth and made it (he established it; he did not create it a chaos, he formed it to be inhabited!): I am the Lord, and there is no other" (45:18). The text offers room to reflect scientifically on God's fashioning (fine tuning) of the universe so that it would be a place to be lived in rather than a formless waste. But the main point, which Isaiah goes on to declare, is this: "There is no other God besides me, a righteous God and savior; there is no one besides me; turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other."

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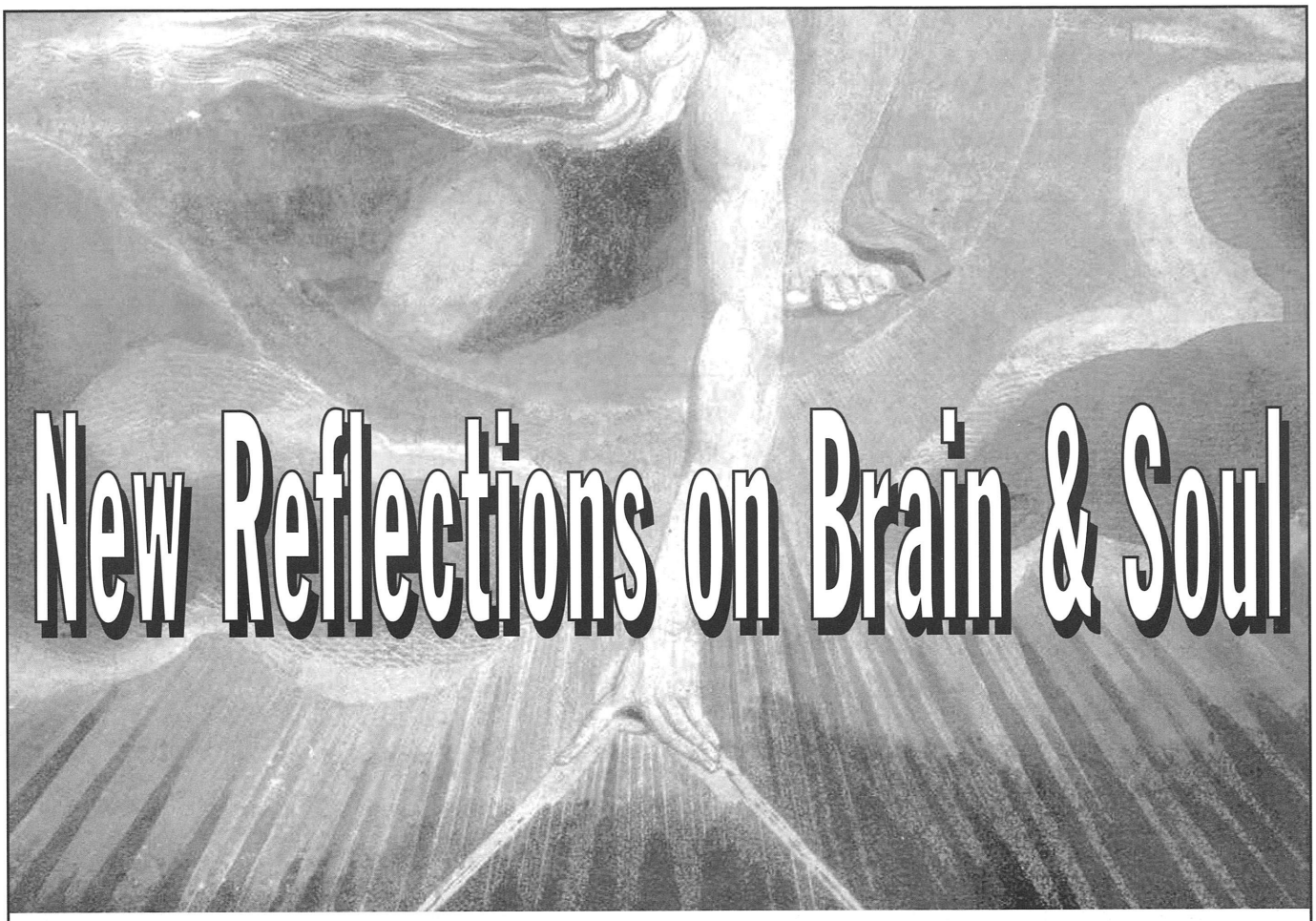


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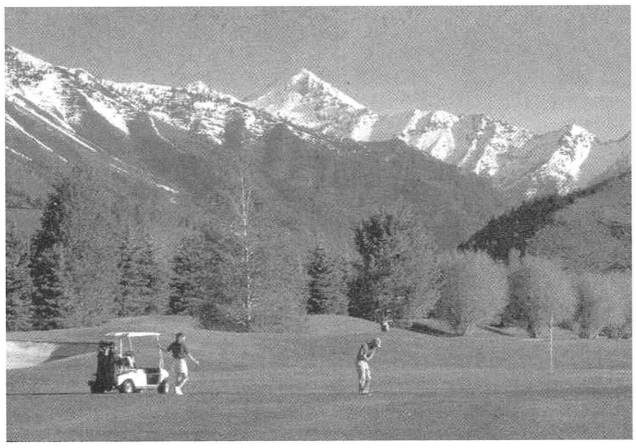

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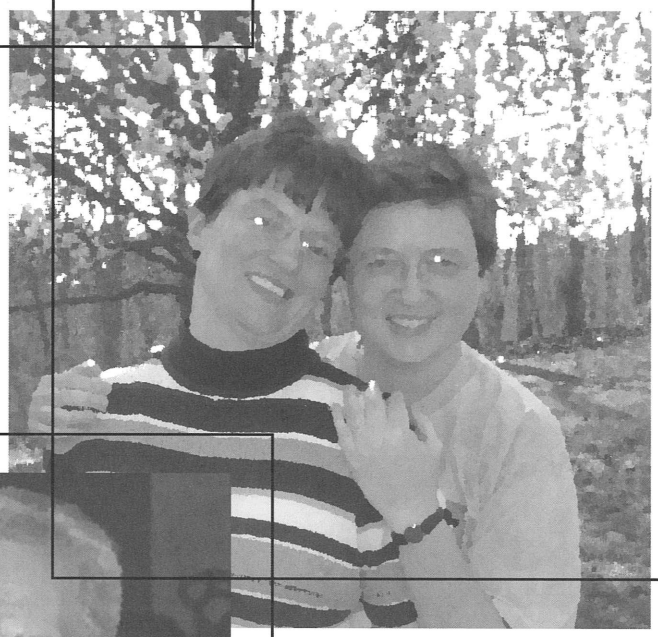

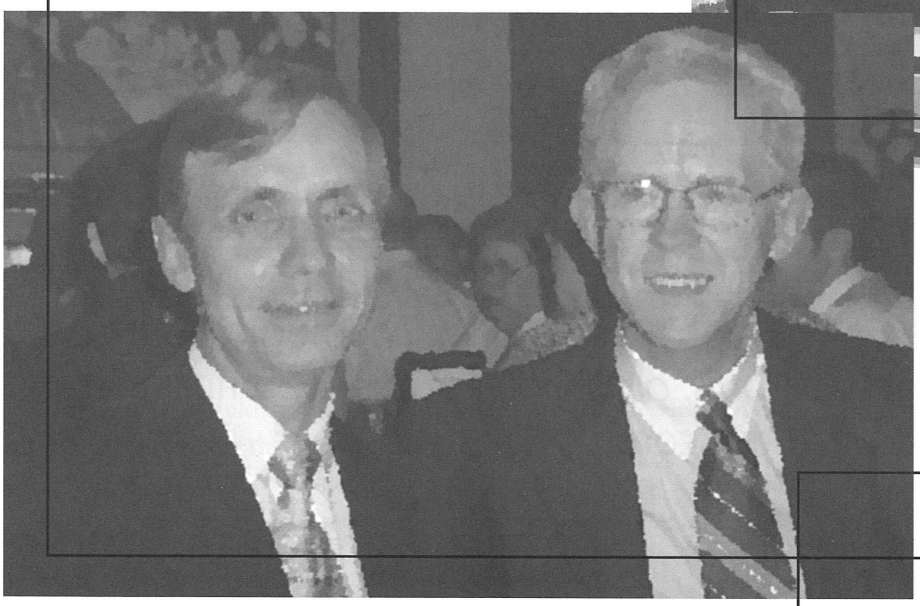

# AND OUT OF THE CLOSET

Discussed: January Workshop, psychiatric issues, pastors, church officials, differences, Kinship Kampmeeting, openness, voices, guidelines, delicious dangers of living out the gospel

# The Ontario Experience

*By Aubyn Fulton*

Something out of the ordinary happened in Ontario, California, over the 2006 Martin Luther King Jr. holiday weekend. It was a workshop held at the Ontario Convention Center (January 12–15), formally titled "Christianity and Homosexuality: SDA Perspectives," but referred to most often in communications I received as the "January Workshop." It is too soon to tell if the workshop will make a lasting change or be seen in retrospect as a watershed of any kind, but I suspect that most who attended felt something special occurred.

The workshop was jointly sponsored by the Association of Adventist Forums and SDA Kinship, but both organizations gave unusual autonomy to the Planning Committee, comprised of David Larson from Loma Linda University; David Fergeson, a businessman from Glendale, California; Fritz Guy from La Sierra University; and Bronwen Larson, a businesswoman from Loma Linda. The planners emphasized that the purpose of the workshop was to publish a book on homosexuality and the Adventist Church.

Although the organizers were clearly interested in including a wide range of perspectives, it seemed that at least part of their intent was to explore how far and in what ways the Seventh-day Adventist Church could be encouraged to take a more loving stance toward its homosexual members. The papers presented at what might otherwise have been seen as something of an academic conference were essentially first drafts of chapters for such a book, with ample (though inevitably not enough) time for feedback and discussion.

The workshop was held in a large room on the second floor of the convention center, with a little more than half the room devoted to tables arranged in a rectangle, and about forty chairs at those tables. Each person at the tables had a card in front of them with their name printed on it. Behind the tables was a second row of chairs more-or-less filled throughout the weekend.

By my rough estimate, attendance peaked on Sabbath at something over eighty, and probably averaged around sixty-five over the entire conference. I was told that each Seventh-day Adventist college or university in the United States except two sent at least one representative. The two exceptions were due to conflicts in time and travel problems, not ideological or institutional objections. In attendance, too, were pastors; officials who worked for the General Conference, North American Division, or important affiliated organizations; and a number of gay and straight lay people with particular expertise and/or interests in the subject.

David Larson gave me the assignment of acting as a discussant for one of the papers. Since this really only meant that I got to make the first series of comments and questions for that paper, I did not feel much of a burden as I approached the workshop, but I was full of curiosity.

I should note that I do not report on this meeting as a neutral observer, believing that the Adventist response to gay and lesbians has for the most part been shameful. I had been to a Kinship Kampmeeting some years before, and had some small idea of what that culture was like, but I had never been to a gathering of more "official" Adventism, which discussed homosexuality openly and with anything other than condescension and censure, if not outright contempt. Just how was this going to work, I wondered?

Each main day of the workshop began with a paper by a gay or lesbian Adventist, or by an Adventist with a close family member who was gay or lesbian. On Sabbath morning, a Southern California pastor told the story of a miraculous outpouring of a powerful spirit of love and community that erupted in one of his churches when the members decided to embrace the differences that so often divide us. These personal stories of pain, rejection, and oppression by the Adventist Church—but also of redemption, grace, and hope—set the tone for the weekend.

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The rest of the papers focused on psychiatric, psychological, sociological, and historical issues, and theological, biblical, pastoral, legal, and ethical perspectives. Each generated lively and productive discussion. It became clear though, that whatever the differences of opinion on the technical issues in the room, all who attended were committed to reducing stories of pain and oppression, and multiplying stories of redemption and hope.

Although, on the one hand, it might seem that we are long overdue for this kind of basic commitment, on the other hand, it was quite thrilling to see so many mainline church leaders genuinely take this stand.

More than one paper referenced Seventh-day Adventist world church president Jan Paulson's 2005 General Conference mention of the "open door" that God has set before us, which ought not be closed to shut others out, and Paulson's call for the Church to be known as a "compassionate family." Two of the implicit themes of the workshop seemed to be how this door could be opened in Adventist churches and how the Church could realize the vision of a compassionate family, from which we have often fallen short, particularly in regard to gay and lesbians, but also in matters related to ethnicity and gender.

Notably lacking in the conference were voices articulating the more traditional condemnation and rejection of

homosexuality—partly because several Church leaders who may have shared these views turned down invitations to attend.

Some thought it was appropriate to have the discussion among more supportive voices, since the alternative was already well known, and the most helpful views were likely to come from those willing to engage personally the people and issues involved. Others argued that the primary commitment to diversity and openness expressed at the workshop—and more practical considerations of the credibility of the proposed book in the mainstream church—required inclusion of more traditional perspectives, as well.

In the end, it was decided that the more traditional voices would be represented, perhaps by inviting some who had chosen not to attend to write responses to specific chapters.

The conference lacked diversity in another way. Although I counted a few African-American, Asian, and Hispanic faces around the table, the overwhelming majority was white. In a church where so much of the growth is in its nonwhite population, and where by most accounts the nonwhite population skews more conservative, it seems that any conversation about homosexuality that hopes to lead to real change will inevitably need to include more nonwhite voices.

The first point in guidelines for the workshop passed out on the opening day was the following statement: "This workshop is not the event." Publication of the book would be the event; the workshop was a means to that end. As the weekend wore on, it occurred to me that even the book itself might not be the event. The ultimate event may be the conversation ignited at the workshop, which publication of the book may very well fan.

As word spreads that Adventists of good will, who may disagree on the technical issues, can talk openly and honestly about how to make real the grace and love of the Kingdom of God—and risk the delicious dangers of living out the gospel—who knows what might happen? Of course, Christians of all ages have managed to find ways to resist the transforming power of the gospel—but every time we get another chance it is exciting.

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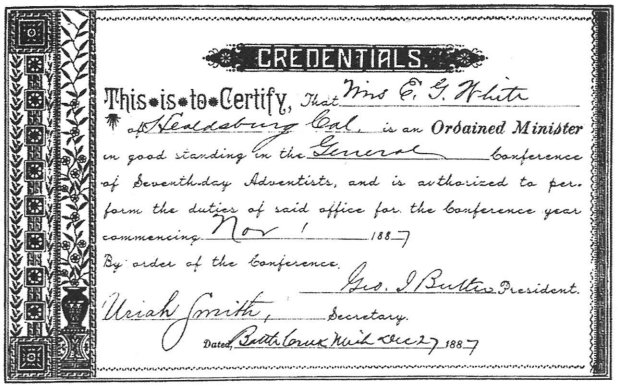
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Discussed: Stephen Haskell, missionary parents, Pakistan, Bible study, prayer, Adventist ideals, *Little Women*, tomboy, sexual abuse, clean start, isolation, loneliness, clarinet practice, absolute truth

# Spinning the Coin of Truth

*By Sherri Babcock*

I need to start with a disclaimer. My story does not come close to the heart-wrenching tales that many homosexual people have. Many young Adventist homosexuals have been thrown out of their homes and estranged from their families, but that is not my story. Both Jill, my partner, and I have been blessed with parents who believe in unconditionally loving their children, and our family is treated no differently than the families of our siblings.

Many Adventist homosexuals have been refused baptism, removed from personal ministry positions, or disfellowshipped, leaving them without a spiritual community. But that is not my story. Jill and I are actively engaged in our local Adventist church.

Many Adventist homosexuals have lost jobs, careers, and the credibility of their entire life work when their orientation has become known, but that is not my story. In our places of employment, Jill and I have been able to be open about our family, and we have experienced very little harassment and discrimination.

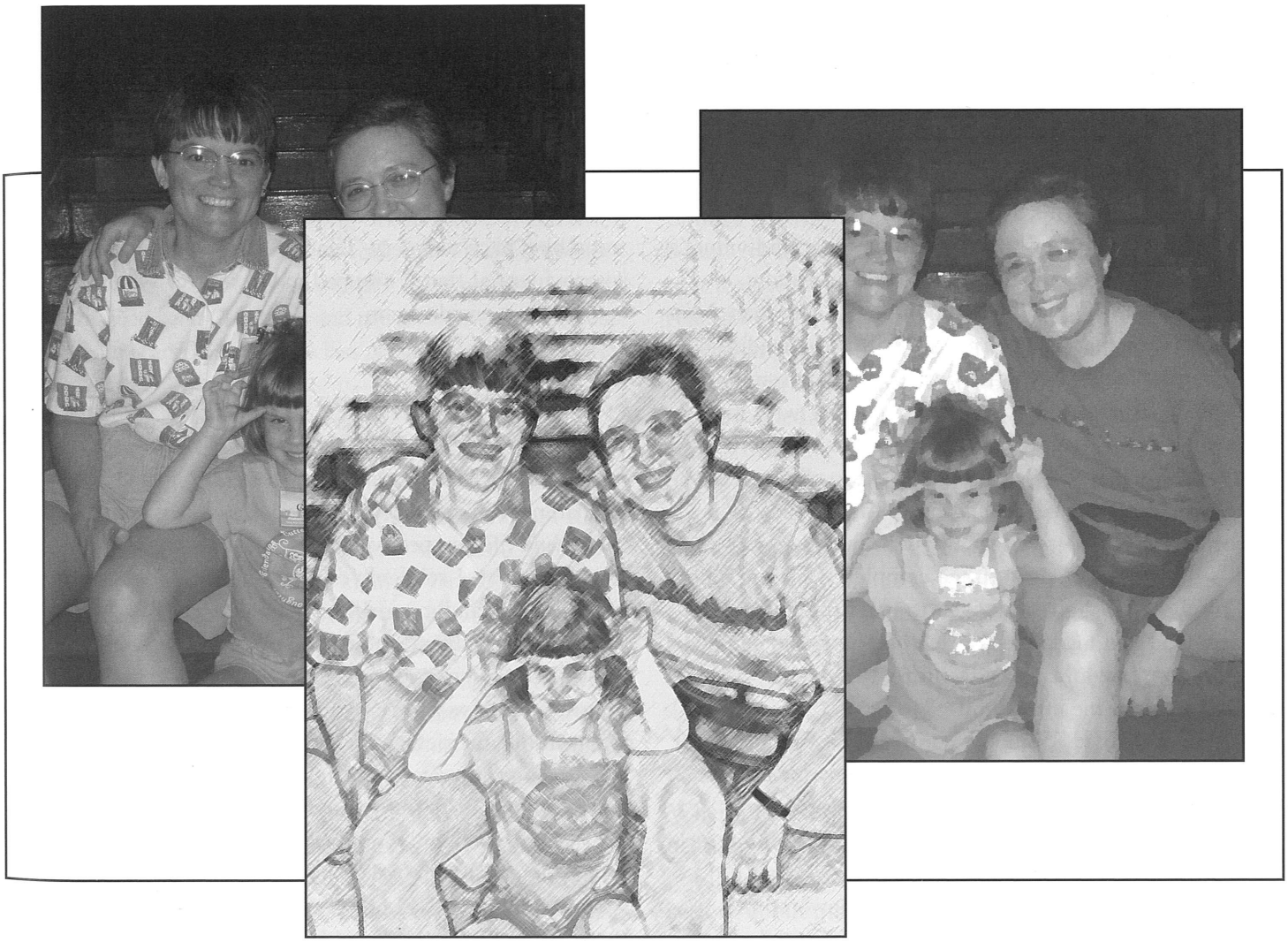
So why listen to my story over the hundreds of others that could be told? Maybe my story needs to be told specifically because it is less heart wrenching. In spite of periods where I have struggled and been in pain, my story provides generous glimpses into what a Christian attitude toward homosexuality might look like.

## Early Years

My story starts within the context provided by my Adventist ancestors. My great-great-grandfather, D. A. Robinson, cofounded Atlantic Union College in 1881 along with Adventist pioneer Stephen Haskell. He later became the first male Adventist missionary to India, following behind nurse Georgia

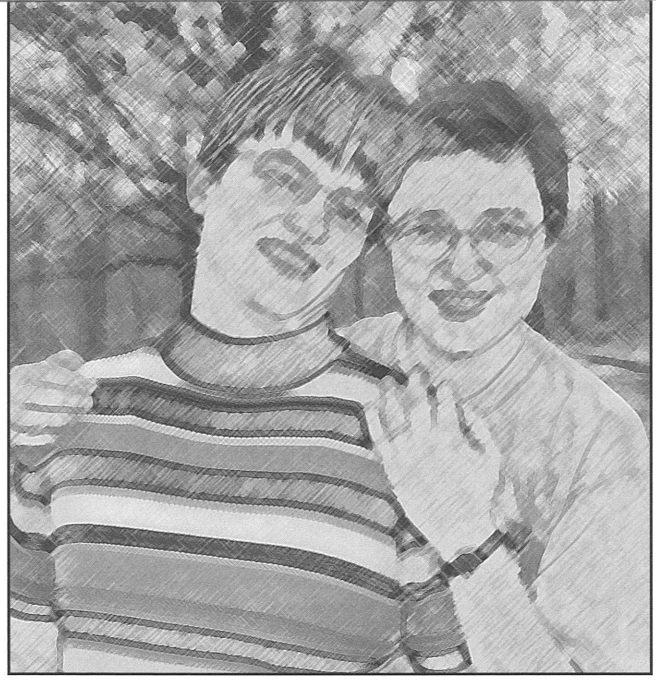
Burrus. My great-grandparents and my grandparents were missionaries to Africa. My parents are both Adventist educators, my father being the current president of Atlantic Union College, and they were missionaries in Pakistan when my conscious childhood memories began.

With this rich family heritage, my childhood was filled with stories of church history, miraculous mission stories, Bible stories, Pathfinder activities, and relationships with student missionaries. I experienced firsthand the thrill, adventure, and responsibility related to serving God and God's remnant church. I assumed that God's plan for my life included attending Seventh-day Adventist schools through college, taking a year off to be a student missionary, getting married, working for the Adventist Church, becoming a fully credentialed missionary, and spreading the "truth" throughout the world so Jesus could return.



In Sabbath School and Bible classes, I was taught both sides of the truth coin. On one side, I learned the importance of "absolute truth": how possession of the truth defined the Seventh-day Adventist Church and qualified it as remnant. I learned the importance of knowing right from wrong, along with what things were right and what things were wrong.

On the other side, I learned about the importance of "present truth": how early Adventists redefined their beliefs through Bible study, prayer, and divine revelation; how they were led by the Holy Spirit to cast their message in the light of what was important for the present day. I was taught that Adventists were expected to study for themselves and know why they believed the way they did. I learned that God held people



accountable only for living up to the amount of light they had been given, and that God took an individual's history, culture, and abilities into consideration.

In the midst of all this traditional Adventism, I was discovering that parts of me did not fit the traditional Adventist ideals. My father was constantly reminding me to "act like a lady." I preferred playing with my brother's cars, trucks, and Legos, rather than with my own dollhouse and Barbies. I wanted to climb trees, excel in school, wrestle, and fight kites, rather than read *Little Women* and learn how to sew.

By the age of eight, I had completely claimed the "Tomboy" label already given to me. I often wondered why God had made me a girl, when boys had so much more fun, freedom, and adventure. I frequently asked God to make me into a boy.

In spite of my tomboy identity, I was flattered when a missionary kid from another town, who was four years older than me, asked me to be his "girlfriend." Little did I know that his idea of having a girlfriend meant having sex. When I realized what he wanted and tried to back out, he overpowered me.

Confused and ashamed, I was afraid to tell my parents, so the sexual abuse continued until he went away to boarding academy two years later. At that point, I segmented my short life and promptly erased my memory of almost everything from the previous two years. I needed a clean start.

As I entered my preteen years and the boys I considered my best friends started to show an interest in dating me, I began to feel that I was someone else living inside a girl's body. That someone else was eventually given the name Sandy Smith. Sandy represented someone totally androgynous (which perfectly described how I felt) and Smith was totally anonymous (not the college president's daughter).

I would spend long hours in the evenings pacing the parapets around our flat-roofed house, talking to God and pretending to be Sandy, someone who was strong and independent and didn't fit a traditional label. Although I couldn't name it, I knew something was wrong with me. The emotional isolation and loneliness were unbearable, and I felt I would never be able to be my true self.

One night, while in the persona of Sandy Smith, I came perilously close to committing suicide by jumping off the parapet. Just as my center of gravity went over the edge of the roof, a college girl, whom I considered to be my adopted big sister, appeared on the sidewalk below. Not wanting to land on her or for her to witness my death, I twisted around, caught the parapet, and scrambled back to safety. That suicide intervention was so providential that it stopped me from ever seriously considering suicide again.

## Teenage Years

My circle of friends expanded in the eighth grade, when my parents returned to the United States. My unique accent and life perspective made me intriguing to the American boys. I suddenly realized that I could date any boy I wanted, and my girlfriends all thought I was crazy for not taking advantage of it. So my first few years in the United States were marked by dating the most sought-after boys and enjoying the attention it brought me from the girlfriends that I had crushes on.

During my junior year in academy, my roommate had a falling-out with her boyfriend of four years. She was heartbroken and would cry herself to sleep every night. One night, she asked me to come down to the bottom bunk and hold her until she fell asleep. During the next week, I would hold her spoon fashion until she drifted off. Then, I would climb back up to my bunk and go to sleep.

The second week, I started to I realize that I didn't want to go back to my bunk. I wanted to shelter her from the pain and be there for her on a more long-term basis. I didn't understand my feelings, but I had a sense that they would get me into trouble. I prayed that the feelings would go away, and I spent a lot of time trying to figure out what was going on with me.

One day, while I was agonizing on the way to clarinet

practice, I silently cried out, "God, what is WRONG with me?" I immediately got my only audible response, as I heard a voice booming through the hallway, "Sherri, you are a homosexual." I spun around to see who had spoken, and if anyone else had heard, but the hall was empty.

I started to cry and ran out of the building screaming "No, God, anything but that! I'd rather die!" After running through the woods and fields around the school for an hour, I ended up on a large rock in the middle of a pond. I was exhausted and still crying as it began to rain.

After regaining my composure, I reminded myself of what I had learned about "absolute truth." Since I was clearly taught that homosexuality was wrong, I decided that this must be my cross to bear. I had to overcome this temptation and allow God to change me. Although I was already the junior class pastorette, I spent even more time leading out in spiritual activities.

I buried myself in schoolwork, and I started to date boys who were not necessarily the most popular, but who were good solid Christians and my close friends. I graduated from academy as senior class president and valedictorian.

## Young Adult Years

During my sophomore year in college, I realized that spontaneous attractions to women were still occurring, in spite of my dedication to change. Dreaded and unbidden, those feelings would pop up at the most startling moments. I was trying everything to bury myself in studies, church activities, and other distractions, but it wasn't enough. Thinking that I must need to dedicate my life to God more deeply, I continued the original life plan and took a year off to be a student missionary.

Although being a student missionary was definitely an enriching, life-changing experience, I realized during that year that even while I was living a life totally dedicated to God's service, my feelings were not changing. In desperation, I came out to my parents and asked for help. Although my parents assured me of their unconditional love and support, they obviously could not make my decisions.

By the end of that year, I started to understand that for some unknown reason, this was not something that God was going to change. In spite of that realization, I still could not accept being a homosexual.

After returning to college, I decided either to live a single, celibate life or to see again if I could fall in love with boys with whom I was friends. I dated sporadically, but the struggle, isolation, and loneliness almost resulted in an emotional breakdown. At that point, I finally threw my salvation on God's mercy and started trying to find another woman to develop a relationship with. I had to find out if I really was a homosexual. If I were, I figured I could be of more use to God as a "less-than-perfect" woman than as an insane one.

By mid-year, I had discovered my first love. The comfort level and lack of emotional angst that I felt when with her were liberating. I experienced for the first time being totally myself. I felt whole and realized that several facets of my life had finally become integrated. Along with this wonderful new experience came the constant fear of being publicly exposed and getting kicked out of school.

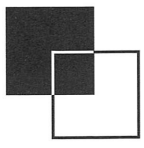
At the end of the year, I transferred to Walla Walla College to finish my engineering degree. It soon became clear that the distance and social pressures to "get married and have children" were more than our relationship could bear. Heartbroken, I started to date men again, but I felt that I was lying to them at best and driving myself insane at worst.

I worried that if I got married, I would ultimately end up breaking a good man's heart and ruining both of our lives. I got severely depressed and decided to drop out of school, even though I had only one quarter left and I had just been selected Outstanding Engineering Student of the Year. I needed to find out who I was and locate people with whom I could be myself. I decided to go to San Francisco and start a new life.

## Coming Out and Healing Years

When I called my educator parents to tell them of my decision, they were adamantly against the idea of me not finishing my degree. On discovering that I was serious about pursuing such a disastrous course, they promised to find me a contact number for SDA Kinship if I would promise to stay in school and graduate.

I gave them my promise and contacted Kinship the week before spring break, asking if I could meet some of its women members in southern California during the break. They not only welcomed my impromptu visit, but let me stay in their homes, took me out to eat,



spent long hours sharing their own life stories, and introduced me to the gay and lesbian community.

One night after telling them my life story, I asked, "But, how can God love me if I am a homosexual?"

Marge didn't miss a beat. She said, "Sherri, if someone had just told you their life story, and it was similar to the one you have just told us, would you be judgmental or offer them your love and understanding?"

I replied, "I'd understand, of course, I know the struggle they've been going through."

Then Marge looked me right in the eye and said, "Sherri, do you honestly believe that you are more loving than God?" At that moment, I realized that God's grace was big enough to love me, even if I had turned out to be a lesbian.

On the long drive back to school, I processed everything I had learned and the people I had met in California. I realized that, like any community, the gay and lesbian contains both healthy and unhealthy people, activities, and social scenes. I determined to sift out the bad and keep the good. I was finally ready to start looking at the other side of the truth coin: to study and find out what my "present truth" was, and why I believed it.

"Sherri, do you honestly believe that you are more loving than God?"

During my final quarter at Walla Walla, I connected with more Kinship members and the local gay community. Out of loneliness, I quickly fell into a mismatched relationship with an Adventist woman, and then stayed in it out of a sense of obligation. She then moved to Ohio with me after I graduated and both of us got jobs at Worthington Foods.

Living with her, I soon discovered that she was definitely not my type of Adventist. She didn't like to attend church, and she drank, smoked, and liked to go to bars regularly. During our two-year relationship, we attended church only sporadically, and I discovered that our relationship frequently cut me off from my hobbies, interests, and support networks.

Since we worked different shifts, I frequently had free time, but she jealously forbade me to go out with friends. As a result, I spent a good part of those two years cross-stitching, serving on the SDA Kinship Board, and continuing my study of the Bible references used against homosexuality. I learned to understand the context and original language translations. I finally came to believe that God expected me to live my life according to biblical ideals, but within the context of my sexual orientation.

When our relationship fell apart, I started processing the childhood sexual abuse. As I let my inner child tell her story, I relived the experiences mentally and emotionally. For several months, it was all I could do to keep going to work every day. Many areas of my life went on hold as I dealt with this new crisis. Through counseling and education, I learned how to nurture and protect my inner child. I joined a twelve-step program for abuse survivors and gained healing from sharing stories with others.

As I became more open about both the abuse and my sexuality, I discovered that many people tried to link these two aspects of my life in a cause-and-effect relationship. It became frustrating for me to explain repeatedly that sexual abuse does not necessarily affect sexual orientation, as evidenced by the multitudes of straight women who survive abuse. I eventually realized that people who need a reason for homosexuality will find one regardless of its relevance. As for myself, I believe I would have been a lesbian with or without a history of sexual abuse.

As my healing progressed, I entered a handful of brief relationships. Although some of those lasted a couple months, most never got past the initial dating stage. I discovered that I didn't trust my own emotions and judgment. Even though I wanted someone to share my life with, I was not emotionally ready. So I chose to be celibate for one year. I took that year to rediscover who I was as a person, to broaden my base of friends, and to develop a basic comfort level with myself.

## Growth and Family Years

Halfway through my year of celibacy, I met Jill through mutual friends at a gay-friendly ecumenical church. She respected my celibacy commitment, and we started a slow-moving friendship that eventually transitioned to dating. Early on, I invited Jill to visit the Adventist church, and she readily accepted.

The first Sabbath I took her to church, I could tell it

was not going to be a normal service. The chairs were arranged in a circle two rows deep. We selected some chairs on the second row on the right side and the service started. I soon discovered that the guest speaker was the assistant to the president of the General Conference. I was familiar with him, since I had worked at the General Conference several summers during college.

I remembered my parents mentioning that the appearance of my picture and name in Kinship's *Connection* had recently caused quite a stir over the General Conference grapevine. However, since I had never worked closely with him and had not even seen him in several years, I doubted he would remember me by sight.

As the sermon started, he settled into several stories of how the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Russia was growing by leaps and bounds. He was a virtual encyclopedia of miraculous opened doors and opportunities to spread the gospel. In the middle of this grandiose presentation, he suddenly remembered who I was, stopped talking about Russia in mid-thought, walked over to stand in front of Jill and me, and launched into a diatribe about the evils of homosexuality

I was shocked and humiliated. How could this happen the first time that I brought Jill to my beloved church? I don't know how long it continued, but at some point, he turned around and continued his sermon on Russia as though he had never stopped. On the way home, I stumbled all over myself apologizing to Jill.

In spite of that introductory experience, Jill agreed to attend church with me again. As our relationship deepened, I struggled with the idea of being "unequally yoked" with a non-Adventist. But God pointed out with some humor that being yoked with a spiritually equal Methodist was a whole lot better than being yoked with a spiritually unequal Adventist! So, after my year of celibacy was over, I asked Jill to enter into a long-term relationship with me.

We solidified our relationship two years later at a Celebration of Covenant, held at a local metropolitan park. We decided to tap into an old Quaker tradition and selected six couples to serve as our sponsors. Our sponsors were people with experience who could mentor us in relationship building. We were both incredibly blessed to have our parents serving as two of those six couples. The wedding weekend was perfect, and more than eighty friends and family members from across the country attended. As a helicopter whisked us away from the reception, I knew that I had never been happier in my life.

About three years after our wedding, Jill let me know that she really wanted to have a child. I, on the other hand, was quite content with our life and didn't even want to imagine the challenges presented to gay parents. Because of my reluctance, our discussions about parenting continued for another two years. When I finally realized how deeply ingrained her feelings were, I agreed to coparent. We selected a donor that the child would be able to meet at the age of eighteen, and Jill got pregnant on the first try.

Grace was born on her due date exactly nine months later. We chose the name *Grace* not only because it was the name of my great-grandmother, but also because we had recently finished reading *What's So Amazing about Grace?* by Philip Yancy. We felt that this little gift of a baby perfectly symbolized the undeserved and unexpected ways that God moved in our lives.

It didn't take me long to fall in love. As I learned to care for this little girl, I began to get surprising insights into the meaning behind biblical parenting metaphors for God. My spiritual relationship was incredibly enriched by becoming a parent myself. I became more loving toward those around me as I experienced the fragility and worth of such a tiny human life. As Grace gets older, I am continually challenged to find new and creative ways to explain God and how God works in the world. I am constantly amazed at the strength of her childlike faith and her own uncomplicated relationship with God.

Shortly before Grace was born, my twelve years of

employment with Worthington Foods came to an end. Due to the acquisition by Kellogg, my plant engineer position overseeing the Worthington and Zanesville facilities was eliminated. Kellogg generously offered me the only available engineering manager position—a transfer to their headquarters in Battle Creek, Michigan.

After interviewing with my new employer, I realized that Kellogg required seventy to eighty hours of work each week, mandatory committee meetings on Sabbath, and three weeks of travel every month. So, after much prayer, I declined the transfer offer and decided to start my own consulting practice in the Columbus area. It was a huge leap of faith to go from a regular paycheck to what turned out to be very little income for the next nine months.

Just as Jill's maternity leave came to an end, I finally landed a long-term project management contract. The work was steady enough, so Jill was able to make the choice to stay home and parent Grace on a full-time basis. For five years, we have received extremely good care. Now that contract is ending, and the future is again unclear as I approach the birth of our second child. However, if there is one thing I learned from my previous experience, it is that God's timing is far superior to anything I might plan, even if I did have complete foreknowledge.

## Church Involvement

During the first eight years of our relationship, Jill and I attended an assortment of churches in the Columbus area: a couple different Seventh-day Adventist churches, Spirit of the Rivers Ecumenical Church, and the First Baptist Church, where we learned about social justice, built a Habitat for Humanity House, and had our daughter, Grace, dedicated.

Shortly after Grace's dedication, we decided to attend another Seventh-day Adventist Church because of the wonderful children's program and because I deeply missed worshipping on Sabbath. Although we have never officially joined the church, we have been attending there for five years now.

We try to attend church quietly, avoid confrontations, and testify to God's working in our lives as a family. We are constantly amazed by the grace, love, and acceptance we have received from many of the members. The other parents in cradle roll and kindergarten treat us as a family. The church school staff has approached Jill and me to encourage us to send Grace to their school.

Jill is expecting our second child in April, and some of the church members are already asking if they can host a baby shower for us. I recently accepted an invitation to serve as the chair of the Church Facilities Committee.

In spite of the many wonderful relationships we have at church, we often feel that we have still not found our true spiritual home. We still feel the need to keep our opinions and spiritual insights to ourselves during Sabbath School discussions. We still occasionally endure Sabbath School diatribes from a few members against the evils and threats to Christianity that homosexuals, homosexual marriages, and homosexual families pose. And we keep waiting for some vigilante to decide that it's time to "clean house" and get rid of us.

Maybe our true spiritual home cannot be experienced this side of heaven, but we occasionally get glimpses of the promise that keeps us seeking new ways to nurture our relationship with God. We feel blessed by the members who present a more loving Christlike approach, and that our relationship includes being a part of a church family.

## Conclusion

Although my story is far from finished, I currently find myself using both sides of the truth coin to provide guidance in my life. Instead of focusing on one side at a time, I am learning to spin it on its edge.

On one hand, I am constantly trying to identify and distinguish right from wrong, sift out the bad, and cling to the good. On the other side, the varied church communities that we have been involved with have expanded my definition of God's church, God's work, and God's people.

I now understand "truth" as concepts, metaphors, and guiding principles instead of black-and-white commands and literal stories. I have discovered that truth, understood in this way, is immediately applicable to my daily life, and it calls me to greater commitment, greater faith, and greater action.

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**Sherri Babcock has enjoyed a loving, stable relationship with her partner, Jill Babcock, for more than thirteen years. They live in a suburb of Columbus, Ohio, with their five-year-old daughter, Grace.**

Discussed: Kenya, Uganda, right choices, sense of humor, loneliness, biblical integrity, praying, fasting, no-win situation, wrong prayer

# A Pastor's Story

*By Leif Lind*

I worked as a pastor and a missionary for the Seventh-day Adventist Church for twenty years, on three continents. I am the father of two grown-up children who, like me, have lived and worked in several different cultures and countries.

I am gay.

It took me years before I could say the word, even to myself. As a pastor and a married man, I struggled for years in a private hell from which there seemed no escape. As a minister, I felt I had no one to turn to, and, as far as I knew at the time, I was all alone in a frightening and traumatic dilemma.

## Third Culture Kid...and Gay

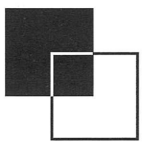
But I'm getting ahead of myself. My growing-up years were basically very happy ones. I came from a loving, two-parent family, and my parents were proud of me. I grew up essentially as a single child, as my two sisters were out of the home by the time I arrived. My parents being Norwegian missionaries in Kenya and Uganda (where I was born), I had wonderful opportunities for experiences that only travel can bring.

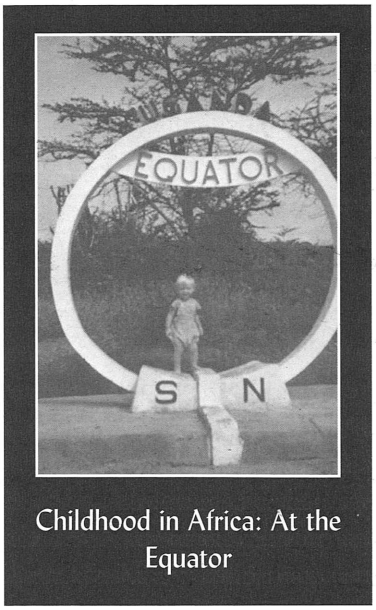
Growing up and going to school in eight different countries, although disconcerting at times, was largely a beneficial experience. My father served in numerous church leadership positions —from mission director to division president— and was a legend in his day.

I was considered a "good" Seventh-day Adventist kid growing up, and my classmates generally liked me. I was straight looking enough that I did not attract the negative attention that sometimes torments gay youths as they grow up. My childhood asthma also provided a convenient excuse for me not to participate in some of the more active school sports, which I did not particularly enjoy and at which I did not excel.

During my adolescence, no one talked much about gays—the word was not even commonly used then. I grew up in remote mission fields in a conservative family in which the topic of sex itself was never discussed. In retrospect, I now realize I can hardly blame myself for being so late in discovering (or admitting) my sexual identity.

I also understand how the mind can play





Childhood in Africa: At the Equator

strange tricks in an attempt to deny the obvious—especially when acceptance is too painful or incongruous with one's belief system. I knew I couldn't be like those strange homosexuals, with their outlandish behavior and costumes I occasionally read about in the media. That simply wasn't me. (It still isn't!)

So how old was I when I first understood who I was? I don't really know for sure. Looking back today, I realize from early childhood impressions that I considered men attractive long before I had the vaguest notion of sex. But generally for me, it was a gradual, sickening awakening to the fact that I simply wasn't the same as others.

In college, I know some of my friends were concerned about me for not having "enough" girlfriends, or at least not showing enough interest in the one or two that I did have. Again, I assumed I was "doing the right thing" by asking out a girl or two or going steady with them; I was probably unable to distinguish between simple friendship and genuine inner bonding.

What I did understand at some level, though perhaps I did not know why, was that I had a tremendous need for male bonding. Whether intentional or not, it turned out that all of my close male friends were straight. Perhaps this was simply an unconscious attempt to play it safe with feelings I still couldn't understand.

## To Everything There Is a Season

Before I knew it, my high-school and college years had passed. Hindsight often distorts or changes one's outlook, and it can be hard to remember exactly what one was thinking at the time. I don't believe I knew or fully understood who I was when I made the decision to marry.

I worked at that time as a pastor in Norway while corresponding with my fiancée in Canada. What did I really expect? Perhaps I just hoped everything would turn out all right after getting married. In any case, I was once again making the "right choices" in life.

This quest for doing right (even perfection) is, of course, commonly held within Adventism. I believe it is also common among gays and lesbians, who may try to overcompensate for their perceived inadequacies by showing their church and families that they can be successful, or "make good" in life.

Concerning marriage, I asked myself, Didn't almost every man get married? Despite my sense of humor, I have always taken life seriously. I had never engaged in premarital sex—straight or gay. I had high ideals for marriage (I still do), and wanted to make a happy home for my wife and children. The option of not marrying simply did not occur to me.

Even Paul himself said it was better to "marry than to burn" (1 Cor. 7:9), although some of his ideas on marriage are hardly considered the norm. Scripture also says it is "not good that man should be alone" (Gen. 2:18), a text I consider as relevant today as when it was written.

So my fiancée and I married, and I continued to deny the inevitable. My conservative church upbringing did not prepare me to accept the overwhelming sense of devastation and loneliness I faced when I finally admitted a mental attraction to men that no amount of my praying or fasting would change. Yes, I believed God could do anything, but for some reason, it seemed, he was not answering my pleas.

## Return to the Birth Country

The years passed—by and large, happily. We experienced both joys and challenges raising a family in the mission field, where we had been transferred. Some nights I would wake up in a sweat, having dreamt (as a conscientious Adventist!) that I was in a courtroom scene at "the time of the end."

In my dream, somebody asked me if I was gay, and I argued with myself about whether or not to tell a lie. (Yes, I am a poor actor, despite having desperately put on the biggest show for years!) If I admitted that I was gay, I would discredit my faith and the church I loved; if I told a lie, I would be eternally damned. It was a no-win situation.

Sometimes I would dream of being eternally lost for having same-sex desires that I couldn't even explain. Then I would beg God again to forgive me for being what I was. Years passed before I discovered that I was praying the wrong prayer.

Quite apart from the sheer terror of facing my orientation head-on was the overriding concern I had for biblical integrity. For me, this was paramount. How could I possibly understand the handful of scriptural references to homosexuality without seeing in them an outright condemnation of my very being?

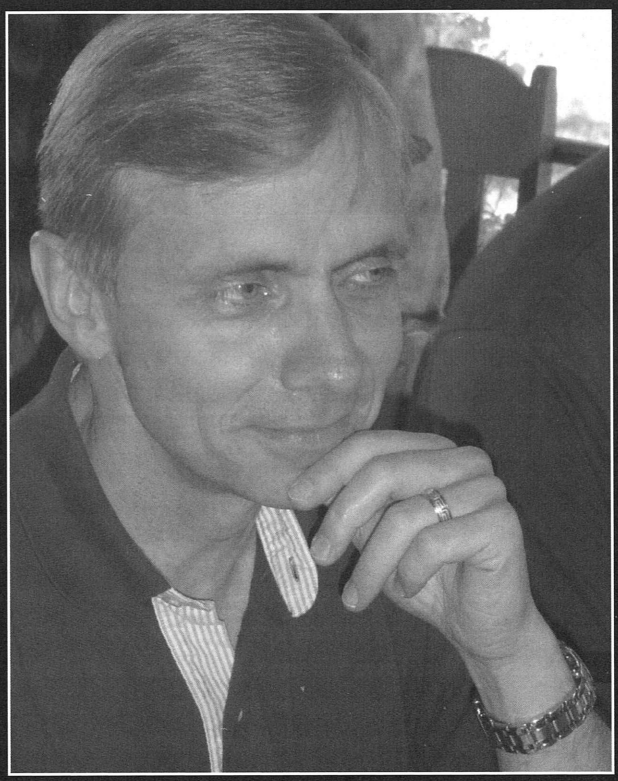
Well-meaning relatives later warned me about God's judgment and the danger that I might rationalize away Scripture. How could I disagree? Rationalizing can be a danger for anyone, even the accuser. I was probably more aware of that peril than they realized. But I also knew that growth in understanding can be painful for anyone—straight or gay—and that many are unwilling to look honestly at all aspects of the question.

As Adventists, we all know the so-called problem texts relating to the Sabbath and the state of the dead—yes, on almost any subject—texts that on first reading seem to say one thing, but that we know after careful study say something entirely different.

Part of the reason for this difficulty in understanding is that the Bible's authors wrote in a culture, time, and language foreign to today's world. We strive to understand the principles involved and learn what the writer has tried to tell us. With prayer and careful study we as church members are encouraged to tackle any biblical subject. Why should we treat the topic of homosexuality any differently?

And so I avidly, in secret, studied Scripture and read books on the subject, sometimes disagreeing with both the "traditional" (conservative) and "progressive" (liberal) viewpoints. I had to know in my own mind what I believed and why. Years later, I prepared a thirty-five-page biblical study for myself, summarizing my own understanding on the subject.

Growing up in East Africa



The author

## Gay...and Adventist?

In the early 1980s, the concept of the existence of other gay Adventists first dawned on me after I read a special issue on the topic in *Spectrum*. I read and reread the experiences of other gay church members, hardly daring to believe their stories. It still seemed too remote for me; North America was a world away.

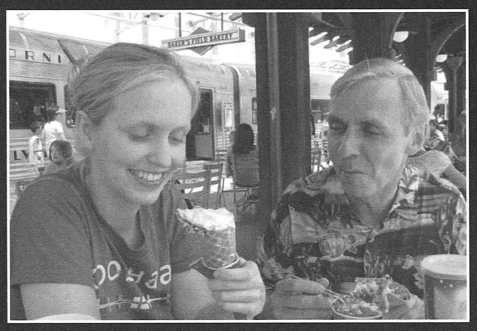
The same issue (as well as an earlier one of *Ministry Magazine*) presented the sad saga of Colin Cook. Former-pastor-turned-counselor Cook, himself a "former" homosexual, claimed the ability to provide counseling to church members struggling to become straight. Although the Church promoted his program as "the answer to homosexuality," I remember being extremely skeptical of his claims at the time and thinking, Either this man was never really gay or he is simply not being honest. Time revealed the danger of his claims after repeated charges and evidence of his sexual abuse of male clients.

## Going to America

In 1990, after eight years in the mission field, we returned to North America. My wife's health was not good after repeated bouts with malaria, and we felt it was time for the children to attend church school after having been home schooled for years. We gladly accepted a call to pastor two churches, and for several years we put down new roots, with our children attending local church school and my wife taking nursing studies.

The pressure inside me mounted, however. I began to realize that continually living in fear was draining an enormous amount of energy while I was trying to deny an essential part of my core being.

## Out of the Closet



Leif enjoying a lighter moment with his daughter

I will never forget the day I finally decided to come out to my wife of almost twenty years. True to form, I had planned months ahead. I had compiled a list of books, tapes, Web sites, and personal phone numbers to help her cope with what I knew would be a traumatic event for her. I would wait until a week after she had graduated from nursing school so that the news would not affect her studies. I planned to tell our two teenagers a few days later.

This was without doubt the hardest thing I have ever done. I was literally sick to my stomach for months beforehand. I kept arguing with myself that I really had no reason to tell her anything. I even got melodramatic, telling myself it would be better for me to die alone with the secret I held. I wasn't even "living the gay lifestyle." But I also knew it was time to be honest; I was living a lie. Although our married life appeared normal, I was experiencing mental torment in an effort to conceal inner longings that my wife could never meet.

I also knew that, at some level, my wife knew all was not well, and that she was hurting. "I sense there's a barrier between us," she said on a couple occasions. I just scoffed at her words, terrified that she might guess the truth. I knew what she meant, but I sensed she didn't really understand.

On Friday, February 2, 1996, with our teenagers away on a church campout, I finally told her about the real me. Knowing my tendency to joke, she didn't believe me at first. When it finally hit home, we both sobbed on each others' shoulders for what seemed an eternity. We talked until the early hours of the morning, and then again for most of the next day.

For her, it was the beginning of a nightmare; for me, the weight of the world had been lifted off my shoulders. To her credit, never once (then or since) has she blamed me for being gay, nor has she tried to convince me to change my orientation. Her disappointment in my years of deception was to be expected. Still, we were, at least for several weeks afterward, probably closer than we had ever been before.

In my own planned way, I knew full well what the consequences could be. I knew that our marriage, like the overwhelming majority of "mixed marriages," would probably break up. (This is something we both eventually agreed on, as we worked through anger issues, a normal part of any grieving process.) I knew it would be difficult for our children to accept, although they, too, have been amazingly understanding about the gay issue—far more than I had expected. By their admission, the breakup of the marriage was hardest on them.

## After Coming Out: Facing the Conference and the Future

News of our story did not break for several months after my coming out. All that had changed in my life was that my family now knew who I was. During this whole time, I fully understood that I would probably lose not only my pastoral job, but also my career. I knew the difficulties unemployed pastors face, particularly because they have usually not been trained for other occupations.

Confronting this at midlife would not make things easy. How would I continue to take care of my family?

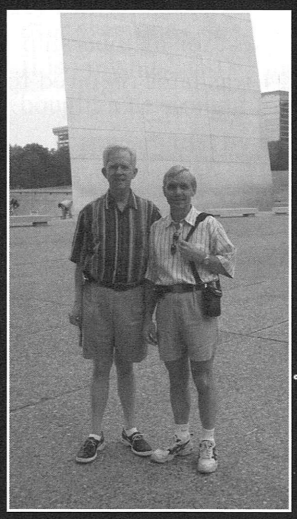
What about medical coverage for myself and other family members? What about losing retirement benefits? Would unemployment insurance—assuming I got it—cover me long enough to finish retraining? It was, for me, a frightening scenario.

I had hoped that our family would shortly be able to move and make a graceful transition to nondenominational employment elsewhere, but this did not happen. Understandably enough, my wife needed to talk to others about our crisis, and although she tried to be careful about the people to whom she spoke, one shocked church member felt it their duty to report me immediately to the conference.

With partner Taylor, right, daughter and her friend at church

When the conference finally found out, I was given what I can only describe as an ultimatum: immediate resignation without the usual severance pay, despite twenty years of church service with a clean record. The ministerial director of the conference, a pastor who had repeatedly insisted that we think of him as our "buddy" rather than merely our boss, never once sought to talk with my wife or me once he knew I was gay. It was as if I had ceased to exist.

Now, most people would describe me as fairly easy-going and agreeable. Those who know me well understand that I can be also quite determined, and I considered the ultimatum of "immediate resignation without severance" unfair. I did not feel like being a doormat.



Leif and partner at the General Conference Session in 2005

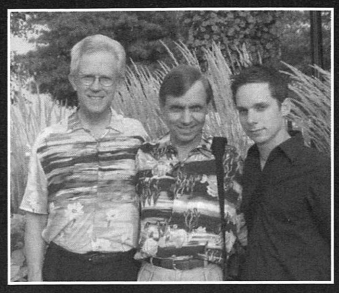
Not only did the conference's ultimatum go contrary to local government law, it also violated denominational policy. In a phone conversation, the conference president at that time appeared sympathetic, saying that he understood how I could see my treatment as unfair. He also agreed that had the issue been anything other than homosexuality, the decision would probably have been different.

The conference leaders summoned me to appear before them. I showed up, but I did not inform them that I would attend with someone they knew very well: an attorney previously terminated from denominational service for being gay. Although this approach was foreign to me, I felt trapped and was afraid.

I will never forget the expressions on some of the faces the moment we appeared together in the conference committee room. It was a Kodak moment, had I only brought in a camera! On being questioned, I assured them that the attorney was there only as "a friend." Although he said almost nothing during the meeting, I had made my point, and we reached a considerably happier compromise than would have otherwise been possible. One could only wish that the perceived threat of legal action had not been necessary to achieve this result.

I remained unemployed for about two years, retraining while looking for work. During that period, I received unemployment insurance for as long as I was eligible because the government believed my version of the story: that the conference had fired me rather than that I had resigned, as my termination letter from the conference had guardedly stated (for obvious reasons). The conference president even went so far as to inform me verbally that the denomination might still employ me "if"—and he said it was a big "if"—I were to remain celibate and "if" I could find a local church willing to accept me as a pastor on those terms.

I will never know whether or not he was serious, but he undoubtedly knew that the Church needed to



Leif with his son and partner in Annapolis

be cautious for legal reasons, and he was perhaps uneasy about the steps I might take. He need not have been concerned.

I was then on my own. The family had separated, my wife relocating thousands of miles away and the children, aged fifteen and seventeen years, going off to church boarding schools. I felt, as I know they did, that the world had fallen apart. I moved a few miles away and started to attend a local Adventist church, where the pastor and his members accepted me warmly, and I was even permitted to teach the adult Sabbath School class regularly.

I found a two-bedroom apartment in town, where I could share the rent with another man. For this, the new conference president criticized me. In my response to a letter from him, I wrote in August 1997:

> If someone who wishes to judge me for my rooming situation would be willing to help pay my rent for a one-bedroom apartment instead, I would gratefully accept such an offer. Since I don't realistically expect such assistance, I don't believe anyone else has much to say either. Would it be better if I chose to share a two-bedroom apartment with a female roommate? This is part of the Catch-22 situation we often find ourselves in: we are censured by others, regardless of the company we keep.

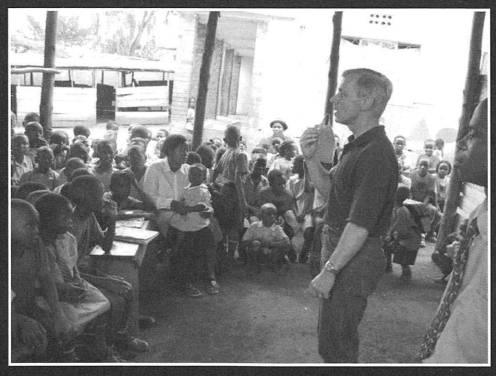
Furthermore, I expressed my desire to remain a church member:

> I personally feel the call and the fulfillment from working within the Church's mission. Should I be restricted from doing what I feel God has given me talents to perform, particularly when I commit myself to Him on a daily basis? I do not personally believe such limitation would come from Him.

Throughout this process, I was relieved to find that many local church members supported both my wife and me during this difficult process of coming out. A couple months later, however, I received a letter from the new pastor at my former church in which he questioned me regarding my request for church membership transfer.

> As you know, you have many friends in the _____ Church who are deeply concerned with your well-being and your relationship with the church, and who sincerely hope that we will all one day walk the streets of gold together.
> In responding to your request we are constrained to uphold the teachings of the church in this regard and therefore find it a necessity to ask you to respond to the following questions before we can decide whether or not we can grant your transfer.
> 1. Are you presently practicing the homosexual lifestyle?
> 2. Are you determined by the grace of God to keep yourself from practicing the homosexual lifestyle?
> 3. Is it your understanding that the homosexual lifestyle is scripturally defendable?
>
> Leif, we are uplifting you in our prayers to God as we await your response to this matter.

I was not "practicing the homosexual lifestyle" and did not at that time have a partner. I still felt the questions unnecessarily intrusive, and wondered how many straight men or women would have such direct questions addressed to them when they asked for membership transfer. Although my request for membership transfer was initially granted, I was later required to drop church membership.



Addressing Uganda orphans in 2005

# Relative Concerns

Probably the hardest part of the coming-out process—after coming out to my wife and children—was the effect it had on other relatives of mine. I had not anticipated the storm it produced, particularly from the Adventist side of the family. Although I prefer not to divulge some of the intense feelings that emerged (some of which unfortunately remain to this day), I was shocked to hear of my nieces threatening to inform my eighty-six-year-old mother about my sexual orientation unless I told her myself. I wasn't sure at the time about the necessity of doing so, but I was sure it wasn't their place to inform her and that, if it were done, I would much rather do so myself.

One of the first missives I received from my family came from a concerned niece who wrote in 1996:

> Dear Leif,
> You are my uncle, you're part of my family and I want to love you as I always have. Nothing you do will change that or make me stop praying for you—or hope the best for you. But this love and concern compels me to say that you are making a terrible mistake that will and has affected the lives of so many people—family friends and your congregation....
>
> Are you willing to abandon your responsibility as father and husband to pursue a sexual lifestyle that "makes you happy?" The biggest tool Satan uses is selfishness. When your priorities take precedence over everyone else's, then God cannot speak to you. It is [my husband's] and my opinion that you have bought a lie straight from Satan....
>
> It appears that by your actions which are purely self serving, that you are not serving God—who is COMPLETELY SELFLESS. You can search the scriptures all you want to—Satan knows them better than we—and I am sure that he can persuade you to believe any lie he wants. But from our study of scripture, this lifestyle is completely against God's will (Rom. 1:26, 27, 1 Cor. 6:9, 10) and as such is outside of Christianity—because it destroys family and it will eventually destroy you.
>
> We've prayed and thought about this and in our opinion here are some lies that Satan is telling you:
>
> You were born this way and thus do not have a choice to stop. We all have lusts, anger and frustrations that we can make decisions about every day.

Leif with his partner at a banquet

> Some people are compulsive—that is not an excuse to be an alcoholic. Some have too many hormones—that is not an excuse to cheat on your spouse. We all have choices to make and Satan wants you to believe that you don't have a choice in this matter. That is the biggest lie!... This lifestyle has been condemned by God Himself. As proof—look at the hurt going on around you and in you right now. This has already destroyed your family—that should be enough of a signal from God.
>
> Leif, I have to tell you that this whole situation hurts me very much. I can't talk with any of my family without the hurt of your actions coming up in conversation. I have relived my divorce to some degree by this and my heart aches for [your wife] and the kids.

I responded to her letter as best I could, believing her intentions, at least, to be good. Besides commenting on some of the assumptions and stereotypes she believed, and noting what I considered her inappropriate comparison between homosexuality and alcoholic addiction, I noted the following:

> You mention that because of the hurt and pain around our family right now that I should see this as a "signal from God." However, I believe all this is a reminder of the fact that we live in a world of sin. You will remember that Job's friends thought the same about Job's plight (and no, I am not comparing my difficulties to his! only making the point that problems are no definite proof of anything except that we live in a world where sin causes problems). His three friends were con-

vinced it was a "signal from God." So were the disciples in Jesus' day (John 9:1–3) who held the common Jewish belief that suffering had to be the result of the individual's sins.

I find it ironic that we as Adventist Christians still fall into some of the same pitfalls as the ancient Israelites!

That was the last I ever heard from this niece, but there was more to come from other family members.

## Move to the Washington, D.C. Area

By early 1998, my partner of a few weeks and I had decided to move to the Washington, D.C. area, where we both found work. We had met through a support group for Adventist gays and lesbians, and we both felt a commitment to the Church in which we had been raised and worked. We started to attend one of the Adventist churches in the area, and there we heard again, rather indirectly, from one of my relatives.

Leif with Taylor, daughter, and son-in-law

Although we did not know about this immediately, we later discovered that my brother-in-law, a retired pastor, had felt conscience bound to phone our senior church pastor and "let him know the truth" about my partner and me. Our pastor already knew, because we had been open with him and his staff from the beginning. There were no surprises here.

To his credit, the pastor ignored the phone call and never breathed a word about it to us until just before he left, alluding to it when we invited him and his wife to our house for a farewell Sabbath lunch. We first heard about the incident through other family members.

In 1999, my boss at that time, a church member, decided to inform one of the new pastors at our church about my partner and me. Literally within the hour, the pastor complained to the pastoral staff about us. But again, those in the church office were not surprised, and they dropped the matter despite protests from the new pastor.

The year 2000 saw a flurry of correspondence from another niece (sister of the one who had previously written, and daughter of the brother-in-law who had phoned our church). She was also ostensibly concerned about my spiritual well-being.

You have proven to me that you are well versed in the Bible and I expected that much. On the other hand because God has blessed you with that knowledge He expects more from you too. If your lifestyle is so OK, why do you have to defend yourself so much from me and the entire world which, as you know, has a hard time getting over that orientation. I do believe that God made Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve. Why do you have a hard time with the verses that say, "Do not lie with a man as with a woman," or "Do not lie with animals," etc.? I suppose you think it is alright to go lie with an animal then?...

You can try to justify your actions as much as you wish. I am sorry you still think I am being judgmental, but until God brings some of my faults or wrong thinking to my conscience then I have to go with what I know. It is also hard for me to accept your lifestyle when I have had to try to explain to my children that their minister uncle is not a minister anymore because he has chosen to live a gay lifestyle. Your actions, like a ripple in a pool go out and affect a lot more people than just you.... I think you have convinced yourself that you are alright in your thinking because you need to. And since you are a "devout" Christian that makes it right. Why do you keep Sabbath and the other commandments, but do not keep, "Do not fornicate?" What are you going to say when Christ comes back and your kids are not there, the kids that God entrusted to you? You were the head of the family and have NOT set an example.

Leif and his mother at home

I tried to reason, but, as I have since learned, use of logic in this subject is not always helpful! After a few more rounds of communication, I told her there simply wasn't any point in further discussion. It may have seemed harsh, but I could see no other reasonable way to deal with this matter. However, I was still to hear more.

Pastors at our church had come and gone. A few months later, our new senior pastor informed us that my niece had complained to her pastor about my partner and me, and her pastor had written an accusatory letter to our pastor. This time, our pastor talked directly with us, interrogating us about our relationship, posing personal questions that would never have been asked of any straight couple. It was almost the final straw, and we refused to discuss the matter further. The subject was reluctantly dropped.

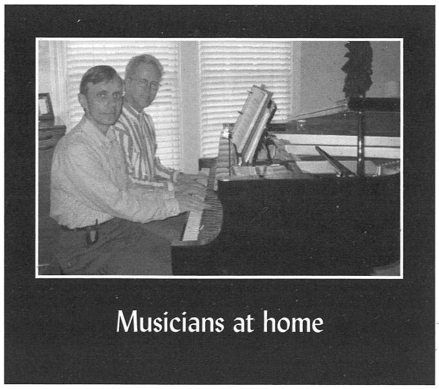
## Worth the Price?

Do I regret the decision to come out and be honest? I regret the considerable pain I have caused both family and friends. I regret having lost my vocation as a pastor with a church that I still love and support. Although I now have a wonderful employer, my current job is not likely to provide a long-term career solution, and I am still unsure what path my professional life will take.

But not for one moment am I sorry that I was honest about myself. I am now at peace with myself and with God, and happier as a result. I have shared almost nine happy years with an Adventist partner who holds the same values and commitment in life. I just wish I had made the decision earlier in my marriage—had I been able. Doing so would have been easier on my former wife (with whom I still have an amicable relationship), though perhaps not on the children, who would have been younger.

To those who ask the question, "What makes a person gay?" I reply, "What makes a person straight?" The truth is, no one knows; no one really understands. "Weak father, domineering mother?" Certainly not in my case. And who would choose to be gay? Who would choose to pit themselves against all odds and make life as difficult as possible if it were really a matter of choice or sexual "preference?" Not too many people I know.

What does it mean to be gay? What does it mean to be straight? Certainly neither orientation is all about sex, as some may believe. As I mentioned earlier about my high school girlfriends, there is an emotional connection or inner bonding that a gay person simply cannot achieve by living a straight life. In addition, an entirely different mindset is involved in which a general sensitivity (often including strong proclivities to music and the arts) makes itself evident.



Musicians at home

Clichés perhaps, but still largely true. For a gay man, this often translates into seeing the whole world with gentler, more sensitive eyes than his straight peers. "Feminine virtues," as I have all too often been reminded? Or Christian ideals toward which all of us should strive (Gal. 5:22, 23; Matt. 5:3–12)? But that is another subject.

The current General Conference president—a fellow compatriot, my former professor, and a personal friend of our family—recently gave the following advice about homosexuality in his youth-oriented question-and-answer online forum *Let's Talk*. (His column on homosexuality is filed, ironically, under the heading Pop Culture, rather than the more logical heading Relationships—where the topics of Dating, Family, Marriage, and Sex are listed.)

He counsels the Church's youth:

> This means that the biblical expectation is for those who believe they have a homosexual orientation to live a celibate life or to limit sexual activity to within a husband-and-wife marriage situation.

It is precisely this type of advice that leads to the tragedy that our family, as well as many others, has experienced!

One can only pray that the Church will no longer take an ostrich-in-the-sand approach, but face the reality that its gay brothers and sisters are everywhere in the Church: from congregational laity to college faculty, church pastors, and even General Conference workers. We are hurting and isolated, and as much in need of denominational acceptance, support, and the forgiving grace of Christ as anyone else.

Please don't continue to ignore us. I believe Christ can use us all.

Leif T. Lind writes from Redlands, California.

Discussed: redemptive fellowship, HIV infection, Colin Cook, dehumanizing fear, the Bible as a lethal weapon, need to worship without fear, open door, forgiving heart, wilderness exile

# A Report to My Gay Brothers and Sisters

*By Ben Kemena*

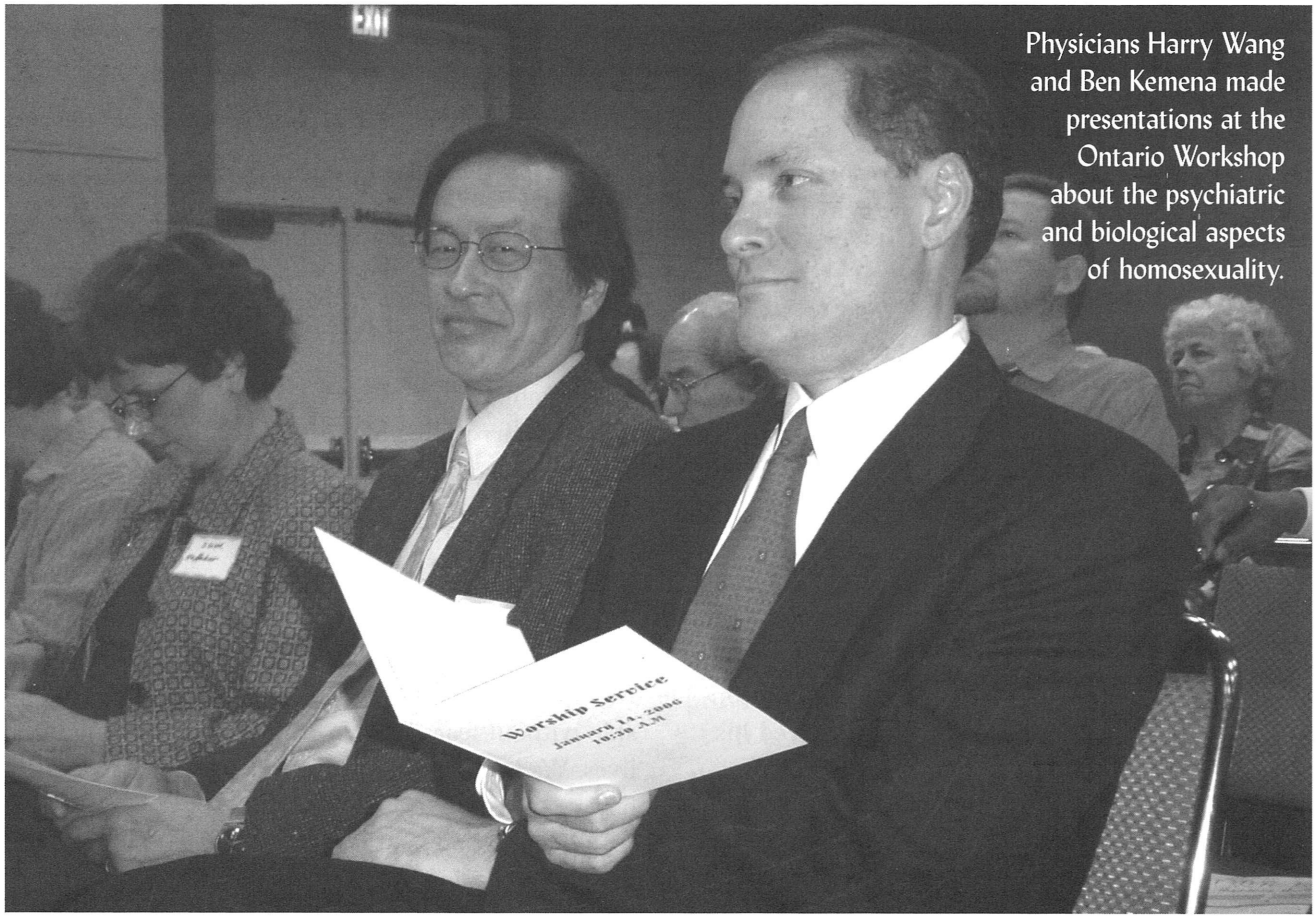
*Then Moses climbed Mount Nebo from the plains of Moab to the top of Pisgah.... There, the Lord showed him the whole land....I have let you see it with your eyes, but you will not cross over into it. (Deut. 34: 1–4)*

My path has been your path—your life has been my life. Our lives and the bigotry we have endured is neither better nor worse than any other minority group that has faced discrimination. But this is our story about "our tribe"—and it bears repeating if only because it shows where we have been and where we might now be going.

In the beginning—1977—gay and lesbian Seventh-day Adventists rejoiced in the simple accomplishment of meeting fellow believers. The reunions were nothing short of miraculous and the fellowship nothing short of redemptive. Seventh-day Adventist Kinship was functionally born.

Although these joyful gatherings were not officially endorsed by the institutional church, there was a fragile dialogue with church leadership, scholars, and administrators. The first Kinship Kampmeeting of 1980 inspired great hope. In retrospect, it is fair to say that neither gay Adventists nor their Church knew the ground that lay ahead.

There can be no nostalgia or sentimentality regarding the next two decades. Cast under the shadow of HIV infection, Kinship members faced unspeakable loss under the looming shadow of a silent church. The Adventist Church would not establish an AIDS Task Force until 1999. Spiritual and physical losses were compounded by the catastrophe of repeated sexual abuse admitted by the Seventh-day




Physicians Harry Wang and Ben Kemena made presentations at the Ontario Workshop about the psychiatric and biological aspects of homosexuality.

Adventist Church-sponsored "ministry" of Colin Cook.

I do not know what Kinship expected of the institutional church—and I certainly don't know what the institutional church expected of Kinship. But one thing is certain—hopes were transformed to anxiety and evolved into a dehumanizing fear.

Gay and lesbian Seventh-day Adventists have been in a lonely exile from the institutional church for a number of years. Unknown as it occurred, that exile was heralded by a church lawsuit against Kinship initiated in 1987. Although this lawsuit was fought successfully, it was a traumatic time in Kinship history.

> In December 1987, the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists filed a U.S. federal lawsuit against Seventh-day Adventist Kinship for a "breach of trademark" demanding a change of name and financial damage compensation. This was done in the name of "church moves against support group for homosexuals." In October 1991, federal courts rejected the suit and allowed SDA Kinship to keep its full name. On legal advisement, the General Conference did not appeal this decision. (Ron Lawson)

That exile grew into a deeper wandering in the spiritual wilderness when the General Conference specifically forbade church leaders from meeting with gay and lesbian Seventh-day Adventists. Fortunately, a courageous few were willing to ignore the rules and genuinely minister to gay and lesbian Adventists despite cruel church directives.

> In view of the fact that homosexual behavior is clearly contrary to biblical teachings, Church beliefs,...and in order to avoid the appearance of giving the sanction of the Church to such behavior, it was voted: To request all General Conference personnel to decline invitations to speak to gatherings of homosexuals. Signed, Robert Folkenberg, 1994

Robert Folkenberg was removed as president of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists under pressure for violations of ethics in 1998.

With the 1998 murder of a gay Wyoming university student, Matthew Shepard—motivated at least in part by sexual orientation—a church response was expected. This was particularly noteworthy because the behavioral recklessness of Shepard that led to his murder was rooted in the response of his church to the issue of sexual orientation.

Shepherd was an Episcopal church member, church acolyte, and regularly attending member, and his bishop voted to deny church enfranchisement to homosexuals. When the bishop announced his decision, many gay Episcopalians—including Shepherd—walked out of the Anglican service.

Shepard called his mother, disavowed his Episcopalian Church, never returned to it—and died within eleven weeks of that announcement. We can only assume that his behaviors reflected the assumption that he was beyond grace—and this unfettered his discretion.

In 1999, poorly timed to coincide with the one-year anniversary of Matthew Shepard's murder, gay and lesbian Adventists received this strident message from the institutional church on the matter of "homosexuality":

> The Bible makes no accommodation for homosexual activity or relationships.

It was a much harsher policy than previous directives—and builds on a chorus of chilling messages to gay and lesbian Adventists. More than twenty-five years after Kinship's founding, another generation of gay and lesbian Adventists flee the institutional church and seek refuge in Kinship or other Christian communities of faith.

The litany continued, and almost as a postscript the Adventist Church statement on "same-sex unions" was delivered in 2003.

> Homosexuality is a manifestation of the disorder and brokenness of human inclinations and relations caused by sin coming into the world.... God's Word does not countenance a homosexual lifestyle....

More years and lives passed. An active debate within Kinship emerged suggesting that the only way to cope with such a brutal institutional church was to avoid it—and to steer "our tribe" far from harm's way. Dialogue was a dream. The people of the Book appeared to use the Bible as a lethal weapon.

With no formal church response to AIDS, a church-initiated lawsuit that almost destroyed the fledgling Kinship organization, the violence of Colin Cook, and toxic church rhetoric—our wilderness wanderings appeared the safest course of action. Approaching the metaphorical Jordan appeared unthinkable—and, indeed, for our most vulnerable members, irresponsible. I fled with fury and fear—and gazed from a safer corner of the wilds.

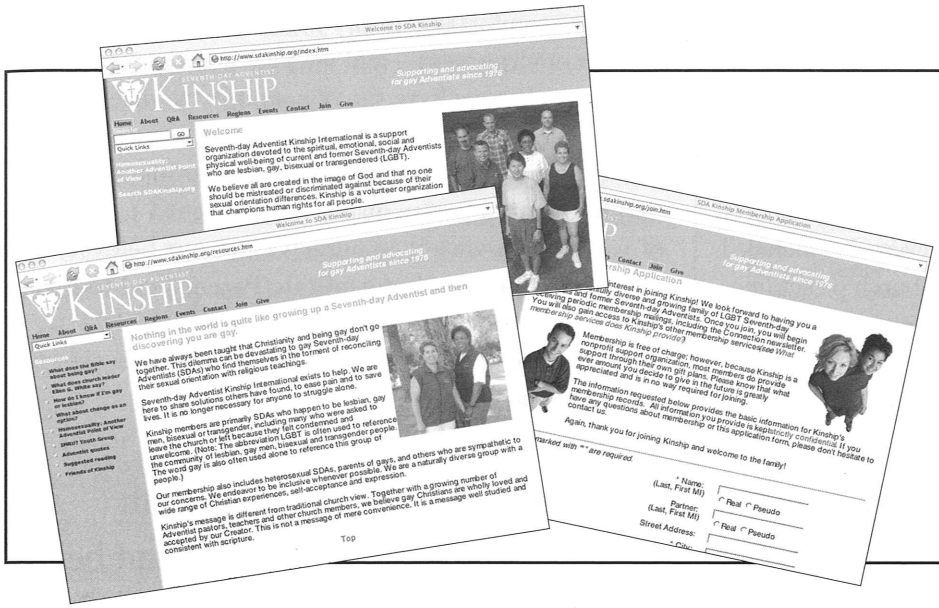
I recite this litany of history because it bears repeating. It is our history. I do not memorialize it to stir more ill-wind against the institutional church. Rather, I affirm our demand to exist, our need to worship without fear, and our desire to live full and healthy lives. We have been lonely in our wilderness journey, but we have not been alone.

We have had many loyal friends and allies providing genuine spiritual oases. Many have shown more patience and charity than I—and a few have reminded us that one day, we must—and can—reapproach the banks of the Jordan.

The wilderness has shaped our character and tempered our souls. We have learned to treasure each other; we have rejoiced in the respite we provide one another. We have learned to savor an act of kindness. We have cheered each other in prayer. We have honored the simple dignity of emptying the sand from worn shoes and resting our feet to walk another day. We have learned that love wins and wins and wins.

The people of the Book have accused us of many things, but when they have met us, they have been wholly unprepared to witness our loving hearts. The Church has tried to obliterate, deny, repress, and condemn our being. With glorious providential disobedience, we continue to sing hymns, read the Gospels, and pray to the same everlasting Parent God. There can be no greater testament of the Holy Spirit than observing an oppressed and beaten people pray.

Gay and lesbian Adventists have prayed in anxious anticipation for a sign that their church exile might be over. At the 2005 General Conference of the




Online information about SDA gay people is available at Kinship's Web site <www.sdakinship.org>, and Carol Grady maintains a Web site for families of gay children at <www.someone-to-talk-to.net>. Harry and Janice Wang have produced a three-minute DVD on three prominent Adventist families with gay children. Contact them at harrycwant@comcast.net and janicenakaw@comcast.net.

Worldwide Seventh-day Adventist Church in Saint Louis, gay and lesbian Adventists around the world heard these words:

> God has set before us an open door, which is not our privilege to close and keep others out. I have a word of caution to anyone who is looking for bad grapes in the church: only God can safely grade people. God loves all people globally....I want the Adventist family around the world to be known as a compassionate family. (Jan Paulsen, July 9, 2005)

I must admit that these words fell on my increasingly deaf ears. I listened to the sermon and reread the transcripts. I wanted these words to apply to me and my tribe. I tried to summon more charity and a forgiving heart. As one might expect at this moment in my life, I have been scarred by spiritual rape.

After decades of abuse, I'm never sure whether another attempt at church reconciliation is merely an exercise in self-victimization—or is a moment of divine inspiration. Nonetheless, I was fearfully close to hope with respect to the institutional church. Harboring hope means standing on the banks of the Jordan.

On January 12–15, 2006, members of Kinship met with a varied group of Adventist church leaders and theologians regarding the topic of homosexual orientation in a workshop format. The workshop was designed to help invited authors to write chapters for an upcoming book on the issues of homosexuality and the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It was not a meeting regarding church policy by intention, but it provided a historic forum.

It is easy to vilify people you never meet—gay or straight. It was the first meeting of its type in almost twenty years and it marked the latest tidewater in the relationship of the institutional church with its gay and lesbian members.

Although it may be a bit premature to suggest that the long exile and wilderness wandering of gay and lesbian Adventists is over, there is a definite feeling that the darkness may be giving way to the joy of morning. It was an event that I believed would not happen in my lifetime—and because it carries such hope, I remain wary...but hopeful, nonetheless.

Gay and lesbian Seventh-day Adventists have long been amputated from the complete body of Christ insofar as the worldwide Adventist Church is concerned. It has been a painful amputation; it has been a treacherous separation. Could it be that our church would consider kinder political rhetoric? Could it be that our church would offer safer schools? Could it be that our church would welcome us back?

It is a shocking and frightening question. We are shocked that such a possibility can even be pondered —after all, we are familiar with our wilderness expe-

rience and its constantly changing landscape. But does that suggest that we would prefer continuing estrangement rather than conversation? Are we afraid to hope? Have we been hurt too much?

If we still have the capacity to hope, if we have nursed our most crippling wounds, it is because we have labored together in love and prayer. This effort has also included brave Adventist allies daring to cross church picket lines to love us. Although we are refugees from our church, spiritual mentors have continued to walk with us—providing us spiritual nourishment, affection, affirmation, and prayer. To name all of our beloved allies would be akin to the begats of Matthew—but just because I don't name each one of them doesn't mean I treasure them any less.

The wilderness has been challenging and difficult—but it has also been a place and time of awesome beauty. Because it is so frightening to ponder something beyond wilderness, it is intimidating to relish the full majesty of hope. We are afraid to have our hopes dashed, afraid of a mortally wounded soul. We are afraid of what might be our own unrealistic expectations.

Perhaps it is better to wallow in the cynical mire of the familiar than savor the joyful thrill of possibility. I have chosen to believe that this conference workshop heralds the end of our status as shunned—and offers a new welcome as refugees and long-lost comrades. This weekend, I stood at Pisgah and gazed across a new and promised land.

Brothers and sisters and intersexed and transgendered of my tribe—it is not easy for me to admit that I have reached this spiritual place. You know the pains and hardships of this journey. You know the sorrow of my casting out and wilderness exile. You have felt my anger, bound my wounds, and cradled me in your arms. You know the fears of my heart—and I love you for showing me the human face of God.

I'm here to tell you that some influential mainstream Adventists—both individually and collectively—appear ready to see gays and lesbians as human beings and to see our lives as injustice personified. We are more comfortable in the wilderness than any other present environment—and we may need to return on occasion—but we have the opportunity to meet on the banks of the Jordan and cross the river.

That river crossing will be treacherous—and the nature of compromise discontented—but I posit to all of you that we owe it to ourselves, to our beloved dead, our youth, and our infinite Parent God to give the crossing our best effort. Most importantly, I believe there is enough goodwill on the other side to welcome our endeavor.

I'm here to tell you that some influential mainstream Adventists—both individually and collectively—appear ready to see gays and lesbians as human beings and to see our lives as injustice personified.

I have deliberately recited a venomous history to remind you just how vulnerable I am willing to allow my own heart to be and as proof that I am not naive. I have recited the history to remind you that our Parent God has brought us to these banks. I have recited our history so that you might witness Providence. I have recited the past as an invitation for prayer. Please pray for us and all God's church.

In the future, the main area of concern will remain theological in the Adventist context—rooted in deep controversies that surround the nature of divine inspiration, hermeneutics, biblical exegesis, and discomfort with the notion of a present truth. At the deepest level, human beings are discomforted by change.

> There is no excuse for anyone in taking the position that there is no more truth to be revealed, and that all our expositions of Scripture are without an error. The fact that certain doctrines have been held as truth for many years by our people is not a proof that our ideas are infallible. Age will not make error into truth, and truth can afford to be fair. No true doctrine will lose anything by close investigation. (Ellen White)

In many instances, the discussions, conversations, and debates will border on the supremely esoteric. Yet I rejoice in the academic traditions of our church.

Let us spar over the texts, the translations of the Hebrew and Greek testaments, and the nuance of tradition, context, and intent.

We are standing on the shoulders of a grand tradition—a tradition that led us to question, ponder, reflect, debate, and review. These are exactly the types of scholarly conversations that must occur. And when they involve us as gay and lesbian Adventists, we respectfully ask for a seat at that church table.

I cannot tell you where the analysis and reviews will take us—but I fear neither scrutiny nor setback. Ultimately, our goals cannot (and should not) be to coerce church policy. Rather, we should endeavor at every opportunity to allow the witness of our own lives to shine brightly. An integrated, healthy, mature, and well-lived life is the most eloquent testament to our Parent God.

Gay and lesbian Adventists (along with other oppressed minority groups within the denomination) shall always be comforted by knowing that with respect to divine legitimacy, we have never been on trial. Indeed, many of us pray for change in the institutional church because we understand that until the Word of God is presented to gays and lesbians in a manner recognizably Christ-like, the promise of a Second Coming will remain unfulfilled.

There will be tempests at times and—built upon the shoulders of a new generation—we will continue to guide the weary to refuge in the coming storms. After thirty years (and much longer for some), we know how to wait—and we know the price of waiting. I may not stand with you in the land of future promise—but I have lived to see it, breath the air, and feel the love. I have recognized our spiritual birthright.

May we rejoice in the notion that institutional church silence is cautiously giving way to dialogue. We have many leaders and visionaries within Kinship and the institutional church to whom we should express thanks and thanksgiving. Forged in our wilderness crucible, may our characters remain charitable and forgiving.

May we choose to hope once more. I know that any relationship with the Adventist Church remains frightening to many of you hurting today, but I believe this hope is sunlight rather than a train in the tunnel. Let us spread this good news.

---

Ben Kemena is a physician who lives in the area of Denver, Colorado.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*Continued from page 31...*

When one reads past the tired old arguments and proof texts for the gift of prophecy (Rev. 12:17 and 19:10; come on!), it becomes clear that Ellen White actually did a great job of pushing Adventist thinking forward. But all too often, it seems that when Adventism aligns itself with the prophetic tradition it grabs a few verses of dubious context from Daniel and Revelation and uses them to justify our existence. Clearly, the Adventist atavists have confused the gift of prophecy for the gift of apocalyptic literature.

In fact, this literalistic fetishism of the prophetic gift has kept it hidden under the obfuscating bushel of idolatry. The mere myths of her prescient or historical insight are props for a shallow faith, calling for signs and wonders when the gift is here, now, incarnate.

It doesn't have to be this way for another generation of Adventists. Writing on hope in Lamentations, eminent biblical scholar Walter Brueggemann suggests that, "the capacity to turn memory into hope in the midst of loss—a capacity that is defining for Jews and Christians—is not a psychological trick or an opting for optimism or even a focus on signs of newness. It is a pivotal theological act, attesting to the fidelity of God, who is the key player in the past and future."[2]

But instead of action, Adventism has codified its progressive memories, cut out by the atavists who dichotomize: "Ellen White, our way or not way." This has cut off our prophetic memory, blinding us to the power that made Adventism rise out of great human disappointment, to the gift to peer through our Judeo-Christian past and foresee a future of personal and public hope for humanity.

For a new generation, perhaps our doctrine of prophecy could belong to more that one person and her editors; instead, it could be embodied in the Adventism of progress, of a blessed hope envisioned by Ana and Fernando Stahl, the Community Services volunteer, the indigenous ADRA worker, or the Union College chapter of Amnasty International. The spirit of prophecy, more than miraculous prognostication or possession, could lead us to see and save the poor—in spirit, in resources, in justice, in peace.

No longer embarrassed, I see that the spirit of prophecy tells us that:

> All who became the subjects of Christ's kingdom ...would give evidence of faith and repentance. Kindness, honesty, and fidelity would be seen in their lives. They would minister to the needy, and bring their offerings to God. They would shield the defenseless, and give an example of virtue and compassion. So the followers of Christ will give evidence of the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. In the daily life, justice, mercy, and the love of God will be seen"[3]

The prophetic vision continues through Isaiah:

> Then justice shall abide in the wilderness
> And righteousness shall dwell on the farm land.
> For the work of righteousness shall be peace,
> And the effect of righteousness, calm and confidence forever.
> Then my people shall dwell in peaceful homes,
> In secure dwellings,
> In untroubled places of rest. (32:16–18)

That weekend in Washington, still standing on the Capitol Hill, we closed with a prayer of lament and liberation inspired by Walter Brueggemann's thinking on Lamentations. As it was read, we turned to face outward across the Mall. The day was overcast, and I shivered. I looked down at the grass, noticing it missing mostly, the exposed earth as dirty brown as the sky.

Through the cloud-filtered light, the stone, cold monuments, and bureaucracies looked like a big daguerreotype-o. A frozen, two-tone world. I thought about the millions of protestors who had stood here before and of politicians who drive by. I wondered: why do we stick to the same old sight? And I dreamed: whither the gift next?

## Notes and References

1. All Scripture passages are taken from the *Tanakh* (New York: Jewish Publication Society, 1985).

2. Walter Brueggemann, "Hope in the Face of Loss," *The Other Side*, 35, no. 2 (Mar./Apr. 1999), 17-20, 49.

3. Ellen G. White, *Desire of Ages* (Oakland, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1898), 107.

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**Alexander Carpenter studies critical theory, the arts, and religion at the Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, California.**

Discussed: Focus on the Family, religious right, restored Israel, cheap grace, committed saints, femininity, contemporary culture, progressive politics, pluralism

# American Evangelicals: History, Politics, and Apocalyptics

*By Gregory Schneider*

By some accounts, Seventh-day Adventists are evangelicals. By other accounts, we are a cult with no right to be counted in the club of true Christians. Although I do not care much whether or not the gatekeepers to the kingdom of the evangelicals want to let us in, I do think it important to keep track of who these Christians think they are and what they are doing.

It is important because they are culturally the closest of all Christian groups to who and what Seventh-day Adventists are. It is important also because evangelicals are influential. Adventists tend to listen to them whether we realize it or not. Think of your local Christian radio station, the broadcast and print media empire of Focus on the Family, and the various publications of the *Christianity Today* group (led in part by senior editor and former Seventh-day Adventist, David Neff), just to name almost at random a few prominent culture shapers.

They are also the prime recruiting ground for today's avowedly Christian political culture warriors. Think (again) of James Dobson's Focus on the Family, the Christian Coalition, and, at a very different and much smaller spot on the political map, *Sojourners* magazine and Evangelicals for Social Action (ESA).

Randall Balmer. *Blessed Assurance: A History of Evangelicalism in America.* Boston: Beacon Press, 1999.

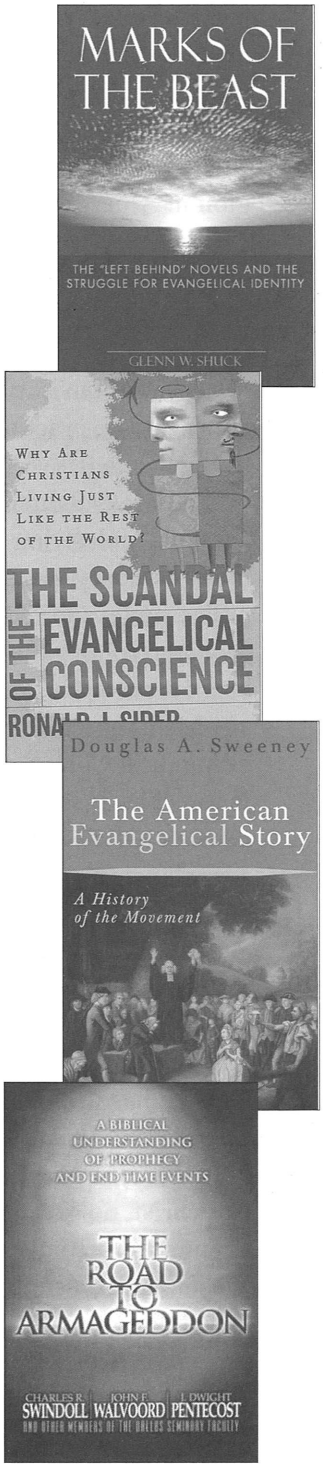
Glenn W. Shuck. *Marks of the Beast: The Left Behind Novels and the Struggle for Evangelical Identity.* New York: New York University Press, 2005.

Ronald J. Sider. *The Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience: Why Are Christians Living Just Like the Rest of the World?* Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2005.

Douglas A. Sweeney. *The American Evangelical Story: A History of the Movement.* Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2005.

Jim Wallis. *God's Politics: Why the Right Gets It Wrong and the Left Doesn't Get It.* New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005.

Timothy P. Weber. *On the Road to Armageddon: How Evangelicals Became Israel's Best Friend.* Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2005.



Two short, accessible histories of evangelicalism in America are Randall Balmer's *Blessed Assurance* and Douglas A. Sweeney's *The American Evangelical Story.* Although born in an evangelical subculture, Balmer writes as an outsider who accents the populist and political meanings of evangelicalism, including an especially intriguing chapter on the political uses of the ideal of femininity.

Balmer dispenses deftly, as any honest historian must, with current claims that the United States was founded as a "Christian nation" and guesses that leaders of the Religious Right now reject the principle of church-state separation because they no longer feel "that they can compete in the free marketplace of religion in America" (101).

Sweeney wrote his book to be used as a text in colleges and seminaries, and his pervasive use of the first-person plural "we" makes it clear that these will be evangelical insider institutions like his own Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. Sweeney's accent is on the theology, practices, and institutions of the evangelical movement.

Whereas Balmer will help us understand religious passions underlying debates over Supreme Court nominees, Sweeney gives us insights into how and why praise songs and "celebration" so pervade the way we "do church," or at least define the terms of our squabbles over worship.

Many observers may be puzzled over how many evangelical Christians have become so militantly pro-Israel. The answer is found in the premillennial dispensational view of the Bible. Many Adventists, using a small part for a complex whole, refer to dispensationalism as "the secret rapture." Timothy P. Weber's *Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming: American Premillennialism, 1875-1982,* established him twenty years ago as the preeminent historian and critical interpreter of this way of reading Bible prophecies. Now he has updated and extended his work in *On the Road to Armageddon.*

"Without a restored Israel, there could be no Antichrist, no great tribulation, no Armageddon, and no triumphant second coming of Jesus" (155). Thus does Weber encapsulate the logic connecting evangelical eschatology to pro-Israel politics. Weber warns us that since the 1970s the dispensationalists have left the bleachers and jumped onto the playing field of Earth's history to lend their support to the most extreme elements of Israeli society, working to create a world of apocalyptic conflict, a world in which they do not expect to have to live (18).

In a sweeping study of eleven *Left Behind* novels, Glenn W. Shuck discerns a trajectory pushing the novels' protagonists, and possibly their readers, in a direction much like what Weber describes. Shuck's *Marks of the Beast* describes a political engagement in the later novels motivated by a sense of acting out the inevitable will of God as scripted in dispensational prophecy.

In Shuck's judgment, this is an activism that surrenders believers' free agency and subordinates the living God to the interpretations of his followers. This dangerous position contrasts with a more fluid model of evangelical adaptation to contemporary culture that Shuck finds in the earlier novels.

From the aforementioned Sojourners community and ESA come two books by the respective leaders of those groups. Jim Wallis has a better subtitle in *Why the Right Gets It Wrong and the Left Doesn't Get It* than in his title *God's Politics.* A *New York Times* best-seller for many weeks this year, the book is the culmination of the Sojourners community's decades-long effort to lead toward a progressive politics inspired by Christian faith and affirming of the full range of pluralism in the American public square.

Ron Sider, founder of ESA, has long been a latter-day Mennonite prophet calling American Evangelicalism to serve the common good of the nation and of the world. *The Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience* is a short and readable but scathing indictment of where the American evangelical community has taken itself by means of a "cheap grace" version of the doctrine of justification by faith.

The American evangelical salt has pretty much lost its saltiness, Sider says, with a lot of eyebrow-raising data to back himself up. Nevertheless, there is hope, if the churches will follow the lead of their deeply committed saints who hold to an orthodox biblical worldview in a manner that actually changes their behavior. "Interestingly," he notes, "a disproportionate share of the saints were women, African Americans, and persons earning less than $25,000 per year" (126).

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**Gregory Schneider is professor of religion and social science at Pacific Union College, Angwin, California.**

## Addressing Apostasy

In regard to Mark Finley, apostasy, and Monte Sahlin's "Dropouts: Missional Challenge for a Maturing Church" (summer 2005), I have discussed these issues with some former church members. Some of the major reasons they told me for their "apostasy" include:

1. Lack of fiscal responsibility—only one example being *Spectrum's* report on the Lake Region Conference.

2. Continued employment of those responsible for the fiscal mess or other manifestations of irresponsibility.

3. Extreme judgmentalism and intolerance of those who continue to grow in Christ.

I am disturbed that the reasons for "apostasy" are not seriously addressed. I believe we will continue to lose members if they are not.

*Elvin Feltman*
*Howard, Ohio*

## The Time That is Not Yet

Sigve Tonstad's focus on hope deferred, affirmed, and reconstituted (fall 2005) was helpful for those of us who search for meaning as we wait for the "time that is not yet."

*Edwin Hill*
*via the Internet*

## American Ways of Thinking

Reading the article of Julius Nam, "A Conversation with Myself" (fall 2005), I am a little surprised to see that he has some misgivings as to the orthodoxy of his thoughts. It seems to be a quite new idea for him that Christ is also acting among all faiths and denominations and cultures in the world.

I believe that European Adventists have had these thoughts for many years, perhaps even from the start of the Advent message in the 1800s.

To a European, American ways of thinking seem to be strictly tied to the late 1800s way of interpreting the Bible, and the church members seem to be copying their forebears generation after generation.

*Kristen Falch Jakobsen*
*Ringstad, Norway*

## Adventist Education

Regarding the General Conference Commission on Education report (fall 2006):

There seems to be grief over a lack of control over our schools, and consequent inability to stop movement down the famous slippery slope that leads to secularism. The levers they've lost—or never had—are the ones usually listed, and include an ability to influence budgetary resource allocation, power to require acceptance and compliance with central policy, mandated loyalty to a nonexistent philosophy of education, and avoidance of interference with General Conference authority by incompetent campus trustees.

If these perceptions were founded in fact, I, too, would tremble, but they are not, and so their remedies are specious.

My own reaction is that, although the commission is obviously alarmed, its concerns are largely unfounded. Its proposed remedies for imagined problems reflect an unacceptable dictatorial style of management ill-suited to the college culture. Protections from its feared fates are already available and can work; though they would, properly, place responsibility and power securely with the campuses instead of with central administrators.

I'm very familiar with these protections, because they have been established at La Sierra University. They are derived from the American Association of University Professors *1940 Statement of Principles*, and where they are understood, they work.

The Pawluk/Williams article is carefully worded, but too cautiously states the case against the commission report, and it does not spell out solutions already in our toolkit.

This is brief, but the evidence and argument behind it are not. Perhaps a basic question is whether the commission is willing to listen.

*Ted Benedict*
*Monterey, Calif.*

# Church as a Scientific Experiment

I'll take a full-body massage anytime. I've had two in my whole life. The second was the other day, and the therapist was saying: "When I went into the Takoma Park Adventist Church, I just knew these people were my people."

She had grown up Catholic, or nominally Catholic, near where I used to live in Maryland. At thirteen, she'd entered her house one day to find both her siblings smoking marijuana, and both her parents drunk and passed out on the living room floor.

The house was desolate that day, her heart battered. But she began to realize that her family's destiny didn't have to be her own. And when, several years later, she visited a community of Adventist believers bound together by the grace of God, and determined to be healthy, she felt she had found her true home.

Today, at forty-seven, she is a nurse and massage therapist. She is thin as a rake, has an exercise-induced cholesterol rate of 180 ("Without exercise, it's 300") and runs marathons and—oh my!—super-marathons. Her business is flourishing and her life is headed forward, like the clouds on the back of the wind.

What's so...well, so experimental about this?

Let me tell you about Nancey Murphy, who in October, in Coeur d' Alene, Idaho, will headline the 2006 National Conference of the Association of Adventist Forums. Her theme will be "Science and the Human Soul." I've known her since before her book on *Theology in the Age of Scientific Reasoning* won the annual American Academy of Religion prize for the best new work in its category. By then, she had earned not only a doctorate in the philosophy of science at Berkeley, but also a second doctorate in theology at the Graduate Theological Union in the same city.

When you consider how much of establishment science leans toward sheer determinism—physics explains everything; free will is a fantasy—a science-sympathetic reflection on the human soul, from a Christian, surely meets a need. Do our choices mean something, or are we, at bottom, as helpless as puppets? Murphy will bring a wonderful intelligence and a passionate faith to her reflection on this question.

She believes that whenever religious people think about their convictions, they must approach what they are doing scientifically. Theology, in other words, must subject itself to the canons of probable reasoning, the same rules of thought that govern science.

Not that this makes for easy answers, or easy consensus. Even hard science—physics, chemistry, and the like—cannot, in a straightforward way, get hold of final truth. "Paradigms," in the now familiar image, come and go: Aristotle, Newton, and Einstein saw vastly different worlds. Still, consensus comes easier here than in the "soft" sciences, like psychology or economics, where the human element is a complicating factor. And it comes hardest, no doubt, in the science of God—the theory of the source of everything.

Are we embodied souls, or just machines who fool ourselves into thinking we make a difference? No one can settle the argument easily, or soon, even though it matters so much that we try.

And that brings us back to church. Murphy thinks churches—congregations, denominations—are like laboratories. They are living experiments, and the data from those experiments help, over the long run, to build up or to tear down the hypotheses at the core of Christian conviction.

So when a local congregation gives a battered heart new hope and purpose, it helps to make the most important case there is: the case for God.

Charles Scriven
AAF Board Chairman

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# This South II

Parlay on a promise
The orange rind feet
Making tracks
Peel sweat
Into my palms

I still see them hanging,
Dried leaves
Dripping from trees

*death be like life, you know*
*but turned backwards*
*like smiling when your heart be frowning*

I still feel them wading,
Swans padding towards
A Northern star

*death be like life, you know*
*but turned backwards*
*like smiling when your heart be frowning*

I still smell them burning in Mississippi
The stench of people whose graves are etched
In cotton balls
Call out to me
Because I am their own

They tell me:
*"wear de South*
*on your lapel for honor child*
*I earn it for you."*

By Ramona L. Hyman, from *The Sanctuary of a South*