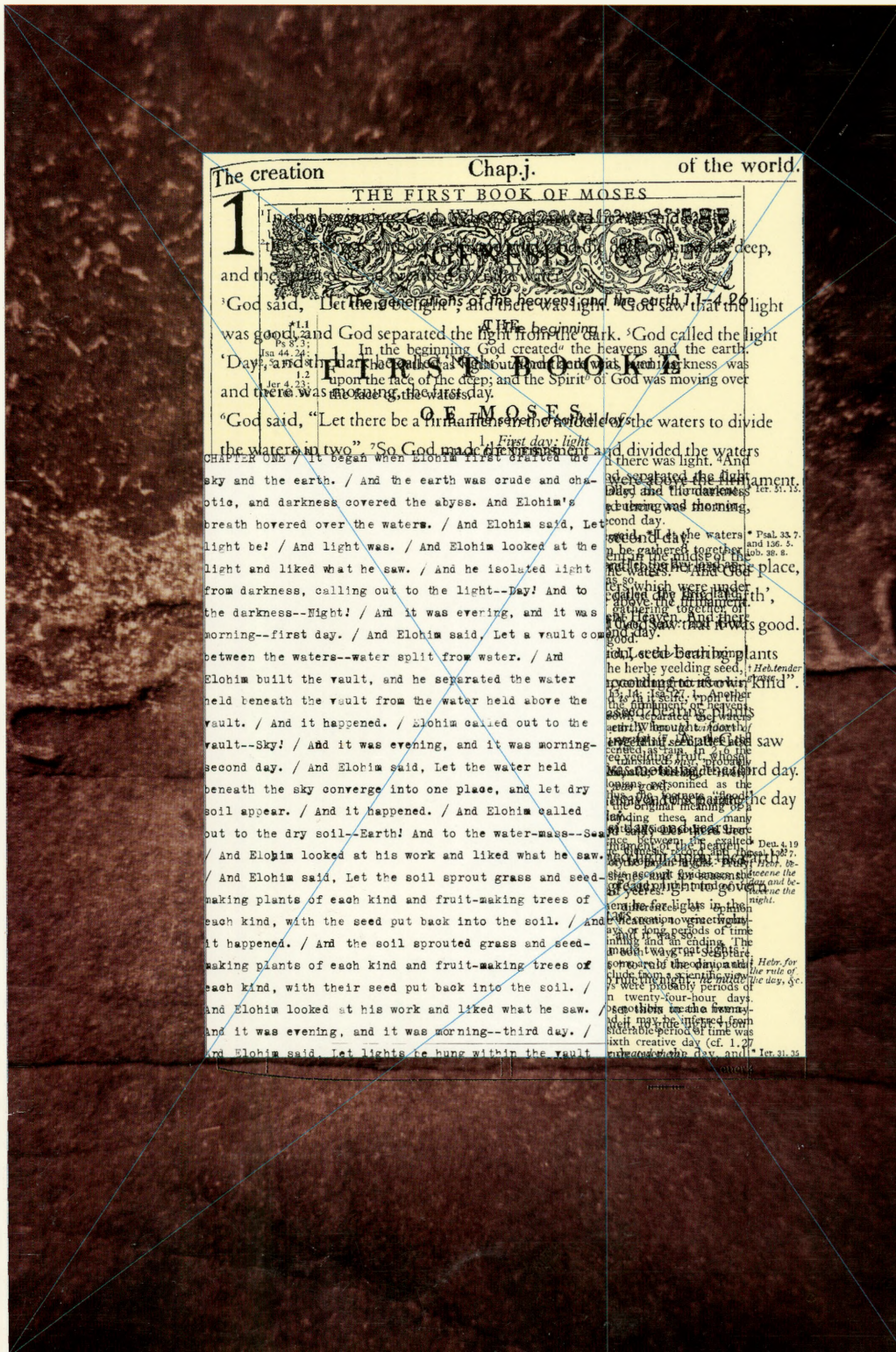


SPECTRUM

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Redesigning Genesis

Bible Commentaries

Robert Alter
John Brunt
Richard Davidson
Sigve Tonstad
Roy Gane
David Larson

Inside a Monastery, Inside My Heart

On Becoming a Conference: The Costa Rican Story

Terrify Us with Your First Terror

SPECTRUM

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About the Cover

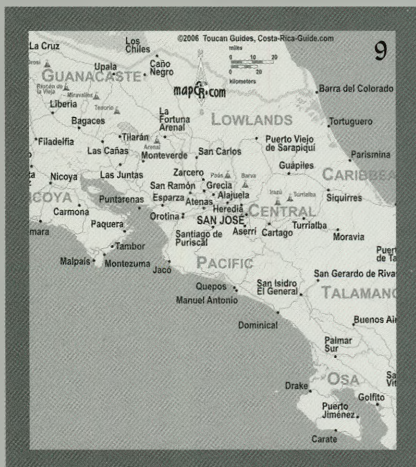
Redesigning Genesis: Chapter 1, left panel. Inkjet on paper. This panel depicts the first text page of Genesis in an art project that is described in the article on page 27. The work is an artistic interpretation of a postmodern translation of Genesis, and is featured in several illustrations throughout this issue.

About the Artist

Cliff Rusch teaches art and serves as the public relations art director at Pacific Union College, Angwin, California.



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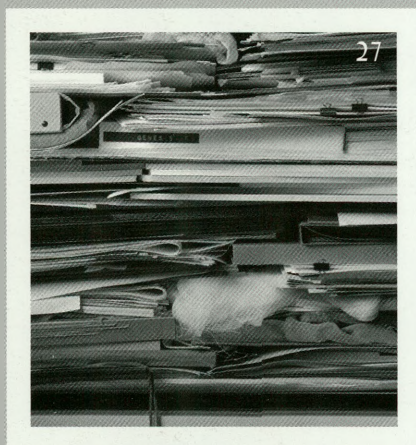


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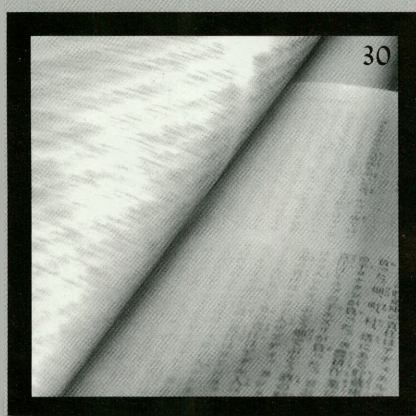
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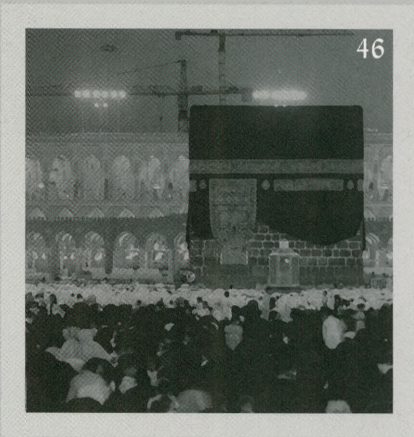
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A Nature Walk through Revelation

When you step outside at midnight and the temperature is still in the 90s, you don't need Al Gore to tell you about global warming. The temperature charts featured in his movie and book *An Inconvenient Truth* show the ten hottest years occurring during the past fourteen. After experiencing the ten hottest days and nights of this year, which have also set records for high temperatures and the number of days over 100 degrees Fahrenheit, I am convinced that global warming is upon us. People in the San Fernando Valley, Saint Louis, and New York probably don't need convincing either.

Or, are we simply in the midst of Revelation 16? Is God pouring out his wrath? Have the seven last plagues begun? Does our understanding of Revelation change our response to current conditions?

Bill McKibbin, commenting in the July 11 issue of *Christian Century* on the science mentioned by Gore and NASA's chief climatologist, James Hansen, says "we need, as a planet, to be emitting less carbon dioxide inside of ten years—an enormous task given that China and India are finally beginning to use power in appreciable quantities (and not for luxuries but for the second light bulb or first refrigerator in a house)." He suggests it is mandatory that churches help lead the way. "Mandatory because by now this is a theological issue. All the forces of nature that we used to call 'acts of God' have become, at least in part, acts of humankind" (29).

An Inconvenient Truth ends with suggestions for what you personally can do to help solve the climate crisis. If you believe that Jesus' coming will end the climate crisis, does that absolve you of any responsibility for change?

And how does the current crisis between

Israel, Lebanon, and Hezbollah affect your reading of Scripture?

This issue of *Spectrum* is devoted to the Bible, and the reading of it. How we choose to do so or not promises to play a large role in our future—and not just in our own personal salvation. How we respond as a church and culture, and in society, are impacted, too.

We have assembled an incredible array of authors in this issue, from across the spectrum of Adventist theology and beyond, to inspire your reading. The journey through Scripture is travel literature at its best. This summer, give yourself a treat. Take a nature walk through Revelation. Let Robert Alter show you the joys of a literary reading of the Bible. Consider John Brunt's reading of Scripture as you worship on Sabbath. Discover the Bible again for the first time.

Bonnie Dwyer
Editor

NOTEWORTHY



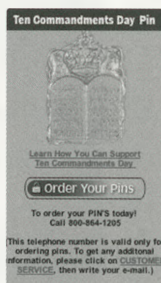
Adventist Media Finds Bizarre Bedfellow for Ten Commandments Day

By Alexander Carpenter

On May 6 and 7, Adventist media—including 3ABN, Hope Channel, and Amazing Facts—teamed up with Ron Wexler and a group of right-wing religious broadcasters such as Pat Robertson to restore the Ten Commandments' role in American public life. More than 3.2 million dollars were spent just by 3ABN and ASI, hundreds of thousands of books were printed, and more than seventeen hours were broadcast during the weekend. What was behind all this and who is Ron Wexler?

In late 2005, Ron Wexler (a developer of Israeli real estate for right-wing Christians) and Pastor Myles Munroe (Bahamas Faith Ministry International—a Pentecostal organization) formed the Ten Commandments Commission. Their stated objective was to elevate the importance of the Ten Commandments by placing monuments, plaques, and symbols throughout North America. Originally, the commission had settled on February 5 as Ten Commandments Day.

Something happened and Munroe was removed from the leadership. Blackie Gonzales (Son Broadcasting, a couple of VHF stations in New Mexico) replaced him as chairman of



the Ten Commandments Commission board of directors. The main focus of the Ten Commandments Day is the promotion of little fake gold pins in the shape of the Decalogue that allow people to show their commitment to God's law. Several videos on the Ten Commandments Web site encourage people to purchase these pins for \$14.99 each, plus \$6.95 shipping.

According to Wexler, an orthodox Jew, as interest grew, the Ten Commandments Day was moved back three months to Sunday, May 7, 2006. Wexler says: "We literally have not been able to keep up with the incredible response we've gotten over the last few weeks for our Ten Commandments Pins."¹

Some folks at Daily Kos think the whole thing is an attempt to make money. As Tatarize points out:

It is worth \$14.95, right? Wait, at the bottom of the page there is a distributor's link for the wholesale price... \$5.50. That's a 270% markup. Then they want \$6.95 for shipping USPS Media Mail which actually costs \$2 for a package that size.²

Didn't Moses smash the Ten Commandments? What was that

over? Oh yeah, religious leaders and people celebrating a golden religious icon.

And some folks in the world of Adventist media jumped on this bandwagon.

Not only have some publicized the proclamation itself, Pacific Press and Signs of the Times; 3ABN, Hope Channel, and Mark Finley have published related books. In addition, Amazing Facts has a Ten Commandments bookmark, and the North American Religious Liberty Association offers a Ten Commandments CD.

During the three-hour special on the denomination's Hope Channel, Pastor Brad Thorp and Gary Gibbs, president and vice-president, hosted Ron Wexler and Blackie Gonzales. During the interview, Wexler shared the usual restorationist shibboleths about how weather and homosexuals are running amuck because the Ten Commandments aren't in certain courthouses. Along these lines, Hope collected thousands of petitions from Adventist churches.

Wexler provides further "reason" to restore the Ten Commandments (and buy his pin).

As the fury of Hurricane Rita is about to hit the shores of Texas just 3 weeks after the disaster left Katrina, people of faith must be wondering...it

was revealed to me that in numerology, the numerical value of the Hebrew letters that make up the name Rita + God is equal to 620. The number of all the Hebrew letters that make up the Ten Commandments is...620! Is there a connection?³

What? Why is the Adventist Church advertising this guy's agenda?

Well, what became of all this? According to the *Washington Post*, many Adventists are wondering, as well. Apparently, there are a lot of books left over.

Meanwhile, conservative Adventists dutifully wonder in a chat room where the "first day" folks were when it was time to spread the word about the Ten Commandments.⁴

Or was it all about making a buck?

According to Alan Reinach, head of the North America Religious Liberty Association-West, it all "turned out to be largely a non-event."⁵

Were we used by Ron Wexler? Who spearheaded the Church's coordinated jump onto this bizarre bandwagon? Was the Ten Commandments Commission just an attempt to make money off of pin sales?

Perhaps this will help: This is what Ron Wexler was doing before he created the Ten Commandments Day. He also heads Heritage Study Incorporated, which is registered as a 501c (3) in Boca Raton, Florida. On December 8, 2005, the Federal Bureau of Investigation filed a criminal complaint in Florida that shows how Wexler teamed up with a husband and wife pyramid scheme that defrauded people of more than six million dollars. Wexler and his partner lost six hundred thousand dollars.

Notes and References

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Alexander Carpenter, a graduate student at the General Theological Union in Berkeley, California, is a regular contributor to *Spectrum* magazine. This article originally appeared on *Spectrum's* Web site at www.spectrummagazine.org/weblog/060602blogosphere.html

Hundred-Dollar Assassins

By Basim Fargo, Kjell Aune, and Valerie Fidelia, MEU/TED News

Bagdad, Iraq — "Killings in Iraq are becoming more and more common," according to a report by the president of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Iraq, Basim Fargo. "A man could hire an assassin for as little as a hundred dollars. Human life is so cheap in Iraq today, but in the eyes of God it is so precious," says Pastor Fargo. He observes, "The indiscriminate killing of people used to be by the tens every day, but now people are killed by the hundreds."

"Many of our members have left the country, but some still come to church every Sabbath to worship the Lord. Our local leaders feel they have a job to do and attend to their

challenging tasks under very difficult conditions. They count on God being with them," says Pastor Fargo.

Valerie Fidelia, women's ministries leader in the Middle East describes the activities of one vital ministry provided by the church in Iraq. "Despite the extremely tense situation in Iraq the women of Baghdad Adventist Church are still active. During the months of April, May and June they report that two people have come back to the Lord through their work. They have also managed to give five Bible studies in spite of the fact that travel throughout the city is very dangerous." A special day of prayer was also held.

"As the news focuses away from Iraq and concentrates more on Lebanon, we ask that you do not forget our courageous sisters in Iraq who do not know when they wake in the morning if they will still be alive by nightfall," urges Mrs Fidelia.

Besides random killings, kidnapping is also a big problem and explosions take place almost everywhere. Electricity is supplied only 2-4 hours daily. Many people are without employment and food for the family is a daily issue. "Material and spiritual support is much needed," says Dr Kjell Aune, president of the Adventist church in the Middle East Region. "Don't forget our members in the war-torn country of Iraq. Pray for their courage, safety and basic needs."

Dr Aune urges people of all faiths to pray for the situation that has currently arisen in Lebanon. "May God intervene and ensure stability in the region, may our members and employees not lose their hope and faith, and may the Church be kept strong and faithful."

The A.T.S. Throws a Great Party

By Robert M. Johnston

The nice tote bag issued to participants in the Second International Bible Conference (July 7–17, 2006) indicated that the gathering was sponsored jointly by the Adventist Theological Society (A.T.S.), the Biblical Research Institute (B.R.I.), and the Horn Archaeological Museum. The staff of the B.R.I. serves as the arm of the A.T.S. which functions as an organ of the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Adventist Theological Society members also staff the Horn Museum, so it would not be wrong to consider this conference completely an A.T.S. affair.

The meeting, which cost more than \$250,000, was financed through the A.T.S. with the help of a generous donor and contributions from the General Conference and the North American Division. The B.R.I. staff was responsible for organization and logistics, which they handled very well. The Horn Museum planned the tours that were part of the program. Among other things, the tote bag included an attractively printed Program Book and Tour Book, which contained explanations of the sites of the Seven Churches of Revelation 1–3 and Patmos.

The some 250 participants were not by any means all A.T.S. members, but the group included people sent by their divisions from all over the world, as well as people like me, who happened somehow to find out about the conference and were able to pay their own way to Turkey. Of course, it was intended for the theologians and scholars of the Church, but almost all the top officers of the

General Conference attended. Those of us not of the A.T.S. were given a friendly welcome.

The venue, the Sürmeli resort hotel on the shore of the Aegean Sea, was spectacular. It stands not far from ancient Ephesus, south of the Turkish city of Izmir (ancient Smyrna). Food and service were outstanding. The theme of the conference was ecclesiology, “The Adventist Theologian and the Nature, Mission, and Unity of the Church,” but conference organizers defined the boundaries of the topic very generously.

The conference was carefully structured, but not oppressively so. The two Sabbaths included worship and lectures. Three of the other days were also given over to lectures, as I will explain, and the conference devoted five days to visiting archaeological sites and the Island of Patmos. When we toured, we filled five large buses, each of which had a tour guide. The tours were excellent.

General Conference president Jan Paulsen delivered the first Sabbath sermon and made an unscheduled presentation just prior to his early departure. In the latter session, he appealed for goodwill and dialogue between the two Adventist theological societies. As we have learned to expect, what he said was thoughtful and balanced. Vice President Ted Wilson preached on the second Sabbath, calling on all to stand against the “Mars Hill of secularism, pluralism, higher criticism, fuzzy theology, ambiguity,” and other such annoyances.

Each morning, Mark Finley presented a devotional, each based on the messages to the Seven Churches. These were genuinely helpful. Finley came across to me as one evangelist who really likes to learn and knows how to use what he learns.

I perceived that the heart of the lecture component of the conference was intended to be the plenary sessions. Besides the two Sabbath speakers, the plenary session speakers were (in order) Angel Rodríguez, Jiri Moskala, Roberto Badenas, Ekkehard Müller, Gordon Christo, Kwabena Donkor, Richard Davidson, Edward Zinke, Gerhard Pfandl, and Larry Lichtenwalter. The speakers were carefully chosen and their papers thoroughly vetted.

I would have to describe the majority of these presentations as reactionary, defensive, rigid, and quite predictable, in both tone and substance. Presenters apparently devoted a disproportionate amount of the time and effort into getting them into Power Point, for the presentations showed a disinclination to explore the topics broadly and deeply or to acknowledge difficulties in the positions they affirmed. Some time was allowed for questions and comments at the end, but time constraints limited these to sound bites. I felt it would have been more helpful to have a format that ensured sustained dialogue, especially between scholars who express contrasting views.

The breakout sessions contrasted sharply. There, presenters read papers for twenty to twenty-five minutes and then fielded responses from the audience. One had to choose among five simultaneous papers at a time, from a total of seventy-five. Anyone who had submitted an abstract was put on the schedule, including even me. These papers were not vetted ahead of time, and judging from the abstracts and the presentations I heard, there had been no attempt at censorship, and contrasting views were represented.

Some of the papers were adven-

turous or even revolutionary. A few plowed new ground and even pointed toward a theological paradigm shift. I wished I could have heard more. The only woman who presented alone was Cyndi Tutsch, from the White Estate, but there was a presentation by the husband and wife team of Jonathan and Kathleen Kuntaraf.

On the last Sabbath afternoon, all attendees gathered to hear and vote for a "Consensus Statement." A committee was handpicked earlier to draw up this document, which was basically a brief summation of plenary session presentations. There was really no reason why it could not have been prepared before the conference began. The whole group of participants discussed the document part-by-part and indicated its approval with a show of hands.

If only a minority disapproved of the wording of a section it was deemed to represent a consensus! Finally, the group voted on the whole. I realize that getting a consensus from such a large group would have been a minor miracle, but why was it so important that it be called a "consensus"? It is true that in the end no one voted against the statement, but the degree of manipulation and intimidation used to achieve this result left a bad taste in many mouths.

One of the stated purposes of the conference was the promotion of unity among Adventist theologians. Perhaps the thing that most contributed to such a result was the fellowship. Eating, traveling, and networking with fellow Adventists of differing flavors was a happy experience. We discovered that the Others who think differently are not necessarily evil and that we have a lot in common after all.

It was in this informal way that

some sustained dialogue occurred, to the frustration of dining room personnel patiently waiting to clear the tables. Politeness forbade much frank grappling with the issues that hovered in the backs of our minds, but this conference was a beginning. In the future, I hope there will be similar occasions in which the Adventist theological community will be more broadly represented and the formal dialogue freer and more sustained. It will please the Lord.

The conference was a great party, and I thank the A.T.S. for letting me go and even present a paper. I am glad I went.

Robert M. Johnston is emeritus professor of New Testament at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Mich.

Loma Linda Researchers Help Save Endangered Turtles

By Patricia Thio

Source: *Adventist News Network*

Larry and Carol Stevenson may not have planned to become advocates for endangered sea turtles. But, in 2004, they realized many endangered sea turtles were being harvested for consumption from the waters around Roatan in the Bay Islands of Honduras. So they struck a bargain with local fishermen to "reclaim" as many turtles as they could and return them to the inshore waters of the island.

The deal was not without cost though, and the family now spends significant funds on the purchase of turtles, a steady supply of food for the animals, and valuable work time in maintaining a protected area for the turtles to be temporarily housed.

With the help of their daughter, Ashley, and son-in-law, Barry Kennewell, they own and operate the Reef House Resort on Roatan. Their desire to give back, both to the local community and to the



COURTESY LOMA LINDA UNIVERSITY

Stephen Dunbar, Ph.D., assistant professor, Department of Earth and Biological Sciences, marks a green turtle for later identification in Roatan.

marine environment from which they make their living makes them different from other resort owners.

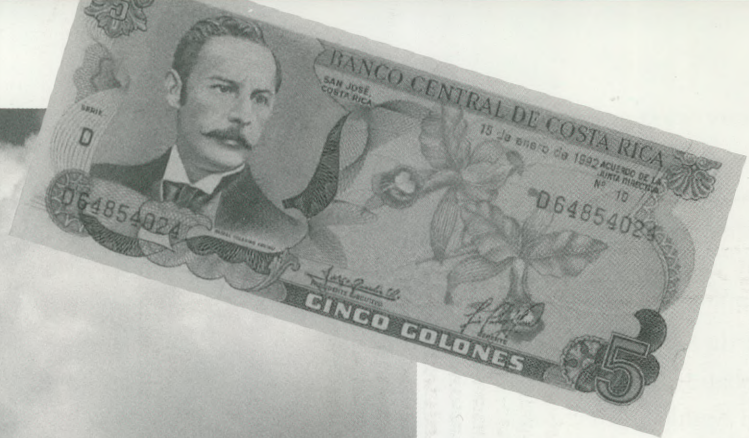
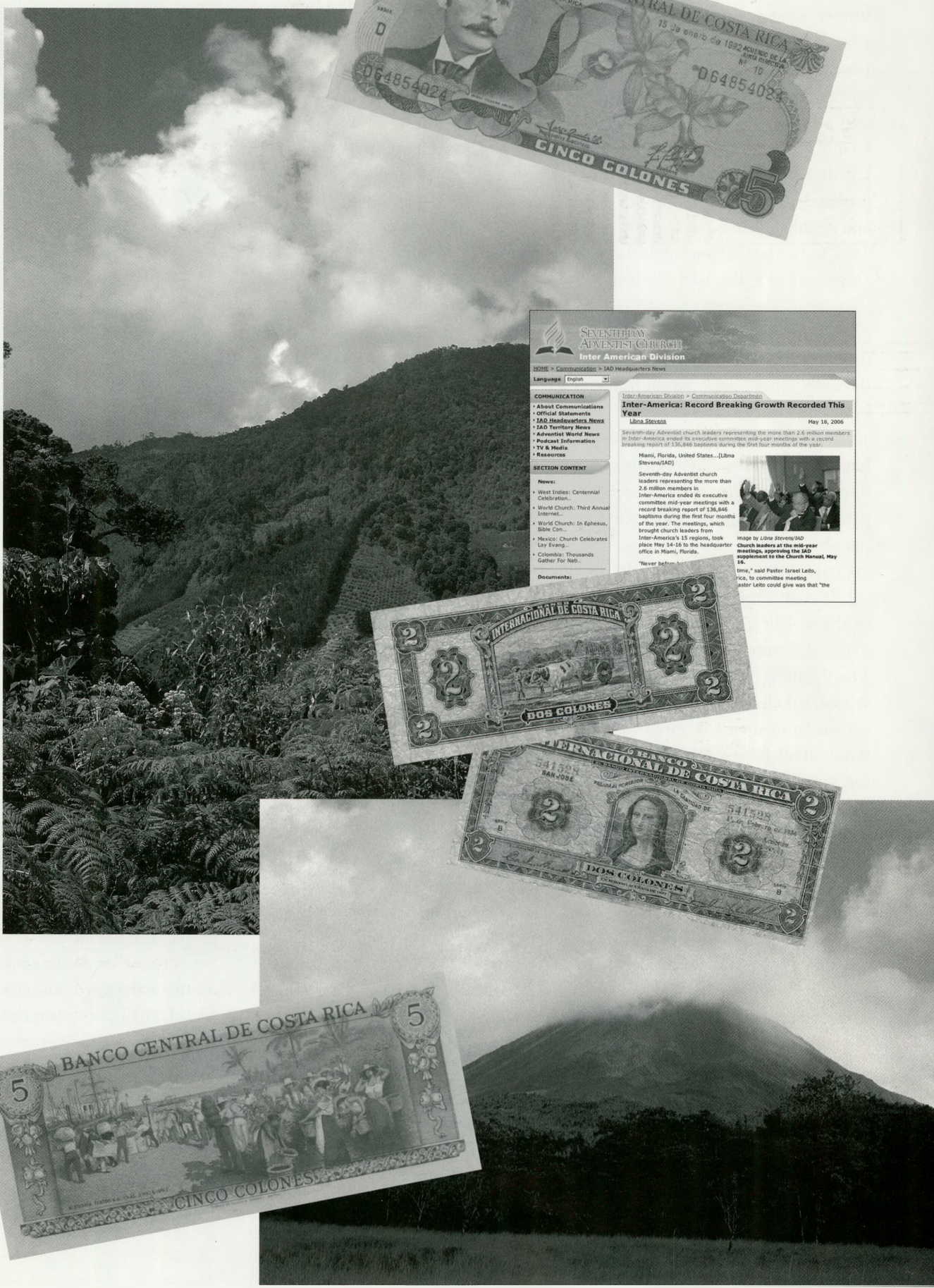
It was more than accidental that the Stevensons offered to provide dive support to Stephen G. Dunbar, Ph.D., an assistant professor in the department of earth and biological sciences at Loma Linda University (LLU), and his graduate students, April Sjoboen and Viren Perumal, in October 2005. At that time, Dr. Dunbar and his students were in Honduras conducting rapid assessments of Roatan's marine life for a project funded by USAID.

"Hurricane Wilma had whipped up the waters around most of the island, but Larry Stevenson kept saying, 'It's calm over where we are—why don't you come dive with us?'" Dr. Dunbar recalls.

During that trip, Mr. Stevenson asked Dr. Dunbar if he would be interested in doing some work with

Continued on page 80...

THE INTERNATIONAL CHURCH



SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH
Inter American Division

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Language: English

Inter-American Division > Communication > Headquarters

Inter-America: Record Breaking Growth Recorded This Year

Lina Stevens May 18, 2006

Seventh-day Adventist church leaders representing the more than 2.6 million members in Inter-America ended its executive committee mid-year meetings with a record breaking report of 136,846 baptisms during the first four months of the year.

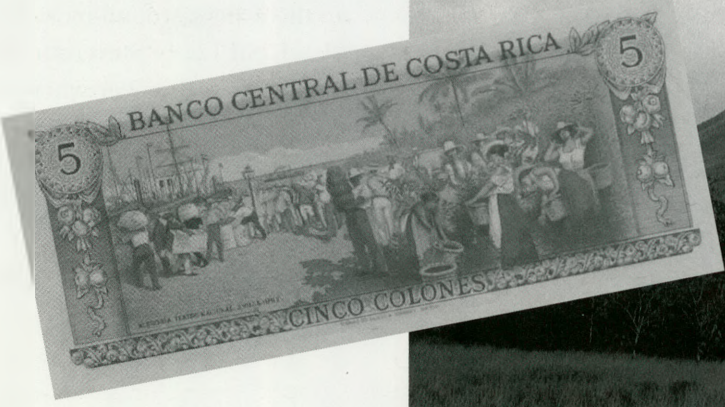
Miami, Florida, United States... [Lina Stevens/IAD]

Seventh-day Adventist church leaders representing the more than 2.6 million members in Inter-America ended its executive committee mid-year meetings with a record breaking report of 136,846 baptisms during the first four months of the year. The meetings, which brought church leaders from Inter-America's 15 regions, took place May 14-16 in the headquarters office in Miami, Florida.

"Never before..."

Image by Lina Stevens/IAD
Church leaders at the mid-year meetings, approving the IAD supplement to the Church Manual, May 16.

"...," said Pastor Israel Leito, IAD, to committee meeting pastor Leito could give was that "the



Discussed: baptismal goals, teenage girls, missions, conferences, Social Security payments, nepotism, accreditation, revolving funds, credibility

On Becoming a Conference: The Costa Rican Story

By Timothy Puko

Mario Thorp moves quickly up and down the center aisle of his church in Edison, N.J. He is almost shouting, trying to energize his sermon, told in Spanish, about the contrast between sin and grace. He stops and reaches out his long, slender arm to pat a man on the shoulder. Later he walks over to two teenage girls and talks with them directly as he tilts over the pew in front of them.

He asks them if they are sinners and of the devil. He is referencing 1 John 3:8. Their answers are uncertain and punctuated with giggles.

“Si practicas el pecado estás del Diablo,” he tells them plainly. Then his straight face gives way to a broad smile and he changes the mood. He holds out an open palm, his voice hushes accordingly, and he switches to English to make his point. “That’s what we’re talking about: grace.”

This is what members at the Edison Spanish Seventh-day Adventist Church say they like about their pastor, Thorp—that he’s energetic and can connect with the youth,

especially by speaking both of their languages. The church is full on Sabbath morning and growing, they say. When Elder Laz Rodriguez asked the New Jersey Conference for the best pastor available late last year, conference officials assured him Thorp was it, Rodriguez says after the service.

Yet it was only five years ago that Thorp left his home church in Costa Rica, he says, marked and unwanted by administrators there. The problem they had with him, the reason they tried to force him to other countries in the union, is that in 1995 he saw a high-ranking administrator cheating on his wife, he says.



"I was a lamb to the slaughter from day one when I saw that. They were just waiting to cut me out," Thorp says. In 2001, he accepted a transfer to the United States, but for those six years "I lived in hell," he adds.

Thorp's story is remarkable not because it is exceptional, but because it is common. Abuse by church administration forced at least thirty seasoned pastors out of Costa Rica in recent years, often without much of their earned retirement benefits, according to some of the workers now in the United States. Many of the expatriates have joined with church members in Costa Rica in making wide-sweeping accusations about

under probation since 2004. One of the major concerns of the Adventist Accreditation Association and the Costa Rican government's accreditation organization is the university's theology degree program, which was modified without authorization from the General Conference Education Department. Furthermore, the country's Supreme Court ruled the Social Security Administration and the university liable for quickly settling more than twelve years of unpaid Social Security payments to a former university professor.

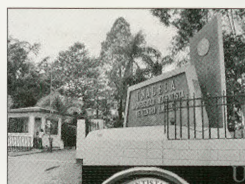
The Costa Rican media has also honed in on the university, producing reports about government inves-

The Costa Rican Supreme Court ruled the Social Security Administration and the university liable for quickly settling more than twelve years of unpaid Social Security payments to a former university professor.

unethical and illegal conduct among the leadership throughout the Inter-American Division and the Costa Rican church administration. These problems have allegedly festered for at least the past decade and their repercussions have rippled throughout the continent.

The situation in Costa Rica is very complicated and just as confusing. The division president says the problems are limited and in the process of being fixed. The dissidents say that recent changes in administration were offered as appeasements, but that corruption is still the culture of the county's Adventist administration. Even what is known for sure about recent years' events in Costa Rica seems constantly subject to polarized interpretations.

First, what is known: Central American Adventist University, in La Ceiba, Alajuela, Costa Rica (left, and Web site, below), has been



tigations into student allegations that the university falsely advertised its faculty's qualifications. Some congregations in the country had become so exasperated with the situation that they requested a switch in affiliation to U.S. conferences and have created a Web site to increase awareness of the "procedural irregularities that our church has been suffering."

Costa Rica has a population of slightly more than four million people, comparable in size to the state Kentucky. Today, there are 161 churches and 46,181 members. The Costa Rica Mission was first organized in 1927, the same year that Central American Adventist University was established. However, it was not until 2006 that conference status was granted to a portion of the membership.

This field promotion was one the biggest developments of an already tumultuous 2006. A year that brought a court decision against the Church, a meeting between General Conference and division officials about the university's status, and the forced resignation of a union president, it began with a meeting of delegates in late January. In what he says was a move inspired by a distressed letter from some Costa Rican pastors, Inter-American Division president Israel Leito brought delegates and pastors together from around the country for a meeting to discuss various problems.

As with any steps taken by Leito and the current administrators, this special session was met with harsh criticism, some claiming that a vast majority of delegates were selected because of their loyalty to the current administration. Nonetheless, the session resulted in the division's Executive Committee approving the

Central-South Costa Rica Mission for promotion to conference status, something for which Leito's critics had been clamoring.

"Let me put it this way: For us to organize a conference, we have strict guidelines," Leito says. "They must be in a growing mode, they must be stable and they must be mature enough to handle the Church's business."

January 2006 was not the first time Costa Rican delegates requested promotion for their missions. At an official session in 1998, when all of Costa Rica was still part of one field, delegates voted for promotion. Instead of approving, church leaders in 2003 divided the field into three separate missions.

Leito says that explosive church growth in the region requires the regions to be divided, now a common practice within the division. Doing so creates more administrative positions to help manage the growing number of members. It also keeps the power away from the people because mission officers are appointed rather than elected.

The current Costa Rica missions, as listed in the most recent yearbook, range from about eleven thousand to nineteen thousand members, comparable in size to many small conferences in the United States. If Costa Rica were organized as one conference it would be more the size of the largest U.S. conference.

The January delegates are still requesting the union to investigate remerging the Costa Rican fields. In the meantime, the other two missions will be moved forward toward conference status, something Leito says could happen for the Caribbean Costa Rica Mission within the next year. But it will not happen, he says, until they are ready and their promotion would be in the best interest of the Church.

Again, as with anything in Costa Rica, that is just one interpretation. There is another.

Warner Richards grew up, studied, and became a pastor in Costa Rica. Now he is pastor at the Corona Seventh-day Adventist Church in Queens, N.Y., and in May he was sitting at a conference table in an upstairs room at the Northeastern Conference headquarters. On his left was his wife Norka Blackman-Richards, an adjunct English professor at Queens College of the City University of New York, whom he met when they were both students at Central American Adventist University. On his right was Anthony Usher, another former Costa Rican pastor and current senior pastor at Brooklyn's

Christian Fellowship church. Across the table were Mario Thorp, and two other former Costa Rican workers, Pastor Ricardo Morin and Eunice Senior-Baker, wife of the Northeastern Conference president.

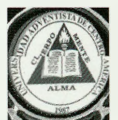
These are not people without credentials, yet their interpretation of the Costa Rica situation is very different from Leito's official stance. They all took time on a Friday morning specifically to meet with this reporter and discuss the Costa Rican problems, which they describe as surreal and threatening to the foundation of the Adventist Church.

They agree that a core of church administrators in the country and in its union have manipulated the church governing system in order to exploit it to build personal fortunes and artificially inflate baptismal numbers. They all have their personal testimonies of how administrators tried to intimidate workers, withhold their Social Security or other retirement benefits, encourage falsified baptismal certificates, and eventually force them out of their jobs.

"[Corruption] is no longer something that goes on now and then to cheat the process. It's become the norm," Richards says. "The reason there is so much aggression against workers [in Costa Rica] is because the system that has been set in place is one that requires absolute loyalty to the leaders." Richards says that at administrative meetings dissent among pastors was always unacceptable to administrators. "You're sitting there and seeing the injustice and, if you say something, your job is on the line. That's the type of loyalty they demand."

There are two well-connected groups that make these types of accusations against church leadership. There are the former workers, like those who met in New York, and there is a grassroots organization in Costa Rica. The group in Costa Rica is responsible for the Web site, <http://www.concerned-adv-members.org>, which alleges that church leaders in the country have violated church policy, ethics, and local laws. There is no information on the site explaining exactly who runs or supports it, and a request for that information sent to the site went unreturned.

One former university professor, Daniel Scarone, says delegates from almost forty churches formed the group known as the National Committee to Recover the Church in Costa Rica, in December 2004. Their primary goal at that point was to bring awareness to the issues before the 2005 General Conference Session



in Saint Louis. Using personal testimonies from named and unnamed church workers and correspondences between church officials and local media reports, the site details problems at the university and throughout the country's Adventist workforce.

Many of the grievances bubbling to the surface are connected to the desire of some administrators to create a rouge system, Richards and others say. In their interpretation, the fields were kept as missions, not

which pastors reported baptisms before the people were actually baptized, but adds that those pastors were fired. He says that he is not aware of any systemic practice to inflate baptismal numbers promoted by Gonzalez, but that Gonzalez is no longer the union president anyway.

The breaking point came after pastors met with Leito during preliminary investigations leading up to January's special session. Workers loyal to Gonzalez told him who the whistleblowers were in Leito's meet-

One of the Adventist Accreditation Association's issues with the university is that it created an unauthorized theology program.

because they were not ready for promotion, but because this allowed for consolidation of power by requiring field leaders to be appointed instead of being elected by the members. Those leaders then went about trying to consolidate their power further by putting intense pressure on pastors to fulfill high baptismal goals, often encouraging them to do so fraudulently. Those who met the goals were heavily rewarded professionally and financially. Those who did not, or who dared to speak out, as Richards describes, were threatened with the loss of benefits or work entirely.

"Soul winning became solely a numbers game, and pastors who could not keep up with the game were made to feel unworthy of their calling," Richards wrote in a letter sent to General Conference officials.

Under the leadership of South Central American Union Conference president Luis Gonzalez in the late 1990s, Richards says that pastors were given yearly baptismal quotas to fill. If a pastor didn't fulfill the requirement, usually about 150 baptisms a year, whatever numbers were not achieved were added to the number required from that pastor during the next year. Failure to meet those numbers would result in loss of vacation time and public ridicule at worker's meetings, Richards says.

Furthermore, this system encouraged pastors to fabricate numbers, Morin says in Spanish as translated by Richards. Morin says it was common for pastors to give food and clothing to non-Adventist Costa Ricans, in exchange for their Social Security numbers to be used on baptismal certificates. Fundamental Adventist beliefs have also been watered down in an attempt to make transitions easier and provide more encouragement for people to join the Church, Morin says.

Leito says he has heard about one or two cases in

ings, Leito says. Those pastors were then subjected to "reprisals" by Gonzalez, and, because of this and other heavy-handed managerial tactics, Gonzalez was asked to resign after the special session. Many pastors in the country "were living in fear that anything they [did] or [said] could come and hurt them later," Leito says. But he believes the problem was limited and has been fixed, and he denounces Richards and other critics—especially the ones in the United States—as conspiracy theorists.

"Several of our pastors that came and are working there, they did not migrate because of problems with the Church. They migrated for economical reasons, for better pay, better working conditions," Leito says. "I have told people when a pastor moves to Haiti and has issues with the Church, then I will listen to him."

Again, the forced resignation of Gonzalez, though welcome, has been met with skepticism and claims that he is being used as a scapegoat. The problems allegedly remain, notably in connection with the Perlas, a well-connected family within the division. Some Perlas and their in-laws take up a number of high-ranking administrative positions within the division, including division secretary Juan O. Perla and university president Herminia Perla. The university has become a focal point for those trying to demonstrate how the need among administrators for staff loyalty has driven the creation of an unethical administrative system.

Daniel Scarone is now the Hispanic ministries coordinator for the Michigan Conference in the United States. Before that, from 1992 to 1996, he was a theology professor at the university in Costa Rica. It was during his last two years there that he says the situation in the country grew out

of control. He says Juan O. Perla, then president of the Central American Union Conference and one of two university board members, asked him to shorten the length of a General Conference-approved master's degree program he was in charge of. Scarone says he told him he couldn't go against General Conference guidelines.

"The president told me, 'OK, there is no problem,'" Scarone says. "'Do it as we are saying to, and if [General Conference officials] come back to you, just tell them what they want to listen [to], and then when they are gone, just go back to doing it the way we want you to.' He was suggesting to me to cheat."

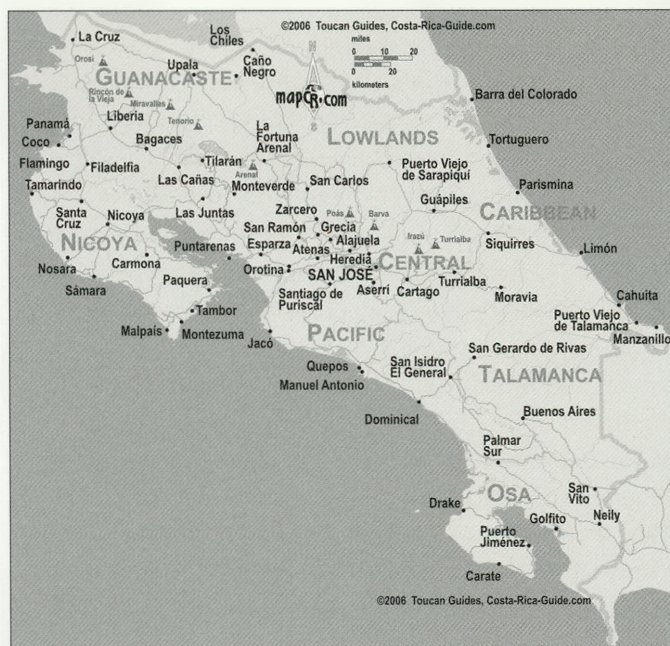
Perla did not respond to an e-mail about Scarone's version of events. Later in the evening during which Scarone says the men had this conversation, Scarone, then an interdivisional worker, decided to resign at the end of the school term. Two other faculty members, including the head of the Theology Department, left with him in one of the first exoduses of church workers in Costa Rica.

"What I detected is that they were trying to devise a system in which they might provide a cheap kind of leadership at the churches, [not] very knowledgeable people in charge of the churches," Scarone says. "That's the reason why the theological program was almost completely dismantled. As far as I know, they called this new guy 'pastorcitos,' what in English would be called 'little pastors.' When you go there, you cannot find any longer a pastor with history in service and in charge. They are all young people with not too much experience or knowledge."

One of the Adventist Accreditation Association's issues with the university is that it created an unauthorized theology program that gives bachelor's degrees to students who have not spent enough time in academic study. Critics say this is the administration's method for fast-tracking young, impressionable men into field work so that seasoned pastors willing to buck the system can be pushed out.

"Maybe it is correct, I don't know," says Enrique Becerra, a former associate director of education with the General Conference who led trips to the university with the accreditation team. "I have heard the explanation from several people, but I call it an interpretation."

The official interpretation of the problem's origins, one basically accepted by the Church's world director of education, C. Garland Dulan, is that the evangelistic needs of the country were so great that the adminis-



tration needed to get pastors in the field as quickly as possible. "The [membership] growth was outgrowing the pastors, not because of not having the funds to hire the pastors, but because there weren't enough pastors to hire," Leito says. The university responded by implementing a theology program that placed its students in the field as active pastors and brought them back to the university only once a year for a month of intensive courses, Leito says.

Dulan and Becerra say investigating the cause of the probation is not a responsibility of or standard protocol for the accreditation team. "Our concern was not so much, why they did what they did. Our concern was what the government requires and what the Church requires. In that instance, they didn't meet either," Dulan says. "We are not an investigative team, from the standpoint of anything other than looking to see whether the criteria that we specify are being met. Outside of that, we may have personal concerns."

Dulan did not say that he had other personal concerns stemming from his two visits to the university. Ignorance of Spanish kept him from getting a feel for the environment there except for what was discussed as part of the official investigation, he says. His most recent trip came in March and he says that, although the university did not have enough time to implement



fully the requested changes before the association's April meeting, it showed itself on track to have its probation lifted when the accreditation association meets this October.

There are people who agree with Dulan and Leito that the situation, not only at the university, but also across the country, is getting better. Edwin Lopez is Costa Rican, a pastor, and the Hispanic ministries coordinator with the Idaho Conference in the United States. He has worked closely with Scarone and others in the North American Division to push for change within Costa Rica. The pastors he knows and family members of his who still live there have been telling him that church administration is doing less micromanaging.

"Among membership in Costa Rica, pastors are not behaving with that heavy-handed [way] that they used to behave. Local congregations are being treated very different by many pastors," he says. "The Church has changed in the way that the Church is not being abused the way it used to be. But the situation is the same in that the same administration is at the top of church leadership."

Lopez continues: "Members, not only in the metropolitan areas, but members all across the country, don't trust leadership. Since the Church was hurt so deeply, getting that confidence back for the leadership and for the structure is kind of difficult. Members are there, they love their church, they're faithful to the doctrines of the Church, but that doesn't mean they have come back with confidence in leadership."

There are dark clouds still hanging over the leadership. Although some church representatives agreed to some reconciliation during the January session, the country's government did not. Two rulings in April make that clear. First, the government agency that oversees financial organizations told church officials that their revolving fund, used to self-insure church facilities and give loans to church employees to purchase homes, cars, and other items, is illegal.

The revolving fund is a touchstone for controversy within the Church as well, with many claiming that it has been used improperly to reward favored employees and funnel unearned money to church administrators. Leito says this is untrue, that the fund is modeled after similar programs run by U.S. church fields and that appropriate steps have been taken to register it with the

government. However, in the United States revolving funds are not used for loans to employees. Only churches and institutions can borrow from that fund. And loans are never given to the relatives of officers, because of conflict-of-interest implications. Leito's son was given a loan that has proven to be very controversial. So for some, Leito's assurances are not enough.

"We observe that the attitude of denominational leadership here and up the ladder to the [Inter-American Division] level is that the rules established and manipulated by these leaders take precedence over national law," former university professor Mike Lynch (*photo above*) said in an e-mail from Costa Rica. "This is not and certainly should not be the position of our world church."

Lynch's personal case is the other looming dark cloud. The second ruling in April, coming from the Constitutional Chamber of the Supreme Court, requires the country's Social Security Administration to resolve issues quickly with Social Security funds owed by the university to Lynch. Lynch's case has been working its way through the country's court system for the past two years. He alleges that the university underreported his Social Security payments and that it unjustly fired him when he pursued corrections for this and other problems at the university.

American-born Lynch worked in the Inter-American Division as a professor and teacher for thirty-five years, mostly at the university, and as a national employee in Costa Rica. Shortly after becoming an interdivisional worker in 2000, he began investigating his Costa Rican Social Security savings to ensure that enough funds were available for his retirement.

"Soon I discovered that there was a serious shortage of reported payments from the university on my [Social Security] account," he says. "I requested administratively that this problem be resolved. There was little interest in dealing with the problem from the university administration."

After further investigations into the matter, Lynch says he began to realize that Social Security payments were underreported, not only for him, but throughout the university. Pastors Thorp, Richards, Usher, and others say they found their retirement savings similarly underfunded when they left the country. Leito agrees

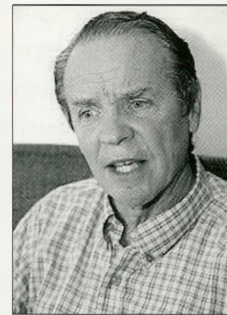


PHOTO BY FLANDER ALAN/LA NACION

that this was a problem at the university, but disagrees with the assertion from some former workers that the practice was part of an intentional attempt to move money inappropriately. The problem, he says, was more a misunderstanding of the law. According to him, university officials are now eager to hear from the government about what exactly is owed so it can be paid.

"It's not that we have corrupt leaders," Leito says. "This is my problem that people need to understand. I'm not defending anyone by saying people did not make mistakes. I don't believe they intentionally went out to deceive or cheat anybody. Even the president of the university right now, her Social Security is woefully underpaid. All through the years they have not contributed what was to be contributed, even for her."

One of the issues in verifying which interpretations are correct—or which parts are correct—is the wealth of information available. Lynch has become famous for e-mails he has sent to friends, allies, and church administrators. Within a day of receiving a request for documents in June, Lynch responded with more than fifty thousand words of personal e-mails and correspondences with church and government officials, much of it in Spanish.

The joke has been made numerous times that an

cating that something is really wrong."

Rajmund Dabrowski, communication director for the General Conference, says the Inter-American Division is in charge of handling all such inquiries and potential investigations. When asked if he or other General Conference officials had seen Scarone's document, he said he had not and did not know who had. For his part, Leito describes Scarone as "the most unethical minister that I know in my life," and says that when Scarone visited Costa Rican churches last year, his work resulted in deep divisions between local church members and local administration.

There is at least one former General Conference official, however, who finds Scarone's document impressive. Humberto M. Rasi is semi-retired now, but still in charge of special projects for the General Conference's Department of Education. He was a director of the department for twelve years, stepping down in 2002, which, by coincidence, was the same year the department first took action against the Central American Adventist University. Scarone consulted with Rasi when compiling the documentation he later sent to Paulsen's office. "I think the dossier of Scarone raises valid questions about church administrative decisions and actions," Rasi says.

He is careful not to suggest that Scarone and the other critics are right, especially in matters outside of

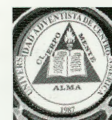
The problem was a misunderstanding of the law. . . . [I]t's not that we have corrupt leaders. This is my problem that people need to understand. I'm not defending anyone by saying that people did not make mistakes." — Israel Leito

entire book could be written about church issues in Costa Rica. But a book-length packet of documents has already been prepared and was sent in March to General Conference president Jan Paulsen and other world church administrators. Scarone collected 418 pages of witness testimony, archived letters and e-mails, financial documents, and news reports to send to Paulsen's office.

"The main purpose of sending this and the hope involved was that the General Conference pay attention to this documentation and start to convene an impartial committee to go down to Costa Rica," Scarone says. "I think that it's something clear, at least, not, what I would say, as an accusation, but, to say, 'Look there are irregularities.' We don't know if this is right or wrong, but there are evidences that are indi-

education, with which Rasi is less familiar. But he is also unwilling to dismiss the claims immediately. Some of the witness testimony and the financial documents may indicate that some administrators were acting improperly, especially in relation to the revolving fund and the Social Security payments, he says.

"I think Scarone has acted in a pastoral way in addressing issues," Rasi says. "He has prepared a dossier, trying to help the leadership of the Church beyond the Inter-American Division to see these matters and to seek a solution. Of course, some top division administrators



are very uncomfortable with that because they would prefer it to remain under the division jurisdiction.”

Paulsen sent a letter in response to Scarone saying that the division is addressing the situation, the same type of response Lynch and others say they have seen before. Dabrowski says that, according to church policy, church members and fields can take grievances beyond the division president’s office and to the General Conference, but that they would have to follow formal procedure

would implicate division leaders in unethical conduct. Critics say the lack of wide-sweeping action in the face of those extreme scenarios has added to the credibility hit Adventist leadership has taken in the country.

“The Church has become irrelevant, but boy we are not going to change that protocol for nothing,” Anthony Usher says in frustration. “Apparently we’d rather let [members] go than change.”

There is also the issue of the Church’s relationship

“The Church has become irrelevant, but boy we are not going to change that protocol for nothing.” —Anthony Usher

and contact lower levels of church administration first. When asked if people involved in the Costa Rican situation have taken those steps, he said he did not know and referred the question to Leito. Letio says he has never received any direct contact from Scarone or Lynch.

Dabrowski deflected to Leito any questions about specific actions taken by the critics of Costa Rican and Inter-American Division administrators and any responses to those actions. The Inter-American Division “has full jurisdiction over church affairs within its territory,” he said in an e-mailed statement. “As a church, we are a member/constituent-based organization.... Our Church looks to the entities involved at the level of activity, in this case the union, and to the division as its next level of administration for this region, to oversee issues and activities within respective territories.”

Speaking on the theme of unity at a Bible conference in Turkey in July, Paulsen said rapid growth has forced the Church to be more decentralized in its management. “Rapid growth [and] expansion, numerically and territorially, means that the kind of control and guidance which in the past may have come from one central headquarters...is not sustainable or effective,” he said according to Adventist News Network. “There may be technical reasons or political reasons or reasons of government regulations which severely limit the extent of involvement which may come from an international headquarters in another part of the world.”

For many affected by the situation, this position is unacceptable. For them, the need for General Conference involvement—involvement from an impartial group—is clear because all the worst-case scenarios

with its individual members. Some of the church workers interviewed for this story said they feel let down by the Church. They have trouble understanding, considering all the stories they have and the evidence they have compiled, how General Conference officials can rationalize any decision to let the division handle everything.

“If that’s what people feel, that’s what people feel,” Dabrowski says in a phone interview. “I’m not pleased when people feel badly. But it seems that any problem-solving ought to be based on facts. There are many people who don’t like a particular government or a decision of a government. I believe in a democracy and a democratic process within the Church.”

Those facts themselves, again, can be overwhelming. After two years, the Lynch court cases have not been completely decided. Church education officials have made three visits to the university in two years but will have to wait until October to make a decision on possibly removing its probation. There are the countless e-mails from Lynch, and the four hundred-plus page packet from Scarone. And there are the forty-six thousand church members in Costa Rica—the majority without power to elect their field leaders—spread across three administrative fields. The amount of research it would take to find conclusive answers to all the issues is daunting.

“And it would be good for the General Conference, for the sake of faithful Adventists in Central America and the sake of the good name of the world Church, to look into the matter,” Rasi says. “If the documents are found to be fake, if the information is invalid, then the air would be cleared. If the opposite occurs, then issues would be clear—and matters would be taken care of.”

Timothy Puko writes for the *Press*, of Atlantic City, New Jersey.

Did My Neurons Make Me Do It?

This October, Adventist Forums will sponsor a conference on "Science and the Human Soul." Nancey Murphy will be the main speaker. In addition, T. Joe Willey will open the session on "Neuroscience, Human Nature, and Redemption." Sabbath morning, Alden Thompson will present "With All Your Adventist Body, Soul, and Mind." We encourage you to read Murphy's book, *Bodies and Souls, or Spirited Bodies?* published by Cambridge University Press.

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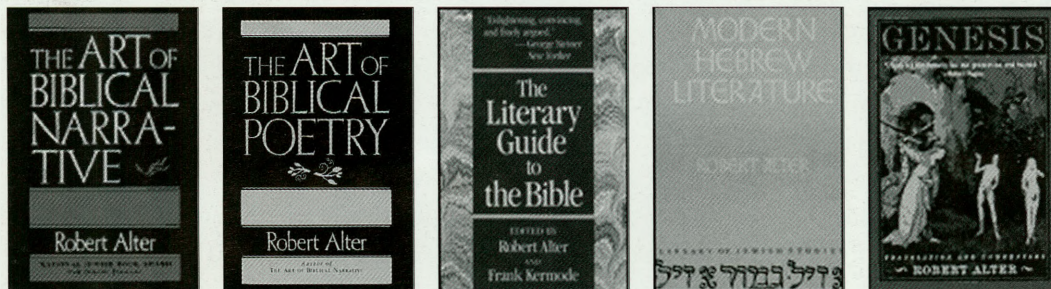
Axon

Discussed: T. S. Eliot, literary play, puns, God's end of the telescope, Hagar, Flaubert, Gideon,
literary archaeology, historical amnesia, sensual deliquescence, imaginative force

An Agenda for a New Kind of Literary Study of the Bible

By Robert Alter

The literary study of the Bible may for some seem to be what philosophers would call a category error. The Bible, according to this common though imprecise understanding, is a set of religious texts. Its purpose is to convey a vision of how God created the world, of his designs for the historical destiny of humankind, including a special account of his covenanted people, and to set forth in forceful terms the moral and ritual obligations that the readers of these texts through the generations are expected to fulfill. What, then, could all this have to do with literature? One does not have to be a Philistine to pose such a question. A reader as subtle as T. S. Eliot saw fit, after his conversion to Anglo-Catholicism, to rebuke those who read the Bible for its poetry.



In 1971, Robert Alter, a literature professor at Berkeley, gave an informal colloquium at Stanford on the literary study of the Bible. The lecture grew into an article, then a book. More books followed. The *Los Angeles Times Book Review* says he makes reading the Bible fun again. In March 2006, he gave the Longo Lecture at Pacific Union College, which is published here with the permission of the author and the college.



But religion and literature are by no means mutually exclusive categories, as the evidence of literature outside the Bible in many languages should abundantly remind us. The great seventeenth-century Anglican poet George Herbert was one of the most intense and profound religious poets in the English language, and it is also hard to think of a poet more acutely aware than he of the elaboration of poetic form—rhyme, meter, imagery, even typography. Herbert and his

phonetic aspects of language, to the expressive possibilities of syntactic ordering, and to subtleties of word choice, while they deploy as well a variety of strategies for the presentation of character and dialogue, shifts in narrative point of view, the effective selection of narrative detail, significant analogues among different episodes, and much more. It is my conviction, as I will try to show through some brief examples, that careful attention to the elaboration of these aspects of literary

The literary play of the Bible is almost always play with a purpose.

near-contemporaries, John Donne and Milton, illustrate, as do countless other writers, that what is literary is not merely aesthetic, though, whatever else it may be, it is almost always aesthetic, as well.

Because of the way that the aesthetic and the religious are interfused, I will avoid that common phrase, “the Bible as literature,” often used as a rubric for college courses, because there is something condescending or at least concessive about it: the Bible, it suggests, isn’t really literature, or at least not chiefly literature, but one might, as a kind of intellectual diversion, choose to view it as such. It is a more just description to speak of the literary dimension of the Bible, and that is what I will try to illuminate here.

What role, then, does literature play in Scripture? The bulk of the Bible is either narrative prose or poetry. (I will not attempt to draw the catalogues of laws—cultic, civil, and moral—under the literary tent, though some recent scholars have attempted to do that.) Literature is a particular use of language that seeks to exploit the strong expressive potential of the artful ordering of words and in so doing makes available to its audience a kind of utterance that is more memorable, more forceful, and often more complex or more richly paradoxical than would be possible through extraliterary uses of language.

In poetry, the linguistic resources tapped include sound (especially its rhythmically regular character), imagery, syntax, and, in the special case of biblical verse, the complications of the semantic dynamics of parallelism between the first half of the line and the second, or in triadic lines, among the three members of the line. (I will have more to say later about the dynamics of parallelism.)

The prose narratives also reflect attention to the

form in the biblical poems and narratives brings us closer to what the biblical writers actually meant to say.

Now, the manipulation of literary form is from a certain point of view a kind of play, anthropologically related, let us say, to a child’s kneading clay or putting together any other raw material in order to make a pleasing shape. The presence of such play is evident throughout the Bible, a good deal of it detectable even in translation, though some of it, as always the case in literature, is visible only in the original language. But, as we would expect, the literary play of the Bible is almost always play with a purpose.

Let me begin by citing the humble instance of the pun, commonly and wrongly dismissed as the lowest form of humor. The Hebrew Bible abounds in puns. Perhaps it is a form of expression that tends to flourish in languages like biblical Hebrew that work with a relatively small vocabulary. These plays on words are often quite telling. For example, toward the end of Psalm 69 (verses 31–32), the speaker affirms, in a gesture reminiscent of some of the later Prophets, that a heartfelt song of gratitude is more pleasing to God than a sacrificial beast slaughtered on the altar. (This and all subsequent biblical quotations are my own translations.)

Let me praise God’s name *in song*
And exalt Him in thanksgiving,
and it will be better to the LORD than *an ox*,
than a cleft-hooved bull with horns.

The statement seems straightforward and, certainly from a modern point of view, admirable, but in the Hebrew, the theological argument turns on a pun. “In

song" is *beshir* and "than an ox" is *mishor*. What the poet has done is to effect a religious or cultic substitution by shifting the vowel in a monosyllabic noun: *shir*, "song," is made to take the place of *shor*, "ox," on the linguistic surface of the poem, as in the spiritual depths of the psalmist's life. Such purposeful punning occurs many hundreds, perhaps even thousands, of times in Hebrew Scripture.

Let me cite another example from biblical poetry that is less microscopic and also visible in translation. The relationships between the two or three parts of a line of biblical poetry (a subject to which we will return), though seemingly a matter of semantic equivalence, generally involves some sort of development from the first part of the line to the part, or parts, of the line that follow—an intensification, a focusing, a concretization, or a miniature narrative momentum. In Psalm 90, one of the great meditations in all literature on the unbridgeable difference between God's eternal temporal scale and the transience of human life, we encounter this haunting line:

For a thousand years in Your eyes
are like yesterday gone
and like a watch in the night. (Ps. 90:4)

Here is time, through the magic of poetry, imagined through God's end of the telescope; in a rushed sequence of diminishing temporal terms, we move from "a thousand years" in the first verset to a "yesterday," which has already vanished in the second verset, to "a watch in the night," not even the twenty-four hours of the yesterday that has gone, but a mere four hours or less (one-third of the night in biblical reckoning), a brief period devoid of daylight, when everybody but the night watchman are plunged in sleep, as the psalm will proceed to remind us.

I offer this single memorable line as a token of thousands of others in the Bible, where the peculiar semantic dynamics on which the poetic line is constructed enable a vision of God and human existence that would scarcely be possible—surely not with this evocative power—in a nonliterary form of expression.

As a final preliminary instance of the force of literary shaping in the Bible, I would like to call attention to the boldness and precision of word choice, a feature shared by poetry and narrative, though deployed differently in each. In the story of the banishment of Hagar and Ishmael in Genesis, there comes a moment

when Hagar concludes that there is no hope for the child's survival: "And when the water in the skin was gone, she *flung* him under one of the bushes and went off and sat down at a distance, a bowshot away, for she thought, 'Let me not see when the child dies'" (Gen. 20:15–16).

Now, to the best of my knowledge, I was the first translator to render the crucial Hebrew verb here as "flung," although that is clearly what it means. (The very same verb is used in Exodus when Pharaoh decrees that every male Hebrew infant should be flung into the Nile.) Others represent it as "place," "put," "lay," or some other evasive term. The King James Version uses "thrust," which is a little better but does not go far enough. It is probably a general rule that great writers are more daring and more surprising than their translators are willing to be.

I think due respect for the precision of word choice of biblical prose throws the following light on this heart-stopping moment in the story: Hagar is convinced that her only child is about to perish from thirst in the blazing heat of the desert sun. She cannot bear to watch him die and so withdraws a bowshot away (a beautifully apt measure of distance here because Ishmael, as we learn at the end of the episode, is destined to become an expert bowman).

In a paroxysm of maternal despair, she does not place her child under the bush but flings him down there. The terrible emotional cost of the ordeal Sarah has inflicted on Hagar through Abraham is thrown into sharp focus by this single violent verb. Perhaps one may glimpse here how the "message" of the biblical story about human nature and the moral consequences of particular actions is more complex than might initially appear.

Literary analysis, of course, is not necessarily a magic key, and there are a good many things one should *not* do in the literary study of the Bible. Let me rapidly list a few cardinal sins of literary analysis of Scripture. One should not read the Bible as though it were modern literature, as though biblical narrative had been written by someone like Balzac or Conrad, biblical poetry by Baudelaire or Wallace Stevens. The conditions of production of liter-



ature, the governing conventions, and the strategies for organizing both narrative and poetry were in many respects quite different from those obtaining in modern Western literatures, so one cannot simply impose a modern literary framework on the ancient texts.

The fundamental difference between a literary practice based on individual authorship, with the name of the author and indication of copyright on the title page, and a literary practice where authors are anonymous (except for the Prophets) and the texts them-

grid. Methodology, it should be said, is often seductive to scholars in the humanities because it gives them a reassuring sense that their work is not subjective but rigorous and perhaps even scientific; and also, since methodological fashion changes by the decade, it encourages a feeling that what the scholars are doing is at the much-invoked cutting edge of intellectual endeavor.

Thus, when some younger biblical scholars began to take an interest in literary analysis in the late 1970s,

Good readers will be good readers in spite of methodology. . . .

selves often constructed as collages of different sources, has far-reaching consequences. These sweeping contrasts do not mean that there are never points of illuminating contact between ancient and modern.

The repertoire of literary devices, after all, is not infinite, and thus sometimes more or less the same device or technique will be observable in both a modern and a biblical text, and one may learn from the modern about the ancient, or, indeed, the other way around. From time to time, the reading of a modern writer otherwise quite unlike the Bible may throw light on a biblical literary practice.

Flaubert, for example, is utterly different as a stylist from any of the biblical writers in the lexical wealth of his language, the sheer profusion of his stylistic palette, yet his almost fanatic devotion to finding *le mot juste*, the exactly right word for the particular context, may teach us to appreciate better the extraordinary lexical precision and elegant rigor of the makers of prose narrative in the Bible.

Joyce, who in *Ulysses* actually uses an abundance of biblical materials, though in rather unbiblical ways, produced in that novel one of the most elaborate systems of recurring narrative motifs in modern literature. Having read *Ulysses* with attention to its structure of motifs, we may be in a better position to appreciate the centrality of recurring motifs in many biblical narratives—stones in the Jacob story, dreams in the Joseph story, water in Moses's story, fire in the story of Samson, and so forth.

The more prevalent error, at least in academic circles, in trying to understand the literary operations of the Bible, is to try to analyze it according to lines laid out in some pre-existing methodological

there was a wave of structuralist studies of various biblical texts. This was followed by a spate of semiotic readings, reader-response interpretation, deconstruction, and, a little later, by the more ideological trends of academic literary studies such as New Historicism, postcolonialism, and feminism. By and large, the results of all this activity driven by academic fashion have been less than illuminating.

I do not mean to dismiss such work wholesale. Good readers will be good readers in spite of methodology, as is demonstrated by one resolutely structuralist biblical scholar who, in the midst of elaborate and often wearying schemata of purported formal structures in the biblical texts, manages to offer some wonderful local insights into what is going on in the stories and poems.

I would like to propose an alternate model for how literary scholarship should deal with the Bible. What is called for, I would argue, is an enterprise of literary archeology. Just as archeology proper has given us a much better understanding of the material culture of ancient Israel—the layout of its homes, the structure of its sanctuaries, the mechanisms of its economic and agricultural life, and much more—through patient digging and the painstaking piecing together of fragments, we need to sift through the biblical canon and reconstruct the organizing conventions and distinctive techniques of biblical literature.

Instead of reading the Bible according to the guideposts of some ready-made system of analysis, we need to try to recover the Bible's own literary system as best we can. I am convinced that this is an empirical undertaking: by observing recurring patterns in the

biblical corpus and asking questions about how and why they occur, by accumulating the evidence of different but related examples, we can begin to get a handle on at least some of the governing literary conventions of the Bible.

Conventions, as I tried to show in my book on biblical narrative and in a good deal of subsequent work, are the enabling frameworks of the act of literary communication. When in the opening sentence of a story we see words such as these, "Once upon a time in a land far away," the knowledge of narrative convention we have had since early childhood allows us to pick up this beginning immediately as a signal that the narrative we are reading is not a realist novel or an epic poem but a fairytale, and we accordingly are prepared to encounter certain kinds of details we would not expect or accept elsewhere—wicked witches, princesses in towers, magic wands, symmetrical series of three sons or three daughters, and so forth.

In the case of the Bible, the familiarity with literary convention that was second nature to the original audiences was largely lost over the centuries because both Christians and Jews, focusing on the biblical texts as divine revelation, read them in entirely different terms, whether theological, typological, allegorical, mystic, or moral.

It is because of this historical amnesia that a literary archeology of the Bible is needed. Such features of the stories and poems as the use of repetition, the presentation of dialogue, the deployment of poetic insets in the prose narratives, the function of puns in linking adjacent segments of the text, the complex interplay of the two halves of the poetic line, need to be carefully scanned so that the organizing principles that undergird these narrative and poetic materials may be inferred.

In some cases, the recovery of a convention may involve a certain margin of conjecture because we can find only a handful of occurrences in the corpus where we might prefer to have at least several dozen; yet in many instances, a wealth of instances can be found and persuasive general conclusions can be drawn.

In the brief compass of these remarks, I will offer three exemplary instances in which the understanding of a recovered convention of biblical literature throws into fine focus what is going on in the story or in the poem. In each case, many dozens or even hundreds of examples of the operation of the same convention could be cited.

My first illustration involves the formal presentation of dialogue in biblical narrative. Most readers of the Bible will be aware that there is a fixed formula for introducing direct speech in these stories: And X said to Y, followed by X's words, and then, And Y answered and said (or, simply, And Y said to X), followed by his or her response to X. But what I began to notice some years ago, and what I believe has not been observed in the scholarly literature, is that there is a divergence from this general pattern that looks like this: And X said to Y, followed by X's words, and then again, with no intervening response from Y, And X said to Y, with more of the first speaker's dialogue. In the end, Y may finally answer, or no response may be given.

Why this odd repetition of the formula for introducing speech as the same interlocutor continues to speak? After examining dozens of instances of this pattern, in keeping with my notion of empirical investigation, I arrived at the following conclusion: whenever the formula for introducing direct speech is repeated without an intervening response from the other speaker, that repetition indicates some sort of difficulty in response on the part of the second speaker—bafflement, embarrassment, surprise, or whatever the case may be.

When Gideon has successfully completed his expedition against the marauding Midianites (in this passage they are also referred to as Ishmaelites), he is approached by his men with the following proposal:

And the men of Israel said to Gideon, "Rule over us, you, your son, and your son's son, for you have rescued us from the hand of Midian." And Gideon said to them, "I will not rule over you, and my son will not rule over you. The LORD will rule over you." *And Gideon said to them,* "Let me ask something of you, that each of you give me the nose-ring he took as booty"—for they had nose-rings, as they were Ishmaelites. (Judg. 8:22–25)

The dialogue begins according to the set form: the speech of the men is introduced, they speak, Gideon's speech is introduced, and he answers. After Gideon's bit of emphatic dialogue, however, in which

he renounces the proffered kingship, there is no recorded response from the men of Israel. Instead, the narrator repeats the formula for introducing speech, "And Gideon said to them," and Gideon proceeds to request the donation of gold nose-rings.

What is going on here? On the basis of many analogous instances that exhibit the same formal pattern, I would propose that the repetition of "And Gideon said" indicates an awkward, perhaps painful or even ominous silence on the part of the men of Israel: Here they have offered a crown to their triumphant commander, and he flatly refuses them! At this point, Gideon recognizes that this is a moment of danger: the men might well rebel against him, fall away from him, or choose another candidate for the throne.

Thinking quickly, Gideon realizes that his troops need a security blanket, and if it isn't a king, he must offer them something else—hence the request for the gold nose-rings, from which he will fashion a golden ephod (the story of course pointedly alludes to Aaron and the golden calf), which will prove to be a snare and delusion to Israel.

As readers, if we pick up the signal conveyed to us by this convention for the presentation of dialogue, we are able to tune into more of what is going on between Gideon and his men, and grasp more of the interplay of political, psychological, and theological concerns in the story.

A far more widely deployed convention of biblical prose is the use of minute divergences from verbatim repetition in strings of phrases, clauses, and whole sentences that, at first glance, appear to be repeated word-for-word. These little swerves from the verbatim—a change of one or more terms, the addition or deletion of an item, a switch in the order of items or events as they were initially reported—are almost always (the exceptions are quite rare) apertures of meaning, points at which nuances of difference are introduced in regard to the characters, their motives, what happens to them as they interact with different characters.

Others besides me have observed this phenomenon—I would make special mention of Meir Sternberg and George Savran—and there are so many hundreds of occurrences of the convention in biblical narrative that its existence as a general principle used by the writers and recognized by their audiences is

scarcely in doubt. Let me offer one succinct example.

In Genesis 27, the episode in which Jacob steals the paternal blessing from Esau, when the blind Isaac calls Esau to his bedside, he asks his firstborn to bring him game to eat, "so that *I may solemnly bless you* [literally, "so that my essential self may bless you"] before I die" (verse 4). Rebekah, having eavesdropped on this conversation, reports Isaac's words to her favored son Jacob in what looks like a verbatim repetition, with her report ending in the following quotation of her husband's speech: "*I shall bless you in the LORD's presence before I die*" (verse 6).

The change she makes is small but significant: she substitutes for *nafshi*, "my essential self," which amounts to an intensive form of the first-person pronoun (misleadingly rendered in the King James Version as "my soul") the verb "to bless" simply conjugated in the first-person singular but followed by "in the LORD's presence" (or, "before the LORD").

Isaac's intention to execute a performative speech act in blessing his firstborn son is converted by Rebekah into a solemn declaration before the Lord. The message she is conveying to Jacob is that this blessing, uttered as it will be in God's presence, will be irrevocable. Thus, if Jacob wants to get the blessing for himself, he must listen to his mother's plan of deception and make the utmost haste to carry it out, or the blessing will be lost forever.

When Jacob then comes before his father, pretending to be Esau, he repeats, as we would expect in biblical narrative, the very words his father spoke to Esau and that were repeated, with the strategic revision just noted, by his mother to him, inviting Isaac to "eat of my game so that *you may solemnly bless me*" (verse 19). Why does Jacob revert to the actual words Isaac spoke, which he himself did not hear, instead of using the version reported to him by his mother?

I would suggest that in the midst of the lie he is perpetrating, the mention of "in the LORD's presence" sticks in his throat and so he substitutes language that implies a relatively secular if solemn act; in this fashion he employs unwittingly, and perhaps with unconscious irony, the formulation his father himself had used. One should also note that a phrase present in both previous versions of this clause is quietly deleted here: Jacob does not go on to say "before you die," no doubt sensing that it would be tactless to mention the imminence of death to his old and failing father, even if Isaac himself had done so.

Recognition of this convention, then, of purposeful divergence from verbatim repetition provides us a means of reading the story more fully. Whenever utterances are repeated ostensibly word-for-word, we need to look for the places where one term is substituted for another or some other kind of change is introduced. If we then ask ourselves why the small swerve from verbatim restatement has been made, we will begin to see in most instances that more is going on in the story than meets the casual eye.

My last example is from poetry. Now, it has been understood at least since the eighteenth century that lines of biblical poetry are generally organized as two (or sometimes three) units—I have been calling them “versets”—that are parallel in meaning. If you have “hearken” in the first verset, it is likely to be followed by “listen” or “incline your ear” in the second verset; if you have “speech” in the first verset, you can usually count on the appearance of something like “utterance” or “saying” in the second.

But poets, including biblical poets, are not fond of

simply repeating themselves, and it has become more widely recognized in the past couple of decades that there is very often some sort of development between the first verset and the second in what at first may seem sheer synonymity. As I noted above, ideas and images tend to be intensified, focused, concretized, made more specific, and sometimes a miniature narrative momentum is built up as the poet moves from the first half of the line to the second. A reader who assumes, as many have, that there is nothing but synonymity operating in these lines of verse will be lulled into inattention and miss much of what is truly interesting in biblical poetry.

I offer as a single vivid instance that can stand for countless others two lines from Proverbs 5, the poem in which the Mentor warns his disciple (“my son”) to resist the wiles of the “stranger-woman” and content himself with the virtuous sensual joys of married life:

For the stranger-woman’s lips drip honey,
and smoother than oil her palate.
But in the end she is bitter as wormwood,
sharp as a double-edged sword. (Prov. 5:3–4)



Pastor Roy &
Bennie Gee

AU '66

Auburn Gospel
Fellowship

“A SAFE PLACE
FOR GOD’S GRACE”
10:45 A.M. Sabbath

TWO CONGREGATIONS ONE HOLY CHURCH



Pastor Rick &
Nancy Kuykendall

AU '80

First Congregational
Church of Auburn

“STRIVING TO BE
AN ENLIGHTENED
CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY”
10:00 A.M. Sunday

710 AUBURN RAVINE ROAD, AUBURN, CA 95603 • 530.885.9087

“How good and how pleasant it is to live together in unity!”

This brief specimen illustrates how even didactic poetry can exhibit remarkable virtuosity. Since poetry obviously depends to a greater degree than does prose on the meaningful play of the original words, in this instance my comments will involve a little more detailed reference to the Hebrew.

In the first two lines, at first there would seem to be a pat matching of conventional word pairs. "Honey" and "oil" are often paired in parallel versets as two different tokens of the pleasurable good life. "Lips" and "palate" may look like another virtually formulaic pair, but they actually deserve a second look. The lips are, after all, on the outside, the palate deep within the mouth. The sequencing of the two offers an instance of narrative progression between the two versets: first the kiss on the honeyed lips, then, in a more intense erotic gesture, the penetration of tongue into mouth.

In the Hebrew, a pun lurks in "her palate," *hikah*, which is only a half-vowel away from *heiqah*, "her lap," a term often used as a metonymic euphemism for the woman's sexual part. Kissing leads to deep kissing, which leads to the dangers of actual sexual intimacy with the seductress, to be spelled out in the next line.

The phonetic richness of this line in the Hebrew invites a brief note. The concentration of alliterations is striking ("lips drip" in my translation is a pale intimation of it). The initial verset in the Hebrew sounds like this: *nofet titofna siftey zarah*, with a dense cluster of t- and f- and n- sounds occurring in shifting combinations. It is as though the sensual deliquescence of the seductress's lips had suffused the language itself. Then "smooth" in the second verset of this line, *halaq*, figures in a second alliterative pattern with "her palate," *hikah*.

The second line constitutes an obvious antithetical reversal of the first, with sweet honey turned into bitter wormwood and the smooth inside of the mouth into the sharpness of a sword. Here, too, however, the reader conditioned to watch for development from one half of the line to the next will see how an initial idea is forcefully intensified. Wormwood is nasty-tasting stuff, but, at least in reasonable doses, it won't kill you, and it was even taken as a tonic.

The double-edged sword is quite another matter: by this point, we have moved from smooth kisses to a lethally sharp weapon. The Hebrew, moreover, for "double-edged sword" means literally "sword of [two] mouths," so the mouth image with which this whole small sequence began culminates here in the devouring "mouths" of a well-honed sword with two edges.

Finally, in another strong wedding of sound and meaning, every one of the first three versets ends with the feminine *ah* suffix: *zarah* (stranger-woman), *hikah* (her palate), and *la 'anah* (wormwood). The last word of the fourth verset breaks this pattern with *pifyot* (mouths), a phonetically dissonant note at the end that aptly accords with the ominous appearance there of a double-edged sword in a sequence that began with honeyed lips.

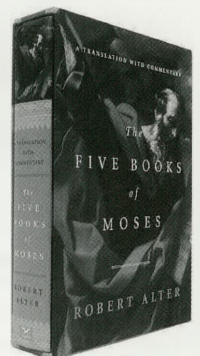
Although I am a little uneasy about the application to the Bible of the term *message* because it sounds too reductively simple for the way the biblical writers convey complex meanings (messages, before the era of e-mail, were the province of Western Union, at so many cents a word), I hope that this last example may suggest that even when a biblical writer wants to get across an explicitly didactic message, the deployment of literary resources gives vividness, depth, and imaginative force to what is said.

The kind of literary archeology I have tried to illustrate through these examples holds, I am convinced, ample rewards for the reader.

Literature involves an elaborate system of rules, methods of ordering language and ideas, and expectations on the part of the audience conditioned by literary conventions. A certain cultural amnesia, as I have argued, has taken over in regard to the particular system within which the literature of the Bible was shaped.

To the extent that we can recover the principal elements of that system, all of us who read the Bible for whatever motives will have the possibility of seeing it more fully—which is to say, not only enjoying more fully the pleasures of the imagination it offers but grasping more firmly the truths about human nature, society, history, and humankind's relationship with God that these endlessly rich writings sought to convey.

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Discussed: ideas, challenges, overlapping images, art, Bible as a physical book, order, chaos, geometry, DNA, manuscript, story, binary code, superstition, abstraction

Redesigning Genesis: One Artist's Approach

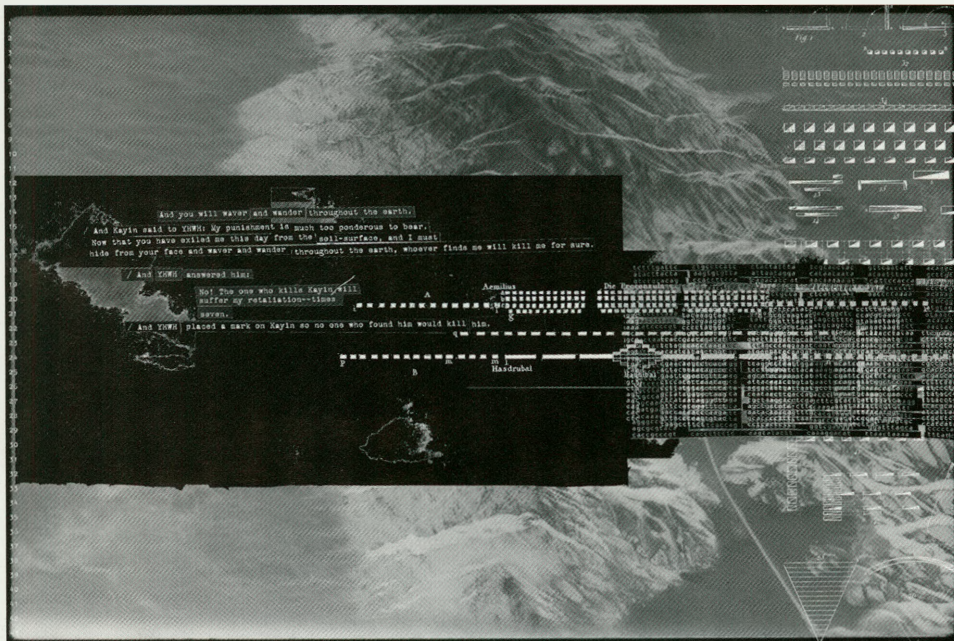
By Sharon Fujimoto-Johnson

"Some clients think they're God. What I never expected was to work for the real one. It's kind of intimidating. But the possibilities are infinite. What other client requires no formal presentations and understands your ideas better than you do? Then again, what other client can hurl lightning bolts?"

Redesigning *Genesis*, Rusch's visual art book and MFA thesis for the Academy of Art University, San Francisco, opens with this thought.

Rusch created *Redesigning Genesis* around writer/musician Mike Mennard's translation of Genesis, which according to Rusch, "challenges traditional inter-

pretations of the content and voice of Genesis and the various attempts to modernize the text. [Mennard] believes that the existing versions are not true to the oral traditions of the original, that they 'fix' inconsistencies, soften political incorrectness, and are out of sync with the original."



In *Redesigning Genesis*, Rusch's intention was

to parallel the new-ness of this translation by approaching the concept, design, and visual form in non-traditional ways that breathe new life into the original meaning of the text. . . . [*Redesigning Genesis*] references a wide variety of conflicting translations through the use of overlapping images, and presents Genesis as a multi-layered text that puts the reader through cycles of making sense of chaotic content. Visuals also represent the underlying order of the universe and man's form of expressing them, such as geometry, the golden section, binary code, and DNA code. In addition, the text is often presented as typed manuscript—as if God is pecking out the script as he goes, adjusting the story, making changes, and also making mistakes.

Rusch's visual interpretation of Genesis challenges us to reexamine and recreate the book we thought we knew. His rhythmic, experimental collages—so far removed from the staid leather covers and block columns of text in the Bibles we've memorized—remind us that the Bible is a physical book, "flesh," and not simply words, and that these words are alive. This art asks us to consider the genesis of a new book of Genesis.

Rusch's *Redesigning Genesis* is the kind of art that challenges us and perhaps even unnerves the traditionalist in us, because it asks questions and asks us to ask questions. Art is emancipated exploration, and when thoughtful art collides with the spiritual, we transcend the mundane, the empty, the decorative, the flippant, and we make space for growth and clarity in our faith. As Gregory Wolfe, editor of *Image*, writes, "In their highest forms, religion and art unite faith and reason, grace and nature; they preserve us from the twin errors of superstition and rationalist abstraction."¹

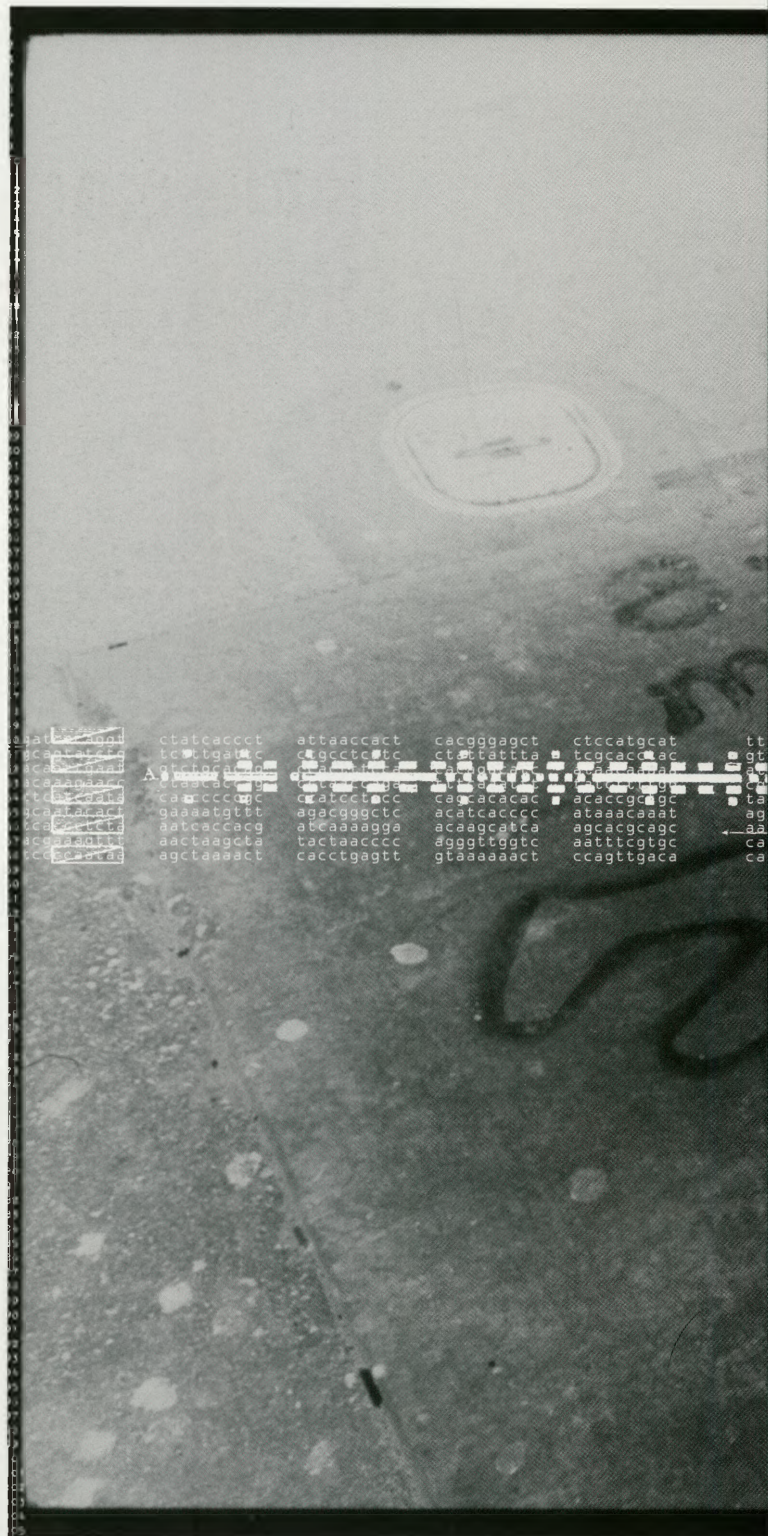
Notes and References

1. *Intruding Upon the Timeless: Meditations on Art, Faith, and Mystery* (Baltimore, Md.: Square Halo Books: 2003), 17.

Cliff Rusch is assistant professor of graphic design at Pacific Union College and art director and designer for the college's Public Relations Office.

Mike Mennard is assistant professor of English and communication at Union College, as well as a freelance writer, recording artist, children's poet, and songwriter.

Writer Sharon Fujimoto-Johnson is the translator of *Rainbow Over Hell*. She was once a student in Cliff Rusch's art classes. Sharon writes about art for the *Spectrum* Blog.



CHAPTER FOUR

And the adam had sex with Havva his woman,
and she conceived and bred Kayin [Gain].

/And she said: I have gained an adam with
YHWH's help. /

And she also bred his brother Hevel.

And Hevel became a shepherd of sheep, while Kayin worked the soil.

/ And when the time came, Kayin brought fruit from

the soil as a gift to YHWH.

As for Hevel, he brought the fattest first-born of his flock.

And YHWH acknowledged Hevel and his gift, but he acknowledged
neither Kayin nor his gift.

And YHWH said to Kayin,
whose face appeared fallen.

/ And YHWH said to Kayin:

Why be outraged?

Why is your face so anguished?

Invariably, if you do right, you will be exalted.

If you do not do right, wickedness will camp at your porch
obsession which will dominate you.

/ And Kayin said to Hevel his brother: Come with out me to the field.

/ And when they got to the field, Kayin ~~murdered~~ Hevel his brother
and he killed him.

/ And YHWH said to Kayin:

Where is your brother Hevel?

/ And he answered: How should I know? Am I my brother's guardian?

/ And YHWH replied:

What happened? A cry from the soil!

Your brother's blood cries out to me.

And you are now expelled from the soil which gulped
with a gaping mouth your brother's blood. And now,

whenever you work the soil, it will work against you.

Two panels from the Cain and Abel story in *Redesigning Genesis*. On page 27, the visual elements include diagrams of armies and troop placements to suggest future implications of the first killing of a man and DNA code representing man. Pages 28 and 29 include a background photograph showing death. Text is presented in reverse and as cut-together pieces to represent chaos, darkness, and the impact of the act of killing.

Twenty years ago, Andrew Becraft and Sharon Fujimoto-Johnson were neighbors on a missionary compound in Yokohama, Japan. Both the children of missionaries, Andrew was a “white boy” born and raised in Japan, whereas Sharon was a Japanese-American girl displaced from California. Today, they are both writers and translators. Here, they discuss issues in translation in an increasingly global world.

Discussed: obligations, cadence, cultural trade deficits, displacement, religious food chain, aesthetics, silence, friendship, intentions, grace

and Loyalties: A Dialogue on Translation

By Andrew Becraft and Sharon Fujimoto-Johnson

FUJIMOTO-JOHNSON In translations, meanings are always skewed just a bit. Context is largely lost. In addition, nuances, rhythm, and the sounds of the original language are also all inevitably lost. Translation, then, is an art of approximation.

I think translation requires one to soak up a bit of the source language, if only to hear the lilt and music of that particular language.

BECRAFT For me, the success or failure of any translation depends entirely on whether or not the translator has met his or her obligations. The obligations of a technical translator are clear—convey the information, without regard to the diction or cadence of the original. Things get a bit trickier for those of us who've tried our hand at translating literature. Is our obligation to the author? To our own readers? To art?

Ultimately, translation is a matter of divided loyalties. For example, loyalty to art may come into conflict with loyalty to accuracy. Overcoming these conflicts and balancing divided loyalties can be just as much a creative act as the original writing process itself.

FUJIMOTO-JOHNSON And just as significant is the translator's struggle between loyalty to the source language and to the target language. The translator stands between two languages and works as a transfer medium.

"Good"—or perhaps "diplomatic"—translators try their best to stay in that space between languages, because once loyalty shifts primarily to one language or the other, translation risks becoming a form of imperialism or otherwise dispossession.

As a form of cultural trade, the import-export of translation must go both ways. English literature is widely exported into other languages. Amazon.com's Japan site, for example, is categorized between Western literature and Japanese literature. Translations of *The DaVinci Code* and *Who Moved My Cheese?* are readily available on bookshelves elsewhere in the world.

BECRAFT This isn't always the case here in America, though. Even as the world becomes more connected and interdependent, it seems that America becomes more and more isolated. The "cultural trade deficit" seems to grow with each mystery novel, each action movie, each music video, and with each foreign policy decision by the President.

FUJIMOTO-JOHNSON At the same time, within our borders, we are seeing what might be called “displaced writing.” In the recent issue of *Poetry* (page 67), translator Aleksandar Hermon comments on Bosnian poet Semezdin Mehmedinovic, who writes in Bosnian while living here in America. “If the central event of your life and poetry is displacement, your story—and your poem is entirely different,” he says. “A displaced voice can never sound smooth.” Mehmedinovic’s poetry, as the work of a displaced person, includes “losses and absences, [and] discontinuities in the language.”

Translation, it would seem to me, is itself a type of displacement. It takes a work out of its contextual home and places it in a foreign setting among readers who may not necessarily understand its references and cultural markers. To a degree, it then changes the work itself.

BE CRAFT Look at what happens in a translation between languages with little in common, such as English and Japanese. Japanese authors have at their disposal not one but four scripts—*kanji* (characters derived from Chinese); *hiragana* and *katakana* (two phonetic systems); and Latin or “Roman” script.

The potential for visual expression is wholly lost when translated to a language like English, as are allusions present in homophones. Representing Japanese homophones phonetically (instead of with *kanji*) can introduce interesting allusions that are absent from an English translation. Cultural context is similarly lost between the two languages, unless the translator inserts explanations or otherwise modifies the text in translation.

I think this is why so many translations from Japanese sound stereotypically “Asian.” Something that could just as easily be translated “I’m glad I could help you” is too often interpreted “It is with honor that I accept the responsibility of serving you,” generally followed by a loud gong. You really must know both the language and the culture intimately in order to avoid making Japanese appear like an alien “other.” Knowing a few people is just not enough.

FUJIMOTO-JOHNSON To understand the language is to understand the culture and vice versa. The Japanese language is, at one glance, grammatically simplistic. Often, there’s no distinction between singular and plural. Implied subjects abbreviate sentences. Verb tenses are mixed rather freely, because as one native Japanese speaker explained to me, verb tenses don’t always represent time. It is a language of aesthetics.

BE CRAFT Under the surface, Japanese is a very complex language that contains an elaborate structure based on levels of politeness. In communication, one chooses among three main levels of politeness—*kudaketa* or *futsu* (plain), *teinei* (polite), and *keigo* (advanced polite)—according to his/her status in relationship to the other person.

FUJIMOTO-JOHNSON Then there is veiled meaning. What is left unspoken is sometimes as meaningful as what is spoken. To really understand Japanese, one must learn to listen in the space between words, to silence that is often foreign to the Western ear.

However, translation is not only a linguistic tool, but also a life tool. We’re all translators. Everything we see, read, live, and understand comes to us through the filters of our personal histories, belief systems, and hopes. Just as with translation, we create of life an imperfect approximation based on what we understand. People of faith are translators of faith standing between faith and non-faith, between the Bible and the world.

Believers of all religions have often mistaken religion for a food chain, and everyone believes his/her belief system is at the top. Perhaps a little translation would be in order. If we could recognize that the God of our translation is not necessarily supreme—that he himself changes form in translation—he is, after all, both the familiar *tu* of the French language and the God of deferential terms of the Japanese language—then perhaps we might find other (less divisive, less violent) methods of hashing out our differences.

The beauty—and value—in translation is that it allows us to expand our understanding of universals in humanity. Much like love or parenting or friendship, it’s riddled with imperfection, miscommunication, and inevitable loss, but also with immeasurable value. Translation is a very human act, and when carried out with good intentions, I think it can carry with it a bit of grace.

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How My Mind Has Changed and Remained the Same with Regard to Biblical Interpretation

By John Brunt

For some time, the Society of Biblical Literature has included a section at its annual sessions in which an older member reflects on how her or his thinking has evolved over the years under the title “How My Mind has Changed and Remained the Same.” Now that I am officially eligible to retire (although I do not intend to do so anytime soon), I have been emboldened to use this genre to express some thoughts on biblical interpretation.

Twenty-four years ago, *Spectrum* published an article I wrote on this topic.¹ In it, I argued that various methodologies included within the “historical-critical method” of biblical interpretation, such as source criticism, form criticism, and redaction criticism, can be used apart from the liberal assumptions that often accompany them, and that they are legitimate tools for Adventists who take the inspiration of Scripture seriously.

I held that portions of the actual methods used involve nothing more than careful, disciplined observation. The parable of the wicked tenants in Mark 12 and parallels served as a test case. The article concluded: “Indeed, virtually all Adventist exegetes of Scripture do

use historical-critical methodology, even if they are not willing to use the term. The historical-critical method deserves a place in the armamentarium of Adventists who are serious about understanding their Bibles.”²

About that same time, I taught a course at Walla Walla College called “A Scientific Approach to Biblical Interpretation.” The title had come from the previous teacher, Malcolm Maxwell, but I did not change it. In the course, we examined the role of reason in all interpretation, the need for some kind of control in interpreting texts, and the usefulness of historical-critical methodologies in attempting to ascertain the original intent of the author. I maintained that by careful use of

exegetical principles, the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and some readily available tools, the informed reader (and not only the scholar), could interpret the text of Scripture and provide a faithful exegesis.

Much has happened in the past quarter century in biblical interpretation. Postmodernism has shaken the confidence that texts even have such a thing as meaning apart from a socially constructed reading by a particular community. At the other end of the spectrum, Adventist fundamentalists challenge the notion that the text needs to be interpreted at all. The faithful reader should just “take it as it reads.”

I continue to resist both of these positions and hold that although the text always needs to be interpreted, and although the interpreter never has some spot outside her or his culture from which to interpret with total objectivity, nevertheless, texts do convey meaning that transcends their interpreters. In addition, the humble attempt to analyze as objectively as possible does yield fruitful understanding of the text’s message.

My thinking has changed over the past twenty-four years, however. I have come to a quite different understanding of what it means to “interpret” a passage of Scripture.³ This change comes because I now understand the text of the New Testament in a different way. The following table summarizes this difference in a slightly exaggerated way to make the point.

This change has come about from an understand-

ing of the difference between oral cultures and literary cultures and the different role that the text plays in the two. Significant influences have been Walter Ong’s book on orality and literacy, the *Semeia* volume on orality and textuality, Paul Achtemeier’s presidential address at the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL) annual meeting in 1989, and the continuing work of the Bible in Ancient and Modern Media section of the Society of Biblical Literature.⁴ In addition, I have been influenced by Richard Rice’s emphasis on the unbiblical nature of American Christianity’s individualism.⁵

These works emphasize that texts have different functions in different kinds of cultures. Robbins differentiates seven kinds of media cultures: oral, scribal, rhetorical, reading, literary, print, and hypertext.⁶ We are somewhere between print and hypertext in twenty-first century America, whereas the New Testament world was closest to the rhetorical. However, as Joanna Dewey shows, the manuscript world of the first century had a high level of residual orality, where the written message was primarily an aid to oral presentation.⁷

Richard Ward uses the works of Quintilian to show that when an author sent a document with a messenger to be read, instructions were often given on how to read, and even how to hold the manuscript and how to gesture.⁸ Most biblical materials would have originally been experienced through the medium of oral presentation.

At a 2005 session of the Bible in Ancient and Modern Media, David Rhoads proposed a new discipline of New Testament Studies that would explore the dimensions of these insights for interpretation.⁹ This

Old Understanding

The text is a product in itself to be read and understood

Interpretation is the task of the individual reader

The text gives religious and theological understanding to the individual reader

Historical-critical methodology is useful in interpreting the text

The use of the text in preaching and worship is the practical application of good exegesis and interpretation

New Understanding

The text is intended as notation to enable its oral presentation in a worshipping community

Interpretation takes place in community as the text is presented and made to come alive

The text evokes faith in a context of public worship

Historical-critical analysis is prologue to the true task of interpretation

Preaching and worship are the necessary culminating context of a process of interpretation

discipline would analyze the performance event as the site of interpretation while continuing to draw on the insights of traditional methodologies. It would lead to understanding of the original oral context and might result in oral presentations of passages of Scripture. (At the session Rhoads gave an oral presentation of Philemon.) He suggests the name *performance criticism*.

Although the usefulness of the title might be questioned, there is no doubt that this perspective is important in its recognition that biblical texts were not written to be read by an individual reader curled up by a fireplace in the den, but were designed to be presented orally in a public setting.

Even as late as the second century, Papias had a clear preference for the oral over the written. In the following statement, quoted by Eusebius, he speaks of the tradition about Jesus: "And whenever anyone came who had been a follower of the presbyters, I inquired into the words of the presbyters, what Andrew or Peter had said, or Philip or Thomas or James or John or Matthew, or any other disciple of the Lord," wrote Papias, "and what Aristion and the presbyter John, disciples of the Lord, were still saying. For I did not imagine that things out of books would help me as much as the utterances of a living and abiding voice."¹⁰

The expectation that the New Testament texts were intended for oral presentation is clear within the New Testament itself. In Revelation 1:3, John pronounces a blessing on the one who reads and those who hear the words of his prophecy: "Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of the prophecy, and blessed are those who hear and who keep what is written in it; for the time is near" (NRSV).

In both Revelation and Paul's writings, hymns and other liturgical expressions suggest that the context of this oral presentation is Christian worship. In Colossians 4:16, Paul urges the believers to share their letter so that it can also be read in Laodicea, and to ask the Laodiceans to reciprocate. "And when this letter has been read among you, have it read also in the church of the Laodiceans, and see that you read also the letter from Laodicea" (NRSV).

Of course, the lack of means for duplicating manuscripts, as well as the low rate of literacy, made some kind of oral presentation the only possible context in which most early Christians could have experienced the content of the letters.

Perhaps a useful analogy to illuminate the role of the text in first-century culture might be the role of musical notation in today's culture. Musical scores are not writ-

ten to be read privately by individuals, but to enable performance of the music. The analogy is not perfect, but most New Testament writings probably functioned more like musical notation functions today than like the novel you buy at Barnes and Noble functions.

No one took these manuscripts home to read them, but they came together to hear them read aloud, in a context of worship. There can be no doubt that this was true for the letters and Revelation, but as much of the work of the Bible in Ancient and Modern Media has shown, it was probably true of the Gospels and Acts as well.

Walter Ong has also shown that, although people in oral cultures should not be considered less intelligent than people in literary cultures, they do think in a way that is more pragmatic and less theoretical than we do. In addition, they think in ways that are more communal and less individualistic than in our culture.

Now, what does all this mean for biblical interpretation? I suggest that it has implications for the scope of what we consider to be the task of interpretation. It also has implications for our understanding of the content of the message that is interpreted.¹¹ This article, however, looks only at the first of these implications.

If the original intent of the New Testament texts was to evoke faith by being presented orally in public worship, they cannot be fully interpreted by theoretical analysis, any more than a Beethoven symphony can be interpreted by theoretical analysis. Certainly musicologists and music historians can explain a lot about a symphony. But it takes a conductor and an orchestra to interpret truly, for the music is only interpreted when it comes alive and is heard. True interpretation is more than analysis; it involves performing the music so that the original intent of the composer can be not only discussed and analyzed, but also experienced.

Of course, the music will never live again in exactly the same way as the composer intended. Musical notations are inadequate to cover all the variables of presentation. And different interpreters will choose different methods of interpretation. For Christopher Hogwood, the best interpretation comes from using period instruments, whereas other conductors prefer modern instruments that they believe the composer would have included had

such instruments been invented. Music critics and historians will argue as to which music is closer to the original intent of the composer. Their arguments might be based on extensive research and analysis. But their arguments do not constitute the sum total of interpretation. The music is interpreted when it lives again in sound.

I have heard baritone Thomas Hampson speak about the extensive research he does on songs in order to “interpret” them when he sings. The research involves history, culture, music theory, and much more. The true interpretation comes in the singing, however,

private experience, for the text was intended from the start to be part of a corporate worship experience. Only when the text comes alive in oral presentation, song, prayer, sermon, and other aspects of worship, has the process of interpretation been completed.

I am not at all willing to forgo the kind of theoretical analysis of New Testament texts that I supported twenty-four years ago. It can help us make the text come alive. But neither do I believe that such analysis is the sum total of interpretation. Nor is the use of the text in preaching and worship an optional, practical application

The goal of Bible study should go beyond either private devotion or doctrine and should ultimately let the Bible come to life to help form and shape a believing, worshiping community.

which benefits from, but is more than the careful analysis of the material he discovers in his research.

Now it is quite possible that another historian of music might not have Hampson’s voice and could not therefore interpret by singing as Hampson does. But the whole process of interpretation does not have to be accomplished by a single person. Communal collaboration in the process might be necessary. The same is true for biblical interpretation. The interpretive process may necessitate teamwork within the community. Yet each part of the team should recognize the role it plays in the total process, and it should see that the process is not complete until the message actually comes to life again.

Now, imagine hearing the book of Revelation read all at once in a worship setting. There would be little time for the kind of theoretical, historical analysis that we call interpretation. Rather, if the author’s intent is to be realized, the images of Revelation, many familiar from the world of apocalyptic and the Old Testament, would evoke responses of trust in the One seated on the throne and in the Lamb, and would give courage to worshiping Christians.

In our day, historical analysis can help us understand how first-century Christians would have responded to the images of Revelation and what echoes from the Old Testament and from their culture would have sounded for them as the message was performed. But once this analysis is completed, has the text really been “interpreted”?

I would argue that true “interpretation” means letting the text function for us in the same way it functioned for the original hearers. This cannot be a merely

added on to the process of interpretation. Making the text come alive in a way that evokes faith within a worshiping community is part of interpretation because it is part and parcel of the purpose of the text.

This is not to rule out private study of the text in personal reflection and devotion. The invention of print media opened up a new opportunity for the message of Scripture to be conveyed, and this opportunity is a great blessing that expands the role of the Bible. It also brings the possibility of distortion and misunderstanding, however. This privatization of Bible study has contributed to the kind of privatization of Christianity that Rice observes and opposes as unbiblical. The original intent of Scripture was not individualistic private devotion, but Christian community.

Unfortunately, even when the community is included in the role Scripture plays, biblical interpretation is often seen merely as a source for the discovery of doctrine, that is, what the community will believe. Individuals study the Bible for personal piety; the community studies to know what doctrines to believe. Without denying the importance of personal piety or doctrine, the goal of Bible study should go beyond either private devotion or doctrine and should ultimately let the Bible come to life to help form and shape a believing, worshiping community. In other words, the end product of interpretation is neither a commentary, nor a creed, but a community.

Therefore, the preacher who vividly brings the images of the text to life may be a much better “interpreter” of it than an erudite commentator who analyzes

it with all the tools of historical criticism. But at the same time, the preacher who takes advantage of the careful analysis should have more resources available for deciding how to make the text come alive. If we are faithful to Scripture, the goal of the entire interpretive process should be the rehearing of the text in a context that evokes faith and forms community.

I can think of powerful occasions when this has happened. Charles Teel's worship services on the book of Revelation, which have been presented in a variety of settings, serve as one example. Another is a sermon that Lou Venden preached at a Sabbath morning worship service a few years ago to a meeting of the Adventist Society for Religious Studies.

It was at a time when some teachers who were part of the group were going through a storm in life, and Venden made the story of the shipwreck in Acts 28 come alive in a way that comforted and inspired at a deeply personal level. That is genuine interpretation. The text, which was originally intended to be presented in a worship setting, was interpreted by fulfilling its original intent and making it come alive again for worshipers.

So what would I do differently today if called upon to teach the course I taught a quarter century ago called "A Scientific Approach to Biblical Interpretation"? First, the name would have to change.¹² A new title might be "A Holistic Approach to Biblical Interpretation." It would cover all the topics it covered twenty-five years ago. But it would also cover more.

The course would include a broader process of interpretation. Students would reflect on how to make the text live again in the public context of Christian worship in ways faithful to its original purpose. And the course would need to go even further. It would need to include worship settings where "living" Scripture was experienced, (in other words, to carry on the previous analogy, where students heard the music), for anything less would fail to complete the interpretive process and would fall short of the original intent of Scripture.

Notes and References

1. John C. Brunt, "A Parable of Jesus as a Clue to Biblical Interpretation," *Spectrum* 13, no. 2 (Dec. 1982): 35-43. (It was originally written for the Biblical Research Institute Committee.)

2. *Ibid.*, 42.

3. All of my examples will come from the New Testament, but most of what I say about the Christian community in relationship to the New Testament would apply to the people of God and the Old Testament as well.

4. Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy* (London: Routledge, 1982); *Orality and Textuality in Early Christian Literature: Semeia 65*, ed. Joanna Dewey, Society of Biblical Literature, 1994 (contributors are Thomas E. Boomershine, Arthur J. Dewey, Joanna Dewey, John Miles Foley, Martin S. Jaffee, Werner H. Kelber, Vernon K. Robbins, Bernard Brandon Scott, Richard F. Ward, and Antoinette Clark Wire); and Paul J. Achtemeier, "Omne verbum sonat: The New Testament and the Oral Environment of Late Western Antiquity," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 109, no. 2 (spring 1990): 3-27.

5. Richard Rice, *Believing, Behaving, Belonging: Finding New Love for the Church* (Roseville, Calif.: Association of Adventist Forums, 2002).

6. Vernon K. Robbins, "Oral, Rhetorical, and Literary Cultures: A Response," in *Semeia 65*, 75-91.

7. Joanna Dewey, "Textuality in an Oral Culture: A Survey of the Pauline Traditions," in *Semeia 65*, 37-65.

8. Richard F. Ward, "Pauline Voice and Presence as Strategic Communication," in *Semeia 65*, 95-108.

9. David Rhoads, "Performance Criticism: An Emerging Methodology in Biblical Studies." Society of Biblical Literature members may access this on the Web at www.sbl-site.org/PDF/Rhoads_Performance.pdf.

10. *Ecclesiastical History 3:39:4*, in *Eusebius, A History of the Church*, trans. G. A. Williamson (New York: Penguin Books, 1965), 150.

11. For example, knowing that the society from which the Bible came was much more pragmatic in its thinking should warn us against trying to make the Bible too theoretical. Philippians 2 has been fodder for metaphysical discussions about the nature of Christ, but in an oral context was clearly not about that, but was a practical admonition to unity and humility in Christ. In addition, an understanding of oral structuring of discourse can aid the interpreter in catching verbal clues about the structure and meaning of the message.

12. The name has changed. In the current Walla Walla College Bulletin, it is simply called "Interpreting the Bible."



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Discussed: Bible Conference of 1974, medieval times, faith bias, historical-critical method, Spirit of Christ, presuppositions, *sola scriptura*, divine intervention, angels, sacrilegious hand, standard of excellence

The Authority of Scripture: A Personal Pilgrimage

By Richard M. Davidson

I have not always held the view of Scriptural authority that I now maintain. My personal pilgrimage has, I believe, helped me understand at first hand the major viewpoints now held both outside and within the Seventh-day Adventist church. Having journeyed through a different perspective on the authority of Scripture and then returned to the position I now hold, I feel that my present convictions are not just a result of what my fathers and pastors and church leaders and the Adventist pioneers taught me. Instead, they are the result of my own wrestling with God and His Word.

I am now convinced that the issue of the authority of Scripture is basic to all other issues in the church. The destiny of our church depends on how its members regard the authority of the Bible.

Please let me share my experience. I was born in a conservative Adventist home and given a solid grounding in historic Adventist teachings and practice under godly parents and academy Bible teachers. But in college I found myself confronted with a crisis over the authority of Scripture. In a class entitled "Old Testament Prophets" the professor (who is no longer teaching Bible in our schools) systematically went through the traditional Messianic passages of the prophets and explained how they really did not foretell the coming of the Messiah. He then went through the passages Adventists have regarded as referring to the end of time, arguing that they really applied only to local situations in the time of the prophets. Then he took the passages in the prophets that are quoted in the New Testament and insisted that the New Testament writers misinterpreted and twisted them.

By the end of that course, my faith in the authority of Scripture was greatly shaken. My teacher had not explained the method by which he had arrived at his conclusions or the presuppositions that underlay his method, and his conclusions were devastating to me. I was confused, and for some time I preached little on the Old Testament.

My seminary experience in the late 1960s served to confirm the conclusions of my college Bible teacher. In an Old Testament course (taught by someone who is no longer teaching in Seventh-day Adventist schools), I was given an assignment that amounted to half of my grade. The assignment consisted of reading a scholarly debate over the proper method of approaching the Bible, and writing a critique that had to reveal my decision as to which side in the debate was right.

This assignment was a watershed in my hermeneutical pilgrimage. I agonized over the two positions for weeks. I was not told in class which way to cast my vote, but the general tenor of the lectures, I now see, was designed to lead me in the direction of the historical-critical-

cal method. At last I decided. I cast my lot with what the article called the “descriptive approach,” a veiled name for the historical-critical method.

The paper defending this position was written by the dean of the Harvard Divinity School. (How could I argue against Harvard?) It pointed out that the “descriptive method” was free from the subjective bias associated with a “confessional” approach to Scripture. I became convinced that if I sharpened my tools of exegesis enough, I would confidently and dispassionately decide on the correct meaning of any scripture. I could accurately describe what its author meant, I could dissect the biblical text, conjecture about its original form and intent, and reconstruct its life-setting and the process that gave rise to its final form. If I studied hard, learned appropriate languages, and mastered all critical tools, I would be in charge. I could scientifically determine without any “faith bias” what was the most probable meaning, authenticity, and truthfulness of any given Bible passage.

For several years while I served as a pastor, I was an avid proponent of the historical-critical method. It was a heady experience for me. I felt good wielding the critical tools and making decisions on my own as to what I would accept as authoritative in Scripture and what was culturally conditioned and could be overlooked.

Then came the Bible Conference of 1974, sponsored by the Biblical Research Institute of the General Conference. While attending that conference, I awoke as from a dream. I came to realize that my approach to the Scriptures had been much like Eve’s approach to God’s spoken word. She was exhilarated by the experience of exercising autonomy over the word of God, deciding what to believe and what to discard. She exalted her human reason over divine revelation. When she did so, she opened the floodgates of woe upon the world. Like Eve, I had felt the heady ecstasy of setting myself up as the final norm, as one who could judge the divine Word by my rational criteria. Instead of the Word’s judging me, I judged the Word.

As the basic presupposition from which I had been operating dawned on me, I was jolted to the core of my being. I became eager to understand more deeply the issues in hermeneutics and the proper approach to Scripture. That passion eventually drove me back to the Seminary for doctoral studies. This time at the Seminary I was delighted to find that most of the teachers were coming to the Scriptures from a different perspective from the one I had encountered in the 1960s. The first class I took in the Th.D. program was “Principles of Hermeneutics.” Out of it came a settled conviction, one that blossomed into my doctoral dissertation in the field

of hermeneutics with special implications for the authority of Scripture, a conviction that has grown more intense as I have myself been teaching the class “Principles of Hermeneutics” for several years.

I have become convinced that on the most fundamental level there are only two major approaches to the authority of the Scriptures in the discipline of Biblical studies and in the church. One is the historical-critical method along with its daughter methods which employ similar critical presuppositions. This method arose during the eighteenth-century Enlightenment and is still very much alive and well. The other is the grammatical-historical Biblical interpretation which rejects critical presuppositions. Revived by the Reformers after a period of eclipse during medieval times and continuing until the present among conservative Christians, this approach also is alive—but perhaps not so well, for many, even among Evangelical Christians, have recently been rejecting it in favor of a modified form of the historical-critical method.

Conflict in the Adventist Church

In Adventism at the present moment, I believe I can say safely though very regretfully, these two approaches toward Scripture are locked in a life-and-death struggle.

I do not want to be an alarmist, and it is not in my nature to seek to stir up controversy or polarization. But I cannot pretend that the problem does not exist. There are many who feel that a discussion on this issue involves merely semantics, that there really is no clear-cut and radical distinction between the two approaches.

But my own experience, based on my own hermeneutical pilgrimage, has convinced me otherwise. I believe that there is a true division on this issue even within Adventism and that the ultimate authority of Scripture is at stake. The subtle but radical difference between the two approaches can perhaps most graphically be shown by placing the main features side by side, and by giving illustrations from real life as I have personally observed them.

The outline below presents the basic differences between the historical-critical method and the traditional Protestant (and Adventist) approach, which we may call the “grammatical-historical” or “historical-Biblical” interpretation.¹ This chart is of course schematic and cannot represent fully every variation.

Contrasting Definitions

Edgar Krentz, in his recent but classical treatment, *The Historical-Critical Method*, clearly indicates how the historical-critical method is “based on a secular understanding of history”² which approaches Scripture “critically with

the same methods used on all ancient literature.”³ “The methods are secular.”⁴

We must ask, is secular historical science with its accompanying presuppositions, appropriate for the study of Scripture? Can we approach Scripture solely from “below,” from the naturalistic level, in light of the Bible’s

A Comparison of the Two Methods

Historical-Critical Method

A. Definition

The attempt to verify the truthfulness and understand the meaning of biblical data on the basis of the principles and procedures of secular historical science.

B. Objective

To arrive at the correct meaning of Scripture, which is the human author’s intention as understood by his contemporaries.

C. Basic Presuppositions

1. *Secular norm*: The principles and procedures of secular historical science constitute the external norm and proper method for evaluating the truthfulness and interpreting the meaning of biblical data.
2. Principle of *criticism* (methodological doubt): the autonomy of the human investigator to interrogate and evaluate on his own apart from the specific declarations of the biblical text.
3. Principle of *analogy*: present experience is the criterion for evaluating the probability of biblical events to have occurred, since all events are in principle similar.
4. Principle of *correlation* (or causation): a closed system of cause and effect with no room for the supernatural intervention of God in history.
5. *Disunity* of Scripture, since its production involved many human authors or redactors, Scripture cannot therefore be compared with Scripture (“proof-texts”) to arrive at a unified biblical teaching.
6. “*Time-conditioned*” or “culturally-conditioned” nature of Scripture; the historical context is responsible for the production of Scripture.
7. The human and divine elements of Scripture must be distinguished and separated: the Bible contains but does not equal the Word of God.

D. Basic Hermeneutical Procedures

1. *Historical Context (Sitz im Leben)*: Attempt to understand the reconstructed hypothetical life setting which produced (gave rise to, shaped) the biblical text (often quite apart from the setting specifically stated by the text).
2. *Literary (source) criticism*: The attempt to hypothetically reconstruct and understand the process of literary development leading to the present form of the text, based on the assumption that sources are a product of the life setting of the community which produced them (often in opposition to specific Scriptural statements regarding the origin and nature of the sources.)
3. *Form criticism*: The attempt to provide a conjectured reconstruction of the process of pre-literary (oral) development behind the various literary forms, based upon the assumption that the biblical material has an oral pre-history like conventional folk-literature and like folk-literature arises on the basis of traditions which are formed according to the laws inherent in the development of folk traditions.
4. *Redaction criticism*: The attempt to discover and describe the life setting, sociological and theological motivations which determined the basis upon which the redactor selected, modified, reconstructed, edited, altered or added to traditional materials in order to make them say what was appropriated within his new life setting according to new theological concerns; assumes that each redactor had a unique theology and life setting which differed from (and may have contradicted) his sources and other redactors.
5. *Tradition history*: The attempt to trace the precompositional history of traditions from stage to stage and passed down by word of mouth from generation to generation to the final written form; based upon the assumption that each generation interpretively reshaped the material.

Historical-Biblical Approach

A. Definition

The attempt to understand the meaning of biblical data by means of methodological considerations arising from Scripture alone.

B. Objective

To arrive at the correct meaning of Scripture, which is what God intended to communicate, whether or not it was fully known by the human author or his contemporaries (1 Pet 1:10–12)

C. Basic Presuppositions

1. *Sola Scriptura*: The authority and unity of Scripture are such that Scripture is the final norm with regard to content and method of interpretation (Isa 8:20).
2. The Bible is the ultimate authority and is not amenable to the principle of criticism. Biblical data are accepted at face value and not subjected to an external norm to determine truthfulness, adequacy, intelligibility, etc. (Isa 66:2).
3. Suspension of the compelling principles of analogy to allow for the unique activity of God as described in Scripture and in the process of the formation of Scripture (2 Pet. 1:19–21).
4. Suspension of the principle of correlation (or natural cause and effect) to allow for the divine intervention in history as described in Scripture (Heb. 1).
5. *Unity* of Scripture, since the many human authors are superintended by one divine author; therefore Scripture can be compared with Scripture to arrive at biblical doctrine (Lk 24:27; 1 Cor 2:13).
6. *Timeless* nature of Scripture: God speaks through the prophet to a specific culture, yet the message transcends cultural backgrounds as timeless truth (John 10:35).
7. The divine and human elements in Scripture cannot be distinguished or separated; the Bible equals the Word of God (2 Tim 3:16, 17).

D. Basic Hermeneutical Procedures

1. *Historical Context (Sitz im Leben)*: Attempt to understand the contemporary historical background in which God revealed Himself (with Scripture as a whole the final context and norm for application of historical background to the text).
2. *Literary Analysis*: Examination of the literary characteristics of the biblical materials in their canonical form.
3. *Form analysis*: An attempt to describe and classify the various types of literature found in (the canonical form of) Scripture.
4. *Theological analysis* of Biblical books: a study of the particular theological emphasis of each Bible writer (according to his own mind set and capacity to understand), seen within the larger context of the unity of the whole Scripture that allows the Bible to be its own interpreter and the various theological emphases to be in harmony with one another.
5. *Diachronic (thematic) analysis*: The attempt to trace the development of various themes and motives chronologically through the Bible in its canonical form; based on the Scriptural position that God gives added (progressive) revelation to later generations, which, however, is in full harmony with all previous revelation.

own claim that it originated from “above,” from divine revelation. Can the scientific method dictate how to approach Scripture, or should the method of studying Scripture come from principles found in Scripture alone?

Contrasting Sets of Objectives

In the contrast between the two sets of objectives outlined in Section B of the chart, we see a radical divergence between historical-critical studies and historical-biblical ones. The objective of the historical-critical method in ascertaining the correct meaning of Scripture is to arrive at the human author’s intent as it was understood by his contemporaries in relation to their local setting.

On the other hand, the objective of historical-biblical interpretation (the classical approach of Adventists and the Reformers) is to determine the correct meaning of Scripture as a message sent by God, whether or not it was fully understood by its human writer or his contemporaries.

According to 1 Pet 1:10–11 NIV, “The prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the suffering of Christ and the glories that would follow.” The prophets did not always understand fully. They searched intently. They tried to understand the import and the fullness, but it was only as Jesus came and explained the Scriptures that the full light of what had been prophesied was understood. They, or rather, Christ is still unfolding their meaning today.

There is a growing tendency even within Adventism to go along with the stated objective of the historical-critical method. Recently I was discussing the appropriate objective of exegesis with an Adventist doctoral student at a secular university. He was quite candid with me. He argued vociferously that exegesis has as its goal an understanding of what the human author’s intention was, as understood by his contemporaries.

I replied, “But what about 1 Peter 1:10–12?” My friend was quite aware of the passage but answered, “Well, that particular writing—and I don’t believe it’s Peter’s—is culturally conditioned by the time when it was written; therefore, I can no longer go along with Peter’s particular understanding.”

I’m not trying to say that every historical-critical scholar would use this student’s evasive maneuvering. But I find a trend in our circles to see the meaning of the Scriptures only as they were interpreted and understood by the human authors’

contemporaries in relation to their immediate setting.

At a recent meeting of Seventh-day Adventist scholars a lecture was presented on the book of Revelation. The major thrust of the lecture was that the book of Revelation can only be understood in the light of its first-century context, and that it refers only to a first-century situation. The book was intended to bring comfort to those being persecuted or oppressed at that time. Although we may make some later reapplications, these are not the accurate and true meaning of the text.

At another session I heard Adventist scholars discuss the Messianic psalms. The thrust of the discussion was that there are no Messianic psalms. New Testament writers misinterpreted certain psalms as Messianic. But, I ask, how does this square with the specific declarations of New Testament writers concerning the original Messianic intent of their authors (as, e.g., in Acts 2:25–35)?

The Role of Basic Presuppositions

Our chart lists seven presuppositions underlying each approach to Scripture. Number one is the basic orientation point; two, three, and four are crucial principles, and five, six, and seven are the outworking of these principles. Let’s begin with the first and most basic presupposition underlying each approach.

In the historical-critical method the principles and procedures of secular science constitute the external norm for evaluating the truthfulness and interpreting the meaning of biblical data. We recognize at once that the ultimate issue here is: Who has the final word? What is the ultimate norm? Is Scripture to be judged by the principles of a secular historical method or is the method to be judged by Scripture? Do we still believe in *sola scriptura*?—in the Bible only? (I must say I have been shocked to find that this belief seems to be waning in the Seventh-day Adventist church.)

A few years ago, while on a sabbatical study leave, I was invited to a seminar at which Adventist professors discussed inspiration. They asked me what I thought. When I mentioned something about *sola scriptura*, a colleague sitting next to me, who had once been a classmate of mine at the Seminary and had since taken doctoral studies elsewhere, responded, “Do you still believe in *sola scriptura*? That’s passé. We no longer take it as our norm.” He added,

"I believe in inspiration, of course. I believe that the Bible is inspired. So was Mahatma Ghandi. So was Martin Luther King. So is Mother Theresa. If they all were inspired, how can we determine what is true and what is not true among writings that claim to be inspired? We have to develop certain rational criteria which we can apply to each text to determine its truthfulness and authenticity."

Edgar McKnight clearly points out the rationalistic basis of the historical-critical method: "The basic postulate [of the historical-critical method] is that of human reason and the supremacy of reason as the ultimate criterion for truth."⁵

To me the response to this position is plain: "To the law and to the testimony; if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isa 8:20). The Bible and the Bible only is the ultimate authority. Yes, we have other "authorities," but the Bible is the only supreme authority. In the historical-biblical approach the authority and unity of Scripture are such that Scripture is its own final norm rather than secular science or human reason or experience.

The Principle of Criticism

The principle of criticism is the heart of the historical-critical method, even in its modified forms. Edgar Krentz acknowledges that "this principle [of criticism] is affirmed by all modern historical study."⁶

When critical scholars talk about biblical "criticism" and the historical-critical method, they do not mean critical in the sense of examining a thing rigorously, neither do they intend to connote the negative idea of fault-finding, nor do they mean "crucial," as in the expression "this is a critical issue." The technical meaning of "criticism" in the historical-critical method is that "historical sources are like witnesses in a court of law: they must be interrogated and their answers evaluated. The art of interrogation and evaluation is called criticism." In this process "the historian examines the credentials of a witness to determine the person's credibility (authenticity) and whether the evidence has come down unimpaired (integrity)."⁷

In its essence, such criticism is the Cartesian principle of methodological doubt.⁸ Nothing is accepted at face value, but everything must be verified or corrected by reexamining evidence. In everything there is an "openness to correction" which "implies that historical research produces only probabilities."⁹

In effect, this principle makes "me" the final deter-

miner of truth and exalts "my" reason as the final test of the authenticity of a passage. "I" judge Scripture; Scripture doesn't judge "me."

The heart of the matter as I see it is this: Criticism is appropriate for everything in the world except the Scriptures. God asks us to develop our critical powers so that we will not accept anything we hear, see, or experience unless it is in accordance with what He tells us in the Bible. I am not opposed to the critical spirit; I just refuse to use it on the Word of God, which is the critical authority by which I am to be judged. The proper approach, I believe, is found in the grammatical-historical biblical interpretation, which claims that the Bible is the ultimate authority and is not amenable to the principle of criticism. Biblical data are to be accepted at face value and not subjected to an external norm that determines their truthfulness, adequacy, validity, or intelligibility.

Gerhard Maier, a noted European biblical scholar who broke with the historical-critical method, writes in his book *The End of the Historical-Critical Method* that "a critical method must fail, because it presents an inner impossibility. For the correlative or counterpart to revelation is not critique, but obedience; it is not correction of the text—not even on the basis of a partially recognized and applied revelation—but a let me be corrected."¹⁰ The proper stance toward Scripture is captured by the prophet Isaiah: "This is the man to whom I will look: he that is humble and contrite in spirit and *trembles at my word*" (Isa 66:2).

Ellen White clearly rejects the principle of criticism in approaching Scripture:

In our day, as of old, the vital truths of God's Word are set aside for human theories and speculations. Many professed ministers of the gospel do not accept the whole Bible as the inspired word. One wise man rejects one portion; another questions another part. They set up *their judgment as superior to the word*; and the Scripture which they do teach rests upon their *own authority*. Its divine authenticity is destroyed. Thus the seeds of infidelity are sown broadcast; for the people become confused and know not what to believe... Christ rebuked these practices in His day. He taught that the word of God was to be understood by all. He pointed to the Scriptures as of *unquestionable authority*, and we should do the same. The Bible is to be presented as the word of the infinite God, as the *end of all controversy* and the foundation of all faith.¹¹

The presence or absence of the fundamental principle of criticism is really the litmus test of whether or not the historical-critical methodology is being employed. For this reason I rejoice that the Methods of Bible Study Committee Report rejects the classical historical-critical method and warns that “even a modified use of this method that retains the principle of criticism which subordinates the Bible to human reason is unacceptable to Adventists.”¹²

The Principle of Analogy

In close relation to the principle of criticism is the principle of analogy. Edgar Krantz observes that “all historians also accept Troeltsch’s principle of analogy.”¹³ The principle of analogy is simple: Present experience is the criterion for evaluating the probability that events mentioned in Scripture actually occurred, inasmuch as all events are in principle similar.

In other words, we are to judge what happened in biblical times by what is happening today; and if we do not see a given thing happening today, in all probability it could not have happened then. The implication has been felt in Adventist circles. Some Adventists say that because we do not see special creation taking place now, but only micro-evolution, we therefore have to adopt some theistic macro-evolution to explain the past. We do not see universal floods today, so there cannot have been a universal flood in the past. We do not see miracles, so we have to find natural explanations for the so-called miracles reported in the Bible. We do not see resurrections, so we have to explain away the resurrections recorded in the Bible.

The advocates of historical-biblical interpretation, on the other hand, suspend the principle of analogy in order to allow for the unique activity of God as described in Scripture.

The Principle of Correlation

The principle of correlation is somewhat similar to the principle of analogy. It states that there is a closed system of cause and effect with no room for supernatural intervention. Events are so correlated and interrelated that a change in any given phenomenon necessitates a change also in its cause and effect. Historical explanations rest on a chain of natural causes and effects. A recent article argued, “If the divine cause plays a role then it can’t be explained or analyzed historically, and therefore we must assume that any divine cause has made use of only this worldly means.”¹⁴

This is not to say that Seventh-day Adventists who employ the historical-critical method do not believe at all

in the supernatural. Indeed the historical-critical method as such does not necessarily deny the supernatural. But it involves a willingness to use a method that has no room for the supernatural. Scholars using it are required to bracket out the supernatural and seek natural causes and effects. So they look for natural explanations for the Exodus, for the Red Sea, for Sinai, and for how the Scriptures came into being. They look at the way folk literature came into existence in Germanic and other cultures and decide that the Bible came into existence in the same way, through a natural process of oral development, editing, correction, manipulation, and redaction.

Some Adventist teachers currently teach the “JEDP hypothesis” of how the Pentateuch came into being. They show their students how to dissect the Pentateuch and describe the stories of Genesis as simply mythological and poetic rather than historical. Some parents have come to me weeping and have said, “We’ve set aside thousands of dollars for years to send our children to an Adventist institution and now, as a result of their Adventist education, they have become agnostic. They no longer believe in Christianity, let alone the Adventist church. They no longer accept the authority of the Bible. What can we do?”

What we can do is to suspend the principle of correlation and allow for divine intervention in history as described in the Scriptures. When the Bible speaks of a divine event, we will not bracket it out and try to seek for merely natural and human causes.

Resultant Principles

There are several resultant presuppositions that follow as corollaries from the basic ones we have looked at so far. One result is the conclusion that Scripture is *not* basically a unity, because it is the product of different human authors. Consequently scripture cannot be compared with scripture to arrive at a unified biblical teaching.

Of course there is an illegitimate proof-text method that takes the work of the human authors, there must be a basic unity to Scripture. Therefore, scripture *can* be compared with scripture in order to arrive at biblical doctrine. Jesus did this on the way to Emmaus. “Beginning with Moses and the prophets He expounded to them from all the Scriptures those things concerning Himself” (Lk 24:27). That was the proof-text method at its best. Unfortunately,



there is a trend within Adventism to pit Paul against Peter, Old Testament against New Testament, etc., positing major divergences and contradictions in theological positions. This historical-critical principle is opposed to the Bible's own claim to unity and harmony of teaching.

Cultural Conditioning

This leads us to our next corollary, that Scripture is time-conditioned and culture-conditioned, and therefore many of its statements have no universal or timeless validity. Many, even within Adventism, argue that in the first chapters of Genesis we find simply a time-conditioned, cultural statement of mythological/poetic/theological understanding but not a detailed statement of how creation actually took place. The details of cosmology can be expunged as long as the basic truth, the *kerygma*, of the passage, is preserved, namely that God created. The rest is culture-conditioned.

Recently an Adventist professor talked with me about angels. He said that the very mention of angels in the Bible bothers him. "In fact," he stated, "I'm beginning to conclude that the mention of angels in Scripture is simply a time-conditioned way to get something across to people who believed in such beings in Bible times. Now we live in a secular world in which we no longer have a society that believes in such beings, so we can move away from those time-conditioned statements to the simple fact that God is present."

It is true that God does speak through the prophet to a specific culture. We must understand the prophet's times. Yet God's message transcends cultural backgrounds as timeless truth. "Scripture cannot be broken" (Jn 10:35).

Can the Human and the Divine Be Separated?

A final corollary in the historical-critical method is that the human element can be separated and distinguished from the divine, inspired element.

I listened recently to a tape of a public lecture by an Adventist scholar who argued that the Bible picture of the wrath of God reflects the human element of the writer. Such a picture of God's wrath was not a part of divine revelation, but God allowed it to come into Scripture. The lecturer proposed that as we move from the Old to the New Testament, we see the teaching about the wrath of God counteracted by the picture of God revealed in Jesus Christ.

But, to the contrary, I find as we move to the New Testament that the understanding of the wrath of God deepens. The wrath of God is just as real as the love of God, if we

understand fully what the Bible means by the wrath of God.

Can we pick and choose? Can we separate the human from the divine in the Bible? Ellen White spoke forcefully to this point:

There are some that may think they are fully capable with their finite judgment to take the Word of God, and to state what are the words of inspiration, and what are not the words of inspiration. I want to warn you off that ground, my brethren in the ministry. "Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground." There is no finite man that lives, I care not who he is or whatever is his position, that God has authorized to pick and choose in His Word. . . . I would have both arms taken off at my shoulders before I would ever make the statement or set my judgment upon the Word of God as to what is inspired and what is not inspired.¹⁵

Do not let any living man come to you and begin to dissect God's Word, telling what is revelation, what is inspiration and what is not, without a rebuke. . . . We call on you to take your Bible, but do not put a sacrilegious hand upon it and say, "That is not inspired," simply because somebody else has said so. Not a jot or tittle is ever to be taken from that Word. *Hands off brethren. Do not touch the ark. . . .* When men begin to meddle with God's Word, I want to tell them to take their hands off, for they do not know what they are doing.¹⁶

Hermeneutical Procedures

We cannot comment in detail on each, but we observe that the same study *tools* are used in the latter as in the former: the same careful attention is given to historical, linguistic, grammatical-syntactical, and literary details. There is no intention in the historical-grammatical approach of lowering the standard of excellence or de-emphasizing the diligent and accurate study of the Scriptures. But there is an intent in historical-biblical study to eliminate the *critical* element that stands as judge upon the Word.

As one examines various procedures of the historical-critical method—historical criticism, literary criticism, form criticism, redaction criticism, and tradition criticism—three basic steps in each procedure emerge. First, there is a *dissection* of the Word into various sources, oral traditions, and smaller units. Then there is a *conjecture* about the life setting and original source were. Finally,

there is a *reconstruction* of what the scholar decides the original must have been like.

In light of these three common procedural steps in historical criticism, a statement by Ellen White is very much to the point. It seems Ellen White knew quite well what was involved in the historical-critical method. In her day it was called "higher criticism." Note her pointed indictment:

As in the days of the apostles, men tried by tradition and philosophy to destroy faith in the Scriptures, so today by the pleasing sentiments of *higher criticism*, evolution, spiritualism, theosophy, and pantheism, the enemy of righteousness is seeking to lead souls into forbidden paths.

She continues, focusing on higher criticism:

To many the Bible is a lamp without oil, because they have turned their minds into channels of speculative belief that brings misunderstanding and confusion. The work of *higher criticism*, in *dissecting, conjecturing, reconstructing*, is destroying faith in the Bible as a divine revelation. It is robbing God's word of power to control, uplift, and inspire human lives.¹⁷

Ellen White put her finger on the method, and upon the three basic steps in its application, and revealed the baleful results.

Providentially, a growing number of Bible students who were once convinced of the validity of the historical-critical method are awakening, as I did, as from a dream to learn what they have been doing. Many have shared with me how Scripture had lost its vitality in their lives, how they no longer were able to preach with power from the whole Word. They always had to stop and think, "Is this portion of Scripture really authoritative?" With joy they have rediscovered the power of the Word as they have renewed their confidence in its full authority. I would like to see every Seventh-day Adventist, every Christian, possess absolute confidence in the Word!

Conclusion

This critique and discussion of the two conflicting approaches to Scripture should not be regarded as an attempt to slander or impugn sinister motives to any of my colleagues inside or outside the Seventh-day Adventist church who practice the historical-critical method. Although I have considered it crucial to indicate by con-

crete examples the inextricable link between the historical-critical method and its methodological presuppositions, I have sought to preserve the integrity and the anonymity of those whose views I have used for illustration.

It must be recognized that virtually every non-Seventh-day Adventist institution of higher learning which teaches biblical studies (except for a few evangelical seminaries and the fundamentalist Bible colleges) is steeped in the historical-critical method. Exposure exclusively to this method on a day-in-day-out basis in every class and from every professor is likely to produce its effect, even if only subtly. I believe that some who have been trained solely in the historical-critical method and have not had an opportunity to hear a fair presentation of both sides, may be open to a clarification of the issues. This is why I have shared my personal pilgrimage toward a clearer understanding of the full authority of the Scriptures.

Endnotes

1. Conservative biblical scholars have usually called this approach the "grammatical-historical method," more recently (and accurately) the "grammatical-historical-literary method" (see William Larkin, Jr., *Culture and Biblical Hermeneutics* [Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988], p. 96). I prefer to avoid referring to this approach as a single unified "method"; instead, I refer more generally to the basic "historical-biblical interpretation" that rejects critical presuppositions.
2. Edgar Krentz, *The Historical-Critical Method, Guides to Biblical Scholarship* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), p. 1.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 48.
5. Edgar V. McKnight, *Post-Modern Use of the Bible: The Emergence of Reader-Oriented Criticism* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1988), p. 45.
6. Krentz, p. 56.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 42.
8. See McKnight, p. 45.
9. Krentz, pp. 56, 57.
10. Gerhard Maier, *The End of the Historical-Critical Method*, trans. Edwin W. Leverenz and Rudolph F. Norden (St. Louis: Concordia, 1977), p. 23.
11. Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 329. Italics supplied.
12. "Methods of Bible Study Committee (GCC-A): Report," *Adventist Review*, January 22, 1987, p. 18.
13. Krentz, p. 57.
14. Seth Erlandsson, "Is There Ever Biblical Research Without Presuppositions?" *Themelios* 7 (1978):24.
15. Ellen G. White comment, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 7:920. Italics supplied.
16. *Ibid.* Italics supplied.
17. Ellen G. White, *Acts of the Apostles*, p. 474.

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“A Blessing in the Midst of the Earth” Traveling the Prophetic Highway in Isaiah

By Sigve Tonstad

Before heading down the prophetic highway in Isaiah, let me come clean on my own background and presuppositions. I do not believe that studying Isaiah needs an excuse, but if an excuse were needed for one who is not an Old Testament scholar, mine might be the notion of Isaiah as “the fifth Gospel,” a book whose voice is pervasive in the New Testament and whose influence on Christian theology may be as great as any of the Gospels in the New Testament.¹ I say “might be” advisedly because the New Testament appropriation of Isaiah is not what has stirred my interest in his book. Isaiah entices me in his own Old Testament voice—his own voice beckons me—quite apart from his influence on the New Testament.

As to presuppositions, I will state two. First, I find unpersuasive the notion that most of this book should be read on the assumption that it addresses a specific historical situation contemporary to the author.² I do not deny that Isaiah is anchored to historical events that existed at the time of its composition. Often, however, the historical referents are elusive. Isaiah's imaginative vision reaches beyond emerging realities at the time of its author, at times levitating high above the troubled realities of history.³

Second, the question of authorship, dominant as it has been in Isaiah studies, will not be of much concern

in the present context because the text and not its author will be our focus. Moreover, the theme of our text is featured in all three divisions that many scholars see in Isaiah (19:18–25; 49:6; 56:1–8). It is a moot point as to whether this affords evidence of the prophet Isaiah's own hand or of a series of exceptionally attentive students in a “school” that lasted several centuries, another resilient theory relative to this book, or of the ubiquitous redactor, yet another staple of compositional criticism. Existence of a school of Isaiah is of interest mainly by setting an impossibly high standard for those engaged in the field of education.

The Text

Let us begin, then, by reading the text:

On that day there will be five cities in the land of Egypt that speak the language of Canaan and swear allegiance to the Lord of hosts. One of these will be called the City of the Sun.

On that day there will be an altar to the Lord in the center of the land of Egypt, and a pillar to the Lord at its border. It will be a sign and a witness to the Lord of hosts in the land of Egypt; when they cry to the Lord because of oppressors, he will send them a saviour, and will defend and deliver them.

The Lord will make himself known to the Egyptians; and the Egyptians will know the Lord *on that day*, and will worship with sacrifice and burnt offering, and they will make vows to the Lord and perform them. The Lord will strike Egypt, striking and healing; they will return to the Lord, and he will listen to their supplications and heal them.

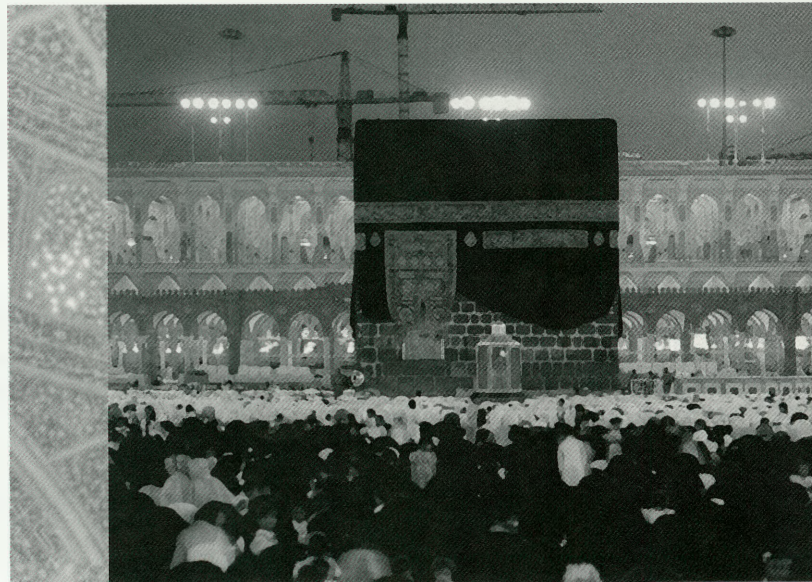
On that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian will come into Egypt, and the Egyptian into Assyria, and the Egyptians will worship with the Assyrians.

On that day Israel will be the third with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, whom the Lord of hosts has blessed, saying, "Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my heritage." (Isa. 19:18–25)

First Impressions

Imagining that most readers need a little time for the message to sink in, let us hear what some scholars have taken from the text by way of first impression. André Feuillet calls this passage "the summit of religion."⁴ J. Wilson, working on how to turn this text into sermon material, is afraid that alien elements in the text will lead people to miss its exceptional message. "Will you believe me when I tell you that no more astounding words than these have ever been spoken or written?" he asks.⁵ W. Vogels says that, although commentators differ widely with respect to many things in the text, they agree on one point: the text offers a perspective of reconciliation and inclusion unequalled in the Old Testament.⁶

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Our own impressions will most likely confirm those of these scholars and initiates: The text does indeed seem to deconstruct fixtures of alienation and enmity. It rises above divisions long deemed irreconcilable. It offers a hitherto unimaginable prospect: the arch-enemy and arch-oppressor uniting with wayward Israel in worship of the one God, united, indeed, precisely on the point where division has been most insurmountable.

Close-up of the Text

When we take a closer look at the text, the details then emerging become even more intriguing. Let us consider point-by-point some of the most distinctive features.

"On that day"

Five times in this text we find the phrase "in that day." This phrase, as well as many specifics in the text, is quite damning to interpretations that attempt to anchor the content to emerging political realities at some point after the Exile. The repeated use of this phrase, heralding ever more surprising reconfigurations, makes it plain that "the prophet sees these events occurring in the end times, or at least at the point where God takes decisive action in world events."⁷ Not only is the perspective eschatological, it also draws up a vision so contrary to convention and expectation that it presupposes a dramatic, supernatural intervention. In this sense, "on



that day" is "the Day of God"; the day when God's purpose is revealed and made a reality.⁸

Strange Things in the Land of Egypt

Strange things are said to happen in Egypt "on that day": "five cities in the land of Egypt...speak the language of Canaan and swear allegiance to the Lord of hosts" (19:18); "there will be an altar to the Lord in the center of the land of Egypt" (19:19); "the Lord will make himself known to the Egyptians" (19:21); the Egyptians "will return to the Lord, and he will listen to their supplications and heal them" (19:22).

Surely this is a scenario that stretches our mental capacity to the limit, entirely unexpected and without precedent. Historically, Egypt is the oppressor of Israel. Egypt is the prototype enemy, the epitome of oppression and arrogance. In Jewish self-understanding, existence is predicated on the decisive deliverance from Egypt. "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery," God says at the founding occasion at Sinai (Exod. 20:2).

Again and again in the Old Testament, mention of the land of Egypt comes with the qualification of Egypt as "the house of slavery" (Exod. 13:3, 14; 20:2; Deut. 5:6; 6:12; 7:8; 8:14; 13:5, 10; Josh. 24:17; Judg. 6:8; Jer. 34:13; Micah 6:4). Egypt is a stable reference point as Israel's polar opposite, the perennial enemy of God and the good. This view of Egypt does not relate only to the past. In the book of Isaiah itself, Egypt is a present menace, nowhere more so than in the verses immediately preceding the text considered here (Isa. 19:1-15).

Indeed, hostility to Egypt is said to be such a characteristic feature of Isaiah that the great Isaiah scholar Hans Wildberger takes the dramatic turn of heart toward Egypt found in this text as evidence that Isaiah could not be the author.⁹

And yet, from the very first intimation, cracks appear in notions forged by injury and fortified by memory: "there will be five cities in Egypt that speak the language of Canaan" (19:18). These five cities are not five Israeli settlements, diaspora Jews, as many commentators would have us believe, reflecting their presuppositions as to the time of its composition.¹⁰ It would not be much of a feat for the five cities to speak "the language of Canaan" if their inhabitants were Jewish in the first place.

However, something greater is stirring in the land if the cities are genuine Egyptian cities and the people who speak the language of Canaan are Egyptian.¹¹

Coming together on the level of language, speaking the same language, as it were, signals a giant leap forward in the direction of reconciliation and mutual understanding. The fact that the language spoken is the cultic language of Israel enhances the sense of a new bond.

John Calvin takes this common language to prove that "by such a language must be meant agreement in religion."¹² Still more amazing, if J. Alec Motyer is correct, is the observation that the expression "the lip of Canaan" "reflects the beginning of a return to the state where 'the whole earth was one lip'" (Gen 11:1).¹³

Sensing a paradigm shift from the beginning, we can see that it does not matter whether agreement exists as to whether the number five is small, significant, or symbolic. Any number—even the smallest—means that the impasse is broken and that something unprecedented is happening.

When we weigh the options more carefully, the prophet most likely is beginning to tell us that the leading city in Egypt is part of the five, because in the very next verse he proceeds to say "there will be an altar to the Lord in the center of the land of Egypt" (19:19). If five is a small number, a mere five "is able to accomplish great things," and if symbolic, it serves to convey "the radical nature of the turn."¹⁴

Egypt and the Metaphor of Israel's Exodus Experience

The text becomes stranger still when we tune our ears to hear the echoes of textual antecedents in Isaiah's vision. Lo and behold, do we not hear Israel's exodus experience recapitulated?¹⁵ Only this time, Egypt, the erstwhile oppressor, is cast in the role of the oppressed.

Echoes of Exodus ring insistently. When the Egyptians "cry to the Lord because of oppressors, he will send them a saviour, and will defend them" (19:20c; compare Exod. 6:6; 3:8). A new Moses arrives on the scene, but this time he is commissioned to lead the Egyptians to freedom.

"Just as Israel was saved through a mediator, Moses," says Vogels, "so he will likewise send to Egypt a liberator, a kind of new Moses."¹⁶ "What is remarkable is that now the God of Israel will respond to Egypt's cry of deliverance and will send a savior to rescue as he once had done for the oppressed Israelite slaves," writes Brevard Childs.¹⁷

The Egyptians have also been oppressed. They also need deliverance. To Egypt comes the promise that "the Lord will make himself known to the Egyptians; and the Egyptians will know the Lord on

that day" (Isa. 19:21a), just as it was said to Israel that "you shall know the Lord" (Exod. 6:7) at the time of the original Exodus.

As a result, the Egyptians "will worship with sacrifice and burnt offering" (Isa. 19:21b), recalling that Israel's exodus, too, centered on the right to worship and offer sacrifices (Exod. 3:18). Thus, the reconfiguration that sets up a new role for Egypt does so according to the pattern of the elect people of God. Isaiah predicts an exodus experience for the Egyptians, too.¹⁸

And the vision has not yet reached its zenith. "On that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian will come into Egypt, and the Egyptian into Assyria, and the Egyptians will worship with the Assyrians" (19:23). The text has not mentioned Assyria until now, but its mention at this point only adds quantity to what is already qualitatively in place.

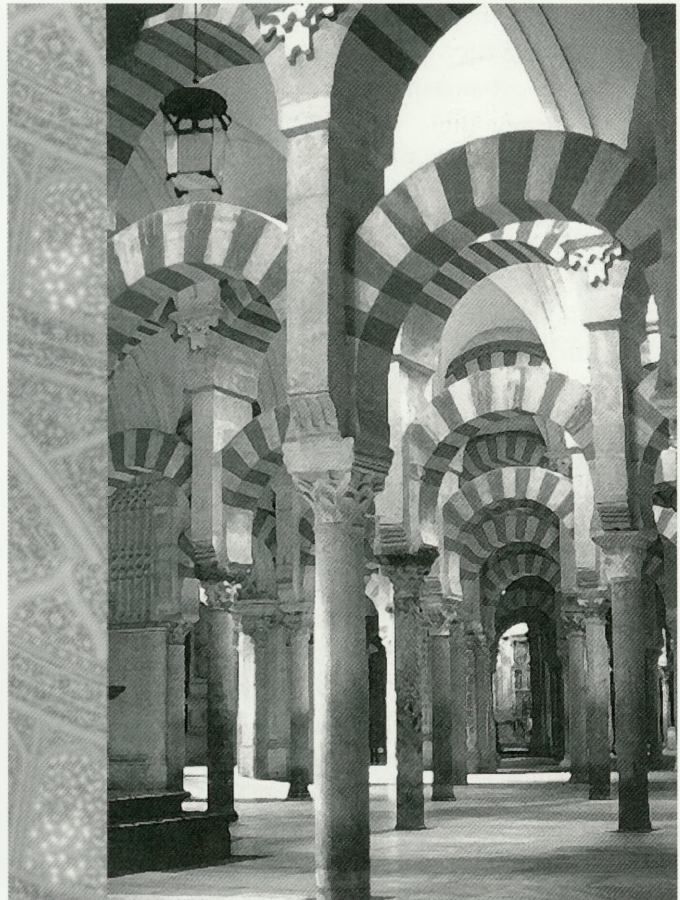
Assyria, too, the other great enemy of Israel in the Old Testament, is included in the reconfiguration. Perhaps the most frightening and cruel of all the conquerors that ravaged the Near East, Assyria belongs as a full partner in the new worshiping fellowship.¹⁹ The highway in view drives home the point, because a highway "is a favorite metaphor in the book for the removal of alienation and separation (Isa. 11:16; 33:8; 35:8; 40:3; 49:11; 62:10)."¹⁹

Reconfiguring the Elect

Language that used to be exclusive for Israel, the chosen people, is now extended to Israel's sworn enemies. "On that day Israel will be the third with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, whom the Lord of hosts has blessed, saying, 'Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my heritage'" (Isa. 19:24, 25).

God's people, reconfigured and reunited along the prophetic highway, will be "a blessing in the midst of the earth" (19:24)! This is the ultimate goal of the vision. The other nations do not become Israel; but they have the same status in a trinity of equals. Unity is not achieved at the expense of diversity, as though diversity in itself precludes a meeting of minds and hearts. Importantly, the other nations "are not to be subjects of Israel, and in virtue of so being, objects of Yahweh's regard," writes George Buchanan Gray, "they are to be as directly related to Yahweh as Israel itself."²⁰

However, unity is no loss to Israel because its recognition was never the main point. Israel was called



to become a blessing in the earth, a conduit of God's redemptive intervention (Gen. 12:2). This commission has now been fulfilled in a spectacular manner even though Israel must acknowledge that Egypt and Assyria, former enemies, are partners in her vocation.

Although this possibility may seem unsettling to one accustomed to occupy the limelight alone, comfort can be taken in the thought that God is not eclipsed. "For although from this time forward there is to be no essential differences between the nations in their relation to God, it is still the God of Israel who obtains this universal recognition...."²¹

Obstacles

This message contrasts so much with expectations that it was and is bound to run into obstacles. Indeed, on a par with the miracle that these ideas were ever conceived is the wonder that our ancestors preserved them for posterity. If Augustine had prevailed in his discussion with Jerome as to which version of the Old

Testament should be the Bible of the Church—Augustine defending the Greek version, Jerome the Hebrew text—the most amazing part of the text might have been lost in our Bible.

The translators of the Septuagint could not swallow the notion that God's mercy included the enemies of Israel in this way and on a level indistinguishable from the elect people of God. So we read in the Septuagint (LXX) a quite different text and with a quite different message. There, God's solicitous care works for the exclusive benefit of Israel, reducing Egypt and Assyria to mere geographic locations that house a smattering of diaspora Jews.

That is, all the three parts of the threesome are ethnic Israelites. "In that day shall Israel be a third among the Assyrians and among the Egyptians, blessed in the land which the Lord of hosts (hath) blessed, saying Blessed is my people that is in Egypt, and among the Assyrians, and the land of mine inheritance, Israel" (19:24, 25, LXX).

The words *with Egypt* and *with Assyria* in the Hebrew text, thus joined together in worship of the one God, have become *among* the Assyrians and *among* the Egyptians in the LXX, and the blessing rests only on the Israelites *in Egypt among* the Assyrians.²² If ever a translation also proved itself as an interpretation, this text could be Exhibit A. The LXX text certainly deserves to be seen as a "tendentious revision," more likely intentional than accidental and probably justified on the assumption that Isaiah could not have meant what he actually says.²³

Application of the Text

What shall we do with this text today? How shall we read it? Does it have any meaning in our time and in our context? Does Isaiah's prophetic highway offer hope that divisions may be overcome despite diversity—even despite hostility—or does it set up parameters that make us, too, uneasy, looking for a way to restore the blueprint to its traditional shape—as did the translators of the Septuagint?

Read as predictive prophecy expecting a literal fulfillment, this vision never materialized. The enmity between these nations continued unabated until their end. In fact, so little has changed that the enmity continues today virtually in literal terms. There is no highway from Cairo to Mosul that courses through Jerusalem, only a huge concrete wall arising in the immediate vicin-

ity of the Holy City as a telling metaphor for entrenched alienation, insecurity, and fear.

If the political landscape reveals a world split apart, as Alexander Solzhenitsyn described it in his speech to graduating Harvard University students in 1987, it is no less divided now even though the fault lines in the geopolitical crust shifted after the fall of communism. Moreover, if ethnic and political divisions remain, religious fault lines dwarf them. More than any other factor, religion seems to be the generative force of conflict in the world. Religion stands out as the most fissile material of our time, ready to blow up in our faces at a moment's notice, the element about which there will be no compromise and no common ground.

This reality, too, flies in the face of our text because it envisions longstanding enemies united precisely in worship, in their perception of, in their devotion to, and in their appreciation for the one God. "Together they form a *single* new and permanent people of God," says Otto Kaiser of the three peoples in Isaiah's vision.²⁴ Thus constituted, united on the level of religious belief and practice, this trinity is to be a blessing in the midst of the earth. Whatever we hear the text saying or make it say, it envisions religion as a blessing to humanity; it does seem to know of a brand of religion that has the capacity to bring reconciliation in the place of hatred and conflict.

Absent a literal fulfillment of this prophecy in the past and absent the prospect of a political fulfillment in the present, we should nevertheless hesitate before we dismiss the vision as pure utopia. What we have before us should not be read as a political prophecy—or even a religious prophecy—but as an inspired spiritual perception, a joining together of what has been wrongfully put asunder.

Here are a few concrete suggestions for appropriating the text in our time.

The Need for a New Paradigm

First, the text proposes a new paradigm. The entity long seen as an enemy and an oppressor also belongs to the elect. According to the view from the prophetic highway, the enemy has also been oppressed and needs deliverance. It is not off target to claim that Isaiah's vision theologially anticipates Jesus on the cross: "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34).²⁵

For this option to open up, it must first be imagined, paradigmatically; it must be envisioned as a real option, then the privilege must be extended without

reserve to those appearing to belong to the opposite side. The stereotype of otherness and enmity must be surrendered when, in God's view of things, there is an exodus planned for the enemy, too, and its exodus is configured along the same lines as for those seeing themselves as more naturally entitled to the privilege.

Moving from a new perception of God's intention, the reader is called to see the other side in a new light. Importantly, the new conception demands a new rhetoric. New terms must be adopted and old terminology abandoned if what used to be seen as the evil empire and the axis of evil is actually the elect of God. What is seen as possible from God's point of view, then, must also in some way or other become our intention.

The question may be asked whether human participation is expected for this vision to become a reality. Here the answer depends on how one perceives the prophetic ministry. If we see the prophet's role mostly as a person who predicts and informs concerning matters of the future, human participation need not concern us. However, if the prophet is a person who seeks to influence and persuade, sharing a point of view to see others adopt it, then the aim of his ministry is precisely to enlist human participation. To those who have experienced the Exodus comes the call to make the exodus experience available to others equally in need.

It is not well-known that this text already has introduced a partial paradigm shift in Seventh-day Adventist understanding of mission, especially in the area of Adventist-Muslim relations. The late Robert Darnell, probably the foremost Adventist scholar in Islamic Studies to date, found in this text the theological rationale for a new approach to Muslims.

Darnell spent many years as a missionary in the Middle East, while also completing a doctoral degree in Islamic Studies. By first-hand acquaintance with Muslims, he sensed that the traditional paradigm of confrontation was failing, and by acquainting himself with neglected strains of Islam he concluded that the traditional view was untenable. In short, Darnell advocated a contextualized approach to Muslims, seeing Muslims come to a new understanding of God from within their own context. In doing so, he did not see himself representing a fixed point around which other entities moved.

Rather, Darnell's point was moving, too, particularly in the sense that he saw his witness located within an impregnable Fortress Christianity. The witness advocated by Darnell and his small circle of associates in the Middle East was the witness of the itinerant believer, a



pilgrim living in tents, joined in dialogue with other believers actual and potential across the lines that divide, whether this divide be ethnic, political, or religious.

An attempt to implement this paradigm is taking place against great odds under the leadership of Darnell's protégé, Jerald Whitehouse. My point in the present context is not to speak for or against the validity of Darnell's inference and application of this text. I intend merely to observe that the text in Isaiah represents a dramatic realignment, a new paradigm.

A contextualized approach to Islam represents a paradigm shift of similar magnitude, whether or not our text provides the warrant. I shall not hide the fact, however, that the text leaped into my view of the world as a shocking discovery when, many years ago, I heard Darnell in person invoke it in defence of his project, facing profound misgivings in the

Christian community within which he served.

Redirecting attention to another group traditionally seen as an adversary in Seventh-day Adventist tradition, what shall we make of Ellen G. White's counsel, "We should not go out of our way to make hard thrusts at the Catholics?"²⁷ Did she, too, on a lesser scale than Isaiah, see the need for a new perception of things? Although Isaiah saw the Egyptians and the Assyrians actually coming together in worship of the one God, it is possible that his vision contributes to the creation of conditions for the vision to become a reality.

Again, turning to Ellen G. White's revised paradigm, "We may have less to say in some lines, in regard to the Roman power and the papacy, but we should call attention to what the prophets and apostles have written under the Spirit of God."²⁸

Yes, as a church we have called attention to what the prophets have said, but has Isaiah been part of the prophetic repertoire? Have we heard and presented this particular prophecy and pondered its implications?

The Need for A New Theology

As a second point in terms of application, the text proposes a new theology. If anyone seeks to scale back the task, the inclination should be resisted. That is to say, what Isaiah envisions is theologically driven. It is fully and entirely a scenario that represents God's character and God's point of view, inviting, in turn, the believer to take another look at God's character.

"In that day," the text repeats again and again, and "that day" is God's day, revealing what God intends and what God represents no matter how incurable our divisions or how dismally entrenched our alienation. The text does not describe what *is* but what God *wants*, the original and ultimate and undeviating purpose of God's mind and heart.

The prophetic highway does not end in Isaiah 19 as a project boldly conceived but quickly abandoned. The highway continues throughout the book, as in the stunning vision of inclusion in Isaiah 56, "Thus says the Lord God, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, I will gather others to them besides those already gathered" (Isa. 56:8).

Here, too, the action described is merely an extension of God's character. Whether in joining Israel with her enemies, Egypt and Assyria, as "a blessing in the midst of the earth," (19:24) or in the gathering of the outcasts into "a house of prayer for all peoples" (56:7),

we see God as a persistent gatherer, reaching out to all God's alienated sons and daughters. In this sense, as Walter Brueggemann observes with respect to the latter text, gathering "is Yahweh's most defining verb, Yahweh's most characteristic activity."²⁹

A profound and pervasive overhaul of theology is needed for religion to become the remedy by which to overcome hatred and division. As to contemporary evidence to prove this need, there is no want of examples. One will suffice: the incident on Orthodox Easter, 1993, when Metropolitan Nikolaj, the highest-ranking Serb Orthodox Church official in Bosnia, spoke glowingly of the leadership of Radovan Karadzic and General Ratko Mladic, leaders now sought for the crime of genocide, as examples of "following the hard road of Christ."³⁰

Needless to say, such a view of the road of Christ, expressed by a leading clergyman in our time, lies far from the prophetic highway in Isaiah.

The Need for a Vision of Healing

Finally, as a third aspect awaiting appropriation and application, there is in Isaiah's vision an idea rarely noticed, or at least not given as much emphasis as it deserves. Here, as at numerous decisive junctures in the book, Isaiah resorts to the language of sickness and healing to describe what is wrong and what can be done to make it right. The Egyptians "will return to the Lord," he says, "and he will listen to their supplications and heal them" (19:22; compare 6:10; 30:26; 53:5; 57:18, 19).

This language is not the traditional and favored terminology of orthodox theology. To state it more categorically, this is not the legal language of sin and punishment that dominates theological discourse; it is the medical language of sickness and healing. Isaiah often views the human predicament in medical terms, as here in his view of Egypt. Taking this into everyday language, we, too, can see a difference between sick people and bad people.

We will most likely relate to them differently, looking at the sick person with compassion and at the bad person with fear, if not contempt. The bad person goes to jail for punishment, whereas the sick person goes to the hospital to be healed. Intriguingly, Isaiah casts the Egyptians in the ailing category, assuring us that there is a God who will heal them.

Pondering what is to be "on that day," we find in the text a reconfigured conception of the world, a new theology, and a vision of healing. These are preliminary obser-

vations. To the extent that we, too, long to be part of God's diverse blessing in the midst of the earth, it is well to hear the prophet speak. Traveling the prophetic highway on this occasion has not taken us to its destination, but it is my hope it will not leave us unmoved.

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13. J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 168.

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Discussed: eschatology, focus on family life, mission, Waldenses, world religion, Qur'an, PARL, triumphalistic evangelistic efforts, reform efforts, spiritual growth, Jesus' ministry

New Directions in Adventist-Muslim Relations

Spectrum Interviews Jerald Whitehouse

Adventists officially began to address relations with the Muslim community in 1990 with the creation of the office of Global Mission within the General Conference. However, in the post-9/11 world, they changed their approach. What was formerly the Islamic Study Center has become the Global Center for Adventist-Muslim Relations (GCAMR), and Jerald Whitehouse has become its director. The center is located in Loma Linda, California.

Central to Whitehouse's approach is basic respect for Islam and an understanding that God has been and is active in the spiritual lives of honest Muslims. His purpose is to challenge Muslims to a deeper faith, one that considers important an assurance of salvation from an understanding of God's plan for saving faith as revealed in the Bible. Yet he maintains that Muslims do not need to abandon totally their spiritual and cultural heritage, but rather use it as a foundation upon which to build deeper faith.

Spectrum recently caught up with Whitehouse and asked him a series of questions about Muslims, the program he directs, and his approach.

SPECTRUM *What is the purpose of the Islamic Study Center that you oversee for the General Conference? Is helping Adventists understand Islam as significant as taking Adventism to Muslim countries?*

WHITEHOUSE In 1995, the Global Center for Islamic Studies was renamed the Global Center for Adventist Muslim Relations to indicate a new focus on building understanding relations with Muslims. Foundational work in raising awareness of Islam had been

done previous to that, and it was felt that it was time to shift the focus to building relationships and equipping Adventists to engage more effectively in a respectful manner on spiritual matters with Muslims.

Over the past eleven years, we have tried to fulfill that mandate from the General Conference Office of Adventist Mission (formerly the Office of Global Mission).

If one looks at the history of Adventist Muslim relations, we have suffered from a lack of clarity in how we should relate with

Islam. Our traditional evangelistic methods have not communicated well with Muslims, in some cases have been offensive to the Muslim, and have sometimes precipitated violent responses. This has resulted, in many cases, from our inaccurate understanding of Islam itself, or from outright offensive statements about Islam.

Although we are concerned about communicating the biblical message clearly as we understand it, we must always do so with respect and with an "other competency" that guides us into a nonoffensive and respectful encounter. Doing anything less is to compromise the very representation of the gospel that we are trying to communicate.

So our purpose can be thought of as twofold: First, and probably most important initially, it is to equip Adventists with the knowledge, attitude, and practical tools to interact with the Muslim "with gentleness and respect" (1 Pet. 3:16 GNT). Secondly, it is to assist Adventists actually to engage with Muslims in a spiritual journey as together we seek to know God's will for our lives in these end times of earth's history.

SPECTRUM *What do Adventists and Muslims share in common?*

WHITEHOUSE There are a number of areas of commonality between Adventists and Muslims that should be our first focus. The tendency has been to focus on the differences and therefore try to point out error in the other. This has only led to deterioration of relationships and sometimes increase in hostilities. It is only as we recognize that the Muslim's spiritual life is as God-centered and complex as ours that we can begin to interact in a substantive manner.

We have strong areas of commonality in our belief in one God, for example. We are in the line of the three monotheistic faiths coming out of Abraham. Allah is the Creator God, the God of Abraham and the rest of the prophets through whom he has sent messages. Yes, there are differences in emphasis and understanding of certain characteristics of God, or how God is known. But our differences in this area do not change God himself as the Supreme Being worshiped by Adventists and Muslims. It is an area for discussion and growth in understanding, to be sure, but it must be recognized also as an initial area of commonality.

Another area of strong commonality between Adventists and Muslims is our eschatology. It's in our name and therefore provides a strong link to

Muslims, who also believe in the "end of time," the return of Jesus (Isa al Masih), and the day of judgment. Again, there are differences in the details of understanding of these beliefs. But the basic understanding of a day of accountability, of the end of this demonstration of sin at the coming of Jesus, the institution of a new home for God's faithful, and the resultant commitment to living godly lives in preparation for these events, are strong commonalities that we can utilize in building a relationship of trust in spiritual matters with the Muslim.

As a leading Muslim writer noted to me personally after several hours of discussion on areas of commonality and areas of difference: "Yes, we have our differences. But we must remember that at the end of all things we both will stand before the same God. Shouldn't we work together to assist each other to prepare for that day?"

Other areas of commonality would be our conservative lifestyle, focus on family life, and our health principles. Abstinence from pork and alcohol are elements that assure the Muslim that we are serious about our faith and our relation with God.

SPECTRUM *Some Adventists consider your approach to Islam and mission controversial. Why is that? What do you do that raises questions within Adventism?*

WHITEHOUSE From my perspective, the concerns raised are largely from two issues: one is a lack of accurate information and understanding of Islam or from a focus on only the negative aspects of Islam. We often fall into the trap of comparing the worst in the other with the best in our own tradition.

One of the prerequisites of respectful interaction with the other is a healthy self-criticism. We must be willing to admit that in our own faith tradition there have been individuals, even leaders, who have not represented the best ethics of our tradition appropriately. It doesn't help for us to simply point the finger and say, "They have a greater problem in this area than we do." Our first responsibility is with ourselves.

Another area of concern could stem from my perspective on our mission as Seventh-day Adventists. It is my understanding that God ordained first the "Advent Movement" and subsequently the Seventh-day Adventist

organization as a prophetic movement in the end of time with a unique mission that is bigger than itself.

It is a prophetic role within all peoples. It is a role and mission that takes precedence over institution building or sectarian agendas. It is to carry a warning message to prepare a people from among all peoples for the coming of Jesus. It is based on the understanding that God is using the Advent movement to prepare a larger remnant that we are certainly a part of, but we are not the whole. The final remnant is larger than Seventh-day Adventists alone.

This understanding forms the basis for my rela-

I personally don't think God classifies any country or people group as "closed."

tions with Muslims. I can move into the Muslim context with a biblical, spiritual message, establish trusting relationships, and move on a path of mutual spiritual growth. But if it is cloaked with an institutional or sectarian agenda, it will be rejected as undermining faith and destroying traditional values of Islam.

Because our regular Adventist evangelistic approaches are not able to function in some countries where religious freedom is not practiced, we have classified certain countries or people groups as "closed." I personally don't think God classifies any country or people group as "closed." This is a human creation from within our institutional mindset. If one looks at mission history in the Christian era, the major mission movements did not have the privilege of religious freedom. They did not classify any country or people group as "closed."

The Waldenses did not wait for religious freedom in Europe before disguising themselves as traders and seeding the Scriptures into Europe. The biblical message should be able to move into any people group and take root within that context in order to prepare a people for the coming of Jesus. Such a spiritual movement finds a resonant note within sincere, honest hearts in the Muslim community.

I am pleased that the Church is wrestling with these issues at top levels. As can be expected, there are cautions and concerns. But there is a growing sense that we must find ways to relate effectively on spiritual matters with the Muslim and that this will require new ways of thinking and working.

SPECTRUM *You mentioned in an earlier conversation that three Muslims who accepted some form of Adventism were killed after their story was told. Have any Adventists working in the 10/40 window lost their lives for proselytizing?*

WHITEHOUSE I prefer not to respond to this question.

SPECTRUM *If participating in any kind of organized religious activity other than Islam is so deadly in some places, why did the General Conference vote guidelines for organizing companies of believers in such areas?*

WHITEHOUSE The General Conference did not vote guidelines for "organizing companies of believers" in such areas. What happens within the Muslim community must be the decision of adherents there. We cannot dictate how they should organize or proceed in spiritual matters. As I indicated above, the church leadership is wrestling with the issues of our relationship with such groups as Islam. There is a growing realization of some of the issues that I raise in the third question above. I feel that a recapturing of the "spiritual movement motif" is a key to this entire question.

SPECTRUM *Jon Dybdahl has described Adventism as a world religion for Ministry magazine. How do you define Adventism? Is it a Christian religion? What is the importance of a definition for a religion in Muslim countries?*

WHITEHOUSE I have no quarrel with Dybdahl's description. I would use different descriptives but I see no basic difference in our philosophies. I think I have essentially answered this question under the previous questions. However, let me expand a bit.

Islam by definition is the religion of "submission," or as some more current scholars prefer, "commitment" to God. Muslims therefore see it as the universal religion. The biblical prophets (the Qur'an lists about twenty-four prophets that are also in the Bible) were Muslim, since they were totally submitted to God. Islam has over the centuries become an organized religion that represents a political and religious force. Christianity has suffered from the same progression—from being a Christian—one who follows Jesus—to

Christendom or an organized religion with political and religious triumphalistic agendas.

My assertion would be that we must avoid all association with these "institutional" agendas that carry the tone of triumphalism. We must recapture the "spiritual movement motif" as we endeavor to fulfill God's purpose for us in these end times. Jesus asserted very clearly: "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36). What part of that phrase do we not understand? Ours is a spiritual mission, but when clothed in a "Christian" package it is interpreted by the Muslim as an organized religious/political entity with triumphalistic objectives. This truncates who we are and our mission.

SPECTRUM *What efforts are being made by Adventists to address religious freedom within Islamic countries?*

WHITEHOUSE The Department of Public Affairs and Religious Liberty is active within Muslim circles in promoting religious freedom. Obviously, this is a large and ongoing task and I applaud what PARL is doing in this regard. I am not directly involved in its initiatives since I have a different focus.

It is interesting to note that more and more Islamic leaders are speaking out on behalf of tolerance and religious freedom. This is a welcome development. Rashid Omar, a professor at the University of Notre Dame in Indiana, where he coordinates a program that focuses on religious conflict and peace building, in a recent dialogue between Christians, Jews, and Muslims at Andrews University, noted that Islam is in need of reform to apply the ethical principles of the Qur'an in the current world.

He further gave a word of caution: that the efforts of himself and colleagues with similar concerns in Islam are made more difficult by the "triumphalistic evangelistic efforts of Christian organizations." Personally, I take his concern seriously. We can encourage and strengthen the reform efforts of these key leaders in Islam while not compromising our end-time spiritual mission.

SPECTRUM *Does the contextualization that you recommend for Adventism in Muslim countries work when similar changes are made to the worship and sacred study of Scripture in a Buddhist or Hindu culture?*

WHITEHOUSE I cannot answer this question fully since I have not studied those traditions in depth. I do feel

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that similar respectful research needs to be done with other faith traditions. I am convinced that there are values and principles of truth in every faith tradition upon which we can build in linking with them in spiritual growth. The issues we face are different in each faith tradition, so I cannot say what form it would take in another tradition. But a respectful, careful approach, seeking to plant the biblical message within that context will be rewarded.

SPECTRUM *Once I asked a Christian who grew up in a Muslim home to tell me his conversion story. He said that he could not do that because his mother had taught him never to be critical of other people. Does becoming an Adventist require being critical of other religions?*

WHITEHOUSE There is no place for criticism of another faith tradition. That does not mean we don't look critically at that system (as we should our own) and define clearly where the biblical message must provide guidance to new understandings and behaviors. But

one should never be required to abandon totally his or her past heritage.

The biblical message does judge one's past and that must either be abandoned or seen in a new biblical light. But it is more productive to focus on those spiritual elements from one's past that one can build upon. Our mission is one of witnessing to the biblical message about God, not of being destructively critical of other faith traditions.

SPECTRUM *How has your study of Islam affected your concept of Adventism?*

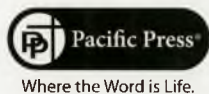
WHITEHOUSE My description of Adventism and its end-time mission has been clarified because of my interaction with Islam as well as my study of God's incarnational activity in history and the model ministry of Jesus.

Jerald Whitehouse directs the Global Center for Adventist Muslim Relations in the General Conference Office of Adventist Mission.

"I have always believed in God. What changed in my heart during the translation of Rainbow Over Hell was that I realized God believes in us. As He believed in Saburo Arakaki and saw a man of God and not a murderer, so He believes in us."

—**Sharon Fujimoto-Johnson**,
former assistant editor and designer of *Spectrum*.

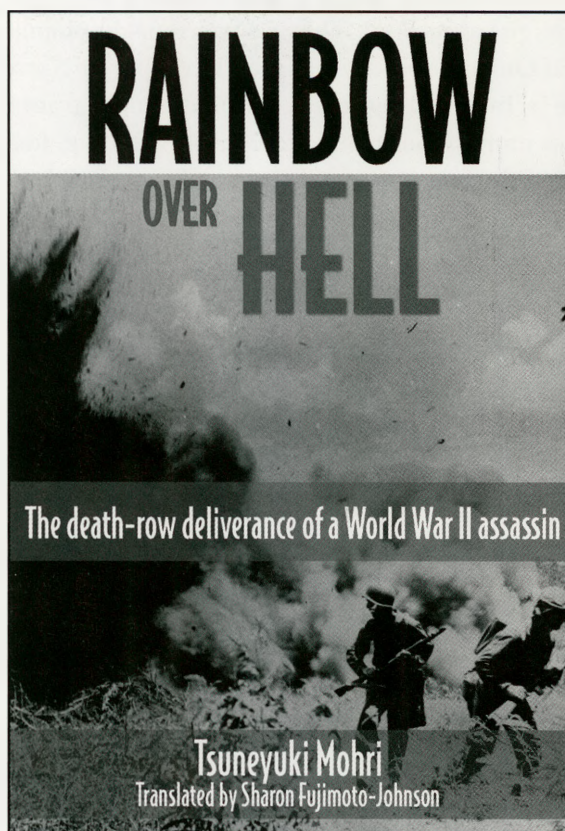
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Discussed: diaspora, Shari'ah law, peace and freedom, execution threats, Christian dream,
faithful fundamentalist Muslims

Looking for Middle Ground with Islam

By *Berge Schantz*

Is middle ground at all possible in the discussion of Muslim cultures? This was the challenging question the editor of *Spectrum* put to me as we were negotiating some aspects of Islam and Muslims in the world today.

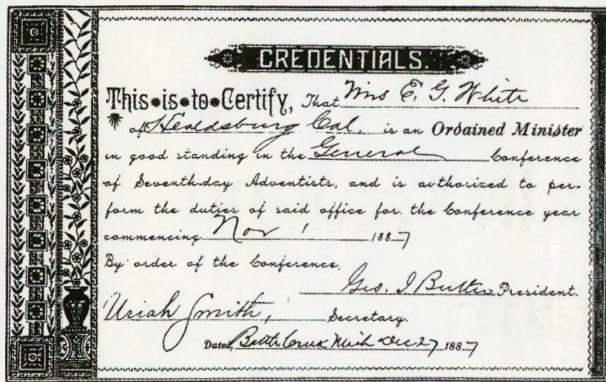


It is possible to find middle ground between many cultures in the world because they have much in common. The middle ground problem arises in situations where culture and religion are integrated. In the editor's challenge, the word *culture* was tied to Muslim. Interestingly, in anthropological studies, Islam is the prime example of an almost complete integration of culture and religion. This means that the challenge really is to find middle ground between two religions because Muslim culture is synonymous with a religion, Islam. In Islam, religion is integrated into culture in such a way that separation of the two is impossible.

One result of this inseparability is that Muslims in diaspora have a hard time living in non-Islamic cultures. A change in an Islamic cultural pattern—for instance, in the way a woman dresses or how she takes part in normal societal life—could mean that she rejects a religious practice. The result of such an act could be punishment according to Shari'ah law, or even no hope of access to the Islamic paradise.

So a reasonable answer to the question will require that we distinguish between a Muslim and an Islamist.

Muslims are fellow citizens in the world. Regardless of race, color, or language, they should always be met with understanding



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and respected as equals. As individuals, they are potential recipients in God's saving grace and must be worthy objects of Christian witnessing activities.

In contrast, Islamism—a growing radical political/religious movement—must be studied and understood. Christians should be aware of the perils and threats it presents to Western culture, humans, and property. In their understanding of the Koran and the Hadiths, Islamists aim to get world dominion by the means of the Shari'ah law. They feel that they are justified to use oppression or even terror as means to reach their goal. This can be clearly observed in recent events.

To reach middle ground between two religions requires that both sides be prepared to contextualize, negotiate, and tolerate, to be flexible and even to some extent yield within the framework of their own religions. A healthy sense of humor also helps.

However, these characteristics are not what we experience from fundamentalist, rabid, and extreme Muslims. In their camp, the virtues needed for a meaningful dialogue are really regarded as weaknesses on the part of Christians. In dialogues between Christians and strict Muslims, the latter have no room for middle ground positions. If they agree to talk they will instead use the opportunity to take advantage or even exploit the "weak" Christians.

Fortunately, not all Muslims are like this. As a matter of fact, the majority of the more than twenty-five million who reside in the Western world want to live in peace and enjoy freedom and the benefits they receive. They are prepared to adapt their lifestyle (culture and customs) in order to live among Christians in a harmonious and peaceful manner. They are, however, kept in line by extreme fundamentalist Islamists, who account for less than 10 percent of the total. They can and will use execution threats from the Shari'ah law to keep their Muslim sisters and brothers inside the fold of Islamic doctrines.

A middle ground in culture—although difficult to establish—can be reached on the personal level with individual Muslims. In religious matters, a middle ground position is only a Christian dream. It is unacceptable for faithful fundamentalist Muslims.

Børge Schantz was the founding director of the Adventist Centre for Islamic Studies, at Newbold College, and recently published *Islam in the Post 9/11 World*.

Discussed: Sodom and Gomorrah, mercy and justice, vendetta, wickedness, kooks, fanatics, and serial murderers, Puritans, Pope John XXIII, New Orleans, Hillel, love

Israelite Genocide and Islamic Jihad

By Roy E. Gane

On their way to the land of Canaan after wandering in the wilderness, the Israelites wiped out a major segment of the Midianite population and totally annihilated the people of Arad, as well as the subjects of Sihon and Og (Num. 21, 31; Deut. 2–3). These massacres were just a preview of what they were commissioned to do to the inhabitants of Canaan:

However, in the cities of the nations the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance, do not leave alive anything that breathes. Completely destroy them—the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites—as the LORD your God has commanded you (Deut. 20:16–17 NIV).

Israelite Genocide and the Problem of Theodicy

Such destruction can only be described as systematic, divinely mandated genocide.² How can a God of love (compare 1 John 4:8) be so merciless? We cannot simply blame the Israelites; they were the Lord's agents. Instead of destroying the peoples of Canaan by fire as he did Sodom and

Gomorrah (Gen. 19:24–28), he used the Israelites as his terrible swift sword, at least partly to teach them faith through the discipline of war (compare Judg. 3:2, 4).

Some scholars refuse to accept the possibility that God—at least the God revealed by Jesus—could have ever commanded genocide under any circumstances. So they must posit radical discontinuity between Israel's God and the God of the New Testament and/or interpret the Old Testament as misrepresenting God's true character.³ Those of us who accept the entire Bible as the Word of God have no choice but to admit that God sometimes gives up on groups of people and chooses to destroy them (Gen. 6–7, 19; Rev. 20), and during a certain phase of history he uniquely delegated a carefully

restricted part of his destructive work to his chosen nation of ancient Israel, which he tightly controlled and held accountable under theocratic rule.⁴

It will only be with the frank acknowledgment that ordinary ethical requirements were suspended and the ethical principles of the last judgment intruded that the divine promises and commands to Israel concerning Canaan and the Canaanites come into their own. Only so can the conquest be justified and seen as it was in truth—not murder, but the hosts of the Almighty visiting upon the rebels against his righteous throne their just deserts—not robbery, but the meek inheriting the earth.⁵

It is pointless either to defend or condemn God (compare Job 40:2). Our attempts at theodicy—justifying God's character—are stimulating exercises, but in the final analysis we can only stand back and let God be God, admitting that our reasonings are flawed by inadequate perspective.⁶ Ultimately, our acceptance of his character is a matter of faith. He has given us plenty of evidence to trust him, but not enough to penetrate all the mysteries of his ways (compare Deut. 29:29 [Hebrew v. 28]).

There are some clues that the Lord's treatment of the peoples in Canaan was in harmony with his character of mercy and justice:⁷

1. He gave them ample opportunity to know him through witnesses such as Abraham and Melchizedek (Gen. 14:17–24).
2. He kept his people of Israel waiting in Egypt until the end of four centuries of probation for the Amorites (Gen. 15:13, 16). This is more than three times the 120 years he gave the antedeluvian world (6:3).
3. Depraved inhabitants of Canaan practiced gross immorality (Lev. 18:3, 27–28) and child sacrifice (Deut. 12:31). If God hadn't destroyed them, he would have owed the people of Sodom and Gomorrah an apology (compare Gen. 18–19).
4. As exemplified by what happened at Shittim (Num. 25), idolatrous and immoral men and women in close proximity to the Israelites would inevitably corrupt them and thereby cause their destruction (Deut. 7:4; 20:18). The Lord's ideal for the Israelites and the Canaanite environment were mutually exclusive.

5. The fact that the Lord threatened to treat unfaithful Israelites like Canaanites (Lev. 18:28; Num. 33:55–56; compare on 16:1–35, "Bridging Contexts") shows that his vendetta was against wickedness, not ethnicity. Those who rebel against him are subject to "equal opportunity punishment."

Genocide, Jihad, and Theocracy

An ardent pacifist, Albert Einstein wrote: "Heroism on command, senseless violence, and all the loathsome nonsense that goes by the name of patriotism—how passionately I hate them! How vile and despicable seems war to me! I would rather be hacked in pieces than take part in such an abominable business."⁸

Unfortunately, Einstein's twentieth century witnessed war and genocide on an unprecedented scale, with the annihilation of millions of Armenians, Jews, Gypsies, Tutsis, Hutus, and others just because they belonged to certain groups.

For us, genocide evokes revulsion and instant condemnation. But then we read the Bible and find that God's chosen people carried out on their enemies—of all things—genocide! Not only does the Bible condone this behavior; God commanded holy wars of extermination and punished his people for rebellion if they failed to shed the last drop of blood (Num. 33:55–56; 1 Sam. 15).

The brutal question is: How is genocide by the Israelites different from all other genocides? What gave them any more right to massacre entire populations, including women and children, than other "holy warriors" through the centuries? After all, "Christian" Crusaders in the Middle Ages, who piously perpetrated unbelievably bloody atrocities, and their Islamic opponents both acted in accordance with sincere beliefs that they were engaged in holy war approved by their respective deities. Hans Küng pointedly observes:

Many massacres and wars not only in the Near East between Maronite Christians, Sunni and Shi'ite Muslims, between Syrians, Palestinians, Druse and Israelis, but also between Iran and Iraq, between Indians and Pakistanis, Hindus and Sikhs, Singhalese Buddhists and Tamil Hindus, and earlier also between Buddhist monks and the Catholic regime in Vietnam, as also today between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland, were or are so indescribably fanatical,



bloody and inexorable because they have a religious foundation. And what is the logic? If God himself is “with us,” with our religion, confession, nation, our party, then anything is allowed against the other party, which in that case must logically be of the devil. In that case even unrestrained violation, burning, destruction and murder is permissible in the name of God.⁹

Today, Islamic militants view themselves as simply continuing an international jihad, “holy war.” When Yassir Arafat rallied his supporters by yelling, “jihad!” he appealed to a kind of divine mandate. However Americans and their Western allies may characterize the so-called “war on terrorism,” those on the other side have consistently said that it is a religious war motivated by zeal to carry out (their interpretation of) commands enshrined in their “holy books.”

If the jihad of firebrand groups such as Al-Qaeda, Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and Hezbollah involves indiscriminate slaughter of men, women, children, and the elderly, why is anyone sur-

An aerial view of the Islamic holy city Mecca.

prised? Shocked, dismayed, angered, of course, but why surprised? This is the way their kind of “holy war” works. Those whom we despise as kooks, fanatics, and serial murderers are idolized as heroes and martyrs by those who share their religious worldview. If ancient Israelite holy war does not disturb us the way modern Islamic jihad does, it is at least partly because the carnage of the former is chronologically removed from us. CNN and *Time* magazine do not assault us with the visual impact of corpses and mangled wreckage in ancient Arad, Heshbon, and Jericho (Josh. 6).

For me, a believer in the divine authority of the Bible, Israel’s holy wars were unique because that nation was a true theocracy acting on the basis of direct revelation from God and carrying out retributive justice on his behalf. When God tells you to do

something, you do it, even if it is unusual and unpleasant. A towering example of such obedience was carried out by Abraham, the father of the Jews and Arabs and the spiritual father of the Christian faith. When God commanded him to offer his son as a human sacrifice, he set about to do this painful deed and was stopped only by another divine command (Gen. 22).

The problem is that other groups also claim to be theocracies acting on commands from God/god(s)/Allah. We immediately think of the Taliban in Afghanistan or the Shiite regime of Iran, which have attempted to enforce on modern civil society the rules and penalties

Religious Belief and "Holy War"

Of course, my belief that ancient Israel was a theocracy is precisely that: a belief, which is based upon the same holy book produced by that theocracy. The Israelite holy wars were commanded by the Lord of the Bible. For Muslims, their jihad is authorized by Allah of the Koran. In spite of all the similarities between our monotheistic deities and all of our attempts at ecumenical "bridge-building," respect for other religious groups, and postmodern "political correctness," if we are not Muslim, we do not accept the Koran as authoritative revelation from the true God. Conversely,

Obviously we cannot force other people to change their worldviews, but we can improve our own contribution to world peace.

stated in the Koran and other sources as if Allah were uttering direct commands today. Historically speaking, Christians have not been immune from this approach. For example, the medieval church claimed divine authority and in some respects the Puritans of the Massachusetts Bay Colony tried to live as a theocracy, enforcing authoritative biblical revelation as binding on their society.

None of the groups just mentioned has been a theocracy in the sense that Israel was because they have lacked the resident, manifest Presence of the divine King in their midst and the powerful checks and balances that go with his ongoing, intimate control. With Israel, the Lord was operating the brakes as well as the accelerator, making sure that his people carried out his orders and then stopped. Thus he commanded the Israelites to wipe out the inhabitants of Canaan, but not people of other nations (Deut. 20) and especially not relatives of Israel (Num. 20; Deut. 2), unless their hostility made them dangerous (Exod. 17; Num. 21, 3 1; Deut. 2-3). When King Saul, in his misguided zeal, broke Israel's sworn treaty with the Gibeonites (Josh. 9) by attempting to wipe them out like other peoples of Canaan, God held him and his family seriously accountable (2 Sam. 21).

The Lord's goal was to provide a spiritually and physically secure home for his people within a limited geographic area so that they could flourish in their own land without being destroyed by idolatrous, corrupt, and predatory neighbors. By sharp contrast with Islam, Israel was not commissioned to use military force anywhere in the world for propagating the faith and attempting to destroy polytheism.¹⁰

Muslims do not accept the Bible the way we do.

We confront the hard reality that our approach to the ethics of "holy war" genocide depends upon our answer to a religious question: Which deity is true and therefore has ultimate authority over human life? Problems such as the Middle East and its political and ideological environment will never be satisfactorily and permanently solved at any conference table as long as moral attitudes and ethical judgments are founded on different religions the way they are. If we could agree that because theocracy no longer exists on Planet Earth, there is no such thing as "holy war" in the twenty-first century and therefore indiscriminate slaughter is unconscionable, inhumane, and universally condemnable, we have a solid basis for resolution of conflict. The catch, however, is that this is a religious statement alien to the worldview of many Muslims.

Given that we have different religions, we must ask: "Can people with fundamentally different truth claims live together without killing each other?"¹¹ Hans Küng argues in the context of gruesome modern history that "there can be no peace among the nations without peace among the religions. In short, there can be no world peace without religious peace."¹² The prognosis looks bleak indeed unless/until some kind of dramatic change occurs. Pope John XXIII was on target when he said, "The world will never be the dwelling-place of peace, till peace has found a home in the heart of each and every man, till every man preserves in himself the order ordained by God to be preserved."¹³

Jonathan Swift, the British satirist, wrote that we have just enough religion to make us hate but not

enough to make us love one another. This reminds me of a Schnauzer named "Bear." His owners enrolled him in a training course for guard dogs with two parts: the first to develop aggression and the second to control it. Bear passed the first with flying colors but flunked the second.

Obviously we cannot force other people to change their worldviews, but we can improve our own contribution to world peace. A first step is to get acquainted with those of different persuasions as human beings. Philip Yancey describes his reaction to a conference in New Orleans between Muslims, Jews, and Christians:

Suffering sometimes serves as a moat and sometimes as a bridge. The Muslim who fled from the soldiers at Deir Yassin years later had an automobile accident in the United States. It was a Jewish nurse who stopped, tied a tourniquet with her scented hanky, and painstakingly plucked glass from his face. He believes she saved his life. The Muslim man's wife, a physician, went on to say that she had once treated a patient with a strange tattoo on his wrist. When she asked about it, he told her about the Holocaust, a historical event omitted from her high school, college, and graduate school education in Arab countries. For the first time, she understood Jewish pain.

Why do human beings keep doing it to each other? Yugoslavia, Ireland, Sudan, the West Bank—is there no end to the cycle of pain fueled by religion? As Gandhi observed, the logic of "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth" cannot sustain itself forever; ultimately both parties end up blind and toothless.

Our meeting in New Orleans did not, rest assured, change the Middle East equation, or make peace between three major religions any more likely. But it did change us. For once we focused on intersections and connections, not just boundaries. We got to know Hillel, Dawud, and Bob, human faces behind the labels Jew, Muslim, and Christian.¹⁴

As Christians, what we need is not less of religion, but more of truer religion (compare Matt. 5:20) that is permeated by Christ's self-sacrificing love. Leaving vengeance up to God to administer according to his wisdom (Deut. 32:35; Rom. 12:19; Heb. 10:30), our mandate from our Lord is to love others as ourselves (Lev. 19:18; Matt 22:36–40; John 13:34–35; Rom. 13:8, and so forth). The holy war we are to wage is love.

Notes and References

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3. C. Cowles, "The Case for Radical Discontinuity," in *Show Them No Mercy: 4 Views on God and Canaanite Genocide* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2003), 13–44; J. J. Collins, "The Zeal of Phinehas: The Bible and the Legitimation of Violence," *JBL* 122 (2003): 3–21.
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Jesus and Genocide: Another Alternative

By David R. Larson

Virtually everyone agrees with Roy Gane that we Christians should not practice genocide. The question before us is whether we can think of God ordering ancient Israel to act so ruthlessly (Num. 21:1–35, 31:1–54; Deut. 2:1–37, 3:1–29, and 20:1–20).¹ He answers Yes and I say No. Instead of criticizing his thought-provoking essay, I offer another alternative that displays our differences in the article that follows. “I believe that” precedes each of the following assertions.

The primary sources of truth for Christians are Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience. Because it creates the Christian community like a constitution invents a nation, Scripture is the most important of the four. The idea that Scripture is the Christian's only source of truth is accurate if it means that none other shares its primacy. It is false if it suggests that we can flourish as Christians by studying only it.

The history of the first Seventh-day Adventists illustrates how experience can trigger changes in our interpretations of Scripture. Following October 22, 1844, the day on which they had mistakenly expected the triumphant return of Jesus Christ,

they reconstructed their views. Even those who disagree with their changes concur that they had to revise their interpretations because their experience of the Great Disappointment proved they had been wrong. This is what experience can do to our interpretations of Scripture. Discoveries about the Christian tradition and the conclusions of sound reasoning, scientific and otherwise, can do this, too.

When interpreting any portion of Scripture, we should be sensitive to its linguistic, historical, and religious contexts. We should also trace the direction in which the whole of Scripture is moving so that in our day we can travel even further down the same road. It is right to move



beyond Scripture in the same direction but wrong to go against it. To be a Christian today is not the task of simply believing and doing what the ancients did. It is the adventure of plotting the trajectories of Scripture and doing all we can to advance them in our time.

The abolition of slavery in the nineteenth century is illustrative. Although some portions of Scripture assume or maybe even endorse it (Gen. 16:1-16; 17:1-27; 21:1-21; Exod. 20:8-11; 21:1-36; Lev. 19:1-37; 25:1-55; 25; Deut. 15:1-23; 23:1-25; Philem. 1-25), many Christians eventually concluded that faithfulness to God required them to oppose it. What's more, although a number of texts in Scripture suggest otherwise, once they reached this

conclusion they inferred that even in antiquity slavery could not have been God's will. How we view God in the present properly shapes what we think God did in the past. Because God's character is like this, we rightly reason, God might or might not have done that.

Any occurrence is of God only if it fits with God's character. No sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, dream, vision, or prophecy can prove otherwise. Neither can a cloud by day or a pillar of fire by night. These are

all too easy to counterfeit and misunderstand.

Jesus Christ provides our clearest picture of God's character. It is true that "All Scripture is inspired by God." One way or another, every line "is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16). Yet we Christians measure everything in Scripture and elsewhere against what we learn from Jesus Christ. We remember that "Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son" (Heb. 1:1-4).

Only of him do we say that "the Word became flesh and lived among us" (John 1:14). It is this Son and no

for any of them to be spared. But God saved Noah and his family. Heavenly messengers dragged Lot, his wife, and his daughters from their doomed city. And God delays the end "not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9). None of these occurrences counts as genocide.

Many say that the story of Abraham and Isaac (Gen. 22:1-14) shows that God's character can command people to do evil. This is a mistake. In his time Abraham's willingness to kill his son and offer him to God as a burnt offering was not unusual (Lev. 18:1-30). Many of his neighbors followed the ancient custom of sacrificing to their gods the "first to open the womb" of

The fact that Abraham's God stopped him from sacrificing Sarah's first and only son must have shocked his neighbors.

one else "who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known" (John 1:18). Only he can declare, "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). We neither discard nor disdain anything in Scripture because each text helps us plot its trajectories; nevertheless, how we interpret each passage depends upon how it fits with Jesus Christ. He is the norm within the norm.

The practice of genocide is not compatible with the character of God as embodied in Jesus Christ. This fact is decisive for everything else we Christians say about it. We cannot hold that genocide is wrong for us today but that it was right for those who lived in ancient Israel because Jesus Christ manifests what God has always been like (John 8:34-59). As it is with slavery and some other issues, our position should be that our religious ancestors honestly believed that God commanded them to practice genocide but that now we see this differently. The gap between Jesus and genocide is just too wide. Remembering Israel's savage conquest of Canaan helps us understand how far we have come and the direction we should keep traveling; however, we should not justify it.

Some appeal to events like Noah's flood (Gen. 6:1-8:22;), the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19:1-38), and the ultimate extermination of the wicked (Rev. 20:1-15) to establish that genocide can fit with God's character. Each of these instances lacks its defining features, however. Genocide is the extermination of entire groups with no regard for the relative guilt or innocence of individual members and no opportunity

all their livestock and wives.² Centuries later, even some descendants of Abraham sacrificed their firstborn (Ezek. 20:1-49; Jer. 7:1-34). The fact that Abraham's God stopped him from sacrificing Sarah's first and only son must have shocked his neighbors. This is why God's disapproval of human sacrifice is this story's primary point. All other interpretations are secondary though often worthy applications.

God is this story's supreme hero, not Abraham. Over the centuries many reversed their roles, regrettably. This happened most severely when commentators, like Martin Luther and John Calvin in the sixteenth century, and Søren Kierkegaard, in the nineteenth, shifted their emphasis from God's rational nature to God's inscrutable will. This made God appear arbitrary and capricious. The results have been disastrous in theory and practice, even contributing to the Holocaust, as many historians hold.

Because he lived when he did, Abraham learned the hard way that God prefers the slaughter of animals to the sacrifice of humans. Centuries later, the prophets taught that God does not want the sacrifice of animals either (Micah 6:6-8). Many generations after that, Paul appealed to the Christians at Rome "to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship." The word Paul used for "spiritual" literally means *logical*. He invited his readers to "be transformed by the renewing of your *minds*, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Rom.

12:1, 2, emphasis supplied). Here, then, with respect to the idea of “sacrifice,” we plot one of Scripture’s most important trajectories.

Without endorsing what they did, we can understand why many in ancient Israel thought that God commanded them to practice genocide when we recall their communal view of moral responsibility. Several passages of Scripture indicate that they functioned as though one person’s sins made his or her entire clan guilty (Num. 16:1–15; Josh. 7:1–26). In his time, Ezekiel did all he could to change this view. “It is only the person who sins that shall die,” he argued in great detail (Ezek. 18:1–32). Because many did not yet understand this, they held that each member of any group that sins deserves punishment. In time, most agreed with Ezekiel that God judges us as individuals. This gradual shift from the communal to the personal is another important trajectory in Scripture.

On at least one occasion Abraham acted more maturely. When he learned that the three strangers for whom he and Sarah had provided a special meal were on their way to incinerate Sodom and Gomorrah, he objected. “Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked?” Abraham respectfully implored. “Far be it from you,” he pled, “to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked!” In words that should thrill us, Abraham inquired of the Lord, “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?” (Gen. 18:25).

I do not know what I would have done if I had lived in ancient Israel when it practiced genocide. I hope I would have protested and invited others to join me. I hope I would have implored, “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?” I hope I would have fallen on my sword before I shoved it through the belly of my neighbor’s screaming baby.

Notes and References

1. All biblical citations are from the New Revised Standard Version.
2. As Dalton Baldwin has brought to my attention, we can detect echoes of this ancient ritual in Exodus 13 and Leviticus 27. Note the provisions for sparing human firstborns by “redeeming” them. This was an important step in the right direction.

David R. Larson teaches in the Faculty of Religion at Loma Linda University.

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Reflect



JOURNEYS

A view of the Aegean Sea
from Simonopetra Monastery.

Discussed: Father John, Mount Athos, prayer, support, chanting and incense, quietness, waiting, openness, rope ladders, Patmos, spiritual battle, satanic spell, spiritual growth, core values, gift of time

Inside a Monastery, Inside My Heart

ons on an Adventist Pastor's Spiritual Journey to a Greek Orthodox Monastery

Text and photographs by John Hughson

It all began with a dream. I wanted time alone, away from the familiar, away from the busyness of the incessant “to do” list of pastors. I was hungry for an extended period of time for reflection, study, meditation. I felt God calling me to move deeper in my spiritual walk with him. Little did I know where it would lead. Persons on their deathbed often take an inventory of their lives. I didn't want to wait that long. I wanted to give God both access and time to fully accomplish his plan through my life and ministry. Doing it now would be challenging, yet liberating.

An opportunity to join a Greek Orthodox priest on his annual pilgrimage became the centerpiece of fulfilling my yearning for spiritual renewal. I joined Father John on his yearly journey from Edinburgh, Scotland, to northern Greece to the ancient monastic community of Mount Athos and the monastery of Simonopetra. Mount Athos, often

referred to as the Holy Mountain, is a peninsula ten miles wide extending thirty miles into the Aegean Sea. For more than one thousand years, this peninsula has been the principal center of monasticism in the Greek Orthodox Church. Dotted the mountains are twenty monasteries—along with many smaller settlements from simple



huts to caves—in which monks reside in search of complete isolation and rigorous asceticism.

So why would an Adventist pastor spend time at a monastery? I desired the spiritual stimulation that would come from an experience unlike anything in my education, training, and ministry. I sought to be open to other ideas and ways of seeking God, but not because I was unhappy with my own church. Rather, my desire was similar to M. Basil Pennington's as expressed in his book, *The Monks of Mount Athos*: "To enter more into their ways and traditions was not so much to practice or imitate but, in the light of a different way, to see my own way more clearly and fully and also to appreciate more and glorify God for what He is doing in their midst."

In preparing for this month away, I received the blessing of my conference president, senior pastor, and the local church board. The reactions from fellow pastors, family, and friends included amazement, support, admiration, and curiosity. The most significant reactions came from my wife and three adult children. They each wrote me thoughts and encouragement, which I put in the front of my journal.

As I embarked, my prayer was, "Lord, thank you for opening up the door and for preparing me for this trip. I give it to you to move in my life as you wish. Make it all my heart and mind want it to be."

When I entered the monastic life of Simonopetra, I stepped into a completely new world, a world of new sights, sounds, and smells. There were icons and relics, chanting and incense. Everything in the environment and daily routine of the monks witnessed to their total devotion to God. Mealtimes of vegetarian food were spent listening to readings about the lives of the church saints as we ate silently.

At the monastery, I was introduced to a whole new facet of the Christian life hardly existent in my own: inner stillness, listening, and reflection. I came to appreciate the benefits for spiritual growth that come from quietness, waiting, and openness. I learned about the power of repeating the Jesus Prayer—"Lord Jesus Christ Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner." When the prayer becomes a regular part of your day as breathing in and out, it is like an inner fountain that springs up at the moment of temptation.

I began to understand a lot more what it means to

pray without ceasing. The power of the Jesus Prayer is that it succinctly expresses the good news of the gospel. It is rooted in the prayers of the tax collector and blind beggar recorded in Luke 18:13 and 38. Here the tax collector prays, "God, have mercy on me, a sinner," and the blind beggar calls out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me." Historically, there were variations of the Jesus prayer that developed with the rise of monasticism in fourth-century Egypt. From the sixth century to the present, it has remained a very important prayer for all devout Orthodox and other Christians.

An American-born Greek monk, Father James, became my spiritual mentor. We spent extended time together outside the monastery while looking out on the blue Aegean Sea. He shared his spiritual journey with me and told me the history of the monastery and Mount Athos. I shared with him from my life and talked about the purpose for my spiritual journey. He was used by God in answer to my prayer and my desire to make this experience life changing.

Father James made a little wrist prayer rope to help me stay focused during prayer. Before I left, he gave me another as a gift for my wife, and he sent her a letter. He wrote about our sharing and assured her that a monk on Mount Athos was praying for her and our family. In addition to my time with Father James, I enjoyed going alone to a gazebo above the monastery, a great place to look out on the sea. The view was so panoramic that I found it easy to put the issues of life in proper perspective.

I wrote in my journal that the holy mountain had become a holy mountain to me personally. Being there gave me a spiritual "second wind" as I push toward the finish line of my life. I left determined to make every day count in the last quarter of my life and ministry. This renewal was not only for the home stretch of my life here on earth, but also for eternity. I wrote, "I want it to be the final push to look into the face of God with joy unspeakable for his grace that got me there and the choices I made to accept his invitation."

After leaving Mount Athos, I spent a Sabbath visiting three of the six monasteries of Meteora, which means "in the air." The monasteries there were built on top of huge natural sandstone towers that rise as high as twelve hundred feet. Originally, the only way to reach them was by climbing rope ladders or being hoisted up in a

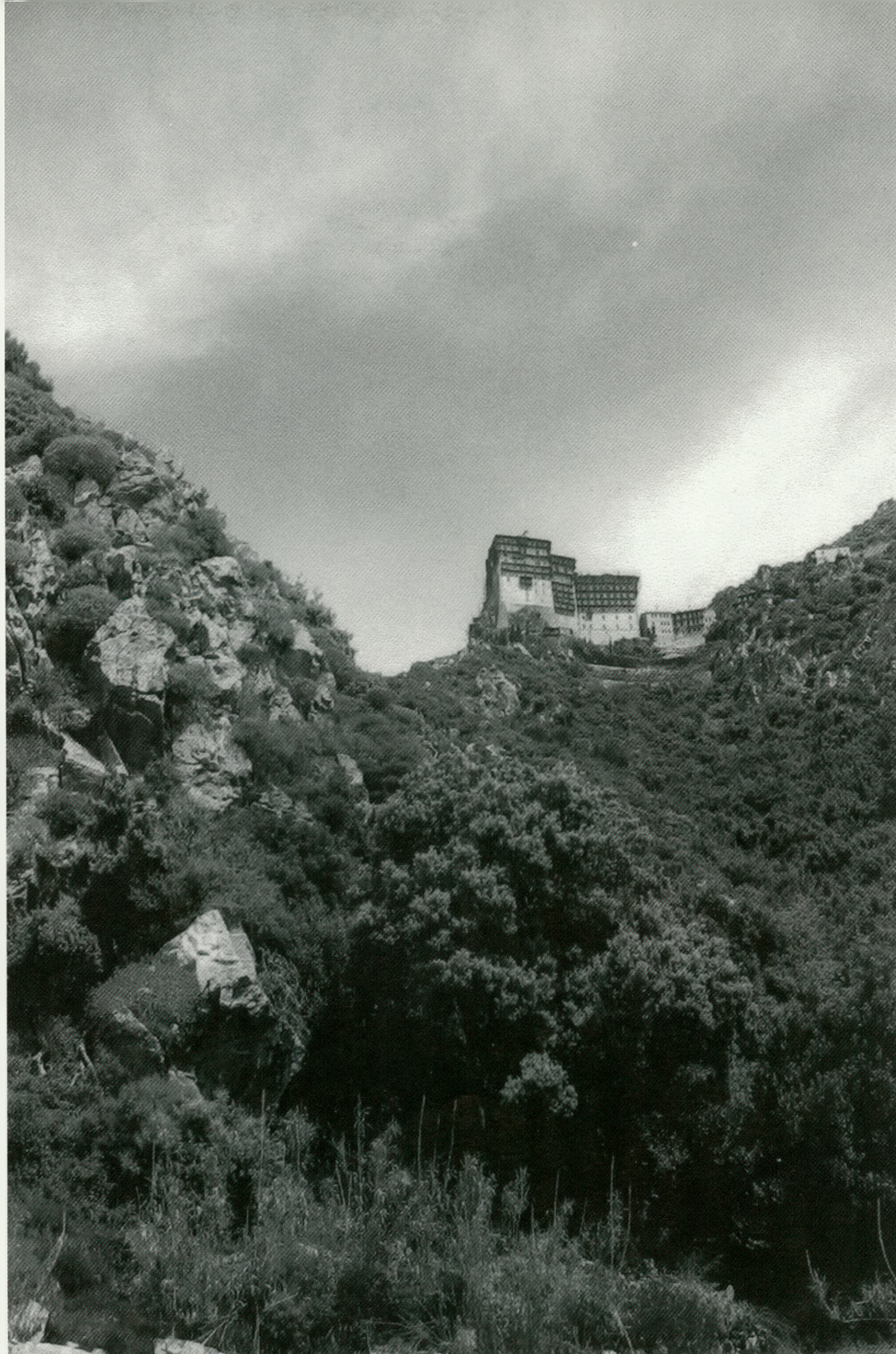
basket or net. These monasteries were built for advanced asceticism! It made a profound impression on me to be in such an incredible place, where obedience is practiced, the will disciplined, and faith and character formed. I was inspired to aim higher in my own walk with God.

From Meteora, I traveled by train and boat to the island of Patmos. Ever since childhood, I have wanted to visit John's prison. In preparation for my visit, I read several passages from Revelation. As I sat in the cave where John is believed to have lived and written Revelation, I read again his message to the seven churches and his description of the new earth.

I could look out on the sea where John might have looked when he wrote that in the new earth there will be "no more sea." This no doubt expressed his loneliness over being separated by the sea from friends and loved ones. As I viewed the hills of the island, I wondered if John had walked to the top of them. He might have looked longingly in the direction of his homeland. Yet he knew that his real home was being prepared for him. I found myself more confident than ever of seeing John and telling him about my visit to Patmos.

I came to realize that the corollary of a spiritual journey is spiritual battle. The enemy of our souls opposes anyone who takes determined steps to engage in a serious spiritual quest. He is quick to threaten with fear as to whether commitments will last. He can taunt with doubts that change isn't really needed in one's life.

Here is what I wrote in my journal, "A key goal of a spiritual journey is to break the satanic spell or delu-



Simonopetra Monastery on Mount Athos, Greece.

sion we are all under as fallen creatures. We are all fooled and taken in by the lies and myths of the evil one. We don't see the reality of sin and temptation for what they really are. Our culture does so much to dis-





From the Monastery to the Aegean Sea.

tort reality; our fallen-ness makes us vulnerable in so many ways. But once the spell is broken you can no longer be deceived and fooled. Once you see through his attacks, seeing the sick reality behind them, he has nothing left. His foothold in your life is broken.”

At so many points in my journey, God brought Scripture passages to me at just the right time. One of the most important was Revelation 2:17, from John’s message to the church in Pergamum. John’s words to the victorious at the end hit me with new meaning: “And I will give to each one a white stone, and on the stone will be engraved a new name that no one knows except the one who receives it.” Additional texts that played a very significant role were Ephesians 6:10–18, which reminds us how real the spiritual battle is, and Psalm 17, a prayer of David that expresses how he was no match for his enemies and his enemies no match for God.

As I plan my follow-up to this amazing spiritual journey, I have very specific plans and objectives for how I want to live the remaining years of my life. I realize that spiritual growth means a lot more than simply being busy and active in my ministry. It also means seeking proactively times of stillness, waiting, listening, and reflecting. It means reviewing, evaluating, and recentring my life regularly.

As an Adventist and pastor, I have been—perhaps unwittingly—conditioned to consider contemplative disciplines unnecessary or wasteful; that to be on fire for the Lord means to be always on the go, planning program after program. In fact, I thought the monastic lifestyle of a monk was the epitome of wasting time. I equated religious busyness with being spiritual. This has always been an easy trap in which humans get caught.

Socrates said that the unexamined life is not worth living. For the pastor, the unexamined life results in an unbalanced life. In the Bible story of the sisters Mary and Martha, it was difficult for Martha to slow down and appreciate the benefits of sitting at the feet of

Jesus. The contemplative side of the Christian life has always gone against our activist natures.

John's counsel to Laodicea in Revelation 3:15–19 focused on increasing the Laodicean's spiritual devotion. Paul's message in Ephesians 6:10–18 was to put on the whole armor of God in order to survive the spiritual battle. Both John and Paul put emphasis in these two vital passages on deepening one's commitment—not on getting busier—as the way to greater spirituality.

All too often, pastors neglect taking time for stillness, for listening and being open, for waiting upon the Lord. We certainly need balance. In order to be effective as Christians and pastors, we must live and minister from the overflow of a satisfying spiritual life. In his book, *Seize the Day with Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, Charles Ringma quotes Bonhoeffer, "To be silent does not mean to be inactive; rather it means to breathe in the will of God, to listen attentively and be ready to obey."

Ringma continues in his own words: "Speaking is seldom one of our problems—listening is. Action and busyness are usually the norm for our lives—quietness and reflection seldom are. Such reflection is not for the purpose of withdrawal from life. It is the way in which we engage life with a new-found energy and courage. Silence is the mother of speaking. Quietness is the seed bed for action. Reflection is the impetus for new direction. If we don't engage in quietness and reflection, we may remain busy, but our activity will hardly be creative."

A pastor's greatest need is not to fill up when reaching "empty," but to stay filled up by taking periodic sabbaticals. These may be extended times alone or just a couple days. When you are deadly serious, God will spare no support in making it successful. He may allow some critical attacks from the enemy as the only way to bring you to where he knows you need to be. Be prepared for tears, pain, and discomfort, but also be prepared for breakthroughs, growth, freedom, and pure joy.

Conferences should

adopt policies that make a sabbatical experience possible for ministers. Without such experiences, a heavy price may be paid in pastors being burned out and even leaving the ministry. It could be argued that a minister is free to do this during vacation time, but a sabbatical signifies something far different from a mandated work break with one's family.

Sabbatical time is an endorsement and encouragement for pastors to seek a sanctuary in time and place for spiritual growth. It implies care for the inner person, the part that cannot be measured in conference reports. It says that private accountability before God is directly related to public ministry. Perhaps many pastors could be saved and others made stronger with new direction, energy, and creativity if personal renewal was viewed as every bit as significant as church renewal.

My purpose for this journey was fulfilled many times over. It gave me the rare gift of time to review my life year-by-year from birth, to evaluate my core values, to recenter my life more fully on Christ, and to identify and correct areas of drift. It was a thrilling and challenging time. As a result of this spiritual journey, I feel more free and confident than ever. I am ready to make the final years of my ministry and life the best ever!

John Hughson is executive pastor of the Pacific Union College Church, Angwin, California.





LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Conversations about Sex

Thank you for publishing the congenial exchange between Ellen Brodersen and George W. Brown regarding Christianity and homosexuality (spring 2006). As these conversations continue, I hope that we can consider the following:

1. "The homosexual lifestyle" does not exist. Homosexual men and women arrange their lives in just as many different ways as heterosexuals. In both cases, our responsibility is to clarify which of these is better and worse.

2. Unsuccessful heterosexual unions do more damage to the institution of marriage than do successful homosexual ones. The latter cause fewer husbands, wives, children, friends, and relatives to despair of happy married life than do the former.

3. Although I do not know this for certain, I suspect that the percentage of homosexual men and women who violate children is no greater than the percentage of heterosexuals who commit these crimes. In any case, child abuse rather than the orientations of the abusers should be the focus of our attention.

4. Our sexual rules and laws should be applied evenhandedly. To punish more severely homosexual fornication and adultery than their heterosexual counterparts is hypocritical at best.

5. Homosexual men rarely brutalize and murder heterosexual ones, whereas heterosexual men frequently act this savagely toward homosexual ones. This log in the eye of the majority is a bigger problem today than the sliver in the eye of the minority.

The question now before us is not whether homosexual men and women should be liberated, but whether heterosexual ones can be minimally decent.

*David R. Larson
Loma Linda, Calif.*

I grew up with missionary parents in the mission field, the same mission field in which Leif Lind grew up and at the same time. I am also one of the nieces he wrote about in his article (winter 2006). Now I find myself in a strange dilemma, needing to expand on his article, to put forth the other side as tactfully as possible and come to the defense of God. There is an old Norwegian saying: "No matter how thin the pancake, maybe there are still two sides."

I do not want to diminish the pain and agony that Leif went through with his struggle; it was real to him, I am sure, as it has been for countless others. No doubt, it was traumatic and there are many people still struggling with the issue of homosexuality. As

family members, we found it hard to comprehend and absorb the news, too.

This is where I must part company, however. After reading the article, I found that it left one with the impression of Leif justifying himself. Leif mentions that several topics discussed by Adventists lead to differing opinions, especially when texts may say one thing but on further inspection say something entirely different. This may be true, but to a limited extent. A root word in Greek or Latin or Hebrew may have other meanings, much like a word in the dictionary has several connotations. But the Bible give us clear guidance on this particular topic, and however you may want to dissect the verses they are there nonetheless. The Bible has withstood centuries of secrecy, burning, banishment, and so forth, yet it is still intact. God must have had a hand in that for a reason.

Satan knows all the chinks in our armor. Where there is a flaw in our nature, in our upbringing, or whatever, Satan sees that weakness and uses it. We are all flawed, whether our flaws involve drug addiction, alcoholism, gossip, envy, deceit, anger, or homosexuality. Ephesians 6:12 says; "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." The Holy Spirit

must be the guide for us in prayer.

We can be wholly compassionate with the struggle of homosexuality in a person, but we are lacking in truth if we turn a blind eye to the sin. If a double standard is allowed to remain in the Church, what kind of message are we sending to those struggling with real issues of their own? It will eventually tear the Church apart. God's high moral standard for us will be tarnished if we lower the bar to suit ourselves and feel comfortable in our sins. We cannot ask God to bless what he has forbidden. We are all sinners and expected to reach out to one another in love.

However, we are not expected to close our eyes to sin, whatever it may be—even in the politically correct climate in which we live.

There are two forces in the world, which we cannot see: God with his moral code and Satan with his counterfeit. For every law God has set in place for our safety and well-being, Satan has a counterfeit.

Scripture is very clear on homosexuality; there is no way around it. How much clearer can God be than when he states, "Thou shalt not..."? Simply stated, it is sin. Homosexuality is no worse a sin than murder, gossip, theft, adultery, envy, and so on. All sin separates us from God.

When I was young, my father, who is a retired minister, explained to me in simple terms how sin works. His words made a lasting impression on me. He depicted all of us being attached to God by a string. When we sin, the string is cut and we fall; we are disconnected from God. No matter what sin we engage in, the result is exactly the same. Thankfully, with Christ's grace the string is reconnected.

We cannot hope to live lives pleasing to God without abandoning sin, no matter how we justify it in our minds. There are some issues in our Christian walk that are ambiguous and not necessarily crucial to our salvation, since they are based more on tradition. God made us individuals with different personalities. He doesn't want cookie-cutter Christians, but there are some subjects that are black and white and allow no wiggle room. God loves the sinner, not the sin. He also said, "Go and sin no more."

I still stand by my original letter. The Bible backs me up. My heart hurts for Leif and those struggling with this same issue. I can only pray that the Holy Spirit intervenes. God bless each of you as you read this.

*Linda Moyer
Via the Internet*

Your articles on "In the Church and Out of the Closet" (winter 2006) are emotional and heartrending, but I would like to question an assumption that comes through loudly and clearly: Gays and lesbians should have full rights and privileges in the Adventist Church and be treated as normal people because that is how they are born and they cannot help themselves.

I want to be on record as stating that the gay lifestyle is not a salvation issue. There will be gays and lesbians in heaven. Since right behavior is not the basis for our salvation, then wrong behavior cannot keep us out of heaven. We are saved by grace from first to last. This does not mean that right behavior is unimportant (it is very important), but it is not part of justification and

the basis of our salvation.

Now back to my point. If it is true that gays and lesbians are born that way and cannot change, then we are in serious trouble. The Bible makes it clear that we are all born with behavior that is unacceptable to God: "All have sinned and fall short [the tense in Greek is more accurately translated as 'continually falling short'] of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23); "All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one" (Rom. 3:12).

It is true that there are a few Adventists who follow the ancient English monk Pelagius, who believed we are not born sinners, that we do not inherit any sin from Adam, but this is not the understanding of the vast majority in the Christian faith.

We are born sinners; we are born selfish; we are born unable to change without divine intervention. We teach that a person must be born again, that a person cannot change his sinful orientation without divine help, without a miracle, that God must do what we cannot do. Without going into the pros and cons of the gay/lesbian lifestyle (which is an entirely different issue), I am simply dealing with the assumption that being born a certain way precludes change.

If that assumption is correct, then to be consistent we should apply the same logic to everyone and say that since we are all born sinners we cannot change and therefore God should accept us anyway. But if God can perform a miracle to change a sinner why cannot he perform a miracle to change the gay or lesbian?

It seems that if we are going to argue the acceptability of the
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LETTERS

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gay/lesbian lifestyle, we must give up this assumption and build our case on stronger evidence.

*J. David Newman
Silver Spring, Md.*

Daring to Disagree with Schneider

My response to one of the articles in the spring 2006 issue of *Spectrum* might be titled "Daring to Disagree with A. Gregory Schneider."

In his article about James Dobson, Schneider seems to be trying very hard to be fair to Dobson, without quite being successful.

He challenges Dobson's reference to the "Judeo-Christian Ethic" by a rather elaborate description of what he feels are their historical roots on the assumption that the beliefs are false without any real proof that they are indeed false.

This type of approach is similar to the procedure that C. S. Lewis deplored when secularists entered into lengthy descriptions of the historical process of why Christians believe in God by assuming that their belief was faulty without any real proof of it.

It seems to me that Dobson's statement "Judeo Christian ethics" has considerable support from the Bible itself, and could be titled "biblical ethics."

Toward the close of his article, Schneider describes groups that may be unfavorably affected by Dobson's views—homosexuals, unmarried pregnant women, and never-married single mothers.

Although I am in total agreement that a high level of compassion should be practiced toward all these groups, to me it is inescapable to conclude that the practices of these people are out of harmony

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standards.**

—Charles G. Edwards

with biblical standards. And it seems to me that Schneider comes close to being antinomian, or denying any distinction between right and wrong.

The same Jesus who said, "Neither do I condemn you" in John 8, also said, "Go and leave your life of sin."

*Charles G. Edwards
College Place, Wash.*

Church Identity Crisis

David Thiele's article, "Who Is the Seventh-day Adventist in 2006?" (spring 2006), raises important questions about the continuing Seventh-day Adventist "identi-

ty crisis," but it ends without giving any real answers and suggests that "deeper" and "more complicated" issues are involved.

The "deeper issues" to which Thiele vaguely alludes have to do primarily with the continuing baleful influence of the exegetical (or eisegetical!) legacy of William Miller's time-setting "theory or system" of prophetic interpretation.

The Achilles' heel of Miller's thought is the key assumption that the twenty-three hundred *ereb boqer* (evening morning) of Daniel 8:14 and the seventy weeks of Daniel 9:24 commenced in 457 B.C. In its full original context, Daniel 8:13–14 refers back to the career of the little horn of Daniel 8:9–12, which arose, not in the Persian period in 457 B.C., but centuries later in the Hellenistic period (Dan. 8:9, 23).

This error was carried over into the more specific time-setting modifications and reinterpretations of Samuel Snow and his Seventh-Month Movement and included in the post-Disappointment acceptance of Hiram Edson's heavenly reinterpretation of the Great Disappointment. Its uncritical acceptance was due largely to the Founding Father's confidence in Ellen G. White's inspiration and her strong confirmation of Edson's reinterpretation.

If the Church continues to make 1844 its primary "foundation pillar" (and "stumbling block"), thus rejecting (at least to some degree) its True Cornerstone—the Rock Christ Jesus—eventually the current identity crisis will lead to an even greater disappointment than Millerism experienced. Then both past and present Adventist leaders' worst fears will prove to be self-fulfilling prophecies!

*Arlin Baldwin
Coarsegold, Calif.*

How (If You Don't Mind the Bother) to Read the Bible

I used to think people read the Bible for the wrong reasons: merely to win arguments, or curry divine favor, or manufacture pious feeling. Now I think people don't read the Bible at all. Who has the time and patience? Who with an I-Pod wants to be bored by so much...*text*?

A few, of course, do pull the Good Book off its shelf. And when they find their reading at once satisfying and productive, it may be for reasons the rabbi knew.

A rabbi, so the story goes, is in prison, in Russia, awaiting trial. One day, a high official of the police stops by and poses some questions about the Bible. In the end, thinking of the Garden of Eden, he throws out a theological puzzle.

"What," he says, "shall we make of a God who knows everything, but nevertheless said to Adam, 'Where are you?'"

To the police official it seems like a

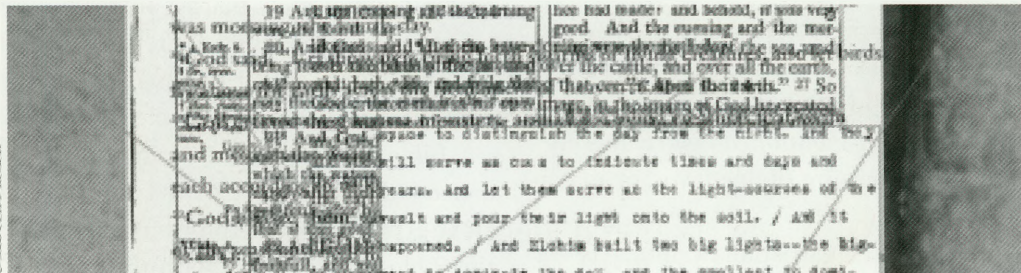
contradiction that an all-knowing God would have to ask.

The rabbi replies with his own question: "Do you believe the Bible addresses everyone in every era?" When the official says Yes, he continues: "In every era God says to every person, 'Where are you? How far have you gotten in your life?'"

Now the rabbi looks at his visitor with breathtaking gravity. "God says something like this: 'You have lived forty-six years. How far along are you?'"

Forty-six, it turns out, is the exact age of the police official, and when he hears

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NOTEWORTHY

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the turtles he had already collected.

"Larry made it very clear that his goal was not to profit from the animals, but to have them studied and released," says Dr. Dunbar.

Within weeks of returning to LLU, Dr. Dunbar was pulling together the current literature on hawksbill and green sea turtles, only to find a paucity of information on any species of sea turtles from Honduran waters. Dr. Dunbar says, "It was evident that no one was pursuing studies of sea turtles in Honduras to a level that was leading to published information. I thought, 'I can do that!'" And that's exactly what he's doing.

Currently, Dr. Dunbar is developing an umbrella organization called the Protective Turtle Ecology Centre for Training Outreach and Research (PROTECTOR). He aims to eventually coordinate and integrate turtle research efforts in Honduras.

One of the first research projects under the PROTECTOR umbrella is the Turtle Awareness and Protection Studies (TAPS) project. TAPS was initiated in March, 2006 at the Reef House Resort when about 20 hawksbill and four green sea turtles were marked, weighed and measured in anticipation of their future release.

Dr. Dunbar and Mr. Breman have also begun mapping the turtle's historic and current distribu-

tions, as well as the nesting beaches around the island of Roatan. Dr. Dunbar explains that with so little published information on Honduran sea turtles, one of the first steps is to look at where turtles were once abundant and see how that compares with where they show up now. "Then we can start asking why those differences exist."

"There's so much still to do, we're really just getting started," Dr. Dunbar emphasized. For the PROTECTOR team, every turtle conserved and released back into the wild is worth all the effort.

For more information about the project, and for a link about turtle adoption, please visit www.llu.edu/llu/grad/natsci/dunbar/taps.html.

EDITORIAL

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these words, he inhales deeply, then lays his hand on the rabbi's shoulder and exclaims: "Bravo!"

But his heart, or so it is said, trembles.

This appears, at the start, to be a case of reading the Bible for the sake of argument. The high official is interested in theory. But the rabbi shifts attention from the theological puzzle to the quest for a better self, a better mode of being. The Bible is to be read for renewal: you look for perspective on life—your *own* life, and on how to live it.

This story came to me by way of Martin Buber, the Jewish theologian. And it does seem, now that I think about it, that Jewish piety is resolutely *practical*. What is more, it seems that Christian piety veers all too often into other, often unsavory, preoccupations—the sort of preoccupations I mentioned before: merely winning arguments, or currying divine favor, or manufacturing pious feeling.

But on these matters the Christian Scripture is—if I may state the obvious—thoroughly Jewish. We must be, as James chapter 1 declares, "doers" of the word. The last quiz, as Jesus says in the Judgment Parable of Matthew 25, is about practical compassion. The New Testament itself, it turns out, is resolutely practical.

What if our Bible reading became more Jewish? What if we saw the Bible as a human (and divine) *story*, not just a book of theories or doctrines? What if we took the story to be a record of people who *struggle*—struggle with faith and doubt, success and failure, argument and counterargument? What if we saw it, in other words, as a thoroughly *practical* guide, a book honest about human imperfection, a book about the quest—mine, yours, ours—for a new and better mode of life?

Bible reading could still, I suppose, be a bother. It's natural to cave in to job pressures. It's easy to slouch on the couch. It's scary to ask where you are—where you really are—in life.

But now, with this more Jewish perspective, Bible reading would truly matter. Instead of being a merely religious or intellectual exercise, it would be about... *life*. It would be about the flourishing of the self, and of how the common life from the self draws sustenance.

Bible reading would be, in a word, about abundance—the abundance Christ came to give, and Christ alone is able to give. And from this perspective couldn't the Bible compete even with the I-Pod?

I think so, but it would still be...by God's grace. Of course it would.

Charles Scriven

AAF Board Chairman

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Terrify Us With Your First Terror

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Words grow callous
Rubbed by time

We are comfortable in our language
But you are not domesticated
We are comfortable in our language
But you are not tamed

LORD, you who broke the bread
YOU who broke your body
Now break these words

We are lost by scabs! Break this text
until it is raw
and its meaning is flushed
red

overturn our metaphors
dash to pieces our similes

terrify us with your first terror

By Julie Cook

Julie Cook is a public relations writer
and English instructor
at Mission College, Thailand.

