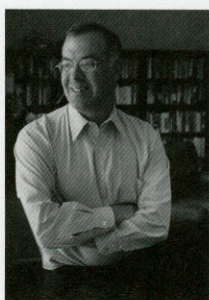


## The Language of Morality | BY JONATHAN PICHOT

Published in Spectrum Collegiate Blog (<http://www.spectrummagazine.org>)

Jan. 28, 2008

A few years ago, David Brooks (right) visited Princeton University (below) in an attempt to understand my generation's meritocratic elite. What he found were trained workaholics, their eighteen-hours-a-day schedules packed with classes, work, extracurriculars, and sports. These students he dubbed Organizational Kids. They were smart, friendly, tolerant, and driven. Yet, whenever he tried to speak to them about anything other than their careerism, about ideas of good and evil, sacrifice and sin, the students were lost. As he recounts:



*In talking to Princeton students about character, I noticed two things. First, they're a little nervous about the subject. When I asked if Princeton builds character, they would inevitably mention the honor code against cheating, or policies to reduce drinking. When I asked about moral questions, they would often flee such talk and start discussing legislative questions.... When it comes to character and virtue, these young people have been left on their*

*own. Today's go-getter parents and today's educational institutions work frantically to cultivate neural synapses, to foster good study skills, to promote musical talents. We fly our children around the world so that they can experience different cultures. We spend huge amounts of money on safety equipment and sports coaching. We sermonize about the evils of drunk driving. We expend enormous energy guiding and regulating their lives. But when it comes to character and virtue, the most mysterious area of all, suddenly the laissez-faire ethic rules: You're on your own, Jack and Jill; go figure out what is true and just for yourselves.*

Apparently, in the sanitized world of secular academia, religion and its uncomfortable ideas of a fallen world, sacrifice, and virtue have been replaced with vague ideas of playing by the rules. These students, Brooks observes, have been raised in unprecedented peace and prosperity. They have had nothing to rebel against and so are happy to simply conform themselves to the modern world. They believe the world is fundamentally just because their upbringing gives no evidence otherwise.

My generation's elite is certainly not unaware of the injustices in the world. On the contrary, they're very engaged. But they interpret the problems of the world as largely structural, to be fixed by better policy and education, not, as some religions would posit, created by the deeper dilemma of human nature. Most elite graduates can't speak eloquently about virtue and vice because they were never taught to. The problems they're trained to fix—technical, business, law, medical—are external. And so they approach injustice, and thus morality, the same way they would a problem set in calculus.

On the contrary, in the Adventist subculture, one cannot help but be saturated by the vocabulary of morality. This creates a significant difference between thoughtful Christian students and other students in my generation: believers, in general, speak more eloquently about virtue and morality. Having been exposed to the biblical narratives, we've dealt with the tragic and the mystical, with inconsistency and moral obligation. We





also have had the added advantage that we actually believe this stuff.

These ideas are not just mental exercises from which we can walk away at the end of class. These questions and their answers have far-reaching consequences in our lives and our most personal understanding of ourselves. This dynamic is quickly observed, for example, in any good Pacific Union College Honors class. When a group of students who have spent their lives fervently believing in the literal nature of the Bible are exposed to the very real possibility that this is not true, the reaction is not simply intellectual, it is physical and emotional. Students lose sleep over this sort of thing.

For anyone who believes a biblically inspired interpretation of reality is closer to the truth than a secular one, the advantage of growing up Christian is obvious. But that upbringing does not translate into moral literacy unless it is honed through education. As Adventist colleges in North America face a growing identity crisis, an emphasis on moral literacy is one advantage a secular school cannot replicate.

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**Jonathan Pichot** is in his sophomore year at Pacific Union College, Angwin, California.

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## Evangelism—Like Elections?

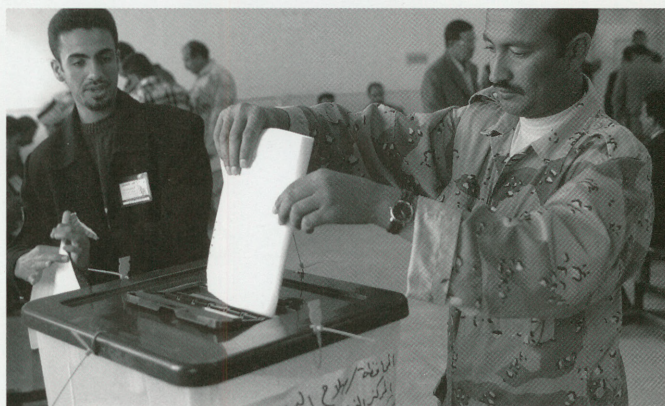
**BY JARED WRIGHT**

Jan. 17, 2008



WE'VE BEEN BANTERING about both elections and evangelism for a while here, and in discussing them side-by-side, I couldn't help noticing the parallels.

**Elections.** First, elections are primarily about drumming up support for a person who represents a package of ideas. That candidate may be eloquent, forceful, sympathetic, or persuasive in some way, and those personal qualities might draw potential voters.



Second, every candidate is selling something to the voters—whether the promise of affordable health care, a more “secure” nation, a stronger economy, or better education—a candidate’s viability depends on his or her ability to peddle his or her platform.

Third, in elections, although personal qualities and platforms matter a lot, sometimes just showing up in the neighborhood can be enough. The 2008 campaign trail is littered with stories of people who were going to support X candidate until Y candidate spoke at the local high school, shook my hand, held my baby, stopped on my block. People are persuaded by personal contact.

**Evangelism.** The same three things hold true when evangelists seek votes for their respective religious party (denomination): personal qualities (charisma, eloquence, and so forth), a convincing platform with promise of change for the better, and simply being present and making face-to-face contact all play a part in the “success” of evangelistic campaigns. Success is measured in similar ways—by the number of voters who show up and check “yes.”

It isn't difficult to “turn out the vote” when tapping into people’s needs for personal contact, the hope of a better life, and the promise of personal gain of some kind. However, as Christians who care about fostering spiritual formation and growing spiritual community, we need to remember that the spiritual life is very different from voting for president.

Chris Blake put it very well when noting that the charge to Jesus’ followers is to make disciples, not decisions. Campaigns are about decisions. The Kingdom of Heaven is about discipleship.

We would do well to remember the differences.

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**Jared Wright**, a graduate of Southern Adventist University, is studying for his M.Div. at La Sierra University. He created the Adventist Environmental Advocacy blog.



## COMMENT

Whatever the outcome of the nomination process resulting from the presidential primaries and eventual election of this country's chief executive, American culture will still be the same. That's as far as elections go in the United States of America.

The same may also be true in a former American colony, the Philippines, but with one important difference: political candidates in the latter change political parties as often as Americans buy a new car. A new car simply makes one feel more comfortable with one's presumed social position, whatever that is.

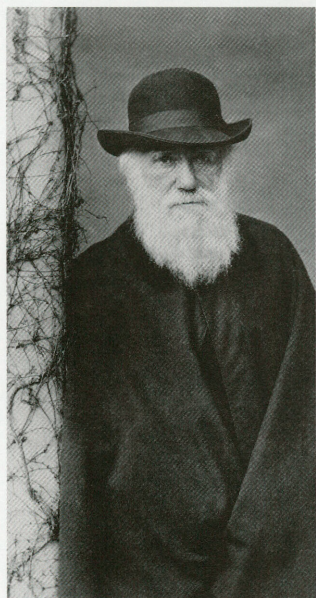
Needless to say, changing one's religion for another can also result in nothing less than a radical change, especially when the shift we're asking is from a religion that has been part of one's native culture to one that's completely foreign. This sounds like stating the obvious, but don't many evangelists fail to consider this? Why is it so much harder for Buddhists to convert to Christianity, for example, yet it seems easier for Roman Catholic Christians in Latin America and the Philippines to become Protestants? That said, elections or evangelism, such as those conducted on behalf of a foreign government, usually don't result in any significant change in the colonial culture. Social scientists, at least in my country, sometimes refer to this phenomenon as Split-level Christianity. Simply put: many professed Christians (Adventists), especially those residing in the colonies, may have only been half converted regardless of what the growth charts and accession rates seem to project.

Joselito Coo, Jan. 18, 2008

## UAP: Creation, Evolution, and Education

BY KIRSTEN NIXON

Feb. 12, 2008



SINCE DARWIN (left) published his *Origin of the Species* in 1859, the debate over the origin of the world among evolutionists and creationists has degraded into a mess of uncommunicative polarization. This bitter dialogue has infiltrated, and in some ways paralyzed, one of the most profound and mysterious topics of the human race. However, not all have the view that science and religion are incompatible.

One such group that

works to integrate science and faith is the Geoscience Research Institute, based in Loma Linda, California. This Adventist organization recently helped to conduct a four-day conference (February 4–7, 2008) in conjunction with the Universidad Adventista del Plata, in Argentina.

The conference, titled “Jornadas de Creación, Evolución, y Educación,” hosted more than three hundred elementary and secondary school teachers from Argentina, Paraguay, and Uruguay. Presentations covered topics concerning theology, the story of Genesis, biology, geology, genetics, and the impacts of Darwinism on society, among other things. Interlaced throughout the program was an emphasis on the role of science in Adventist education.

The conference spotlighted the relationship between science and the Bible and the ways in which one can serve to compliment the understanding of the other. One such example was given that there exist two types of questions: those that can be answered by science, and those that cannot. If a question can be proven with an experiment, it is scientific.

Those that cannot, require faith. Science cannot prove whether or not God exists, because there is no way to make a definitive test that can do so. Nor can science prove whether or not God is under the same laws of physics as man. The answers to these questions are subjective, and the answer you get depends on the worldview you decide to use. The Bible is one of these worldviews.

In a world dominated by science and public opinion, conventions such as these serve a unique purpose for evolutionists and creationists alike. Openly discussing these topics allows us not only to form more comprehensive pictures of the origin of life, but also to guard against the dangerous idea that we have all of the answers.

Kirsten Nixon is a student at La Sierra University.

## COMMENT

Thanks, Kirsten, for the information. It is true that it is important to the discussion to recognize what science can address and what it can't.

There are a couple of things that I would like to clarify though, and, if it seems like nit-picking, I'm sorry. I do think it is vital to be working off the same page and misunderstanding is so easy.

First, the theory of evolution (T of E) is often lumped into discussions around how life began, how the world began, and the age of the earth. While T of E compliments findings from other fields in these areas, evolution itself is separate. If you confuse T of E with geology, physics, and abiogenesis, you are going to be working at a disadvantage (and I say “you”



not meaning you, Kirsten, but anyone). By which I mean scientists are going to immediately peg you as someone who is ignorant about evolution and ignore you (at best).

Second, saying that "if a question can be proved by an experiment, it is science," is really misleading in a couple of ways. Science never proves anything. Evidence can accumulate to the point that scientists can say something is pretty sure but it is ALWAYS open to the possibility of changing—based again on evidence. So when someone critiques T of E by saying, "But scientists can't prove it," again, you are showing your ignorance and scientists will ignore you (at best).

The other problem with that statement is, it sounds like science is limited to findings from experiments. This is a pervasive but profoundly wrong belief about science, which leads to another common but wrong critique of T of E: that you can't do experiments on something that happened so long ago, so scientists are just guessing anyway. This actually implies that evolution is not happening now, too, which is wrong.

Science is about providing natural explanations for the natural world. It uses the process of observation to do this. Experimentation is a wonderful way to refine the observations to reduce bias and alternative explanations, but it is simply one tool of science. One can make observations, develop hypotheses, test those hypotheses against more observations, and so forth, all without designing a traditional experiment. If this idea was true what

would I expect to see? Do I see it? How would I recognize it?

If it were false what might I see? And so on. And then there are your peers always refining and critiquing your conclusions as well in an ongoing pursuit of what the evidence shows.

I know that you, Kirsten, are not necessarily making any of the arguments I was discussing above. You are just reporting here. I have heard them so often though and I think they are based on misunderstandings that need to be clarified so the discussion can continue.

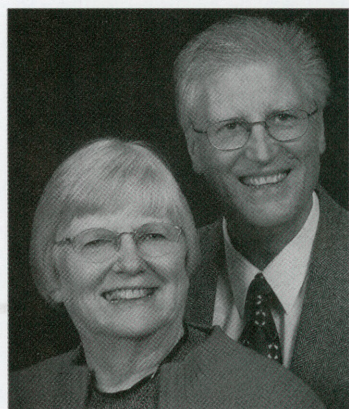
**Beth**, Feb. 12, 2008

#### COMMENT

**Steve Hindes** (2005) suggests a number of ways that science is different from religion. In science,

- Nothing is beyond question
  - There is no preset range of acceptable answers and unacceptable answers
  - Blind faith in science is appalling to scientists
  - Emotionalism is discouraged
  - Substantive debate of the evidence by knowledgeable proponents of all points of view is encouraged, invited, and given top priority at gatherings
- It's pretty obvious that, in the debate over evolution and creationism, creationists mostly demonstrate an unwillingness to subscribe to these principles.

**Steve Parker**, Feb. 13, 2008



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Bennie Gee**

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