



Doctoral Debates: Ellen White, Life's Beginning, and Old Soils

A Not So Silent Ellen White

Ronald Osborn's intriguing piece "True Blood: Race, Science, and Early Adventist Amalgamation" signals a desire for this generation to reinterpret (resuscitate?) Ellen G. White in ways perceived to be meaningful and relevant to the twenty-first century.

I am also a PhD candidate working on a dissertation treating White's relationship to black people.

After compiling some 700 pages on what White actually wrote and said about black people, I find it curious that Osborn based so much of his 15-page spread on what White did not say in response to Uriah Smith's amalgamation defense.

Osborn, aware of White's "courageous statements against slavery," nevertheless reckons 1864 as a pivotal date in White's thinking on black people in which she published four cryptic lines on amalgamation which did not even mention blacks, or any specific racial group, at all. From this it is posited that only in 1891 (or thereabouts) did White realize the full humanity of blacks. This is not mere intellectualizing; Osborn recommends his paradigm of White's racial evolution be taught in Adventist schools.

Osborn's assumptions are best approached by underscoring the foundation of Ellen White's pre-1864 writings on black people, which are of course, mostly in the setting of enslavement. An even casual perusal of the four sections in *Testimonies*, Volume 1, dealing with the Civil War and slavery written in 1862 and 1863 and featured in the *Review and Herald* several years before Smith's amalgamation apologia, reveals White's deep belief in the full humanity of the captive blacks, which is the basis of her explicit indictments of the slavery institution and Confederate secession. Observe one such representative pericope:

There are a few in the ranks of Sabbathkeepers who sympathize with the slaveholder. . . . Some have brought along with them their old political prejudices, which are not in harmony with the principles of the truth. They maintain that the slave is the property of the master, and should not be taken from him. They rank these slaves as cattle and say that it is wronging the owner just as much to deprive him of his slaves as to take away his cattle. I was shown that it mattered not how much the master had paid for human flesh and the souls of men; God gives him no title to human souls, and he has no right to hold them as his property. Christ died for the whole human family, whether white or black. God has made man a free moral agent, whether white or black. The institution of slavery does away with this and permits man to exercise over his fellow man a power which God has never granted him, and which belongs alone to God. The slave master has dared assume the responsibility of God over his slave, and accordingly he will be accountable for the sins, ignorance, and vice of the slave. He will be called to an account for the power which he exercises over the slave. The colored race are God's property. Their Maker alone is their master, and those who have dared chain down the body and the soul of the slave, to keep him in degradation like the brutes, will have their retribution. The wrath of God has slumbered, but it will awake and be poured out without mixture of mercy (358).

It is indisputable that White is undercutting the exact notion of black inhumanity or compromised humanity that Osborn claims she only came to grips with some three decades later. Just as significant are the paragraphs on African Christian heroics that White includes in the same series where the amalgamation statements were featured,

Finally, the "All Ye Are Brethren" vision White alluded to in her March 21, 1891, speech occurred sometime in 1890 amidst a mixed St. Louis congregation that had experienced deplorable racist aggression on the part of the

white constituency that traumatized Ellen White. Of the episode she later wrote, “We had some experiences at St. Louis that I can never think of without a feeling of dread” (Letter 105, 1904). When surveying the available evidence, it becomes clear that the “All Ye Are Brethren” vision was not given to revolutionize White’s racial worldview but to rebuke and admonish the recalcitrant white supremacist church members.

I wholeheartedly concur with Osborn that Ellen White needs to be reapplied and reinterpreted for a new generation and millennium, but this process should rely on verifiable evidence—namely what Ellen White actually said and wrote—not arguments from silence.

BENJAMIN J. BAKER
Washington, D.C.

Ron Osborn Responds

I am grateful to Benjamin Baker for his letter, which reminds us of what is most important in Ellen White’s writings on race: her passionate opposition to slavery and her belief in the full humanity of all persons. I must, though, correct several misstatements in his letter.

Baker writes that I count “1864 as a pivotal date in White’s thinking on black people.” What I actually wrote was “amalgamation theory played no central role in White’s theology or in her later writings.” In the first paragraph of my article I explained why we must wrestle with the amalgamation question: not because amalgamation was “pivotal” for White but because, strangely, it has become pivotal for some Adventists.

Contrary to what Baker suggests, my article was not merely based upon inferences from White’s silence. It is true that White did not directly interpret her own words for us. But where White was silent her community was not. The fact that the pioneers did not find her words on amalgamation “cryptic” or insignificant but spoke clearly and with some frequency about their meaning over the course of many decades is important. For any serious historian, this is evidence that must be carefully weighed, not quietly passed over as it has been by numerous Adventist writers for many years even as they directly interpret and defend the amalgamation passages. That, to my mind, is the real argument from silence. It was a silence I felt compelled to break.

Baker also mischaracterizes my words about White in 1890, suggesting that I see White even at this late period as being unconvinced of “black or African humanity.” But

what I wrote was that she appears to have still been “wrestling with questions of racial equality.” My reading was offered in tentative, not dogmatic, terms, and I made clear that equality, not “humanity,” was the challenge I think White faced.

Uriah Smith himself defended the humanity of “amalgamated” races on the grounds that merely having a single drop of Adam’s blood in one’s veins qualified one as a member of the human race, deserving to be treated with compassion and dignity, and to be elevated to as high a social and political level as possible. Smith was no craven apologist for slavery or racial oppression either.

Baker’s letter lends support to a traditional Adventist view of prophetic inspiration that my article invited readers to rethink. According to this outlook (which I realize may not be Baker’s own), the best way of understanding White on questions of race as well as science is in essentially static and heroic if not infallible terms. My view is that White’s statements on amalgamation are indefensible but that at least potentially her thinking on matters of race grew over time. The moral arc of White’s views on race (to paraphrase Martin Luther King Jr.) may have been long—or at least longer than we had initially hoped—but they bent toward justice. This to me as an Adventist is what matters.

RON OSBORN
Los Angeles, California

Amalgamation and the Spirit of the Times

Ronald Osborn’s article left the impression that Ellen G. White’s reference to the “the base crime of amalgamation” was “understood by Seventh-day Adventists to refer to perverse but somehow scientifically possible sexual unions across diverse species, including humans and other creatures.” Consequently, the amalgamation statement has been “a source of anti-Adventist polemics from the moment they first appeared in print.”

Believing in amalgamation and human degradation was not unique to Mrs. White. Contemporaries sometimes employed it to explain the diversity of humankind discovered by explorers in uncivilized parts of the world. This non-biblical stock-taking of mankind fit nicely with the widely accepted scientific notion of a Great Chain of Being descending from God to angels to man and then on toward animals. Because blacks and non-human primates were located at the bottom of the human hierarchy, they were regarded as “inferiorly organized and poorly endowed

morally” compared to whites. (See Elise Lemire’s “Miscegenation” *Making Race in America*.)

Such views even found their way into Ellen G. White’s own library, which included *Negro-Mania: An Examination of the Falsely Assumed Equality of the Various Races of Men* (1851), a crude and disjointed scientific anthology... The legendary *Review* editor Uriah Smith was the first to defend Mrs. White’s amalgamation statements as scientifically sound. “Naturalists affirm that the line of demarcation between human and animal races is lost in confusion,” he declared.

Ellen White and Uriah Smith were plainly following the (unsound) science of their time.

I agree with Osborn. It is high time for Adventists to throw amalgamation theories and the hocus-pocus satanic eugenics into the trash bin of pseudoscience, and simply abandon “amalgamation of man and beast” and the surrounding Noah’s curse with a footnote that the Ellen G. White Estate no longer maintains these views after the nineteenth century—the position essentially taken in *The Story of Redemption*.

T. JOE WILLEY
Loma Linda, California

On the Beginning of Life

I read with great interest Mark Carr’s essay “Just What is the Seventh-day Adventist Position on When Life Begins.”

First of all, I am not certain what is really meant by the term “moral status” of the embryo although it is mentioned numerous times throughout the essay. Does it simply refer to the “value” we place upon it, or does it imply the principle of right and wrong?

Carr would like to see more position statements coming from the church on this issue. I am not sure this would be very helpful since any statement such as this is formulated by a small group of people, and it merely represents a consensus among that select group and not necessarily the church at large, especially when there is a wide range of beliefs and opinions on the subject. I am equally uncertain if Adventist medical students really “need clear position statements from their church as they personally work out their own professional practice standards.” In the same vein, I wonder how we would determine what an “authentic” Seventh-day Adventist position is on this or any other subject.

On the question of when life begins, it is obvious to me that one cannot turn to the scriptures for an easy answer because practically any position can be defended with cer-

tain passages as Carr demonstrates. We cannot turn to the Bible for answers to questions the biblical writers didn’t ask. It is greatly puzzling to me, however, as to how Carr is able to make the following statements: “More importantly to the moral status placed on the developing embryo is the implantation in the uterine wall which establishes pregnancy. Indeed, if a line is to be drawn, this is where it should be; life begins at implantation in the women’s uterus.”

From a medical point of view, pregnancy is established when pregnancy hormone (HCG) is elevated above non-pregnant level. Although this normally happens in the uterine lining, there are situations when this occurs outside the uterus. Therefore, to insist that a pregnancy is not established unless it has safely implanted in the uterine wall does not appear to be an acceptable position.

Loma Linda University’s guidance document on embryonic stem cell research contains the same misinformation in asserting that “many contraceptives act by preventing [natural embryos] from implanting in the uterus.” It is certainly true that the human reproductive process is not very efficient and many fertilized ova will ultimately lead to pregnancy failure naturally. However, an assumption that “we cannot and should not expect medical technologies that assist in human reproduction and research to be more efficient than nature itself” is an incorrect one, in that assisted reproductive technology is rapidly advancing to the point that it is becoming more efficient than nature itself. One must look elsewhere for a better reason.

Finally, the SDA Guidelines on Abortion state that “prenatal life is a magnificent gift of God.” Should we also apply this statement in situations where pregnancy occurs as a result of incest or rape? For those who are involved in such a tragedy, it can hardly be seen as a gift, let alone a magnificent one.

I certainly appreciate Dr. Carr’s attempt to formulate an ethical framework in dealing with this highly divisive and controversial issue. The fact that we are engaged in such a dialogue is a positive sign of life.

PAUL EUN, MD
Seattle, Washington

Mark Carr Responds

First let me offer appreciation for your very thoughtful response to my article. It is substantive and free of polemical attack, thank you!

Moral status is a term that is used in ethics/bioethics to

refer, as you put it, to the value placed upon whatever entity we are focusing upon.

Of course, in the tradition of Protestantism you are correct to question the idea of authenticity and consensus. But the effort to identify the broad parameters of both authenticity and consensus should be embraced, in part, because the opposite is much worse.

My point is that for Adventism the target area is not pinpoint small, but neither is it simply anywhere on the wall. There is such a thing as a non-authentic SDA view, even if I would also seek to identify a range of beliefs. As for my students, perhaps I underestimate their desire to know what their church teaches, but after thirteen years here at LLU I'll stand by my assertion.

I certainly grant the point that it is difficult to use scripture in such complex matters, but again, I'll stand by the church's efforts to do so. Just because there are no pointed passages doesn't mean scripture is irrelevant; it simply makes our work more difficult, and this is a task I would rather embrace than avoid.

If it is puzzling to you that I can use implantation as a morally important marker in the development of the embryo, it is doubly puzzling to me that the medical community can't settle on a definition of how and when pregnancy occurs. You use hormonal levels to define when pregnancy occurs. Others do not. As to the point of LLU's guidance document advancing misinformation, I suggest you take that up with LLU's Vice President of Research Affairs. As a theologian and ethicist I largely depend upon the expertise of others in my efforts to understand the biology of pregnancy. And the biology of pregnancy is important (though not determinative) when one takes a personalist perspective, as I do. For personalism the value of—the moral status of—the fetus increases as it develops from conceptus to implanted zygote, in part because the potential that the fetus will survive to term increases dramatically at the point of implantation.

On the other hand, the physicalist perspective attempts to avoid the moving target of medical science by arguing for inviolability at the time of fertilization. The physicalist tries to stand above the fray by placing moral status at a point on the timeline prior to all the fuss over if and when pregnancy occurs. My article tries to point out that the statements that the Adventist church has thus far produced move toward personalism and away from physicalism.

As I hoped to make clear in the article, the personalist

position of the sort that I hold (there is a range of perspective here) does not devalue the conceptus; the fertilized egg holds high moral status from the beginning. But in marginal cases where other values come in conflict with that of the fetus (as for instance, rape or danger to the mother's life) the situation may arise when the value of the fetus is less than inviolable. This is true even if we may hold that "prenatal life is a magnificent gift of God." As for looking to nature for moral standards, you are correct to criticize me. If and when Seventh-day Adventists use Natural Law ethics it certainly would not be because our faith tradition has formally used it in the past. Thanks again for your kindly response.

MARK CARR

Loma Linda, California

Old Soils

Regarding Graham Will's article about volcanic soils, there are many problems associated with old soils including determining if a particular layer is really a soil where plants grew over time in contrast to a rapidly deposited soil-like layer as might occur during a flood. [Researchers say] one person's soil becomes another's geological deposit. And New Zealand buried soils contain much less organic matter than their modern counterparts.

Likewise it is easy to forget how active soils are. The up and down movement of water and of organisms such as insects and earthworms through the soils can easily change the composition of organic matter and clays in a soil and its underlying sediments. Hence, the suggestion that the 2% clay found in 2000 years for the Taupo soil challenges a recent creation because older ash layers below have 80% clay may not be that significant. Water infiltrating down through porous sediments would be expected to transport clay to lower layers. A number of soil scientists point out that in the context of time, it is not so much the quantity of a particular entity at one time that is important, but it is the mean residence time (MRT) that is significant. In other words, you need to take into account how long, on average, something like a clay particle stays in one place.

Graham suggests that "there must have been at least 1000 years between the Taupo eruption and the one before it. That leaves only about 2000 years or less for several lower buried soils." He might be right, but dating of soils is problematic. Carbon-14 that is usually used in dating soils can be moved up or down as particles are moved up or down.

It also needs to be kept in mind that the scientific

literature sometimes reports fairly rapid soil development such as 45, 150, and 230 years. I have noted 30-foot saplings in just 8 years after the Kapoho volcanic flow in Hawaii. Many factors can influence rates of soil development, and moisture seems very important.

Graham further suggests that the soil data “support C14 dating of 50,000 plus years.” However, when you read scientific articles with titles such as “Problems in radiocarbon dating of soils” or “Twenty five years of radiocarbon dating soils: Paradigm of erring and learning,” it is not difficult to surmise that there are conundrums.

The fact remains that a lot of the published carbon-14 dates for New Zealand soils give dates that are older than the few thousand years of the biblical model. An interesting explanation for this within a recent creation context is that before the Genesis Flood the concentration of carbon-14 was very low, giving old dates. Right after the Flood the concentration gradually rose providing a sequence of gradually younger dates followed by the younger carbon-14 dates that reflect historical dates. Another explanation may be the dilution of carbon-14 in lower layers by carbon-12 or -13 originating from “old” carbon-14 weak gases and/or minerals, resulting in older dates. There are many things that we do not yet know about soils and their dates. Presently any firm conclusions are likely premature.

ARIEL A. ROTH
*Emeritus Director
 Geoscience Research Institute
 Loma Linda, California*

Graham Will Responds

In my paper I make a plea for SDA students of faith and science to have regular dialogue. It is good to see Ariel commenting on my paper. In reply I would like to make the following points.

1. Ariel makes the point that some soil look-a-likes may be produced by a flood action, or in other cases some observers may consider them geological deposits. To me the soils and paleosols (buried soils) that I was dealing with in the Rotorua area were true soils. At the site where Photo 1 in my paper was taken, I spent many years of research into the soil profile’s capacity to supply adequate nutrition for successive crops of fast growing pine trees. This involved the inspection of many soil pits, the laboratory chemical and physical analysis of soil layers and pot trials growing pine

seedlings. I have no doubts in my mind that I was dealing with a succession of soils developed over a considerable period of time from a succession of volcanic eruptions. There is no evidence at all of any flood in the area.

2. Ariel discusses the movement of clay particles down a soil from layer to layer. That could not have happened in the case of the layers I refer to as having 80% clay. I should have made it clear that these layers are top soils that have developed in material from the last eruption in that area which is well north of Rotorua near Auckland.

3. Mention is made by Ariel of particles moving up or down in soils. The samples taken for carbon-14 dating in the paper by Vucetich and Pullar that I quote were peat, wood or charcoal. These are most unlikely to move.

4. Carbon-14 dating may raise questions—this is not in my field. However, when I look in my own field of Soil Science I see the evidences I raise in my paper—multiple paleosols, high levels of secondary clay, etc. These are topics that I feel should receive further study by our church.

GRAHAM WILL
Rotorua, New Zealand

Responding to Past Letters

We regret that Dr. McMahon’s letter (Fall 2010) seems to miss the point of our article, which was intended to reflect a close reading of the actual Hebrew text of Genesis 1:1–2:4a. Nowhere did we imply, nor do we believe, that the original hearers of this account of Creation could have conceived of millions or billions of years. Indeed, there is no evidence that they had the mathematical notation or the vocabulary with which to conceptualize such vast periods of time. Instead, our intention was to convey the results of what is sometimes called a “close reading” of the extant Hebrew text, and thus to carry the conversation beyond



Continued on page 76...

New York's Best-Kept Secret

Winter Highlights:

Feb 12

Rebekah Wang—*Polarization in the Adventist Church / What makes a Hospital Adventist*

Feb 19

Rev Eliezer Reves—*Immigration and Religion: An Ethic of Reciprocal Solidarity in the Works of Jane Addams*

March 5

Gina Rae Foster—*Lyric Dwelling: The Art and Ethics of Invitation and Occupation*

March 12

Brian Straver—*Triumphs & Tragedies of Louis Conradi / When Loughborough Got it Wrong*

March 19

Ron Lawson—*Review of Finding My Way in Christianity*

See www.MNYAForum.org for our current program.

Contact us at (718) 885-9533 or chaplain@mnyforum.org.

Worship with us Sabbath mornings at 11:00 at St. Mary's Episcopal Church, 521 W. 126 St., Manhattan

(two short blocks from the 125 St. Subway station on the #1 line).

Upcoming Events at San Diego!

March 5 **The Role of Faith-based Colleges in the World of Higher Education** — Drs. Richard Osborn and Richard Winn, Vice Presidents, Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC)

May 20–22 **Thirteenth Annual SDAF Retreat at Pine Springs Ranch near Idyllwild, Calif.** — Dr. John R. Jones, LSU School of Religion

Recent Happenings:

January 8, 2011 **Genesis 1: What in the World did that First Hebrew Audience Hear?** — Brian S. Bull, MD, LLU School of Medicine, and Fritz Guy, PhD, LSU School of Religion

CDS OR AUDIO CASSETTES MAY BE ORDERED FROM:

San Diego Adventist Forum

P.O. Box 3148, La Mesa, CA 91944-3148

SDAF.org@gmail.com | 858-694-0755

Please visit our current website for membership application (includes free emailed newsletters), CD/tape subscription form, complete list of SDAF CD/tape archives and a list of upcoming presentations.

www.tsdachurch.org

(click SDAF link at the bottom of the page)

Also, watch for our new website in 2011
(check above link and/or spectrummagazine.org)

(Darla Tucker), October 22, 2010.

5. <http://www.alumniawards.com>

6. Frost, Michael and Alan Hirsch. *The Shaping of Things to Come*.

(Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003), 47.

Gil Valentine (pictured, previous page), is Chair of the Department of Administration and Leadership in the School of Education at La Sierra University. He has served as a senior administrator in Adventist Higher Education institutions in Pakistan, Thailand and Australia. Prior to his appointment at La Sierra he served in the South Pacific Division Education Department as Tertiary Education Officer.

FEEDBACK ■ Continued from page 9

the usual chronological questions. We wanted to direct attention to the theological significance of the text; this significance, we are convinced, was its message. Thus we would encourage twenty-first-century readers to avoid the common but unwarranted assumption that ancient Biblical texts directly address modern scientific concerns.

Incidentally, Dr. McMahon is not the first conservative Creationist to cite the late eminent Hebraist James Barr in favor of a literal interpretation of the Creation days in Genesis 1. Barr is very clear:

Interpretations which suppose that the seven "days" of creation are not actual days but long ages, days of revelation, or the like... are all transparent devices for making the Bible appear to be factually accurate by altering its meaning at the awkward points. In other words, schemes... which are reputed to preserve the authority of the Bible and the accuracy of its narratives seldom succeed in doing so: they paper over one crack while causing another and yet larger one to appear elsewhere.

Barr then continues with a listing of what he considers to be factual errors in Genesis. His point was that a reader who takes the Genesis author's 24-hour days as factually correct must also take the vast ocean above the sky as factually correct. We believe that those who cite Barr's authority at the one point where he agrees with them are, in the interest of intellectual honesty, obligated to state that his overall view of Genesis is radically different from theirs.

BRIAN BULL

FRITZ GUY