

 community through conversation

SPECTRUM



Translating the Bible into Pictures

Grace Link Unchained

Secrets of Love and Life in the E. G. White House

House Church

The Adventist Civil Rights Movement: A Prophetic Voice for LGBT Adventists

An Adventist Wycliff

community through conversation

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From the art created for GraceLink, an illustration in the whimsical style chosen by the editors of the Primary lessons.

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Editorials

- 2 Eschatology Without Excuses | BY CHARLES SCRIVEN
- 4 Seeing Adventism Whole | BY BONNIE DWYER

Children’s Bibles

- 6 Translating the Bible into Pictures | BY RUBÉN R. DUPERTUIS
- 20 GraceLink Unchained | BY BONNIE DWYER
- 24 Interview: *The Story Behind the Bible Felts* | BY ALITA BYRD

Church and Home

- 29 House Church | BY SOMER GEORGE
- 35 The Adventist Civil Rights Movement: *A Prophetic Voice for LGBT Adventists* | BY JUAN O. PERLA

E. G. White at Home

- 45 Secrets of Love and Life in the E. G. White House: *Men—Lost and Found* | BY GILBERT M. VALENTINE
- 57 “I Have Seen a Better Land”: *Confessions of an Ellen White Biographer* | BY TERRIE AAMODT

Book Reviews

- 63 Can the Gift of Prophecy Keep on Giving? | BY JONATHAN BUTLER
- 70 Taking the Bible Seriously in Edward W. H. Vick’s Theology | BY JAMES J. LONDIS
- 76 An Adventist Wycliffe: *In Defense of God and Human Freedom* | BY ALDEN THOMPSON

Poem

- back cover Sabbath | BY RUTHIE HEAVRIN OROZCO





Eschatology Without Excuses | BY CHARLES SCRIVEN

I believe the gospel of hope is indispensable. So, when skeptics and know-nothings dismiss it as nothing but a painkiller and an excuse, it sickens me—because I realize they're on to something. A Second Coming church, such as ours, can easily distort hope into an alibi for escape: find a cocoon and wait things out; get on the radio, eat plants, underline the Bible.

Were such a distortion to be truly commonplace, we'd be useless as stumps, or even worse—if we kept on winning converts, we'd be recruiting more people to be the same.

Some of our most influential preachers take us, I'm afraid, in this direction. For them, the present, where we live now, is a parenthesis—a kind of bus stop where, aside from heresy and “soul-winning,” little happens but the waiting. So they barely mention discipleship, nor do they remind anyone to “till and keep” the garden—that, after all, would turn hope into something you *do*, not just something you talk about.

I got to thinking about all this when my graduating class met in late April for a weekend homecoming at Walla Walla University. Many of my classmates showed up; lots of teachers, nurses and physicians, engineers, all people who make *enhancements* to the present world. I realized, as I think people often do at such events, how much I appreciate the time they shared with me back when, how much their wondrous, complicated lives inspire me still. Many are active Adventists. Do their accomplishments rebuke know-nothing dismissals of Christian hope?

Another thing: planners had adopted “Beauty in Expression” as the weekend's theme. I could not remember such a theme at an Adventist General Conference, or in any instance of public evangelism, or in any version of the church's Fundamental Beliefs. Such a theme seemed right for a college campus, but in more conventional settings it would have been, well, innovative.

All this reminded me that if you look for the *convictions*

of a religious community—for its truly *life-changing* beliefs—you can't stop at what preachers or doctrinal statements have to say. You have to look at how people actually *live*—not just in their worship or at the potluck, but also in the workplace or at the mall or on the iPhone.

In that light, it seems to me that one Adventist *conviction*, widely shared, is that God does care about what goes on in the present, and whether it's beautiful or not. “All things bright and beautiful,” says the hymn, “The Lord God made them all.” We even sing that “Emmanuel's ground” yields a “thousand sacred sweets” *before* we reach the “golden streets.”

Not all of us, and perhaps none of us all the time, think the here-and-now is something you just wait out or try to run from. Someone who hears a tornado bearing down on the house would not polish the silverware but would scream at the kids to head for the basement. All of us, at least now and then, polish the silverware.

Still, are *enhancements* of life just distractions from our end-time “warning” work?

When I look at the Bible, I think not. On page one, the purple-headed mountains and divine-image-bearing man and woman, and all the rest that the Creator makes, are called “very good.” Then, a page or so on, God really does tell his human creatures that the garden is for them to “till and keep.” It seems, at least in Genesis, that the world is a good a thing to invest in.

I know someone will say, “But Adam and Eve got into trouble, and now Satan's in control. Now the world is hopeless, bound to get worse and worse.”

But did Abraham get that message? Years after the start of trouble, God tells the founder of Israel: “I will bless you...and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” Abraham's influence, so says Genesis 12, will help people on *earth* to flourish.

It's true that we're in trouble. The motivation for cutting

the Gospel of hope down to a “final warning message” comes in large part from Jesus’ own words. His great sermon on last things, found in Matthew 24 and 25, declares that before the Kingdom’s final victory, false prophets will arise, and also wars and famines and earthquakes. To avoid torture and death, he tells the disciples, you may have to flee.

Jesus does add, just as we’ve always said, his assurance of final victory. Amid all the hardship and disaster, the Son of Man will flash into view like lightning and gather his followers to himself. Although no one knows the day or hour, it will happen.

But we’re looking at the Bible here, so notice now what Jesus also says: *In the meantime, keep awake—and do your job.* Even when life is hard, do good work. Jesus elaborates on the point with a parable about three servants entrusted with “talents,” or money, while their master is away. One servant is afraid to invest any money; he just buries it for safekeeping. But such a servant—his master uses harsh words—is “wicked and lazy.”

So the proper way to wait for Jesus’ final victory is to do the work God gives. Even when it’s hard, investing in the here-and-now is *God’s plan for our lives.* Long before Jesus’ sermon, Jeremiah told put-upon Jews, then captive in Babylon, to get busy building families and working for “peace”—*shalom*; human well-being—right then and there, in that foreign city (Jeremiah 29:7). Now Jesus, at the center of his end-times speech, summons his followers to be busy in the same way. He has already, remember, inserted the importance of peacemaking into the Beatitudes—and underscored its urgency in the prayer he modeled: “thy will be done, on *earth* as it is in heaven.” (Matthew 5:9; 6:10).

When Jesus faces questions (Matthew 11) about whether he’s “the one who is to come,” he points to the *good* things that are happening: the healings, the poor having good news brought to them. So if there are (in the language we use) *bad* signs of the times, there are *also* good signs of the times. *There is no iron law that all will get worse.* Jesus did predict suffering; he did say life

would be difficult—but he also spoke eagerly of the good that seemed, with his own ministry, to be gaining traction. The conventional, or stereotypical, Adventist eschatology seems to miss this, even though the Bible is as clear about it as about the Ten Commandments.

My classmates at Walla Walla have done many things to enhance the here-and-now. And part of the reason we enjoyed our time together is that all weekend, musicians and artists gave expression to beauty as if on cue from their very Maker. They seemed to know, by instinct or the study of God’s word or both, that God never said, “My Son’s first coming fell flat and nothing’s changed. I’ll get it right the *second* time.”

All this has helped me form a thought that’s not new at all. It’s that although the Second Coming really does provide the hope we need, that hope is no excuse for escapism; it’s a stimulus to urgency. It tells us what will *last*—Jesus will—and thus what goals, values and passions are worth embracing today. So when eschatology is faithful to God’s word, it underscores what Martin Luther King called “the fierce urgency of Now.” It’s motivation to get busy with what matters now, *good* signs of the times. Hope is something you *do*.

A world doomed to go downhill, a world where we might as well bury our resources as use them for good ends, would be no place for moral aspiration, nor even for Adventist faith. How, I ask you, can the Second Coming happen if God can make no good difference now? ■

Charles Scriven chairs Adventist Forum.



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Seeing Adventism Whole | BY BONNIE DWYER

**What is
the cost of
orthodoxy?**

You really need to write a story ... the caller launched into the latest water cooler talk from the General Conference concerning GraceLink, the Sabbath School curriculum for children seemingly being thrown out the window. The General Conference Administrative Committee had just voted for the creation of a new curriculum, one that more heavily emphasizes the beliefs of Adventism.

I started making phone calls to learn more. While those who developed GraceLink were happy to describe the wide-ranging scholarly and artistic efforts that went into its creation, nobody wanted to talk on the record about the politics that seemed to undergird the change to a new curriculum. Was the story the change in the curriculum, or the politics? Or should we be following the money to determine the amount that had been invested over a decade in creating Grace Link, plus the cost of developing new materials to replace it. Repeated requests for just the publishing figures went nowhere. But then, how do you accurately quantify development costs when they are spread across a decade of time as well as all the world divisions? Hmmmm. The vote for the curriculum change centered on an intent to put a greater emphasis on Adventist doctrines, on orthodoxy. What is the cost of orthodoxy?

That is where we begin our efforts to see Adventism whole in this issue. We also attempt to view Ellen G. White whole. It is from historian Terrie Aamodt that I borrow that concept of seeing something whole. She explains in her "Confessions of an Ellen White Biographer" (see p. 57) that seeing a person whole is the challenge

for a biographer who wants to produce more than hagiography.

During the month of May 2016, seeing Adventism whole included incredible stories from Rwanda, where, according to reports in the official press, evangelistic efforts added to the work done by local church members, yielding approximately 100,000 baptisms. Meanwhile, in South Africa there was a major kerfuffle over the legitimacy of the degrees held by the Division president who resigned, but was then encouraged to reconsider his decision by General Conference President Ted N.C. Wilson. But with essentially a vote of no confidence from the Division Executive Committee, Division President Paul Ratsara asked for reassignment as a local pastor. The story extended past Ratsara and included the Division vice president, who confessed to ghost writing a majority of Ratsara's doctoral dissertation, as well as the Division communication director, whose two doctorates turned out to be from diploma mills. This drama unfolded day-by-day on our website and eventually in other Adventist media, too.

Seeing Adventism whole can be challenging; maddening, even. And yet, as in seeing Biblical characters like David and Moses whole, it is that wholeness that captures our hearts. ■

Bonnie Dwyer is editor of *Spectrum* magazine.

Correction: An incorrect image of William Foy was used to illustrate the article of "Let the Slave Reply" (*Spectrum*, Vol. 44, No. 1). There are no known photos of this pioneer prophet.



CHILDREN'S BIBLES

Translating the Bible into Pictures | BY RUBÉN R. DUPERTUIS

I became interested in the intersection of comic books and Bibles for children as a part of my attempt to make some sense out of *The Brick Testament*, a web design project illustrating scenes from biblical stories entirely in the medium of LEGO blocks. Despite the ostensibly child-friendly nature of the images—LEGOS are, after all, a children's toy—the project has a sharp critical edge to it. We catch a glimpse of it in the fact that the index has content ratings alerting viewers to which scenes contain “Nudity, Sexual activity, Violence and Cursing.” Indeed, what Smith chooses to illustrate from the Bible emphasizes its “adult-themed” content by highlighting the violence, sexuality, and oddity of its content. Much of the material typically omitted or cleaned up for children's editions of the Bible is not only present in *The Brick Testament*, but is illustrated in great detail. One finds, for example, scenes illustrating the Rape of Dinah (from Gen 34:1–34), Noah's drunkenness (Gen 9:18–9:29), and the beheading of John the Baptist, including an image of John the Baptist's recently severed head on a platter (Mark 6:20–29, Luke 3:19–20).¹

Thus, given Smith's illustration choices, it is hard to see *The Brick Testament* as a children's Bible. That said, in my judgment, *The Brick Testament* is not unrelated to the tradition of illustrated Bibles. Because many, if not most, of the illustrated Bibles produced in the twentieth century are meant for children, *The Brick Testament* can be read as a critique of or reaction against ways in which the Bible is presented to children. Regarding the purpose of the project, Smith himself states that, in the end, “illustrating the Bible in LEGO has been, for me, a chance to re-tell these stories in a way that's more faithful to the text than the other illustrated Bibles I've seen.”² If *The Brick Testament* is a reaction to this tradition, it is worth looking at it alongside some examples of illustrated Bibles for children. I have chosen Bibles that



fall generally into the category of comics because, while *The Brick Testament* is not technically a comic book, it is clearly borrowing the general form, language, and aesthetics of that medium by the use of sequential frames to convey a story, through the use of images, as well as captions, word and thought bubbles. I have also chosen to focus on the presentation of the story of Cain and Abel from Genesis 4:1–16 in several different Bibles, in part because this story regularly features in most relatively recent Bibles for children, but also because it is a narrative that presents any translator with a number of difficult decisions.

In what follows, I first address my approach to comic-book Bibles and *The Brick Testament* principally as translations. I then examine the presentation of Genesis 4:1–16 in three comic-book Bibles, before turning to some aspects of *The Brick Testament* in general, and its presentation of the Cain and Abel Story in particular.

Comic-Book Bibles as Translations

While a number of different approaches to this material would be fruitful, including retelling and adaptation among many, I have chosen translation for several reasons. The

first is the nature of what can be referred to really as “the comics medium” itself. The wide range of what has been considered and presented as children’s Bibles includes retellings of a handful of stories, catechisms, epitomes, summaries, and various illustrated and picture Bibles³. Comic-book Bibles, a relatively recent phenomenon, certainly fit within the tradition of illustrated or picture Bibles, but they also present some distinctive features and challenges.⁴ Clear definitions of “comics”, “comic books” and/or “graphic novels”⁵ are notoriously difficult to come by, but one of the most useful and well-known is that of McCloud, for whom comics are “juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer.”⁶ It is worth emphasizing the image-driven nature of the medium, as is thinking of images or icons in broad terms. While for some, comics are a combination of language and images⁷, for McCloud, and others, the images, icons, and symbols used to convey meaning in the medium are signs in the same way that the letters of an alphabet are. The comics medium is, in fact, increasingly being viewed as a language system that has developed a set visual vocabulary that requires a particular literacy on the part of the reader.⁸

It is also worth noting that, in comics, the images or pictures do not simply illustrate the text or the story, but are a central means through which the medium conveys meaning. Comics can, in fact, be thought of as a “hybrid word-and-image form in which two narrative tracks, one verbal and one visual, register temporality spatially. . . . Highly textured in its narrative scaffolding, comics doesn’t (sic) blend the visual and the verbal—or use one simply to illustrate the other—but is (sic) rather prone to present the two nonsynchronously; a reader of comics not only fills in the gaps between panels but also works with the often disjunctive back-and-forth or reading and looking for meaning.”⁹

If the comics medium consists of a language, then presenting or telling a Bible story in this medium can be considered a translation.

A second reason lies in the fact that what little critical attention comic-book Bibles have received has all been relatively recent and has, in one way or another, addressed translation issues. Beard and du Toit, for example, examine children’s Bibles, including “picture” Bibles, in South Africa explicitly as translations, through the framework of cognitive poetics.¹⁰ Burke and Lebrón-Rivera explore the possibility of reading a recent graphic novel production of the story of Samson as midrash.¹¹ They never use the term “translation,” but their central concern is with the “transfer of Scripture” into the graphic novel format, evaluating the level of accuracy of the graphic novel by comparison to the story of Samson in the Masoretic Text. Responding to Burke and Lebrón-Rivera, Clark also took up the analysis of recent graphic novel versions of the story of Samson. The concern with the “faithful transfer” of Scripture is even clearer here, as Clark notes places where the transfer of meaning was “unfaithful” and where it hits the mark.¹²

A third reason is that fidelity in translation is also a goal of many of the comic-book Bibles themselves. This is the case, for example, in the comic-book Bible series put out by the United Bible Society. In an article published in *Bible Translator* with the aim of introducing potential translators to the conventions of comics, Mundhenk says of the series, “The series of Bible comics is an attempt to adapt the message of the Bible in a way that is both faithful to the message of the Bible and also faithful to the comics format.”¹³

The self-presentation of most of the comics I examined for this study also invokes fidelity to scripture. The back cover of one comic-strip version of the Hebrew Bible attributes the following endorsement to a prominent Christian leader: “Parents will do their children a real spiritual service by providing them with *Picture Stories* from the Bible. The stories follow the text of Scripture very closely.”¹⁴ Another authority says of the book, “[the author] has put the Bible stories

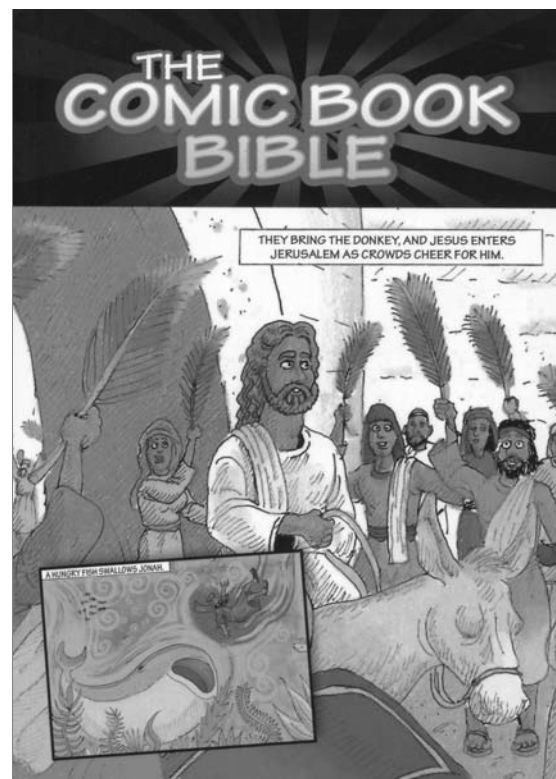
***The Brick
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presented to
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meaning.**

into the modern comic form without sacrificing the accuracy of the Biblical text, and with all due reverence." Although less explicit about being a translation, *The Comic Book Bible* also presents itself on the back cover as a kind of Bible starter-kit, translated into "picture book" form in order to be attractive and understandable to children.¹⁵ And, as I noted above, fidelity to the biblical original is also part of *The Brick Testament's* presentation.

Smith has said of his project: "For me, it's all about making the content of the Bible more accessible without changing that content."¹⁶ Although, as I note below, Smith's purpose in accurately representing the content of the Bible may ultimately be ironic, the claim of accuracy is there, thus legitimating the project by evoking popular notions of translation.

My own interest in approaching these texts as translations is two-fold. The first concerns the type of translation that comic-book Bibles represent. Jakobson distinguished three kinds of translation: (1) interlingual translation—what is typically thought of as "translation proper"—in which the signs from one natural language (such as Hebrew or Greek) are interpreted by means of signs in another natural language (such as Spanish or English); (2) intralingual translation, in which the signs of one language are interpreted by means of other signs in the same language—essentially paraphrasing; and (3) intersemiotic translation, the interpretation of verbal signs by means of a non-verbal sign system.¹⁷ Comic-book Bibles are, or at least can be, all three types of translation. While the potential for interlingual translation exists, most comic-book Bibles start with an existing English language translation.¹⁸ What parts of the biblical text they render in what Jakobson calls "natural language," whether that be rewording, paraphrasing, retelling, etcetera, could be seen as intralingual translation. Certainly the use of images and icons would qualify as an intersemiotic translation. This last type is probably the most useful of the



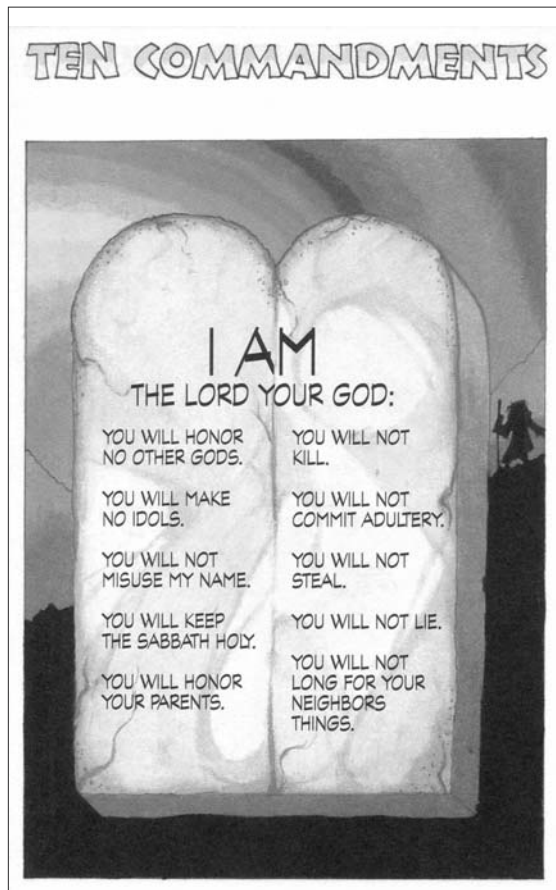
Cover of *The Comic Book Bible* by Rob Suggs

three for our purposes, but it is worth noting that the comics medium defies simple characterization.

I am also interested in the models of translation invoked, or better yet, assumed, when discussing comic-book Bibles. The focus on the fidelity of comics in their representation, retelling or translation of biblical stories often appears to assume a rather simplistic model of translation that, in my judgment, may be overly optimistic about the possibility of capturing the objective essence of the original into the target language or medium. Indeed, one of the central developments of translation studies in the last few decades has been dispelling the notion that the mark of a good translation is whether it is accurate or not.¹⁹ Much of recent translation theory reflects the understanding that translations are always complex cultural transactions.²⁰ As Venuti puts it, translations are "the site of many determinations and effects—linguistic, cultural, economic, ideological."²¹ But if the undistorted transfer of meaning is not fully

possible, what then is the role of the translator and what makes a good translation? For Venuti, while some violence is unavoidable in the act of translation, translators have a choice between two tendencies. One possibility is performing what he calls a “domesticating” translation that privileges the values and cultural assumptions of the target-language reader. Domesticating models of translation, Venuti argues, are dominant in English-language translation. This applies to most contemporary English translations of the Bible, perhaps especially those aimed at niche markets. In addition to presenting the biblical texts in attractive, accessible, and understandable ways, they erase the cultural distance between the Bible and the present day, enlisting it (and the attendant authority of the Bible) in the maintenance and reification of contemporary cultural structures and ideologies

The Ten Commandments from *The Comic Book Bible*



For Venuti, the other possibility is foregrounding the cultural distance from and otherness of a source text by adopting a “foreignizing” translation. This is not a claim to be able to capture objectively some essence in the source text, because in the end the text’s “otherness” is still rendered by means of the terms of the target language. The point, however, is “to develop a theory and practice of translation that resists dominant target-language cultural values so as to signify the linguistic and culture difference of the foreign text.”²² With these possibilities or tendencies in mind, we can take a look at how the Bible is translated in comic-book Bibles for children.

Cain and Abel in the Primeval Epic and Comic-book Bibles for Children

I will focus on the story of Cain and Abel in Genesis 4:1–16, a staple of recent children’s Bibles. While there are numerous interpretive difficulties in this little story—as evidenced by the complex history of interpretation²³—in my reading of the story there are four issues in particular to which I want to pay attention. The first is the apparent arbitrariness of God’s choice of Abel’s sacrifice over Cain’s. The choice is not explained or justified in the Hebrew Bible. Both Cain and Abel make offerings from what is appropriate to their occupation: Cain the farmer, Abel the shepherd. As Brueggemann notes, “The trouble comes not from Cain, but from Yahweh—the strange God of Israel. Inexplicably, Yahweh chooses—accepts and rejects.”²⁴

The second interpretive issue is the first interaction between God and Cain immediately after the latter’s sacrifice is not accepted and “his countenance fell” (Gen 4:5). In the wake of God’s arbitrary preference for Abel’s sacrifice, the reminder that doing well leads to acceptance, while not doing well opens one up to sin, is hardly comforting since it is unclear what Cain did wrong in the first place (Gen 4:6–7). At best this, too, is another

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er enigmatic feature of the story. At worst, God is not playing fair and is toying with Cain.²⁵ The third issue is God's second interaction with Cain, in which Cain is cursed, his connection to the ground severed, and he is destined to live as an exile and a wanderer. Cain's protest results in a form of accommodation: a mark protecting him from harm. The literary function of this mark on Cain is "two-edged. On the one hand, it announces the guilt of Cain. On the other, it marks Cain as safe in God's protection."²⁶ The fourth issue I want to highlight is the violence that is at the heart of the first murder in the Bible. As with much in this terse, brief narrative, the pivotal moment is striking for its brevity; Cain invited Abel to a field where he "rose up against his brother Abel, and killed him" (Gen 4:8, NRSV).

The Comic Book

Bible also

presents itself

on the back

cover as a

kind of Bible

starter-kit.

Of the numerous publications that would fit under the category of comic-book Bibles, I have chosen to focus on three. The first, *The Comic Book Bible* by Rob Suggs, is a Christian publication (as are the other two examples on which I focus) that aims at an audience of children from ages eight to twelve, and tells selected stories from both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament.²⁷ In *The Comic Book Bible*, the story of Cain and Abel is told in six panels on one page. At the top of each page is a Bible verse related to the story, a choice that may be related to an anxiety often seen in illustrated or picture Bibles over the relationship to the text of the Bible.²⁸ In this case, the words selected from the Cain and Abel story are from Genesis 4:4–5: "...and the Lord had respect for Abel and his offering, but unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. ..." This choice highlights the importance of God's preference of the sacrifice of one brother over the other, which in the Hebrew Bible is enigmatic if not arbitrary.

In *The Comic Book Bible*, however, God's preference for Abel's sacrifice is anything but arbitrary. One way in which this is achieved is by the dialogue supplied to the characters. In the



Picture Stories from the Bible by M. C. Gaines

first frame of the story Abel says "I'll offer the best of my flock," while in the next frame, Cain states, "Abel is always sacrificing. Maybe this old plant will do for me". The order in which the sons are introduced and offer their sacrifices is reversed from the order in the Hebrew Bible, effectively making Cain play catch-up and introducing the notion of jealousy. The words ascribed to the brothers emphasize the importance of the proper attitude during worship. In addition to making clear the superior quality of Abel's sacrifice, the story also suggests that God's choice is understandable. In the second frame Cain says "Abel is always sacrificing...", and in the third he thinks, "As usual, God liked Abel's sacrifice better, well I'm sick of it." In this story Abel apparently sacrifices more often, his offerings are better, and God routinely chooses the sacrifice of Abel over that of Cain. The justification of God's choice is also done visually. Abel is introduced in the first frame as the cute, bright-eyed younger brother, active in tending his flock, while Cain bears a droopy

moustache (a permanent frown?) and stands idle in the background, leaning up against a tree. We see Abel's face again in the third frame—again he is smiling, while his brother, watching him out of the corner of his eyes, thinks jealous thoughts. Whatever insight Cain's thoughts and words give the reader about his motivations, visually he is typed throughout as a villain.

The first interaction between God and Cain before the murder of Abel is omitted entirely, while in the presentation of the second there is no indication that God's punishment of Cain for the murder of his brother with exile is accompanied by a way of protecting him against those who would do him harm. Here it is simply a punishment. This story is about a young man with a bad attitude (and bad facial hair) who succumbs to jealousy, kills his brother, and suffers a corresponding punishment. Finally, *The Comic Book Bible* avoids the violence in the story, showing a frame of Cain's ambush of Abel, then going directly to God's second encounter with Cain.

Cain and Abel from *Picture Stories from the Bible*



This is not surprising, as violence and perceived amoral actions in children's Bibles have been reworked or omitted for the better part of the last two centuries.²⁹

An earlier comic-book Bible for children touches on many of the same themes. Published originally in 1942, *Picture Stories from the Bible* by M. C. Gaines has stories from both the Old and New Testaments in two separate volumes. Its version of the story of Cain and Abel is longer, told over fourteen frames.³⁰ As is the case in *The Comic Book Bible*, in *Picture Stories* the reason for God's choice between Cain and Abel is made abundantly clear. After the brothers and their respective occupations are introduced, a caption states: "One day Abel decided to make an offering to the Lord—Cain pledged an offering too, but his heart wasn't in it." Below the caption is a scene of Cain and Abel flanking Adam at the dinner table in which Abel says, "For God's goodness I feel I should sacrifice a lamb from my flock to him!" Cain, however, states, "Oh well, I can offer him some of my fruit." The next frame depicts Cain watching Abel prepare his sacrifice, thinking, "I'll not be outdone by my brother." The frame in which God's choice is conveyed begins with the following caption: "God, looking into their hearts, commends Abel but not Cain..."

Here the point is that attitude matters and that jealousy is the reason for God's rejection of Cain, and again the order in which the brothers offer their sacrifices is reversed. An interesting aspect of this Bible is the emphasis on God's ability to see into the brothers' hearts, something noted specifically in the caption, and underscored by visual representation of the brothers. Unlike *The Comic Book Bible*, where the superiority of Abel is clear visually, here the two brothers are, from the beginning, virtually identical. The initial frame of the story depicts them as young children, Cain climbing a tree expressing his desire to watch things grow when he grows up, and Abel expressing his desire to be a

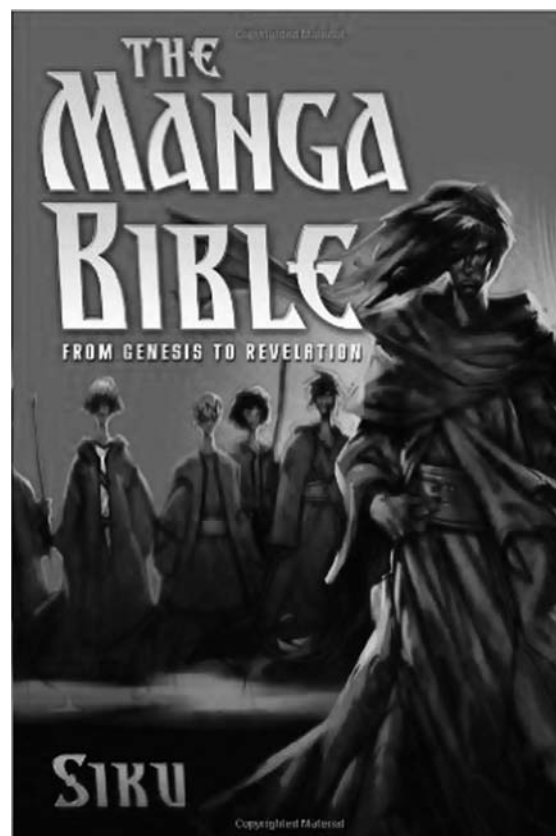
Much of recent translation theory reflects the understanding that translations are always complex cultural transactions.

**As with
much in this
terse, brief
narrative, the
pivotal moment
is striking
for its brevity.**

shepherd while on the ground petting a sheep. All subsequent frames have the boys as adults; they are thickly muscled, idealized, and indistinguishable from each other, except for the fact that Cain has a thin headband. Their physical similarity serves to call attention to the fact that God (who, like the comics' reader, is privy to the characters' thoughts) knows people's hearts and is not fooled by outward appearances.

Other choices in *Picture Stories* are also worth noting. The first interaction between Cain and God is presented here, but it is framed by Cain "slinking" away, muttering jealous words—something both visually depicted and stated in a caption—and a running Cain shouting, "You just wait." Abel's murder is here portrayed in more detail than in *The Comic Book Bible*, in a frame with a caption reading, "They came to a field and suddenly Cain attacked and killed Abel..." Below the caption, Cain has Abel in a headlock with one arm, while in the other is a large stone ready to strike. The actual moment of Abel's murder is not shown and the story quickly moves on. *Picture Stories* is one of the few comic-book Bibles for children to present the double-edged nature of God's second and final encounter with Cain. The final frame of the story depicts a downcast Cain protesting his punishment, particularly his fear that being a "fugitive and a vagabond" would get him killed, and a response from God: "I shall set a mark upon you lest they do this, and it shall be the brand of Cain." The brief explanation feels a bit more like an etiology for the "brand of Cain" than an emphasis on the idea that Cain is both punished and protected. Furthermore, the protection by God is necessary, given *The Picture Bible's* choice to narrate the story of Cain taking a wife and becoming the father of Enoch. The inclusion of this material drawn from Genesis 4:17 is unique in the comic-book Bibles for children I examined.

A very different treatment of the story of Cain and Abel can be found in the recent



***The Manga Bible* by Siku**

Manga Bible series from Zondervan, which has a volume dedicated to Genesis and Exodus entitled, *Names, Games, and the Long Road Trip*.³¹ A more cartoony version clearly aiming at humor, this Bible is much more self-conscious in being a re-presentation of biblical stories and is missing the somber tone of some of the other versions. *The Manga Bible* lingers over the events of Genesis 4:1–16, devoting to it thirty frames over four-and-a-half pages (for comparison, the much longer story of flood in Genesis 6–9 gets only thirty-five frames over six pages). Like *The Comic Book Bible*, *The Manga Bible* makes the superiority of Abel visually clear. Cain, drawn as an adult with angular features and spiky hair, is an unhappy thug. The first frame depicting Cain as an adult has him reaping grain with a sickle while complaining that "farming is too hard..." The much younger Abel, on the other hand, is a cute kid with a round face and bowl haircut who is introduced to the reader in a frame

depicting him holding a small sheep saying, “Sheep are so cute.” The only frames in which Cain is smiling are those in which he is planning and carrying out his plan to kill his brother, and believes he has tricked God by hiding the body of the murdered Abel. Given the clear visual labeling of Cain as a bad guy, God’s preference for Abel’s sacrifice is not surprising. Aside from the rather generic labelling of Cain as a villain, the reason for God’s preference for Abel’s sacrifice is more narrowly defined as Cain’s greed. Here the issue is not necessarily the right attitude or what is in one’s heart, but how much one gives to God: Cain is shown reconsidering how much to give to God as a sacrifice, finally offering a minimal amount, after reasoning that he couldn’t “give [God] an empty dish.” While humor is clearly the aim, the message is clear: Cain’s sacrifice was unacceptable in its quantity, not its quality.

The first interaction between Cain and God immediately following the rejection of Cain’s

sacrifice is represented in *The Manga Bible* in four frames that stand out for their more sophisticated use of the language of the comics medium—motion or zip lines indicate Cain’s confusion at the rejection of his sacrifice, sound effects indicate his anger as he cracks his knuckles, and finally God’s voice irrupts into a frame asking Cain questions that are a paraphrase of Genesis 4: 6–7. Tired of being picked on, Cain decides that God’s disfavor is Abel’s fault and begins to plot his murder.

Here too, the violence of Cain’s murder is presented more graphically than in *The Comic Book Bible*, but it is still suggested rather than shown. Four frames portray Cain luring Abel out into a field, a fifth shows only the top of Abel’s head while above him looms Cain with a large rock in his hands. Finally, while *The Manga Bible* does suggest that Cain is both cursed and protected, it appears to be uncomfortable with God’s protection of Cain and has him earn it with “tears of repentance.”

As translations, these Bibles are clearly on the domesticating end of the spectrum, but that is precisely the point. The stated goal of these comics is, in some way or another, to make the Bible accessible and fun for children. Several aspects about how this is done are worth noting. What is portrayed, including how it is portrayed, is filtered through contemporary beliefs about what is appropriate for children. This includes the decision to turn stories full of ambiguity into clear articulations of contemporary morals. But since what is deemed appropriate social behavior varies, it is worth noting the different reasons given for God’s refusal to accept Cain’s sacrifice. Both *The Comic Book Bible* and *Picture Stories* emphasize Cain’s lack of appropriate attitude and jealousy, while *The Manga Bible* highlights Cain’s laziness and, in particular, his greed—he simply did not give enough. Particular details may differ, but that these Bibles serve to reify contemporary values and morals places them squarely within the long tradition of children’s Bibles.³²

Cain and Abel from *The Manga Bible*



**The words
ascribed
to the brothers
emphasize the
importance
of the proper
attitude during
worship.**

**Abel is
introduced in
the first frame
as the cute,
bright-eyed
younger brother,
active in
tending his
flock.**

The visual aspects of how the biblical stories are represented are also clearly shaped by the concerns of the contemporary target culture. The fact that almost all comic-book Bibles are in color says something about the younger audience these publications are targeting. Historically, most comics are in black and white. The exceptions are the more recent publications, including *The Manga Bible* series by Zondervan, which appear to be designed specifically to appeal to readers already interested in the comics medium. One could argue that giving all of the biblical characters some measure of recognizable ancient clothing represents a foreignization of sorts, highlighting the distance between the biblical and our contemporary worlds. The effect, however, is one of domestication, as the “foreign” or ancient clothing works along the lines of contemporary notions of what is ancient or primitive (much like the elaborate sets of the “sword and sandal” films produced by Hollywood). Furthermore, all biblical characters are portrayed as recognizably white, despite the fact that in detail they range from fairly detailed to relatively abstract.³³

This last point is worth elaborating. When it comes to the use of the comics medium, my initial judgment was that these comics are not very good—at the very least they do not represent a very sophisticated use of the comics medium. This is less applicable to the more recent publications that appear to be much more aware of, and willing to make use of, the lexicon of the medium. Of the comic-book Bibles discussed above, I would highlight *The Manga Bible* as the most sophisticated. But even the rather simplistic art of the others can have a particular function in the comics medium. McCloud argues that one of the key aspects of good comics art is identification on behalf of the reader with particular narrative characters. Identification, something that is also a part of exclusively textual narratives, is complicated in this case by the fact that typically comics represent people visually, and not all of us look the same. He argues that the more specific and

detailed a representation of a particular person becomes, the fewer the number of people who can readily identify with the character.³⁴

Applied to comic-book Bibles, it might be argued that the rather simplistic art functions as a way of allowing greater identification. This does not necessarily work for *Picture Stories*, where the decision to render Cain and Abel in identical, adult, hyper-masculine bodies and fairly detailed facial features does not facilitate identification. If anything, Cain and Abel represent a distant, idealized past. As I noted above, that the brothers are nearly indistinguishable also underscores the point that God knows people’s hearts and that proper attitude is what determined God’s preference of Abel over Cain. Identification is key, however, in the other two comic-book Bibles, where the character of Abel is much younger and drawn more simply or even abstractly than his brother. In *The Manga Bible*, for example, the character of Abel is a cute, somewhat generic good kid, while the character of Cain is so wholly other, so monstrous, that any possible sympathy, let alone identification, is made impossible.

Critiquing the Illustrated Bible Tradition by Illustrating the Bible

Because Bibles for children, including illustrated or picture Bibles, are for the most part produced for didactic purposes, they tend to follow fairly consistent patterns in the stories they select and how these stories are presented. *The Brick Testament*, Smith’s ongoing web-design project illustrating biblical stories using only photographed LEGO blocks, can be read as a critique of this tradition. Begun in 2001, by 2003 the site had received enough interest to lead to the publication of a coffee table book entitled *The Brick Testament: Stories from the Book of Genesis*. Smith published two more books in 2004 and has continued to add scenes to his online site. The website, which is my focus here, now has illustrations for much of the Bible.³⁵

While Smith notes that his images are often used in church settings for educational



Genesis 4:9 from *The Brick Testament*

purposes, the critical, if not satirical, edge of his project is readily apparent. What is of interest here is how this critique is carried out. *The Brick Testament* inhabits a carefully negotiated space at the intersection of a number of genres, styles, and sensibilities. Part comic book, part Bible illustration, part photography, part interactive online experience, Smith intentionally plays off of the conventions of all of these genres and media. But he plays with these conventions, particularly those of the comics medium, in ways that highlight the cultural otherness, occasional oddity, violence, and clearly “adult”-themed content of much of the Bible. It is, in a way, a sustained project of “foreignization.”

I take two of its central ideas to be a critique of literal readings of the Bible and an emphasis on the otherness or foreignness of the Bible. Smith critiques literal readings of the Bible by adhering to a strict literalism himself. In every frame the image is accompanied by the text being illustrated, effectively functioning as a caption. This can be read as a desire to follow scripture closely; indeed, Smith claims that his illustrations remain

“true to the text of the scriptures.”³⁶ In most frames, however, this literalism creates a redundancy that effectively stilt the narrative. Because the comics language depends on both a textual and visual register, in this medium adaptations of biblical narrative that keep much or most of the wording of a biblical account are rare.³⁷

In *The Brick Testament's* version of the Cain and Abel story, the encounter between God and Cain immediately after the murder begins with a frame illustrating the following part of Genesis 4:9: “Yahweh said to Cain, ‘Where is your brother Abel?’ ‘I don’t know,’ he replied.” In the illustration above

the text, the dialogue is placed in word balloons, thus reproducing it twice on the page (see illustration, opposite).³⁸ The effect of this redundancy is magnified in the remaining frames, which reproduce the final encounter between Cain and God almost in its entirety, including instances of rather lengthy speech by God. The end result is humorous in part because of its clumsiness and redundancy. As comics narrative, however, it is awkward, if not just plain bad. But because Smith is presumably carrying out a narrative illustration that is “faithful” to the text of the Bible, the ultimate source of the awkwardness, then, is presumably the Bible itself.

Smith also appears to delight in capturing those places where this literalism produces surprising, odd, or humorous results. Such is the case in his illustration of Genesis 9:28–29. Smith illustrates the majority of these two verses, which note the years that Noah lived after the flood and the total number of years he lived, in one frame in which Noah and his wife stand next to each other holding hands. The next frame illustrates the words, “And he died,” in a scene in which Noah is lying on his back while his wife, still standing, looks

**Violence and
perceived
amoral actions
in children’s
Bibles have
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or omitted
for the better
part of the
last two
centuries.**

**Cain, drawn
as an adult
with angular
features
and spiky hair,
is an unhappy
thug.**

down on him. Literalism followed to absurd ends can also be seen in Smith's illustration of Mary's hymn of praise in Luke 1:46–55. Smith illustrates each of the attributes ascribed by Mary to God. The words, "He has scattered the proud and arrogant," he illustrates with an image of God shooing a number of people away; "He has cast down rulers from their thrones," he illustrates with an image of God throwing a king off a chair; and that God "has raised up the lowly," is accompanied by an image of God holding three men with tattered clothing above his head. By following literalism to a fault, Smith is able to highlight just how much typical translations (and illustrations) do to make the text intelligible in our contemporary contexts.

The emphasis of *The Brick Testament* on what might be called the otherness of the Bible itself comes through in its retelling of the Cain and Abel story. Where most comic-book Bibles work hard to make the story relevant to contemporary sensibilities, particularly along the lines of what is deemed acceptable for children, *The Brick Testament* seems to push in the opposite direction. By the mid-twentieth century, traces of sexuality were removed not just in Bibles for children but in children's literature more generally³⁹. Accordingly, direct representations of Adam's "knowledge" of Eve, and her subsequent conception of Cain, in Genesis 4:1 are usually avoided in Bibles for children.

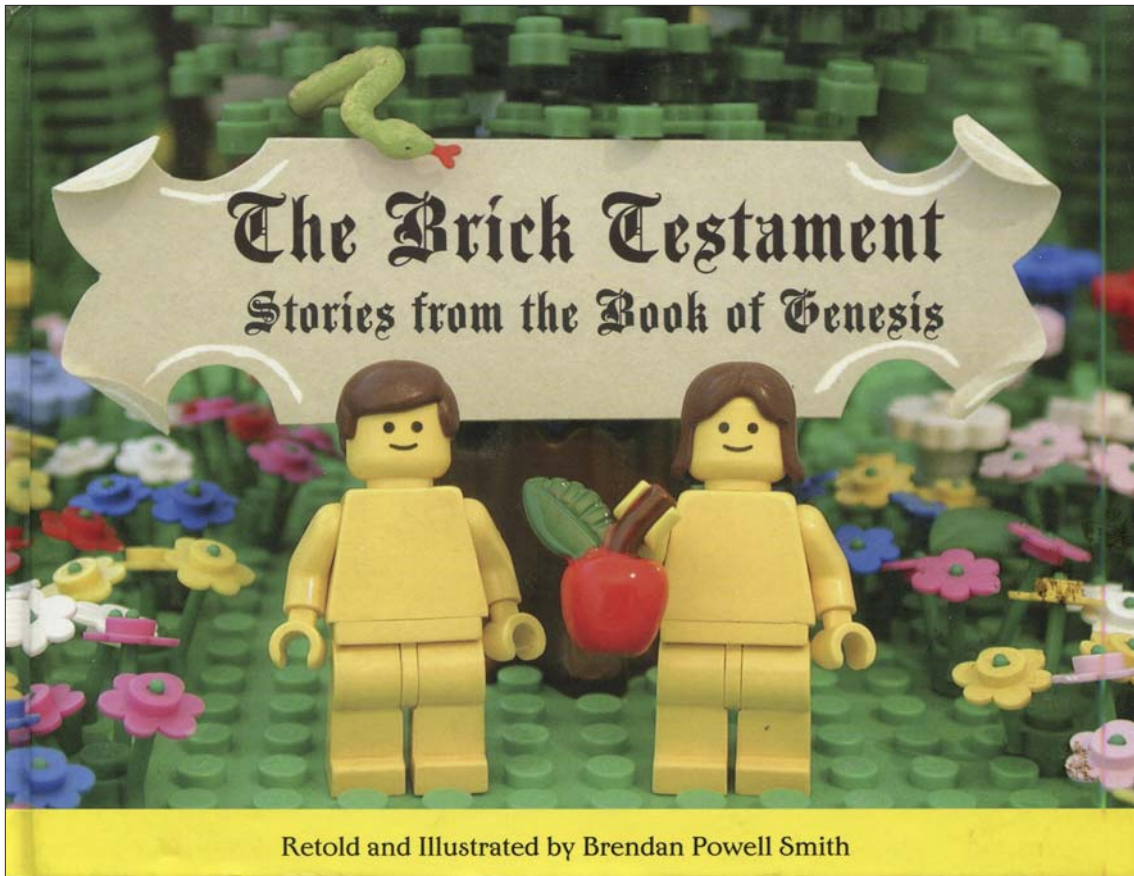
Smith, however, begins by sidestepping the euphemism of Genesis 4:1, preferring to depict the first couple having sex.⁴⁰ As noted above, the violence in the story is typically omitted or downplayed in children's Bibles; however, *The Brick Testament* focuses on it. The text of Genesis 4:8 is, "Cain said to his brother Abel, 'Let us go out to the field.' And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel, and killed him" (NRSV). Smith illustrates this one verse over three frames, the first depicting Cain asking Abel to join him in the field while concealing a knife,

the second showing Cain attacking Abel, and the third, corresponding to the text "And he killed him," showing the slain Abel in a pool of blood (represented by blocks of translucent red LEGOS). Not only does Smith depict the primeval epic's first murder, but he seems to linger on the violence of the narrative.

What remains of the story is told in seven frames, all of which portray the final encounter between Cain and God. In four of the seven, the slain body of Abel is visible in the background.⁴¹ The ambiguity in the story, both in God's preference for Abel's sacrifice and the double nature of the mark given to Cain, is kept. This is due, in part, because Smith has chosen to illustrate almost all of Genesis 4:1–16. But it is worth noting that the interpretive difficulties of the ambiguity suit Smith's agenda well.

Judged in terms of the conventional application of the comics medium, Smith's translation of the Bible is a bad one—but intentionally so. What aspects of comics he appropriates, he appears purposefully to use ineffectively—the redundancy of the captions and the text in the word bubbles, for example—in order to highlight the otherness of the Bible. He uses the aesthetics of the medium to illustrate that, if followed closely, the Bible itself is very different from what one expects. He consistently highlights instances of sex and violence in the Bible, but he also illustrates non-narrative material not typically part of the tradition of children's Bibles.⁴² The legal materials in the Hebrew Bible do not translate well into comics narrative, but they do give Smith the opportunity to illustrate an instance of bestiality.⁴³ Smith's project appears designed to force people to take a look at what is really in the Bible. And the shock value of much of *The Brick Testament* depends on fairly stable patterns in the presentation of the Bible for children. This is emphasized by the choice of a medium often associated with children and the use of LEGO blocks.

The Brick Testament can be fairly viewed as



Retold and Illustrated by Brendan Powell Smith

Cover of *The Brick Testament* by Brendan Powell Smith

an extended project of foreignization in the sense that Smith is able “to signify the linguistic and cultural difference of the foreign text”⁴⁴—in this case the Bible. But the thrust of Smith’s project is a reaction to contemporary translations, retellings, and interpretations of the Bible that he feels have misrepresented what is in it. This reaction is a domestication in its own right, because the force of the critique, the oddity and otherness he is trying to point out in the Bible, depend on contemporary assumptions of what is culturally acceptable and normative, what is odd, and weird. It depends also on the absence of context.

Conclusion

The Brick Testament is at times very funny, smart, and even insightful in some of its critique. At its best, Smith effectively highlights how much modern translators/interpreters have to do to make the Bible intelligible and

applicable in contemporary contexts. And Smith is right, too, in pointing out the adult-themed content of much of the Bible. That the Bible is not a children’s book is clear to anyone who has wrestled with telling some of its stories to astute, young interpreters. A recent reminder of this came as I read one of the comic-book Bibles I studied for this project with my five-year-old daughter and I found myself trying to explain why Jesus could throw tables in the Temple when he was angry, but she couldn’t. Smith is right, of course; the Bible is not a children’s book, but here I sympathize with the attempts of the comics and other children’s Bibles to present some of these stories to children in interesting ways. The problem, for me, comes in the claims to accuracy and fidelity. Given the authority of the Bible in many contemporary settings, these claims are probably rhetorically expedient, but ultimately not very helpful—translation is far too complex a phenomenon

The stated goal of these comics is, in some way or another, to make the Bible accessible and fun for children.

The visual aspects of how the biblical stories are represented are also clearly shaped by the concerns of the contemporary target culture.

for that. So is there a place for comic-book Bibles for children? In my judgment there certainly is. But perhaps *The Brick Testament* is reflecting frustration with the fact that for many the Bible is not allowed to grow up. ■

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2. Meredith James, "Building a Colorful, Accessible Bible, Brick by Lego Brick," *Chicago Tribune*, November 30, 2003. (Accessed August 9, 2010) http://www.thebricktestament.com/press/chicago_tribune_03_11_30.html.
3. Ruth B. Bottigheimer, *The Bible for Children: From the Age of Gutenberg to the Present* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 3–13.
4. While precursors abound, comics emerged in force in the twentieth century. For a very brief history of the medium, see Mario Saraceni, *The Language of Comics*, Intertext (New York: Routledge 2003), 1–3; for a more extensive history see Robert C. Harvey, *The Art of the Comic Book: An Aesthetic History*, Studies in Popular Culture (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1996).

5. I use these terms interchangeably, although I recognize that many will draw more fine distinctions.

6. Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1993), 20.

7. Saraceni, *The Language of Comics*, 5.

8. Examples of this visual vocabulary include the ways in which "motion lines" or "zip ribbons" have been used to connote movement in a single frame, the use of posture and gesture, and even the use of particular icons to indicate certain types of speech (word balloons versus thought balloons). For a discussion of the challenge of representing movement in the comics medium, see McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, 108–117. For the use of posture and gesture, see Will Eisner, *Comics and Sequential Art: Principles and Practices from the Legendary Cartoonist* (New York: Norton, 2008), 103–14.

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14. M. C. Gaines, *Picture Stories from the Bible: The Old Testament in Full-color Comic-strip Form* (New York: Scarf Press, 1979), back cover.

15. Rob Suggs, *The Comic Book Bible* (Uhrichsville, Ohio: Barbour, 1997), back cover.

16. James, *Colorful, Accessible Bible*, 2003

17. Roman Jakobson, "On Linguistic Aspects of Translation," in *On Translation*, ed. Reuben A. Brower, Harvard Studies in Comparative Literature 23 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1959), 233.

18. See the discussion of this issue in the context of the production and translation of children's Bibles in South Africa by Beard and du Toit, "A Proactive Approach," sec-

tion 4.5. In regard to *The Brick Testament*, Smith notes on his site that in earlier stages of the project he drew almost exclusively from the New Jerusalem Bible, but because of copyright issues, he changed the wording based on translations in the public domain and the recommendation of friends with knowledge of the original languages (cf. <http://www.thebricktestament.com/faq/index.html>). The biblical quotations that appear on every page of *The Comic Book Bible* appear to be taken from the KJV.

19. Alan Williams, "New Approaches to the Problem of Translation in the Study of Religion," in *Textual, Comparative, Sociological and Cognitive Approaches, New Approaches to the Study of Religion*, vol. 2 (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2004), 13-44.

20. Stanley E. Porter, "Some Issues in Modern Translation Theory and Study of the Greek New Testament," *Currents in Research: Biblical Studies* 9 (2001): 350-82.

21. Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 19.

22. *Ibid.*, 23.

23. See, for example, the discussion of Genesis 4:1-16 in Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary*, trans. John J. Scullion (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 279-320. See also Joel Lohr, "Righteous Abel, Wicked Cain: Genesis 4:16 in the Masoretic Text, the Septuagint and the New Testament," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 71, no. 3 (2009): 485-96, who traces the history of interpretation of this passage as far back as the Septuagint translation of the Hebrew Bible.

24. Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis. Interpretation* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), 56.

25. *Ibid.*, 57

26. *Ibid.*, 60

27. Unless otherwise noted, all references to *The Comic Book Bible* are to page 13, containing the six frames of the story of Cain and Abel.

28. Bottigheimer, *Bible for Children*, 39.

29. *Ibid.*, 54; Penny Schine Gold, *Making the Bible Modern: Children's Bibles and Jewish Education in Twentieth-Century America* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2004), 124-33.

30. Gaines, *Picture Stories*, 8-10.

31. Young Shin Lee and Jung Sun Hwang (ill.), *Names, Games, and the Long Road Trip: Genesis-Exodus*, Vol. 1, *The Manga Bible*, ed. Bud Rogers (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007).

32. Bottigheimer, *Bible for Children*.

33. Again *The Manga Bible* may be the exception.

Clear identification of the ethnicity of the characters is difficult, which may, of course, be intentional.

34. McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, 24-59.

35. To my knowledge, changes to the website have typically been limited to illustrations of new material. Recently, however, Smith has revisited some of his early illustrations of Genesis, including his treatment of the story of Cain and Abel. My study of Smith's work is based on the original illustrations of Genesis which were displayed on the site from 2001 to 2010. The URL links in the references below are still active.

36. <http://www.thebricktestament.com/faq/index.html>

37. Giving potential translators of the UBS' comic-book Bibles guidelines on how to translate into the comics medium, Mundhenk recommends that when possible, the story should be carried by illustrations alone, with balloons being preferred over captions. Mundhenk, "Translating Bible Comics," 406.

38. http://www.thebricktestament.com/genesis/cain_and_abel/gn04_09a.html

39. Gold, *Making the Bible Modern*, 127-8

40. The English translation below the illustration also avoids the euphemism: "The man had sex with his wife Eve." http://www.thebricktestament.com/genesis/cain_and_abel/gn04_01a.html

41. A similar approach is taken in *The Brick Testament's* version of the flood in Genesis 6-9. Smith emphasizes that some animals did not make it into the ark. He also emphasizes the human loss in the story: the frame illustrating the moment in which Noah and his family emerge from the ark as the waters recede showcases the skeletons of those who did not make it into the ark.

42. The working definition of children's Bibles adopted by Bottigheimer from Sybille Peter-Perrett, "prose re-workings of the narrative sections of the Bible for child readers," makes clear the emphasis on narrative in the tradition. Bottigheimer, *The Bible for Children*, 4.

44. Venuti, "The Translator's Invisibility," 23

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GraceLink Unchained | BY BONNIE DWYER

The year was 1989. Noelene Johnsson was interviewing for a position in the North American Division Children's Ministries Department. What they wanted, she learned, was a new curriculum for children's Sabbath School, so with her hiring she became swept up in one of the church's largest Sabbath School curriculum development projects for children.

A lot of people wanted to do something about it, she recalls. They were dreaming of what it could be. Because of his work with the Valuegenesis study of Adventist young

people, they got Bailey Gillespie involved, as well as Stu Tyner, to develop the curriculum overview. Later the General Conference brought Pat Habada on board to coordinate the development of materials for the world church. They brought together forty people from around the world, from every division, for a consultation session in England, because once adopted, the material would be used in all divisions. They started right at the beginning, studying character development, and how children learn. They went at a snail's pace as they discussed different learning styles and the emotional needs of children that go along with learning. Consideration was given to not just the Biblical lesson, but to how the whole hour of Sabbath School should be spent. There needed to be a basic plan for religious education incorporated into the curriculum.

From the onset, grace was the key experience they wanted for the children. After all, the Bible is the story of grace from the Old Testament forward to Jesus' second coming. He is coming to demonstrate grace. He died as a defining act of grace. Grace is embodied in Jesus. Every lesson should be about grace.

Of course, it is one thing to tell a story, but another to say why a story is in the Bible. Where is grace in any particular story? Once you have seen grace and thought about what it means, the natural response is to worship. Worship is not only singing, praising, and praying; worship is also obedience to God and living His way. Grace is not just received; it is meant to be shared with others within the body of Christ (Community) as well as others outside our faith community (Service). These became the core concepts of the curriculum that was given the name GraceLink:

- Grace (Jesus loves me)
- Worship (I love Jesus)
- Community (We love each other)
- Service (We love you too).



Editors chose this whimsical style art by Kim Justinen for the early edition of the Primary GraceLink lessons.



sure that virtually every Adventist doctrine was taught at some point during the twelve-year curriculum. “Even very young children learn of baptism by immersion, the state of the dead, the Sabbath, and other essential doctrines in an age-appropriate manner. These and others are taught through stories in coherent thematic clusters and reinforced through activities during the Sabbath School hour. The bedrock Adventist message is taught at every level with the most effective methods of instruction,” according to the official description of the curriculum.

Meanwhile, at the Review and Herald and Pacific Press publishing houses, work began on illustrations. Cutting-edge artists were hired to give the new material an age-appropriate contemporary look. However, hand-drawing all the needed illustrations soon overwhelmed them. With at least two illustrations for each of the 624 lessons, there was a lot of drawing to be

Left: Primary GraceLink art by Kim Justinen showcasing her revised, more realistic style. Below: Junior GraceLink art created by GoodSalt’s Lars Justinen and Steve Creitz, illustrating a gritty, realistic style.

With the core concepts in place, an international group of writers was identified and assigned lessons. The work began of putting on paper a twelve-year curriculum composed of 624 lessons, all to be firmly grounded in Scripture. According to the description of the curriculum on the church’s web site, “Because each lesson centers on a single message, each telling of a Bible story is focused . . . This is a thematic curriculum, only one teaching point is made at a time from a specific Bible story.” And everything in the program on a given Sabbath centers around that message. The songs, activities, and crafts are all assembled to reinforce the message in the Bible story lesson. So, in addition to the writing of the Bible stories, ideas and suggestions for songs and activities to expand upon the lesson were assembled for the teachers’ edition. Emphasis was given to experiencing a concept, active learning. Just presenting the facts of a story was not enough. Of course, the writers also needed to keep in mind the age of the children for whom they were writing.

Next, the Biblical Research Institute reviewed the lessons for theological soundness, making



done. The Review turned to the Justinens, artists whom had a proven track record of delivering.

Kim Justinen took on the GraceLink assignment for the primary age. She was known for having many illustration styles but the committee went with a whimsical look. She drew the Biblical characters with Middle Eastern-type features, similar to those in Disney’s “Prince of Egypt” telling of the Biblical story

**They started
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of Joseph. With computer drawing software to assist, she was able to produce the large number of illustrations needed in a timely manner. About one-third of the way through the project the editors asked her to make the artwork more realistic. Then, later, when the first illustrations were to be reprinted in the four-year cycle, they asked her to go into the first few quarters and make some of that artwork more realistic, too. And she complied.

At the beginning no one realized how much work would be required, Johnsson says. The entire project stretched out over a ten-year period. Finally, the General Conference turned it over to the world divisions and those in children's ministries. It became their responsibility to show teachers how to use the new curriculum, because it required a new approach to teaching. The divisions also invested in the translation of the materials into the languages appropriate for their division. The editors continued to find new ways to present the material, too. Animated videos of the lessons were produced and put on YouTube. A Sabbath School app was eventually developed. Teachers could compose their own felt-board illustrations on the computer.

By 2000, when the lessons were finally appearing in Sabbath School classrooms around the world, the church—through its divisions and their unions, conferences, and publishing houses—had a huge multi-million dollar investment in the project.

In the churches, some teachers loved the material. It packaged everything needed to produce a lively weekly program of songs, Bible stories, and activities that all pointed to a single lesson. No longer were children just being talked at, they were actively involved in the Sabbath School program.

Other teachers missed the old way of doing things. They liked the Harry Anderson-style illustrations that had been the staple of past times. They wanted a stronger emphasis on Adventist doctrines. They didn't like the name GraceLink. And they complained loudly to the General Conference.

Johnsson says at first she took the brunt of people not wanting to adopt the new lessons. She felt the materials were so right for the kids, she didn't mind taking credit for its development and approach.

A major complaint centered on the illustrations. Those who disliked the whimsical style would often quote Ellen White's statement in *Publishing Ministry* (217) "The illustrations I could not possibly accept under any consideration. Some of them look as if prepared for a comic almanac."

Kim Justinen points out, however, that it is clear from the context that Mrs. White is referring to illustrations being prepared for her latest adult book. "The effort to somehow connect this to children's illustrations is a stretch."

As a frequent illustrator of children's materials, she notes "Words and pictures share the same principles when discussing what is appropriate for children. If an adult realism style is the only appropriate approach for children's pictures, then it follows that people who write or speak to children should only speak in the words they would use speaking to adults. Of course we would recognize that is a nonsensical stand to take. We all know that we speak differently to primary age children than we do to adults."

For her defense of stylized art, she turns to the Bible. "If there is something inherently wrong with any art that is not realistic, why did God direct Moses to have the hem of the priest's robes embroidered with scarlet, purple, and blue pomegranates? There are no blue pomegranates in nature. Or, why does the Bible state, "... the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing; and all the trees of the fields shall clap their hands." (Is. 55:12)

There was some talk of abandoning the curriculum. Instead, in 2005 a General Conference task force, headed by Vice President Ella Simmons, was put in place to review it and make recommendations. The editors for the curriculum began addressing the complaints. Because some had said that Adventist doctrines were not covered, Gary Swanson, the associate director of the

Sabbath School Department, went through every single lesson evaluating whether or not the twenty-eight fundamental beliefs were covered. At the conclusion of his review, he found that two of the beliefs were not covered adequately, so he set in motion a rewrite to add them.

Regarding the style of illustrations, differentiation between the age levels was put into place. The Junior lessons were illustrated with a realistic style, and some of those illustrations now hang in the lobby of the General Conference building. The complete list of changes was being phased in and were due to be completed by 2018.

With the election in 2015 of new leaders for the Sabbath School Department, however, all that changed. At the spring 2016 Advisory session for Children's Ministries, the department directors from around the world were informed that a totally new curriculum is in the works. Surprised, many expressed their appreciation for GraceLink and requested that it not be abandoned.

Their wishes were not shared with the ADCOM Committee that voted later that week to institute the new curriculum, beginning in 2018. (GraceLink materials for 2017 are already being printed.) An article immediately appeared in the *Adventist Review* announcing the change, and the comments on the *Review* web site following the article were split between the defenders of Adventist orthodoxy and defenders of GraceLink. However, the most critical comment was initially posted on the *Review* website, only to be taken down shortly thereafter. Within the General Conference building, the change created a ruckus among those who had worked to create and refine GraceLink.

GraceLink quarterlies will continue to be distributed while awaiting the new curriculum. In the meantime, those who are unhappy with GraceLink most likely will continue to turn to the "My Bible First" curriculum developed in 2000 by Dr. Phil and Sherry Mills. According to a story in *Inside AST* (Summer 2008), when a Buddhist family began attending their church in the Kansas-Nebraska Conference, Sherry realized that the children had unique needs not being met by the limited materials available for Sabbath School. After attending an ASI Convention, she decided to pursue as her ministry the task of producing materials about the Bible for children. She turned to her mother, Amy Sherrard, a retired missionary, for help. Amy had assisted in the development of a child evangelism program and written children's Bible stories in the past. For illustrations, Sherry turned to a childhood collection of old pictures

given to her by her grandmother and supplemented with pictures from collections of royalty-free illustrations. Other members of the family helped, and soon a three-year curriculum for primary age children was complete. These are the lessons that are pointed to as an example of what the new curriculum will be like.

Only a new logo was shared with the children's ministries directors—an open Bible in the background over which there is superimposed a large hand reaching down to meet a small hand reaching up. Whether there is time for the input from other Divisions that was so crucial to the development of GraceLink remains to be seen. The announced roll-out date of 2018 has already been pushed back to 2019.

Dale Galusha, president of Pacific Press, says "In today's world, churches and families want more options. Expecting one curriculum to meet the needs of all church members in a 19-million-member church—from PhDs to those in developing countries who have been church members for three months—is a stretch. Multiple curricula do not scare me, but if we are going to have them, it's better to have them under the umbrella of the church, in my opinion."

Division Children's Ministries Directors are not so sure about multiple curricula, given the costs and training involved.

Another question that has not been addressed publicly is what happens to all the GraceLink materials that have been developed over the years? They represent a multi-million-dollar investment that could have significant value in the world of Christian publishing where materials for children are a large market. Is that investment simply being discarded?

Historically, Adventists have invested heavily in lavish Biblical materials for children, as exemplified by the ten volume *The Bible Story* books by Arthur S. Maxwell. Those books served the church well, and became the backbone of the colporteur system of book distribution.

Will the next curriculum meet the high educational and illustrative standards of the past? How much will it cost? Will it take longer than three years to produce? And what will happen in 2020 when there is the chance that new leaders could be elected to the Sabbath School Department? ■

Bonnie Dwyer is editor of *Spectrum* magazine.

Interview: *The Story Behind the Bible Felts* | BY ALITA BYRD

Do you remember the felt board from your childhood Sabbath School? Betty Lukens has been creating felts to illustrate Bible stories for children for over sixty years, and still ships the sets all over the world. In this interview, she explains the genesis of the felt stories and how they have evolved over time.

Question: *Generations of kids have grown up learning Bible stories from felt characters placed on felt boards, made by Betty Lukens. How did the Betty Lukens felts come to be? Can you tell us the story? Did it all start with your mother?*

Answer: Yes, the original concept of creating a visual aid for teaching the Bible stories started with my mother, Marie Lukens, over sixty years ago. She was very much involved with teaching children about Jesus, and in teaching Sabbath School. One day she said to me, "I am going to create a set that illustrates every story in the Bible." And to make a long story short—we did.

There were days and weeks and months of creating artwork and writing the stories and cataloguing the pieces into a set. The set evolved over time as well. We now have beautiful colors and detail in the felt pieces



that have come with newer technology in our manufacturing process; the original felt sets were very plain-looking. In the end, we have one of the best visual-aid resources you can find for teaching Bible stories to children in a classroom or home setting. We have people that call in to buy a felt set and will tell us they remember using the felts at church when they were younger, and now they want them to teach their children.

Question: *The Through the Bible felt set contains 600 figures and objects and can be used to tell hundreds of Bible stories from the Old and New Testaments. How many of these sets do you sell around the world every year? How many have been sold overall?*

Answer: The set containing 600 figures is the complete Bible in felt, which tells 182 lessons from Genesis to Revelation. We sell around 1,000 sets each year, to locations all over the world. As far as how many sold overall, that number would be a guess—maybe 20,000 sets in total?

Question: *And so the Bible felts have changed over time?*

Answer: There was one major revision about twenty-five years ago where we updated the stories and improved and added some felt figures. But for the last twenty-five years, the set has seen very few changes. We have added some different scenes and backgrounds, but the original 600 pieces have remained virtually unchanged. So much planning and detail went into creating the set that it really hasn't needed much improvement as time has passed.

Question: *How did the images in the felts originate? Who drew them?*

Answer: We worked mainly with two different artists: Clyde Provansa and Jim Arribito.

Question: *Where are the felts manufactured?*



Answer: We do our manufacturing in California, not too far from where we started many years ago.

Question: *The felts are still sold on a “sheet” and must be cut out, correct? Isn’t that a time-consuming process for customers? Could this change at some point?*

Answer: Yes, we compare the cutting of felt to an act of love. The best way to create the bright and colorful colors is using a complex printing process. We have to use a large sheet of felt during that process—we cannot print the pieces individually. Pre-cutting the felt sets has been a topic of conversation in our office for many years now. We will hopefully find the right type of technology that will help us do this one day in the near future.

Question: *You also sell some non-Bible story felts, such as farm animals, dolls that can be dressed up, the planets, and other educational items. Who designed these felts? How long have they been available?*

Answer: All of these sets were designed and created by me, using different artists over time. We have been selling these other educational items for about 12–15 years now.

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Generations
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felt characters
placed on
felt boards,
made by
Betty Lukens.



Question: *And you also sell some felts that represent early Adventist history?*

Answer: Yes, there is a set for Ellen White, and we also have a set that teaches Daniel and Revelation.

Question: *Are most customers Adventist? Or are the felts just as popular among other Bible-believing Christians? Do you market to other churches?*

Answer: The stories, especially children's stories, from the Bible are popular among most Bible-believing Christian churches. We sell many sets to interdenominational churches, as well as Adventist churches.

Question: *Are felts becoming less popular as teachers and parents have greater access to other resources online, etc? Have sales decreased over time?*

Answer: Yes and no. We have seen technology change our culture here in America in a dramatic way in the last 10–20 years. You can now

obtain a copy of the Bible on your cell phone, which you carry around with you at all times.

There is definitely a group of people that view felts as old-fashioned and an old technology, but not as many as you would think. You can use a computer screen to show an animation of figures, but it is not a direct replacement for something you can hold and touch and feel. Children are still fascinated by felts, and they love to hold them and play with them.

Also, the internet has transformed the reach we now have. We are selling more sets internationally than ever before. Most people around the world have access to the internet, and therefore they can view our products online and order them in that format.

Question: *Where are the felts most popular?*

Answer: We sell felt Bible sets to all corners of the world. We still sell more sets in the United States than internationally, but there are many that ship to Europe, South America, Canada, Australia, and some into Asia.

Question: *What are your goals for the Betty Lukens felt company? What does the future hold?*

Answer: Only the Lord truly knows the answer to this question. I want to continue following his plan for my life. I hope to continue manufacturing materials that will teach children about Jesus—the same mission my mother had over sixty years ago. She was a great woman, and the Lord did an amazing work through her that I want to continue.

Question: *I understand you are semi-retired. What are your plans?*

Answer: You are never retired if you are doing the Lord's work. I am spending a little less time in the office these days, but I want to focus more on missions—working with people to get these felt sets into the hands of people around the world in remote areas. I want to make sure they reach people who have the desire to teach children about Jesus, but not the resources. ■



Alita Byrd is a member of the *Spectrum* web team, and is a freelance writer from Dublin, Ireland.



**Children
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and play
with them.**



House church folks share a meal together in our kitchen.



CHURCH AND HOME

House Church | BY SOMER GEORGE



**I haven't
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On Sabbath morning I'm up early, baking oatmeal, straightening couch pillows, lighting candles. I haven't always looked forward to church, but now it anchors my week. I know that at 11:00, the door will open and the church will pour into our home, bringing food and laughter and maybe some tears. And while I might feel some stress about the crumbs on the floor or the well-worn furniture, I know that once the people come, my mind will be filled with things far more important.

The first to arrive are three young women, ages seventeen to twenty-three. I've known one of them since she was born, connecting off and on over the years. She's had her share of struggles—at home, at church, and most recently in her family's reaction to her having a girlfriend. About a year ago she tentatively began attending our house church, questioning God while des-

perately wanting to find Him. And she stayed, bringing her girlfriend with her.

Her girlfriend grew up in a non-religious home and knew little of Jesus, the Bible, or the ideas that we so often talk of. With her caring and open heart, especially for our children, we all fell a little bit in love with her. And she stayed, bringing her younger sister with her.

Her sister, a senior in high school, showed up: curious, bold, and full of life. She came that first time, that forty-five-minute drive to be here, and then again the next week and the next. She had found a home. And she stayed.

A young couple arrives, carrying a griddle and pancake mix. They had begun feeling disillusioned with church and often found other ways to fill their Sabbaths. Yet they longed for a community, a safe place to explore and to share and to grow. After visiting off and on for several months, they decided to make this their church,

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and then began to open up their own home for our gatherings. And they stayed.

The door opens again. It's my brother and his children. He is one of the co-leaders, skilled in leading music, or Bible studies, or children's stories, or just about anything else our untraditional congregation requires. He and his wife usually host our church at their home. Their quiet calming presence and welcoming home has enveloped us again and again. Another couple, also core

members. People sit on couches, chairs, pillows, and stools. It is far from polished, but certainly feels sincere. Guitars are passed around. Someone plays the piano. We even have a ukulele and a bongo drum.

Every week, one of the young women requests the song "Oceans." And the words are our prayer, my prayer: *"Spirit lead me where my trust is without borders, let me walk upon the waters, wherever You would call me. Take me deeper than my feet could ever*



A typical Sabbath at house church. Sometimes the grownups are out-numbered by kids! We all enjoy singing together.



Somer's mom and a close friend practice foot washing at the river during a network gathering.

members from the beginning, burst in the door, kids in tow. She has provided inspiration and depth both to our activities and our conversations, encouraging us to find a real God in the everyday moments of life. He brings a quiet observance, with bursts of enthusiasm and insight about God, as well as his skill on the ukulele.

Those staying in our home wander upstairs: my in-laws visiting for a week, and our adopted daughter and her husband and kids who have moved here to start a new life after years of drug addiction. Being part of house church has become part of their begin-again life. My mom comes today also. Her grandchildren run to her, vying for a spot on her lap. And everyone brings food.

Soon the counter is full, and someone is flipping pancakes on the griddle while we sit down and begin to sing. It's a mix of songs—old hymns, praise songs, contemporary Christian, children's songs complete with hand

wander. And my faith will be made stronger, in the presence of my Savior." The words wash over us all. And then we laugh as we try to figure out the next part of the song. This happens every week, and yet there is something comfortable and familiar about its imperfection. We are nothing here, if not imperfect.

Finally, we wind down the singing and prayer, aware that we started later than planned and people are getting hungry. Often we spend this early part of the day sharing our weeks and our walks with God, and study the Bible in the afternoon, but our leader for this month (we rotate responsibilities) has decided to mix it up a bit. She has each of the children read some verses from Matthew, and asks them questions about it. It is intended as a story for the children, but the adults can't help but jump in and discuss it too. There is energy in the room as we read and ponder together. And

though we have to cut the conversation short for the sake of time (and restless kids), we take a few moments to apply it to our lives. We are all left with the awareness that there is much more still to study and understand. Most of us are used to sitting with the complicated—with the questions. We take prayer requests and pray for each other's concerns, thanking God for His presence and for the invitation He extends to us all. And then it is time to eat.

doubts we all needed it to continue, so we pressed on, believing that God was in our midst and leading somewhere.

For years my friends and I had longed for a deeper spiritual experience, similar to one many of us had years before when we worked together at a summer day-camp. We wanted to go deeper with God and one another. We wanted to grow and learn. We were tired of the status quo, hollow traditions, and the cer-



Playing Bible charades. My daughter, Eden, rides the donkey during the story of Jesus' Triumphal Entry while others wave branches and shout "Hosanna."

Today is one of our favorites, breakfast foods. There are pancakes and waffles with a wide array of toppings, baked oatmeal, apple crisp, and scrambled eggs. The kitchen and living room space are small, but everyone manages to get their food and find a place to sit or stand. The noise level is high; someone is playing the piano, people are talking, children running in and out. I stop for a moment and just watch. I want to take a picture to capture this. This chaos. This joy. This community. I think back to last week, one of my rare visits to "regular church." While I know that many find what they need there, I am acutely aware that without house church, I don't know where I would be. This is life-giving and full and I am infinitely grateful for it.

That's not to say that it has been easy. This church community did not happen overnight, and there have been times when we all doubted if it would continue. And yet even in our

tainty with which questions were answered and judgements were made.

Some of us started Bible studies and taught Sabbath School. We joined small groups and led song service. We got involved in outreach projects and VBS, but something still seemed to be missing. With young children and busy lives it was hard to maintain something when the heart just wasn't in it. Plus, our world views were shifting; we were questioning things we had always been told, and sometimes it felt that there just wasn't room for that in our churches.

Despite our struggles, we were not ready to leave the church either. Each of us valued the connection we had to the worldwide church and the community that church provided, as well as the many shared values and beliefs. And thus we each struggled with this personal dichotomy.

When the opportunity came for a friend from seminary to come to our area and facilitate a

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There is energy in the room as we read and ponder together.

house church plant, we were ready to jump in. There were others interested as well. Everyone had their own reasons, but for our group it was twofold—we knew there were so many around us that wouldn't show up to a church building, but were in desperate need of community and a spiritual home; we also wanted that experience for ourselves and our families as well.

After some meetings, discussions, training, and a weekend retreat, four house churches were

enjoyed gathering as a church now and no one wanted to miss out. We were there because we wanted to be, not out of obligation, and for some of us, this was an important change.

In those early months and through the first year, there were many ups and downs. Our group had the advantage of having been friends before and shared similarities in our preferences and styles. Other house churches struggled more to blend personalities and approaches, and while



born. Each had four to six adult core members who divided responsibilities for hosting, leading, and facilitating the church experience. We began with an “incubation period” where we met once a month, and then twice a month, as we transitioned out of our traditional churches, and into this new way of being church. We met together as a team to talk about how to structure our time together. After several months of preparation, trial and error, and many conversations and prayers, we settled into a tentative routine, which continued to evolve.

Our previous churches were not happy to see us leave, although some individuals seemed to understand the value of this venture. At times we felt that people were looking negatively at us, as if we had “left the church.” Yet for some of us this was the very thing that kept us from “leaving” the church.

One thing was clear to us all; we genuinely

new ones were birthed, others decided to return to a traditional church setting.

Our group plugged away. We met outside and inside, in homes and at parks. We tried studying a specific book, or a topic. We focused on the children, and we let them go play. We sang a lot some weeks and hardly at all on others. Occasionally there were interpersonal challenges that had to be worked through, other times we wondered what the point was of all this.

Sometimes there were six of us, other times fifteen or twenty. One member began an outreach to a local low-income apartment complex, and we were energized as we began to meet new people. And we were all tired. Sometimes we missed going to church and sitting in a pew without having to do anything. Other times we felt blessed beyond what we would have imagined and relieved to have a

safe place to share our experiences with one another and grow in our spiritual walk. Sometimes we felt awed with the work that God was doing, and other times felt discouraged that nothing seemed to be happening.

We asked ourselves the hard questions, “Why are we doing this? Are we doing enough? How can we disciple people? How do we get people to come? Do we even want more people to come? Do we need to be more structured? Less

come together and worship. This gathering is often more traditional, with song service, a children’s story and a sermon. Then we share a meal and mingle together with others who are also committed to doing church in a new way, albeit more or less traditional than our own. These meetings each have a flavor of their own, often differing significantly from one month to the next.

Back at our own little gathering this week, we reconvene after lunch, sitting around the



Children and adults share in communion together during a network gathering at a nearby camp.

structured? Are the kids getting what they need? Should we be teaching doctrine or is it OK to just focus on inductive Bible study and discussion?” The questions really were endless, and of course they continue still with new ones arising.

The relationship with the conference and the local church was complicated at the beginning. It began with the local church paying part of the house church pastor’s salary, but eventually it made sense for him to be employed as a third pastor at the local church, with the task of “overseeing” outreach, which includes house churches. We are still members of our local church and are encouraged to pay our tithe there.

We have thus far had a great deal of autonomy and space to make decisions and choices about how we operate. Every other month our house church pastor organizes a Sabbath “network” gathering, where all the house churches (now five, including one Spanish-speaking, and one Eritrean)

living room, waiting for our afternoon time to begin. Our facilitator is sitting on a kitchen chair, in jeans and sweater, several notebooks on her lap. She begins to talk, and we all grow silent. She tells us that she has been thinking this week about the fact that everyone has a story, but that she had begun to feel angry at God because she didn’t like hers very much. It wasn’t a straightforward conversion story like we often hear in church, but instead a twisting, turning, often painful, questioning type of story. A story where God does show up, but not in the way He is expected, and sometimes in ways that feel barely enough.

With courage, and the belief that stories are worth sharing and that we can see God when we look closely enough, she began to speak: a difficult and frightening childhood, a secret escape where God used an unlikely person to save her and her family. A slow, agonizing loss of her sis-

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ter, someone we all knew and loved. Where was God in those last excruciating moments? She wove her story of suffering with a story of redemption. It was in the little moments that God showed up with reminders of his love.

As she spoke of kneeling in front of a wooden cross and being reminded that He too suffered, one of the girls got up and quietly left the room, tears streaming down her face. The story continued, and our brave speaker encouraged each per-

gradually finding God; or He was finding her, and she was overwhelmed by His love and kindness. She offered to share her story sometime, though it might be short.

I found myself thinking, *this is church*. God is here with us in a way that we cannot understand. I find myself wanting to hold on, to grasp it, but if anything, I've learned that God cannot be grasped, not in that way. He can be touched, but the minute we try to hold on to Him, to expect

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Our first communion together as a house church. Isaac is reading about the first supper from a Bible book.

son to consider their own story with God. Where did they find God, how did He find them? When was He there, and how? Were there times that He seemed not to be there? What was that like?

People began to share their experiences of encouragements from God, signs of His presence and His personal care. There was a reverence in the room, as if something sacred had just been spoken. People wiped away tears. Someone volunteered to share next week. There was talk of the way that God moves outside of the boxes we try to keep Him in; how we are grateful and sometimes a little scared at how much bigger He is than we are. He is not as contained and simple as we might sometimes wish.

Then on to more laughter and sharing. The one who left was found by her sister and they returned together. Her heart had been touched. She had not known Him before, but she was

something of Him in a particular way, He exceeds that and surprises us.

So in this experiment that we call “church,” we move forward, trusting when we can, doubting at times, but holding on for the ride, not sure where He is taking us, but mostly certain that we want to go. Knowing that He means us no harm, and will most likely take us somewhere uncomfortable and beautiful, and better than any of us could imagine for ourselves. ■

Somer George lives on a farm with her husband and two young children in New Market, Virginia. She works with foster and adoptive families, providing parent-child evaluations and teaching parents how to form healthy



attachment relationships with their children. She is co-leader of a house church, which is part of a larger network in the Potomac Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

The Adventist Civil Rights Movement: *A Prophetic Voice for LGBT Adventists* | BY JUAN O. PERLA

In the 1980s, an Adventist pastor reneged on his promise to marry an interracial couple.¹ His decision enraged the couple's Canadian community. News reports of the incident reached E.E. Cleveland, a black Adventist pastor and civil rights leader in the United States. He shared the story with Neal Wilson Jr., then president of the Adventist Church's General Conference (GC). Wilson called a meeting of the GC's Human Relations committee, and the group voted to revoke the credentials of any pastor who refused to marry interracial couples. The GC's action that day did not come easily. Rather, through sustained activism and prayer, black Adventists involved in the civil rights movement won an important victory over racism.

Today, the Adventist civil rights movement delivers a prophetic message of hope to LGBT Adventists fighting homophobia.² Like racial minorities, LGBT persons have also been the object of scorn and oppression. Civil rights leader Coretta Scott King aptly noted, "Homophobia is like racism ... it seeks to dehumanize a large group of people, to deny their humanity, their dignity and personhood."³ Unlike race, however, sexual orientation is not always apparent. While some gay Adventists speak up for their dignity, many others experience the cruel effects of homophobia in isolation, out of fear of discovery and rejection.⁴ For this reason, the Adventist struggle for LGBT equality has been less public than the Adventist

civil rights movement.

Nevertheless, as was the case with racial minorities and interracial marriage, Adventists are learning to accept LGBT equality and same-sex marriage as well. Already, twenty-five percent of Adventists in the United States favor same-sex marriage and, of the sixty-four percent that oppose it, only twenty-one percent are between eighteen and twenty-nine years old.⁵ Adventist ethicist Gary Chartier affirmed this trend in *The Future of Adventism*. He explains that the Christian community blurs "divisions based on ethnicity, nationality, and class, and increasingly also divisions based on gender and sexual orientation" because "the church, rooted in the inclusive practice of Jesus, is an institutional rejection of the destructive business of boundary-making."⁶ The Adventist civil rights movement is a stark reminder of that important truth. The sooner Adventist leaders embrace that reality with respect to LGBT members, the safer and more welcoming the Church will become for all people of faith.

Racism in the Adventist Church and the Adventist Civil Rights Movement

Some Christians in the nineteenth century defended black slavery on biblical grounds;⁷ early Adventists, however, opposed it as "the darkest and most damning sin." Church visionary Ellen White even encouraged Adventists to *disobey* the Fugitive Slave Law, a federal



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mandate that required returning runaway slaves to their masters.

Despite White's opposition to slavery, her earlier writings incorporate pseudo-scientific beliefs about race popular in her time, such as claims that “certain races of men” were the product of mixing between humans and animals (known as “amalgamation” or the “polygenesis theory”).⁹ Such statements stirred controversy among early Adventists “with critics charging that she believed Negroes were not human and defenders insisting she meant no such thing.”¹⁰ Eventually she distanced herself from such views and declared: “Birth ... or color cannot elevate or degrade men.”¹¹

When it came to race relations, White also expressed some ambivalence. After the American Civil War, she rejected segregation and lamented that “sin rests upon us as a church” when prejudice got in the way of building an inclusive faith community.¹² As Adventism expanded into the South, however, missionaries confronted violent prejudice from southerners who disliked the church's Sabbath beliefs and integrationist values.¹³ Motivated by safety concerns and a desire to evangelize white and black southerners in spite of the racial divide, White compromised her integrationist values and endorsed segregation “until the Lord shows us a better way.”¹⁴

Against that background, many Adventist institutions in the United States barred black members on account of their race well into the twentieth century.¹⁵ As late as the 1960s, some Adventist pastors justified these exclusionary practices with dated interpretations of biblical texts such as the Curse of Ham, suggesting that Ham's son Canaan turned black after Noah cursed him to be a servant to his brothers.¹⁶ According to these pastors, black Adventists could not hold positions of authority or even enter certain facilities because, as descendants of Canaan, blacks were also cursed.¹⁷ Other church leaders used more subtle Adventist teachings to discourage political activism,

effectively endorsing segregation.¹⁸

The number of black Adventists grew sharply in the twentieth century, putting pressure on the denomination to confront its prejudices. The North American church initially accommodated the growth in black membership by creating separate institutions for African Americans.¹⁹ But this approach proved unsustainable as black members enlisted in the civil rights movement of the 1960s and demanded equal treatment in the church as well.²⁰ Black students and their friends amplified the demands for change through public protests across Adventist colleges.²¹ Black Adventist theologians supported these efforts through liberationist interpretations of the Bible,²² and a renewed emphasis on Ellen White's integrationist commitments.²³

Other black Adventists, such as Frank Hale Jr., formed the Laymen's Leadership Conference (LLC) with the purpose of ending racial discrimination in the Adventist Church. In 1961, the LLC adopted a platform with several recommendations urging the GC to re-articulate Adventism's position on race “in light of social changes,” to require diversity training for pastors, and to remove racial barriers to church membership, employment and access.²⁴ Five days after receiving these proposals, the GC issued a statement rejecting segregation as incompatible with Christian teaching.²⁵ Still, the church changed little in practice.

The GC finally resolved to desegregate four years later, in 1965, at the apex of the civil rights movement.²⁶ The 1965 resolution did not occur in a vacuum. Rather, it followed two important events: the landmark 1954 decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* outlawing racial segregation in schools, and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 banning racial discrimination in public facilities.

Relying on these new anti-discrimination laws, black members of the church's South Central Conference (SCC) sued the denomination because many Adventist academies continued to deny admission to black stu-

dents.²⁷ United States Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach joined the lawsuit on the side of black Adventists, and pressured the GC to end segregation or risk losing federal government subsidies such as tax exemptions. The GC gave in to these demands and, shortly thereafter, adopted the 1965 resolution.

Charles Dudley, a black civil rights activist and SCC leader, chided the GC for letting the federal government play the role of the Good Samaritan.²⁸ In Dudley's view, the church should have acted out of its own initiative rather than legal compulsion.

Two years later, in 1967, the United States Supreme Court struck down state laws prohibiting interracial marriage in *Loving v. Virginia*. The following year, the church's North American Division (NAD) resisted these changes and issued guidelines advising against interracial marriage on religious grounds.²⁹ Indeed, the Adventist Church had consistently opposed interracial marriage for more than a century.³⁰ The NAD's guidelines invoked the counsel of Ellen White who, at one time, directed that "there should be no intermarriage between the white and the colored race."³¹ The GC published the NAD's guidelines in the *Church Manual* in 1977, and did not remove them until fifteen years later in 1992.³² In that context, the story of the Adventist pastor who refused to marry an interracial couple as late as the 1980s is less surprising.

Although efforts to combat racism continue, the GC formally shifted the tone on race relations in 1985 when, at the insistence of black Adventists, it condemned racism as "one of the odious evils of our day."³³ That statement also declared that "Scripture plainly teaches that every person was created in the image of God" and "made of one blood," refuting any lingering doubts about the Curse of Ham and the polygenesis theory in Adventism. Here, the prophetic voice of the Adventist civil rights movement sounds all the louder for LGBT Adventists today.

Homophobia in the Adventist Church and the Adventist Struggle for LGBT Equality

Societies have treated same-sex love differently over time. While some cultures have accommodated same-sex relationships, others have criminalized them and even enforced castration or death as the punishment.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, psychologists in Europe started to study same-sex love and labeled it "homosexuality" and "inversion."³⁴ Some of them followed the so-called "degeneracy theory" prevalent at that time, and cast homosexuals, along with "Jews, Negroes, rapists, murderers and incest abusers as the most dangerous of social 'degenerates.'"³⁵ Proponents of degeneracy theory feared that biological and moral degeneration in certain groups of people threatened the established social order. Other psychologists, however, found homosexuality to be an innate, morally-neutral characteristic and, on that basis, advocated for the decriminalization of consensual homosexual acts.³⁶

Early Adventists stayed aloof from these developments in the study of homosexuality, in contrast to issues of race, which remained an important social concern in the United States. Ellen White, for example, wrote nothing directly on homosexuality or inversion.³⁷ By contrast, the degeneracy theory influenced Adventist teachings on health and sexuality generally.³⁸ For instance, White attributed the "sad degeneracy" of the human race to a failure to observe the "laws of health," such as eating meat, drinking stimulants or indulging in sex.³⁹ Her health reform protégé, Dr. John Harvey Kellogg, took those concerns further and dedicated his life's work to combatting "race degeneration" by promoting dietary cures, sexual abstinence, and selective breeding (known as "eugenics").⁴⁰

Ultimately, Ellen White and the Adventist Church rejected many of Kellogg's theories, but his medical views still reverberate in certain Adventist circles.⁴¹ An extreme example of the degeneracy theory's effects on Adventism occurred in Germany in the years leading up

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to World War II, when some Adventist church officials there endorsed the Nazi's efforts to sterilize "all physical and mental degenerates"⁴² and supported "the extermination of ... Homosexuals, Jews and people with physical infirmities."⁴³

In the shadow of that uneasy past, the Adventist Church has been engaged for decades in an ideological debate over the proper medical and theological understanding of homosexuality and same-sex relationships. The first explicit reference to homosexuality in Adventist literature appeared in 1951.⁴⁴ The author warned that homosexual acts often involve an older man and an "innocent victim," invoking the sorts of anxieties promoted by the degeneracy theory. Two years later, the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* lent biblical support to this negative view of homosexuality by repeating unchallenged interpretations of biblical verses that seem to condemn certain homosexual acts.⁴⁵

Today, Adventism is still dusting off traces of the degeneracy theory, which in retrospect sounds more like nineteenth century folktales about "certain races of men" than well-researched science.⁴⁶ For instance, the church's Fundamental Beliefs presents homosexuality as a "disorder" and "homosexual practice" as a "dis-

ortion of the image of God."⁴⁷ And the GC's official statement on same-sex unions indiscriminately characterizes all same-sex relations as a "lowering of the heavenly ideal" and a "manifestation of the disturbance and brokenness in human inclinations and relations."⁴⁸ The authors of these documents cite biblical verses such as the story of Sodom and Gomorrah to support their claims, without considering the real-life impact of their views on faithful gay Adventists. Such uncritical and offensive use of the Bible harkens back to a time when some pastors used the Curse of Ham to brand blacks as less worthy than whites.

The GC's "official statements" also obscure a rich history of LGBT activism and dialogue in the Adventist Church. Much as the civil rights movement of the 1960s precipitated desegregation in Adventist institutions, the gay liberation movement triggered a more robust discussion on homosexuality as well. After the 1969 Stonewall riots launched the United States, and much of the western world, into a debate over LGBT rights, Adventist commentators wrote a flurry of articles on homosexuality throughout the 1970s. For the most part, these authors believed something was terribly wrong with the way homosexuals were abused in society, yet those same authors failed to consider how their

religious views might be fanning the flames of fear and prejudice.⁴⁹ Instead, they fell back on the soon-to-be-discredited medical notion that homosexuality was an illness that could be “cured” through therapy and prayer.⁵⁰ In response, some gay Adventists wrote letters to the editors of these publications and offered their positive stories, providing the earliest murmurings of an Adventist gay voice.⁵¹

Towards the end of the 1970s, a gay Adventist ran a magazine ad inquiring whether other gay Adventists existed.⁵² To his surprise, several individuals responded and they started to meet in small groups across the United States and abroad. Eventually, they formed Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International (“SDA Kinship”) to support gay Adventists and their families.⁵³ At last, gay Adventists had succeeded in creating a safe space to worship and socialize without reprisal, producing *de facto* segregation between openly gay Adventists and unwelcoming congregations. The segregation was not a problem for Adventists who feared gay members. As an Adventist layman exclaimed at the time: “Let them (homosexuals) worship somewhere else. We don’t want them here.”⁵⁴

Like the LLC, which had been established during the civil rights movement to end racial discrimination in the Adventist Church, SDA Kinship desired to rid the church of its prejudice towards gay members as well. In 1980, SDA Kinship invited church leaders to speak at its first spiritual retreat. Three theology professors from Andrews University and two pastors attended the gathering with the GC’s approval. The guest speakers presented papers on homosexuality and faith, and concluded that a “simplistic” reading of the few references to homosexual acts in the Bible was insufficient to discern God’s will for gay Adventists today.⁵⁵ After listening to the stories of the retreat’s gay attendees, the guest speakers returned to the GC with a three-page written report (“SDA Kinship report”).

Similar to the LLC platform presented to the GC in 1961, the SDA Kinship report offered

specific recommendations, including proposals for the church to study the question of homosexuality holistically and to publish balanced and responsible articles on issues of concern to gay Adventists.⁵⁶ The report also suggested that pastors, teachers and administrators undergo sensitivity training to help them minister to gay members under their care. And it asked the church to create closer ties to SDA Kinship and to become more inclusive of gay members. The GC initially accepted most of these proposals, but then quickly and quietly retracted its approval under pressure from right-wing conservatives who began questioning the denomination’s *bona fide* Christian credentials.⁵⁷ Fear and prejudice had reared its ugly head once again. In short, to appease conservative members uncomfortable with change, gay Adventists like black Adventists would have to wait for equality “until the Lord shows us a better way.”

The story of gay Adventists did not end, however, with the GC’s dismissal of the SDA Kinship report. Just as the civil rights movement improved the situation of black Adventists, gay Adventists found cause for hope as the gay rights movement gained momentum in the 1990s. By 2003, the wind started to shift in favor of LGBT equality in the United States when the Supreme Court decriminalized consensual homosexual acts in *Lawrence v. Texas*. Around the same time, certain states started to recognize same-sex unions. Similar developments around the world prompted negative responses from church officials, although Adventist leaders in some countries, such as the Netherlands, remained relatively undisturbed.⁵⁸

The most public display of support for gay Adventists came in 2008, in the form of Adventist opposition to Proposition 8, a highly contested California law prohibiting same-sex marriage. In a campaign called “Adventists against Prop 8,” more than 1,300 Adventists and their friends expressed their disapproval of the law by signing a public petition.⁵⁹ Filmmakers contributed to these efforts with a trailblazing documentary, “Seventh-Gay Adventists,”

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which chronicled the story of three Adventist same-sex couples making sense of their faith and sexuality in a church that was often hostile towards them.⁶⁰

Like Adventist theologians who offered liberationist interpretations of scripture to support desegregation, Adventist scholars began to publish theological perspectives that prioritized the wellbeing of gay Adventists over dogma.⁶¹ These scholars understood that faithful gay Adventists were not seeking to undermine God's authority. On the contrary, gay Adventists desiring the same covenantal relationship available to heterosexual couples were merely affirming the church's teaching on marriage and family. Still, church officials seemed unwilling to engage in open dialogue.

The church's most blatant act of exclusion occurred in March 2014, when, in response to gains by LGBT activists around the world, the GC sponsored an international conference in South Africa "to gain a greater understanding of the issues surrounding alternative sexualities."⁶² Conference organizers made it "clear that they intend[ed] no redefinition of the Church's historic opposition to all sexual expression other than heterosexual marriage."⁶³ And they ensured such a result by inviting only gay Adventists that claimed to be "redeemed out of homosexual behavior,"⁶⁴ while excluding SDA Kinship and other LGBT Adventists who wished to share their positive stories.⁶⁵ The irony of hosting the conference in Africa did not escape commentators in and outside the church. They pointed out that, two years earlier, Adventist pastor Blasius Ruguri of the church's East Central Africa Division had publicly supported Uganda's anti-gay legislation that, in some cases, would have sentenced homosexuals to death.⁶⁶

Even more unnerving is the church's silence on homophobia, which echoes the church's prolonged silence on racism. In response to Ruguri's political statements, the GC issued a press release, which stated: "The Seventh-day Adventist Church subscribes to the biblical

teaching that the practice of homosexuality is condemned by God and is forbidden. At the same time the church is strongly opposed to acts of violence, hatred and discrimination against a person because of his or her sexual orientation."⁶⁷ This statement failed to appreciate that for many LGBT Adventists the church's one-sided, disparaging view of same-sex relationships feels like an act of "violence, hatred and discrimination," designed arbitrarily to dehumanize an entire class of people. Black Adventist lawyer and religious liberty scholar, Jason Hines, challenged the church's "milquetoast" response: "How can we expect a pastor in Africa to care about the rights of homosexuals when the Adventist rhetoric in America is at the very least tinged (and more often saturated) with homophobia and hate?"⁶⁸

A sea change took place when countries around the world started legalizing same-sex marriage. In 2015, in *Obergefell v. Hodges*, the United States Supreme Court upheld the constitutional right of same-sex couples to marry. Repeating its reactionary response against interracial marriage after the *Loving v. Virginia* decision in 1968, the NAD again issued guidelines, this time opposing same-sex marriage on religious grounds.⁶⁹ The Andrews University Seminary also issued a white paper condemning "homosexual practice," while conceding that an innate homosexual orientation is not morally culpable.⁷⁰ An Adventist satirist wittily captured the tension in that position with a blog post titled, "Adventist church cool with gay people as long as they're not gay about it."⁷¹

Despite the church's resistance to LGBT equality, a new wave of Adventist students is breathing life into the type of activism last seen at the height of the Adventist civil rights movement. One example is Andrews University graduate Eliel Cruz, a self-identified bisexual Adventist and news commentator, who founded the school's unofficial gay-straight alliance. As a student, Cruz led a widely publicized social media fundraising campaign to benefit LGBT homeless youth in Chicago, after school admin-

istrators rejected his club's plans to raise the funds through a bake sale on campus.⁷² Other students like Cruz are starting gay-straight alliances across Adventist colleges in the hopes of making these campuses more welcoming of LGBT persons.⁷³

With time, gay Adventists at all levels of the church will feel more comfortable coming out of the shadows. Same-sex couples that marry outside the church will start bringing their children to Sabbath school and sending them to Adventist academies and colleges. Like the SCC's black members in the 1960s, gay Adventists will be able to hold their faith community legally accountable for any discriminatory responses.⁷⁴ And, as was the case with segregation, the church will find itself once again in a losing battle against social change unless it learns from its past mistakes. Ellen White's counsel on this point is compelling: "We have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us ... in our past."⁷⁵

Perhaps this time the GC will not wait for the government to act as the Good Samaritan to point out that "sin rests upon us as a church" when it fails to create an inclusive faith community, and instead heed the prophetic message of its troubled history with racism. Regardless of the church's current stance on homosexuality, an easy place to start is to condemn homophobia, like racism, as "one of the odious evils of our day." Starting from this premise, the church's position on homosexuality and same-sex marriage should look very different. ■

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71. See *BarelyAdventist*, <http://barelyadventist.com/cool-with-gay-people-as-long-as-theyre-not-gay-about-it/>. (Accessed May 8, 2016)

72. Jared Wright, “Andrews University LGBT Bake Sale Dustup Reveals Adventism’s Issues with Homosexuality,” *Spectrum*, (Mar. 10, 2015), <http://spectrummagazine.org/article/2015/03/10/andrews-university-lgbt-bake-sale-dustup-reveals-adventisms-issues-homosexuality>. (Accessed May 8, 2016)

73. *Intercollegiate Adventist GSA Coalition*, <http://www.iagcadventist.com/>. (Accessed May 8, 2016)

74. See, e.g., Lawson, *Christianity and Homosexuality*, 3:53–54, note 4

75. Ellen White, *Life Sketches*, 196.

**Towards the end
of the 1970s,
a gay Adventist
ran a magazine
ad inquiring
whether other
gay Adventists
existed.**

Elmshaven Bedroom



E. G. WHITE AT HOME

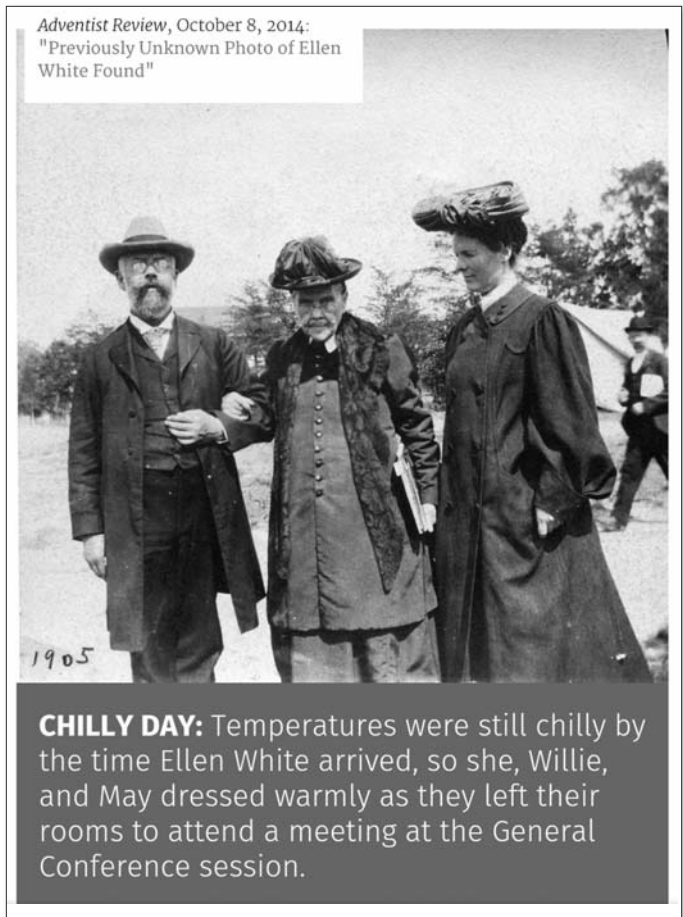
Secrets of Love and Life in the E. G. White House:

Men—Lost and Found | BY GILBERT M. VALENTINE

The recent discovery and publication of a previously unknown photograph of Ellen White at age seventy-eight should not be passed over too quickly. The un-posed snapshot picture shows Ellen, on the arm of her fifty-year-old son, W. C. White. She is wearing a flowered scarf around her neck and a rather stylish Edwardian hat. The image, captured apparently at the General Conference session in 1905, significantly enriches and enlarges our perception of Ellen White as a person.¹

At age twelve, at the time of her baptism, Ellen had wrestled with what it meant to be a fully committed Christian and had resolved that even if her friends did not, she would take a stand against fancy hats and dresses that might be considered vain. Even if her fellow believers were not concerned, she knew, she later wrote, "I must be plain in my dress."² This was a kind of a testing truth for the validity of her Christian experience. With her father being a successful milliner one could imagine that discussions of hats and fashion in her home would have been a common topic of conversation. Was this why the question of dress was her "besetting sin," and one she felt she had to overcome? Somehow the image of the prophet in a stylish hat and wearing pince-nez in her old age helps to mellow the image of austerity of the plain-dress image of her earlier years, and introduces us to a more human Ellen White. But who is the other woman in the picture, wearing an even more stylish hat?

Accompanying Ellen White in the newly discovered photograph is Ellen White's daughter-in-law, W. C. White's distinguished looking Australian wife, May White (nee Lacey).³ A decade before the shutter clicked, Willie had persuaded May, a woman half his age, to become his second wife. The story of Willie's proposal and marriage to May in the mid-1890s is worth exploring because, like the new photograph, it also helps provide a warmer, more



human picture of Ellen White than is often portrayed when emphasis is placed only on her prophetic preaching and leadership roles. How did May Lacey come to be Ellen White's daughter-in-law?

A more complete understanding of this fascinating love story becomes possible when contemporary documents from the White family collection in the 1890s are rounded out with little-known oral history accounts that give May Lacey's own perspective.⁴ Hearing May's own take on the event that changed her life, and her perspective on her mother-in-law, adds important dimensions to our picture of this important church founder. Valuable clues from May's

older brother, Herbert Lacey, also draw back the curtain on a little known romantic episode for Ellen White herself in her later years.

A Wedding on the Run

Contemporary sources tell us that Willie's wedding to May Lacey took place in a quiet, matter-of-fact way, conducted with "the greatest solemnity" on a late Thursday afternoon, May 9, 1895. The vows were exchanged in Father Lacey's spacious home in Glenorchy, just outside Hobart, the capital city of Tasmania (Australia). It was not a flashy affair, nor a romantic event. Ellen White observed that there had been "no sentimentalism," in this courtship and marriage.⁵ That was not the White's style. There had been, in fact, hardly any courtship at all. For May, undertaking the marriage was much more a carefully considered duty, the taking on of heavy new responsibility, than a decision based on any flight of passion. And the event was squeezed in between speaking appointments.

Ten family members attended the simple service, along with eleven invited friends of the bride. Because no Adventist ministers were legally licensed in Tasmania to conduct weddings, a Methodist minister acquaintance, Mr Palfryman, performed the service. Willie gave his wife a gold wedding ring during the service because May's father, "a gentlemanly English type," had insisted on it.⁶ It was the local custom and Father Lacey, a very proper, retired British Police Commissioner, did not at all like the idea of his attractive twenty-one-year-old daughter traveling around the country in the company of a forty-year old American man without at least some outward sign that they were husband and wife.⁷ Ellen White, normally opposed to wedding bands as extravagant, understood the circumstances that necessitated the ring and gladly agreed to offer the closing prayer for the service.

According to Ellen White, "an attractive wedding supper" in the crowded dining room followed the service. But by 6.00 p.m., with all the friends departed, the groom himself headed out the door to a church committee meeting, while

the bride was left to finish packing suitcases. By 8.30 p.m., the couple were catching the train, with mother-in-law in tow, for a slow overnight trip North to Launceston, Tasmania. Willie slept on the carriage floor between his mother and May, who stretched out on the seats. But at least, for this occasion, the compartment was first class.⁸ Not until Friday night did the new couple get to spend their first time alone together. At Launceston, the groom and his mother spoke at Sabbath meetings and again on Sunday, and then they all caught the overnight steamer at Devonport for Melbourne. May slept in a cabin with her new husband's mother, and the crossing was so rough they were both violently sick. The next two weeks were spent in committee meetings and speaking appointments in Melbourne. The party of three then headed back up to Ellen White's home in Granville, Sydney, where the new bride would meet for the first time her two newly acquired step-children, Ella, aged thirteen, and Mabel, aged eight. This was not what we today would call a honeymoon.

May's two new step-daughters had very recently arrived in Sydney from the United States where, for the last three-and-a-half years, they had been staying in their father's home in Battle Creek under the care of family friend Mary Mortenson. Their biological mother, Mary (nee Kelsey) had died of tuberculosis in June 1890, at age thirty-three. The family was bereft. In late 1891, the girls' widowed father accompanied their grandmother out to Australia for a sojourn that originally was intended to last only a short time. But duty seemed to call them to stay on and on—indefinitely—and by 1895 Willie was missing his daughters.

May Lacy had also lost her mother to tuberculosis, in 1891. Seventeen years of age at the time, she knew what it was to lose a beloved parent and could sympathize with the children. This was clearly a significant part of the calculation that figured in her decision to marry Willie.⁹ But what other reasons were there for taking on these new duties and marrying a man twice her age? Who really was May Lacey?

**Attracted
by her voice,
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imagination.**

A Noble-Looking Girl with a Fine Mind

May was born in 1873, in Cuttack, the former capital of Odissa State, not far from the coast in Northeast India. Her father served with the British Civil Service as a district Police Superintendent with a force of hundreds under his command. Boats, elephants and horses facilitated his travel throughout his district. At the age of three-and-a-half, May had been sent back with her elder brother to a boarding school in London, where their parents visited them on furlough. The tropical climate of northeast India, however, was hard on her father's health and he soon took early retirement on half-pay and returned to England. Damp weather and the absence of blue sky during long winters in Leicestershire in the British Midlands, where the family had settled, didn't help his health either, however. In 1883, when May was nine, the family migrated to Hobart, Tasmania where they found, to their surprise, an extensive network of British ex-civil service acquaintances from India. The family settled at first in suburban Newtown, attended St John's Anglican church, and became close friends of the minister, whose twelve children became good chums with May and her siblings. May's mother, an accomplished musician, played the large pipe organ for services at St John's.¹⁰

In 1887, when May was fourteen, her father accidentally walked into an Adventist evangelistic meeting in Federal Hall, Hobart. (He was actually on his way to attend another Anglican "Federation" meeting at the invitation of his minister friend and mistook the meeting place.) He liked what he heard at the meeting about Daniel 2, read Uriah Smith's commentary, and soon the family had become devout observers of the seventh-day Sabbath and joined the small group of Advent believers. Their Anglican clergyman friend continued his friendship with them even though they became "Jewish," and Mother Lacey kept right on playing the pipe organ at St John's, even after her baptism into the Adventist church.¹¹

At the age of seventeen, May left school and spent a year caring for her mother, who suffered

a slow death from tuberculosis. Then she spent the next year caring for her grieving father and younger siblings. It was also during this time that she found success in selling Adventist publications door-to-door around Hobart. She enjoyed giving Bible Studies to interested customers and resolved that she wanted to become a Bible Instructor. In 1894, at the age of nineteen, after her father remarried, she left home to attend the newly opened Adventist Bible School in North Fitzroy, Melbourne. She had borrowed money for her fees from a minister friend and mentor. A bright student, who played the organ and piano well in church, May had a notable singing voice and soon made an impression at the school. Attracted by her voice, it was here that the twenty-year-old May first began to stir Willie's imagination, although he had first made her acquaintance six months earlier when he and his colleague, A. G. Daniells, had stayed at the Lacey home during a brief visit on church business.¹²

W. C. White, in January 1894, had been appointed as President of the new Australasian Union Conference based in Melbourne.¹³ The demands of the role seemed to necessitate a wife and he began to give new thought to getting married again. By mid-1894, Willie and his mother had considered the problem seriously. The absence of his daughters was distressing. Finding a wife was clearly a priority.¹⁴ But finding the right person, who could relate to his new role and also fit into his particularly complex family situation, was not easy. Besides his church administration work fostering publishing and school development work, Willie had to give large chunks of time to caring for the publishing and church development interests of his mother. She had become anxious that his other duties did not allow him to give enough time to her work, even though to a large extent during the ten years since his father's death Willie's work had revolved very largely around his mother. Any new wife would have to be someone of whom his mother would approve and with whom she could live. As he thought about it, a plan evolved in his mind.

**The image...
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loved me.”**

The Schemer

One day, toward the end of May’s third term at the Bible School in Melbourne, Willie approached her and told her about a vacancy occurring on his mother’s staff that needed to be filled fairly urgently. May Walling, Ellen White’s niece and personal assistant, had had to return to America for legal reasons on August 30, 1894. Would May consider going to work for Ellen White at Granville in Sydney? Thinking that this would be a simple interim arrangement to meet a short-term need, she agreed. Looking back on the decision years later, she perceived that there was indeed scheming behind the plan. She also acknowledged that it would have defeated Willie’s purpose for her to have known his real intent or for his mother to have guessed what might be his purpose. Thus, he kept his thoughts to himself.

May signed on to Ellen White’s staff, as Ellen’s personal assistant and travelling companion, sometime in early August 1894. It was a time of financial crisis in Australia when May joined the busy household. During this period there was an average of fourteen people at the meal table each day, some in serious economic distress. Ellen reports that her house was almost like a “free hotel,” with people coming and going, and she gladly accommodated this and was a gracious and entertaining hostess. Nevertheless, underneath it all, it stressed her greatly because it was a drain on her finances and her emotional resources.¹⁵ May reports that her assigned tasks included driving Ellen White’s horse and carriage, taking Ellen on outings to the community, to speaking appointments, or on shopping expeditions. Ellen White’s compassionate generosity impressed her new assistant. She recalled that Ellen would buy large bolts of “beautiful cloth” at market and have it made up by her own seamstress for needy parishioners. She “never gave away old clothes.” At other times she would purchase substantial grocery supplies to help support needy families. She would borrow from others in order to be generous. According to

May “she was very, very generous.”¹⁶

May also reported that her new role included a nightly routine of unbraiding Ellen White’s hair as she sat on a small stool in front of her. Then she would “brush and comb it” for twenty minutes or so. “That rested her head,” she explained. Then she followed the dowager prophet and preacher upstairs to give her “a full massage” four evenings a week. A “sweat bath and salt glow” occupied the other two nights before May tucked her charge into bed and kissed her goodnight. Only on Friday nights was there no treatment.¹⁷

May also recalled that after speaking publicly at a meeting at a church for an hour or so, the diminutive preacher would get “wringing wet with perspiration” and she knew it was not healthy for her to stand and talk to people afterwards. It was May’s task, therefore, to “take her to some room and give her a sponge bath” and take “fresh underwear for her because it was all wet through with perspiration.” It required “a lot of effort” for Ellen White to make herself heard in public arenas without a public address system, and Australian summers could be fiercely hot. Thus there was no time for chatting; avoiding catching a cold was more important.¹⁸

During the last months of 1894, May enjoyed being part of the White household and related to her employer very warmly. The two women got on famously. Spending so much time together in such intimate settings, Ellen quickly came to develop a high appreciation and much affection for her twenty-year old assistant. She was in Ellen’s estimation a “noble-looking girl” and she possessed “a fine mind.”¹⁹ And May was able to relate to Ellen as to her own mother. She felt a deep affection for her. Willie’s secret scheme was working. Ellen came to see that May “loves the truth and loves the Lord and is content with anything. Everyone acquainted with her loves her,” she enthused. “She loves me and I love her.”²⁰ Five months after May’s arrival in the house and the bonding with his mother that he had hoped for, it was time for Willie to spring his trap.

The Surprise

As May tells the story, it happened “very sudden.” At about ten o’clock one summer evening, (probably late December), she was finishing a “salt glow and sweat” treatment in the massage room and “Elder White” appeared and offered to help her “empty the water.” Stating that he would “like to talk . . . a little bit this evening,” he took her out onto the upstairs verandah overlooking the garden. As if conducting a business interview, he asked her what she wanted to do in the future. Recalling the memorable conversation years later, May said that she replied that she wanted to train to be the “matron” of a school. “Well,” he responded, “how would you like to be the matron of a private home?” And then he explained to May about his two daughters who did not have a mother. Would May like to “come and be with them.” May recalls that she was flustered and surprised at the suddenness of it all. She had not discerned any affection from him. She “didn’t know hardly what to say. I didn’t know he liked me,” she recalled. “I don’t think he told me he loved me.”²¹

Finding her voice, as they stood on the verandah, May expressed surprise that Elder White was not asking one of his mother’s other helpers. Did he not know that “Miss Campbell was very much in love with him?” American Emily Campbell was a very efficient editorial assistant and general administrative helper in the household, who had been spending much time in his company and was holding out strong hopes.²² White replied that he understood how Emily felt but she wasn’t the one. Later it dawned on May that, besides Emily’s bossy temperament, Emily may have not qualified as a candidate because she was an older woman and may not have been able to have any children.²³ May reports that she then suggested two or three other women more the Elder’s age. She was very much aware that she was nineteen years his junior. But here was the senior church leader in Australia, someone twice her age, telling her that she was the one the Lord wanted him to marry. Every time he prayed about it, he explained, May was the one who

“always came up before him.” Pressure? Duty? Hardly knowing what to say, she told him she could not answer him then. Awkwardly she replied that she would have to have time to think about it and pray about it. What she didn’t feel able to tell “Elder White” that night, she recalled, was that she was already “terribly in love” with someone else.²⁴

Back in her room, May recounts that she sat staring at the wall for three or four hours trying to sort through her jumbled thoughts and praying before she tumbled into bed. How long the process of thinking and praying took is not clear from the records, but at least she viewed the proposal seriously. Which should prevail, love or duty? As she prayed and thought about it, she came up with three signs the Lord would have to give her if accepting this proposal was to be her duty; signs that what the Lord was apparently telling Willie was also something the Lord also intended her to hear and thus something she ought to do.

First, her father would have to approve. That was a major concern given the age difference. Second, she had major debts to care for at the school. That was a large obstacle. They would have to be paid somehow before she could even consider marriage. The third was an even more difficult problem. Her love for Arthur. The Lord would have to “take away the love for Arthur Currow from my heart,” she recounted. Arthur L. Currow was a fellow ministerial student from College who had captured May’s heart. They had not agreed yet upon marriage, nor even specifically talked about it, but she knew in her heart that it would not be long before Arthur was going to ask her and she was planning to say yes.

At what point Willie White told his mother about his proposal to May, is not clear. May suspected that he had probably talked to her before the deed.²⁵ With the advantage of hindsight, May later observed that Willie was “a very obedient boy,” and that “he wouldn’t do anything in which his mother didn’t agree.”²⁶ Whenever it was that his mother learned of her son’s plan, she

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was absolutely delighted and intrigued by his clever scheme, and she soon became an agent for Willie. By the time she wrote to tell the news to her elder son Edson, in mid-January, she had known for some time, and was pleased that she had been let in on the secret. At first, "I had not the slightest thought when she came to my home," she reported.²⁷

As May remembered things, Ellen White asked a number of times how her decision making process was going. Upon learning of the school fee problem she quickly came up herself with the money to repay the minister who had loaned the school fees for May's education.²⁸ That was one problem cared for. Father's permission would have to wait until Willie could talk in person to him. May's love for Arthur would also take time. When Ellen White asked later "have you decided yet," she responded that there was still "one sign that hasn't been fulfilled." May sensed that Willie's mother "seemed to want me to say, Yes." "She really was anxious that we should be married, I'm sure," May later recalled. And in time, "gradually," she reported "the love for Arthur was taken out of my heart." Whether Willie ever learned about the near miss with Arthur is not clear.

May noted that she certainly did not love Willie at this time. "I didn't love him when he asked me. I wasn't in love with him. . . . I learned to love him."²⁹ But with the matter of her love for Arthur diminishing to the point of being resolved, May felt able to write to Willie and tell him that yes, she would marry him. By this time he was on his way to Melbourne and en route to a three month absence in New Zealand.

Ellen White, didn't learn of May's final answer until January 15, 1895. "I told her [May] today," she wrote to her eldest son, "that I would like to understand if the matter was settled between her and Willie. She said it was, if her father would consent." It seems that Willie was a confident and determined suitor, for even in advance of May's firm answer he had already planned to visit Tasmania to call on May's father and set

"before him his love for his daughter."³⁰ Ellen White was as bubbly over the affair as she had been in a long, long time. "She is a treasure. I am glad indeed for Willie," she told Emma and Edson. "She is just the one I should choose. . . . this is all right."

Willie boasted to his elder brother that May did not have a "little sallow, pinched-up body" but was rather a good big wholesome woman." She was surrounded by "sunshine, comfort and peace." But if Willie was already deeply in love with May, she still had love to learn. "I didn't love him when he asked me. I wasn't in love with him," she observed. "But I learned to love him and he was a very kind husband . . . We were always very happy together."³¹ But there were several people unhappily affected by the decision.

The Disappointed

What the heartbroken Arthur himself felt when he heard the sad news we do not know, but he may well have figured that, with a Union President who had a prophet for a mother, the odds would have been well and truly stacked against him. He completed college, found a new love, and became a valued pastor and teacher in Australia.

Arthur was not the only heartbroken one.³² Emily Campbell when she heard the news of the engagement was also heartbroken. "She got ill," and "had to go bed. She was terribly in love," recalled May. Soon Emily left Ellen White's employ, returned to America, and married someone else. Another heartbroken hopeful was Mary Mortenson, back in Battle Creek. Mary had been caring for Willie's two daughters and had fallen in love with their father by correspondence, nurturing her conviction that the Lord wanted her to become mother to the two girls, wife to Willie, and daughter-in-law to Ellen. According to Ellen, Willie "had plainly stated to her" that such a scenario was not in his mind but she apparently was too much in love to hear. She had confided her hope to the two girls and when the news of the engagement to May broke in

Battle Creek, O. A. Olsen, the GC President, reported that both Mary and the girls were in “a high state of excitement.” Mary’s reaction, and the ordeal that the children experienced, led to the cancelling of the White’s plans for her to accompany the two girls to Australia to join Ellen White’s staff. The new venture for May was going to have enough complexities as it was, without a disappointed rival on the staff.³³

Adjusting to a Dominating Mother-in-Law

In the meantime, and it seems even before May had fully made up her mind about the marriage proposal, mother-in-law-to-be was already taking in hand the preparation of a trousseau for her daughter-in-law. Ellen explained that she wanted to prepare May for married life “with a real becoming wardrobe, but not expensive or extravagant.” “You know,” she commented to Edson and Emma, “that is not my besetting sin.”³⁴ As May recalled it, her mother-in-law-to-be “bought a whole lot of materials to make dresses” and Mrs. Rousseau, the school principal made them up. The colors included cream, black, tan, white and red. “She had one the color of grape juice, that dark red.” Was this too much interference from the groom’s mother? Apparently not. May thought it was wonderful. As Ellen White had noted, May really was a woman who was “cheerful, kind, and tenderhearted and is ... always satisfied and thankful.” From May’s perspective, Ellen White was just a “wonderful mother-in-law,” in fact, “a wonderful companion to be with.”³⁵ She was “very kind” and “very sweet.” She could “laugh heartily, and was certainly entertaining.”³⁶ But that is not to say that she was not a dominating presence. She continued to intervene in ways that other wives would certainly have considered to be intrusive. To be part of the White household necessitated the possession of the special gift of submission, although that did not mean being submerged. Before the marriage, Ellen White had expressed herself to her son that she was pleased that May had “an individuality



which cannot be submerged even in you.” May should not be “cramped to any person’s ideas.” She was glad that May’s “perceptive faculties are of no ordinary character.”³⁷ Part of the social skills that enabled May to thrive in the White house was knowing when to be submissive and when not to be.

After the wedding in Tasmania, May and Willie moved back to Sydney and then, with Willie’s mother, they moved on up to Coorانبong and settled themselves on a forty-acre property that Ellen White had bought on the edge of the new college estate. At first they lived in Ellen White’s camp meeting tent pitched on the property, and then in time moved into homes erected on Avondale Road. May and Willie lived just across the street from where Ellen had built her home, “Sunnyside.”

Eleven months later, in early April 1896, May fulfilled the wildest dreams of both her husband and her mother-in-law. She produced twin boys. Ellen reported that she had been awakened at 10.00 p.m. by her nurse, Sarah McEnterfer, with the news of the two noisy arrivals. May, however, recalls her mother-in-law actually being in the room around the time when they were born and that she “just clapped her hands” with joy and then quickly took charge of the naming. “She herself, named them all,” May reported. She noted that Ellen White in choosing names for

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her two boys “got in her husband’s name” and the names of her own boys. She decided on James Henry, and Herbert Clarence. “In those four names she got the names of her husband, and all her boys. . . . She had them all named up that night!”³⁸ At one level, May “didn’t mind her naming them.” That was the way things were in this household, she reasoned to herself. But it did cross her mind that this might be a mother-in-law extending her reach too far. When pressed she conceded that this was meddling “a little bit” too far. “I didn’t resent anything,” she recalled. “I knew it was all right.”³⁹

The first years of marriage for Willie and May were not without their stresses and tensions, however, particularly after the arrival of the twins. Caring for two new babies, a frequently absent husband, (nine months in 1897) and having two step-daughters (one of them a fourteen-year-old) who were learning to adjust to a new, inexperienced step-mother was not easy. Having May’s elder brother and his new wife boarding with the family added to the demands on the family, as did the strong presence of mother-in-law across the street who noticed everything and was not above intruding. In late 1896, Ellen criticized May’s untidy kitchen, the children’s garments that were sometimes not mended on time, the lack of “heavenly atmosphere” and a sense of “too much stir and bustle, noise and confusion, disorder and untidiness.”⁴⁰ The fact that the criticism and the mother-in-law advice about how to do better and how to organize the house was expressed as sourced from a dream, and clothed with the authority of the prophetic voice, somewhat blurred the boundaries of the relationships involved. But May’s willingness to submit to duty, her strong spirituality, and her deep affection for her mother-in-law, clearly helped her to cope. This, however, was no ordinary situation. Nevertheless, May was glad that Ellen White was fond of her grandchildren and made time for them, counseled with them, worked with the girls in the garden, and took them for rides in her carriage.⁴¹

Ever practical, she bought the boys a small red and blue wheelbarrow each when they turned two years of age, and she was always available to help nurture them spiritually.

The next time May gave birth to a baby boy she related that she was much more proactive about who would do the naming. With the arrival of her fourth child, on October 6, 1907, after the family had returned to the United States, May staked a claim for Arthur as the child’s first name and Lacey as his second. Her reason, she explained, was that she had always liked the name and no one objected. Asked by the interviewer whether any of her family twigged to the special meaning the name had for her, she was inclined to think that no one noticed.⁴² And so it was. If Ellen White’s first two grandsons carried the names of her own special men, her third grandson carried the memory of May’s own long-ago love. May reported that she was never unhappy as part of the White household. She was loyal, loving and true. But that might not always stop one being wistful. Just when her son Arthur learned of the significance of his name is not clear, but it seems clear that he eventually learned the secret.

A New Love for Ellen?

The mid-1890s was a season of tension between love and duty in the White house. In 1896, shortly after her son’s marriage, Ellen White found herself also having to make a difficult decision about whether to give priority to love or to her sense of duty when it came to marriage and her work. That year, her long-time friend and colleague Stephen Haskell, who had lost his wife two years earlier, made so bold as to approach the widowed Ellen with a proposal of marriage. It was a very appealing proposal. In many ways the two were soulmates. They shared together a deep love for the church and its mission and it is clear from her many, many letters to Haskell that Ellen felt a tenderness for him. As Jerry Moon notes, the correspondence with Haskell is the most prolific of any that she had outside that with her own family.⁴³ In mid-1896,

she arranged things with the brethren and pressed an invitation to Haskell to come and share in the work in Australia and help with the new college in Coorabong. W. C. White was initially hesitant, but Ellen pressed, and the personal warmth of the invitation may have given hope to Haskell that a proposal might be considered.⁴⁴ Haskell arrived in Adelaide from South Africa about October 12, in mid-Spring, and joined Ellen White in ministering at the camp meeting. They then made their way back to Melbourne for meetings, travelling together north to Sydney and arriving back at Coorabong sometime during the last week of the month. Haskell stayed with Ellen White for about six weeks before going to New Zealand. He apparently chose this time to press his suit.

In many ways it was an attractive proposal for Ellen White and she wrestled with it. As Ron Graybill notes, her last decade of marriage with James had been a difficult time, with its lengthy periods of stress and separation; the downside of James' temperament had been aggravated by a number of strokes.⁴⁵ The loneliness of fifteen years of widowhood, and the tenderness, affection, and admiration she felt for Haskell, were a strong pull on her emotions. The natural affinity they had for each other was apparently noticed by a member of the extended family, Herbert Lacey, who reports that the two "were very frequently together." Something about the chemistry between the pair prompted Lacey to ask Ellen White about the possibility of a marriage to Haskell.⁴⁶

Duty and a sense of the importance of her larger responsibilities, however, persuaded Ellen White that accepting Haskell's proposal would not be the best way forward, although deep down she might long for the affection and the companionship. As she explained to Lacey, changing her name to Haskell would create insurmountable problems for her publishers and for her identity as a writer. How could she continue to write as Ellen G. White? The consolation she found came from an assurance she said

had been given in a dream. Her son, W. C. White, had been designated by the Lord to care for her until her work was done.⁴⁷ And indeed, in mid-1897, the General Conference finally formally assigned a salary and budget for him, to be utilized in caring for his mother's interests. Discussions had been going on about this possibility since mid-1894, when it became clear that W. C. White was not coping with his work as President and was nearing a nervous breakdown. But what to do with Haskell?

Ellen had earlier also invited a Miss Hetty Hurd of California, now working in South Africa, to come and assist with the new college in Australia. Hetty had been reluctant. Now Ellen persuaded the disappointed Haskell that he should think about marrying this younger woman of their mutual acquaintance. Haskell dutifully obeyed and wrote Hetty a letter of proposal. Hetty responded almost at once, booked passage to Australia and the couple were married in Coorabong on February 27, 1897. "We can sympathize and unite in the grand work that you and I love, ... Ellen White wrote to Haskell later when congratulating him on his marriage to Hetty.⁴⁸ "In everything which relates to this we are united in bonds of Christian fellowship." In the years that followed, the Haskell's often worked closely with Ellen White, both in New South Wales and later in California, and the correspondence between them continued to be warm and steady.

The episode of Ellen White's forfeited opportunity for re-marriage would probably be unremarkable were it not for the existence of another photograph. Just how much Ellen White experienced the cost of turning down Haskell's proposal may be indicated by the fact that in her last years she kept a portrait photograph of the handsome preacher on a shelf of the mirror cabinet, opposite her bed, in the bedroom of her Elmshaven home.⁴⁹ At Elmshaven today, Haskell's photograph has joined the collection of photographs of the other men in her life, (her husband and her four sons). The opportunity for

Before the marriage, Ellen White had expressed herself to her son that she was pleased that May had "an individuality which cannot be submerged even in you."

love passed by in submission to duty was quietly treasured by Ellen White, it seems, as a memory of what might have been.

Arthur's Return

May (Lacey) White was more fortunate than her mother-in-law. For May, the love passed over in submission to duty in 1895 was to be found again in her later years.

Just as May's marriage to Willie had developed rather unexpectedly in 1895, so it came to an end unexpectedly in September 1937, catching her by surprise. After he turned eighty years of age, May reported, Willie travelled much less and spent more time at home with her. The massage skills she had learned in order to treat his mother forty years previously, now came in handy for her husband. For three and a half years she observed, she gave him a full hour-long massage that would send him off to sleep each night. But on the night of September 2 she noticed something wrong. He had been overworking and woke up during the night struggling to breathe. The next morning, he slipped away, suffering a heart embolism. He was buried in Battle Creek.

For the next seventeen years, May lived on her own, enjoying her children and grandchildren. And then, in 1955, Arthur Currow, now a widower, made an unexpected re-appearance in Glendale City, California, where his physician son served at the Glendale Adventist Hospital. May and Arthur's paths crossed again. The old chemistry, so long dormant, was still there, and the flames of love blossomed anew. They were married a week before Christmas, amid the Christmas lights, at the romantic little chapel on the third floor of Mission Inn, in Riverside. In a delightful turn of events, it was Elder Arthur Lacey White who performed the wedding of his mother to the love she had turned aside, for the cause of duty, six decades earlier. They enjoyed eight-and-a-half years together. After Arthur's death in 1963, May lived another six years and, on her demise, was interred with Willie in the family plot in Battle Creek.⁵⁰

The other woman in the stylish hat with Ellen White, in the newly discovered 1905 photograph, opens a wide window for us and reveals a side of Ellen White not often in view, but which helps to give a more complete picture of her remarkable life. ■

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Whidden, a Festschrift for George Knight entitled *Adventist Maverick* (2014). He is married to Kendra Haloviak Valentine, who also teaches at La Sierra University, and enjoys visiting his Kiwi homeland with him.

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2. *Youth's Instructor* (December, 1852): 22. The article is the earliest biographical reflection written by Ellen White.
3. Formally Ethel May, she preferred to be called by her middle name, May.
4. Records of three interviews with May White Currow are preserved. Interviewers were Olaf Reno (June 4, 1960), James R. Nix (June 11, 1967), and Ed Christian (1968), DF791a, Oral History Collection, Ellen G. White Estate, Loma Linda University (EGWE-LLU).
5. Ellen G. White to Edson and Emma White, May 15, 1895, Ellen G. White Estate, Washington, D.C. (EGWE-DC).
6. Ellen G. White to Emma and Edson White Jan 15, 1895, EGWE-DC. The expression is Ellen White's. She also reported that David Lacey had been "a strict vegetarian for years" but was considered "a very intelligent, kindhearted man."
7. May White Currow, interview (Christian, 1968), EGWE-LLU: 4; May Lacey to W. C. White, February 13,

She was
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estimation a
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May Lacey and Arthur Currow



1895, EGW-DC DF 121.

8. Ellen G. White to Edson and Emma White, May 15, 1895, EGW-DC. May White Currow, interview (Nix, 1967), EGWE-LLU: 32.

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15. May White Currow, interview (Nix, 1967), EGWE-LLU: 29. "She was a very pleasant hostess. She always had something to say, all the time. . . always had plenty to say." See also, Ellen G. White to Edson and Emma White May 15, 1895, EGW-DC. See also, Ellen G. White to Lucinda Hall, April 15, 1895, EGW-DC.

16. May White Currow, interview (Nix, 1967), EGWE-LLU: 24.

17. May White Currow, interview (Nix, 1967), EGWE-LLU: 23. May was given special training as a masseuse for this purpose by a visiting nurse recently graduated from Battle Creek Sanitarium and at first practiced on the cook and the seamstress before starting the treatments with Ellen.

18. May White Currow, interview (Nix, 1967), EGWE-LLU: 28

19. Ellen G. White to Emma and Edson January 15, 1895, EGW-DC.

20. Ibid.

21. May White Currow, interview (Nix, 1967), EGWE-

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LLU: 31.

22. Ibid. According to May, Emily was “a rather dictatorial woman” and they thought for sure she would be the one. They used to say among themselves “I wonder how bossy she’ll be when she’s Mrs White?”

23. Ibid., 33. It was later that May learned that Ellen White very much wanted some more boys as grandchildren.

24. Ibid., 30-31.

25. Ibid., 32.

26. Ibid., 37

27. Ellen G. White to Emma and Edson White, January 15, 1895, EGW-DC.

28. May White Currow, interview (Reno, 1960), EGWE-LLU: 6.

29. May White Currow, interview (Nix, 1967), EGWE-LLU: 34.

30. Ellen G. White to Emma and Edson White, January 15, 1895, EGW-DC.

31. May White Currow, interview (Nix, 1967), EGWE-LLU: 34.

32. Bernard Brandstater, interview by Gil Valentine, October 10, 2015. According to a Brandstater family recollection, one of the Brandstater brothers (Hermann) was also a disappointed suitor and laid the blame on Ellen White for his missing out in the marriage stakes for May’s hand. This jilting may have occurred two years earlier however, when a date was cancelled by May with a lawyer friend at the time that W. C. White and A. G. Daniells first visited the Lacey home.

33. Ellen G. White to Lucinda Hall, April 15, 1895, EGW-DC.

34. It is not clear if Ellen White is speaking ironically, tongue-in-cheek, here with her family. If she is, then the sense would be that this was an occasion that warranted a frill or two.

35. May White Currow, interview (Nix, 1967), EGWE-LLU: 37.

36. May White Currow, interview (Reno, 1960), EGWE-LLU: 6; May White Currow, interview (Christian, 1968), EGWE-LLU: 4.

37. Ellen G. White to W. C. White, March 15, 1895, EGW-DC.

38. May White Currow, interview (Nix, 1967), EGWE-LLU: 5. That May’s brother’s name was also Herbert seemed just a coincidence.

39. May White Currow, interview (Christian, 1968), EGWE-LLU: 5.

40. Ellen G. White, “Words to the W. C. White Household,” November 27, 1896. The letter is a detailed critique of the way

May was running the house, and of the unhelpful attitudes that the two step-daughters were beginning to manifest and habits they were adopting. Tensions in the family may be noticed in the fixed expressions on the faces of May’s step daughters in a late 1896 photograph.

41. Ella Robinson, interviewed by Jim Nix, 1967, EGWE-LLU: 13. The eldest granddaughter, Ella, recalled having to “greatly reduce” the size of the velvet bow in her felt hat and discard her fashionable flared riding gloves because they were considered too extravagant at the time and given the circumstances, to wear to church.

42. “I don’t believe any of the family ever thought of that, but I did.” May White Currow, interview (Christian, 1968), EGWE-LLU.

43. Deny Fortin and Jerry Moon, *The Ellen G White Encyclopedia*, (Washington D. C.: Review and Herald, 2013), 404. There are 271 letters from Ellen and many more received from him.

44. Ellen G. White to S. N. Haskell, June 1, 1896, EGW-DC. The letter is to him as an individual and offers him a room in her house and the freedom of her home which he can make his “headquarters.”

45. Ronald D. Graybill, “The Power of Prophecy: Ellen G. White and the Women Religious Founder of the Nineteenth Century,” Dissertation submitted to John Hopkins University (1983), 25-53. Graybill documents the conflict and the lengthy separations and reconciliations that characterized the last years of James and Ellen’s relationship.

46. H. Camden Lacey to A. W. Spalding, April 2, 1947, EGW-DC. Lacey’s letter is written to church historian Spalding in response to a request for information about the founding of Avondale College.

47. Ibid.

48. Ellen G. White to S. N. Haskell, March 1, 1897, EGWE-DC.

49. The photograph was not of Hetty and Stephen—just of Stephen. Photographs of the room at the time of her death show the photograph on the nightstand.

50. *Review and Herald* (September 18, 1969): 32; Obituary Notices. Ella May Lacey Currow White, Pacific Union Recorder (October 23, 1969): 7.

“I Have Seen a Better Land”:

Confessions of an Ellen White Biographer | BY TERRIE AAMODT

After her first vision, which she experienced in December 1844 at age seventeen, Ellen White recounted how it included experiencing the Second Advent and entering heaven with Jesus. Then she and the rest of the redeemed followed Jesus to “a table of pure silver ... many miles in length ... [filled with] the fruit of the tree of life, the manna, almonds, figs, pomegranets [sic], grapes, and many other kinds of fruits.” Ellen asked Jesus if she could have some. “He said, not now. Those who eat of the fruit of this land, go back to earth no more. But,” He continued, “in a little while if faithful, you shall both eat of the fruit of the tree of life, and drink of the water of the fountain.” In the meantime, He told her, “you must go back to the earth again, and relate to others, what I have revealed to you.” An angel brought her back “down to this dark world,” as she described it. After this vision, Ellen Harmon could not see the world as others saw it. Her terrestrial surroundings would never seem as beautiful as they had before her vision. “Sometimes I think I cannot stay here any longer, all things of earth look so dreary,” she wrote about a year later. “I feel very lonely



here, for I have seen a better land.”¹

Ellen Harmon White could describe a better land, but how does the historian, and how does the biographer, describe how she got there, and how her first visionary visit to heaven shaped her seventy-year public career? Sometimes I wonder why we even try—surely this task must lie beyond the grasp of ordinary mortals. But with a firm grip on my ordinary mortality, I will describe for you what I have learned about this task. It has become clear that there are things a biographer can do, things she cannot do, and things she must do. Here’s what I mean.

While she can examine and report a prophet’s account of her calling, the biographer cannot describe the mind of God, or the mechanisms by which He selects someone to bear a special message to the world. If explaining aspects of God lies within the reach of human capacity at all, it belongs to the realm of the theologian. Using the tools of the historian—diaries, letters, published books, historical artifacts, public and private documents—the biographer can describe what was said to have happened, what one personage witnessed happening to another, and how people remembered later what happened. To the extent that histor-

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ical tools reveal probable causes and effects, the biographer can analyze why something happened. Even within those parameters, the work of examining what is legitimately available to the biographer is a bit like sanctification—it is the work of a lifetime.

What should shape these toils? Given the significance of Ellen White for the Advent movement, perhaps the biographer should focus exclusively on affirming her prophetic gift. On the other hand, given the amount of time and ink that has been spent on that endeavor for well over a century, perhaps it is the biographer's role to provide a corrective to the hagiographic record, exposing the hidden or suppressed details that would modify or disconfirm earlier accounts. Although the range of choices and approaches may seem bewildering, I maintain that there is only one thing that the biographer can do, and in fact it is what she must do: she must present the person whole.

I spent time thinking about this aspect of the biographer's task during a national academic conference on Ellen White in Portland, Maine, held in October 2009. The proceedings of that conference became the 2014 volume *Ellen Harmon White: American Prophet*, published by Oxford University Press. At the conference, nearly equal numbers of scholars who were connected to the Adventist denomination and scholars who were not, discussed the appropriate way to present the life story of this significant but understudied figure to a general audience of academic historians. Our keynote speaker the first day was Professor Joan Hedrick, the Pulitzer Prize-winning biographer of Harriet Beecher Stowe. Although she had not studied Ellen White previously, we sought her advice on how to examine and report the life of a prominent nineteenth-century American woman writer and activist. She described the task of telling Stowe's life story in some detail to an audience of conference participants and graduate students from the University of Southern Maine.

At the end of her talk, the first person to

ask a question was Ciro Sepulveda, a history professor from Oakwood University. He inquired, "It's clear from hearing your talk that you have profound admiration for your subject, but how do you deal with the flaws?" At that moment, a certain cohort of the audience was all ears. Hedrick said in reply,

I view them as great complications of the plot, as good material for biographers. And the flaws bring a person into sharp focus—they really do. Nobody is human without having flaws. To see the flaws as well as the virtues, and how they intersect—we can all see in ourselves that our strengths also have a downside. Seeing the human is seeing the human being whole. I don't see it as a problem but I see it as a possibility. I see it as great literary material and sometimes as great didactic material.

That point about seeing the person whole is, I maintain, the distinction between biography and hagiography. It sounds simple and straightforward, doesn't it? Just see the person whole. What does that mean for the biographer? What does it mean for the biographer of Ellen White?

I cannot claim the lofty eminence of Stowe's biographer, but I can describe what the attempt to see Ellen White's life whole looks like approximately one-third of the way through my manuscript. There are many dimensions of her life story that deserve this level of attention, including her injury, her Methodism, her vision for her denomination, and 1844, among others. Here I will explore her circle of her family and her closest friends.

Her Circle—the White Family

As we endeavor to understand Ellen White whole, a crucial part of our understanding comes from her relationships to those closest to her, particularly her own family. Her letters to them provide the richest source of our understanding of her personal life. Her correspondence with her husband, James, reveals the complexity of their relationship. They

were colleagues, partners in the faith. They shared pulpits at countless camp meetings and churches for a couple of decades. They strategized periodicals, books, and publishing. When James spent several weeks on a speaking tour after the birth of their fourth son her letters to him were tender. "You may be assured I miss your little visits in my room," she told him when the baby was three weeks old, "but the thought you are doing the will of God, helps me to bear the loss of your company. . . . In much love, your Ellen." A few days later: "Write often. I am anxious to hear from you." And a few days after that: "I think if you stay until the 27th of November it is plenty long enough. I am very lonely here without you." James replied at one point, "I love my family and nothing but a sense of duty can separate me from them," echoing a refrain he and Ellen both used. But he too was lonely: "O, I do wish you and Bub [the baby, yet unnamed] were here, but in three long weeks I shall see you, Lord will."²

In mid-November, as Ellen regained her strength, she ventured with her four boys on a visit to family friends, Charles and Jane Glover, in the country. It was apparently during this trip that her baby, later named John Herbert, contracted an erysipelas infection, and James hurried home. After three weeks of agonizing illness, the baby hovered near death. In the wee hours of December 14, Ellen was called to his bedside and knew his life was ending. "That was an hour of anguish for me," she wrote. "We watched his feeble, gasping breath, until it ceased, and we felt thankful that his sufferings were ended." Deeply in shock, she did not cry. "I fainted at the funeral," she remembered, "My heart ached as though it would break, yet I could not shed a tear. . . . After we returned from the funeral, my home seemed lonely. I felt reconciled to the will of God, yet despondency gloom settled upon me." As she recounted to a friend a few weeks later, "For weeks I had watched over my suffering child with agonizing feelings which I cannot describe, and at last

I witnessed its death struggle, the closing of its little eyes, but could find no relief by weeping. My heart was full to bursting," she remembered, "but I could not shed a tear. His little coffin was near me in the meeting house. My eye rested upon it with such feelings of loneliness as none but a mother bereft of an infant can feel. I fainted, yet could not weep."³ Ellen White was typically guarded about her personal feelings, making this detailed description of her grief unusual. She did not try to explain it away or find a lesson from suffering. She simply described what she felt. Although many experiences drove her to tears, the deepest wells of her sorrow, after her accident and after the death of her baby, left her dry-eyed in the midst of her emotional devastation. She did not try to explain why the shock of paralyzing grief left her without tears.

John Herbert's death was just the beginning of severe family trials. A few years later, when James slipped into depression after he had the first in a series of strokes in 1865, their relationship became stressed to the point of incompatibility. In the 1870s Ellen arrived at a decision. If "the work" beckoned, and if James was unable to participate, she would go on alone. James would continue to have problems with his health and his emotional state for the rest of his life, some of them famously documented in an exchange of letters between Ellen and her best friend Lucinda Hall in 1876. Yet Ellen flew to his defense in Battle Creek as the aging, increasingly querulous founder sought to retain his influence over church affairs. And she came to understand how best to soothe him when he gave way to depressive thoughts. As James's biographer Gerald Wheeler has noted, "Those who have never battled depression or similar problems cannot grasp what he constantly faced."⁴

In 1880, Ellen, who had known her share of despondency, wrote him a long letter, trying to soothe the paranoid feelings that led him to believe that his family and coworkers were conspiring against him. In this moment of

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stress, we see how she had developed a response to the suspicion and depression she had experienced at various times: "Let us, dear husband, make melody to God in our hearts. Let us not be found accusers of our brethren, for this is the work Satan is engaged in." She reflected the thinking and the discussions she and James had had recently on the character of Christ, as they discussed a series of art prints on the plan of salvation and as she was working on the manuscript that would become *The Desire of Ages*: "Let us talk of Jesus and His matchless love. I feel every day like deeply repenting before God for my hardness of heart, and because my life has not been more in accordance with the life of Christ." She sought a sense of reconciliation with Christ and with her loved ones: "I weep over my own hardness of heart, my life which has not been a correct example to others. Let us bring ourselves into harmony with heaven and we will then be in harmony with our brethren and at peace among ourselves. Let us now, both of us, redeem the time." Her long experience as a Methodist and a Millerite had taught her the importance of honesty and humility in personal relationships even if she, like any other human being, had not always lived up to her ideals. She well knew the role of confession in intimate relationships: "Forgive me for any words of impatience that have escaped my lips, every seeming act of wrong in your sight," she continued in her letter to James.

During the last months of James's life, the couple were reconciled and James was characterized by a sweetness that had eluded him for many years. Dudley Canright, who had experienced his own share of James's wrath, reflected that "I think I never saw Brother White so tender and patient as he was these last few months of his life." A few weeks before his death of malarial fever in 1881, Ellen wrote, "When there was needed a man to move forward in battling for the right, God chose my husband and used him for the upbuilding of His cause." In 1906 as she

described her marriage to James she stated, "He is the best man who ever trod shoe leather."⁵ Why would a biographer, or why would a reader, for that matter, be interested in this story? As we strive to understand what a prophetic calling is, what a prophetic role is, we may be tempted to think that a prophet has some kind of hidden advantage. Shouldn't choices be clearer if you already have a good idea of how the story will turn out? Shouldn't a prophet just *know* how to handle a given situation? To see a person whole, we must understand how she responds to situations of stress. And we must put those moments in the larger context of deep and long-standing relationships. To grasp Ellen White, we must understand her personal, professional, and faith-based relationship with James.

Her Circle—Her Closest Friends

We also learn a great deal about Ellen White by looking at her relationships with her closest friends. It is often lonely being a prophet. White sought companionship, but with the intimacy of friendship also came her close prophetic scrutiny into their lives. She valued the skill and energy of younger associates such as Uriah Smith and J. N. Loughborough, but she worried, sometimes substantively, that their family lives would blunt their commitment to the cause. She also sympathized with their difficulties, however. As the new year 1860 began, she reported sorrowfully on the attempts of family and friends to care for John and Mary Loughborough's only child, Teresa, who was not quite two when she succumbed to tuberculosis. "Oh, how sad the sight—a mother witnessing the last agonies of her loved one, her only child!" she confided in her diary. "We witness the dying struggle. The little eyes are closed, no more to look on earthly things. The little prattling tongue has ceased. This is a dark, dreary world. The whole human family are subject to disease, sorrow, and death."⁶ She wept with the stricken parents and strove to

comfort them as best she could.

Upon reflection, though, she came to believe that Teresa's death was preventable, and that Mary could have spared her daughter's life if she had been less selfish. Four months after the little girl died, Ellen White called John and Mary out for their friendship with Carrie Carpenter, deemed by White as a poor influence. She zeroed in on Mary, saying that she and Carrie were "too closely linked." This "childish" relationship "greatly crippled" John's usefulness to the cause. And then there was Teresa. "I dare not withhold," White told the still-grieving parents, "I was shown the time and the occasion of Teresa, that frail flower, receiving disease when it might have been avoided as well as not." She referred to the fact that while John was away on church business and Mary and her friend Carrie traveled here and there, "You all three [Carrie, Mary, and Teresa] were sleeping in the same bed when Carrie was much diseased. You, Mary, violated the laws of health. Your little plant breathed in a feverish, poisonous atmosphere." As White recounted it, Teresa became ill, prayers were offered, and the little girl improved. But Mary, "without consulting duty, reason, or consequences," took their little girl on another trip. "Exposure again brought on disease which had not been eradicated from the system, and it took a deeper hold of the vitals; the consequence was fatal." Mary's "sickly dependence" on Carrie, White declared, "is a sin."⁷ This was not the first time Ellen White had criticized Mary Loughborough's values and judgment, but in the context of the death of her only child, this letter must have devastated Mary.

Biographers have reported how Ellen White wept at Teresa's deathbed in January and how Mary Loughborough attentively helped Ellen as she gradually recovered from the birth of John Herbert that September, dressing the little boy almost every day, meeting Ellen and her boys when they returned from their visit to the Glovers in November, and mourning the

baby's death with Ellen in December. But when the biographer does not mention the April letter, the story sounds different, and the conclusions are different. Mary's role helping Ellen and the baby in the fall has a different level of poignancy, given what had happened a few months earlier. And, while Ellen's letter to Mary in April, taken in isolation, is harsh in tone toward a grieving mother, the strongest criticisms in her written testimonies typically were directed toward those who caused the vulnerable to suffer. The tone of her April letter to John and Mary Loughborough was in the vein of the criticisms she leveled at men who physically abused their wives or were unfaithful. The survival of the friendship between Ellen and Mary during this difficult year tells us a great deal about both individuals.

Probably Ellen White's most graphic description of crushing personal sorrow is found in her writings just after the death of John Herbert in 1860. On the other hand, she did not speak of devastating disappointment on October 22; rather, she described 1844 as "the happiest year of my life." Why? When she reminisced about 1844, she was not referring to the Disappointment. For her, "1844" did not conjure images of a traumatic, dismal failure, with people waiting outside all day on the 22nd, increasingly shivering with cold as darkness fell, and finally dissolving in tears. Neither did she return in her memory to the fever pitch of anticipation—the thumping heart, the catch in the breath from a sneak preview of the sublime—that Millerites felt during the final days, weeks and hours. Rather, she recalled the absolute authenticity of her own and her fellow believers' experience. The Second Coming was absolutely real and incredibly close.

During that time of focused anticipation, believers could no longer pretend to be better than they were; no longer could they put off confronting the shabby impulses that underlay their personal weaknesses. Their *real* self would experience this *real* event. It was too late to play

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games. The spiritual authenticity of 1844 brought deep happiness to Ellen Harmon. For the rest of her life, she tried to tie the urgency she felt about the approaching Advent to her driving desire to recapture the openness and honesty of 1844—on a personal level, and within the Adventist community as a whole. We need to keep that dynamic in mind when evaluate the impact of Millerism on Ellen White’s life.

As she grew frail with advancing age and could no longer travel to speaking appointments or write large volumes of material, the *Review and Herald* published some of her materials, designed for reading out loud on Sabbath, either during Sabbath services or, for Adventists who lived far from any church, to each other at home. In November 1913, just before her eighty-sixth birthday, the *Review* published a message from Ellen White. She knew her own life was nearly over, and she had told a friend years earlier that she did not expect to live until the Second Coming. As she thought about her reunion with Jesus, which would occur in what seemed to be the next instant after her death, she sought to communicate to *Review* readers why the Second Advent was such a positive experience, and why being ready to meet Christ mattered:

At his second coming all will be changed. . . . Christ will come in his own glory. . . . Then the last trumpet will sound, the voice of God will speak, and the whole earth, from the summits of the loftiest mountains to the lowest recesses of the deepest mines, will hear that voice. It will be heard in the dungeons of men, in the caverns of the deep, in the rocks and caves of the earth, and it will be obeyed. It is the same voice that said, “Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest,”—the same voice that said, “Thy sins be forgiven thee.” And those who obeyed that voice . . . will now hear the words, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.” To them that voice will mean rest, peace, and everlasting life. They will recognize it as the voice of the One who has been touched with the feeling of their infirmities.⁸

As we look at Ellen White’s life, the myriad theological influences, the personal and family relationships, the books she and her assistants produced, and the institutions she inspired, we will understand her best if we can grasp what compelled her to endure. As she said in 1844, “I have seen a better land.” ■

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Prophet (Oxford University Press, 2014). At present she is working on *Ellen White: Voice and Vision*, a volume in the Adventist Pioneers biography series edited by George R. Knight.

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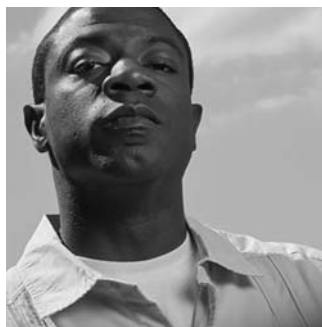
Can The Gift of Prophecy Keep On Giving? | BY JONATHAN BUTLER

The *Gift of Prophecy in Scripture and History*, edited by Alberto R. Timm and Dwain N. Esmond (Silver Spring, MD: Review and Herald, 2015), is actually a book about Ellen White's prophetic vocation and reminded me of how people get hired. Very often, those responsible for filling a position write the job description with a particular candidate in mind. They interview a myriad of prospective hires. But all the while they are thinking of the especially lustrous individual for whom the job description was originally crafted. With the other hopeful prospects that show up for the interview, the hiring committee is more or less going through the motions. The seemingly "open" job search is actually a *fait accompli*. This book is divided evenly between the biblical study of prophecy in general, and the historical study of White in particular. The biblical essays on the "gift of prophecy," however, amount to a "job description" tailored to White. Each chapter is therefore less an abstract discussion of "the gift of prophecy" than it is an exploration of *her gift*. Both halves of the book seldom stray any real distance from White, and clearly the essayists want her for the "job" of contemporary Adventist prophet.

When he characterizes the Old Testament prophets (Chapter 1), Jeri Moskala is transparently describing Ellen White.¹ Like her, the Hebrew prophets were "*sui generis*, one

of a kind"; they could not manipulate or alter God's message; they offered special insights; they interpreted history; they taught righteousness. Like her, they made accurate predictions of the future, but their prophecies were conditional, so that even when they were "wrong" they were right. But did Old Testament prophets—or White—make mistakes, either in the lives they led or in the messages they delivered? Moskala writes that they did, but argues, "There is a difference between a mistake and a mistake." On the one hand, biblical figures made egregious errors: Abraham lied, Moses murdered, and David committed adultery. On the other hand, their peccadillos were hardly worth mentioning: grammatical gaffes and minor historical inaccuracies. Based on the biblical model, it is not difficult for authors in *The Gift of Prophecy* to concede, in principle, that White erred; it is quite another thing for them to provide an actual example of any significance.²

In noting the many striking parallels between the biblical prophets and White, however, it is important to recognize that White herself had been immersed in these very Scriptures. As a result, she was fully capable of submitting herself as a "job applicant" for prophet, so to speak, whether she did so consciously or unconsciously, presupposing in her own mind the biblical specifications of what she should be like as a prophet. When the essayists in *The Gift of Prophecy* turn the pages of the Bible, they see White's image everywhere, like the Virgin Mary's likeness in a smudged window. But White's similarities to the biblical prophets need not be understood in preternatural terms. After all, no book was more formative of her experience than the Bible. In "applying for the job" of prophet, she therefore knew just what the "job" entailed from a biblical perspective. In effect, she had received the "interview questions" in advance and had come "prepared." The Bible writers, then, had anticipated her, but she also had remembered them.



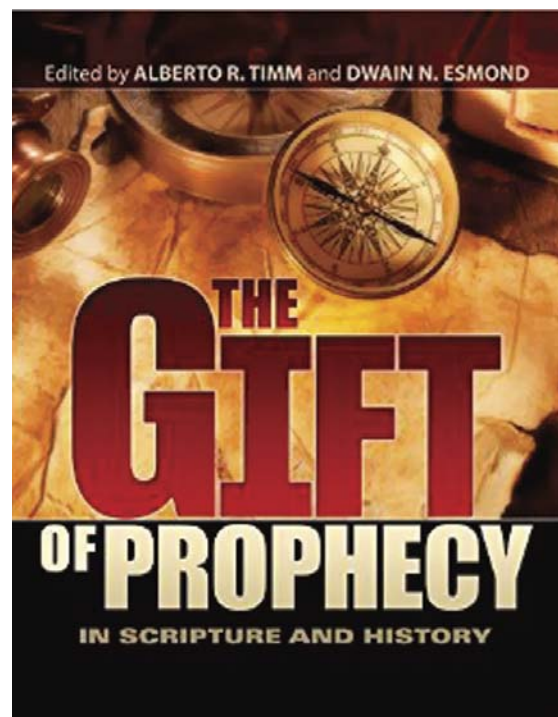
Left, Alberto R. Timm, Co-Editor, Associate Director of the Ellen G. White Estate. Right, Dwain N. Esmond, Co-Editor, Associate Director of the Ellen G. White Estate

**In all fairness
to her, prophets
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that their
messages are
culturally
conditioned.**

What authors in *The Gift of Prophecy* fail to appreciate adequately—what White herself did not fully understand—is the extent to which she remembered the Scriptures as a person of her time and place, her gender and ethnicity, as well as her religious background and cultural biases. In all fairness to her, prophets of any era rarely recognize that their messages are culturally conditioned. But like them, White was a product of her times. This can be seen as both her most salient qualification as a prophet and, ultimately, her severest limitation. It was her timeliness that made her so compelling to her contemporaries, and it is that same culture-bound timeliness that renders her remote and less relevant to many of her spiritual descendants. How many of us find her *Testimonies for the Church* to be as riveting and moving as her contemporaries did? And it was these *Testimonies*—not the *Conflict* series or the later devotional writings on Christ—that nineteenth-century Adventists equated with the “Spirit of Prophecy.”³ She would not, of course, have accepted an assessment of her prophetic vocation that admitted to its diminishing impact. In her unequivocal view, God had spoken directly to her, not as an echo of her cultural milieu.

The essayists share White’s sense that culture exerted minimal impact on anything divine. Inspired writers were “culturally conditioned” but only in their use of “language, grammar, syntax, thought patterns, metaphors” and in other inconsequential ways. Their substantive message was “transcultural because it comes from above, and not the *Sitz im Leben* context or perspective.”⁴ But such a viewpoint trivializes just how much White’s culture affected her as a prophet. There was far more to her humanity than the awkward fact that, though advocating vegetarianism, she lapsed into meat-eating herself, even consuming gag-worthy oysters.⁵ The New Englander in her seemed to have prompted both her health reforms and some of her diet preferences.

What proves much more significant regarding White’s relationship to her culture is the way in which, like so many of us, she often looked into the Bible and saw what she wanted to see.



***The Gift of Prophecy in Scripture and History*, Alberto R. Timm and Dwain N. Esmond, eds., Silver Spring, MD: Review and Herald, 2015. 416 pages.**

When, as a nineteenth-century spokesperson for temperance, she “saw” teetotalism among biblical figures, including Jesus, it was more a case of wishful thinking on her part than sound exegesis.⁶ Or when, as a nineteenth-century anti-Catholic, she clearly “saw” the face of her religious and cultural nemesis—Roman Catholicism—in the opaque symbols of *Revelation*, she had displayed more ethnocentrism than strict Biblicism.⁷ Or when, as a sabbatarian Adventist, she “saw” only her religious community as the “Remnant,” or when, as a prophet, she equated her gift—and no one else’s—with the “spirit of prophecy” in her time, this probably tells us more about White’s visions than John’s.⁸

The essayists find no fault with White’s innocence, which she exhibited throughout her career, of any notion that her culture may have influenced her. In fact, in various ways, she emphatically rejected the idea that it had. On this there is no daylight between how they view White and how she viewed herself. From the early visionary who rebuffed the idea that she’d been mesmerized, to the mature writer who

combated charges of plagiarism, White fiercely, and at times defensively, dismissed the accusation that she'd been inordinately influenced by anyone other than God.⁹ With respect to how her inspiration had been affected by her culture, writers in *The Gift of Prophecy* do not so much provide a critical analysis of the prophet as historians typically do, but instead act more like press secretaries who pass on White's point of view.

But White's very understanding of inspiration was itself a product of nineteenth-century American culture. Her insistence that she had not been influenced was itself a sign that she had been.¹⁰ She clung tenaciously to the idea of her independence, even though, in a series of well-known instances, it did not fit the reality. In the 1860s, she denied reading health reformers before writing her own tracts on health when, in fact, she *had* read them. In the 1880s, she insisted that her visions led her to select the historians who shared her views when, more typically, the historians she read *colored* her visions. In her time, to be inspired implied being an empty slate on which God had inscribed divine messages. There is no more telling example that she was a woman of her times than in the way she embraced this view.¹¹

But she was, after all, anything but an empty slate on which God wrote in immaculate prose. Her slate had been filled and refilled by her own life experiences. This tangle of the religious, the psychological, the social and cultural had

scrawled itself there by way of sermons and exhortations, books, pamphlets and newspapers, as well as letters and conversations. She also fell ill and depressed, she prayed and sang, she took walks and carriage rides, she travelled great distances. And it was all these very human experiences, both extraordinary and ordinary, that scripted her visions. It is not easy to understand the process. The gifted novelist tries to describe where the ideas came from for their book. To some degree, they were autobiographical. They also seemed to have come out of nowhere. As they say, there was both perspiration and inspiration. Writing is work; it is also a gift. From time to time, White attempted to relate her own creative process, not as a novelist, but as a visionary. For her the visions were brilliant and spectacular divine events, and each time they occurred it was natural for her to lose track of their human aspects. Ironically, the visionary herself proved an unreliable witness as to the nature of her visions. This was a way her humanity surfaced.¹²

The Gift of Prophecy covers new ground, and for this it should be applauded. We come across material in this book that we might not have expected to find in a Seventh-day Adventist study of prophecy. If we find fault with the way that material is interpreted, we should nonetheless appreciate finding it in the book. We read in Moskala and Larry Lichtenwalter (Chapters 1 and 8) of striking contrasts between the classic Old Testament prophets and the prophets described in First Corinthians 14. We gain insights from Chantal and Gerald Klingbeil's use of the "cognitive sciences and psychology" regarding the emotions of the prophets (Chapter 6), however unexpected such an interdisciplinary approach might be for this book. We learn from Richard Davidson (Chapter 7) that White exegeted Scripture as though she knew the original biblical languages, when she did not.

We read in the study by John Reeve and Rodrigo Galiza (Chapter 10) of ecstasies, visionaries, and prophets in the Early and Medieval Churches that a close reading of White's *Great Controversy* or her other historical writings do not

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Though this facetiously illustrates the point, Ellen White has remained the only recognized prophet within Seventh-day Adventism.

The essayists find no fault with White's innocence, which she exhibited throughout her career, of any notion that her culture may have influenced her.



Julian of Norwich (c. 1342–c. 1416), English mystic

reveal. Likewise, we face the fact in Denis Fortin's essay (Chapter 11) that the magisterial Reformers, whom White embraced, rejected the very prophetic gift that she possessed. We also learn from Michael Campbell (Chapter 12) that, if sixteenth-century Reformers would have had little use for White's gift, nineteenth-century Americans provided a lush environment for her kind of prophetic claims. Judging by the extensiveness of my own marginal scribbling, I would expect there is much for readers to learn from Theodore Levterov on the early acceptance of White as a prophet (Chapter 13), or the nature of her authority throughout her later career in Merlin Burt's essay (Chapter 14), or her view of the Scriptures, along with her use of them, as covered by Alberto Timm and Frank Hasel (Chapters 15 and 16), and, inevitably, her literary borrowing dealt with by Jud Lake (Chapter 17). Though these latter chapters may be mostly review for serious students of White, they will be read by conservative Adventists as much for their slant as for their content.

As a whole, *The Gift of Prophecy* points to wider vistas on prophecy, both biblically and historically, than Adventists are used to seeing.

But its authors fail to take full advantage of their more expansive purview. Instead, they tend to adopt a rather traditional view of prophecy when it comes to White herself. Examples of such parochialism permeate the volume. To categorize the biblical prophets or White as *sui generis* or one of a kind, for example, implies that prophetic experiences can only be understood by using the unique tools of religious methodology. Indeed, one must presumably be a believer in the prophets to understand them fully; one must be an Adventist to believe in White. Adventists are fine with such an approach when it comes to explaining their prophet, but are at a loss when Mormons make claims for Joseph Smith on the same grounds. This line of thought also rules out drawing on disciplines other than religion—biology, psychology, or sociology—for insights into visionaries.¹³ The Klingbeils, then, surprise us by enlisting cognitive psychology to explain the emotions of the prophets. They use cognitive psychology, however, only by cherry-picking the discipline. They employ it to explain the emotional response of the prophets to their visions but not to account for the visions themselves.

In a careful analysis of prophecy in the Corinthian community, Lichtenwalter appears to see it as a template for Adventism's prophetic experience. Yet where was—and is—the allowance among Adventists, including White herself, for a multiplicity of prophets, as was found in Corinth? And where was—and is—the expectation among Adventists that they should pass judgment on their prophet, as the Corinthians did on theirs, sorting out truth from error in her writings?¹⁴ Surveying White's uncanny insights into biblical narratives without the advantage of knowing the original languages, Davidson reports many "burning heart" experiences as an Old Testament scholar who can only account for White's glosses on Scripture as miraculous. He admits, however, that he has not yet researched the books in her library (and she read other books as well).¹⁵ He will need to do so for his thesis to be taken seriously. We will

look forward to his sequel.

The chapter on the gift of prophecy in the Early and Medieval Churches and the one on the Reformation are as innovative and informative as any in the volume. Reeve and Galiza recognize the gift of prophecy among groups like the Montanists, the Donatists, and the Waldenses. They acknowledge the gift as well in women like Hildegard of Bingen and Julian of Norwich. But they also introduce us to a case of strange bedfellows.¹⁶ The fact that the Catholic Church sought to repress generations of prophets seems oddly suggestive of the traditional Adventist penchant for ignoring them. Adventists, after all, never wanted to sanction false prophets. Reeve and Galiza do credit LeRoy Froom, A.G. Daniells, and George Rice for tracing prophetic succession throughout Christian history. But they chide Froom and

as an example, if Hildegard cannot be included among the “true” prophets, how can White make the cut? As to a succession of prophets from the second to the nineteenth centuries, Froom and Daniells, to their credit, attempted to do what White and other early Adventists unfortunately neglected doing. Nowhere in *The Gift of Prophecy* do the authors ask why White, in searching for Adventism’s useable past in *The Great Controversy*, should have affected such a profound historical amnesia with regard to prophets between Bible times and her own. Why would she have failed to embrace her kindred spirits—her fellow prophets, often themselves women—throughout Christian history?

Campbell narrates a colorful travelogue through the prophet-rich landscape of American religious history in which White could easily

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Left to right, Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179), German mystic; John Bunyan (1628–1688), author of *The Pilgrim's Progress*; Ellen G. White (1827–1915). In all the illustrations above, the inspired writers look heavenward for inspiration; no human sources of their writings are pictured. Placing herself in the good company of other mystics, White adopted this pose a number of times.

Daniells for allowing “prophets” into the tent who do not belong there.¹⁷

In his helpful discussion of prophecy at the margins of the Reformation, Fortin is similarly critical of Froom and Daniells. He, too, wants a sharper definition of prophecy that does more to separate the wheat from the tares.¹⁸ This makes sense, but only if White herself must undergo the same level of scrutiny. Just

have been lost in the shuffle. As a postscript, he asserts her uniqueness without offering credible support as to why.¹⁹ Leverov reviews White's importance in the formation of early Sabbath-keeping Adventism. At that time White was criticized, from the outside, for being an extrabiblical and marginal liability for Adventists.²⁰ Burt follows her through later Seventh-day Adventist history when she sought to reach the

outsiders with a more traditional evangelical emphasis.²¹ These two chapters, back to back, demonstrate not only White's capacity to reinvent herself, but her ability to provide Adventists with radically different reasons to believe in her. It is the later White who aspired, as a writer, to be less than inspired, in a way, and simply inspirational. Her literary borrowing reflected the change. The early White leaned heavily on fellow Adventists; the later White was more open to source material from non-Adventist biblical, historical, and devotional writers.²² Jud Lake does his best with the provocative question of her literary indebtedness. Unfortunately, though he reflects an awareness of the historical revisionism of the 1970s and early 1980s, he does not sufficiently respond to it or integrate it into his argument. But there is no way of adequately addressing this topic without a proper appreciation for the work of Ronald Numbers, Donald McAdams, William Peterson, Walter Rea, Fred Veltman, and Ron Graybill.

Like the American political scene, historians of Seventh-day Adventism—and biographers of Ellen White—seem to have polarized. On the “left,” non-Adventist historians have discovered White, while ex-Adventists and still-Adventists have rediscovered her. For them she deserves the “job” as prophet, but her “resume” reveals the psychological and cultural baggage of an ordinary and flawed person. On the “right,” conservative Adventist academics, pastors, and administrators argue for the White “hire” as a prophet because she is such a “stand-out candidate” that she may as well have fluttered down as an angel

from above. The two factions need to be talking to each other, not past each other. In political terms, *The Gift of Prophecy* speaks from the “right” to the faithful who form the base of the party. It is unlikely that anyone other than the Adventist base will read the book. By way of

contrast, the “left” recently published *Ellen Harmon White: American Prophet* (lower left), edited by Terrie Aamodt, Gary Land, and Ronald Numbers (Oxford University Press, 2014). This book has found a general readership, both widening and deepening appreciation for White beyond the reaches of Adventism.

The church has more than enough writing on White for the base. It is now ready to benefit from books on her for the general public. It is an important way the gift of prophecy can keep on giving. ■

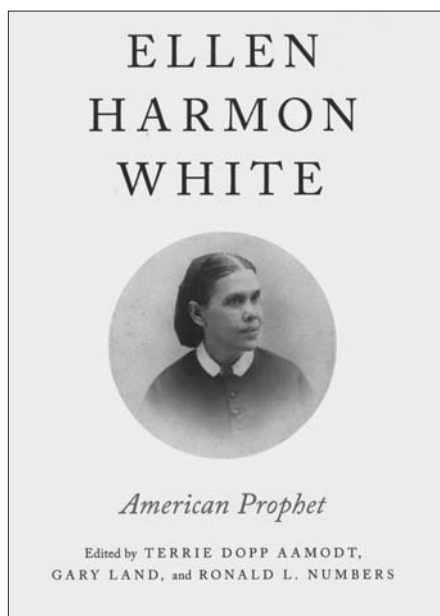
Jonathan M. Butler obtained a PhD in church history at the University of Chicago and authored *Softly and Tenderly Jesus Is Calling: Heaven and Hell in American Revivalism 1870–1920* (1991). Most of his scholarly publications, however, have focused on Millerism and Adventism. He coedited (with



Ronald L. Numbers) *The Disappointed: Millerism and Millenarianism in the Nineteenth Century* (1987). He contributed two chapters to Terrie Dopp Aamodt, Gary Land, and Ronald L. Numbers, eds., *Ellen Harmon White: American Prophet* (2014).

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14. Taves reflects on why the very earliest Adventists committed to one visionary rather than multiple authorities, in *Fits, Trances, & Visions: Experiencing Religion and Explaining Experience from Wesley to James* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 163. Throughout her life as a prophet, White unflinchingly discouraged the idea of a multiplicity of Adventist visionaries, in *Selected Messages*, III:340–341; she also refuted the notion that there were degrees of inspiration, either in the Bible or in her writings, or that aspects of her writings could be challenged; in the way of inspired writings, it was all or nothing; see, *Selected Messages*, I:17, 18, and *Testimonies for the Church*, 5:671.

15. *The Gift of Prophecy*, 166.

16. *Ibid.*, 210–211, 212, 214–215.

17. *Ibid.*, 209–211.

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19. *Ibid.*, 245.

20. *Ibid.*, 253–254, 261–264.

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22. George R. Knight provides an overview of her writing life in *Meeting Ellen White: A Fresh Look at Her Writings, and Major Themes* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1996), 91–106; on how her books were written, see Douglass, *Messenger of the Lord*, 444–454; for an example of the “later” White and literary borrowing, see Fred Veltman, “The Desire of Ages Project,” *Ministry*, LXII (October 1990): 4–7. It is not always easy to parse the difference between the “early” and “later” White with regard to literary dependence; White’s *Great Controversy*, for example, evolved over several decades and underwent major literary changes, drawing upon both Adventist and non-Adventist authors. As it turned out, however, White leaned heavily upon Adventist icon Uriah Smith for many of her non-Adventist sources; see Ronald D. Graybill, “How Did Ellen White Choose and Use Historical Sources? The French Revolution Chapter of Great Controversy,” *Spectrum*, 4 (Summer 1972): 49–53.

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Taking the Bible Seriously in Edward W. H. Vick's Theology

BY JAMES J. LONDIS

As early as 1978, an important article appeared in *Spectrum* which featured the theological efforts of (now former) Seventh-day Adventist seminary professor Edward W. H. Vick. It opens this way: "Edward W. H. Vick is an unusual figure among Seventh-day Adventist theologians because he has worked out his theological interests in a more exacting and consistent fashion than his teachers or contemporaries within the denomination."¹ Dr. Ron Walden next identifies what it is to be a theologian who, while using all the disciplines, wants to understand what the text of the Bible means in contemporary culture. Vick's efforts to be helpful to the Adventist church were then appreciated by few, even though his purpose was to produce... "greater coherence and power in Adventist preaching, provide a reasonable, integrated, satisfying set of motives for Adventist life, and generally result in better ministers, better Christians and better people."²

Walden concludes his piece with a poignant hope:

*If Edward Vick, who is not now teaching at an Adventist college, had received more sustained encouragement, he might have developed more fully some of the intriguing hints dropped in his published work and the Advent movement would undoubtedly have benefited. As it is, perhaps, we may hope for more from his pen, and especially for works in which his extraordinary methodological suggestions are worked out to their substantive conclusions. If Adventist ministers, leaders and scholars were to confront such a body of theological literature, agreeing where appropriate and disagreeing where necessary, but never relaxing the effort to understand these matters, the church could only be better for it.*³

Over the years, Walden's wish for "more from his pen" has been granted, even into Vick's eighth decade. In a prodigious effort, Vick has applied his theological acumen and interests across a range of issues essential to the future

of Adventism, not the least of which is revelation, inspiration and biblical authority. Published by Energion publications in 2011, Vick's book *From Inspiration to Understanding: Reading the Bible Seriously and Faithfully* burrows into the deep caves of what most threatens the future of our church: "What is the basis of Scriptural authority and what methods will enable us to interpret it as responsibly as we can?" Without mentioning it by name, Vick's research challenges the adequacy of certain statements in the "Methods of Bible Study" document approved by the General Conference. It is my purpose in this article to summarize this volume, thereby encouraging more Adventists to thoughtfully engage it as we anticipate the report on hermeneutics for the 2020 General Conference Session (voted at the 2015 Session in San Antonio, Texas).

To begin with, Vick, in granular fashion, details the various ways contemporary believers approach the Bible, what it means for the Bible to acquire the status of "Canon" in the Christian Church, how the question of "inspiration" relates to the Canon, and the reasons the Church takes the Bible to be authoritative. His analysis of the "series of mistakes" often made by believers about "authority" is worth the price of the book. *All this resides in the first 100 pages.* The reader is challenged to think carefully (which few do) about the meaning of the term "authority" and its relation to Christian tradition and doctrine. *Most Adventists, unfamiliar with this history, need to know it if they are to have a view of the Bible's authority that is consistent with the history of how it came into existence.*

All this is prolegomenon to how we should understand the basis of Biblical authority. In the past, the church has linked that authority to its understanding of a doctrine of "inspiration" which itself, over the millennia, has acquired meanings which contribute to our present confusion. Vick asks: Why and how, for the first time in Christian history, have large portions of the Christian community embraced

the concept of “verbal inspiration?” Currently defended (along with its cousin “thought” or “plenary inspiration”) largely by the fundamentalist wing of Protestantism, he asks whether their infallibility and inerrancy view is even faithful to the Scriptures it seeks to secure. “No,” is his response, and lays out the confusion, inadequacy and error of this approach.⁴ It follows what is known as a “presuppositional methodology,” which imposes on the Bible a pre-determined understanding of the basis of its authority.

If, on the other hand, we allow it to speak for itself and study the history of how the Bible came to be, a doctrine of inspiration will emerge that is more faithful to it. This will lead to a greater illumination of the meanings we should derive from it. Logic, then, requires concluding that if our concept of “inspiration” shapes our understanding of the Bible’s authority, it also impacts what we conclude the Bible *can reveal*. Put differently, it helps us perceive what we “do not know, and *why* we do not know” the meaning of every issue we think Scripture addresses.

That God is living and active is a primary assumption of the Old Testament. It is not concerned with rational arguments or proofs, nor are the prophets religious ‘geniuses’ with highly developed powers. Revelation is an act of God’s grace. He need not have continued to reveal his purpose to Israel. He did so.⁵

Revelatory events were many, varied and complex in Israel. Casual experiences, encounters, deep personal experiences; all became occasions for Yahweh to reveal Himself. “God came to men in many ways and at different times. . . . He reveals himself to the one who is ready to obey and to ‘perform’ the word he hears.”⁶

Like the Old Testament, the New Testament does not understand the “knowledge” of God as an intellectual achievement, but something personal and deeply relational. This in no way suggests that “facts” are unimportant since before the heart, so to speak, can respond appropriately to the Jesus of the New Testament, its words concerning Jesus must be understood. “The pur-

pose of revelation is not simply to impart information, but to communicate the life of God. Hence the condition of reception is not intellectual acumen but trustful and obedient acceptance. This, the New Testament calls *faith* “... ‘By this we may be sure that we know him, if we keep his commandments.’”⁷

What Vick means for our understanding of “revelation” is clear: God is the “subject” (the infinite subject) of revelation, who takes the initiative to make himself known. In our sinful, broken state, we can neither find nor attain knowledge of God. Philosophy and science cannot find God, even though they are magnificent rational achievements. Most especially, we humans cannot understand or know ourselves through these disciplines. “Information may be discovered. Love may not. God is not ‘discovered.’ There is no revelation without the presence of God. . . . To insist on this preserves the important conviction that only what is beyond man’s situation can reveal the nature of that situation.”⁸ Since one cannot communicate love or pass on “presence,” the Christian teaching of the Holy Spirit is essential if one would adequately understand revelation. Words spoken about God “may be empty, formal and dead” if God is not present through the Spirit. There is little dissension among believers about this portion of Vick’s discussion.

However, the book then moves into perhaps the most contentious of all the issues:

A doctrine of inspiration, if it is to be at all satisfactory, must take into account the facts about how the books of Scripture came into being and how they were recognized as special books. Different writers have understood the idea of inspiration in different ways. We examine some views and consider carefully possible meanings for the term, inspiration. Does inspiration have to do with the process i.e. the composition of the book or the product of the writing, or with both? The great diversity in the writings, and the practice within the churches in using and valuing some portions of Scripture over others, means that a ‘flat’ doctrine of inspiration is unsatisfactory, i.e. one which claims that all parts of Scripture are equally inspired.⁹

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**Like the
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relational.**

In short, if the authority of the Bible is based primarily on the doctrine of “inspiration,” any defensible theory must “take into account how the scriptural books came into being and how they became part of the canon.”¹⁰ Beliefs that ignore this process or give it insufficient importance must be rejected.

It is a common mistake to veil the variety of viewpoints, teachings, aims, styles, approaches, theologies, by simply speaking of the ‘the Bible.’ But the Bible is too diverse for that. [An adequate theology of inspiration cannot]... assume such unity. It is a fatal weakness of traditional inspiration theories that they either chose to overlook, or just did not see, the diversified character of the Bible itself.¹¹

In Vick’s analysis, no currently supported doctrine of inspiration in very conservative church groups will stand up under careful investigation; not verbal, not inerrancy, not infallibility, not even—strictly speaking—“plenary” or “thought” inspiration. One cannot base Biblical authority on one’s theory of inspiration, even if one assumes that those rare biblical texts that refer to “inspiration” (I Tim. 3:16, e.g.) are clear and self-evidently true. The Greek *theopneustos* (literally “God-breathed”), translated “inspiration,” will not support the English meaning given to it, nor is the Greek meaning of the term transparent.

Vick further notes that if one moves away from the fundamentalist or even reformed evangelical theory of revelation/inspiration (the latter supported by many, but not all, Adventist scholars), one cannot simply appeal to the “plain reading of the text” as a sufficient basis for interpretation. That approach makes two questionable assumptions: First, that any passage in any given biblical book may be illuminated by comparing it with other passages in other books. Second, that each book in the canon was the result of a process in which the Spirit dominated the writers to ensure that their teachings were consistent with each other.

Letting the sixty-six books of the canon book “speak for themselves,” therefore, does not and

cannot result in theological consistency. Even when a New Testament writer quotes an Old Testament passage as a Messianic prophecy, we must be cautious. “Out of Egypt have I called my son” cannot be used with impunity to refer to Jesus’ escape into Egypt to avoid Herod’s effort to kill him. Early church usage of the Old Testament cannot exercise the same authority for us that it did for them because we understand the function of those texts very differently. Nor will it do to argue that when an “inspired” New Testament writer quotes an Old Testament passage and applies it to Jesus differently than the passage indicates, that this makes his interpretation “inspired” and therefore correct. Having said that, it is important, says Vick, to note that the New Testament writers did urge believers to see in the events surrounding Jesus the fulfillment of the *promises given to Israel throughout its history*.

Vick makes the case that we must locate the canonical status of Scripture elsewhere. This is not to suggest that the Bible is not the result of God’s activity, only that no body of sacred writings can have authority over a given faith-community if that community does not accept its authority. Reasoning which assumes that a few obscure allusions to Biblical texts can ground the *authority* of the Bible is both circular and weak. In short, it is imperative that believers keep the authority of the Bible independent of theories of inspiration. “No account of how the book came to be what it is can explain why it has authority now.”¹²

What does the preceding analysis imply for *interpreting* the Bible, the so-called “hermeneutical” issue? Vick’s comments do not amount to a “theory” of interpretation similar to those developed by prominent philosophers like Hans-Georg Gadamer or Paul Ricoeur. Instead, he pulls out of his considerations several pragmatic proposals to help the modern believer relate more thoughtfully to Scripture, including its most troubling portions.

Reading the Bible, even for devotional purposes, is “interpreting” it. The believer is looking for meaning and guidance in how to live

one's daily life. Most Christians do not read Scripture "to inform themselves about ancient history, nor to 'prove' some dogmatic position, nor to enjoy it as literature."¹³ It is read to better understand God's ways and will and to hear God "speak," as it were, to each person and to the church. Reading for that purpose requires that you must understand the text and what it means; it is to "interpret" the text. While it may, at times, be a relatively simple matter, very often interpreting the text is complex. Name any discipline in science or the humanities, including theology, and you will find that one has to master its vocabulary. "It takes time, expenditure of effort and a degree of intelligent and sustained interest to grasp such meanings. The professional is often not able to interpret adequately to the layman the meanings which he, the professional, understands."¹⁴

"Interpretation" has a variety of meanings which should not be conflated or confused. It may refer to "translation" from one language to another, to rendering meaning for an obscure passage from the ancient past, or helping someone catch the meaning of an artistic creation. Most of us recognize that to interpret a non-verbal Beethoven symphony, musicians with high performance skills are required. "But something similar must be said when the subject matter is verbal. . . . In the case of the New Testament for example, knowledge of Greek and of the contemporary culture and history; secondly, a sympathy with the author, and a desire to understand him; thirdly, a disciplined imagination to render the meaning . . . in an appropriate way."¹⁵

This process often leads to rival theories that require us to "interpret the interpretations." How does one do that? Every discipline must confront this challenge, including theology. Vick poses a series of questions to highlight the difficulties in this many-layered interpretive process. "What was the written text interpreting, and how can we (the contemporary interpreters) understand that? We have to find our way through the many divergent interpretations of Christian teaching." Since most interpretations claim to be based on

the text of Scripture, we are forced to interpret the interpretations. This brings us to a third question: "How shall we, modern interpreters, understand our contemporary situations in the light of our Christian faith?"¹⁶

We live in a culture very alien to the Biblical writers, making it difficult for us to believe, think and feel as they did. Vick is concerned that many dismiss "the Christian message of God's love in Jesus Christ because they feel that they are being asked to believe, in connection with the essential message, things they cannot believe." In Scripture's religiously saturated culture, nothing happened unless God somehow willed it, from sickness to good fortune. Miracles were far more prevalent, as were human contacts with supernatural beings. "Today's is a context in which thought is secular, scientific, historical, post-Enlightenment and analytical. . . . In short, we are modern readers dealing with an ancient book."¹⁷

While we can strive to be faithful to the meaning of the writer as we study his text within his culture, what do we do to be faithful to what his meaning would become in our culture? Do we handle snakes to prove we trust God? Do we refuse to allow women to speak to teach men as counseled in I Tim. 2:11–15? When a loved one is dying, shall we avoid medical science and rely solely on prayer? Are we really to think that we live in a three-storied universe with the stars in a dome? When millennia separate us from the biblical writer, we cannot presume to understand his meaning simply because it has meaning for us. What does it mean to be "faithful" to *his* meaning? He interpreted the meaning of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ for his time; we must interpret it as it occurs in ours.

How are theologians to be faithful to the Bible in constructing theology, Vick asks? Do we merely repeat what the Scriptures say? That is not interpreting and betrays the ethical obligation of the theologian to admit that he stands within a tradition of interpretation that cannot be sidelined, even if he disagrees with portions of it. Notice Vick's quotation from theologian Langdon Gilkey:

**There is
no revelation
without
the presence
of God.**

**In interpreting
the Bible,
the Christian
interpreter
is dealing
with the
revelation
of God.**

*'In the Christian tradition these symbols find their normative expression, and for theology their source, in the Scriptures, since their primary reference is to the events of revelation to which the Scriptures witness. It is these symbols that are reinterpreted in various ways in tradition; and it is they that the theologian must reinterpret, re-present, in a manner intelligible to us and yet 'appropriate' or faithful to their sense in their original locus.'*¹⁸

"Symbols" like the following: "God as Lord, as judge, as electing, choosing, covenanting, God as giver of the Law, God as redeemer, God as faithful, covenant, the elected people, the Messiah, the New Age to come." Again:

*The awesome and risky task of 'constructive' or 'systematic' theology is to propose a unified contemporary understanding of that same complex of symbols, and understanding that is (a) faithful to their original sense in Scripture and tradition, (b) adequate to our own general experience, and (c) intelligible in our time.*¹⁹

Vick points to "offensive biblical passages" that should trouble those who reject a historical approach to Scripture. One may "then be in the irrational and untenable position of having to acknowledge that all the directives of Scripture [are] binding, having their source in the divine."²⁰ Elisha the prophet, for instance, instigates Jehu's revolution, sending one of the sons of the prophets to appoint him King of Israel. Jehu, accepting this honor, shoots Joham and Ahaziah, orders the murder of Jezebel, demands that Ahab's seventy sons be beheaded, and then obliterates all associates of Ahab. Following the slaughter of the Baal prophets and a number worshipping at their temple, the Bible states "For this butchery and slaughter, the Lord commends Jehu" (II Kings 9,10).

When we couple the Jehu passage with Paul's comments about the shamefulness of women speaking in church (I Cor. 14:33-45) and the Old Testament's putting to death of homosexuals (Lev. 20:13), we must admit that the traditional understandings of the inspiration of Scripture require modification. The historical distance between then and now requires our

thinking differently about "then." It is here that the various "criticisms" or methods of interpretation become necessary, even if not always definitive. A case in point: a number of biblical manuscripts do not always agree on the wording of specific passages. Which rendering is most likely the original (or closest to it) is an important question to answer, and scholars use sound principles in that task, a "critical" approach to the Bible known as textual criticism. Other so-called critical tools may also be helpful when used judiciously and within the theologian's commitment to the Bible as God's revelation.

Finally, we do not (and cannot) unthinkingly accept the pre-scientific explanations of biblical events, including those in the New Testament. No one today would argue that disease and disabilities are punishment for sin in one's family history or personal life. Nor can we assume that all New Testament "demoniacs" were possessed of demons. Medical science now accounts for their behaviors (bipolar, psychotic) quite convincingly. Still, in spite of our historical and cultural distance, with all of its attendant challenges, Vick ends his volume with these encouraging words:

In interpreting the Bible, the Christian interpreter is dealing with the revelation of God. The believer confesses that here one encounters the living God.

*Through these words God encounters him. He finds that God comes to him, speaks to him, becomes a reality in his experience. Hence the Bible is not simply a book to be studied as literature. What the Christian interpreter reckons with is that the reality of God has become known and is becoming known through Scripture. It is the same God known through Jesus Christ to those who in the New Testament witnessed to their faith. So the interpreter presupposes that the reality revealed to him is the same reality revealed to them.*²¹

In today's world, skeptical of all things concerning "faith" in the God of the Bible, Edward W. H. Vick's trenchant theology of inspiration, revelation, and Biblical authority, coupled with the importance of careful princi-

ples of interpretation, contribute significantly to making the reality of the God of Jesus Christ more rationally compelling and eminently worthy of worship. For this, all believers, including Seventh-day Adventists, owe him their profoundest gratitude. ■

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ADVENTIST FORUM

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A plate from William Blake's *Illustrations of the Book of Job*, a series of twenty-two engraved prints published 1826.

An Adventist Wycliffe: *In Defense of God and Human Freedom* | BY ALDEN THOMPSON

Does Sigve Tonstad get any sleep at all? If he is not grappling with the difficult issues confronting humans in their search for a credible God, he is writing monumental books about those struggles. *God of Sense and Traditions of Non-sense* (GoS) joins three other substantial volumes that have appeared under his name in the last ten years, each with an impressive bibliography and helpful indexing.¹

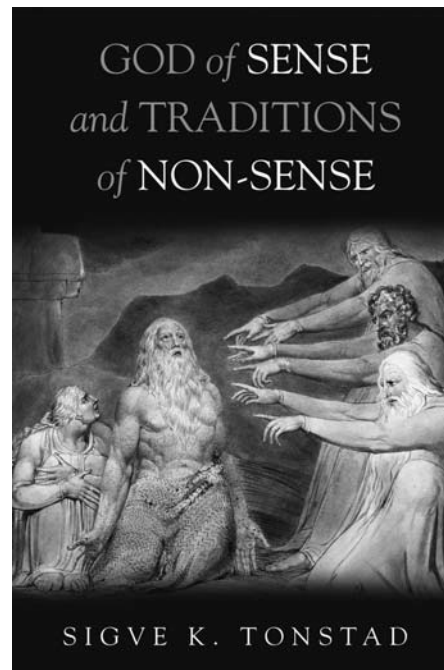
The precursor of GoS appeared in 2000 under the title *The Scandals of the Bible*.² In this modest little book of 154 pages, the Norwegian-born physician and biblical scholar describes the issues that haunt him: “I have chosen a category of scandals that concern God’s silence in the face of evil with all its atrocities. It is God’s apparent and disturbing inaction that has been most puzzling to me, as it has to many others.”³ In short, his focus is theodicy, the attempt to justify the existence of a good and powerful deity in the face of evil. Now, sixteen years later, that little book has mushroomed into a spectacular *magnum opus* of 453 pages, published by Wipf and Stock, a major U. S. press.

In GoS, the use of the term “non-sense” does not at all refer to mere “foolishness.” Rather, Tonstad is addressing a deeply-rooted tradition that, in the name of “human incapacity” and “divine inscrutability,”⁴ would deny human beings their right to pose their questions to God. Key spokespersons for that oppressive tradition include Job’s friends (especially Elihu), Augustine of Hippo (354–430), Martin Luther (1483–1546), John Calvin (1509–1564), and Karl Barth (1886–1968), a startling list of villains, to be sure. Elihu’s modest fan base makes him a safe target. But Augustine, Luther, Calvin and Karl Barth are all heavy-weights. Even in Adventism, Ellen White’s *The Great Controversy* dedicates some sixty pages to Luther, and another seventeen to Calvin.⁵

But before we turn specifically to the book’s arguments, let me explain a line in my title: “An Adventist Wycliffe.”

As I worked through the book I kept thinking of an Ellen White quotation that had an incendiary impact on me when I was a young Adventist reading *The Great Controversy*. Referring to John Wycliffe, the “morning star” of the Reformation, Ellen White wrote: “Wycliffe received a liberal education, and with him the fear of the Lord was the beginning of wisdom. He was noted at college for his fervent piety as well as for his remarkable talents and sound scholarship. In his thirst for knowledge he sought to become acquainted with every branch of learning.”⁶ The whole paragraph is a passionate affirmation of learning in the service of God. At a time when the church’s scholars are often viewed with suspicion, Tonstad has “sought to become acquainted with every branch of learning.” The enormous breadth of knowledge reflected in GoS is what triggered the connection with Wycliffe. And it’s all there: biblical studies, church history, Holocaust literature, modern novels. Astonishing is not too strong a word.

From one perspective, I suspect that Wycliffe, a strong advocate of predestination, would join Tonstad’s list of vil-



Sigve Tonstad, *God of Sense and Traditions of Non-sense*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2016. Xxii + 453 pages.

**In short,
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lains in this particular project. The only interest most predestinarians have in theodicy is to oppose it. And this book is serious theodicy. But depending on the agenda, we all choose up sides differently. Just as Ellen White admitted that Calvin as a public leader was not “faultless nor were his doctrines free from error,”⁷ so Tonstad states: “A comprehensive representation of the lives, work, and legacies of people like Augustine, Martin Luther, or Karl Barth would look different from the one given here and in many respects be admirable.”⁸

Though Tonstad’s title highlights the crucial tension between those who need the freedom to confront God (sense) and those who feel the need to curtail that freedom (non-sense), another two-part agenda could just as easily receive top billing: 1) the defense of the miraculous in Scripture; and 2) an apology for a personal demonic being who opposes God. The two are closely linked, for if one denies the supernatural, a personal devil vanishes as well. And when that happens, Tonstad suggests, one stands helpless before the horrors of the Holocaust.

In that connection, he cites a famous quote from the German New Testament scholar, Rudolph Bultmann (1884–1976): “It is impossible to use electric light and the wireless and to avail ourselves of modern medical and surgical discoveries, and at the same time to believe in the New Testament world of spirits and miracles. We may think we can manage it in our own lives, but to expect others to do so is to make the Christian faith unintelligible and unacceptable to the modern world. The mythical eschatology is untenable for the simple reason that the parousia of Christ never took place as the New Testament expected. History did not come to an end, and, as every schoolboy knows, it will continue to run its course.”⁹

What was so unnerving for me was the connection Tonstad drew between Bultmann’s condescending statement—“as every schoolboy knows”—and the Holocaust. Tonstad ticks off the rising crescendo of horrors that stalked the Jews in Germany, “undeterred by the racial

Nuremberg Laws of 1935; by the dismissal of all Jewish university professors the same year; by the *Kristallnacht* of November 9, 1938, when Jewish property was vandalized and synagogues burned to the ground all across Germany; by the decree on September 1, 1941, that all Jews had to wear a yellow star in public; and by the mass deportation of Jews that began on October 15, 1941.”¹⁰

Tonstad quotes Bultmann’s biographer, Konrad Hammann, as saying that “Bultmann wanted his students ‘to continue doing theology’ in the direction shown by Karl Barth in 1933, ‘as if nothing had happened.’”¹¹ His search for “benign ways to tame the beast” included his (failed) efforts to convince Barth to join him in signing an oath of loyalty to Hitler.¹² Tonstad notes that Bultmann’s quote about the modern use of electricity and the wireless is horribly ironic when “the electric lights are turned off in the gas chambers at Auschwitz, and when the radio fails to report live from the scene.” The failure of Christianity is also reflected in the fact that in 1938, when the disasters began to mount, “the persecuted Jews were not at all or hardly prayed for.”¹³

But now let’s look at the genealogy of *GoS* as reflected in *Scandals*, its out-of-print precursor.¹⁴ While there are brief glimpses of the Holocaust in that little book, its primary focus is on “scandalous” biblical stories, almost all of which show up in one form or another in *GoS*. After opening with “The Concubine’s Long Night” (Judges 19–21), *Scandals* touches on all the right stories and all the right people, including the great biblical skeptics who were unafraid to confront God over evil: Abraham, Moses, Job, Elijah.

The most notable contrast, however, between *Scandals* and *GoS* lies in the overall structure. In *GoS*, the opening lines focus on the Holocaust; the story of the concubine does not appear until the eleventh chapter of twenty-one. But I was also struck by a notable omission and a significant addition in *GoS*, at least when compared with *Scandals*. The omission is the chapter on “Child Sacrifice,” intriguing because *GoS* provides a rich analysis of both Genesis 18 (Sodom)

and 22 (sacrifice of Isaac), noting, in particular, Abraham's tenacious worry that the "Judge of the all the earth" might destroy the innocent and the wicked together. But Tonstad does not attempt to explain why Abraham, after his brave confrontation over Sodom, heads to Mt. Moriah without a whimper. Might a solution lie close at hand in the missing chapter, "Child Sacrifice"? In Abraham's day, as throughout the Old Testament, child sacrifice had come to be seen as the highest gift to rapacious gods. If everyone else was sacrificing their firstborn son to their gods, why would not Abraham be asked to do the same for his God?

An intriguing *GoS* addition to the narratives found in *Scandals* appears in the analysis of Job, namely, the suggestion that the vivid description of the untamed Leviathan in the second divine speech in Job is a reference to a demonic being.¹⁵ That addition is not mentioned in *Scandals*.

But what is most striking about *GoS* is the full-fledged application of the principles adumbrated in *Scandals* to our modern world in light of the Holocaust. Tonstad opens with a horrific narrative from his native Norway. At 5:00 a.m. on November 26, 1942, 100 taxis fanned out across the Norwegian capital Oslo, each one accompanied by three armed men and led by a policeman. They rounded up 302 Jewish men, 188 women, and 42 children. Shortly before 3:00 that same day, the German ship *Donau* left Oslo with its human cargo. Less than a week later, in the evening of December 1, all the women and children were murdered.¹⁶ The vivid images documented in that opening narrative reverberate throughout *GoS*.

In many ways, *GoS* reads like a modern novel, with chapters on biblical narratives interleaved with segments on ancient and modern literature; the narratives are often left open, then picked up again later in the book as the "plot" thickens. The Christian apologist Origen (185–254) and his dialogue with the deceased second-century Celsus is one of those recurring themes, as is the extensive treat-

ment of *The Brothers Karamazov*, the capstone work of the Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821–1881). In particular, Ivan Karamazov's "poem," "The Grand Inquisitor," assumes a central role in Tonstad's depiction of the vivid contrast between the suffering God revealed in Jesus and the domineering God of power as seen by imperial theologians.¹⁷

On balance, the book is a *tour de force*, all the more so because Tonstad's beautiful prose is unmatched. And he isn't even writing in his native tongue.

But I must close with a reference to an unfinished task thrown into bold relief by *GoS*, namely, the question of how to do justice to the role of a sovereign God in human experience. How does one account for the beauty and power of monastic lives, for example, in the Roman Catholic tradition, lives such as Thomas Merton (1915–1968) and Henri Nouwen (1932–1996)?

Perhaps the need to worship an all-powerful God is reflected in the "Trial of God," described in several forms by Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel, whose God died at Auschwitz and who makes several appearances in *GoS*. In the introduction to Wiesel's dramatic presentation of the trial, Robert McAfee Brown tells how a teacher of Talmud befriended the fifteen-year-old Wiesel in Auschwitz. This is the story as Brown recounts it: "One night the teacher took Wiesel back to his own barracks, and there, with the young boy as the only witness, three great Jewish scholars—masters of Talmud, Halakhah, and Jewish jurisprudence—put God on trial, creating, in that eerie place, 'a rabbinic court of law to indict the Almighty.'¹⁸ The trial lasted several nights. Witnesses were heard, evidence was gathered, conclusions were drawn, all of which issued finally in a unanimous verdict: the Lord God Almighty, Creator of Heaven and Earth, was found *guilty* of crimes against creation and humankind. And then, after what Wiesel describes as an 'infinity of silence,' the Talmudic scholar looked at the sky and said 'It's time for evening prayers,' and the members of the tribunal recited Maariv, the evening service."¹⁹

**If everyone
else was
sacrificing
their firstborn
son to their
gods, why
would not
Abraham be
asked to do
the same for
his God?**

On balance,
 the book
 is a tour de
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 prose is
 unmatched.

Another paradox: Why is it that predestinarian, Augustinian/Calvinist parents tend to give birth to free-will Arminian/Wesleyan children, while free-will parents tend to give birth to those who cherish a sovereign God? Some years ago at a seminar in a solidly free-will United Methodist Church in Pensacola, Florida, I asked the some forty-five Methodists in attendance how many of them had family or friends who had once stood in the free-will tradition, but who had shifted their loyalties to the evangelical/Reformed tradition. Virtually every hand went up.

My commitment to the body of Christ, which for me means a big-tent Adventism—or a big-encampment Adventism (to borrow a phrase from John Webster of La Sierra University)—forces me to address that issue. What is important to both Sigve and me is that we both must ask our questions. We may not find the answers, but we must be free to ask our questions. I look forward to long hours of conversation with Sigve and others as we pursue the questions raised in and by his magnificent book. ■

Alden Thompson is professor of biblical studies at Walla Walla University. His books *Inspiration: Hard Questions, Honest*



Answers and Escape from the Flames: How Ellen White Grew from Fear to Joy and Helped Me to Do it Too have played an important role in the community discussion about Ellen White.

References

1. His other major books, all currently in print, are: *Saving God's Reputation: The Theological Function of Pistis Iesou in the Cosmic Narratives of Revelation* (London and New York: T & T Clark, 2006), a slightly revised version of his doctoral dissertation, submitted to the University of St. Andrews in Scotland in 2004; reissued in softcover by Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2013; *The Lost Meaning of the Seventh Day* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2009), and *The Letter to the Romans: Paul among the Ecologists*, The Earth Bible Commentary 7, (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2016).
2. Sigve Tonstad, *The Scandals of the Bible* (Alma Park, Grantham Lincs: Autumn House, 2000).
3. *Ibid.*, 10–11.
4. *GoS*, 4.

5. Ellen White, *The Great Controversy* (1911): on Luther: 120–170, 185–196; on Calvin, 219–236.
6. *Great Controversy*, 80.
7. *Ibid.*, 236.
8. *GoS*, xxi.
9. Rudolph Bultmann, "New Testament and Mythology" (1941), cited from *Kerygma and Myth*, Hans Werner Bartsch, ed. (Harper Torchbook, 1961), 5.
10. *GoS*, 15.
11. *Ibid.* The italics are Tonstad's.
12. *Ibid.* The Barth-Bultmann negotiations are taken from the *Barth-Bultmann Letters*, 78–79.
13. *Ibid.*, 18, citing Nicha Brumlik, "Post-Holocaust Theology," from *Betrayal: German Churches and the Holocaust* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 176.
14. Unfortunately, *Scandals* is out of print, though copies can be had for a price. At the point of writing, one could purchase a used copy through Bookfinder.com for as low as \$53.72 and a new one for as high as \$1,485.93 (from Amazon.co.uk).
15. Job 41:1–34, *GoS*, 260–263.
16. *GoS*, xviii.
17. The most thorough analysis of *The Brothers Karamazov* in *GoS* is found in chapter 2 (22–35) and chapter 18 (427–343).
18. A citation from Irving Abrahamson, ed., *Against Silence: The Voice and Vision of Elie Wiesel* (New York: Holocaust Publications, 1985), 112–13.
19. Robert McAfee Brown, from the "Introduction" to *Elie Wiesel, The Trial of God* (New York: Schocken Books, 1995), vii.
20. Webster's suggestion surfaced in the discussion of a paper I presented at the West Coast Religion Teachers Conference at La Sierra University (April 8–10, 2016): "The Theocentric Former Adventists: Could They Return to a Big-Tent Adventism?" Several of my peace-loving WCRTC colleagues noted how exhausting it was to try to bring everyone inside a "big tent." That's when Webster suggested a "big encampment" like ancient Israel had in the wilderness. The sanctuary would be in the middle and individuals could pitch their tents around the sanctuary at whatever distance they wished.

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Sabbath

BY RUTHIE HEAVRIN OROZCO

Rows of heads peer forward
but my head, which has always turned
toward my thoughts, stares through
stained glass in search of Dickinson's
bobolinks. I have left my studies between
the pages of the week, and my songs
have already been sung.

The church diminishes with each passing
flower and I count my steps to track
my wandering mind. My reflection appears
in a tree and I imagine God waiting
for me, there.

"Come," the Creator once said
in a dream. "Sit beside placid, blue waters
and feel warmth from a stoic sun."

The Easter grass growing on the tree
cushions me like the air beneath Christ's feet.

"Follow," they say and I leave
my congregation behind
as I ascend the mountain.

Ruthie Heavrin Orozco is a graduate
English student at La Sierra University.

