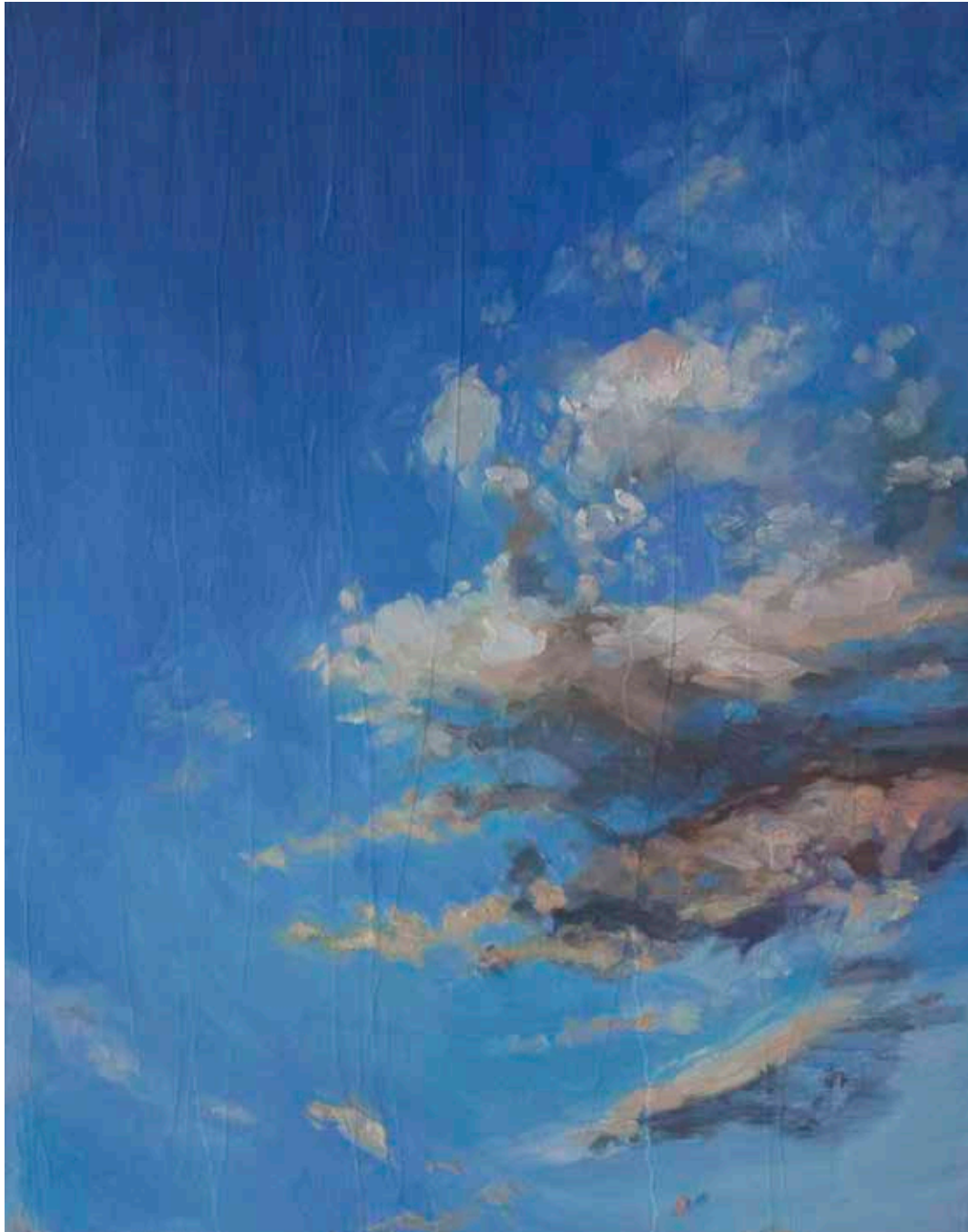


 community through conversation

# SPECTRUM



**Genesis One and the Sabbath • Wandering, Not Lost**

Job's Dilemma and the Future of Adventist Geoscience • *Adventist-Catholic Healthcare*

community through conversation  
**SPECTRUM**

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ABOUT THE ARTWORK: SCATTER

The series "Horizons" is an ongoing body of work that reveals my thoughts and experience on the meditative experience of painting, through the subject of landscape painting. My focus on this imagery is inspired by my experience with personally significant locations along major bodies of water, including the coast of Florida (where I grew up) and Michigan (where I currently live) and how their environment, terrain, and skies impacted my life.

The contemplation of nature is a common experience for many people as a form of rest and rejuvenation. We climb great heights not just for the satisfaction of reaching the peak, but also to witness the immense view only visible at the top. The act of painting is an active mode of meditation where I can retreat when life is increasingly busy and complex. My goal is to simplify and abstract the landscape as a universal horizon by focusing on shape and the colors of the sky, while emphasizing a network of mark-making. I am influenced by painters such as Georgia O'Keeffe, both for her paint handling and in composition and drawing, as well as John Evans for simplified form and use of color.

ABOUT THE ARTIST: KARI FRIESTAD



Kari Friestad is a professor of fine art and program director of visual art and design programs at Andrews University, where she teaches painting and drawing in the Department of Visual Art, Communication, and Design. She received her MFA in Painting from Kendall College of Art and Design of Ferris State University. As a contemporary painter, she investigates the possibilities and limitations of oil paint through the various genres of painting, such as in the ongoing series Horizons, a landscape series depicting universal horizons as a symbol

of contemplation and placement. Originally from central Florida, Kari is heavily influenced by memories of the colorful sky and seascapes of the Floridian coast, as well as the similarities of the sky and landscape of southwest Michigan, where she currently lives and works.

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# Better Together | BY BONNIE DWYER

For some people, it is traveling around the world that helps them understand the diversity within Adventism. While we all study from the same Sabbath School lesson quarterly, the discussion in Lake Titicaca, Peru, is different from that at Orcas Island, Washington, or the Seychelles Islands in Africa. Even regional travel can provide different pictures of Adventism.

In February, I went to Southern California for the One Project at the Crosswalk Church in Redlands, California. I came away blessed by Alex Bryan’s description of the big story of Christianity, delighted by Jennifer Scott’s exploration of the spiritual concept of play. There were earplugs available for those who found the music a tad loud, and lattes were served in the lobby. In the conversation periods between the short lectures, the audience shared their reflections and enthusiasm for the material presented.

A couple of weeks later, I went across town to the Sacramento Central Church where the Last Generation for Christ held a symposium defending Last Generation Theology, given that four new books have come out in the past year questioning this conservative take on Adventism. The Weimar Institute Chamber Singers led the audience in lively hymns between the hour-long lectures. A Fellowship lunch was served in between church and the afternoon session and bountiful refreshments were served at the conclusion of the program. It was a congenial symposium, punctuated with “amens” as the presenters suggested that Last Generation Theology is Adventist theology.

Thinking about these two very Adventist, very different weekends, I decided the attendees from each of the symposiums would benefit from attending the other session. The Last Generation people talk about the importance of

reproducing Christ’s character in believers, but they don’t spend much time on Christ’s character—a trip to the One Project could help fill that void. The One Project attendees might be motivated by listening to people talk about the importance of personal transformation—now. That how they respond to Christ matters.

In other words, we need each other. Adventism is better because of both the One Project and Last Generation

**Rather than harping at each other about the things that we disagree about, let’s celebrate the ideas that each brings to the table. And that might help us with a third group, a group that no longer considers itself part of Adventism.**

Theology. Rather than harping at each other about the things that we disagree about, let’s celebrate the ideas that each brings to the table. And that might help us with a third group, a group that no longer considers itself part of Adventism—those who leave. In early April, I also attended a Nurture and Retention Summit at the General Conference where the discussion was about the 15 million who have left Adventism since 1965. “These are our brothers and sisters in Christ, our sons and

daughters,” Archivist David Trim reminded the audience. Loving attention might have helped them to stay.

The time-honored progression of acceptance, forgiveness, love would serve us all well. Accepting people for who they are, wherever they are, and not expecting them to be exactly like us could get us talking to each other. A spirit of forgiveness for ideas that might differ could bind us together, make possible that love that is to be the mark of Jesus’ followers.



BONNIE DWYER is editor of *Spectrum*.

# Framing Narratives | BY CARMEN LAU

In a time for new beginnings, springtime envelopes my home with a lime green canopy. With varied perspectives, this issue of the journal examines Creation, the beginning that, for us, can foreshadow new beginnings. Recently, a few ideas about Genesis have invaded my awareness.

First is the idea that God uses words and deeds to create people. Chapter One demonstrates the power of a word, when God speaks humanity into existence. Chapter Two presents the power of a deed, when God shapes man out of clay. These two stories show God overseeing creation by using words and deeds, actions of which we too are capable. Could this be a way that each of us could be a part of making something new?

For the *Spectrum* reader, who values worshipping God with the mind, one can approach the study of Genesis in tandem with hermeneutics, biology, history, archaeology, and more. Yet, when any academic field of study is considered in dialogue with the Creation Story, I have noticed that some will tend to fidget and be anxious. Perhaps, this reflects a fear that using an intellectual lens might threaten our *raison d'être*. In my view, Tonstad's *The Lost Meaning of the Seventh Day* gives theological robustness to Sabbath-keeping that can neutralize denominational existential fear. If I could offer a summary of that book, it would be this: By marking one day a week as hallowed, God shows His commitment, from the beginning, to being faithful to all of creation.

Building on Tonstad's lost meaning of the seventh day, I value framing seventh-day Sabbath keeping as a mark of *Constantinian Resistance*, and this, to me,

contributes to a full-bodied reason for denominational existence. Constantine did more than codify a day change, he changed the ethos of Christianity. He changed the emphasis from a people worshipping a loving, faithful God who cared for the "least of these," to an organization aligned with the powerful and willing to act politically and coercively, even to the point of violence.

One other idea about Genesis comes from some conversations with Rwandan genocide survivors a few months ago; I gained profound respect for the power of the creation story as a peacemaking framing narrative. Several people told me of their appreciation, and respect, for an Adventist pastor in Kigali, Jonas Barame, who went door to door twenty-five years ago when violence was beginning in the city. The pastor's message to church members emphasized that there was one humanity and one ethnicity, and he used the Creation

Story to validate the idea. This premise continues to be a guiding story for Christians in Rwanda who seek to live peacefully now.

The Bible, a collection of many sorts of divinely inspired writings, contains many stories. Stories can be used to frame reality, when they shape cognition, emotion, and group dynamics. I heard the power of a story in Rwanda. I pray that those who read this issue of the journal will uncover the framing narrative that God intended in the Genesis Creation Story.

**The Bible, a collection of many sorts of divinely inspired writings, contains many stories. Stories can be used to frame reality, when they shape cognition, emotion, and group dynamics. I heard the power of a story in Rwanda.**



CARMEN LAU is chairperson of Adventist Forum.

KEYWORDS: guided innocence, Rainer Maria Rilke, hitchhiking, moving illustrations of faith

# *Wandering, Not Lost*

BY BARRY CASEY

I BELIEVE IN ALL THAT HAS NEVER YET BEEN SPOKEN.  
I WANT TO FREE WHAT WAITS WITHIN ME.  
SO THAT WHAT NO ONE HAS DARED TO WISH FOR  
MAY FOR ONCE SPRING CLEAR  
WITHOUT MY CONTRIVING.<sup>1</sup>

— RAINER MARIA RILKE

**D**uring my year of college in England in the early 1970s, I hitchhiked as often as I could. The roads were less crowded then. I dare say it was safer, too, and students wearing their college colors could almost always get a ride with lorry drivers or other travelers. On a fine autumn afternoon, I set out from my college near Windsor, for Stratford (as in Shakespeare), a short hop of less than fifty miles. I was used to getting a ride within half an hour, but I grew impatient as the afternoon waned. So, I crossed the road to the opposite direction and got a lift within five minutes. The driver was headed south and west, whereas I had been heading north. But that was alright, so I went along.

The protocol for conversations ran along fairly predictable lines. I would jump in, the driver would state where their destination was, and ask where I was going, and off we would go. Often, the next set of questions would be, “Where are you studying?” or “What are you studying?” or more generally, “What brings you to this country?”

After my response that I was studying religion, the driver glanced over at me and gave a short laugh. He looked to be in his fifties, wearing jeans and a jean jacket, short, graying hair, a ruggedly handsome face.

“I wonder if you can help me,” he said. “My marriage is breaking up—my third marriage—and I don’t know what to do. I have a cottage out in Cornwall—” he paused, “and I guess I’ll stay there until I figure something out. You’re religious: what should I do?”

I was a sophomore in college, nineteen years old, unschooled in the ways of the world, and near the bottom of the list for reliable marriage counseling. But I did have malpractice insurance and it was this: I had made a pact with God that if I got a lift I would speak of my faith in Christ as the opportunity presented itself. I added a

rider to the agreement that only if the driver initiated the subject would I “witness” to my faith. I’d had enough of running into roaming packs of over-enthusiastic Christian youths in Berkeley and San Francisco to know that imposing or tricking people into listening to a witnessing spiel was not for me.

So here it was, my cue to speak. I should also mention that the final clause in the agreement was that I be given the words to say. Not asking too much, I reasoned, given the stakes. So, we talked, or rather I talked, and he listened as we pattered along in his little Citroën. He listened intently, with a question or two now and then, or he smiled and nodded. Finally, up ahead was Stonehenge, where I had decided to get out, and, with the stones silhouetted against a blazing sunset, we coasted to a stop by the road. We sat for a moment, gazing in wonder at the sight. Then he turned to me with tears in his eyes and said, “Will you pray for me?” “Of course,” I said, and opened the door to get out. “No, I mean now,” he said, and put a hand on my arm. “Here, right now.” I gulped, and then I prayed with him. We shook hands, I got out, he drove off. And I stood there with a full heart and a mind full of questions.

Here’s the thing: when I got out—and even in the days that followed—I couldn’t remember anything of what I’d said, except that at one point I recited 1 Corinthians 13 in its entirety, a passage I had never memorized to my knowledge. Now, some forty-six years later, with a memory I no longer trust out of my sight, that recitation is still all I can remember saying. I don’t know what happened to that man; I hope his life turned around. I know mine did. Theory turned into practice, hoped-for faith into action. It was enough.

We often describe our youth as lost, when they just may be seeking a point from which to launch. If you don’t

have a destination you can't be lost. It's only when we establish a goal or a time limit or a linear point that we become concerned about losing our way. But, on many of our life journeys we don't know the final point and we may not even know the way. Our lives are moving illustrations of faith as a rolling wave, traveling in a general direction without a specific landing point.

\*\*\*

Somewhere in his many writings Kurt Vonnegut sardonically tosses out the fact that the universe is expanding in every direction, whistling past our ears, outward at thousands of miles per second. Everything else, he intimates, pales beside that. By contrast, Northrop Frye says in his classic, *The Great Code*, that our default demand for unity and integration, for drawing reality in around us, can only rise as high as our finite imagination.

We choose our metaphors, but, before that, they somehow choose us. Our descriptions of our paths through life (there's one!) are the images of what draws us onward (another one!) at certain points in our trajectory (you *see?*). They may change as we change; the important thing to remember is that we adapt to live up to them.

For many people today, their life metaphor is exile and homelessness. Even if they live in the Hamptons, Aspen, or Palm Beach, they feel themselves to be adrift. Another group, often evangelical Christians, revel in the faintly militaristic strains of "We're Marching to Zion," and, while the route ahead runs off the edge of the map, they plunge ahead with confidence. Still others, as advanced in years as they are free to be both curious and experienced, will see their lives as a guided wandering, neither aimless nor pre-determined.

We need to wander until being "lost" doesn't matter.

We need to wander until our reference points are behind us.

We need to wander without fear or assumptions.

But how long can you travel before it's too far to return?

Frye says that if we *really* want to see past the event horizon, we need to follow a way or direction until we reach the state of guided innocence symbolized by the sheep in the twenty-third Psalm.

Even though I walk through the  
darkest valley,

I fear no evil;  
for you are with me. —Psalm 23:4

Frye goes on to note that Jesus was a wanderer and that the diffusion of early Christianity "is symbolically connected with the progress of man back to the garden of Eden," the "wandering but guided pastoral world of the twenty-third Psalm."

The "wandering" motif runs against our linear, goal-driven, deadline-clutching lifestyle, and while there's a necessity for all of that, there can also be a place for unfettered curiosity and the luxury of wandering *without* a necessity or obligation.

Try it sometime: take a stroll through the gospels or the prophets or the Psalms, finding a text that lights up the imagination and following its references and associations until you reach a place you've not been to before. What do you find? Who is there? What do they smile or frown about? What makes them laugh and what are they completely serious about?

Try on a new idea or flip an old one around and see what difference it makes. Imagine that God is in search of us; that your co-worker poses no threat but is struggling to get through her life; that a good word in due season is on the tip of your tongue; and that truth still really matters.

I look back on those hitchhiking days and I marvel sometimes. I would set out with no money and a light heart, sleeping in fields, trudging through the rain, alone on some country road with no traffic for miles—but it was all good. Countless times there were strangers who protected me; friends who gave me shelter, warmth, and a cuppa; country churches and city cathedrals which opened their arms to me; fields and meadows that welcomed me—there was even delight in adversity. What I didn't know freed me, what I was learning strengthened me, what there was to learn lured me onward. Be it ever so.

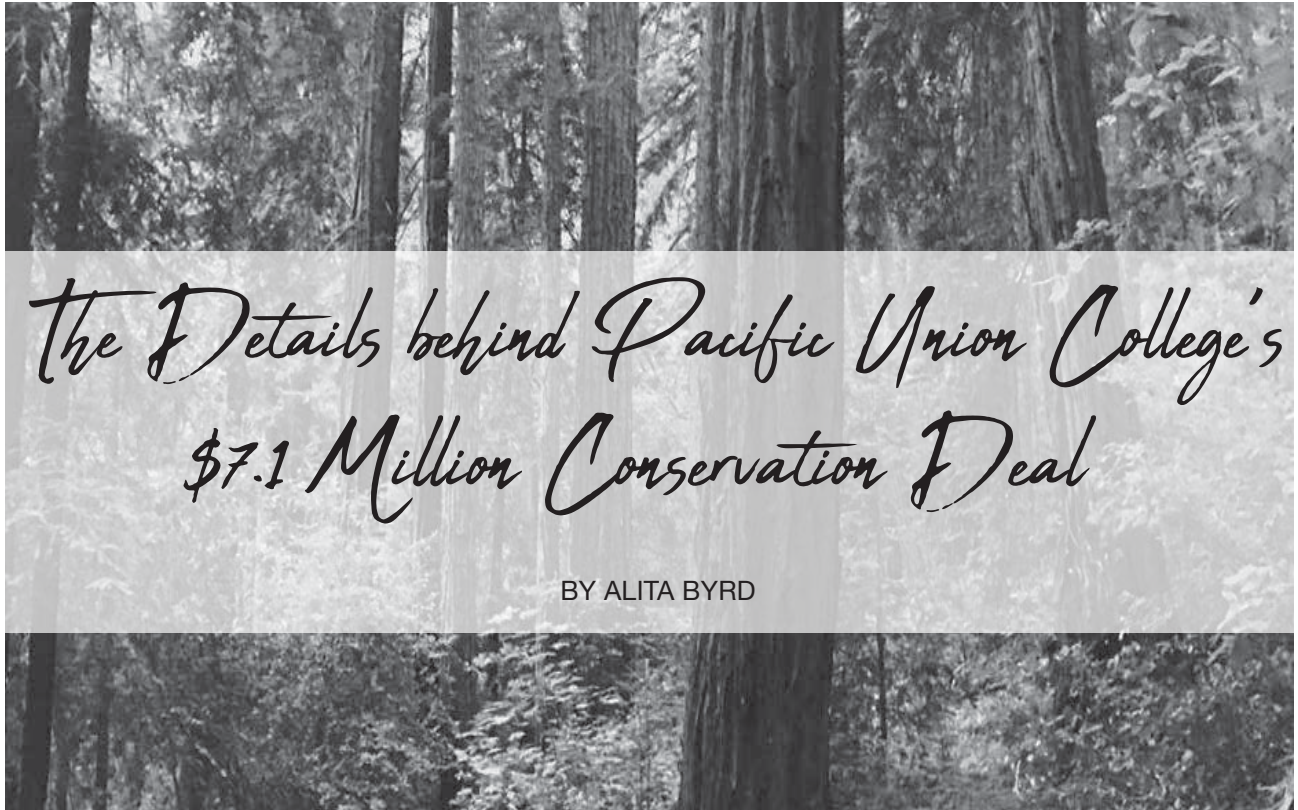
#### Endnote

1. Rainer Maria Rilke, *Rilke's Book of Hours: Love Poems to God*, Anita Barrows and Joanna Macy, trans., (New York: Berkeley Publishing Group, 1996).



BARRY CASEY taught philosophy, ethics, religion, and communications for 37 years at universities in Maryland and the District of Columbia. He is now retired and writing full-time from his home in Burtonsville, Maryland.





# The Details behind Pacific Union College's \$7.1 Million Conservation Deal

BY ALITA BYRD

Coast Redwoods in the forest.

**Editor's Note:** *In this interview with Alita Byrd (AB) Pacific Union College's first forest manager, Peter Lecourt (PL), explains how the college made a deal to "have its cake and eat it too"—a payment of \$7.1 million to keep its forest undeveloped and continue to use it as an outdoor classroom across departments.*

**AB:** Pacific Union College recently announced it had agreed to a deal to keep its more than 800 acres of forest from being developed. The agreement with The Land Trust of Napa County and the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) gives PUC \$7.1 million to keep its forest. That sounds like a pretty good deal! Is it?

**PL:** It is a great deal! With the conservation easement, we generated \$7.1 million to go toward the college's

primary educational mission, yet we also get to keep the forest and continue to use it for educational purposes, such as research and fieldwork conducted by students and faculty in the department of biology. This is a true instance



Peter Lecourt, Pacific Union College's forest manager.

of “having your cake and eating it too,” and has been an amazing opportunity for PUC.

This partnership stipulates that we will not develop the land. As we realize how important the forest is to PUC and to Angwin, keeping the forest to support the mission of PUC—and generating \$7.1 million in the process—are seen as more valuable to the college than the right to develop the land.

**AB: Where does the \$7.1 million come from?**

**PL:** Three and a half million dollars came from California’s Wildlife Conservation Board, which has a mission to help protect animal habitat in California. CAL FIRE’s Greenhouse Gas Fund provided \$2.9 million, as a way to help keep carbon sequestered in trees and out of the atmosphere. The Land Trust of Napa County found a donor, who wished to remain anonymous, interested in the project, and this donor gave \$700,000 to finalize the fundraising process and get us up to \$7.1 million.

**AB: The amount agreed is less than the appraised value of the property. Explain to us why PUC is happy with accepting an amount that is \$1.5 million lower than the value.**

**PL:** Many individuals who own land placed under conservation easements don’t actively use the land. However, PUC plans to actively use the forest as an important part of the college’s future. I look forward to seeing more and more students using the land for both research and recreation, as well as spiritual renewal. This conservation easement is a big part in that effort.

Accepting a value lower than the appraised value is the equivalent of PUC making a donation to the project and shows that PUC is also investing to protect this vital resource alongside our great partners who helped us to make this happen.

**AB: The discussion over the future of PUC’s acres has been a long one. Can you give us just a quick summary of the decades-long argument over what to do with the land?**

**PL:** PUC has long needed to utilize our land to support the mission of the college. As you note, this has been a

lengthy and difficult process. From 1908 (when the college moved to Angwin from Healdsburg) until the early 1980s, the college was using the land for agriculture, including a working dairy. But as agriculture changed and small operations were no longer viable, the farm was abandoned and the dairy closed in 1986.

After that, many ideas about how to best use the land to support the college’s mission have been considered. More recently, there were thoughts that the best way to use the land was to develop it in order to create an endowment for the college.

I’m happy to say that PUC is now in a place where we are viewing our land as our endowment. The forest conservation easement project has shown us there are ways we can keep our land and utilize it to support the school at the same time.

**AB: Can you tell us how the recent deal came about? What role did you have in getting it done?**

**PL:** In the fall of 2013, a group of CAL FIRE conservation officials toured the Las Posadas State Forest in Angwin. One member of this group was John Henshaw, a retired US Forest Service Forester and board member of the Land Trust of Napa County. At one point during the tour, the group noticed the fence with PUC’s land, and they wondered about the state of this land.

John Henshaw learned it was for sale, and he reached out to PUC to see if we were interested in putting a conservation easement on our land. The process took about four years to complete, and John’s role was crucial throughout the entire process. I came into the picture just over two years ago (I actually spent about a year volunteering for PUC on forest-related matters) and I have helped with a number of logistical and “boots on the ground” aspects of finalizing the project and getting it wrapped up.

**AB: What does the deal mean for the future of PUC?**

**PL:** PUC’s new strategic plan is entitled “Reclaiming Our Past, Reframing Our Future,” and the preservation of the forest is one of the first steps toward both appreciating our roots and creating a vibrant future built on PUC’s unique location and assets. At the dedication of the college



Mossy rocks in the PUC forest. (Photo: Bruno de Oliveira)

in 1909, Ellen White told those gathered that “the Lord designed this place for us.” The college’s founders were especially grateful for the natural resources the land provided for an educational setting. While education and what PUC offers have changed, the land continues to be a great asset for higher education.

**AB: Your job is the forest manager for PUC—the first person to oversee college lands. What does it mean to be a forest manager for a university?**

**PL:** I see the forest as one of PUC’s best assets, something that makes Angwin a special place to learn, live, and grow. The forest has the ability to support the mission of the college in a number of ways: academics, student life, spiritual life, and community and alumni relations. My job is partly to help the forest support these various aspects of the college’s mission. I take new freshman on guided hikes in their class on Holistic Living, work with Napa County officials on issues related to forest management, take alumni on tours during Homecoming, and so on. Right now I am finishing work on a

shaded fuel-break along our forest’s ridgeline to protect both the campus and the town of Angwin from potential wildfires.

As one of our best assets, we need to be caring for the forest and making sure it stays healthy and resilient. It takes active management to keep forests healthy. This involves managing the vegetation, roads, trails, community use, and so on.

**AB: What is your background in forest management?**

**PL:** Working as PUC’s forest manager is my first experience in such a position. However, I am uniquely qualified for this job for three reasons. First, I have an AS in Forestry, which I received from the College of the Redwoods. The pool of Adventists trained in forest management is limited, and since the forest is so closely tied together with PUC’s mission, it’s also an asset for PUC to have an Adventist in this role.

Second, I grew up here in Angwin, went to PUC Elementary and PUC Preparatory School, and have two

degrees from PUC, including a BS in Environmental Studies. I know the residents, the place, and the system of PUC quite well. This has really enabled me to “hit the ground running,” quickly learning how to direct a small department at the college.

Third, I have developed a close relationship with John Henshaw. John’s input has been vital to the process of completing our conservation easement, and John continues to play a big role in the land as a volunteer forester, helping to guide the forestry practices that are part of the new forest management at PUC.

**AB: You have referred to the importance of the land in supporting academics. Part of your job is to tie the legacy of the forest to the college’s education programs. What does that mean?**

**PL:** I like to think of the forest as an outdoor classroom and lab that provides unique learning opportunities for students. We are already using the forest in many classes. New students experience first-hand the benefits of time spent in nature in their Holistic Living class; biology majors identify plants and review photos taken by field wildlife cameras; emergency services students develop rope rescue skills off Inspiration Point; and Geographic Information Systems students use their mapping skills. The possibilities are endless. We look forward to seeing more and more students learning from “God’s second book.”

**AB: Why are classes in the environment important for all students to take?**

**PL:** Our modern, comfortable world has largely removed us from nature. It is easy to see nature as an “optional” part of the experience of being a human being. However, science has shown numerous mental and physical health benefits of spending time in nature. Also, the clean air we breathe and the clear water we drink depend on having



Misty morning in the forest. (Photo: Milbert Mariano)

a healthy environment. Getting students out into nature, where they learn about how it works, helps to instill a personal connection to nature, creating individuals who see the preservation of our natural resources as an important part of life on this planet, and who see spending time in nature as part of a holistic lifestyle. As Adventists, an appreciation of nature and its contribution to a holistic lifestyle should be part of the cornerstone of our beliefs.

**AB: Tell us a little bit about your history with PUC’s forest. Did you grow up hiking there?**

**PL:** I was born and raised here in Angwin. I have been hiking and mountain biking in the PUC forest for as long as I can remember. I have always seen it as a valuable resource for PUC and the local community, and I am beyond honored and humbled to be given the task of caring for our forest and helping it to support the mission of PUC.



Hairy Star Tulip (*Calochortus tolmiei*) in the forest floor. (Photo: Nancy Lecourt)

**AB: I believe there are some redwoods in the forest, is that right? What else of note?**

**PL:** Indeed, interestingly, we have some of the interior-most redwoods in the United States. Redwoods normally live closer to the coast, but given the topography of PUC, and the proximity to San Francisco Bay, the PUC forest gets enough morning summer fog to help support redwood growth in a relatively dry environment. We have a truly unique grove of redwoods that call the PUC forest home.

The PUC forest has very high biodiversity. Many different types of plants and animals call our forest home, including a nesting pair of spotted owls, which are on the federal endangered-species list, as well as foxes, bobcats, and black bears, to name a few.

The PUC forest also serves as an important wildlife corridor between the Las Posadas State Forest to the south and private forest lands to the north, helping to support the movement of wildlife up and down the eastern ridge-line of the Napa Valley.

Finally, Moore Creek, which supplies much of the water for the city of Napa, originates in the PUC forest;

as you read this, people in Napa are drinking water that came out of the PUC forest.

**AB: Now that this conservation easement deal has been closed, what are you most focusing on in your job? What are your goals for the 864-acre PUC forest?**

**PL:** I'm happy to say that the work is not yet over! PUC owns an additional 240 acres of forested land that we are working on putting into a second conservation easement. This process has been going on for several months, and we hope this conservation easement process will only take about two years.

My main goal for the forest is to have it support the mission of PUC. In order to accomplish this support, we need the forest to be more “user-friendly” for students, faculty, staff, and the community. I have recently developed PUC’s first official trail map, which has numbers corresponding to intersection markers spread throughout the forest, helping users to find their way around. I am also working on developing a formalized parking area for the forest, complete with a picnic area and a little kiosk to serve as the hub for recreation in the forest. I also hope to develop more informative signage throughout the forest, helping users to learn about the plants and animals that call the forest home. I plan to place benches and picnic tables throughout the forest at strategic locations and install other infrastructure to make the forest more user-friendly.

Alongside this main goal, we’re working to keep the forest healthy and resilient so that it can provide a good home to all the plants and wildlife that live in our forest and continue to support the mission of PUC.

*If you would like to follow along with the progress of the plans for the PUC forest, you can like the PUC Demonstration and Experimental Forest page on Facebook at [facebook.com/PUCForest](https://facebook.com/PUCForest). For those wishing to make financial contributions, donations can be made at [puc.edu/give](https://puc.edu/give). Select “View All Funds” and then select “Forest Conservation Endowment.”*



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# BIBLE

# Genesis One and the Sabbath

A Twenty-First-Century Confirmation of the Sabbath Teaching  
in View of the Literal/Non-Literal Discussions

BY TREVOR LLOYD

Our purpose is to inquire again into the literary genre of Genesis One and to relate this to the inviolability of the Sabbath teaching.<sup>1</sup> Along the way, we face a number of fundamental questions. For example, for those of us committed to the creatorship of God and the sanctity of the Sabbath, how vital is it that we maintain we are reading literal, fact-by-fact history in this chapter of beginnings? Conversely, what might be the outcome if we were to allow that the genre in this instance is non-literal? And which of these positions can be shown as affirming of the Sabbath—and which as negating?

As we will see, the field has been worked over many times and from a range of disciplines. Recognizing that the conclusions have not always been compatible, we do well to maintain a non-dogmatic and teachable spirit. Whichever position we eventually lean toward, past related efforts suggest there will remain further matters to consider. Our discussion commences with reference to some of my own background inquiries

After decades of interest in the creation chapters of the book of Genesis, I took the opportunity, including further postgraduate studies, to examine a fairly wide selection of ancient Mesopotamian and Egyptian creation

accounts extant in the general period prior to and contemporaneous with the writing of Genesis. There were some surprises in store, and these related to the similarities and differences between the positions taken by the Hebrews and their polytheistic neighbors. In the present article, I have concentrated primarily on texts from Egypt—for example, as found on the walls of the chambers and corridors of the royal pyramids, on the interior surfaces of the boards of the coffins of the Egyptian nobility, and on the papyrus texts giving excerpts from the Egyptian *Book of the Dead*.

## Genesis One in Parallel with the Contemporary Egyptian Creation Accounts

What follows is a selection from a number of items in common between the ancient Egyptian and Hebrew creation accounts.<sup>2</sup> These begin with the setting in which the creation takes place, go on to indicate various elements involved in the work of creation, and conclude with the taking of rest. In drawing out these parallels, it is important to note that there is no single, definitive Egyptian account of creation comparable to that given in Genesis. The Egyptian examples are available from a number of

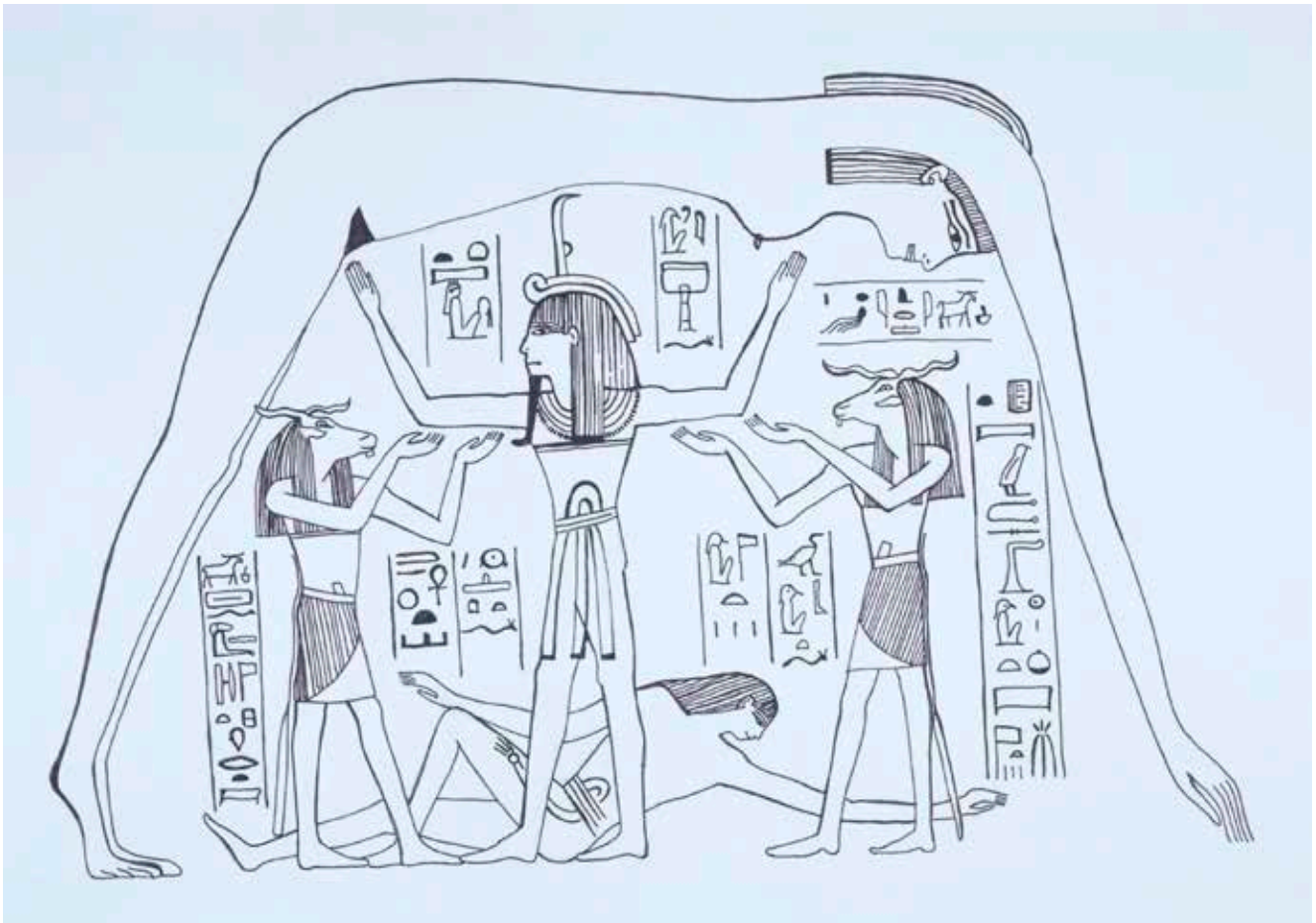


Figure 1: *Shu, the god of air, separates the sky goddess, Nut, from the earth god, Geb. Two ram-headed gods stand beside Shu.* (Drawing by Catherine Fitzpatrick, courtesy of Canadian Museum of History).

locations up and down the Nile valley and from a variety of periods from as early as the third millennium BC. Similarly, it is not suggested that each of the given Egyptian textual items applies to all times and places or that they are in agreement in every detail.<sup>3</sup>

The similarities readily become apparent. For example, as for Genesis One, the religious texts of the Egyptians<sup>4</sup> picture creation as taking place in the context of an abyss of water. The “deep” (Heb. *tehom*) of Genesis 1:2 may be compared with the Egyptian god Re-Khopri’s pronouncement in Spell 307 that he has “issued from the Abyss.”<sup>5</sup> (More later on the contrast between the two cultures regarding the relation of God to the waters of the abyss.) As well, in common with Genesis 1:6–7, a centerpiece of the Egyptian creation schema is a firmament to keep back those same waters to allow for “a kind of ‘bubble’ of air and light within the otherwise unbroken infinity of dark waters.”<sup>6</sup> A hymn in the temple of Darius El-Hibe from the Ramesside period credits Amun-Re

as having “gathered together the firmament and guided the stars.”<sup>7</sup>

In this same context, the Egyptians proposed that the god Atum, emanating from within the abyss of waters, proceeded to form lesser gods and they to form other gods.<sup>8</sup> Two of these, Geb, the earth god, and Nut,<sup>9</sup> the sky goddess, were clasped in nuptial embrace until Shu, the air god, separated them and pushed Nut up as a barrier against the waters which, for both the Egyptians and the Hebrews, remained in place above the firmament. (See Figure 1.)

Then, there is the placing of the heavenly luminaries. As noted in Genesis 1:14–16, we are told that the “greater light” and the “lesser light” were made by God and situated *within* the firmament. Similarly, the Egyptians placed the heavenly bodies within the overarching body of Nut. A good graphic representation is to be found on the ceiling of the sarcophagus room of Ramesses VI, in the Valley of the Kings. There, to one side of the ceiling, the sun



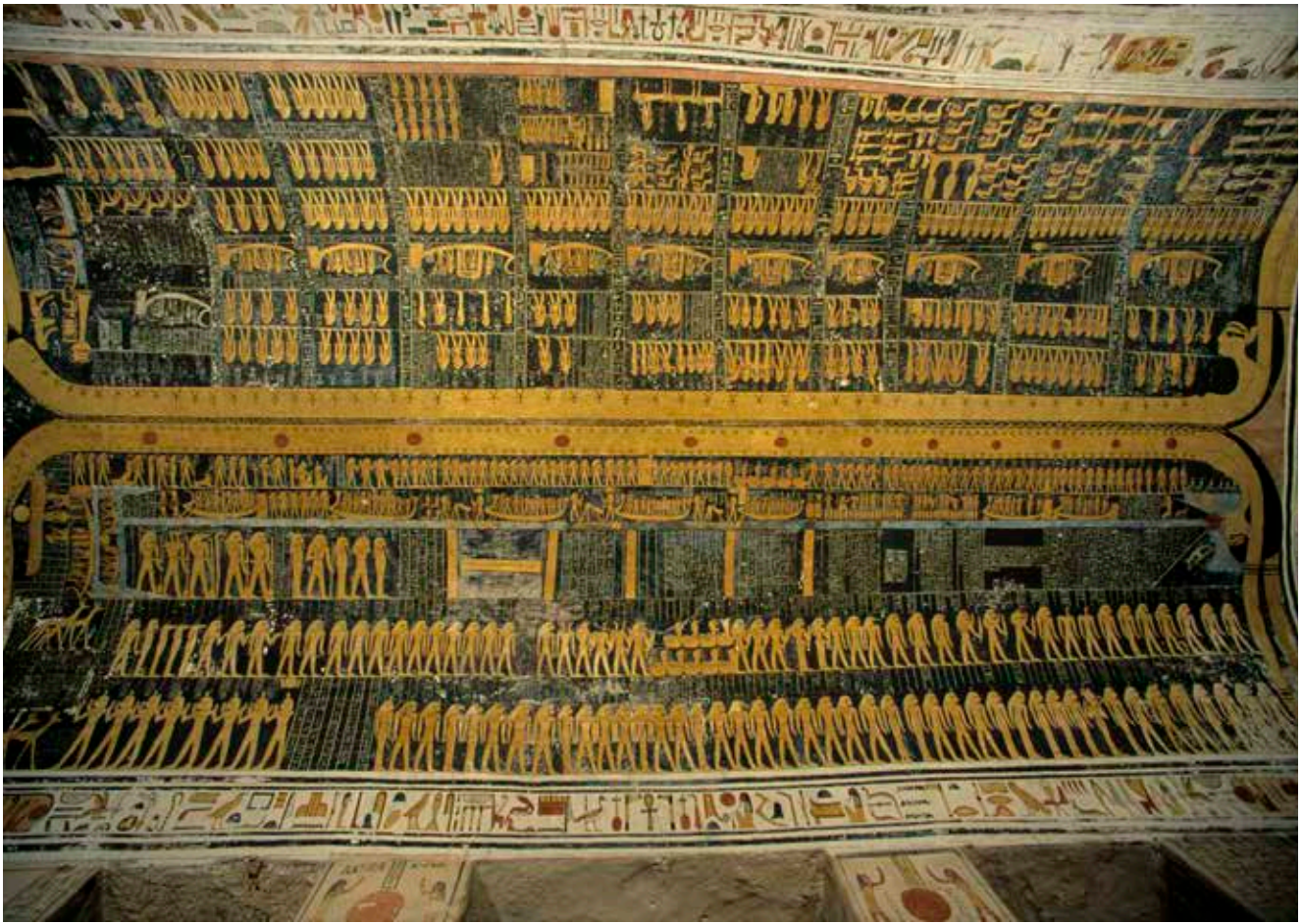


Figure 2: Egypt's Valley of the Kings: Ceiling of tomb of Ramses VI. *Sky goddess Nut surrounds the heavens, New Kingdom, Egypt* (Photo by Kenneth Garrett)

is shown as passing by day through the elongated body of Nut and, on the opposite side, the stars are pictured as making the same journey by night. (See Figure 2.)

The parallels continue with the giving of names to the elements of creation<sup>10</sup> and the declaring of the results as “good.”<sup>11</sup> As well, both Genesis and the Egyptian accounts of creation refer to the modeling of humankind (see Figure 3), to the making of humanity in the image of the divine, and to the provision of the breath of life. A future king, Meri-Ka-Re, was instructed that, in the fashioning of humankind, “[the god] made the breath of life (for) their nostrils. They who have issued from his body are his images.”<sup>12</sup> Elsewhere, it is said of the god of Memphis: “So has Ptah come to rest after his making everything and every divine speech.”<sup>13</sup>

### Hebrew Disagreement with the Contemporary Accounts

Just as significant as the parallels between the creation accounts of the Hebrews and those of Egypt, are

the contrasts. Predictably, while the Egyptians referred to a multiplicity of gods, the Hebrews told of one God only, designated as “God” or as “LORD God.” While the gods of the polytheists were originally immanent with (that is, *dwelling within*) the waters of the abyss, the one God of monotheism is transcendent from the material sphere and, accordingly, was shown as *moving over* the face of the waters.

Likewise, there is contrast in the way the creation of the cosmos is brought about. As already noted with the bodily separation of Geb and Nut, physical action was employed by the Egyptian god, Shu, in the setting up of earth and sky.<sup>14</sup> This does not take place in the Genesis One monotheistic account. The one, all-powerful God can carry out the various cosmic assignments simply by declaring that they are to be so. We are aware of course that, when the text turns from the cosmos (Genesis, Chapter One), to the creation of humankind (Genesis, Chapter Two), the LORD God personally models His first child with His hands and



Figure 3: God Khnum and goddess Hehet, Dendera Temple complex, Egypt (Creative Commons)

similarly opens Adam’s side to create his bride—so that, for this special, intimate occasion, the LORD God has become immanent as well as transcendent.

A further critical distinction of the Genesis account is the careful staging of the work of creation into six specific days, followed not only by rest but by the declaring of the seventh day as blessed and hallowed. There is no such arrangement evident in the Egyptian accounts.

In the above context, it is relevant to note that Gerhard Hasel (former professor in the Seminary at Andrews University) has convincingly argued that Genesis One was written as a polemic against the contemporary polytheistic creation accounts.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, Jacques Doukhan, also of the Seminary, regards this same chapter as a polemic against both the Babylonian and Egyptian stories of creation.<sup>16</sup> This would require, of course, that these polytheistic accounts be written prior to the composing of Genesis One and that, in the main at least, they be suitably available for the composition of the Hebrew text.<sup>17</sup> With such considerations in mind, it is of interest to inquire concerning the type of writing bequeathed to us in the early chapters of Genesis.

### **Some Implications of Accepting Genesis One as a Literal/Historical Account of the Creation of the Cosmos**

We have noted above that, in a number of instances, the Genesis creation account runs parallel with the creation accounts of Egypt. (And, in view of considerable contemporary commonality amongst the myths of the ancient Near East, the parallels range wider still.) At other times, there is an unmistakable difference between the two. On the part of the Hebrews, the differences cluster around the twin themes of monotheism, with emphasis on the distinctive qualities of God,<sup>18</sup> and on the Sabbath institution—themes regarding which we might have expected the two cultures to diverge. Meanwhile, the likenesses between the two cultures relate significantly to the setting up of the physical cosmos, including, as noted, the placing of the firmament with the abyss of waters above it, and the locating of the heavenly luminaries within it.

As indicated, part of our assignment is to explore the type of genre in use in Genesis One—in particular, whether it involves the literal or the non-literal. Affirmations have been made by Adventist scholars from opposite sides of the question. In a chapter titled “The Case for Biblical Literalism,” soil scientist, Colin Mitchell, has

laid down that, in view of the chapter's "inseparable associations with [the] central biblical doctrines [of] the Sabbath and marriage," Genesis One must be both "historical" and "factual."<sup>19</sup> Alternatively, theologian/philosopher, Fritz Guy, has concluded that "a literal interpretation purporting to provide scientifically relevant information remains unwarranted, however widely it is assumed."<sup>20</sup>

As a lead toward assessing whether Genesis One should be regarded as literal, what follows is a preliminary exploration of the nature of three of the main features referred to above—the firmament, the waters above the firmament, and the location of the heavenly luminaries. We shall work mainly from the familiar KJV text.

### 1. The firmament (*raqia'*)—Is it solid and what are the genre implications?

A good deal of passion has been expressed regarding the nature of the firmament—the arrangement set up to divide the primeval waters—the upper from the lower. In the original Hebrew, the term is *raqia'*, and it is of interest to inquire whether it should or should not be regarded as solid. What, we might ask, does the Hebrew text call for? Those banking on a literal creation account would, in a day of inter-planetary space probes, presumably hope for a non-solid *raqia'*. As part of our inquiry, it would be helpful to know whether, beyond the initial creation week or perhaps after the flood, the *raqia'* was ever said to have been dissipated. However, later mention of the firmament hardly allows such a let out. See, for example, Psalm 19:1 ("the firmament showeth his handiwork") and Daniel 12:3 ("and they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament").

Until recent times, the great majority of translations of *raqia'* have had a distinctly material/solid sense. As far back as the Septuagint (Greek) translation of the Hebrew Torah (third century BC),

the term *steréōma* (a firm or solid structure) was chosen. The idea of solidity appeared again in the Latin Vulgate (382 AD) with *firmamentum* (compare with *firmāre*: to make firm), and this was carried over as *firmament* into the KJV (1611), RSV (1952) and NKJV (1982). Meanwhile, NEB (1970) and NRSV (1989) settled for "dome"—calling, it may be noted, for a firm/solid structure. For their part, NIV (1978) and NASB (1995)<sup>21</sup> opted for "expanse," allowing for flexibility between the solid and the insubstantial—there can, it is evident, be an expanse of, say, beaten gold and, alternatively, an expanse of atmosphere.

What would have led so many of the translators to opt for terms suggesting firmness/solidity in the Greek, Latin and English translations, as corresponding to the Hebrew, *raqia'*? They may have been influenced by the use in the Hebrew scriptures of the verbal cognate, *raqa'*. Exodus 39:3, for example, uses *raqa'* in the sense of "to stamp, beat out,"<sup>22</sup> with reference to the making of gold thread in the Sinai wilderness

for the ephod to be used by Aaron, the high priest:

And they did beat [*raqa'*] the gold into thin plates, and cut it into wires, to work it in the blue, and in the purple, and in the scarlet, and in the fine linen, with cunning work (KJV).

With the same basic idea in mind, NIV, RSV, NASB and NRSV translate *raqa'*, in the above text, as "hammered out."<sup>23</sup> (Interestingly, though NIV and NASB both translated *raqia'* as "expanse," as noted above, they take the sense of *raqa'* in the "beat out"/"hammer out" mode.)

Further perspectives on this discussion can be found in substantial papers by Paul Seely ("The Firmament and the Water Above")<sup>24</sup> and Randall Younker and Richard Davidson ("The Myth of the Solid Heavenly Dome").<sup>25</sup> These are noted in some detail, following.

After recognizing the major divide between biblical scholars concerning the way the Hebrews regarded the

## For those of us committed to the creatorship of God and the sanctity of the Sabbath, how vital is it that we maintain we are reading literal, fact-by-fact history in this chapter of beginnings?

*raqia'*, Seely comes down decidedly on the side of a solid dome, rather than allowing that the ancient Hebrews saw it as an atmospheric expanse. To support such a claim, he foreshadows a search in both history and grammar.

As far as history is concerned, Seely claims that “all peoples in the ancient world thought of the sky as solid” and that this view pre-dated the Greeks. Such understandings he likens to the beliefs of primitive peoples of recent times, from Melanesia, North America, and South Africa, to Australia and Siberia. He knows of “no evidence that scientifically naïve people anywhere on earth believed that the firmament was just empty space or atmosphere.”<sup>26</sup>

With an eye again to the ancient world, Seely points out that the earliest conception of the heavens held in China was of an “upside down bowl” with the sun and moon attached to it as it “rotated from left to right carrying the heavenly bodies with it.” In an interesting sidelight, he tells of a fresh conception that arose in China, circa 200 AD, that was reported pejoratively by a Jesuit missionary in the sixteenth century—that the sky was not solid and that this was to be seen as “one of the absurdities of the Chinese.”<sup>27</sup>

In a reminder of what we have already noted regarding the Egyptian version of the setting up of the sky, Seely goes on to reflect on the implications of the relationship between Nut (representing the sky/firmament) and Shu (representing the air/atmosphere), pointing out that, with separate gods involved for these entities, the ancient authors of this creation account are clear that firmament and atmosphere are to be distinguished from each other and not to be equated.

Seely also argues from Heidel’s translation of *Enuma Elish* (the Babylonian creation account), that, with the god Marduk’s using the shell-like half of Tiamat (the water monster) to “[form] the sky as roof,” the notion of solidity is coming through clearly.

From the grammatical side, Seely elaborates on the significance of the scriptural use of the verbal cognate

*raqa'* (to “stamp, beat, spread out”) to the noun *raqia'*, as we have seen in the foregoing.<sup>28</sup>

For their part, Younker and Davidson examined, both historically and textually, what the ancients understood regarding the nature of the *raqia'*. From their detailed presentation, it is evident that there was noticeable fluidity through the centuries between belief in solid and, by contrast, non-solid, heavens. They found “no evidence that the Mesopotamians ever believed in a solid heavenly vault,”<sup>29</sup> and go on to point out that, later, the Greeks opted for a number of concentric hard spheres, while the Hellenistic Jews, in the days of the Septuagint translation, settled, as we’ve noted, for the Greek term, *steréōma*, denoting a firm, solid structure.

Christians from the early Christian era to the seventeenth century, Younker and Davidson advise, were somewhat equivocal regarding the nature of the ancient Hebrew *raqia'*. In 405 AD, as we have already noted, Jerome, in the influential Vulgate version of the scriptures, used the Latin term *firmamentum*, while others were leaning toward a fluid firmament. They state that, by the fourteenth century, biblical scholars saw the celestial spheres as solid but, by

## **Both Genesis and the Egyptian accounts of creation refer to the modeling of humankind, to the making of humanity in the image of the divine, and to the provision of the breath of life.**

the late seventeenth century, commonly regarded them as an “expanse,” and this persisted through to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when the expanse was seen by some as “an atmosphere of fluid.” Younker and Davidson point out that, by the middle of the nineteenth century, “critical biblical scholars” regarded the Bible as accepting both a flat earth and a solid dome, and go on to note that Adventist scholars Richard Hammill (2000), and Fritz Guy and Brian Bull (2011), had accepted a similarly “naïve Hebrew cosmology.”

Younker and Davidson give a detailed word study of the use in scripture of both the noun, *raqia'*, and its cognate verb, *raqa'*. In the process, they advise that, of the seventeen occurrences of *raqia'* in the Old Testament, it is never used “in association with any metal.” For its part, they indicate that *raqa'* is used twelve times in scripture and (as mentioned

above) that five of these are “explicitly associated with metal.” The other associations include the (planet) earth, “the stamping of feet,” the “smashing of an enemy,” and, once, with the spreading out of the skies, “[s]trong as a molten mirror” (Job 37:18). (The last-mentioned they consider as “most likely” referring to clouds.) In this particular word study, they do not recognize that the basic meaning of *raqiaʿ* (“to stamp, beat out, spread out”) may be seen as primarily in association with metal, with the remaining usages employing the verb metaphorically. They do, however, caution against attempts to “derive the meaning of the nominal form *raqiaʿ* solely from verbal forms that are related to the beating out of metal.”<sup>30</sup>

Overall, Younker and Davidson concluded that *raqiaʿ* refers not to a solid dome but simply to the atmosphere and that God “made the *raqiaʿ* (the sky) and also assigned its function (to divide the upper atmospheric waters contained in clouds from the surface waters of the earth).”<sup>31</sup> As discussed following, such a designation for the clouds warrants further thought.

## 2. Are the Waters Above the Firmament [*Raqiaʿ*] Compatible with Undisputed, Present-Day Cosmology?

As we have already observed, both the Hebrews and the Egyptians referred to an abyss of waters (the “deep,” in Genesis One) that had to be divided before the work of creation could proceed. We noted, as well, that both accounts detailed the setting up of a firmament barrier that kept the separated waters in place—achieved in the accounts from Egypt by the raised body of the sky goddess, Nut, and in Genesis One by God’s calling for the existence of the *raqiaʿ*. With this in mind, it will come as no surprise to learn that, after creation, in both accounts the waters of “the deep” were still there.

To give all possible credence to the literal nature of the Hebrew account of waters both below and above the *raqiaʿ*, we might ask if the waters below the *raqiaʿ* could be the clouds we are familiar with from day to day? This, however, cannot be so, for, on the third day, God directed that the “waters under the heaven [that is, under the *raqiaʿ*] be gathered together unto one place” so that the dry land appears. Then, promptly, God declares that the “gathering together of the waters” be called seas—clearly not clouds.

Very well, then, could the waters above the *raqiaʿ* be regarded as the clouds? (As noted in the foregoing, Younker

and Davidson concluded this to be the case.<sup>32</sup>) Again, this can hardly be so. Since the “greater light” and the “lesser light” are said to be in the *raqiaʿ* and the upper waters to be above the *raqiaʿ*, these waters would need to be seen as beyond the “greater light” and the “lesser light” and, hence, cannot be equated with the clouds which, we are well aware, are beneath the heavenly bodies.

It is of interest to note that the upper waters were still in place beyond the creation event—for example, at the time of the flood when “all the fountains of the great deep [were] broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened” (Genesis 7:11). And, again, much later than the flood account, they are mentioned when the psalmist called for praise to be given to the Lord by “... you highest heavens, and you waters above the heavens!” (Psalm 148:4, NRSV). (NIV gives “skies” for *heavens*.)

As part of our literal/non-literal discussion, a little more should be said regarding the location of the already-mentioned “greater light” and “lesser light.”

## 3. The Location of the Heavenly Luminaries

As we have seen, the Egyptians were in no doubt regarding the position of the sun and the stars, in particular. These were pictured as travelling through the body of the sky goddess, Nut—the sun during the day and the stars during the night. Similarly, for the Hebrews, the Genesis record is clear:

And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; ... and it was so (Gen. 1:14,15).

Viewing this part of the Genesis creation text in the context of our present inquiry, we might ask if, under inspiration, this reference to the heavenly lights was given in an historical/literal sense as a guide to understanding the make-up of the cosmos, or if the account was given for some other purpose? (More on this later.) If we accept the predominant interpretation of the *raqiaʿ*/firmament as a solid, overarching ceiling, then we may visualize the lights as adhering to the underside of the *raqiaʿ*, and this is clearly incongruous with post-Copernican cosmology.

Suppose, then, we take the alternative view of the *raqiaʿ* as “expanse,” and go further and envisage an expanse of atmosphere (as noted, the interpretation given for the *raqiaʿ*

by Younker and Davidson) with the sun and moon located within it. It is readily evident that such an arrangement has insuperable difficulties related to the depth of the atmosphere and the dimensions of the heavenly bodies. Most of the atmosphere turns out to be within 11 kilometers (6.8 miles or a mere 36,000 feet) of the earth's surface, and the outer limit of extremely rarefied air can be taken as 100 kilometers (62 miles). Such a confined space is in stark contrast to the dimensions of the moon, with a diameter of 3,500 kilometers (2,160 miles), and of the sun, with a diameter of 1.39 million kilometers (865,000 miles), and we are entertaining the possibility of locating these within an atmospheric expanse of a minuscule 100 kilometers!

A literal interpretation of Genesis One must face a further insurmountable problem related to the distance of the sun from the earth—taken to be 149.6 million kilometers. At this distance, life on Earth is finely balanced and, should it be diminished toward housing it within a literal expanse of atmosphere, life on this planet would, of course, be impossible.

As discussed above, should we wish to pursue the literal possibilities further, we are faced with the need to imagine the waters (said to be above the *raqia'*) as commencing out beyond both the moon and the sun. At the very least, it is evident that contemporary space probes know nothing of a vast body of water in such a cosmic location.

### Summary of Problems with a Literal/Historical Genre

To this point, we have examined three main features of the creation account in Genesis One—the *raqia'* (variously interpreted as *firmament*, *dome*, *vault*, and *expanse*); the waters above the *raqia'*; and the location of the heavenly luminaries. In the process, we have discovered that each of these has a counterpart in the creation accounts of Egypt, and that these have been directly related, for the Egyptians, to the elevated form of the sky goddess, Nut, who stands bodily for the firmament, who personally holds back the infinite waters, and within whose body the heavenly lights move.

It is evident that the parallels and contrasts between the accounts of the two cultures are not the result of mere slavish copying. Rather, the Genesis account appears as imperturbably accepting a number of the contemporary

positions in cosmology—such as the presence of an abyss of waters, the setting up of a *raqia'*/firmament to divide the waters, and the placing of the luminaries within the firmament—while deliberately countering others. For example, in the latter regard, we have found that, while the Egyptian deities are immanent with the watery abyss, Elohim (God) is transcendent from the material sphere. Then, in contrast to the physical exertions of the Egyptian gods, Elohim is able calmly to position the *raqia'* by verbal fiat and, similarly, to place the luminaries within it. In addition, the day-to-day events in Genesis One are set out in a structured fashion followed by a declaration of the seventh day as hallowed, and the Egyptian account knows nothing of such a memorable literary structure and sacred designation.

Our point of special interest has been to discover whether the cosmological features in the Genesis account can be rightly seen as fitting into a literal schema.

We have noted a problem with regard to the *raqia'*—that since ancient times the term has most commonly been given a firm/solid connotation with such designations as “firmament,” “dome” and “vault.” This has been given further weight by the sense of the cognate verb *raqa'* (fundamentally “to stamp, beat out”), as in Exodus 39:3, with the beating out of gold into thin plates. However, in a day of inter-planetary space probes, the notion of a literal, solid ceiling/dome over our heads is clearly to be dismissed. In view of this, some have resorted to an alternative translation: an *expanse*—that is an *atmospheric expanse*. This may appear to bypass the immediate problem; however, as noted following, the further requirements placed on the *raqia'* in Genesis One suggest that the puzzle has not yet been solved.

The *overhead waters* have also proved difficult to fit into a literal schema, and, as we have noted, they are an inescapable feature of the creation accounts of both cultures. With the *raqia'* set up “in the midst of the waters,” it is to be expected that there would be a vast body of water overhead—and it did not escape the ancient Near Eastern (ANE) societies that it was always possible it might again resume its original position. If this body of water were to be regarded as historical/literal, who would have the temerity to suggest where it might be found today?

We looked as well at *the location of the heavenly luminaries*. If we are to regard the Genesis record as historical

and literal, then we are to expect the sun and moon to be either within an overarching solid structure or within an atmospheric “expanse.” It is all too apparent that present-day, undisputed cosmology leaves no place for the attachment of the sun and moon (if not the stars, as well) to the underside of an over-arching dome. Then, as noted, we have found that regarding the *raqia*’/firmament as a literal expanse of atmosphere is no more manageable, in view of the impossibility of fitting a heavenly body with a diameter of 1.39 million kilometers into an atmospheric band 100 kilometers deep.

Before we look for an alternative solution to the above impasse, there are several matters that should be faced. There is the rejoinder that it is inappropriate to raise modern cosmological objections to these early creation accounts when the ancient Hebrews (and their polytheistic neighbors) knew nothing of the cosmology of our day. It is true, of course, that the Genesis account was written some thousands of years prior to our modern cosmological understandings, corroborated by rocket launches and space probes. However, we are looking into an inspired record which many have claimed is both historical and literal in every respect. Please note that an inspired non-historical/non-literal account from ancient times need not align with the unarguable facts of twenty-first century cosmology. However, on the other hand, an inspired historical/literal account can hardly be allowed the same freedom.

In the face of what appear to be insurmountable barriers to a literal/historical reading of Genesis One, ought we to give up the Sabbath teaching as an outdated relic of a pre-scientific age? (These days, who will accept either a solid dome over the earth or an atmospheric expanse accommodating the heavenly luminaries—or a vast body of water held back above these again?) Well-meaning as proponents of a literal Genesis One genre may be, it is evident that such insistence overturns this vital doctrine by seeking to

ground it upon an impossible foundation. There are many of us who will not stand back and allow this to take place. What follows is a search for an alternative interpretation that maintains total confirmation of the creatorship of God and the inviolability of the Sabbath.

### **In Quest of a Confirming Alternative Genre for the Genesis One Creation Account**

In view of the above difficulties regarding a literal Genesis One, should we turn to the figurative—perhaps seeing it as a *parable*? It is a difficult ask. For many of us, the prime purpose of Genesis One does not appear to be like, say, the Parable of the Sower, with each element

(abyss of waters, light, firmament, and so on) to be regarded figuratively and to be given an instructive counterpart. Similarly, the notion of extended *allegory* as drawn out *metaphor*, with the characters/elements symbolizing qualities from everyday life, may not fit well. Might we settle on poetry as the predominant genre of this most celebrated creation account of all time? Hebrew scholar, Jacques Doukhan, amply illustrates the advanced poetic qualities of Genesis One, meanwhile re-

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garding its “general stylistic tone ... as prosaic.”<sup>33</sup> After indicating the difficulty of matching the creation chapters of Genesis with one of the understood literary genres, Paul Petersen concluded (as have others) that “[t]he biblical account of Creation [sic] is completely its own. Scholars speak about *sui generis*—‘of its own genre’.”<sup>34</sup>

The possible genre field may range wider still. In a discussion of “Genesis and God’s Creative Activity,” Fritz Guy adopted, for his present purpose, the term *representation*.<sup>35</sup> Placing this in tandem with the notion of *analogy*, and both within the concept of *creative story*, I have chosen to move in this direction for the present article.

Toward tackling further the literal/non-literal puzzle, here is an approach from the above angle. This involves recounting a modern-day literal/historical anecdote, containing within it two examples of non-literal/non-historical

creative story, the second intended to counter the former in a bit of friendly polemic. The anecdote comes from the early days of Donald Grey Barnhouse (1895–1960), distinguished pastor of Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia from 1927 till his death.<sup>36</sup>

The youthful Donald Barnhouse had taken on the pastorate of a small Evangelical Reformed Church in the French Alps, with the added responsibility of trekking once a week to a nearby village to give Bible instruction. On each trip, he would pass a Catholic priest with similar duties, but going in the opposite direction. They soon became friends and, at times, would pause for a few minutes' chat.

On one of these occasions, Barnhouse's new friend inquired why he did not pray to the saints. In reply, Barnhouse asked why he should and this was a cue for the priest to launch into a heartfelt hypothetical:

"Here I am, shall we say, living as a humble farmer in this district far from Paris and the center of government—and I want to speak with President Poincaré in the Elysee Palace. Is

such a thing possible? Not to be daunted, I go up to Paris and find my local member and tell him what I have in mind. He considers my cause to be worthy and says: 'All right, I know the Minister for Agriculture who is a member of the cabinet'. We speak with the minister who, in his turn, says: 'I'm due to see the president this afternoon and shall request a meeting for you.'"

At this, the priest smiled with evident satisfaction that his specially composed story had made its point beyond the possibility of misunderstanding.

Barnhouse nodded and promptly went on with a counter story: "Suppose my name is not Barnhouse—but Poincaré. I am a young boy and I live in the Elysee Palace. After breakfast one morning, my father kisses me goodbye and goes to his presidential office. Shall I, then, cross the yard to, say, the Ministry for the Interior and ask one of his secretaries to arrange for me a meeting with the minister? If I am successful, shall I then say: 'Can you help me to get an interview with the president?' No, indeed.

Instead, one evening, when we are sitting alone together, would I not say: 'Daddy, there is something I want to know. Please tell me ...?'"

Barnhouse reported that his friend looked back as if thunderstruck that such implied direct access was possible to the Sovereign of the universe.

What shall our response be to the use of creatively composed stories such as these—one a polemic against the other? Shall we lay down that, for the teaching of spiritual truth, we will accept literal, historical fact or nothing—that, if even one statement in the narrative can be shown to be out of order, we'll rule out the whole account? For example, would the force and acceptability of the second creative story (the one by Barnhouse) be lost if it could be shown that the president of France at that time had a young daughter and not a young son, or that the suite of the Minister for the Interior was not across the courtyard but in an upper level of the same wing of the Elysee Palace? I expect not.

From the above, is there an overarching premise that can be carried from this modern-day account back to one from ancient times? Here is a suggestion. Suppose we allow that a non-literal, imaginative, creative story is very much in order so long as it is composed to illustrate/illuminate an unassailable, already accepted, literal truth?<sup>37</sup> In this event, we are to look beyond the surface of the creative story to the grand realities to which, under the promptings of God's Spirit, the story is intended to lead us.

I suggest that we go further and allow that to say a creative story is non-literal (Barnhouse was not a lad by the name of Poincaré and he did not live in the Elysee Palace) does not mean it has no utterly literal reality behind it.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, there was behind/beneath his aptly composed hypothetical the blessed, literal truth of God's willingness to listen attentively to every whispered prayer throughout every passing day. Likewise, to say that the creation account in Genesis One is not literal does not mean there is nothing totally literal behind it—that is, God's creatorship expressed in the

**They indicate that *raqa'* is used twelve times in scripture and (as referred to in the foregoing) that five of these are "explicitly associated with metal."**



physical, intellectual and spiritual spheres—and His going into action in ways that we could not begin to grasp unless confided to us by such means as analogical/representational creative story.

Along with the above assurance, it may be stressed that, in the rehearsing of this Barnhouse anecdote, it is not suggested that it provides total correspondence with the Genesis One account. Rather, its purpose is to illustrate several possible guidelines for recognizing, appreciating, and interpreting non-literal, sacred texts.

Several further points may be made from the Barnhouse incident. The young pastor had composed, on the spot, a telling, every-day, earthly analogy (limited though it might be) to a grand, already-existing heavenly truth. Whether the Poincaré/Elyseé Palace allusions had half, or maybe most, of their facts incorrect pales into insignificance; it is the grasping by the listener of the all-important analogy that matters. Now the underlying certainty of tender communion with our heavenly Parent may be entered into in a new and appealing way. We, too, may look up and say, “Abba, Father.” So, too, along with the original hearers/readers of the Genesis creation accounts, we may discover in this inspired creation account something of the all-important transcendent and immanent qualities of the “Maker of heaven and earth.”

A further correspondence may be noted. Accepting that the truth of the fellowship we may know with our heavenly Father was *illustrated by* but not *based on* the non-literal Poincaré analogy, I propose we allow that the creatorship of God is unforgettably illustrated/represented by, but not grounded on, the details we find in Genesis One.

With the above in mind, shall we quibble that there is no vast abyss of waters from which the earth and the cosmos have emerged? Recall that the polytheistic cultures of those ancient times believed their gods had been spawned *from within* this infinite “deep” of waters. By following up this concept, then critically varying from it (the Spirit of God was said to have “*moved upon the face* of the waters”), the inspired Genesis account, in a single sentence, introduced one of the most revolutionary religious truths of all time—that the one and only God is transcendent beyond, and not immanent with, the physical sphere. With that laid down and understood, belief in the polytheistic gods was to enter a phase of extinction.

Understandably, such a position requires that the making of the Genesis One account was preceded by the acceptance, in Hebrew monotheism, that God is “Maker of heaven and earth.”<sup>39</sup> To this, shall we add that, under inspiration, as well as illustrating the already-accepted creatorship of God, Genesis One is intended to memorialize the weekly Sabbath institution?

### **Wanted: An Enduring Memorial to Creation**

And such a memorial it has been! In terms of our present line of thought, the six-day representation of God’s work of creation culminates in a seventh, “perfecting,” sacred day of rest. Here is a template ideally transferable to humanity’s perpetually recurring six days of labor, climaxing in a day of commemoration and worship. And let it not escape us that the One who accomplished His material creation by the close of the sixth day, in the long ago, later finished a still greater provision, this time soteriological, at the close of the sixth day of the Passion Week. Then, in both instances, came divine rest. And, on this basis, we are assured of rest for body, mind, and spirit.

Note well the efficacy of the Genesis One seventh-day memorialization by way of comparison with the fate of the broadly contemporaneous polytheistic creation account already referred to. *Enuma Elish*, composed primarily to glorify Marduk, the head of the Babylonian pantheon, recounts how, in combat with the salt-water monster, Tiamat, he launched the creation of the universe. In Babylon, at each New Year’s celebration, the statue of Marduk was paraded through the streets and *Enuma Elish* “was recited [before it] in its entirety by the high priest” and, later, parts of the epic “may even have been dramatized, the king and the priests” taking the various roles.<sup>40</sup> Today, both *Enuma Elish* and the god Marduk are barely known outside university departments of ancient history—and this in spite of the fact that the yearly celebrations were, in their day, in the hands of a world-ranking, victor nation.<sup>41</sup>

Periodic religious festivals were also the standard means of commemoration in the neighboring Nile valley. For example, the ancient city of Thebes (modern-day Luxor), opposite the Valley of the Kings and the site of two of Egypt’s renowned temples, staged the Opet festival annually during the Eighteenth Dynasty

(circa 1550 to 1300 BC).<sup>42</sup> In the second month of the Egyptian lunar year, the image of the god Amun was taken from its shrine in the temple of Karnak in the north, placed in a ceremonial barque, and carried on the shoulders of the priests (at times, transferring to a ship on the Nile) toward the temple of Luxor, two kilometers to the south. Attended by the ecstatic acclaim of the people, the accompanying rites were believed “to bring about the rejuvenation and rebirth of divine life.” Such renewal extended, it was believed, to “the life of the cosmos, of the community and the individual.”<sup>43</sup> The festival lapsed during the short-lived monotheistic (perhaps, henotheistic) venture of Akhenaten; however, it re-emerged and was celebrated for a further two and a half centuries into the Twentieth Dynasty. Abandoned later, who, today, outside Egyptology specialists, has heard of the Opet festival?

Compare with the above, the present-day global standing of the Genesis One account, with a considerable proportion of the world population aware of its existence, if not its intent. A good deal of the long-standing renown of this most famous of all narratives of cosmic/global beginnings could well be attributed to the recounting in Genesis One of six days of calm, authoritative, verbal-fiat creation, followed by a declaration of a blessed and hallowed day. Formalized later as a weekly commemoration to be observed on each succeeding Sabbath day, this institution has stood the test of multiple thousands of years, down to the present day. In God’s providence, this perpetual memorial, inaugurated those millennia ago and maintained by an intermittently weakened and captive people, is observed today by practicing Jews, together with tens of millions of Bible-believing Christians, spearheaded by the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Doubtless there are multiple factors that led to the demise of the creation accounts of the neighboring cultures. They failed to conceive of a number of crucial qualities for their gods—related, it appears, to their disposition to “[create] their gods in the image of man,” while “[in] Genesis man is created in the image of God.”<sup>44</sup> As well, though presenting as triumphal and adopting periodic celebratory festivals, Babylon and Egypt did not achieve an enduring memorial of their contrived versions of cosmic and global beginnings. This

demise, of course, should be seen in the context of the majority take-over, by something like 350 AD, of the polytheistic Roman empire by Christianity, with monotheistic creation at its masthead.<sup>45</sup>

We should return to the central focus of the present paper: that is, the relationship between the genre of the six-day fiat creation account and the sacred seventh day. Our intention, throughout, has been to confirm the sanctity of the seventh day, though it is in the same context as a six-day sequence containing impossible cosmological elements. The rationale for such a harmonization will need to be thoroughly convincing if we are to satisfy our generally well-informed, twenty-first century, target audience. Our approach has been to consider an alternative genre for this opening chapter of cosmic beginnings. In the face of evidently insuperable difficulties with a literal/historical Genesis One, we have turned to non-literal *creative story*.

At the same time, as detailed above, we have affirmed a number of the cardinal tenets standing behind and beneath the Genesis One account. These have included the transcendence of the divine Creator, together with His tender regard for those made in His image. Then, there is God’s ability to command the natural world by divine fiat and, at His will, to call both time and space into existence. Importantly, especially for those ancient times, He has jurisdiction over various elements of nature at the heart of the polytheistic pantheon—for example, sun, moon, and denizens of the deep. And, under His authority, a day in the week may be declared as blessed and pronounced as sacred. An account that can convey such profound truths as these, is to be forever cherished, honored, and revered.

As, for the present, we draw our discussion to a close, there are several related matters that can well be kept in mind.

### Some Final Considerations

In relating the Genesis One text to a present-day audience, it may be helpful to ask both *for whom* this creation account was written and *to whom* it was written. John Walton makes the point that,

[t]he Old Testament *does* communicate to us and it was written for us, and for all humankind. But it was not written *to* us. It was written to Israel. It

is God's revelation of himself to Israel and secondarily through Israel to everyone else.<sup>46</sup>

There is a caution to be kept in mind when considering the message of Genesis One: to fixate on our own day may obscure the contemporary religious and social context in which these accounts were written and the monumental place they hold in the sweep of religious and salvation history. Those early millennia were all but totally given over to a pernicious polytheism, against which monotheism was fighting its way generation after generation. While the Hebrew people themselves frequently surrendered to the prevailing religious climate, it must often have appeared that monotheism was about to be snuffed out.

However, this same monotheistic creation account came through and, most critically, was there when, "in the fullness of time, God sent forth his Son" for the reclamation of humankind.<sup>47</sup> To an important extent, the secret of the endurance of monotheism lay in its comprehensibility to the Hebrews themselves—and that would not have been possible with the Genesis One account recited and written in terms of literal twenty-first century

cosmology and terminology. Following our present line of reasoning, can we go further and allow that, under inspiration, Genesis One, composed in the widely accepted/respected narrative genre, retained some of the features of the neighboring creation accounts (note the dividing of the waters and the locating of the luminaries within the firmament), the better to allow the essential monotheistic revelations to be clearly understood? (It will be recalled from the Barnhouse anecdote that, in his response to the priest, he did not compose a totally fresh scenario, but built on the already-provided, non-literal story of the priest and, we might add, achieved his purpose admirably by this means.)<sup>48</sup>

What, we might ask, were the positions of the original author and the immediate audience regarding this initial creation chapter? In this expressive narrative, encapsulating

much of the community's self-understanding and values, did the inspired writer set out to put on record actual history, pure and simple? And, did the listeners/readers consider they were receiving a fact-by-fact, incident-by-incident recital?

First, note that, from culture to culture (Hebrew and other) in the second millennium BC, there was no doubt of the reality of the divine and that it was under divine jurisdiction that an earthly living environment had been brought into existence, along with humanity and other forms of life. As well, they were all clear that the most effective means for communicating that divine involvement was the narrative form, either via the spoken or the written word.

If the foregoing were not in dispute, what was the leading point of difference between the Hebrews and their polytheistic neighbors in the formation of their creation account? Uppermost for the monotheistic, Abrahamic following, it would appear, were the qualities to be ascribed to God, in contrast to those of the divinities of their neighbors. Following this line, a critical question in the mind of the Hebrew author/auditors/readers need not have been:

"Am I composing/hearing/reading history—pure and simple?" Rather, it would be more like: "Is this account portraying for us and for our children the distinctive qualities of our one true God, as a foundation for the remaining values we are resolved to pass on?"

With the reality and creatorship of God beyond question, factuality and literality may hardly have been entertained by either the inspired composers or their hearers/readers.<sup>49</sup> What was wanted was a polemic against the contemporary polytheistic creation accounts, together with a framework that allowed for the representation of some of the eternal qualities of God as listed in the foregoing—and this in the most influential and widely accepted genre available. With these desiderata satisfied, who could complain that the narrative genre employed for Genesis One is not always congruent with undisputed,

**In the face of what appear to be insurmountable barriers to a literal/historical reading of Genesis One, ought we to give up the Sabbath teaching as an outdated relic of a pre-scientific age?**

twenty-first century cosmology? Non-literal, creative story was at its zenith. The Hebrews, their ANE neighbors, and we ourselves were/are the beneficiaries. And what may be the greatest religious revolution of all time was on its way.

A final consideration: Should we be concerned that disallowing a literal Genesis One will eject us into turbid waters involving such elements as “deep time,” theistic evolution, and accounting for death prior to the fall of our first parents? Perhaps we should be so concerned. Perhaps we need not. Here is a suggestion toward clarifying the situation. While the implications of these matters may be worthy of extended study, they may not, of themselves, be necessary accompaniments of settling on a non-literal creation account. As noted earlier, to say that a given account is non-literal should not be allowed to obscure the grand, literal reality behind it. On this view, the actual/literal creation of the cosmos, including earth and life upon it, may be accomplished in all its complexity (and beyond the grasp of the best intellects down to our own day) and later, under inspiration, be recorded in an analogical/representational manner that in essentials could be grasped by both the ancients and ourselves. Under these conditions, an extended lapse of time and its feared concomitants may well not be involved.

### The Seventh-day Adventist Privileged Burden

Could we focus, in closing, on a special feature of the world mission of the Seventh-day Adventist church? There is indelibly engraved into our personal and corporate psyche(s) that, of all the days in the week, God chose one as specially blessed so that its observance could be an untold blessing to the whole of humankind. Looking back over multiple thousands of years, we are heirs of one of the truly long-standing institutions given to bind humanity to the “Maker of heaven and earth.” We know that, for as long as time shall last, this day is to be a memorial of both creation and redemption and that it is an invitation to cease from our own unavailing efforts and to rest in God’s saving achievements—and that, having rested, we may go on to work joyfully in God’s cause. We know that the Sabbath is a reminder of the holiness of God and that a sanctified day is an invitation for us to become a sanctified (“set apart”) people. And, at a very practical level,

we know for ourselves, as we come to the closing evening of each Sabbath, the way it readjusts our thinking for the week to come—helps us grasp that earthly time is but a precursor to the eternal, heavenly realities.

The choice is ours: We can discredit the joyful Sabbath evangel by making it dependent on impossible literal features from the cosmology of the ancient world. Or we can discover within this opening chapter of God’s Word its deeper, enduring, epoch-defining revelations and convey these to a heaven-estranged, rest-denied humanity.

### Endnotes

1. Throughout the present article, the expression “Genesis One” is to be taken as referring to the passage Genesis 1:1 to 2:4a.
2. Additional parallels can be found, for example, in Trevor G. Lloyd, “Creation Accounts—Ancient Egyptian and Hebrew—A Comparison,” *Ancient History: Resources for Teachers* 36:2 (2006): 97–108. (Macquarie Ancient History Association, Macquarie University, NSW, Australia).
3. Note, as well, that much of what we are able, to this day, to read from the Egyptian and Mesopotamian texts may have been in circulation orally before it was put to writing.
4. These include the Pyramid and Coffin texts and pages from the *Book of the Dead*, all of which were seen by the Egyptians as a guide into the after-life. Papyrus Leningrad 116A, the Amduat, Hymn to the Aten, the Shabaka Stone, and Papyrus Leiden are also available.
5. Raymond O. Faulkner, *The Ancient Egyptian Coffin Texts* (Liverpool University Press, 2004, single volume), 226, Spell 307. See, as well, R. T. Rundle Clark, *Myth and Symbol in Ancient Egypt* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1959), 25 —“The basic principle of Egyptian cosmology is the Primeval Waters. It is common to all the accounts of the origin of the universe, however much they may differ in detail.”
6. James P. Allen, *Genesis in Egypt: The Philosophy of Ancient Egyptian Creation Accounts* (New Haven, CT: Yale Egyptological Seminar, 1988), 7.
7. Boyo G. Ockinga, trans., *Ancient Egyptian Religion, Selection of Primary Documents* (North Ryde: Macquarie University, 2006), No. 44.
8. Jan Assmann, *The Search for God in Ancient Egypt*, trans. David Lorton (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 2001), 178–180; and Erik Hornung, *Conceptions of God in Ancient Egypt: The One and the Many*, trans. John Baines (Ithaca; New York: Cornell University Press, 1996), 146–148.
9. Rhymes with “fruit.”
10. William W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger, *The Context of Scripture*, Vol. 1 (Leiden; New York; Köln: Brill, 1997), 22.
11. Robert T. R. Clark, *Myth and Symbol in Ancient Egypt* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1959), 76.
12. See James B. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 3rd ed., (Princeton University Press, 1969), 417.

13. William W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger, *The Context of Scripture*, Vol 1 (Leiden; New York; Köhln: Brill, 1997), 23.
14. Note, however, that not all of the Egyptian gods were confined to physical action. In *Coffin Texts*, Spell 325, we are told of Hu, “Lord of authoritative utterance” who proclaims that “what I say is good, my utterance is good, and what I say is done accordingly” (Hallo and Younger, 1997), 23.
15. See G. Hasel, “The Polemical Nature of the Genesis Cosmology,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 46:2 (April-June 1974): 81–102.
16. See Jacques Doukhan, “The Genesis Creation Story: Text, Issues, and Truth,” *Origins* 55, (2004): 21, 22. (Note that Doukhan sees the purpose of the chapter as not solely polemic.)
17. For purposes of comparison, it may be noted that the Egyptian pyramid texts have been dated circa 2350 to 2150 BC and were inscribed on the walls of the chambers and corridors of the royal pyramids. The *coffin texts*, dating from circa 2050 to 1800 BC, were inked onto the inside surfaces of the boards of the coffins of community leaders. *The Book of the Dead* was in regular use from circa 1550 BC and its pages were typically copied onto papyrus and placed in the coffins of any whose relatives could afford to have them written out. Other Egyptian sources regarding creation may be taken as written as follows: *Papyrus Leningrad 1116A*, circa 1400 to 1300 BC; *Teaching for Merikare*, circa 2050 BC; *Amduat*, circa 1425 BC; *Hymns to the Aten*, circa 1340 BC. As might be expected, there is a deal of duplication amongst these and other sources, in view of their all having the one main purpose—the informing of the deceased of the means to be followed in gaining passage to the after-life.
18. See Henri Blocher, *In the Beginning: The Opening Chapters of Genesis*, trans. David G. Preston (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1984), 50—“The [Genesis creation] text is composed as the author meditates on the finished work, so that we may understand how the creation is related to God and what is its significance for mankind.”
19. Colin Mitchell, *Creationism Revisited* (Grantham, England: Autumn House Limited, 1999), 219, 220. See, as well, the position taken by the *Seventh-day Adventist International Bible Commentary*, Vol. 1 (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association and Review and Herald Publishing, 2016), 39—“Genesis grounds the creation as the historical event that introduces and generates every other event in Scripture.”
20. Fritz Guy, “The Purpose and Function of Scripture: Preface to a Theology of Creation” in B. Bull, F. Guy and E. Taylor, eds, *Understanding Genesis: Contemporary Adventist Perspectives* (Riverside, CA: Adventist Today, 2006), 96. See, also, Olive J. Hemmings, “*Sola Scriptura*, Truth, and the Future of Bible Interpretation,” *Spectrum* 46:1 (2018): 23, note 49—“History has demonstrated that the attempt to transform the Bible into a science book will only create unbelievers, or otherwise mute conformists.”
21. While the New American Standard Bible (NASB) has adopted “expanse” to translate *raqiaʿ*, it gives as a footnote: “Or firmament.”
22. Robert Young, *Analytical Concordance to the Holy Bible*, 8th edition, Revised (London: Lutterworth Press, 1939), 77.
23. Note, however, that, while the most common association of *raqaʿ* in the Hebrew scriptures is with metals (five out of twelve instances), there are other associations which may involve metaphorical use, such as the stretching/spreading out of the [planet] earth (three times), the stamping of the feet (twice), and the smashing of an enemy (once). One other instance comes from a speech by Elihu in the Book of Job (37:18), in which he asks: “Can you, like him, *spread out* the skies, unyielding as a cast mirror?” (Emphasis added here.) Note that Younker and Davidson (see following), have listed all of these instances of the use of *raqaʿ* and argued that “skies,” in this last instance “most likely refers to the clouds.” (See following, AUSS 49:1 (Andrews University Press 2011), 140.
24. Paul H. Seely, “The Firmament and the Water Above” *The Westminster Theological Journal*, 53 (1991): 227–240.
25. Randall W. Younker and Richard M. Davidson, “The Myth of the Solid Heavenly Dome: Another Look at the Hebrew *raqiaʿ*,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies*, 49:1 (2011): 125–147.
26. Seely, “The Firmament”, 228, 231.
27. *Ibid.*, 231, 232.
28. *Ibid.*, 233–238.
29. In this context, however, Younker and Davidson may have overlooked the aftermath of the contest between Marduk, the Babylonian patron god, and the salt water monster, Tiamat. As pointed out by Seely (see above), Marduk’s forming of the sky has a distinctly solid sense about it. One translation reads: “He split her like a shellfish into two parts: /Half of her he set up and ceiled it as sky. ... In [Tiamat’s] belly he established the zenith. / The Moon he caused to shine, the night (to him) entrusting” (*Enuma elish*, IV:137,138; V:11,12).
30. Younker and Davidson, “The Myth,” 141.
31. *Ibid.*, 147. *Seventh-day Adventist International Bible Commentary*, Vol. 1 (*Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association and Review and Herald Publishing*, 2016), 56, takes a similar position—“What is created is not some kind of solid object, but the space or the atmosphere above humans where luminaries are set (Gen. 1:14–15, 17; Dan. 12:3) and birds fly (Gen. 1:20).”
32. In addition, earlier in their article (142), Younker and Davidson appear to endorse a position taken by Kenneth Mathews that “God formed an ‘expanse’ to create a boundary, giving structure to the upper and lower waters (1:6–7). The ‘expanse’ is the atmosphere that distinguishes the surface waters of the earth (i.e., ‘the waters below’) from the atmospheric waters or clouds (i.e., ‘the waters above’).”
33. See “The Genesis Creation Story: Text, Issues, and Truth,” *Origins* 55 (2004): 17.
34. Paul Petersen, “The Creation Account,” *South Pacific Record* 114:41 (24 October 2009): 24,25.
35. Fritz Guy, “The Purpose and Function of Scripture,” 93.
36. Donald Grey Barnhouse, *Timeless Illustrations for Preaching and Teaching* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004), 7. (I have paraphrased the original anecdote and made some adaptations, including a transfer from first to third person and the addition of compatible conversation.)

37. Leading Christian apologist, Alister McGrath, regards *imaginary* as “having no counterpart in reality,” whereas the *imaginative* is “something produced by the human mind as it tries to respond to something greater than itself, struggling to find images adequate to the reality.” Along these lines, McGrath pictures one set of C. S. Lewis’s highly creative and imaginative writings as a house, with each book in the set opening up a window which allows us to “see things in a new way. We can see farther than before, as the landscape opens up in front of us. And what we come to see is not an accumulation of individual facts, but the bigger picture which underlies them. When seen in this way, our imaginative experience ... enlarges our sense of reality. Living in our own world feels different afterwards.” Alister McGrath, *C. S. Lewis: A Life* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2013), 263, 285.

38. Influential American theologian, Langdon Gilkey, developed a similar theme in *Maker of Heaven and Earth* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1959), 317.

39. The title is used by Melchizedek in pronouncing the blessing given in Genesis 14:19, and by Abram in v. 22—and is evidently well familiar to both of them—for how long we do not know.

40. Alexander Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis* (Chicago: Phoenix Books, University of Chicago Press, 1951), 16.

41. It should be kept in mind that, as for religious practice in the Nile valley, over a period of three thousand years, with nations replacing each other, “Mesopotamian religion cannot be conceived as a unitary or even a uniform system.” Ivan Hruša, *Ancient Mesopotamian Religion: A Descriptive Introduction*, trans. from Italian by Michael Tait (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2015), 13.

42. An outline of the Opet Festival can be found in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. For a more detailed account see John C. Darnell, “Opet Festival,” *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology* (2010), 1–15. (Available online)

43. Claas J. Bleeker, *Egyptian Festivals: Enactments of Religious Renewal* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1967), 22, 23.

44. The quotes are from Alexander Heidel in referring to the gods of Babylon. He adds: “The gods were ... as good and as bad as man” and, quoting Cicero: “[the gods were] inflamed by anger and maddened by lust .... it was with the blood of such gods that man was created!” Alexander Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis: The Story of Creation* (Chicago: Phoenix Books, University of Chicago Press, 1951), 125, 126.

45. See Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1997), 7. Stark also examines a range of factors contributing to the near-exponential growth of Christianity in those early centuries.

46. John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2009), 9 (emphases in original).

47. Galatians 4:4.

48. Doukhan may be more defensive than necessary regarding the effect of Babylonian/Egyptian influence on the Genesis text. He notes: “We could go on and observe many other common motifs between those texts, but it is noteworthy that the greatest concentration of parallels, whether of ideas, language, and literary patterns, occurs here in the context of the

introductions. This observation should not mislead us, however. Instead of being an argument on behalf of the Babylonian/Egyptian influence on the biblical text, *thus undermining the original inspiration of the biblical text*, it is, on the contrary, a significant clue of the author’s strong polemic intention against these accounts.” Doukhan, “The Genesis Creation Story,” 21—emphasis added here. It is well-known, for example, that Jesus’ parable of the rich man and Lazarus has been compared with the rabbinic tale of the evil tax collector, Bar Majan, and the poor student of the law, and also with the Egyptian funerary text featuring El-Azar.

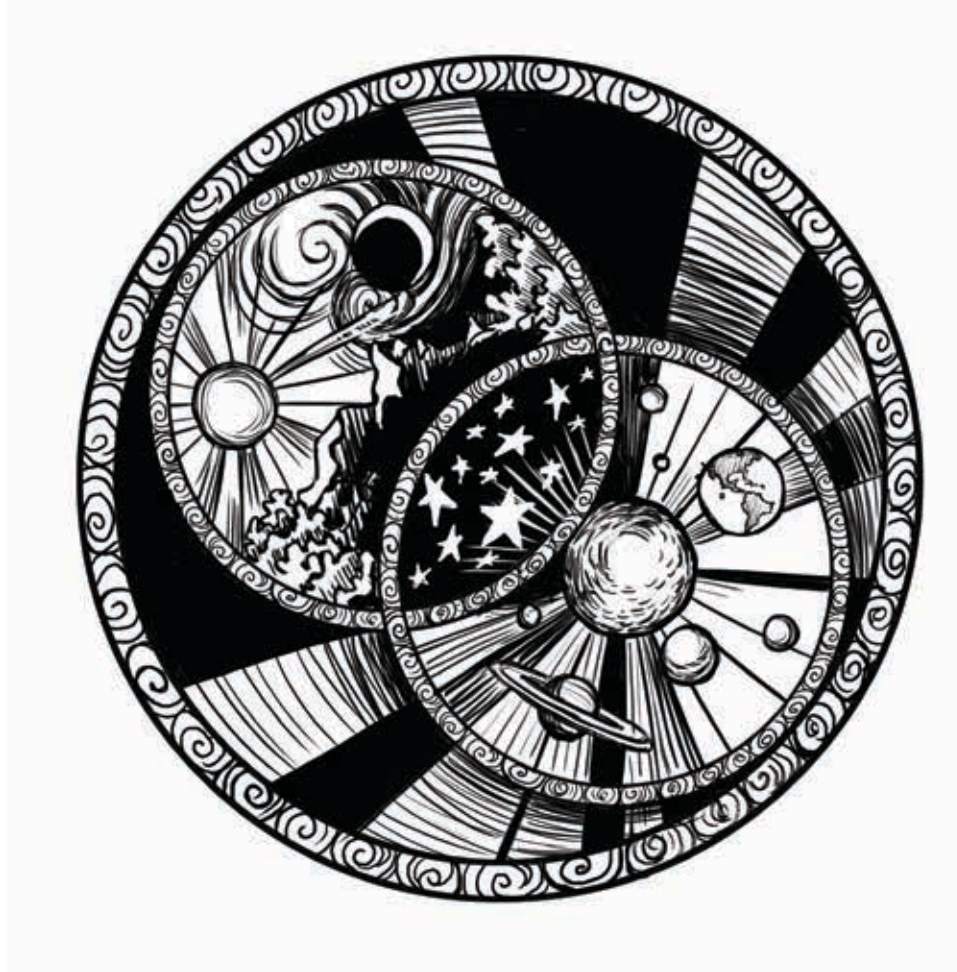
49. Canadian literary historian, critic, and theorist, Herman Northrop Frye (1912–1991) made a parallel point regarding the legendary Greek poet, Homer—presumed to have been born in the period circa 1200 to 700 BC and, hence, to have been a contemporary of a generation of Hebrew authors at some time during that period. Frye writes: “In [Homer’s] poetry the distinction between figured and literal language hardly exists, apart from the special rhetorical show-case of the epic simile already mentioned. ... it is not until the coming of a different conception of language that a tension arises between figurative and what is called ‘literal’ meaning ...” H. Northrop Frye, *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* (Penguin Books, 1990), 23. See also H. Northrop Frye, *Myth and Metaphor: Selected Essays 1974–1988*, ed. Robert D. Denham (Charlottesville; London: University Press of Virginia, 1990), 239.

50. As recognized at the outset of the present article, whatever position may be taken in the literal/non-literal discussions there will remain further matters to be considered. Along these lines, it is evident that confirming the Sabbath doctrine by interpreting Genesis One as non-literal, leaves important questions still to be discussed. These relate particularly to the use made of Genesis One in later passages of scripture. (Exodus 20:8–11 and 31:16, 17 come to mind.) In the process of finding relevant answers, it will be helpful to keep in mind the high status (even evidential status?) that both the Hebrews and those in the surrounding cultures gave to the narrative genre and that, in addition, the scholarly Hebrew recognises four possible meanings that passages from the Torah could be given: Peshat (literal/factual); Remaz (suggested); Derush (deeper); and Sōd (inner/allegorical); with their initial letters, PRDS, giving us the consonants of the word *Paradise*. See, for example, William Barclay, *Daily Study Bible, the Letter to the Hebrews* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1957), 67f. [Note that the vowel in the fourth type of possible meaning, *Sōd*, is pronounced as a long *ō*.] See, as well, Fritz Guy’s “The Purpose and Function of Scripture,” especially 94–96.



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# GOD, THE MISREADING OF GENESIS, *and the* SURPRISINGLY GOOD NEWS



BY BRIAN BULL AND FRITZ GUY

Probably nowhere has the Bible been more consistently misread—by translators, scholars, serious Christians, and casual readers alike—than in the first few chapters of Genesis. This unfortunate misreading of the text has resulted in a wholly unnecessary expenditure of time, effort, and resources in trying to make sense of

the ancient text (as if it were a modern one) in the twenty-first-century world. The good news is that the misperception need not continue, and that the necessary correction is simple and straightforward. But it will take determined and persistent effort to overcome the influence of long-standing assumptions about the nature of the Genesis text.

## Imaginary but Useful Narrative Assistants

In our efforts to understand Genesis 1–11 better—and in the process needing to move back and forth between two very different conceptual realms that are separated by time, space, and culture—we need all the help we can get. Accordingly, we employ a couple of imaginary and symbolic figures.

The first one is Moshe He'eb, who represents the ancient Hebrews but is himself only middle-aged and in good health. He is bearded, and he carries a rough-hewn staff as he walks the rugged and dusty paths of various lands of the ancient world. We find him often enough in the Promised Land, but he is by no means limited to that locale. Moshe personifies the original hearers of the Biblical text and those who found its narratives, exhortations, prophecies, and other material useful in their quest to understand God and themselves more fully. Finding such material valuable, they recorded it for posterity. Moshe's contemporaries listened to the inspired authors of Genesis. They constituted its Original Hearers.

Our second figure, less strange but equally imaginary and symbolic, is Moshe's modern counterpart—a college-educated, intellectually curious young man named Ian Michael O'Dern. He is clean-shaven and casually dressed, a paradigmatic twenty-first-century Christian. He is a serious reader of the Bible; but since he does not know Hebrew, he has to rely on one or more modern translations. He represents almost all of us; and if his initials "I. M." are pronounced rapidly together with his surname "O'Dern," the result sounds (not coincidentally) like "I'm modern."<sup>1</sup>

We hope that these two imaginary figures, representing times, cultures, and worldviews separated by close to 3,000 years, will help to clarify their drastically different interpretations of the same Biblical text. To assist in this venture, a version of Genesis that employs only the information and conceptualizations that were available to Moshe will be employed. We have termed the process of

producing such a version "retro-translation" and have identified the result as an Original Hearer's Version (OHV). It will seem "otherworldly," but it will go far to explaining why the Hebrew text was read and understood so differently *then* (by Moshe) from the way it is usually read and understood *now* (by Ian Michael—and, of course, by us).

## Who and Why Rather Than When and How

Moshe and Ian Michael are each anticipating answers to fundamental—but fundamentally different—questions. Moshe's questions were essentially theological: Why does the world—everything we see around us or know about—exist? Is anyone responsible for it being here? Does human life *mean* anything? By contrast, Ian Michael's questions are historical and scientific: When and how did Planet Earth come into existence? Did humans and dinosaurs ever coexist, and if so, when?

Inevitably, these very different questions have very different answers. To Moshe's theological questions "Who?" and "Why?" the answer, more than 3,000 years ago, was simple and direct: it was our God of love, who

chose to create human reality in the divine image and thus to actualize God's generous will on the land.

Ian Michael, of course, is in an entirely different place. He has read that Creation began with water and darkness everywhere (Gen. 1:2), but he knows that could not have been literally the case because he has seen his home planet, a cloud-swathed blue sphere hanging in empty space—certainly not in water and darkness. Since Genesis (as he understands it) promises to inform him "when" and "how" heaven and earth came into existence, he expects at least background information about the origin of his Planet Earth, the star (which he knows as "the sun") around which it travels, the greater solar system, and perhaps the Milky Way galaxy. He may even be expecting answers about how the space-time continuum began. These two sets of questions and their expected answers

**Moshe personifies the original hearers of the Biblical text and those who found its narratives, exhortations, prophecies, and other material useful in their quest to understand God and themselves more fully.**



could hardly be more different, and no single narrative can simultaneously satisfy both. Any conceivable account of beginnings cannot simultaneously satisfy the expectations of both Moshe and Ian Michael. This, then, is the challenge in reading and interpreting Genesis.

Consider the sentence with which the English Bible begins. Genesis 1:1 is commonly translated “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” When retrotranslated (see the section “Retro-translation” below) this familiar language becomes “To begin with, God created the sky and the land.” This is the beginning of a very different narrative, and we propose to follow where this retrotranslated narrative would lead Ian Michael were he to encounter it now in the twenty-first-century. We think he should encounter it. Further, we attempt to explain how the Creation narrative with which he comes face-to-face when he reads Genesis is so profoundly mistaken. Why should it now be necessary to go through Ian Michael’s Genesis narrative word-by-word to remove material that would have been unintelligible to the original audience—Moshe and his kin?

### Theology Is Not Pre-Science or Proto-Science

A useful approach to resolving this conundrum is to recognize Genesis 1–11 for what it is—*theology*—not for what to many readers it has appeared to be—*science*. Genesis 1–11 consists of language about divine intention, action, and accomplishment. This was certainly the way the narratives were understood in Moshe’s world, where the operation of nature had not yet been distinguished as a separate reality from God’s direct action. Thus, it was what we would call *theology*—certainly not *science* (or proto-science) or *history*. Although theology was not then an explicit category, it is our best term for Moshe’s broader category—a much larger “tent” than Ian Michael understands it to be, living as he now does in the postmodern, scientific, and predominantly secular world.

For Moshe, 3,000 years ago, everything and every occurrence that could not be explained as the result of human action was understood to be the result of divine action. If it rained, the explanation was that God brought the rain.<sup>1</sup> If a woman became pregnant, the explanation was that God opened her womb.<sup>2</sup> Thus, the perception that “God acted” served as an all-encompassing explanatory concept. For Ian Michael, reading Genesis today, thought and language about natural occurrences and the

“laws of nature” fall into the very different category he knows as science.

### Moshe’s “Greater Light” Was Not Even Close to Ian Michael’s “Sun”

It was to Moshe that Genesis was addressed. He understood that after God made “dry ground” (*yabbashah*) possible by confining the “deep” (*tehom*) above the dome-of-the-sky (*raqia’*) and limiting the surface water to “seas,” God filled the dry ground with growing plants. He further understood that God next created a “greater light,” a “lesser light,” and “the stars” (Gen. 1:16). For Moshe’s environment to be productive—for plants to grow and for Moshe himself to survive on the land created for him by God—there had to be sunlight. For this very purpose God had created the “greater light.” It was placed (the Hebrew word meant “firmly emplaced” or “set”) in the *raqia’*. This “greater light” was the essential timekeeper of Moshe’s world, created by God to inform him of the special times for religious celebrations, as well as to mark off the passage of days and years (Gen. 1:14). In every sense that Moshe could understand, the “greater light,” having been brought into existence by a benevolent God, was placed in precisely that location for Moshe’s benefit. It travelled over Moshe’s land every day to enable him to tend his fields and/or flocks and herds. It was there to serve him and what was his. A gracious God had created a world defined by the sky above and land beneath, all benignly overseen by the “greater light”

For Ian Michael, the situation is entirely different. He is fully aware that Moshe’s “greater light” was the sun, but Ian Michael’s own sun is not in any sense confined to a specific place in in the *raqia’*. Ian Michael’s sun is an enormous astronomical body that, at some time in the cosmic past, pulled Planet Earth into orbit around it and has kept Earth there for billions of years. Ian Michael cannot even imagine the sun orbiting the planet he knows as Earth—the sun’s gravity is so vastly greater than that of the Earth that his mind will simply not permit it. To him, a mental image of that sort is inconceivable.

### “Retro-translation” and “Close Reading” Are Useful Tools for Understanding Genesis

“Retro-translation” is our word for the process of taking the modern reader *back* (“retro”) to the conceptual world in which an ancient document originated, in order

to recognize the document's original (and thus authentic) meaning, unprejudiced by modern (and much later) understandings. A retrotranslated Creation narrative does not assume that something existed unless and until it has been introduced into the narrative, and does assume that it continues to exist. For example, "darkness" (*hodesh*) and "the deep" (*tehom*) were described as already in existence when the process of Creation began (Gen. 1:2). Both are therefore to be understood (in a retrotranslated Genesis) as pre-creation realities. Both were radically relativized during the ensuing Creation week—darkness by the creation of light on Day One, and "the deep" by the creation of the "vault" or "dome" (*raqia'*) on Day Two. Neither, however, was included in what was *brought into existence during the Creation week*. Thus, according to a "close reading" of the narrative, neither originated in the Creation process itself as described in Genesis 1.

Further, retro-translation assumes that when Genesis 1 defines something, that is how, going forward, that part of created reality is to be understood. Here we encounter an interesting but rarely noted implication of the generally accepted principle that "Scripture is its own interpreter." When Scripture says that something existed, we know that that entity existed and continued for as long as the Scripture account indicated that it existed—for more often than not Scripture is our only source of information on the subject. And when Scripture defines a specific reality, that is its proper definition in that context. An example is the definition of the Hebrew word *yom* ("day"). The text carefully specifies that "God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night" (Gen. 1:5). There is no getting around this Scriptural definition: The Genesis "day" was the daylight portion of a light-dark cycle, and the dark portion was "night." So, a Genesis "day" was as long as daylight lasted; it was *not twenty-four hours long*.

This idea that a "day" in Genesis was not twenty-four hours long seems strange indeed to Ian Michael. He takes it for granted that, strictly speaking, a day is (and always has been) twenty-four hours long. (The English word "day" is of course sometimes used adjectivally to signify a shorter period of time, as in "a day's work" or "a day's drive"; but even then it refers to a shorter period of time that occurs within a twenty-four-hour period.) A "close reading" of a retrotranslated Genesis, however, requires that a "day" was just as long as Scripture says it was, neither more nor less.

## The Imaginary "Disconnect" Between Science and Religion

In the Foreword to the present book (as well as the Foreword to *God, Sky, and Land*) we wrote, somewhat wistfully, "We wish it were otherwise, but there is no getting around the fact that there is a profound disconnect between science as commonly understood and Genesis as usually read—a disconnect that has existed since the scientific revolution began in the sixteenth century." Often this "disconnect" still exists in Ian Michael's mind as he reads Genesis 1–11 in the twenty-first century, mistakenly assuming that the ancient text is describing his own scientific (and heliocentric) world. When he reads of "the earth" being created in "the beginning," he typically (and understandably) assumes that what is being described is the origin of his home planet Earth. He thinks he is reading a pre-scientific (or proto-scientific) *cosmogony*. He takes it for granted that the creation of "the earth" is an integral part of the birth-process of a heliocentric system that includes the Planet Earth—a process that may well reach back to the birth-process of our Milky Way Galaxy and possibly even the whole universe.

Ever since the earliest Hebrew-to-English translations were produced, the Hebrew word *'erets* has been translated as "earth" in the Creation narratives. As late as William Tyndale's time (1533), the most plausible meaning of "earth" was "dirt" or "rich, dark soil" or "land," although it could also have meant the eternally fixed sphere-at-the-center-of-reality. By the next century, however, when the King James Version appeared (1611), "earth" had acquired the additional meaning of *a planet*. From that time on, the translators whose home planet was Earth seem to have pictured "planet Earth" whenever they encountered *'erets* in the Creation story (although later in Genesis and in the rest of the Hebrew canon it has usually been translated as "land"). To them, the Genesis narratives of Creation seemed to be describing the coming-into-being of their cosmos, their sun, moon, and stars (and sometimes even their universe), along with their home planet Earth. And so, *'erets* uniformly became "earth" rather than "land" in Genesis 1–11 wherever it was linguistically possible.

Thus, Ian Michael's Genesis now seems to reflect a modern cosmology that he (as a college-educated Christian) knows to be more-or-less accurate. The idea of "Earth" understood as "planet" appears to support a

heliocentric arrangement with the sun as the gravitational center around which Earth revolves. Ian Michael is therefore understandably nonplussed when the first Creation story (Gen. 1:1–2:4a) is so problematic scientifically. Combined with James Ussher’s chronology, a Creation account read in this way indicates a very brief history for the Earth and for life upon it. It also indicates that all life forms—dinosaurs, mammals and man—came into existence within a one-or-two-day period (Gen. 1:20–33) a few thousand years ago. To Ian Michael this makes no sense.

If, however, Ian Michael reads something like, “To begin with, God created the sky and the land,” he may recognize that the Creation narrative is not, has never been, and could not possibly be a description of the origin of the universe known to modern science. Initially intended for Moshe, the narrative was about the purpose and meaning of Moshe’s world as a generous gift from God, and it was expressed in language that he could understand (for the obvious reason that “revelation” that is not understood is not revelation at all).

“Sky” and “land” encompassed everything Moshe knew about and everything he could conceive. In his world, the sun really did go westward over the land during the day (as he saw with his own eyes) and back eastward under the land at night (which was the only available explanation). It was a geocentric earth-sun arrangement which, given the time, place, and cultural context of the narrative, could not have been otherwise. Understanding—as he reads about Moshe’s sky and Moshe’s land—that he is being transported back to Moshe’s world, Ian Michael is not at all surprised by the rest of the Creation narrative, which *affirms the ultimate source and meaning* of that world.

That was what Moshe most needed to hear, and that was what the divinely inspired narrative gave to him and his posterity. And that is why the Creation narrative must be read not as pre- (or proto-) scientific history (as it is often misread) but as a “theological anthropology,” an interpretation of human reality in relation to Ultimate

Reality. Once Ian Michael orients himself to Moshe’s time, space, and existential situation—with Moshe’s sky above and Moshe’s land beneath his feet, he can enter Moshe’s existential world as well.

Moshe had only two explanatory categories, and natural science was not one of them. Ian Michael can realize that what he reads in Genesis is not and never was pre- or proto-science at all, but theological anthropology through and through; it is about how created reality is related to the generous Creator God. Our own understanding, along with Ian Michael’s, is of course immensely enriched by the revelation of God incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth.

That is a revelation that Moshe did not have.

## **A useful approach to resolving this conundrum is to recognize Genesis 1–11 for what it is— theology—not for what to many readers it has appeared to be—science.**

### **The Surprisingly Good News for Ian Michael**

Having sojourned briefly in Moshe’s world of “sky” and “land” with a protecting *raqia*<sup>5</sup> overhead and the worrisome *tehom* safely confined to its proper place, Ian Michael, returning to his twenty-first-century world, can now breathe a sigh of relief.

The disturbing tension in his psyche between what he learned in his science courses and what he reads in Genesis has vanished. Understanding that the Creation story is theology, not divinely revealed proto-science, a perceptive Ian Michael is now aware that there could not be a discrepancy between the Genesis narrative and science any more than there could be a discrepancy between Franz Schubert’s “Ave Maria” and the physics of sound, or between Leonardo da Vinci’s *Mona Lisa* and the chemistry of oil paint—or between prayer for healing and scientific medicine. Surprising as it may be, this is surely good news.

Furthermore, Ian Michael now recognizes that the Creation narrative never was in conflict with the relatively recent intellectual project called “science.” The Creation story answered Moshe’s *existential* questions about his own reality and accounted for the existence of his whole (geocentric) world. It explained *why* the sun went westward over the land in the daytime and returned eastward under the land at night. It explained that all the blessings of sky and land and sun, as well as his own existence, were the result

of God acting creatively for Moshe’s own benefit. It confirmed that he existed because an infinitely generous and loving God willed him to be. That this is how the Creation narratives were understood by Moshe. Given the time and place of the communication between God, Moshe, and Moshe’s kin, it could not have been otherwise. And that is surprisingly good news for Ian Michael, and for us.

Why then has the so-called science/religion disconnect, that started with the rise of science in the sixteenth century, continued into the present, so that it proves so perplexing to Ian Michael as he reads a modern translation of Genesis? The answer to this question—and the cause of this long-running misunderstanding—lies in three contrary-to-fact assumptions that are still too often stuck in Ian Michael’s head:

1. That *’erets* in the Creation narratives referred to Planet Earth, rather than to Moshe’s beloved “land”—this despite the fact that *’erets* almost always means “land” or “ground” in the rest of the Hebrew Bible. When Moshe first heard of the divine Creation, Earth-as-planet was still 2,500 years in the future. The Creation narrative was addressed to Moshe, and its subject was (and is) far more important than any kind of science (“pre,” “proto,” “modern,” or “post-modern”).
2. That the first Creation narrative described the coming-into-being of a heliocentric solar system. It did not, and therefore does not. It described the sun traveling across Moshe’s sky by day and under his “land” (or through that “land’s” nether regions) by night—a necessarily geocentric arrangement, the daylight part of which Moshe could plainly see. Instead, Ian Michael usually assumes (erroneously) that the Creation narrative described the origin of his solar system in which a relatively small earth orbits a gigantic sun.

3. That the *raqia’* and the *tehom* can be safely ignored because they were insignificant players in the Creation drama—despite the fact that they appear early and prominently in the narrative. (The *raqia’* and the *tehom* occupy all of Creation Day Two.) As the story was told, one of these entities, the *tehom*, impeded the Creation process until God, by creating and deploying the *raqia’*, enabled the “sky” and “land” to become the home where Moshe could flourish.

**If, however, Ian Michael reads something like, “To begin with, God created the sky and the land,” he may recognize that the Creation narrative is not, has never been, and could not possibly be a description of the origin of the universe known to modern science.**

These three mistaken assumptions have been the (usually unrecognized) intellectual heritage of every English translator since Wycliffe’s Bible. They have certainly been the unexamined intellectual heritage of Bible readers in the last 400 years—almost all of whom have failed to question why the very same text that affirmed Moshe’s geocentric cosmology is now almost always read by Ian Michael (and us) as the divine establishment of a heliocentric one.

### **Anticipating a Theology of Creation**

If, as we have insisted throughout the trilogy which this book completes, the Genesis narratives are not science but theology, serious readers of the Bible (as well as professional scholars) on re-entering Moshe’s world can *read the narratives literally*—as Moshe did. In the course of that literal reading it becomes clear that there is not (and cannot be) a conflict between a theological explanation of the meaning and significance of “first things” and a scientific account of when and how they came to be—and what they consist of.

When they are read not as science but as theology, the Genesis narratives will achieve in the twenty-first-century the purpose for which they were written close to 3,000 years ago. That purpose was to convey theological understandings—understandings of humanness in relation to God—that proved so filled with meaning that they started the Hebrews on a centuries-long quest to achieve

ever-clearer insights into God's being, God's intentions, and God's actions. In time, records of that quest came to make up the Hebrew Bible, our Old Testament. Genesis begins that Bible and, more than any other book, provides the grounds for a theology of Creation.

Finite reality is best understood as the gift of a loving God concerned that all created reality—especially human reality—should thrive. Existence itself is a gift for which profound and continuing gratitude in both feeling and action is the only appropriate response. Significantly, feelings of gratitude increase human happiness (and thus human flourishing). Furthermore, divine generosity motivates a human sense of responsibility and generosity in return.

All created reality—material, vegetable, animal, and human—is valuable and deserves proper recognition as the product of divine creativity. Thus, a theology of Creation involves respect and concern for every person without regard to gender, race, or status, as well as untiring efforts to protect and promote human health and to develop and improve human intelligence and understanding. This, in turn, requires alleviation of homelessness and poverty and ongoing concern for the preservation and improvement of the quality of air and water as vital parts of the Creation provided for us by the Creator.

In order for human beings to thrive, this awareness of our creatureliness needs to be constantly reinforced. To that end, the Sabbath, the capstone of the Genesis narratives of Creation, is a weekly reminder and resource. If our days are to be “long in the land,” our existence requires continuing reminders, not only that we are creatures but also that we are creatures in the presence *and loving care* of our Creator.

The Creation of human moral agents entailed enormous risk for God, the planet Earth, and humanity itself. But God took the risk, saying, “Let us make humanity [Heb. *adam*] in our image, according to our likeness” (Gen. 1:26). Creation was (and still is) a huge divine gamble, a gamble that eventually resulted in enormous cost to God—incarnation, rejection, and death. Perhaps most stunning of all is the realization that the ultimate outcome of God's risk, whether God finally wins or loses the gamble, is to a large extent up to us human moral agents.

A logically inevitable implication of *creatio imago Dei* is social inclusiveness. “So God created humanity in his

image, in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them” (Gen. 1:27). This is a clear affirmation of gender equality as well as cultural inclusiveness. It is obvious that God believes in both human variety and human oneness.

As for the Hebrews' centuries-long quest to achieve ever-clearer insights into who God is, God is the divine actualization and personification of infinite, unconditional, unending love. What God does is to express this love in continuing activity for the benefit of created reality. What God wants for human reality is its flourishing—the fulfillment of its potential for love, happiness, and satisfaction.

This is, in part, what a theology of Creation could look like—and a theology of Creation is, after all, the point of the Creation narratives in Genesis.

### Endnotes

1. We recognize that both of these figures are male. Since (1) the English language is conventionally gendered and (2) contemporary anthropologists tell us that all known cultures are patriarchal, it seems the less misleading course for us to follow the custom of referring to humanity in general with masculine pronouns. For these reasons, our imaginary figures are both male. We regret that this may annoy some readers, but to make one male and the other female would imply differences more far-reaching than we intend (and more distracting!).
2. For heavy rain, *geshem*, see Lev. 26:4; 1 Kgs. 17:14; Ps. 105:32; Joel 2:23; Amos 4:7, Zech. 10:1. For normal rainfall, *matar*, see Deut. 11:14; 28:12, 24; 1 Sam. 12:17–18; 1 Kgs. 8:36; 18:1; 2 Chron. 6:37; 7:13; Job 5:10; 28:26; 36:27; 37:6; 38:28; Ps. 135:7; 147:8; Isa. 5:6; 30:23; Jer. 10:13; 51:16; Zech. 10:1.
3. See Gen. 20:18; 29:31; 30:22; 1 Sam. 1:5–6.

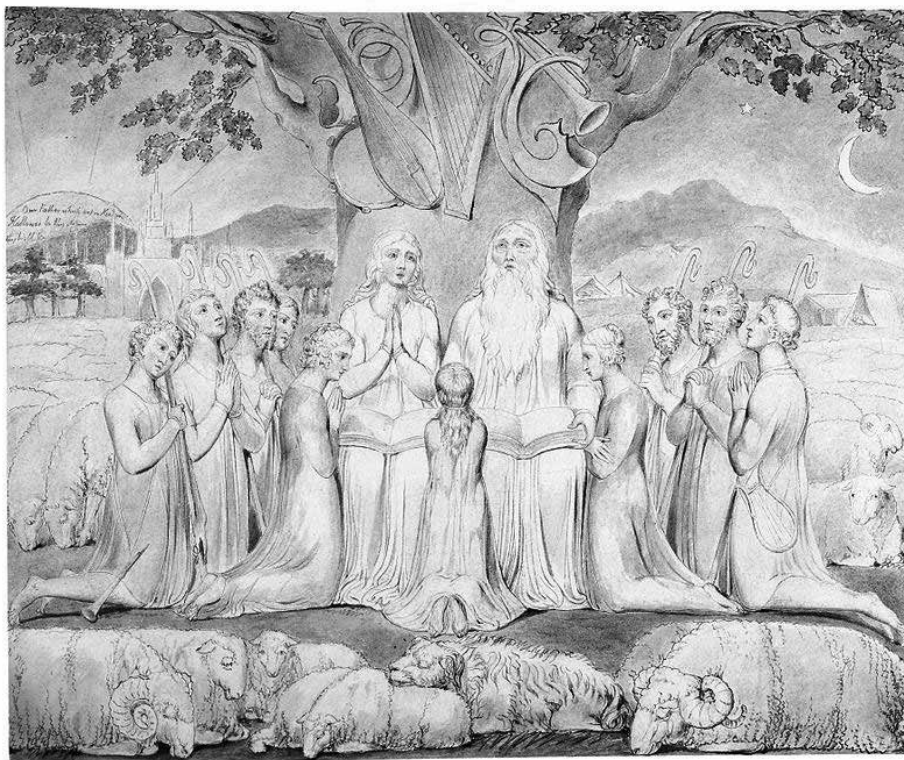


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# Things We Do Not Know

## Job's Dilemma and the Future of Adventist Geoscience



*Job and his Family* by William Blake from *The Book of Job* (circa 1805–1806).

BY GERALD BRYANT

I was invited to speak at the Fiftieth-Anniversary Adventist Forum Conference because I represent a rare breed: the Adventist geologist. My advanced training is in sedimentary geology, interpreting the successive layers of sedimentary deposits, along with their fossil content. Those layers read like a book of ancient history, though, ideally, we find the latest news at the top and the background information at the bottom of the geological column; so, more like a newspaper article. In some ways, geology has distinct advantages over the study of past civilizations: its historical artifacts are less subtle than the symbolic representations of human culture; and there is

much broader access to primary sources. On the down side, it is not a very simple task to read the whole of the sedimentary record because it has been torn apart, pages scattered and lost. However, this book is so important that geologists go to great lengths to bring the pieces together and make sense out of them. This importance is not just economic, but spiritual, inasmuch as geologic history provides deep context to human history.

We read geologic history by exploring the physical evidence and constructing models that organize those features by their association with known processes. We call these “actualistic” or “process/response” models. This

type of historical reconstruction informs our attempts to mitigate environmental threats and to locate petroleum and mineral resources efficiently. Thus, economic applications provide impetus to historical investigations and successful application in exploration is one means of evaluating historical hypotheses. For example, meteorite-prospecting strategies in Antarctica are linked to modeling of the long-term behavior of the ice that covers most of the continent. This expanse provides an ideal catchment for rocky debris from space that survives frictional heating in the atmosphere; however, this would not be particularly useful if those captured meteorites remained buried and dispersed. That is where glacial dynamics come into play. As the East Antarctic ice sheet flows toward the coastline, it encounters topographic barriers that force the deep ice layers upward and facilitate melting. Through time, these dynamics concentrate meteorites and expose them at the surface, where they are visible as dark objects upon the glacial backdrop. Exploiting the geographic relationships intrinsic to this model, the Antarctic Search for Meteorites, a scientific endeavor sponsored by the National Science Foundation, NASA, and the Smithsonian Institution, has collected more meteorites in the last thirty years than were recovered from all around the Earth in the previous 500 years<sup>1</sup>, dramatically lowering the cost and improving the availability of this material for scientific research.

Most of my own research has focused on sandstone outcrops, where I have discovered evidence of ancient quicksand flowing at depth, toppling dunes, and entombing animals. In other circumstances, I would choose to display some of my scenic field photos and explain the interpretive process or, perhaps, direct attention to remote-sensing images from the dune-covered surfaces of Venus, Titan, and Mars, where similar liquefaction features have been detected in recent Rover images; but I am not going to do that. Instead, I am going to take off my geology hat as quickly as possible and address you, more generically, as a fellow Christian, a church elder and Sabbath School leader; because, within Adventism, sedimentary geology is a religious concern.

Perhaps you have heard that the very doctrine of Christ's atonement hangs by the slim thread of our belief in a recent global flood.<sup>2</sup> It is claimed that this Flood, in the time of Noah, produced the bulk of the sedimentary record and its contained evidence for life—and death.

This idea has been favored by many, including Ellen White and other influential Adventists, because it implies a much shorter history of suffering and death than is envisioned through the lens of modern science. More to the point, it places geologic history within the traditional scope of the Genesis sin narrative, rather than within an undefined prehistory where predation and death in the animal kingdom set the stage for human history. Our theological traditions are not equipped to handle such a possibility; so conventional wisdom dictates that it cannot be true. Under these circumstances, some feel justified in promoting the Flood hypothesis as the guiding premise in the interpretation of fossil-bearing sedimentary successions and circumventing the relatively slow and unpredictable validation processes of mainstream science.<sup>3</sup> Let me be particularly clear on this point, since it tends to be obscured by the presentations typically made in our churches: there is no actualistic model of the Flood. Though the idea that the Flood was the primary agent in the production of the geologic record is theologically attractive (and relatively child-friendly), it has not proven useful, scientifically. It remains an *ad hoc* conceptual framework and does not provide a stable platform for ongoing research. A viable Flood model would, at minimum:

1. Enable consistent identification of the start and end of the Flood in the sedimentary record. (Change in process should be reflected in the product.)
2. Provide process explanations for the intricate sedimentary architectures that we observe. (The Flood, as a geologic agent, cannot remain a sedimentological “black box.”)
3. Account for the orderly distribution of body fossils. (They are clearly not hydraulically sorted, so . . .)
4. Explain why there are footprints and nests and other signs of life throughout the rock record. (Unparalleled survival skills?)
5. Identify coexisting sources for the various layers in each local succession. (Multiple distinct layers of sediment and fossils require multiple sources, in

a catastrophic model, and a correspondingly vast surface area.)

6. Integrate the evidence for concurrent igneous and metamorphic processes. (How do the process implications of such features as the Deccan traps, Hawaiian Islands/Emperor Seamounts, Utah laccoliths, and widespread fossiliferous metasediments fit into a catastrophic flood model?)
7. Demonstrate how a Flood model systematically harmonizes the vast array of observed field relationships and makes useful predictions about the distribution of geologic materials. (How did the Flood carve the Grand Canyon at the same time the Great Basin was being choked with local sediment? If exploration geologists are so wrong about process, what petroleum plays are they overlooking?)

If validated, a functional Flood model would revolutionize sedimentary geology and redirect the exploration initiatives of vast financial enterprises; but our treatment of the topic does not trend in that direction. That is, the Flood hypothesis is not competing for respectability within the established forums of the scientific community. Instead, it is being sustained by apologetics that backfill the evidentiary void between hypothesis and theory with a collage of assertions, plausibilities, and boutique explanations, while polemics against mainstream science insulate the hypothesis from falsification.

This approach has been remarkably successful within our community of faith and among Fundamentalist Christians, generally, if success is measured in widespread acceptance; but does that make the Flood hypothesis true? The Bible does not speak directly to this issue; so, in the absence of physical validation, we are depending on lesser religious authorities. I have heard the most avid Adventist defenders of the Flood hypothesis invoke Ellen White's authority, which invites a different kind of discussion than I wish to facilitate. My point, here, does not depend on any specific conclusion regarding the authority of Ellen White in matters of geoscience. I just want to illustrate out how far off topic we have wandered in our corporate testimony to the gospel. We have shored up our theology

of the atonement with claims regarding geologic history, and we have shored up that position with supplementary claims of extra-Biblical authority. How does this improve upon the testimony of Scripture and its direct validation through personal spiritual experience?

If Adventists had demonstrated extraordinary insight and general expertise in geoscience, then perhaps that field would provide a suitable platform for outreach; but such is not the case. Though the Adventist community is a bastion of evidence-based research and practice in the health sciences, in Earth science it is a haven for any hypothesis that promises to salve our theological discomforts. How we fell into this predicament is an important question that I will leave to others.<sup>4</sup> My own primary concern is what to do moving forward. What better options are at our disposal for meeting the theological challenges of this scientific age? That sounds like such a modern issue, but it is really just an old dilemma in a modern package: how to deal with the things that we do not know. We do not know how the sacred account, recorded in the first few chapters of Genesis, relates to our emerging knowledge of Earth history. We simply do not know. How, then, shall we deal with this ignorance? I believe that Scripture offers a wealth of guidance on this issue. I'd like to direct your attention to one instance that seems to me tailor-made for our circumstances.

You remember the story of Job, how he suffered four catastrophes in a single day. First, the Sabeans stole his donkeys and oxen, killing the attending servants. When a surviving servant brought this very bad news to Job, he was no doubt appalled; but it was a rough neighborhood and these things happened, just never before to him. He could mend the breach in his security, enlarge his household, and restore his wealth, eventually. But then, on the heels of the first report, another sole survivor approached Job, reporting an extraordinary lightning strike that had consumed all his sheep, and his shepherds, too. This was trouble of a different sort: fire from heaven. God's fingerprints were all over it. Still, the bad news kept coming in. Three Chaldean raiding parties made off with all Job's camels, killing the herders. Now it was clear that Job's political network had disintegrated, taking with it the entire outer tier of his household and leaving him vulnerable in a harshly competitive world; but worse news was already at his door. A mighty wind had collapsed the house where all ten of his children were



partying, killing them and their attendants. The ultimate tragedy, another heavenly signature.

Things could not get any worse. Two rounds of shattering one-two punches: one punch from society, the other from God. Utter devastation in Job's household. Job's response? "The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised" (Job 1:21b).<sup>5</sup> And then things got worse. Another round of attacks, even more personal. This time, the opening hit came from God, stripping Job of health and physical comfort, and the closer came from his own wife, as her sympathy withered away. "Are you still maintaining your integrity? Curse God, and die," (Job 2:9) she urged. But Job replied, "Shall we accept good from God and not trouble?" (Job 2:10b).

When Job's three friends gathered around him, sitting mute for a week, it must have seemed a hopeful sign. Here, at last, an enclave of human support? But any such thoughts quickly evaporated after Job's cry of misery sounded the opening bell for a fresh round of oppression. One by one, in multiple successions of progressively brutal attacks, the three friends hammer Job with their conventional wisdom, even claiming special knowledge as they press him to forsake the secret sins that must have occasioned his misfortune. As he replies to these pious invectives, Job's reasoning is trapped within similar assumptions as his peers; but he searches beyond a mere reward/punishment relationship to God, seeking larger truths and a more personal connection:

If I have sinned, what have I done to you, you who see everything we do? Why have you made me your target? Have I become a burden to you? Why do you not pardon my offenses and forgive my sins? For I will soon lie down in the dust; you will search for me, but I will be no more (Job 7:20–21).

He says this even as he awaits the second blow of that fourth round of one-two punches: God's final act to end his life. Job has already lost all earthly support and every vestige of divine favor, yet he continues to trust in God: "Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him." (Job 13:15).

I know that my redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand on the earth. And after my

skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes—I, and not another (Job 19:25–27).

Do you see that Job's dilemma was not how to endure his physical pain or how to survive without resources or how to regain status or, even, how to cope with the loss of his family? In the Biblical account, the horrible tragedies he endured serve to accentuate the crucial nature of Job's core concern. Job's dilemma consisted of his inability to reconcile history with his understanding of God. It was a spiritual and epistemic crisis. Job did not understand what was going on any more than did his three friends. They were all blind to the heavenly reality revealed to the reader in the opening scene of this story: Job was not under attack because God was angry at him. Quite the contrary, it was because God was so very pleased with him: "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil" (Job 1:8). How could they know? How can any of us know how much we do not know? We, like they, try to connect the dots before they are all in place. Within Adventism, I commonly hear this idea as a criticism directed at science; but it is even more true of theology — our own theology as well as everyone else's — or is the creation more complex than the Creator? God is greater than we know, greater than we imagine, greater than we can imagine.

At the end of Job's story, when God finally reveals Himself, He does not rush in with apologies and explanations. His presence, His unveiled greatness, is enough. Job is satisfied and reaffirmed in his faith, and God restores him to fellowship with his frenemies. That is what we need, too: a firmer sense of the great and immanent God. Not just familiarity with the pleasing little images of God that we fashion with our intellects and shape with our needs, but contact with the magnificent God who created a cosmos that shocks us and pushes us to search beyond established conventions. That God did not need the protection of Job's over-eager friends, and He does not seek ours. Desperate theodicies belie our hope in God's imminent unveiling. Do we no longer remember what it means to be Adventist?

I believe that the way forward for Adventist geoscience, and for the next generation of Adventist scientists, begins with these three fundamental theological truths:

1. God is the Creator.
2. He is greater than we know.
3. We can trust Him to lead us beyond every difficulty.

These truths simplify our own epistemic dilemmas by relieving us of responsibility for managing the cosmic context of the gospel. We can explore the timing, extent, and effects of the Genesis flood as the scientific questions they are, without fear of somehow diminishing God's power in the lives of our children. I believe that sheltering our young people within a bubble of pseudo-scientific claims is exactly the wrong approach. We must trust them to explore beyond our own conceptualizations and we should encourage them to discard every intellectual idol they encounter upon our thrones of knowledge. Let their science be a gateway to knowledge, not a diversion around it.

In His vindication of Job, God indicted His own would-be defenders: "I am angry with you and your two friends, because you have not spoken the truth about me, as my servant Job has" (Job 42:7b). If we hope to avoid similar censure, we must release our testimony of God from its tether to the perceived needs of the denomination. It is not about us, there are larger issues in play. As dramatized in the story of Job, these higher priorities are not served by pretension or political manipulation. There is no place for coercion or devaluation of those with whom we disagree. God's appearance on the scene of Job's travail makes this clear. He does not merely declare a winner in the great debate but prioritizes repair of the very deep rupture between Job and his friends: "My servant Job will pray for you, and I will accept his prayer and not deal with you according to your folly" (Job 42:8b). I dare to hope that Adventists who fear the prospect of a theology compromised by science, as well as those who disdain a theology dismissive of science, will be able to find more congenial and constructive ways to address their concerns, also. Too many of our disagreements are founded in differences of philosophy and argued as differences of faith.

Foreshadowing Christ's ministry, Job's perseverance through horror and humiliation opened up the opportunity for reconciliation. I recommend that we, also, persevere in doing good within our own spheres of

responsibility, neither under-achieving nor over-reaching the brief God assigns. To enable this, let us resolve, once again, to become people of the Book; but we must be more than that. We must become people of the two books. Without the Bible, we could hardly begin to fathom God's goodness and grace. Without the testimony of nature, in all its various expressions, we cannot hope to maintain an appropriate appreciation of God's greatness. We must respect the book of nature, read that book, and share that book, just as we do its companion volume. Like Job, our children can be fortified by their personal experience of God's grace, even as they are challenged by their own clear-eyed reading of the books of nature and revelation.

## Endnotes

1. Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History, *Antarctic Meteorite Program*. Retrieved November 7, 2018, from <https://mineralsciences.si.edu/research/meteorites/antarctica/index.htm>.
2. Perhaps the most broadly representative presentation of this viewpoint is a volume edited by a systematic theologian at Andrews University: John T. Baldwin, ed., *Creation, Catastrophe, and Calvary* (Hagerstown, Maryland: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2000).
3. The entire issue of *Origins*, Number 64, is devoted to this topic, with two feature articles by Leonard Brand: "Worldviews and predictions in the scientific study of origins," *Origins* 64, (2015): 7–20; and "Naturalism: its role in science," *Origins*, 64, (2015): 21–37.
4. Following the classic work by Ron Numbers, *The Creationists: The Evolution of Scientific Creationism* (New York: Knopf, 1992), in its multiple editions, there is a growing volume of work on this topic. This includes, notably, a dissertation by Cornelis Bootsman, an Adventist geographer who recently completed a second PhD investigating the history of geological thought in Adventism: Cornelis Bootsman, "The nineteenth century engagement between geological and Adventist thought and its bearing on the twentieth century flood geology movement," PhD thesis, Avondale College of Higher Education, (2016). Available from the author on ResearchGate.
5. All Bible passages are quoted from the New International Version (NIV).



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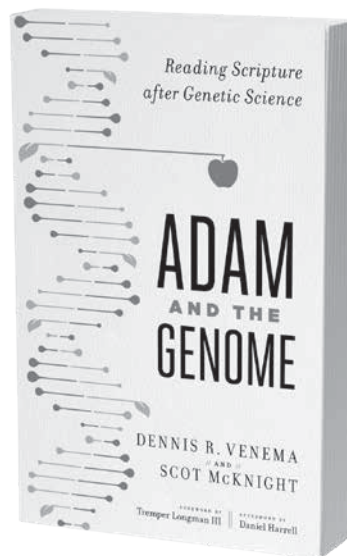
KEYWORDS: Human Genome Project, “historical” Adam, intelligent design, primacy of scripture

BOOK REVIEW

# ADAM *and the* GENOME

## *Reading Scripture after Genetic Science*

by Dennis R. Venema and Scot McKnight

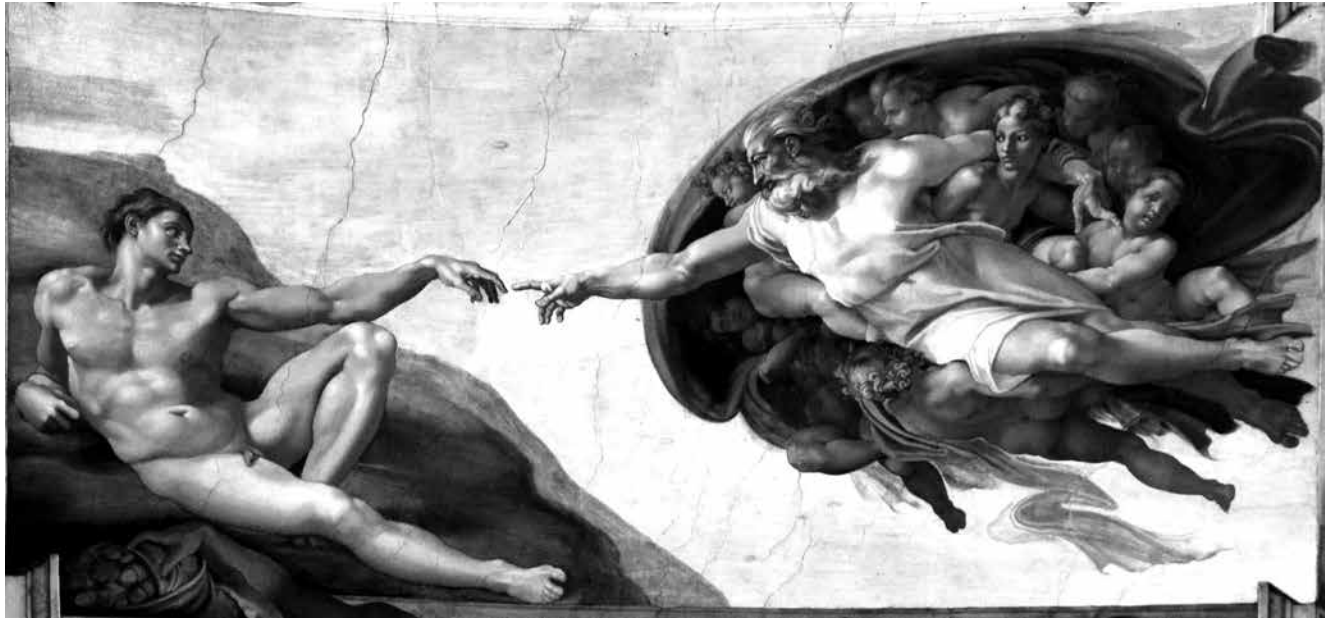


BY BRYAN NESS

The central premise of *Adam and the Genome* is that data from modern genetics, and especially from the Human Genome Project, calls into question the existence of an historical Adam. Christians have long assumed that the Genesis account of Adam and Eve should be taken literally, and that all of mankind are direct descendants of this single human couple created by God. Even less-literal interpretations, that have accepted that humans may have evolved from lower primates, still assume that at some point God stepped in and gave the first

human couple a soul and that original sin began with this first couple, who then passed it on to the rest of humanity. Such views were possible when all that was known about potential human origins was based on basic similarity with other primates and a small collection of pre-human fossils.

Data from modern genetics, and especially from population genetics, has called the above views into question, and suggests that all humans today descended from an ancient population of humans of no less than 10,000 individuals. If it were just one line of evidence,



*The Creation of Adam* by Michelangelo on the Sistine Chapel's ceiling, (fresco, c. 1508–1552). It depicts the Biblical creation narrative from the Book of Genesis, in which God gives life to Adam.

this conclusion might seem easy to refute, but several independent population genetics methods, using different kinds of genetic data, lead to the same basic conclusion. Some methods allow scientists to peek even farther into the past and estimate minimum population sizes in the evolution of pre-human populations.

In the first half of the book, Dennis Venema presents the evidence that modern humans are derived from a population of no less than 10,000. He spends the first chapter explaining how scientists establish what is “true” and what the word “theory” means to scientists. Unlike what many lay people, especially Christian lay people, have been led to believe, the word “theory” does not mean a “tentative or highly speculative scientific conclusion,” but is rather a more robust conclusion, often supported by numerous lines of evidence.

Venema then proceeds to show, using examples from science, just how theories are developed and why scientists consider theories to represent robust and predictive conclusions based on solid data. Woven into this discussion is the reminder that Christians have traditionally considered there to be two books that reveal God and His work: scripture and nature. Thus, if we truly value both as sources of knowledge about God, when they seem to disagree, we need to be willing to reassess both books and reinterpret one or the other or both, as better understanding is obtained. In the history of the church,

though, the scriptures have often taken primacy, even to the point of ignoring clear evidence from nature. The best example of this approach is the refusal of church theologians in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries to discard the earth-centered model of the universe, assumed to be presented in the Bible, for the sun-centered model of Copernicus. It took more than 100 years for theology and science to come together in support of the sun-centered system we know today.

In Chapter 2, Venema plunges into the science, giving a tutorial and history of genetics and the Human Genome Project that should enable most non-scientists to understand the evidence he later presents. Creation science has often felt confident in debunking human and primate evolution because it was based primarily on analysis of a small number of early human and other hominin fossils. Considering new data from modern genetics, such an easy dismissal is impossible. So many lines of genetic evidence consistently support the evolution of humans and primates from older vertebrate lineages that it is hard to know where to start attacking the evidence. Here is a sampling of the main lines of evidence:

- The greater similarity in the sequence of many functional genes between humans and primates than between humans and other mammals, such as dogs.<sup>1</sup>

- Non-functional olfactory genes in humans and primates, shared with functional versions in dogs, that have the same mutations among primates causing them to be non-functional.<sup>2</sup>
- The presence of non-functional, partial vitellogenin gene sequences in humans (and other primates) that share sequence similarity with functional vitellogenin genes in chickens, including sequence similarities in adjacent regions of DNA that involve both coding and noncoding DNA.<sup>3</sup>

The deeper scientists dig into the genomes of living organisms, the more evidence there is for common ancestry for all vertebrates, from fish to humans.

Chapter 3 is the climax of the first half of the book. The arguments that Venema uses to show that modern humans must have originated from a population of no less than 10,000 individuals are complex, and not readily accessible to non-scientists, or even to many scientists, but as a biologist who is trained in population genetics, I can say with confidence that the data and analysis are compelling. Venema does as good a job as anyone could in explaining these arguments so that non-scientists at least have a chance of grasping them.

Venema also makes it exceedingly clear that his intent is not to discount or disrespect the Bible, which he considers to be an inspired book, and claims that it should hold primacy as we develop our understanding of God. Rather, he is urging an honest look at the scientific evidence and a re-evaluation of how we interpret Genesis. If God's two books do indeed share the same author, we must do this.

Venema also confronts the problem of the "historical" Adam directly. For most Christians, the reasoning goes, if there is no historical Adam, then there is no way to save the doctrine of the plan of salvation. This is a valid concern, and Venema suggests there may be other ways of viewing

Adam that would support our understanding of the plan of salvation, such as an archetypal, genealogical, or literary Adam. For the most part, the discussion of the implications inherent in the loss of an historical Adam are left to the second half of the book, which is by the coauthor and is heavily theological.

Before plunging into the theological thicket, Venema takes one more chapter to cover a related topic: intelligent design (ID). In addition to providing evidence questioning the historicity of Adam, the human genome project has also provided evidence that questions some aspects of ID theory. One of the central tenets of ID is that irreducibly complex biochemical systems cannot

have evolved, because several intermediate steps, each of which has no selective advantage, are required to evolve such innovations. Thus, according to ID, all the required pieces would have had to occur simultaneously, which is statistically impossible. Creation apologists often use such biochemical examples as proof that God must have designed and created them.

Central to ID arguments is opposition to the evolutionary model where new genes evolve

from unused copies of older genes, the claim being that not a single plausible example of such a process has been found. Venema shares an example of a duplicated gene in fruit flies that has diverged enough to take on a new, and now essential, function.<sup>4</sup> In addition, he recounts the discovery of the new enzyme, nylonase, that evolved in bacteria, enabling them to break down nylon and use it as a carbon source<sup>5</sup>, and of unique human genes that are highly similar to non-coding DNA sequences in other primates, suggesting that the "new" gene in humans evolved from these non-coding sequences.<sup>6</sup>

Venema interprets the failures of ID not as a sign that God is not the creator, but rather that God is an even more magnificent creator, in that he designed living systems to be able to evolve just as evolutionary biology has proposed. As Venema states:

**Being honest requires recognition that sometimes science can tell us true things that, if we are honest, must be held to be true, even if they seem to run counter to what we want to believe based on scripture.**

Could it be that God, in His wisdom, chose to use what we would call a “natural” mechanism to fill His creation with biodiversity adapted to its environment? And to use evolution to allow His creation to continue to adapt as that environment’s conditions shifted over time? If He did, would he be any less a creator than if He had done so miraculously? I think not. Though it is not something that science can speak to—since it goes beyond what science can establish—I view evolution as God’s grand design for creating life.<sup>7</sup>

The remainder of the book deals more closely with the theological issues that arise from the scientific evidence and is written by Scot McKnight, a theologian by training. McKnight begins by summarizing how his own approach to science and scripture evolved, starting from a position of fundamentalism, where scripture and evolution are in stark opposition—considering evolution a purely atheistic philosophy—to a more mature perspective where both scripture and science have equally valid things to say. McKnight acknowledges how challenging the issue of Adam’s historicity is in light of scientific evidence, and lays down some principles he believes must be followed in trying to solve the dilemma.

The four principles he outlines are 1) respect, in this case for the story related in Genesis; 2) honesty; 3) sensitivity to the student of science; and 4) the primacy of scripture. Respecting the story, as it is related in Genesis, means reading it carefully in the context in which it was written, recognizing the limitations of the author and the nature of the original audience, most notably, that it was written in a pre-scientific era. Thus, we should not force a reading of Genesis that goes beyond the scientific understanding of its time.

Honesty may be one of the more difficult principles and extends to both the scriptures and to science. Being

honest requires recognition that sometimes science can tell us true things that, if we are honest, must be held to be true, even if they seem to run counter to what we want to believe based on scripture. This does not mean one cannot hold a theological belief that is apparently incompatible with scientific knowledge, but it does mean an open recognition of such paradoxes. This honesty cuts both ways, because sometimes science does not have all the data to support (or fail to support) a particular theological view, and this needs to be openly acknowledged as well.

Sensitivity to the student of science is important because many students who are steeped in a fundamentalist approach to scriptural interpretation and understand the

Genesis account in a completely literal sense, will find scientific evidence a threat to their faith. It is easy, when facing overwhelming scientific data, to conclude that science so thoroughly negates the truth of the Bible that the student of science sees the only one option: throwing out scripture entirely and embracing evolutionary theory as an atheist. We need to help students of science see that, although scientific data

may require a reinterpretation of Genesis, it does not mean that Genesis is irrelevant or uninspired.

The fourth principle, the primacy of scripture, is related to the previous principle, and is a reminder that a serious student of God’s two books recognizes that scripture is still the inspired word of God. Scriptural interpretation may have to be adjusted so that it is compatible with established scientific knowledge, but it remains central to religious belief.

A central theological question that always arises in these discussions is whether there was an historical Adam. McKnight believes the adjective “historical” is problematic, because it biases the question, immediately assuming that in order for the Bible to be true, there must have been a literal person named Adam that meets all the usual fundamentalist criteria. He suggests the possible use of several other potential adjectives, such as “archetypal,” “genealogical,” or “literary.” In the remainder of the book,

**The assumption in evangelical theology is that Adam must be our literal historical and genealogical ancestor, or the Bible and the story of the fall and redemption make no sense.**

McKnight explores these alternative ways of viewing Adam, and what effects these alternatives have on Christian theology.

There is no easy way to summarize the complex arguments that fill the last three chapters, and in many ways, they represent a work in progress that will likely not be completely satisfying to many conservative Christians. In Chapter 6, McKnight first presents summaries of four, ancient, Near-Eastern creation stories to give some context to the account in Genesis. He makes no assumptions about whether the author of the Genesis account has read or heard of these stories, but recognizes that, at the very least, the ideas in these stories would have been infusing the culture of the time, thus giving some hint of the purpose and central truths of the Genesis account. There are many similarities among these several creation stories, but also striking differences between the Genesis account and the other four, most notably that the Genesis account considers creation the work of a single God, rather than a group of gods. McKnight draws frequently from ideas presented by John Walton in his book *The Lost World of Genesis One*<sup>8</sup> to make his arguments.

McKnight further explores the intent of the Genesis account relative to the other contemporary creation stories in the form of twelve theses. For example, Thesis 1 reads:

God is one, and this one God is outside the cosmos, not inside the cosmos as the gods of the ancient Near East are. The God of Adam and Eve is unique as the superior one. Genesis 1–2 is more about God than Adam and Eve or the creation of the world. This one true God of Israel, as the New Testament will state explicitly, creates the universe through the Son of God, who is the Wisdom of God.<sup>9</sup>

And Thesis 11:

**McKnight essentially dispenses with the entire concept of original sin, arguing that Paul’s key statement used in support of this doctrine has been misinterpreted due to translation inaccuracies.**

To read the Bible in context means to know where the Adam and Eve story will go in the pages ahead. What will become evident to the one who reads the whole Bible is that Adam and Eve are not just two individuals but representatives of both Israel and Everyone. Hence, Adam and Eve’s sin is Israel’s prototypical sin, their “exile” is Israel’s exile, and they therefore represent the sin and discipline of Everyone.<sup>10</sup>

McKnight finally concludes that the easiest way to reconcile the Adam and Eve of Genesis with the findings of modern genetics would be to consider them literary figures used to tell the story of God’s creation of humans and the birth of Israel. The assumption in evangelical theology is that Adam must be our literal historical and genealogical ancestor, or the Bible and the story of the fall and redemption make no sense. The apparent clash between science and theology is especially troubling. What if these assumptions are wrong? McKnight spends the final two chapters exploring the “many Adams” of Jewish tradition, and finally the Pauline Adam, to see if our modern Adam is the same one the Bible writers and interpreters recognize.

In intertestamental Jewish literature, McKnight identifies “seven kinds” of Adam and Eve. He gives short labels to each of these: the archetypal, moral Adam (Sirach); the immortal and just Adam of wisdom (Wisdom of Solomon); logos Adam (Philo of Alexandria); Adam of Torah observance (Jubilees); Roman Adam (Josephus); fallen Adam (4 Ezra); and Adam as everyone (2 Baruch). His contention is that Jewish thought did not have a single view of Adam, and that when Paul writes about Adam, he was drawing from some of these diverse threads. These “seven kinds” of Adam overlap in various ways, and share various degrees of literalness, some treating Adam in a more literary or allegorical way.

This whirlwind tour of intertestamental Jewish sources is confusing at times and left me with the sense

that I need to read these sources myself more critically. One thing that does seem clear is that all these writers seem to focus on the literary Adam, possibly also assuming that he is the genealogical Adam. The problem of sin also seems to be prevalent, although it is never clear from any of the authors that the sins of each of us now are the fault of Adam. Adam is portrayed as the first to break a covenant relationship with God, but each of us is challenged to renew that covenant and not repeat Adam's mistake.

McKnight presents what he calls two non-negotiable conclusions from his study of intertestamental Jewish thought. First, "the Adam of each of these writings is consciously and constantly the Adam of Genesis, the literary Adam." By this, he seems to mean that their interpretations are less "literal" than many Christian theologians' views of Adam. The second non-negotiable is that "each author used Adam to his (or her) own purposes." None of the writers take a simplistic, purely historical view of Adam. The story of Adam is used to make specific theological points, thus emphasizing different aspects of Adam and ignoring others.

In the concluding chapter, McKnight tackles Paul's use of Adam, focusing the greatest attention on the key passage in Romans 5 that is often used to support the doctrine of original sin. He breaks his arguments down into five theses, the first three of which are the least controversial:

1. The Adam of Paul is the literary, genealogical, image-of-God Adam found in Genesis.
2. The Adam of Paul is the Adam of the Bible filtered through—both in agreement and in disagreement with—the Jewish interpretive tradition about Adam.
3. The Adam of Paul is the archetypal, moral Adam who is the archetype for both Israel and all humanity.

Thesis 4 strikes at the heart of the issue, and is the most controversial for the traditional Christian theology of original sin:

Adam and all his descendants are connected, but original sin understood as original guilt and damnation for all humans by birth is not found in Paul. In Jewish fashion, Paul points his accusing finger at humans for their sins. How there is continuity between Adam, all his descendants, and their sins and death is not stated by Paul.<sup>12</sup>

Although Seventh-day Adventist theology does not accept the Catholic doctrine of original sin in its entirety, and there is some confusion and disagreement on this, it is generally believed that we have inherited Adam's disposition to sin (but not his guilt).<sup>13</sup> McKnight essentially dispenses with the entire concept of original sin, arguing that Paul's key statement used in support of this doctrine has been misinterpreted due to translation inaccuracies. In Romans 5:12, where the NIV translation has, "and in this way death came to

all people, *because* all sinned," Ambrosiaster and Augustine translated the word "because" (ἐφ' ᾧ, eph' hō) as "in whom," making the point that we have all sinned "in Adam." Even the Douay-Rheims translation retains the Augustinian translation: "and so death passed upon all men, in whom all have sinned." McKnight's conclusion from this is that Paul does not say that we sin because we have inherited a sinful nature from Adam, but rather that each of us continues to choose the path of sin ourselves. Dispensing with the doctrine of original sin then negates the need to see ourselves as biological, genetic descendants of Adam, because our tendency to sin is not in our genes, or at least not any genes we got from Adam.

Dispensing with original sin leads directly to McKnight's final thesis, "The Adam of Paul was not the

**Pretending scientific facts are not true, to save what are perceived as essential Biblical truths, risks dispensing with half of God's truth in an attempt to save the other half, that now itself may be untrue.**



historical Adam.”<sup>14</sup> In some ways this is McKnight’s weakest thesis, but it is consistent with one way of looking at Paul’s use of Adam. Paul clearly uses Adam in a literary fashion and as an archetype for all humans, and especially for Israel. He even sees a genealogical link between Adam and Jesus, and given the scientific understanding of the time, this should be no surprise, but this genealogical link, again, does not imply inheritance of some sort of original sin and guilt. It also seems reasonable to assume, according to McKnight’s fourth thesis, that Paul is viewing Adam in a more *literary, genealogical* sense than an historical sense.

No doubt many theologians will take issue with McKnight’s conclusions, but as both authors of this book point out, if God is the author of both the natural world and the inspiration behind Biblical truth, some path to the reconciliation of the truths of both books must exist. Science, by its very nature, is open to objective, experimental investigation, and the more the natural world has been probed using the scientific method, the more evolutionary theory has been confirmed, including the evolution of humans. Pretending scientific facts are not true, to save what are perceived as essential Biblical truths, risks dispensing with half of God’s truth in an attempt to save the other half, that now itself may be untrue.

Just as believers in the day of Copernicus and Galileo had to face uncomfortable truths from the book of nature, so must we today. If we refuse this task, or prohibit those who wish to take it on, the authors suggest that we may alienate honest seekers from the church. What alternative does an honest seeker of truth in science have when told the things they have found to be true in nature are, by theological definition, contrary to scripture, and are therefore off limits for consideration?

As an exploration of the above question, the book ends with an afterword by Daniel Harrell, Senior Minister of the Colonial Church in Edina, Minnesota. Harrell recounts his experiences as a pastor being confronted by university students who have, for the first time, been confronted with the certainties of evolutionary theory and are in spiritual crisis. His solution is not to simply dismiss their fears and reaffirm the truth of the Bible (and the falsity of science), but to open a dialog, as painful as that may be. He contends that such open

dialogue is essential if we honestly want to know the truth. He concludes:

Christianity is not fantasy fiction or a fairy tale. Our faith in God who creates and redeems is grounded in the reality of things as they truly are rather than in how we wish and want them to be.<sup>15</sup>

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## First Day with Parkinson's

He showered and shaved, ate his cereal,  
orange, and peanut-buttered toast,  
slipped on his lab coat and listened  
to Mozart as he drove to work.  
He had no trouble remembering the turns,  
driving through the security gate,  
fitting his car into the parking space,  
removing the keys and nimbly  
dropping them into his pocket.  
As he walked into the hospital  
nobody noticed the tiny forward flex  
of his head and shoulders and his smile  
looked (nearly) as good as ever.  
Good morning, Doctor.  
He played racquetball that evening  
and had no idea that his steps  
were already infinitesimally shorter,  
his balance ever so slightly compromised,  
his repartee a hair slower than the day before,  
his pronunciation a scintilla less crisp.  
Nobody knew. No one noticed. It made no difference.

**-Scott Moncrieff**





## Postlude

She doesn't get around much anymore—  
just shuffles her bones behind a walker  
and drops to a seat like a stone.

But in her rocking chair beside the sliding  
screen she listens to the wandering stream  
and watches birds come to the feeder.

Hummingbirds slurp in a blur of hover,  
the orange flash of a hooded oriole.  
The cry of the red-tailed hawk soars

over the eucalyptus grove, and always  
the stream runs by, loud after spring rains,  
soft in late summer on its way down the valley.

**-Scott Moncrieff**



SCOTT MONCRIEFF is a long-time Professor of English at Andrews University. His previous poems and creative non-fiction have appeared in venues including *Spectrum*, *Christian Century*, *Christian Science Monitor*, *The Nebraska Review*, and *Brevity*.



ADVENTIST

*healthcare*

# Adventist-Catholic Healthcare

## Extending the Healing Ministry of Christ

BY MARK F. CARR

A version of this article also appeared in the Winter 2019 (Vol. 27, No. 1) issue of *Health Care Ethics USA*, a quarterly resource for the Catholic Health Ministry.

### Introduction

An extraordinary interfaith collaboration quietly developed over the past twenty-plus years between Seventh-day Adventists and Roman Catholics in our healthcare ministry to local communities. This article attempts to introduce the collaborative business arrangements (CBA) presently (or soon to be) operating in three regions across the United States. Of note in this article is the manner with which these CBAs are considered and contracted. What sort of analysis is conducted ahead of time and how are the issues identified managed? There are business matters to attend to, of course, but equally important are the religious, theological, and ethical issues within each tradition.

On the Catholic side, there are several documents, institutions, and structural methods of management that help set standards. These may be unfamiliar to many of us on the Adventist side of things. Of central concern is the document *The Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services (ERD)*.<sup>1</sup> This is a document managed by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB).<sup>2</sup> The ERDs are occasionally edited based upon the felt need of the USCCB. In June 2018, the sixth edition of the ERDs was published with changes explicitly addressing the cooperative arrangements between Catholic and non-Catholic healthcare corporations and facilities. Section Six is now titled “Collaborative Arrangements with Other Health Care Organizations and Providers.” In addition to a brief introduction identifying

the long-standing principles of “material” and/or “formal” “cooperation,” there are ten specific, brief assertions against which all cooperative arrangements must be evaluated.

In this article, I hope to offer the unique perspective of my past experience and present position. I am an ordained Seventh-day Adventist minister with a PhD in religious ethics. I presently work for a Catholic healthcare system (Providence St. Joseph Health) as the Regional Director of Ethics in Alaska. In my previous roles at Loma Linda University’s School of Religion, I was a professor of ethics and Theological Co-Director of the Center for Christian Bioethics. In that role, I served as a consultant for Centura Health, the first of the CBAs between Adventists and Catholics.

My thesis is that these cooperative arrangements between our two faiths are both feasible and necessary in the current American healthcare industry. Indeed, they are to be celebrated. The success of Centura Health is an indicator of the high likelihood of success for present and future arrangements, even considering the recent ERD revision, which some have thought to be more rigorous than past editions. Nonetheless, it is also important for us to question our conceptions of “success” as these healing ministries of Christ continually morph and respond to the present-day American healthcare industry. Could American healthcare ever change so much that we should seriously consider backing away from some or all of our present involvement in it?

## The Ethical and Religious Directives, Part Six, 2018

Almost 100 years old, within about sixty pages, the ERDs serve as the formal guidance document for ministries of the Catholic Church in the United States that serve in the health-care context. The new edition only modifies the last section, Part Six. The impetus for these changes came from a document published in 2014 by The Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF),<sup>3</sup> entitled *Some Principles for Collaboration with Non-Catholic Entities in the Provision of Health Care Services*.<sup>4</sup> In an analysis of the CDF document, Peter Cataldo notes “there is much that is new” in this document, in that it offers “for the first time a delineated set of specific principles pertaining to the institutional application of the traditional Principle of Cooperation.”<sup>5</sup> How does this delineation “pertaining to the institution” get expressed by the CDF? Cataldo notes “the institution has a specific identity and moral character itself as a result” of moral decisions made. The institution thus “possesses this identity and character not as a natural person, but analogously as a corporate person.”<sup>6</sup>

Given this moral dimension of institutions that the CDF and Catholic teaching in general recognizes, it is appropriate to assess cooperation in evil on the part of both “administrators” within an institution and the institutions themselves.<sup>7</sup>

With attention to Catholic and “other-than-Catholic” healthcare cooperative arrangements, however, “its content is more confirmatory than new.”<sup>8</sup>

In an online webinar,<sup>9</sup> sponsored by the Catholic Health Association of the United States, both Father Charles Bouchard and Dan O’Brien noted that there is nothing particularly new or challenging about the revisions to Part Six, itself. “These revisions are mainly a question of clarification,” states Father Bouchard. In his conversations with representatives from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, they said they hope readers will understand this new Part Six as “a clarification that would help address new and more complicated situations that we are facing. So, if there is any single take away, that might be it.” O’Brien comments, with regard to the introductory content on the Principle of Cooperation, “they are pretty high-level descriptions...they are not saying everything that can be said.”<sup>10</sup>

In his analysis of the revised Part Six, John A. Gallagher points out a shift toward the church’s “prophetic

witness” or “witness to Christ” in our present-day world. In “Theology and Ethics: Reflections on the Revisions to Part Six of the ERDs,”<sup>11</sup> Gallagher writes:

These Directives are not primarily about the principle of cooperation nor are they principally about the discernment of moral evils, although these remain elements of an appropriate discernment of the church/world, faith/culture tension. The revisions to Part Six of the ERDs are primarily concerned to ensure that prophetic witness, the church’s witness to Christ, the new evangelization are vitally engaged in the world and culture through the health care ministry.<sup>12</sup>

Gallagher notes that in this revision, “there is something new coming forward.” In juxtaposition to more particular interpretations of the threat of scandal or even the principles of cooperation or double effect, he notes that “What the church is and what the church does frames its engagement with the world and culture.” Indeed, Gallagher asserts that, in light of this emphasis, “the principle of cooperation has become secondary.”<sup>13</sup> If it is the case that the primary concern for CBAs revolves around the church’s prophetic witness to Christ, how would an analysis of a potential CBA with a Seventh-day Adventist healthcare corporation appear to us? Would the discernment of such a deal take a broad, sweeping look at commonalities of commitments to being Christ’s witness to world and culture? Or, would the discernment be more concerned for the details of specific ERDs dealing with abortion, end-of-life care, or contraception? Perhaps both analyses are essential.

## How Do We Go About Forming a Collaborative Arrangement?

What exactly does a discernment process look like for both sides of such CBAs? For the purposes of this article, I reached out to over twenty individuals who were party to the discussions that formed three CBAs:

- Centura Health of Colorado<sup>14</sup>
- AMITA Health of the Chicago area<sup>15</sup>
- Sacred Trust of the Northern California area: This CBA is still under review by the Federal Trade

Commission and the California State Attorney General. It remains to be seen whether they will approve it.<sup>16</sup>

For Seventh-day Adventist healthcare corporations, the analysis of a possible CBA revolves around two central questions: is it beneficial to the long-term financial health of the corporation and can it maintain its identity and mission in the process?

In personal interviews with several involved parties of the Centura and Sacred Trust CBAs, those two themes capture their concerns. At first blush, it seems that the analysis (I won't use the term "discernment" since it is not the term Adventists would use) is somewhat ad hoc, but the reader should realize that Adventism is very young (at 155 years) in comparison with Catholicism (almost 2,000 years). It is important to highlight the fact that, as a denomination, Adventism is in a stage of development quite unlike that of Catholicism. One important commonality I have found, however, regards the tension between the clerical branch and the healthcare branch for each tradition. I'll say more about this later.

In 1995, in the Denver, CO market, a deal was struck between PorterCare (Adventist) and the Sisters of Charity

Health Services, Colorado to form Centura Health. Stephen King (Adventist) and Sister Nancy Hoffman (RCC) were present at the outset. Sister Nancy noted in a 1999 article, "It seemed a most unlikely partnership."<sup>17</sup> But market forces compelled these unlikely partners into considering the unusual:

They were, indeed, extraordinary times. By the early 1990's, the for-profit hospital giant Columbia/HCA had rolled into Denver, purchased several hospitals, forced closures and buyouts, and captured 35 percent of the market share<sup>18</sup>

King highlights the second of the two concerns, namely maintaining Adventist identity and culture (an issue similarly important to the Catholic side of the Centura deal): "We stayed totally faithful to what needed to be different—our own theologies—yet there was so much good work to be done together that it did not violate our identities."<sup>19</sup> What appeared at first to Sister Nancy as an "unlikely partnership," years later had become a "wonderful journey," for which she comments, "When you

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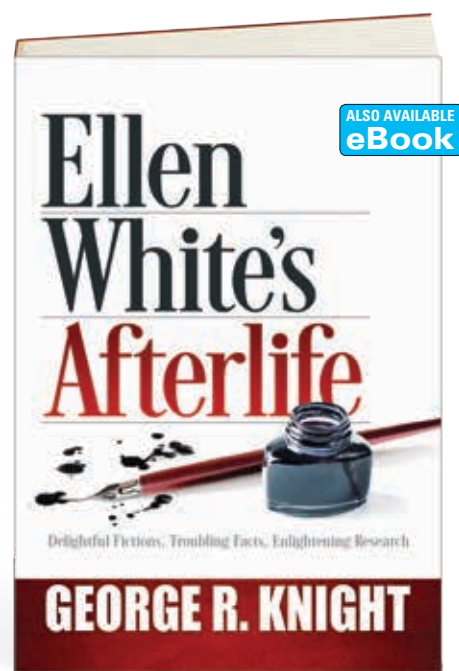
**George R. Knight** has been an influential voice in Adventism for more than 30 years. An educator, historian, and theologian, he has written and edited 95 books, including, *Meeting Ellen White*, *Reading Ellen White*, *Walking With Ellen White*, and *Ellen White's World*. In addition, Dr. Knight was the founding editor of the *Ellen G. White Encyclopedia*.

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come down to the true Christian message, you see how similar we are.”<sup>20</sup>

Yet, there were and remain significant differences. In a *Spectrum*<sup>21</sup> article, Linda Andrews writes:

there have been some tensions. King explains that the Catholic system is more hierarchical than the Adventist system, so cultural differences began to surface. “There was never a struggle over mission or names,” King says, “but our ways of doing business were different. The Adventists have a less centralized system. The Catholic side is more hierarchical.”<sup>22</sup>

Pointing to the overall mission and identity concerns of both sides, what Gallagher identified as aiming toward the prophetic witness to Christ in our world and culture, Sister Nancy and Stephen King authored an article of their experience together at Centura. They comment: “Those of us whose mission and values support the health and well-being of all members of the community have struggled to find innovative ways to continue to provide quality service and patient care to our fellow human beings.” Even though “we lived out our faithfulness to our sponsors in different ways,” they attest to a “reverence” for each other and their traditions as well as a “confidence” in the future.<sup>23</sup>

In the first iteration of the Mission leadership within Centura, King and Hoffman were the two Senior Vice Presidents in the corporate headquarters, working with Vice Presidents in three operating groups in their respective territories. In 2014, Centura restructured, reducing from three to two operating groups, as well as from two Senior VPs to one Senior VP.<sup>24</sup> This reduction of Mission leadership at the corporate office may be a more manageable model as budgets force a reduction of staff. One wonders, nonetheless, if mission identity and leadership formation will suffer as a result.

For Charles Sandefur, at the time the President of the Rocky Mountain Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, the Centura Health deal was a “pivotal moment” for the entirety of Adventist healthcare in the United States. As the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists backed away from legal ownership of Adventist healthcare corporations in the late 1980’s, those corporations began to coalesce into five, roughly regional entities. PorterCare in the Denver area didn’t naturally fit into any of the five areas.

Realizing they needed help to stay in the healthcare ministry, they came to the difficult conclusion that they would be better off partnering with the Sisters of Charity.

Many of the Adventist constituents, however, felt it was better to be purchased and get out of the business than to partner with Catholics. But Sandefur and others, enough others, felt that in order to maintain the mission of Adventist healthcare ministry it needed to be dragged into the twenty-first century, regardless of the existential angst associated with forming such a collaborative association. Those who opposed the collaborative association held to an intense Adventist, anti-Catholic sub-culture. They were not able to imagine upholding commonalities with a Catholic healthcare ministry. Thankfully, more thoughtful people prevailed and Centura was launched.

Aside from this socio-political reality, from a broad-based emphasis on mission and identity, Sandefur noted two specific concerns regarding the connection with the Sisters of Charity. First, emerging from the Adventist mission ethos were concerns for advancing healthy-living principles and maintaining the specialness of Sabbath in Adventist facilities. Second, emerging from identity issues were ownership and branding/naming elements of the deal.

What at first felt more like a “survival mechanism” in a tough market situation has evolved. Now, says Sandefur, such CBAs are seen as “positive expressions of Adventist healthcare mission.” The core mission and identity prior to such CBAs were occasionally casual and assumptive within Adventist healthcare, but as we’ve moved into and through the cooperative ventures, we’ve had to fine tune our understanding of ourselves, and this is good.

In the process of negotiating with interested parties, Sandefur went to Chicago to visit with a select group of bishops from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. He felt they were impressed by the Adventist ability to insist upon and find qualified persons of the Adventist faith to place in executive leadership in the healthcare corporations. For his part, Sandefur left these meetings with a new appreciation for Catholic concern for social justice and for providing health care to the poor and vulnerable of our communities.<sup>25</sup>

For Catholic healthcare corporations, there were similar market force considerations. As American healthcare industry watchdogs noted at the time, affiliation and



collaborative business arrangements dramatically swept through the American healthcare industry. Reaching back further, in 1984, Paul Starr explored the development of the American healthcare corporation in his volume, *The Social Transformation of American Medicine*. Of note for our concern here is how American corporations grew to control how health care was offered. His final chapter, “The Coming of the Corporation,” should be standard reading for anyone today who wants to fully understand where we are as faith-based “corporations.”<sup>26</sup> Catholic entities, aware of the corporatization and affiliation, understood the inherent difficulties of maintaining identity that reaches back for two millennia.

In a 1997 *Health Progress*, “Special Section” article entitled “Catholic Healthcare’s Future,” Alan M. Zuckerman and Russell C. Coile wrote:

Even with 550 hospitals, the U.S. Catholic healthcare system is too small and spread too thinly to succeed without partners. Under the demands of competition and capitation, only tightly organized regional and statewide networks have the bargaining strength to deal with HMOs and employer purchasing coalitions.... Catholic sponsors must find mission-compatible business allies, including managed care plans. Catholic health facilities will announce many transactions and linkages, because the alternative of “going-it-alone” isolation is not sustainable. Catholic healthcare providers must pursue strategies of integration, or they may fail to carry out their mission in the twenty-first century.<sup>27</sup>

With appreciation to Dan O’Brien, senior vice president for ethics, discernment, and church relations at Ascension,<sup>28</sup> we have a bit of a window into the moral analysis that went into the development of AMITA Health<sup>29</sup> in the Chicago, IL area. AMITA Health is a joint operating company originally formed by Adventist Health Midwest, part of AdventHealth based in Altamonte Springs, Florida, and Alexian Brothers Health System, a subsidiary of St. Louis-based Ascension.

At a general level, the history of Adventism’s view toward Roman Catholicism was a concern. Despite the fact that the Adventist Church’s official statement makes the

effort to “stress the conviction that many Roman Catholics are brothers and sisters in Christ,”<sup>30</sup> Dr. O’Brien’s analysis rightly points out that “present day statements are far more palatable” than history would suggest.<sup>31</sup> All told, the Catholic analysis of the potential AMITA deal examined nine areas of concern: 1) Commitment to Health and Healing, 2) Adventist views toward the Catholic Church, 3) Adventist Statement on Values, 4) Sexually Transmitted Diseases, 5) Contraception in Marriage, 6) Abortion, 7) Assisted Reproduction, 8) Care of the Dying, and 9) Employer-Employee Relationships and Unions.

Two areas of concern for Ascension, identified under the principle of cooperation with Adventist facilities, included their policies that allowed a small number of pregnancy interruptions, as well as routine sterilizations. Because the principles of cooperation do not permit the Catholic party to condone or to have oversight for procedures evaluated as intrinsically immoral under Catholic teaching, the proposed Joint Operating Agreement (JOA) explicitly rejected inclusion of the Adventist OB/GYN service lines into the Joint Operating Company (JOC), enabling the moral analysis to conclude that there would be “only remote mediate material cooperation” in the arrangement. The analysis offered by Ascension anticipated the judgment of the Archbishop of Chicago (then Cardinal George) that “nothing stands in the way” (*nihil obstat*) of the affiliation moving forward “from the perspective of Catholic faith and morals.” Indeed, “during exchanges with the Diocese of Joliet” (some facilities fell within this jurisdiction), the Bishop of Joliet indicated that,

Catholic moral theologians or ethicists who direct the development and provision of the various educational and formation programs for the Catholic hospitals within the JOC will need the approval of the Archbishop of Chicago or his delegate.<sup>32</sup>

On balance and given the explicit separations demanded by the JOC, the arrangement was found to be:

justified by the great goods that will be achieved by the affiliation....The transaction is clearly intended to strengthen both the Alexian Brothers and Adventist health systems...and strengthen

the healing ministry of Jesus Christ in metropolitan Chicago.<sup>33</sup>

### How Do the CBAs Protect the Denominational Concerns of Both Sides?

Centura Health was important in the early stages of Catholic-Adventist CBAs. In a 1997 article in *Health System Leader*, entitled “Centura Health—Two Faiths in Alliance,”<sup>34</sup> Elaine Zablocki quotes Dean Coddington, the managing director of BBC Research and Consulting, “a national healthcare consulting firm,” saying that:

Centura is promising. They’ve done something most people didn’t think could be accomplished: They’ve gotten the Catholics and the Adventists to work together, and that’s actually a pretty amazing combination if you stop to think about it.<sup>35</sup>

At the time of the formation of Centura, Terry White, the first Centura executive vice president, said of the arrangement, “We were inventing the wheel. Now hospitals in other parts of the country are using our documents as models.”<sup>36</sup>

Quoting Leland Kaiser (then president of the consulting firm Kaiser and Associates) in her summation, Zablocki writes:

Across the country you find hospitals with religious backgrounds—Adventist, Catholic, Lutheran, Baptist, Methodist—but all with a built-in desire to serve and a spiritual orientation. What really brought these two hospitals together was, first, that it made good business sense, but second, that their shared spirituality was more important than their religious differences. What’s happening in Denver is very important, because I think you’re going to see it across the United States.<sup>37</sup>

Kaiser’s words could not have been more prescient. Twenty years later, we read in the news on almost a weekly basis about major healthcare corporate deals. One wonders how many corporations will populate the sector ten years hence. Indeed, if CBA deals are good for some of our corporations why would we not pursue such arrangements to the logical end—one massive, faith-based, not-for-profit corporation with branded

branches all over the country. If our denominational concerns are well managed what would be the argument against such conglomeration? Perhaps there are legal ramifications I am unaware of, but if focus remains on market strength with mission protections what would stop us from joining forces?

For both sides, maintaining focus on Christ’s healing ministry in our local communities is paramount. O’Brien’s analysis for Ascension from the Catholic perspective is revealing. In addition to the nine points of his Moral Analysis noted above, Ascension, for whom O’Brien works, upholds “System Policy #1.” Meant to establish a baseline from which all other matters emerge, Policy #1 makes clear what is important to their work.

It is the policy of Ascension to function as and to fully express its identity as a ministry of the Catholic Church consistent with Church teaching—including the Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services...and our Mission, Vision, and Values, in accord with the guidance of the Ascension Sponsor, which is the Ministerial Public Juridic Person accountable to the institutional Church (Holy See).<sup>38</sup>

The seven principles that form the core of the expression of Policy #1 are 1) Solidarity with Those Who Live in Poverty, 2) Holistic Care, 3) Respect for Human Life, 4) Stewardship, 5) Participatory Community of Work and Mutual Respect, 6) Act as a Ministry of the Church, and 7) Fidelity.

Although, a cursory look at Catholic healthcare in the US might give the impression that abortion, contraception, and serving the poor and vulnerable would summarize their concerns, this is not the whole story. We run a similar risk when looking at the key elements within Adventist healthcare mission and identity.

Similar to Ascension’s “System Policy #1,” AdventHealth outlined what matters most to them as they engage others within the American healthcare industry. AdventHealth is the parent company of the Adventist side of both AMITA and Centura Health.<sup>39</sup> The document, “Mission and the Management of an AdventHealth Facility,”<sup>40</sup> has three main sections: “Where We Came From, Who We Are, and How We Manage.” The purpose of the document is to “identify, describe and

provide rationale for essential principles regarding the mission and culture of AdventHealth.” It is explicitly designed to be used “in the process of negotiating mergers, acquisitions and joint operating agreements with external partners.” There are six substantive sections meant to express “historic, ecclesiastic, moral, and ethical foundations for health care delivered by AdventHealth.” 1) Social Responsibility, 2) Pastoral/Spiritual Care, 3) Seventh-day Adventist Church and Beliefs, 4) Clinical Care, and 5) Business Relationships.

Meredith Jobe, JD, serves as General Counsel for Adventist Health, the Adventist side of Sacred Trust (should it receive necessary governmental approvals). In general, he noted that, “We are more alike than otherwise, in our mission of providing healthcare to our communities.” He expressed appreciation for the intense concern for society’s poor and vulnerable from the Providence St. Joseph side of the CBA. Additionally, he says Adventist Health would like to learn more about the efforts PSJH puts into mission education and leadership development. Jobe also noted Catholic concerns for end-of-life care (particularly as it relates to legislation for physician-assisted suicide), abortion, and the role bishops play in providing oversight on these issues.

Of special concern for Adventist Health in the maintenance of its mission is the ability to protect positions of leadership in the new venture. Preference for Adventist persons in senior management and executive leadership is a clear concern and it is not limited to positions of mission leadership. Jobe echoed what Charles Sandefur said in my interview with him, namely, the protection of Sabbath observance and healthy-living principles must be maintained in the CBA deals.

The one official document, published by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, that best summarizes Adventist concerns for its healthcare mission is entitled, “Operating Principles for Healthcare Institutions.”<sup>41</sup> Approved in 1988, these principles are best summarized as follows:

- Whole person care, to include preventative medicine and health education to the community.
- Concern for the “unique Christian witness of Seventh-day Adventists,” namely, the seventh-day Sabbath, vegetarian diet free of stimulants, and no alcohol or tobacco.

- Human life, dignity, and relationships.
- Functioning as a part of the local community.
- Competent staff who seek to uplift Christ to those served.
- Financial responsibility in concert with the *Working Policy of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists*.

While this document does not approximate the ERDs, it does help establish a broad sense of agreement and collegial involvement from the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists to Adventist healthcare corporations. Like Catholicism, the Adventist Church does not legally own “Adventist” healthcare corporations, but there remains a very strong bond between the Church administration and the healthcare corporations.

Regarding this bond, it helps to recognize the difference between Catholic and Adventist ethos. For Catholicism, the local bishop has authoritative oversight of all Church ministries operating within his diocesan jurisdiction. The diocesan bishop, for example, has the power to withdraw his recognition of the Catholic identity of a hospital located within his diocese if he determines its administrators are seriously failing in their accountabilities to operate the hospital in accord with church teaching. Such a scenario is unlikely to occur within Adventism.

The Protestant ethos is strong within Adventism (at least in North America) and as such there is a rather wide latitude offered in the relationship between Adventist healthcare systems and the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists (which provides worldwide leadership). If the General Conference were to consider and reject a healthcare corporation’s Adventist identity, it would likely be vigorously defended by Church leadership at the national and regional levels and likely be intensely argued in an American court rather than simply accepted by the system.

On a local level, even if a Conference President (the rough equivalent of an Archbishop) proclaimed a hospital as no longer Adventist, it would have no practical impact because the denomination’s governance structure gives Adventist systems more autonomy from

the local Conference. Indeed, it is hard to imagine such a scenario unfolding because the trust and relationships developed between church administrators and health-care administrators is important and presently robust. Perhaps this is a strength of the Adventist system that allows for a more trustful relationship with local clergy. The fear of oversight and control that occasionally presents in the Catholic context is almost completely absent in the Adventist context.

Nevertheless, there is an ongoing tension in the relationship between Church officials and health care administrators in both traditions. While this topic deserves a full-length address, suffice to say for this article that the Part Six revisions of the 2018 edition of the ERDs is an indicator of the felt need for high-level involvement and assertive oversight by Catholic Church Bishops, particularly as it relates to Church teaching on morality and on the administration of sacraments. Similarly, within Adventism, the General Conference ethos is to protect the fundamental beliefs of the Church.

On the other hand, healthcare ministry, whether Adventist or Catholic, faces a public in need. Serving those in need inclines us toward compassion and empathy, even if we occasionally do not fully understand or support the morality behind the requests they make. For instance, caring for transgender persons is a challenge to both faith groups. Catholicism and Adventism both are challenged by philosophical and theological accounts of human nature that are not binary (male or female or no gender at all). Yet, our healthcare systems must (and do) care for persons who walk through our doors. Science and culture are pushing us, once again, and challenging our historical theological understandings. The tension that this places between healthcare administrators and caregivers and Church administration is obvious to those of us who work on the inside.

### **A Few Final Questions to Ponder**

Let me leave the reader with two lingering questions. First, what will be the ongoing attention to theology and ethics in these CBA structures? A good bit of analysis goes into the formation of the entity up front, but what of the day-to-day work of leadership and spiritual formation, theology and ethics, in the structures that follow? Are there elements of the deal that demand a structure for attending to the faith and moral concerns of both sides? How will each CBA, each facility, allocate staffing and finances for

these concerns? Will there be dedicated, informed theologians and/or ethicists on site? Will such persons be on staff in each facility or regional offices?

The Joint Commission<sup>42</sup>, the accrediting entity for US Hospitals, only requires a mechanism of some sort to deal with ethical issues in a hospital. Will Catholic and Adventist healthcare corporations go above and beyond this simple requirement? In a world where billable services rule the day, mission leaders, theologians and ethicists usually do not bring in any income for these CBAs. Both chaplain services and clinical ethics consult services are expenses for the facilities we operate. When budgets get tight, which service gets funded? A common scenario presently places ethics consult services within spiritual-care departments. Will chaplains with a modicum of ethics training bear the burden of having to take ethics consult calls? I could highlight this question with detailed knowledge of both Catholic and Adventist corporations and hospitals who do not pay for trained clinical ethicists, depending instead on placing the burden of hospital case consult services on chaplains or spiritual-care personnel. It begs the question of authenticity when we make such effort to offer theological, ethical, and legal analysis of these deals at the outset but fail to pay for persons who will give ongoing attention to the day-to-day reality of clinical ethics education and consultation needs.

Second, what does “success” mean for our faith-based systems? Both Catholic and Adventist Church administrative bodies understand and account for financial deliberations as part of the moral discernment necessary to operate in today’s American healthcare industry. Both sides note in their analysis the harsh reality of market forces in the evolution of our healthcare corporations. So, how do we measure success? If we do not meet a certain percentage EBIDA (earnings before interest, depreciation, and amortization) are we failing? Do we fail in our prophetic witness to Christ if one or more of our facilities or full corporations must close their doors? What if we have to file for bankruptcy or sell out to a larger system because our finances simply will not allow us to keep our doors open? Have we failed, in such a scenario, to offer our community the healing ministry of Christ?

Putting the question another way, what are we willing to do in terms of corporate deals and arrangements to stay in the healthcare business in present-day America in order to continue the healing ministry of Christ? Is there

a scenario of how healthcare evolves in a purposefully secular America that compels Catholics or Adventists to back away from the industry? As American for-profit healthcare corporations do battle with not-for-profit, faith-based healthcare corporations, what are we willing to concede? As we often ask in PSJH, “What would the Sisters do” in such a scenario? Would they, would we, ever shut down or sell our ministries in the face of overwhelming obstacles? And on the Adventist side, did the “Heath Message”<sup>43</sup> vision of our Adventist pioneers entertain such a radical reality in light of responding to the signs of the times?

Indeed, in nomenclature precious to Adventism, the “signs of the time” were central to the Sisters of Providence’s expression of their mission as they transitioned to a Public Juridic Person.<sup>44</sup>

We have no fixed blueprint for how to express the role and responsibilities of Providence Ministries other than by reading the signs of the time, trusting in Providence, and embracing our Baptismal call to follow Christ.<sup>45</sup>

What would success and responding to the signs of the time look like for our ministries in a time of environmental crisis that points to healthcare as a significant source of pollution?<sup>46</sup> When the Pope himself is calling for all his believers to adjust their economic and institutional imbalance out of concern for our planet and the poor,<sup>47</sup> what is an appropriate way for our healthcare systems to adjust our views of corporate growth? One international economist, Kate Raworth,<sup>48</sup> rightly notes that we in the West are “structurally addicted to growth.”<sup>49</sup> What is whole-person care in a system that pays surgeons obscene amounts of money for quick fixes to unsustainable lifestyles? Does keeping our doors open, responding to the times, mean that we slavishly demand of ourselves a certain percentage EBIDA?

In America’s capitalistic healthcare industry, where built-in injustices necessarily marginalize so many of our societal members, what does it mean to offer *preferential option for the poor*,<sup>50</sup> to minister for the poor and vulnerable? Ironically, Catholic and Adventist healthcare are two of the more successful players in the American healthcare industry. How do we rationalize being part of an unjust system while stating that we serve the poor and vulnerable? Darlene Fozard Weaver summarizes my point well:

In short, once we understand human dignity not only as a stipulation of inherent moral worth but as a practice of inclusive regard, health care ethics, health care practices, and health care systems appear as both culprits in sinful dynamics of misrecognition of dignity and as vehicles for restoring dignity to its full expression.

## Conclusion

These questions may be uneasy for us; they should be. But we can and should celebrate our work together in the ever-changing scene of American health care. Expanding the reach and methods of health care beyond the walls of our hospitals is something we can and should do together, for the good of the communities we serve. Let our past differences quietly slip away and let us focus on our commonalities. Life in American healthcare will not get any easier for faith-based corporations. But we know we can work together and thus far, at least, we can celebrate an unlikely reverence for each other as we together advance the prophetic witness and healing ministry of Christ.

## Endnotes

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pdf?sfvrsn=2. See also “U.S. Bishops Revise Part Six of the Ethical and Religious Directives,” *Health Care Ethics USA*, (Summer, 2018): 12-15. Available at: [www.chausa.org/docs/default-source/hceusa/2018-summer-issue-v2.pdf?sfvrsn=2](http://www.chausa.org/docs/default-source/hceusa/2018-summer-issue-v2.pdf?sfvrsn=2).

12. Ibid., 33.

13. Ibid., 31.

14. [www.centura.org/](http://www.centura.org/).

15. [www.AMITAhealth.org/](http://www.AMITAhealth.org/). My interaction with personnel at AMITA was limited for this article. In kind correspondence, Deborah S. Fullerton, vice president and chief marketing officer, let me know that they had recently experienced the arrival of two new mission officers. On the Catholic side, Mary Paul, a VP for Mission Integration at Ascension is serving on an interim basis and on the Adventist side, Ismael Gama is now caring for mission services.

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31. “Moral Analysis: Proposed Joint Operating Agreement Between Ascension Health and Adventist Health System.” Dan O’Brien, principal author.

32. O’Brien, “Moral Analysis,” 29.

33. Ibid.

34. Elaine Zablocki, “Centura Health—Two Faiths in Alliance,” *Health System Leader* (Jan. 1997): 17–26.

35. Ibid., 25.

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38. Provided in personal correspondence with Dan O’Brien. For a description of a “Public Juridic Person” see: [www.vatican.va/archive/ENG1104/\\_PD.HTM](http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG1104/_PD.HTM).

39. I’m appreciative of Ted Hamilton’s help understanding AdventHealth’s approach to these CBAs. Mr. Hamilton is the Chief Mission Integration Officer for AdventHealth.

40. Provided to me via personal correspondence. Interested persons may call 407.357.2458 for more information.

41. Available at: [www.adventist.org/en/information/official-statements/statements/article/go/-/operating-principles-for-health-care-institutions/](http://www.adventist.org/en/information/official-statements/statements/article/go/-/operating-principles-for-health-care-institutions/).

42. [www.jointcommission.org/](http://www.jointcommission.org/).

43. Two articles may be helpful to the reader to understand the “health message” in Adventism: [www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/2017/03/healthmessage](http://www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/2017/03/healthmessage). And another one from the official Adventist website: [www.adventist.org/en/vitality/health/](http://www.adventist.org/en/vitality/health/).

44. [www.vatican.va/archive/ENG1104/\\_PD.HTM](http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG1104/_PD.HTM).

45. [in.providence.org/or/departments/missionintegration/Documents/OR%20Region%20Hopes%20and%20Aspirations%20for%20Providence%20Ministries.pdf](http://in.providence.org/or/departments/missionintegration/Documents/OR%20Region%20Hopes%20and%20Aspirations%20for%20Providence%20Ministries.pdf).

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# AdventHealth's CEO Shares His Vision

BY ALITA BYRD

**Editor's Note:** *In this exclusive interview with Alita Byrd (AB), Terry Shaw (TS), head of the newly rebranded AdventHealth—one of the largest non-profit healthcare systems in the US—talks about starting as an intern and working his way up, why the name change is a big deal, and his goal of making spiritual care a bigger part of the patient experience.*

**AB: Recently, the 47-hospital system, headquartered in Altamonte Springs, Florida, officially changed its name from Adventist Health System to AdventHealth. Is this a big deal? Why the change?**

**TS:** Going from Adventist Health System to AdventHealth is definitely a big deal. It's about making things easier for consumers. One of the biggest issues in health care today is the difficulty consumers experience navigating the system to find the care they need.

Previously, our system consisted of about thirty different hospital brands. Now, as one connected system of care with one name, consumers seeking the type of whole-person care we provide can easily distinguish our locations and services across the network.

Our mission is “Extending the Healing Ministry of Christ,” and, by making the care journey easier, we can share Christ's love, through healing and hope, with even more people in the communities we serve.

**AB: You replaced Don Jernigan as CEO of (now) AdventHealth in December 2016, just over two years ago. Was the name change your idea?**

**TS:** Our journey to transforming the organization started years ago when Don Jernigan was our CEO. We worked with a Blue Ribbon Panel, which recommended that the company position itself as a national, connected system of care. There were many meetings, stakeholder and market analysis, lots of research, case studies, and white papers from Seventh-day Adventist theologians along the way. We were sure to get lots of feedback and perspectives and took a well-thought-out approach.



Terry Shaw, head of AdventHealth, one of the largest non-profit healthcare systems in the US (Photo courtesy of Terry Shaw).

Leading up to the brand transition, 60,000 of our team members took part in engaging training called “The Whole Care Experience” to prepare them to deliver consistently on the organization’s mission, vision, values, and service standards. Those service standards are intended to feel personal: Keep Me Safe, Love Me, Make It Easy, and Own It. All our employees work to ensure that these four things happen whenever they are serving someone. And our goal is to provide this to every person, every time.

**AB: You have worked for AdventHealth your entire career, beginning as a finance intern during a summer break from college. Now you are in the top job. You know the organization so well—has the job held any surprises for you? Is it just what you expected?**

**TS:** I have been blessed to be part of the organization for more than thirty years, and throughout that time I have worked with many great leaders and mentors, which helped tremendously when I became CEO. Leading a great organization with a sacred mission and so many dedicated employees is a tremendous honor and privilege.

I think what is really eye-opening is how much we have grown as an organization. Today, we are one of the largest faith-based health systems in the country. We have hospitals in nine states and more than 80,000 team members nationwide.

Back when I began as an intern, I don’t think I could have imagined us growing to this size and having the impact that we are having today.

**AB: Can you briefly describe some of the other positions you have held in Florida Hospital and AdventHealth? Was there a job that was the hardest? One that was the most fun?**

**TS:** Before I joined the corporate leadership team, I held roles at the hospital level such as chief financial officer, senior vice president and vice president. Each role was challenging and rewarding in its own way.

For me, the thing I have always enjoyed is working with teams of people to solve problems and improve things. Whether it’s planning and problem-solving at the

executive level or working in scrubs on solutions that impact our day-to-day work on a more granular level, there is something special about collaborating with others behind a common goal and achieving that goal.

**AB: What other changes, beyond the name, have you made in AdventHealth so far?**

**TS:** Aside from our name, we have embarked on some pretty exciting initiatives. One is around making spiritual care a bigger part of the outpatient care experience. As a faith-based organization, we know that spiritual health plays a big part in overall wellbeing.

We already have a robust spiritual care program in our hospitals, but more than 90 percent of our patient interactions happen in the outpatient setting, thus the impetus to focus on providing more spiritual support in our physician practices, urgent care facilities, rehabilitation centers and other outpatient touchpoints. To help shepherd this work, we hired and trained dozens of clinical mission integration specialists to support providers and frontline staff in the delivery of spiritual care in the outpatient setting across the system.

We’ve also integrated a “spiritual wholeness” screening into visits, which asks questions specifically pertaining to love, peace, and joy in a patient’s life. If a need is identified, the patient could then be referred for spiritual support. Though we are early in this work, we’ve already received thousands of patient referrals for spiritual care. This is something that we know makes a difference and fills a need. We are very excited about it.

**AB: What further goals do you have for the organization?**

**TS:** I want us to be able to fulfill our mission to the best of our ability every single day. To do that, our goal is to operate as a consumer-focused clinical company that not only provides preeminent faith-based health care, but also helps make the communities we are in better and healthier places to live. Being able to impact lives inside and outside of our hospitals is very important to us and is the key to fostering abundant life in the communities we serve.

In addition, one of our imperatives is to improve our product, so we strive to continuously enhance the level of care



we provide. With every consumer we come in contact with, we want to deliver exceptional experiences and outcomes.

**AB: What makes AdventHealth different from other systems?**

**TS:** I think the answer is found in our roots. The Adventist health care philosophy, born out of the sanitarium model, is grounded in faith and follows Christ's healing ministry on earth as its example.

Some of the tenets of the sanitarium model—good hygiene, sunlight, fresh air, nutritious food and belief in God—are still relevant and applicable today. The way we approach care is not just about treating a person's physical ailment, we focus on the whole person: body, mind, and spirit.

In addition, we have the CREATION Health philosophy for delivering whole-person care and living as we were created to live.

So, as you can see, a great deal of how we deliver care today is still inspired by the legacy of our Seventh-day Adventist founders. Sure, we have lots of technology and research at our disposal, but the principles that began in Battle Creek are still prevalent in our work today, which I think is amazing.

Another thing is our people. We have great employees across our company, and we are fortunate to have a culture that attracts talented, mission-focused individuals who show up day-in and day-out to make a difference. These are huge differentiators for us.

**AB: How would you describe the relationship between Adventist healthcare (specifically AdventHealth), and the administration of the Seventh-day Adventist Church? How closely do you work together? How do the denomination's plans for health ministries impact your plans?**

**TS:** Our organization works closely with the church, and we appreciate and respect that relationship. Our board is made up almost entirely of church leaders. AdventHealth is an expression of the Seventh-day Adventist Church's health ministry operating with the church's beliefs and guidelines, so it is important for us to be actively engaged with church constituents and developments.

**AB: AdventHealth has experienced significant growth in the time since you became chief financial officer in 2000. To what do you attribute that growth? Do you plan to continue to expand the network?**

**TS:** The short answer is, yes, we do. In the last seventeen or so years, we have grown in revenue from a \$2 billion to a \$10 billion company, and I believe we are poised to double that to \$20 billion in the coming years.

Now, we could grow faster than that for growth's sake. But we strive to be good stewards, believe in smart growth and are very selective in our growth strategy. Expanding our footprint enables us to bring faith-based care to more communities. And to do that, we know that it takes great people, good plans and certainly God's blessing.

**AB: What makes you the most excited when you get into your office every morning? What do you enjoy the most? What is the hardest job you have to do?**

**TS:** I really enjoy working with our teams. It is truly a blessing to work alongside so many people that are engaged and passionate about our mission of Extending the Healing Ministry of Christ. Whether they work in a clinical care facility or in one of our office settings, seeing our team members bring their collective talents together to contribute to our culture of service, love and compassion is great to be part of.

Overall, one of the biggest challenges is knowing that each decision that I make will, in some way, impact our employees, as well as those we are entrusted to care for. This is a tremendous responsibility, and one that I put my heart and mind into.



ALITA BYRD is Interviews Editor for the *Spectrum* website, and has been writing for *Spectrum* since 1995. She holds a degree in English and journalism from Washington Adventist University and an MA in history from the London School of Economics. She recently moved with her husband and four children to Santiago, Chile, where they will live for the next several years.

## You Know These People: *Prone to Wander* by Trudy J. Morgan-Cole Hits Home

BY TOMPAUL WHEELER

I don't know that it ever qualified as a "bestseller," but when I've talked with friends my age about an "Adventist" book that stood out for them as they grew up, again and again people said the novel *Roommates*, by Trudy J. Morgan, now Morgan-Cole.

Its characters felt like real people struggling with authentic problems, with no tidy bow at the end. Trudy J. Morgan-Cole was twenty-four when *Roommates*, already her second book, was released, and she's kept on writing, both for Adventist publishers and, with her line of historical fiction, mainstream ones. Her newest novel, however, qualifies for neither category—which is why it's self-published. It is "too religious"—the central characters all grew up Seventh-day Adventist, which continues to color their lives—yet its frank depictions of sex and doubt, occasional swear words, and central characters who are, per the title, *Prone to Wander*, ensure you'll not soon see it at an ABC. (In Christian publishing, only the Bible itself usually gets away with such realism.)

Yet, like the writings of Chaim Potok (name-checked within), whose tales of growing up Hasidic in Brooklyn resonated with anyone who grew up in a tight-knit community (or ever longed for one), *Prone to Wander* proves the literary maxim that the more specific, the more universal.

*Prone to Wander* focuses on five friends who attended an Adventist academy (high school) together, alternating their distinctive perspectives with each chapter, as they live out their lives from ages fourteen to forty. Four of the five narratives are in the first person—as memoir; as a client unloading to a counselor; and, for Jeff, the rush of memories as, hurtling to a fatal collision, his life flashes before his eyes.

Though *Wander* lands at just under 500 pages, its quarter-century-spanning narrative never feels either rushed or bogged down. I tore through it, only setting it down for a spell once I'd caught up with one more chapter of Dave. . . or Liz. . . or Katie.

Each character treads their own path, and along the way each finds themselves lonely and disaffected for their own

reasons. Dave is torn between conviction and addiction. Julie tries to live up to the values she inherited. Liz fashions a life her parents can't fathom. Katie struggles to live out her calling. Jeff just tries to live a halfway-decent life.

Like *Roommates*, *Wander* doesn't wince at the worst life has to offer. What most comes across, though,

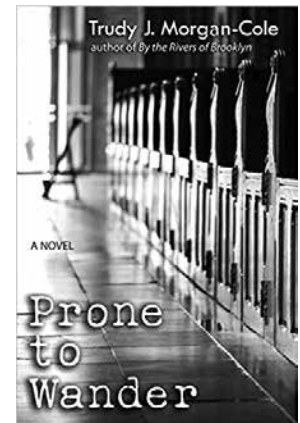
on page after page, is Morgan-Cole's compassion for each of her characters. Their struggles with doubt and self-doubt. Their desire to do the "wrong thing" just to feel some freedom. Their desire to do the "right thing," even when it's what's truly self-destructive. Their grappling with love and God and grace.

*Wander* spurred a flood of personal memories for me—not so much particular events, but how particular life moments feel. Part of what makes its storytelling so effective is how effortlessly it evokes scenes both specifically religious—the awkwardness of spiritual cheerleading, the earnestness of a Student Week of Prayer sermon—and universal—how a newcomer alters a social circle, the anticlimactic ways relationships fall apart.

A good writer creates an entire world as she writes, and *Prone to Wander* pulls us into a world that always has much more happening on its edges. As I read, almost-throwaway lines, about a side character, would land like a gut-punch. The thing is, while the characters may be fictional, I know these people. You may recognize them too.

*Prone to Wander* is available in paperback and as an e-book through amazon.com.

TOMPAUL WHEELER is a writer, photographer, and filmmaker in Nashville, Tennessee.



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## Waitangi

Where did it  
come from, this  
concept

of yours and  
mine? Is it  
enshrined

in the mind  
and every beating  
heart?

Can seas and  
skies and earthy  
rolling

domes be owned?  
And held in  
permanence

as thrones?

**-Matthew Hurlow**



*Photo: Treasure Box (Wakahuia), 1830s–40s, Maori people, Te Arawa (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)*

*The title of the poem refers to the Waitangi treaty signed in New Zealand by Māori leaders and British colonialists in 1840. Matthew Hurlow is a final year English Literature and History major at the University of Cape Town.*