community through conversation

SPECTRUM

Women of the Bible: Miriam, Esther, Sarah, and Mary | *Art by Erica Keith*

WOMEN IN THE BIBLE WHO LOOK LIKE ME

The Art of Remembering: It Matters How We Tell the Sabbath Story

Spiritual Audacity: Abraham Heschel's Prophetic Role

Australian Church Explores New Goverance Models for the 2020s

VOLUME 49 ISSUE 1 ■ 2021

community through conversation

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ABOUT THE ART
Women of the Bible:
Miriam, Esther,
Sarah, and Mary

Art by Erica Keith

www.blackforwardshop.com

ABOUT THE COVER ARTIST: ERICA KEITH

Erica Keith is a creative director, art director, graphic designer, entrepreneur, and founder and CEO of Black Forward. She lives in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Black Forward is 100% Black-owned and operated, and each piece has been crafted or curated by our founder and CEO, Erica Keith. The company collaborates with Black artists to create and promote products with a strong aesthetic and a proud message.

ABOUT SPECTRUM

SPECTRUM is a journal established to encourage Seventh-day Adventist participation in the discussion of contemporary issues from a Christian viewpoint, to look without prejudice at all sides of a subject, to evaluate the merits of diverse views, and to foster Christian intellectual and cultural growth. Although effort is made to ensure accurate scholarship and discriminating judgment, the statements of fact are the responsibility of contributors, and the views individual authors express are not necessarily those of the editorial staff as a whole or as individuals.

SPECTRUM is published by Adventist Forum, a nonsubsidized, nonprofit organization for which gifts are deductible in the report of income for purposes of taxation. The publishing of SPECTRUM depends on subscriptions, gifts from individuals, and the voluntary efforts of the contributors.

SPECTRUM can be accessed on the World Wide Web at www.spectrummagazine.org.

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Letters to the editor may be edited for publication.

ISSN: 0890-0264

SUBSCRIPTIONS AND ADVERTISING
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(916) 774-1080

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EDITORIALS

CREATIVE *Bible Reading*

BY BONNIE DWYER

Now that it's March, how far are you into reading the Bible this year? Did you start in Genesis in January and give up in Leviticus or Deuteronomy? Or, have you found a new approach to this devotional task? Have you found a way that intrigues you? That makes you want to read more? Perhaps, the real question that I would like to ask is, how has your time with the Scriptures changed?

Walter Brueggemann, the noted Old Testament scholar, told readers of the second edition of his book *The Prophetic Imagination* that much had changed between the book's original publication in 1978, and the second edition in 2001. "First, the changes in method and approach in the critical study of the Bible since then are immense," he said. While historical criticism had previously defined scripture study, Brueggemann named social-scientific criticism, rhetorical criticism, and appreciation of the imagination as adding new understanding to the text. Since 2001, many more "isms" and angles have been added for reading Scripture with a changed awareness. Feminist, ethnic, and ecotheology readings of Scripture are now common. Reader response theory has brought new significance to the reader of Scripture.

Secondly, Brueggemann noted his own changed perspective. "When one considers the issues of liberation and exploitation on the ground, then the intimate contact between biblical texts of a prophetic sort and matters of social justice, social interest, and social criticism seem to me to be incontrovertible." Do you identify in any way with this statement? Have the recent discussions of social justice impacted your life and reading?

The third change he noted was the change in the church community and its role in society, because of the long-term and deep force of secularization. No longer could the church confront established power like the Old Testament prophets and bring about social change. Brueggemann noted that in 2001, whatever is prophetic "must be more cunning and more nuanced and perhaps more ironic."

Feminist, ethnic, and ecotheology readings of Scripture are now common. Reader response theory has brought new significance to the reader of Scripture.

Here we are, twenty years after Brueggemann wrote of what had changed for him. Certainly, change has continued impacting each of us—particularly since the pandemic. We've been forced to change, and so has the church. In this issue of the journal, we discuss and explore some changes in how we read and approach Scripture. We add a new kind of theological reading—Crip Theology; Vaughn Nelson introduces us to this way of reading through the lens of disability. Artist Erica Keith shows us what it can look like when we see the people in the Bible as looking like us. Admiral Ncube asks us to reflect on what it means to literally read our community into prophetic text as the remnant. Daryll Ward shows us a new way to understand keeping the Sabbath holy.

Our hope is that in reading you will see the Bible, and our life together as a community, with fresh eyes: That the love story embedded in the Bible will comfort you anew.

BONNIE DWYER is editor of *Spectrum*.

Truth-Telling in a Truth Crisis

BY CARMEN LAU

Ryan White became the synecdoche that stimulated an earnest commitment to understand and treat HIV, and January 6 will likely become the trope to illustrate the problem of people with much information, but little truth or wisdom.

As analysts look for potential historical guidance, the Millerites have been cited as relevant.

Kurt Andersen points out that a 500-year, convoluted history has brought American society to a moment in which a large segment of the population is able to make space for post-facts and post-truths. In his book, *Fantasyland*, Andersen uses the case study of Seventh-day Adventists as one example to show the phenomenon in which people adapt a guiding narrative when original predictions are wrong.

Within Adventist culture, there is a mixed response to the idea that the Great Disappointment could more aptly be named the Great Mistake. In *Being Wrong*, Kathryn Schulz discusses the "wrong, but" strategy of some Millerites after the Lord did not come. Rather than owning up to being wrong, some groups tend to search for an alternate response that allows them to say, "we were wrong, but . . ." Schulz cites William Miller's own reflection from later in his life as one where he says he was, simply, wrong.

> As all men are responsible to the community for the sentiments they may promulgate, the public has a right to expect from me, a candid statement in reference to my disappointment in not realizing the Advent of Christ in AD 1843–4, which I had confidently believed. We expected the personal coming of Christ at that time, and now to contend that we were not mistaken, is dishonest. We should never be ashamed to frankly (sic) confess all our errors" (218).

As descendants of the group who were wrong, how can we move toward self-awareness? God never endorses ignorance, yet confirmation bias complicates learning and can contort the path to wise and humble discipleship. Controlling fears limit the capacity for critical thinking. Moreover, a false sense of certainty restricts the ability to learn and yields complacency in the face of actual problems. Does the fear of being wrong, or making a mistake, hamper our witness to a great God and His work?

Based on numerous biblical commands to "fear not," a follower of Jesus must embrace the duty to mitigate fear within oneself and within one's context. Based on the explicit commandment not to bear false witness, a follower of Jesus must attend to cognitive strategies that guide a person to assess reality with accuracy.

Admirable folks are the ones who tell the truth. Admirable Christians are ones who "fear not." It takes courage to be humble. It takes courage to be wrong.

Theology can be the queen of sciences. Beliefs about God impact the study of sociology, psychology, political science, ecology, and more. A person with a grounded picture of God's character can excel intellectually in any field. We should lament that we have not put theology in its proper space as *the* head of all knowledge. We can lament that theological misconceptions have made Adventists vulnerable to a sweeping Christian Nationalism that uses the cover of "Christianity" to support efforts that move to undermine human rights for all. We can lament the encroachment of victimhood mentality upon abundant Christian living. Fearful and resentful Christians can do the

unthinkable and use misguided biblical hermeneutics to guide the way.

Jeremiah warned leaders and prophets and priests that wounds may not heal. Saying "peace, peace," when there is no peace, will not work. Communities must lament to pierce cultural numbness, acknowledging mistakes and injustices, before healing can occur. Lament can put one in reality.

Knowing the truth of God's character helps one sort truth and error in the culture.

What Christians claim to believe about God, and about humans created in the image of God, are *facts*. We can lament that we have been a part of something that did not recognize these impactful truths.

Further Reading

Andersen, Kurt. *Fantasyland: How America Went Haywire*. New York: Random House, 2017.

Schulz, Kathryn. *Being Wrong: Adventures in Margin of Error*. New York: Harper Collins, 2010.

CARMEN LAU is board chair of Adventist Forum.

LETTERS to the Editor

Appreciation for Research

Editor,

Just a few words towards the end of this strange year.

I wanted to let you know that I greatly enjoyed the last issue of *Spectrum* of 2020, in particular the meticulously researched articles by Gil Valentine and Ron Lawson. But the issue as such was of spectacular quality.

I wish you and yours, and the *Spectrum* staff, a blessed 2021. I hope I will be able to contribute in a small way also in the new year.

Warm greetings,

Reinder Bruinsma

The Church and Its LGBT Members

Editor,

Ron Lawson's article "The Adventist Church and its LGBT Members" in *Spectrum*, vol. 48, no. 4 left me winded—it was very long (not a criticism), and, as it recounted the many attempts LGBT Adventists have had seeking a home in the church, I was repeatedly lifted up in hope only to be dropped again by the despair these people have experienced.

Thank you for publishing it. Professor Lawson's writing style is comfortable, clear, and thorough. I am cisgender myself, and have no direct experience with the issues LGBT people confront, in the church or society in general. So this review of the church's relationship to its LGBT members opened a window for me. I am grateful for his forthright descriptions of his own experiences as well as that of the LGBT community at large.

Edwin Karlow

Perspective on "A Text of Tyrants"

Editor,

I finished reading the article "A Text of Tyrants: Fresh Thinking on Romans 13:1–7," in Vol. 48, Issue 4, 2020. The article focused on an argument for the interpolation of

the passage in the text of Romans 13. That representation, though not definitive or conclusive, as the writer himself admitted, did not cause me cognitive dissonance, nor was my prior understanding of that text subjected to a transmogrification. Why?

As a layman, I have distilled five basic principles/rules that have been quite helpful to understand the Bible text. They are:

1. The Bible text should be read and understood literally in its context, and such literalism must advance the welfare of relationships.
2. If the literal meaning works violence to the immediate context of the text, then the literal rule does not apply. In such a case a circumscribed literal meaning or a metaphorical meaning ought to be explored.
3. Where a conflict arises in the application of the literal rule to two or more similar texts in similar contexts, choose the literal option that most approximates or accords with reason and reality.
4. Compare what other writers of the bible text have written about the same issue within the same context. If the literal rule applies and there is no conflict, it is reasonably safe to follow the literal application.
5. Compare what the Bible records about what Jesus Christ said about the same issue. What He said is the standard definitive principle (literal or metaphorical) applicable to the issue.

Apply these principles to Romans 13:1–7, the following observations emerge:

1. A literal application of the text would logically and practically require all believers to comply with the demands—whether good or evil, expressed or implied—of the civil authority. Such compliance would probably enhance civil peace and welfare.
2. A literal application to the believers of the fledgling church, that although needing as much a conducive environment for proclaiming the gospel as possible, would have been counterproductive. Their actual experiences, (as) far as may be determined, does not accord with a literal application.
3. When the early church faced opposition from the religious authority of the day, the same ones of whom Jesus told His hearers, "they sit in the seat of Moses: whatever they command you to do, that do," their response in Acts 4:19, 20 was, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, judge. For we cannot but speak the things we have seen and heard."
4. Peter and the church were pragmatic without betraying the principle of obeying God rather than man. They wisely suspended the public nature of their ministry within the jurisdiction of the hostile civil authority. They took practical steps in doing so as can be inferred from the record of Acts 13.
5. Paul did not use his civil leverage when the civil authority ordered him to leave the (Philippi) jurisdiction. Paul did not resist the demand but submitted to it.
6. The experience of Peter and the early church and of Paul have left us indices of how believers may submit to the civil authority demands (expressed or implied) without compromising the principle of obeying God rather than man.
7. In 1 Peter 2:13–17, the apostle Peter, as does Paul, similarly, in Romans 13: 1–7, provides the church with specific pastoral counsel within a wider context of living the life of faith in relation to fellow believers and third parties. The civil authority is one of those third parties.
8. The agreement of the apostles Peter and Paul, on essentially the same approach to the same issue of the Christian's relationship to civil authorities, makes the suggested argument for interpolation in Romans 13:1–7 less cogent, if not entirely flawed, from my layman perspective.

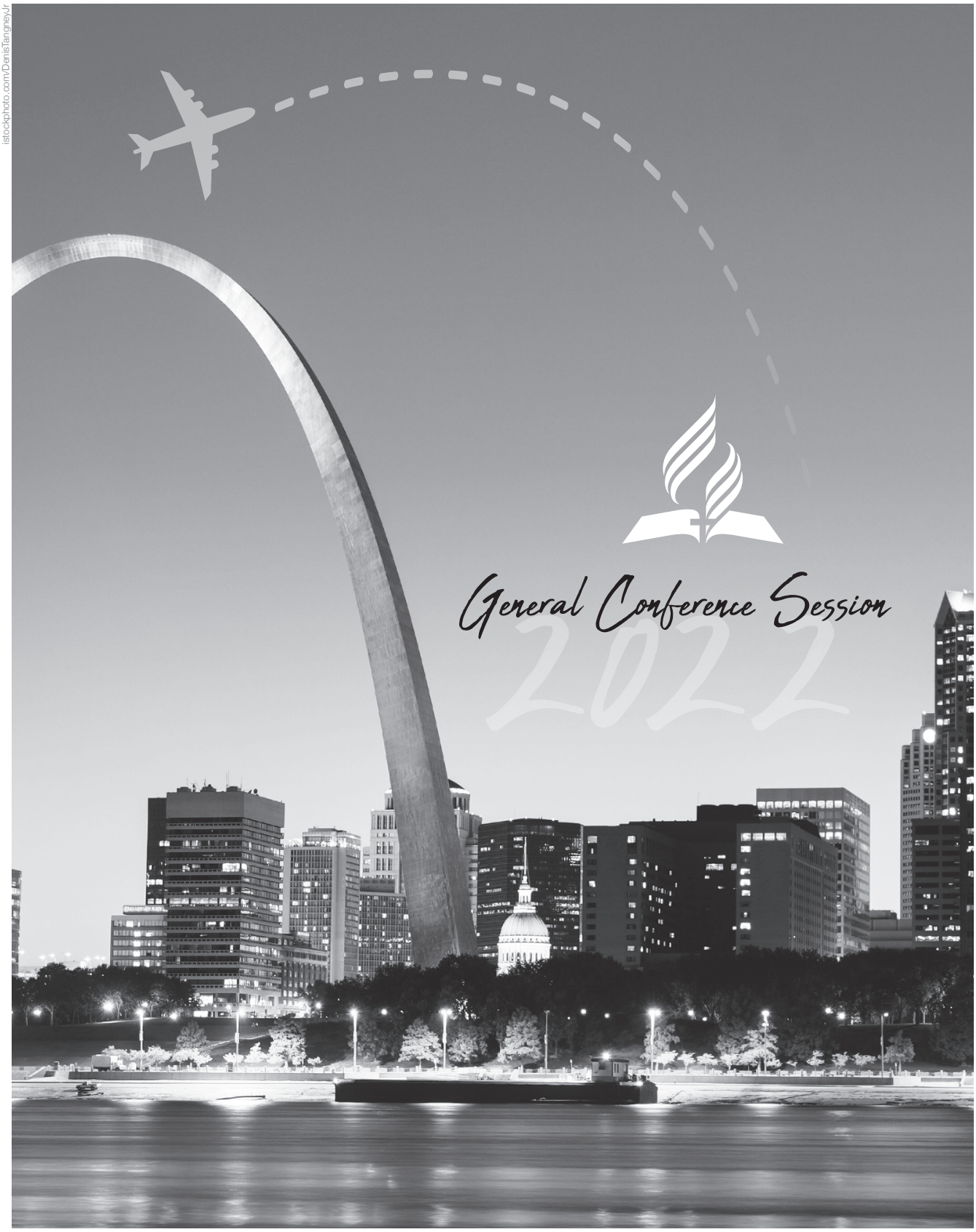
Robert Innocent

Response from Author William Johnsson

I found Mr. Innocent's response fascinating because it presents a jurist's approach. Such multifaceted discussion can enlighten the biblical text. My article was almost entirely reasoned from the text itself; the other was based on comparison with other passages of the Bible. In doing so it failed to deal with the problems in the text itself, namely the change in mood from chapter 12 to 13:1, and again from 13:6 to 13:7 and forward. These shifts to me are persuasive.

William Johnsson

NOTEWORTHY



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KEYWORDS: GC Session, postponement and relocation, St. Louis, MO, Mid-America Union

ADVENTIST CHURCH LEADERS MOVE GENERAL CONFERENCE SESSION *to St. Louis, Missouri*

BY ADVENTIST NEWS NETWORK

The Executive Committee (EXCOM) of the Seventh-day Adventist Church voted Wednesday, February 17, to move the 2022 General Conference (GC) Session, the quinquennial business meeting of the denomination, from Indianapolis, Indiana to St. Louis, Missouri, also located in the United States. The vote comes after GC management was unexpectedly informed by the city of Indianapolis that the space in Indianapolis was no longer available for the June 6–11, 2022 dates. These dates, voted by the General Conference Executive Committee, will remain the same.

"The announcement to us that the dates in Indianapolis were not available came as a complete surprise since we had taken this information to the GC Executive Committee," said president of the Seventh-day Adventist World Church, Ted N. C. Wilson. "The officials in Indianapolis have been gracious but found they were unable to provide the verbally confirmed dates. We felt badly about not continuing the wonderful collaboration with the Lake Union Conference, Lake Region Conference, and the Indiana Conference. However, God had already foreseen the problem and through helpful contacts with the St Louis Convention Center, the exact same dates of June 6–11, 2022, were provided. God always is going before us to open the way," he said.

> Although the GC Session will now be held in St. Louis, which is within the Mid-America Union, instead of the Lake Union Conference, the two unions will join together to collaborate in evangelism and mission ahead of the meetings.

The Adventist Church executive committee had originally voted during the 2016 Annual Council to return to St. Louis for the 2025 GC Session.

"God had already foreseen the problem and through helpful contacts with the St Louis Convention Center, the exact same dates of June 6–11, 2022, were provided. God always is going before us to open the way."

This new development comes after a January 12 vote from EXCOM members to postpone the GC Session, originally scheduled for late June of 2020, for a second time, due to continued challenges arising from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Although the GC Session will now be held in St. Louis, which is within the Mid-America Union, instead of the Lake Union Conference, the two unions will join together to collaborate in evangelism and mission ahead of the meetings.

Gary Thurber, president of the Mid-America Union, also expressed his desire to work together during the upcoming GC Session. "When we learned this exciting news about the General Conference Session, our thoughts turned to the greater St. Louis area, which is divided by the Mississippi River," he said. "In actuality, there are two unions and four conferences covering this territory: the Mid-America Union with the Central States and Iowa-Missouri conferences, and the Lake Union with the Lake Region and Illinois conferences."

Thurber continued, "Because of this, we are happy to be inviting the Lake Union to co-host the GC Session with us. The Lake Union has already prepared in a big way for the Session that was to be held in Indianapolis, so they will bring much experience and help to the table. We are thankful they are willing to work with us to impact the entire greater St. Louis community with the Three Angels' Messages. It is always a privilege and honor to host a General Conference Session!"

Wilson also expressed his confidence that the 2022 Session will be a time for Adventists to come together to share Jesus with the world. "Leading up to the General Conference Session, we look forward to a marvelous evangelistic working relationship with the Mid-America Union Conference and the Lake Union Conference, which both encompass the greater St Louis region," he said. "What a privilege to proclaim the three angels' messages and Christ's soon coming in a united way in Total Member Involvement. As our 2022 GC Session theme says, 'Jesus Is Coming! Get Involved.'"

ANN and ADVENTIST.NEWS are the official news channels of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

KEYWORDS: COVID-19, NAD tithe, mission and Sabbath School offerings, Tom Evans

A POSITIVE YEAR for NAD tithe

BY BONNIE DWYER

When the coronavirus shuttered church services in 2020, treasurers at all levels of the church braced for the worst. What would happen to tithe and offerings if members simply watched services from home and didn't have a designated place and time to turn in their tithe envelopes? Would members use the online giving options that had been created?

It turns out that they would, and they did, according to the year-end tithe report recently posted on the North American Division website. The year of 2020 ended with tithe of $1,093,421,650.01, a gain of $18 million compared with $1,075,010,963.32 in 2019.

The year of 2020 ended with tithe of $1,093,421,650.01, a gain of $18 million compared with $1,075,010,963.32 in 2019.

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Tom Evans, recently retired treasurer of the North American Division, calls this report simply amazing. People are faithfully giving, he points out.

They are returning their tithe, but the sad news is that the combined Sabbath School and mission offerings have not seen the same result. The World Mission Offering is off by 21.18%, and Sabbath School is down 22.14%. In 2020, the combined offering was $16,486,809.93; in 2019, it was $20,917,105.92

In the breakdown of the NAD tithe numbers, eighteen conferences registered a loss for the year. For some, it was a small loss, less than 1%. Tithe in the Washington Conference was down 0.21%, and the South Atlantic Conference saw a difference of -0.22%.

There were forty-two conferences that saw a gain. Again, for some it was a small gain. In the Illinois

Seventh-day Adventist Church
North American Division of SDA
Tithe Comparison
December 2020

			2020 = 52 Sabbaths						2019 = 52 Sabbaths		
		# Of	Membership				Variance		Per Capita		
Code	Entity Name	Rep.	2020	2019	2020	2019	Amount	%	2020	2019	%
AN1111 North American Division of SDA											
AN1111	North American Division of SDA	23			272,232.92	239,141.64	33,091.28	13.83			
ANNG11	Guam-Micronesia Mission	13	5,862	5,796	2,675,841.46	2,543,071.59	132,769.87	5.22	456.47	438.76	4.03
	Group Totals		5,886	5,820	2,948,074.38	2,782,213.23	132,769.87	5.22	454.61	436.95	4.04
AN6111 SDA Church in Canada											
AN6111	SDA Church in Canada	12			0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00			
AN6411	Alberta Conference	12	12,240	11,942	12,672,738.18	13,384,797.79	(712,059.61)	(5.31)	1,035.35	1,120.82	(7.62)
AN6811	British Columbia Conference	12	11,188	11,405	10,926,201.49	10,521,930.83	404,270.66	3.84	976.60	922.57	5.85
AN6B11	Manitoba-Saskatchewan Conference	12	4,019	4,131	4,148,342.83	3,732,235.68	416,107.15	11.14	1,032.18	903.47	14.24
AN6F11	Maritime Conference	12	1,682	1,651	1,697,346.18	1,610,721.94	86,624.24	5.37	1,009.12	975.60	3.43
AN6M11	Ontario Conference	12	34,598	33,917	26,206,279.48	26,091,931.32	114,348.16	0.43	757.45	769.29	(1.53)
AN6P11	Quebec Conference	12	8,775	8,533	5,714,250.96	5,606,189.57	108,061.39	1.92	651.20	657.00	(0.88)
AN6T11	SDA Church in Newfoundland and	12	504	506	641,429.90	534,161.54	107,268.36	20.08	1,272.68	1,055.66	20.55
	Group Totals		73,006	72,085	62,006,589.02	61,481,968.67	524,620.35	0.85	849.34	852.91	(0.42)
AN4111 Atlantic Union Conference											
AN4411	Bermuda Conference	12	3,982	4,019	4,578,594.09	4,941,397.67	(362,803.58)	(7.34)	1,149.82	1,229.51	(6.48)
AN4811	Greater New York Conference	12	31,975	31,120	26,790,803.61	28,078,051.15	(1,287,247.54)	(4.58)	837.87	902.25	(7.13)
AN4B11	New York Conference	12	6,020	5,904	5,384,561.63	5,042,866.36	341,695.27	6.77	894.45	854.14	4.71
AN4F11	Northeastern Conference	12	60,355	59,432	44,915,976.20	47,907,448.59	(2,991,472.39)	(6.24)	744.20	806.09	(7.67)
AN4I11	Northern New England Conference	12	5,208	5,206	6,269,134.59	5,963,527.80	305,606.79	5.12	1,203.75	1,145.51	5.08
AN4M11	Southern New England Conference	12	19,700	19,166	19,277,974.13	19,122,299.97	155,674.16	0.81	978.58	997.72	(1.91)
	Group Totals		127,240	124,847	107,217,044.25	111,055,591.54	(3,838,547.29)	(3.45)	842.64	889.53	(5.27)
ANB111 Columbia Union Conference											
ANB411	Allegheny East Conference	12	31,883	42,290	35,455,227.95	36,460,851.13	(1,005,623.18)	(2.75)	1,112.04	862.16	28.98
ANB611	Allegheny West Conference	12	17,198	16,897	7,286,116.64	7,222,709.11	63,407.53	0.87	423.66	427.46	(0.88)
ANB811	Chesapeake Conference	12	16,435	16,085	20,065,671.81	20,452,526.81	(386,855.00)	(1.89)	1,220.91	1,271.53	(3.98)
ANB911	Mountain View Conference	12	2,248	2,221	3,586,408.80	2,951,673.04	634,735.76	21.50	1,595.38	1,328.98	20.04
ANBB11	New Jersey Conference	12	17,388	16,868	12,631,843.82	13,516,482.79	(884,638.97)	(6.54)	726.47	801.31	(9.33)
ANBF11	Ohio Conference	12	12,274	11,883	13,062,741.11	12,122,194.82	940,546.29	7.75	1,064.26	1,020.13	4.32
ANBI11	Pennsylvania Conference	12	12,547	12,335	13,379,979.17	12,984,142.14	395,837.03	3.04	1,066.39	1,052.63	1.30
ANBM11	Potomac Conference	12	37,583	36,677	36,040,832.19	36,421,573.00	(380,740.81)	(1.04)	958.97	993.04	(3.43)
	Group Totals		147,556	155,256	141,508,821.49	142,132,152.84	(623,331.35)	(0.43)	959.02	915.47	4.76
ANF111 Lake Union Conference											
ANF411	Illinois Conference	12	13,879	13,790	11,920,299.50	11,904,435.58	15,863.92	0.13	858.87	863.27	(0.50)
ANF811	Indiana Conference	12	8,961	8,744	9,525,421.13	9,734,733.48	(209,312.35)	(2.15)	1,062.99	1,113.30	(4.51)
ANFB11	Lake Region Conference	12	31,382	31,595	11,084,114.90	11,047,967.72	36,147.18	0.32	353.20	349.67	1.00
ANFF11	Michigan Conference	12	26,887	26,666	36,804,859.01	36,115,851.37	689,007.64	1.90	1,368.87	1,354.38	1.07
ANFI11	Wisconsin Conference	12	7,789	7,741	7,738,293.77	7,298,013.24	440,280.53	6.03	993.49	942.77	5.37
	Group Totals		88,898	88,536	77,072,988.31	76,101,001.39	971,986.92	1.27	866.98	859.55	0.86
ANG111 Mid-America Union Conference											
ANG411	Central States Conference	12	9,198	8,785	4,638,205.22	4,879,668.88	(241,463.66)	(4.94)	504.26	555.45	(9.21)
ANG611	Dakota Conference	12	4,000	4,003	5,055,444.71	4,782,959.14	272,485.57	5.69	1,263.86	1,194.84	5.77
ANGB11	Iowa-Missouri Conference	12	11,949	12,078	10,743,335.07	10,618,519.86	124,815.21	1.17	899.10	879.16	2.26
ANGF11	Kansas-Nebraska Conference	12	11,684	11,741	12,363,789.37	12,041,783.23	322,006.14	2.67	1,058.18	1,025.62	3.17
ANGI11	Minnesota Conference	12	10,646	10,490	9,532,896.56	9,191,113.36	341,783.20	3.71	895.44	876.18	2.19
ANGM11	Rocky Mountain Conference	12	17,569	17,646	17,383,356.16	18,174,772.97	(791,416.81)	(4.35)	989.43	1,029.97	(3.93)
	Group Totals		65,046	64,743	59,717,027.09	59,688,817.44	28,209.65	0.04	918.07	921.93	(0.42)
ANI111 North Pacific Union Conference											
ANI411	Alaska Conference	12	3,800	3,930	4,460,066.28	4,516,765.26	(56,698.98)	(1.25)	1,173.70	1,149.30	2.12
ANI811	Idaho Conference Inc	12	6,952	6,927	6,573,081.22	5,966,591.65	606,489.57	10.16	945.49	861.35	9.76
ANIB11	Montana Conference of SDA	12	4,024	4,009	5,195,638.62	4,499,877.38	695,761.24	15.46	1,291.16	1,122.44	15.03
ANIF11	Oregon Conference	12	36,939	36,677	35,476,288.78	32,798,898.20	2,677,390.58	8.16	960.40	894.26	7.39
ANII11	Upper Columbia Conference	12	27,155	27,178	27,668,215.28	25,951,621.39	1,716,593.89	6.61	1,018.90	954.88	6.70

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		# Of	Membership				Variance		Per Capita		
Code	Entity Name	Rep.	2020	2019	2020	2019	Amount	%	2020	2019	%
ANIM11	Washington Conference	12	23,944	23,729	21,954,156.45	22,001,821.38	(47,664.93)	(0.21)	916.90	927.21	(1.11)
	Group Totals		102,814	102,450	101,327,446.63	95,735,575.26	5,591,871.37	5.84	985.54	934.46	5.47
ANP111 Pacific Union Conference											
ANP411	Arizona Conference	12	20,695	20,839	15,389,213.43	14,129,472.20	1,259,741.23	8.91	743.62	678.03	9.67
ANP811	Central California Conference	12	34,305	34,613	27,441,066.09	29,125,435.19	(1,684,369.10)	(5.78)	799.91	841.46	(4.93)
ANPB11	Hawaii Conference	12	6,179	6,300	5,679,960.37	5,900,771.84	(220,811.47)	(3.74)	919.24	936.63	(1.85)
ANPF11	Nevada-Utah Conference	12	10,545	10,390	7,358,893.62	7,418,611.32	(59,717.70)	(0.80)	697.86	714.01	(2.26)
ANPI11	Northern California Conference	12	41,015	40,856	42,185,107.72	41,702,327.30	482,780.42	1.15	1,028.53	1,020.71	0.76
ANPM11	Southeastern California Conference	12	70,180	70,187	57,376,489.22	55,672,246.98	1,704,242.24	3.06	817.56	793.20	3.07
ANPP11	Southern California Conference	12	39,775	40,361	32,561,843.97	33,887,554.92	(1,325,710.95)	(3.91)	818.65	839.61	(2.49)
	Group Totals		222,694	223,546	187,992,574.42	187,836,419.75	156,154.67	0.08	844.17	840.26	0.47
ANT111 Southern Union Conference											
ANT811	Carolina Conference	12	24,339	23,806	26,222,727.97	26,098,338.85	124,389.12	0.47	1,077.40	1,096.29	(1.72)
ANTB11	Florida Conference	12	64,863	63,848	64,413,468.81	63,521,555.14	891,913.67	1.40	993.07	994.89	(0.18)
ANTF11	Georgia-Cumberland Conference	12	42,275	41,377	61,891,821.03	55,834,978.97	6,056,842.06	10.84	1,464.03	1,349.42	8.49
ANTG11	Gulf States Conference	12	13,219	12,989	12,475,141.77	10,754,778.51	1,720,363.26	15.99	943.73	827.99	13.97
ANTI11	Kentucky-Tennessee Conference	12	15,662	15,493	18,102,181.62	17,084,244.62	1,017,937.00	5.95	1,155.80	1,102.71	4.81
ANTM11	South Atlantic Conference	12	50,757	49,816	25,275,272.35	25,219,512.50	55,759.85	0.22	497.97	506.25	(1.63)
ANTP11	South Central Conference	12	37,368	36,575	23,119,482.04	21,253,413.76	1,866,068.28	8.78	618.70	581.09	6.47
ANTT11	Southeastern Conference	12	57,605	55,178	26,877,836.89	26,647,822.68	230,014.21	0.86	466.59	482.94	(3.38)
	Group Totals		306,088	299,082	258,377,932.48	246,414,645.03	11,963,287.45	4.85	844.13	823.90	2.45
ANW111 Southwestern Union Conference											
ANW411	Arkansas-Louisiana Conference	12	13,471	13,355	12,719,698.75	10,785,160.86	1,934,537.89	17.93	944.23	807.57	16.92
ANW811	Oklahoma Conference	12	8,588	8,585	8,416,404.74	7,630,815.11	785,589.63	10.29	980.02	888.85	10.25
ANWB11	Southwest Region Conference	12	27,320	26,986	12,363,194.15	12,526,843.17	(163,649.02)	(1.30)	452.53	464.20	(2.51)
ANWF11	Texas Conference	12	62,304	60,591	54,233,191.49	53,142,010.26	1,091,181.23	2.05	870.46	877.06	(0.75)
ANWI11	Texico Conference	12	12,016	12,031	7,520,662.81	7,697,748.67	(177,085.86)	(2.30)	625.89	639.83	(2.17)
	Group Totals		123,699	121,548	95,253,151.94	91,782,578.07	3,470,573.87	3.78	770.04	755.11	1.98
	TOTAL		1,262,927	1,257,913	1,093,421,650.01	1,075,010,963.22	18,410,686.79	1.71	865.78	854.60	1.31

Conference it was less than 1%—at 0.13%. Northern California Conference just made it over the 1% line to 1.15% The conferences with the biggest gains were the Mountain View Conference, with an increase of 21.50%, and the SDA Church in Newfoundland, with 20.08%. The Alleghany East Conference experienced a large increase in per capita giving—28.98%— but it was a tough year for the conference, with a 2.75% loss in tithe dollars year over year.

In 2021, the numbers that will be watched closely will be church attendance. As more and more congregations are allowed to again have in-person services, will the membership return? Or will the comfort of sitting in one's living room and watching a service online replace the experience of worshipping in a church sanctuary?

Evans thinks there is something to be said about being in church giving Sabbath School and mission offerings. But he praises the Lord that members continued to return their tithe in 2020.

BONNIE DWYER is editor of *Spectrum*.

READING THE BIBLE


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KEYWORDS: proof texting, contextual and historical significance, Platonists vs. Stoics, plurality of views

THE *Bible Says*

BY HEROLD WEISS

When I was a teenager attending the Colegio Adventista del Plata (CAP) in Argentina, a friend told me a joke. It went like this—There was a very devout believer who kept a Bible on top of the night table and every morning after getting out of bed opened it at random to receive the Word of God for the day. One morning the Bible opened, and his eyes fell on Matthew 27:5, "And throwing down the pieces of silver in the temple, he departed; and he went and hanged himself." He thought something had gone wrong. Frustrated, he closed the Bible and opened it again. This time his eyes fell on Luke 10:37, "And Jesus said to him, 'Go and do likewise.'" I remember that I was a bit unnerved; I had been taught that it was beneficial to have a text for the day. That was what *La Devoción Matutina* was all about.

> Irony is one of the best ways to tell the truth, and the truth was that picking texts at random, or with an agenda, is a fool's errand.

At the time, I was taking a class in Bible doctrines with the president of the college, a veteran pastor who had been the president of the Austral Union of the South American Division. He had studied theology in what everyone then considered the golden age of theological education at the CAP, the 1940's. All students of Elder Livingston had powerful memories of that most revered teacher. In his class on Bible doctrines, following the Livingston model, every period began with a quiz asking us to write down word for word, punctuation marks included, one of the ten verses that had been assigned at the previous session. The final exam was to memorize word for word, with correct punctuation, 150 verses in the Spanish Reina Valera version, and to know the content of three hundred other verses. When I finished that class, I was confident that I could tell what the Bible says on basic questions, but I did feel that there was much more to be learned from the Bible.

Sixty-eight years later I realize that the memorizing of all those texts served me well. The way I have used

that reservoir of knowledge, however, has gone through several transmutations. After coming to the United States, and graduating from Southern Missionary College, I was fortunate to take classes in exegesis of the letter to the Galatians and of 1 Peter with Professor Ronald Loasby at the SDA Theological Seminary. From him I learned that collecting *texta probantia* was not the way to know what the Bible says. Books must be understood on their own terms. Even if the authors of the New Testament used passages from the Old Testament to bring out the significance of Jesus's life without taking into consideration their contextual or historical significance, we were now living in the twentieth century, when historical and literary studies had opened new ways to read.[1] At the Seminary, I learned that the practice of proof-texting had been judged and found wanting by those who were serious and humble about learning what the Bible has to say.

The uncomfortable joke my friend had told me at the CAP years before actually was a good one because it highlighted the irrationality of proof testing. It was not only a caricature of the devotee; more importantly, it exposed the fallacy of extreme Bible dependency. Irony is one of the best ways to tell the truth, and the truth was that picking texts at random, or with an agenda, is a fool's errand. At the CAP I had already been aware that I could read large sections of the Bible and make no sense of what I was reading. Undoubtedly, those who wrote it knew what they were writing, and those who preserved their writings for centuries before they were considered *Scripture* understood what they read because they considered it worthy of preservation. As Richard Coffen wrote recently, "*If* the results of revelation and inspiration made no sense to those original recipients of the divine message, *then* God's Word was not communication."[2]

An open reading of the Synoptic Gospels in the original Greek showed me that each one of them gave a different sequence and made changes in the details of the same events. Doing this allowed them to use the story to present their different theological understandings of the significance of Jesus's life. Each author composed his gospel separately, according to his theological agenda, and wrote it for a specific audience facing a particular situation. This means that constructing our own version of an event in the life of Jesus by blending the details from different gospels does not give us a unified historical account of what happened. It is quite understandable why repeated searches for the historical Jesus, from the end of the eighteenth century until today, tell more about their authors than about Jesus, as Albert Schweitzer correctly pointed out back in 1906.

Proof texting is irrational because the Bible contains so much that points away from the idea of a single author writing a manual from A to Z. The old joke had made me uncomfortable because I had been led to believe that biblical messages are not contaminated by any worldly, human influence. They come out of the blue and are aimed at all humans without distinction. This posture proposes that if any portion of the Bible is difficult to understand, it must be understood in the light of another biblical passage that is clear. Of course, the classification of a text as difficult or clear is determined by whether it fits the presuppositions of the reader about what the Bible can say. This method for reading is based on the notion that the Bible has only one author and, therefore, it is its own best interpreter. It relegates the writers of the Bible to mere scribes taking dictation and ignores that they wrote for the benefit of concrete audiences facing discrete historical circumstances. The Bible itself, however, amply demonstrates the active role played by the authors of the different books addressing different problems. The example of the differences in the synoptic gospels, referenced above, is not at all isolated.

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Rome, Italy: *Inspiration of Saint Matthew*, 1602 Baroque painting by Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, in Contarelli chapel, Church of St. Louis of the French (San Luigi dei Francesi)

Faithful Jews and Christians have long felt tension over how the Bible was written. They recognize the significant role of the human agents who put words in writing. Consider Caravaggio's 1602 painting, *The Inspiration of Saint Matthew*. In it, an angel is telling Matthew the points he needs to cover, as he is using his fingers to indicate a sequence. Matthew is represented with the flowing robes of an important person, like the depictions of philosophers in Renaissance paintings. His posture is precarious. Rather than sitting at a stately desk, he is standing with the left knee on a bench that has one of its posts over a ledge. His torso is turned, and his eyes look up disconcertedly at the angel, not quite sure of what to do. It would seem that Caravaggio is depicting his own uncertainty as to how the Bible was written.

Are we to credit the human authors of the biblical books for the actual wording of the biblical texts, or was the Bible "verbally inspired"? This question has been at the forefront of biblical Christianity for centuries. It is no accident that almost any conversation about a theological point to be determined from the Bible soon becomes a debate about biblical inspiration. As I argued in a previous contribution to this journal, the current crisis in the Adventist Church was not brought about by the need to decide whether or not to ordain women or how best to reorganize the ecclesiastical bureaucracy to ensure transparency and accountability, but by the issue of how to understand the inspiration of the Bible.[3]

Contemporaneous schools of thought develop their own vocabularies, and their writings must be read according to the technical meaning given to words by the different schools. For example, the books of the Old Testament understand all reality to be material, without differentiating types of matter. At the time when the

books of the New Testament were written, the Platonists understood that the material world was only a shadow of the real world, the ideal world. They distinguished matter, something that is in the process of becoming something else, from form, or idea, something that is unchangeable. The Stoics, for their part, thought that all reality is material, but distinguished different types. The transitory phenomenological material world, available to the senses of human beings, is an emanation of the hypostatic material world, which is permanent and unavailable to human perception. Both types of matter are distinct and different from primordial, undifferentiated, formless matter.

The symbolic universes of different schools of thought must be considered if one wishes to understand what the Bible says. To read Genesis 1 and claim that the author describes how formless matter was given form, since he was well aware of the difference between matter and form, is anachronistic at best. It assumes that the text of Genesis functions in a Platonic symbolic universe. Those who do this are not bringing out the message of the text but putting in a message of their own.

The authors of the Bible wrote each book separately, for their contemporaries, without any awareness that they were writing "the Bible." Most readers now understand that each book operates on a simple landscape within the horizon of its own symbolic universe. The books of the Bible were written in different cultural settings over a period of 1,200 years. The difficulty in a text does not arise because it does not fit my presuppositions as to what the Bible can or should say. It arises out of my incomplete understanding of the symbolic universe of the author of the biblical book I am reading. No doubt the intended audience lived within the same symbolic universe and understood its message easily. Failing to take into account not just the way in which a text functions within a paragraph, but also the way in which a biblical book functions within its symbolic universe, results in an abuse of the author's words.

We live within a global cultural matrix in which the factors that used to distinguish primitive from advanced societies, Eastern from Western mentalities, Northern from Southern mores, intuitive from scientific knowledge, tribal memories from historical evidence, and religious rituals from faith commitments have become better understood; in some cases they have ceased to be, and in others they have been redefined. This means that we are more aware of the need to reconstruct the symbolic universe of the different biblical authors as carefully as possible. Only then can we read their words intelligently. It is no longer possible to claim, like some do, that the Bible is above all cultures. The cultural differences between the authors of the biblical books are in plain view.

There is no such thing as an a-cultural word or text. Human beings communicate to each other within a culture. The culturally conditioned messages of the different biblical authors are quite capable of being transposed to any other culture, just like a melody may be transposed to a different musical key. Verbal messages and musical melodies cannot be heard in a vacuum, and nature does not have them. To be meaningful and persuasive, messages must be couched in the culture of the intended audience. Unfortunately, the ecclesiastical authorities of the Adventist Church are opposed to the transposition of the Gospel to the twenty-first-century global culture. Instead of using tradition as a foundation for the future, they have chosen to make it a monument to a long-past world view.

Often one reads that the Bible says this or that. Well, if what is needed to affirm it is a text of Scripture, it is possible to claim biblical support for almost anything: slavery, patriarchy, ethnic cleansing, holy war, the exclusion of women from teaching, vengeance as a demand of justice, torture, and the death penalty for those who steal, male homosexuals, adulterous women, transgressors of the prohibition to work on the Sabbath, etc. Some teach that the Bible says that God created the universe in a week of seven days about 6,000 years ago, and what the Bible says is the final truth. Their teaching is based on Genesis 1 and arithmetical computations of the genealogies in other chapters of Genesis. They purposely overlook what other biblical authors have to say about the world created by God, and what we know about the nature of ancient genealogies. Some claim that the Bible says that only those who are perfect, that is, are conquerors over all temptations to sin, can be taken to heaven, and they have a list of texts to prove it. Finding support for a view by reference to a biblical passage, while ignoring what else the Bible says about a topic, is an arbitrary exercise. I can't understand how anyone can claim to be telling what the

The culturally conditioned messages of the different biblical authors are quite capable of being transposed to any other culture, just like a melody may be transposed to a different musical key.

Bible says about this or that while dismissing most of the information in the Bible about it.

According to many Christians, the Bible says that the future is predetermined. The end has been decreed since the beginning. God already knows everything, and what God knows cannot be wrong. The future is closed. On the other hand, some Christians claim that God can change his mind at any time. God's hands are not tied by what he knows. God's freedom is absolute. The Bible makes clear that the future is open.

The evidence shows that *both* views are present in the Bible. The prophets, Amos, Hosea, Micah, etc., told the people that on account of their current behavior the future was to bring about their doom. They were feeling secure on account of their national sovereignty and economic prosperity. Theirs was a false security, however. Because of their evil ways, God was going to send drought, famine, locusts, and pestilence to punish them. The prophets insisted that the people needed to abandon their present way of life. They urged them to change course, to turn away, to repent. God is not bound to do what I prophesy. When the author of the post-exilic chapters of Isaiah argued that the proof that Yahve was the only true God was that what he predicted through prophets came to pass, an anonymous prophet wrote Jonah to argue that God can change his mind and make prophets look like fools. God is a God of grace; the future is open.

The biblical apocalyptic texts, however, were written for people who found themselves in a totally different situation. They had little control over their circumstances as exiles in a foreign land or vassals of neighboring empires. Their rulers demanded assimilation to their cultural norms and religious practices. The authors of apocalyptic texts were motivational speakers telling their audiences to hold on, remain faithful to the Creator God who rules the world and has everything under his control. Even if at the moment God's retributive justice seems not to be at work, to the point that the faithful may suffer martyrdom, don't give up on your allegiance to God. What you need is perseverance, patient endurance. God will intervene to bring about a radical vindication of His justice and your faithfulness. This message only makes sense if the future is already determined within a closed universe. The time of the end has already been decreed and will take place soon. The future is closed.

Do all apocalyptic authors give the same description of what Christ is doing after he was raised from the dead by God? Clearly not. According to John the prophet at Patmos, Christ has been victorious over Satan and is now sitting with his father on his father's throne. According to the author of the exhortation to the Hebrews, he has entered the Most Holy Place in the sanctuary made of *hypostatic* matter, visible only by faith. He now is a superior High Priest who not only expiates the sins of those who draw near to him but also takes away the guilt that remains in the conscience of sinners. According to Paul, Christ is now waging war in the cosmic spheres between heaven and earth in which the principalities and powers of the air are still operating. Once he has subjugated them, the imminent *Parousia* will take place. The three descriptions of what Christ is doing between his resurrection and the *Parousia* function in three different symbolic universes: a mythological three-story universe, a Stoic universe, and a Neo Platonic universe.

This means that it is impossible to say "the Bible teaches what I teach." Biblical authors must be identified and contextualized. Take for example the characterization of the relationship of Christianity to Judaism. Is Christianity a Jewish sect like Pharisaism, the fulfillment or the perfection of Judaism, the legitimate heir of the treasures of ancient Israel, the antidote to Judaism, or a totally new beginning only tangentially related to

Judaism? According to James, Peter, and John, as reported by the author of the Acts of the Apostles, Christianity is a Jewish sect. According to the gospel of Matthew and the author of the epistle to the Colossians, it is the perfection or fulfillment of Judaism. Christianity is the heir of its riches. According to the author of the gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles, Judaism is what gives Christianity a foundation, legitimacy. Christianity is not a newcomer to the religious horizon; it has deep roots. According to Paul and the author of the gospel of John, it is a new creation by the power of the Spirit. Much of the Bible must be ignored to maintain that what the Bible says is totally coherent. Writing to different audiences in different cultural environments, each author was inspired to express his faith and confirm the faith of his readers in the God who created and has ultimate control over the world, in a way that motivated faithfulness. What they wrote was persuasive because it made sense to their intended audiences, even if the reactions to their messages were quite diverse.

I pointed out that in order to make the Bible relevant some people choose the passages they prefer and ignore the rest. Making a choice is unavoidable because the Bible contains too many different, at times contradictory, points of view. Therefore, it is necessary to be honest and more specific when identifying the source of one's understanding of the Christian Gospel. My understanding of the Gospel is in terms of the letters of Paul and the gospel according to John. They proclaim that God intervened in the unfurling of history and brought about a new creation. Their affirmation of the rule of the Spirit for the benefit of humanity, however, is nuanced according to their different symbolic universes. As an apocalypticist, Paul envisioned the new creation in cosmic terms, where some regions of the cosmos are still occupied by evil spirits. He thought their defeat was to take place momentarily. Those who through baptism participate in the death and the resurrection of Christ are raised by the Spirit to live guided by the Spirit now and, at the imminent *Parousia*, will receive spirit-bodies. The gospel according to John telescopes the apocalyptic timeline into an ever-present moment of confrontation with Jesus. Facing Jesus, every human being must determine whether he is Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph and Mary who, according to "the Jews," is a bastard, or he is the One sent from above by the Father to give life and light to the world. Those who have faith in God and see Jesus for who he truly is are no longer creatures from the world below. They have been born from above by the Spirit. They now live by the power of the Spirit sent by God as "another Comforter." He empowers those who have faith to have their being in the world of the Spirit rather than the world of the flesh.

Both Paul and the Johannine community saw themselves living as new creatures thanks to the power of the Spirit that energized and guided them. They rejected the law of Moses as the giver of life, which was at the core of the contemporary Judaism of the scribes and the Pharisees. I believe Christianity is the religion of resurrection by the power of the Spirit that gives life. The search for the riches of the Bible comes to fruition with the discovery of the ways in which its authors proclaimed the riches of God. I find the phrase "the Bible says" misguided and pompous. I give credit to the authors of the views I hold and, if appropriate, recognize the views of other biblical authors. All Christian denominations claim to base their diverse creeds on what the Bible says. The resulting Christian cacophony is a distraction, the echo of the plurality of views present in the Bible. Those who claim to tell what the Bible says, I fear, misrepresent the testimonies of the authors of the books in the Bible, and usurp for themselves the formal authority of the Bible.

Endnotes

1. For an analysis of how some stories of the Old Testament may have been understood by the original audiences, and were interpreted by the authors of the New Testament and by the Rabbis whose sayings are found in the Mishna, see Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler, *The Bible With and Without Jesus: How Jews and Christians Read the Same Stories Differently* (Harper One, 2020).

2. Richard Coffen, "A Fundamental Exegetical Principle," www.atoday.org, October 27, 2020 (italics are his).

3. "Reflecting on San Antonio," *Spectrum*, Summer 2015: 80–84.

HEROLD WEISS'S latest books are *Meditations on the Gospel According to John*, *Meditations on the Letters of Paul*, and *The End of the Scroll: Biblical Apocalyptic Trajectories*.

KEYWORDS: Isaiah, Warrior-God, divine determinism, God's preferred will vs. the people's will

INTERPRETING *the Messiah*

BY JEAN SHELDON

The most loved and, perhaps, significant verse of Isaiah 9:1–12:6 also forms the lyrics of my favorite piece in Handel's *The Messiah*: "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon His shoulder: and His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6, KJV). Perhaps our appreciation of these words stems from their awesome combination of divinity, power, aid, and peace. Perhaps we also read these words in retrospect, envisioning their fulfillment in the deeds and teachings of Jesus.

Nevertheless, their original setting resides in acts of violence and punishment. Another way to translate this verse is: "For a child is born to us; a son is given us. Dominion shall be upon His shoulder. And His name shall be called, Marvelous Counselor, Warrior-God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace." In the context of these chapters involving the imperial domination of Assyria, these would be comforting words: the promise of someone who could outdo Assyrian domination. Most scholars view the words I have translated here as "Warrior-God" as "Mighty God." Yet the same word is used to describe Nimrod

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in Genesis 10:8–10 as "first to be a mighty man," with names of the kingdoms He founded. This word, *gibbor* in Hebrew, usually means "hero," and can involve someone who excels in war.[1] This is the way the ancient Israelite community would likely read this word in this verse.

Scholars do speak of larger ways to interpret the word *gibbor*. A hero then would be anyone who used extraordinary power or means to accomplish a great action. That helps us some, but the ancient Israelites not as much. From the time of Sargon of Akkad in the third millennium, who attempted to create the first empire by

conquest, the ancient Near Eastern mind understood peace to be the by-product of war. A prince of peace could have blood on his hands. What should we do with this? Do we throw out the tradition of applying this prophetic statement to Jesus in His first coming, since Jesus in the Gospels never killed anyone? Should we continue to soften it with most translators so that it fits better with Jesus's life, who alone in history deserves the title "mighty God"? Would we better limit its prophetic application to Jesus's second advent? Then what do we do with the image of a vulnerable newborn, not only mentioned in this verse, but highlighted in Matthew's and Luke's gospels?

The rest of this week's lesson includes Isaiah 9:1–12:6: chapters filled with prophecies of violence against the northern kingdom of Israel, violence against Assyria whom Isaiah, speaking for God, refers to as "the rod of my anger, in whose hand is the staff of my fury" and who will exercise that violence against Israel (Isa. 9:8–10:19, CEB). Within this section, Isaiah depicts these consequences to Israel's waywardness in four sequential statements that each end with the words: "Even then God's anger didn't turn away; God's hand was still extended."[2] The extent of violence, albeit intermingled with words of hope and deliverance, raises the larger problem of the portrayal of Yahweh in the Old Testament over against Jesus in the New Testament. Why does such apparent disparity exist between Yahweh and Jesus, who referred to Himself as Yahweh (John 8:58)? When looking for understanding as to whether our own violence is justifiable, must we be forced to choose between God in the Old Testament and God in the New?

I have elsewhere advanced a canonical narrative reading proposing that two voices exist in the Old Testament—the voice of God's preferred will, usually heard first in a narrative sequence, followed by the people's will, which usually fails to heed God's preferred will. In response to the people, the second voice is heard acquiescing or adapting to the people's will. A specific set of criteria establishes further these two voices. Time and space do not permit me to develop this further; and besides, it works primarily within a narrative framework instead of poetry. So instead of utilizing this method here, I would like to point out some principles that I have found useful for resolving the problem here.

The Setting: God Meets People Where They Are

This one is commonly applied to the problem I have outlined above. It recognizes that the people are simply not in a position to understand gentle speech and action. To speak softly and lovingly, and use only kind actions, would not turn them around from their downward path. They are used to external control, harshness, and violence. Try going to a similarly violent society and pleading with them gently, persuasively, to stop their violence. Does it work? According to Ezekiel, Yahweh was dealing with hard-headed and hard-hearted people, so He would have to give His prophets hard heads and hearts in order to be heard (Ezekiel 3:4–9).

The Problem of Language: Divine Determinism

One of the problems in terms of the violence as punishment is that Yahweh is said to cause it. In addition to Assyria serving as the rod of His anger, God is said to raise up their enemies against them. He "stirred up" the Aramaeans "from the east, and the Philistines from the west" (Isa. 9:11, 12, CEB). This is what I have come to call "divine determinism," in which God is said to do what we would naturally suppose was the result of human choice or forces of nature. This divine determinism exists throughout much of the Bible. Even Jesus uses it. Consider this statement: "Do not think that I have come to bring peace, but a sword. 'For I have come to set a man against

When looking for understanding as to whether our own violence is justifiable, must we be forced to choose between God in the Old Testament and God in the New?

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Aaron's Staff Becomes a Snake (Exodus 7, 10). Wood engraving, published in 1886

his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and one's foes will be members of one's household'" (Matthew10:34–36, NRSV). Interestingly, here Jesus is quoting Micah 7:6 and, for that reason, I added single quotes to designate the fact. Yet Micah 7:6 itself does not apply the principle of divine determinism, even in its context. Instead, it reads: "For the son treats the father with contempt, the daughter rises up against her mother, the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; your enemies are members of your own household" (NRSV). Why does even Jesus use this principle?

We have a similar problem in Exodus where it says that "God hardened Pharaoh's heart" (Exodus 9:12). One could argue that God revealed Himself to Pharaoh as a superior deity and thus, by giving him something to harden his heart against, He "hardened" Pharaoh's heart. Similarly, one could say that Jesus sent a sword by sending truth that would lead some, even in one's home, to turn against the one who believe that truth. As helpful as this is, it doesn't explain every instance of divine determinism.

Here is where it is extremely important to recognize the principle of inspiration—that the language is human. Since only the Ten Commandments are said to be of "divine composition" (GC v-vi), I believe that even Jesus's words can be interpreted as human. That doesn't mean that Jesus may not have spoken words that indicated divine determinism, but it does allow us the ability to recognize that human beings who wrote gospels could use their own words and logic. In terms of the Old Testament, the ancient Mesopotamian mind was steeped in the belief that the gods fated everything and everything that happened was according to the divine will. No doubt this thinking was fairly pervasive throughout much of the ancient Near East, including the Hebrews. And in some ways they needed to think that God was responsible for everything, to avoid the worship of other forces and powers who would fill the gap that would result if God wasn't the originator of disaster.[3] Keeping this in mind allows us to interpret these kinds of passages differently, so that we understand the punishments in the Bible to be the result of God not preventing something happening, of natural disasters, of the free choices of others, and so on.

> Try going to a similarly violent society and pleading with them gently, persuasively, to stop their violence. Does it work?

Jesus Is the Frame of Reference

When we confront Jesus's words and actions and His message that these words and actions reveal the Father, that if we have seen Him, we have seen the Father, we are faced with two options: either we don't believe that

Keeping this in mind allows us to interpret these kinds of passages differently, so that we understand the punishments in the Bible to be the result of God not preventing something happening, of natural disasters, of the free choices of others, and so on.

Jesus represented the Father (or at least we treat His claim to do so as less important) or we have to relook at the portrayal of God in the Old Testament and rethink our interpretations of it. To do the latter is important because, in my last eight years of teaching, I have had two theology majors come separately to me to tell me that the portrayal of God in the Old Testament is the greatest hindrance to their peers to having a relationship with Him. How can our Millennials and Generation Z trust God when He seems to behave and speak so differently than Jesus?

Given the way first Israel, and then Judaism, understood Isaiah 9:6, 7—that the child born to them would be named, "Wonderful Counselor, Warrior God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace" as one who would wreak bloodshed—it is understandable why they would reject Jesus as the fulfillment of that and every other messianic prophecy. They expected the messiah to exercise dominion, gain peace by warfare, and control the people so that, by force, they would be righteous.

Jesus did quite the opposite; He rejected dominion in both word and deed as having any part of His kingdom for the sake of humble service (Mark 10:42–45). When He chased the people in charge of monetary exchange from the temple, He was not suddenly in support of violence. So far as we know His raised whip never systematically lashed anyone and no one died as a consequence. Only tables and chairs got pushed over and the cattle got driven out (Matt. 21:12–13; John 2:13–17. When Jesus confronted those who showed zeal for the law when they brought the woman caught having an adulterous affair to Him, He did not punish them or her; He resolved the situation by bringing accountability to the accusers and forgiveness to the accused (John 8:1–11).

To read the Old Testament through the lens Jesus has provided brings a more coherent interpretation of its portrayal of God. It can lead us to view violence as not belonging to God's preferred will. It allows us to understand that we hear expressions of God's will adapted to people's choices much more frequently than we hear words that represent God's preferred or ideal will. And if we let the gospels influence us fully, behind the strong human expressions and harsh punishments, we can imagine Yahweh-Jesus weeping over His hardhearted people, "How can I give you up; . . . how can I hand you over, O Israel?" (Hosea 11:8, CEB).

Endnotes

1. Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, and Johann Jakob Stamm, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, rev. ed., trans. M. E. J. Richardson, 5 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1994): 172; H. Kosmala. גָּבַר, in G. J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, trans. J. T. Willis, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977), 2:373.

2. Isaiah 9:12b, 17b, 21b; 10:4b, CEB.

3. Alden Thompson has used this interpretation to explain why mention of Satan in the Old Testament occurs so late. See *Who's Afraid of the Old Testament God*? (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1989), 43–70.

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KEYWORDS: apocalypticism, conspiracy theories, Sunday Laws, self-designation as the remnant

A RESTLESS *Remnant*

BY ADMIRAL NCUBE

News of COVID-19 vaccines being developed have brought a sense of optimism in some, but in others fears bordering on conspiracy theories. Not surprisingly, Adventists have joined the fray and have given the issue an eschatological twist. Without delving into them too deeply, it is clear that COVID-19 has exposed Adventism's history of entanglement with conspiracy theories: including secret connections between US presidents and the popes, Jesuit infiltration of the General Conference, secret societies, ecumenical collusion, changes in the church logo, and recently COVID-19, which has been labeled a precursor or dress rehearsal to the mark of the beast. This raises the often-ignored question on why Adventism seems to have an insatiable appetite for conspiracy theories? What is it in us that makes us vulnerable?

A Revelation of the Remnant

The concept of the remnant is very dear to Adventists. According to the retired church theologian Ángel Manuel Rodríguez, it plays a role in our self-understanding, mission, and message. The conviction that there is a particular divine reason for our presence in the world makes the idea of the remnant an existential question for Adventism. This explains the sensitivity around the remnant motif, which makes any attempt to de-emphasize or ignore this fundamental self-definition sacrilegious.

> Rather than use prophecy to connect and embrace people in a way that leads them to Christ, we end up manipulating it to accentuate our corporate ego.

Tied to this is a strong belief in the imminent return of Jesus Christ. Our self-designation as the remnant is premised on the shortness of time (Jesus's second coming) and persecution (Rev. 12:17). Thus, for years Adventists have seen themselves as the remnant who bear a special message and will be the subject of Satan's attacks in the last days. Consequently, we have read ourselves in the book of

As Adventism has become more institutionalized and the element of urgency has slowly waned as interest in religion is waning, secularism is growing, and religious exclusiveness is no longer tolerated. This has made it difficult for the remnant to keep portraying itself as an object of attack by other Christians or by civil powers.

Revelation, using various passages to showcase our place and part in end-time Bible prophecy. In a sense, we have made the book of Revelation more of a revelation of the remnant than Jesus himself. As we exerted our energies in proving our place and identity in the book, our experience in the end of time, our persecutors, and final victory, we have relegated Christ to the margins. In accentuating our identity, we have reduced mission to a critique of other denominations.

Without debating the remnant motif itself, the critique here is that an excessive focus on oneself as a victim breeds suspicion about everyone else. An approach to apocalyptic prophecy that places excessive emphasis on ourselves creates an "us versus them" mentality. Rather than use prophecy to connect and embrace people in a way that leads them to Christ, we end up manipulating it to accentuate our corporate ego. We become eloquent in explaining events around the coming of Jesus, while failing at exhibiting His love, which is the greatest mark of the remnant. Unwittingly, we run the risk of missing the person in the book of Revelation as we focus on our experience during the coming crisis. Corporate narcissism is addictive; not only does it create an inflated sense of indispensability, but it increases vulnerability to conspiracies.

A Remnant Under Attack

Since the concept of the remnant has come with an emphasis on persecution, we have been painting ourselves as eternal victims of Satan's attacks. As a result, we are always on the lookout for anything that suggests or points to Sunday laws and persecution. As one African pastor said, "we have become notoriously eschatological and incurably apocalyptic where anything and everything new is viewed as apocalyptic eschatology."

In our understanding of end-time events, *The Great Controversy* by Ellen White occupies a special place. It predicts a national Sunday law in the United States as the trigger moment that will unleash a series of end-time events, culminating in the second coming of Jesus. These include: Protestants in America playing a pivotal role in ushering in Sunday laws, a return to papal domination, and persecution of Sabbath-keepers. With this emphasis, many Adventists are raised to be suspicious of Catholics, critical of other denominations, apprehensive of US presidents and popes, but so sure about their place in the book of Revelation. While we have been alert to any move in the US or Vatican that could trigger Sunday laws, we have unwittingly become vulnerable to speculation and conspiracy theories. Excessive focus on the "last crisis" and rigid apocalypticism unfortunately breeds some sort of fatalism. We end up viewing the Catholic Church, Protestantism, and the United States of America and their role in ushering in Sunday laws as fixed. Our role becomes that of digging up evidence to confirm their place on the wrong side.

The Remnant and Sunday Laws

Many who quote Ellen White's writings on Sunday laws often overlook the point that during her time, the world was divided between Roman Catholics and Protestants. This was also a time when politicians in the US at the state level and the national level were doing all they could to enforce Sunday observance through the famous Blair Sunday Rest Bill, pushed by the National Reform Association. Adventists, and notably Alonzo T. Jones, in the late 1880s vigorously challenged this move, which was seen as a fulfillment of Revelation 13. During this period, Ellen White wrote,

> I have been much burdened in regard to movements that are now in progress for the

> enforcement of Sunday observance. It has been shown to me that Satan has been working earnestly to carry out his designs to restrict religious liberty. Plans of serious import to the people of God are advancing in an underhand manner among the clergymen of various denominations, and the object of this covert maneuvering is to win popular favor for the enforcement of Sunday sacredness. (Ellen White, *Review and Herald*, Extra, [December 24, 1889])

At a time when Adventists were being jailed for not "resting" on Sunday, one can sense an ominous sense of urgency in her statements which include "soon-coming conflict" (GC 592); "movements now in progress" (GC 573); "In the events now taking place is seen a rapid advance toward the fulfillment of the prediction" (GC 579); "The Sunday movement is now making its way in darkness. The leaders are concealing the true issue" (5T 452); "Protestants are working in disguise to bring Sunday to the front" (5T 449); "We have been looking many years for a Sunday law to be enacted in our land, and now that the movement is right upon us" (LDE 125).

It is noticeable that the use of the present tense and earnestness in her tone reveal a reference to something immediate and imminent during her time. At the same time, as Catholics from Europe were moving into the United States, it is easy to pick up in her writings strong language including "popish," "popery," and "Romish," revealing the prevailing attitudes toward Catholicism. Consequently, it should not surprise us that the scenario projected in *The Great Controversy* and her other writings is deeply embedded in the religio-political issues of the 1880s: a point which many ignore. Taken out of context, these statements become fodder for conspiracy-mongers. They are manipulated outside their context into conspiracy theories, with news headlines used to back them up.

Even though the Sunday Law was never passed in her day, it does not cast doubt on her inspiration but rather, as Jon Paulien puts it, "logically positions her predictions in the realm of classical prophecy," which is conditional. The story of Jonah presents a classic example of how God can turn an unambiguous prophecy of doom into a conditional one, thus defying human expectation. Maybe it's high time we move away from a rigid distinction between classical prophecy and apocalyptic prophecy and allow God to work in His own way. It is by taking White's statements outside of their context, and rigidly clinging to a certain fulfillment of prophecy, that we have become vulnerable to conspiracy theories.

A Restless Remnant

Adventist pioneers were persuaded that Christ was about to return and that the final crisis was about to begin. They had witnessed the signs of the end, experiencing rejection by other Christians, and somehow felt that the dragon was angered against them as a small remnant. But here we are, more than 175 years after 1844, and the context has changed. As Adventism has become more institutionalized and the element of urgency has slowly waned as interest in religion is waning, secularism is growing, and religious exclusiveness is no longer tolerated. This has made it difficult for the remnant to keep portraying itself as an object of attack by other Christians or by civil powers.

However, that the context today is far different than what our pioneers faced has largely been ignored. Our vulnerability to conspiracy theories can only be cured when we begin to critically examine our long-held positions. We have inherited such a defensive motif that our doctrinal beliefs are presented with an opposing audience in mind. Our fixation with detailed predictions has reduced us to a crisis-centered people. Our history aptly confirms how futile it is to hinge our relationship with God on a coming crisis or event. Ours should be a faith and a message that need no crisis or predictions to propel it. A conspiracy-theory-driven faith is exhausting as much as it is restless.

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All artwork and photos courtesy of Erica Keith

Ruth and Naomi for the month October 2021
"Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God." Ruth 1:16–17

KEYWORDS: art, “Women of the Bible” wall calendar, representation, raising up Black women, celebrating Black culture

WOMEN IN THE BIBLE WHO LOOK LIKE ME: *An Interview with Artist Erica Keith*

BY ALITA BYRD

Erica Keith talks about the new 2021 calendar she has created, art directing at Hallmark, and why representation matters.

Question: You have created a Women of the Bible wall calendar for 2021, with beautiful drawings and Bible verses. What gave you the idea to create this calendar?

Answer: One of the earliest memories that I have is my mom reading the *My Bible Friends* book series to me and my sisters. I remember enjoying the stories—but my favorite part was looking at the pictures. Even though I enjoyed the books I always had this nagging feeling that none of the characters in the books looked like me. I got the same feeling reading my Sabbath School lesson and also seeing my Sabbath School teacher put the little felt people up on the felt board.

I've carried that feeling with me throughout my Adventist education at Larchwood Seventh-day Adventist Elementary and Pine Forge Academy. Now that I am a mother of three beautiful Black children, I want to make sure they see themselves in the Word. Representation matters!

This pandemic has made us all slow down a little bit and do lots of things differently. If there is one thing that quarantine has done for me it's getting me back to my creativity. So, in the evenings after work, after cooking dinner and after baths and prayer time with the kids, I started sketching on my new iPad Pro.

I've always enjoyed drawing women—in particular Black women. So, then I had a thought: What if I create illustrations of women in the Bible the way that I would like to see them? What if I create a devotional book? That's where it all started. It wasn't until recently that I thought it would be a nice 2021 calendar. After such a crazy 2020 year I knew that we were all looking forward to 2021!

I actually looked at my own family and friends for inspiration. I truly wanted the calendar to have a feeling of familiarity.

Where did you find inspiration to create the look of each biblical character?

I actually looked at my own family and friends for inspiration. I truly wanted the calendar to have a feeling of familiarity. So, if you are looking at some of the women that I illustrated and feel that some of them look familiar, it's because they may very well be inspired by someone you know.

I also surround myself with *Essence* magazines, Pinterest, Tumblr, Instagram, and other places for inspiration. I specifically looked at beauty, fashion, African textures, textiles, and more to pull from and then I began composing my layout.

Do you feel that women are under-represented in the Bible?

I don't necessarily feel that women are under-represented in the Bible, but I do feel as though most sermons, although very enlightening, focus on men in the Bible. When I read stories about the women in the Bible, I see strength, courage, and wisdom. I see inspiring stories that need to be shared.

Who did you make this calendar for?

I was inspired to create the calendar for this year because I knew people wanted something to look forward to. I wanted to create something that would lift spirits and provide inspiration.

Have you sold very many?

The calendar is doing very well. Lots of orders came in before the holiday and I am still receiving calls and messages from people telling me how much they love the calendar. Even though we are well into the year now, people are still making purchases.

Has your church family in Philadelphia been supportive of the project?

The Germantown church has always been supportive of me in all of my life stages and ventures. Many of the church members have purchased calendars for themselves and as gifts for others in their life.

One member was a bit upset that her calendar was delayed due to the USPS mail delays over the holidays. It took about ten days longer but when she received her calendar, she told me that it was worth the wait.

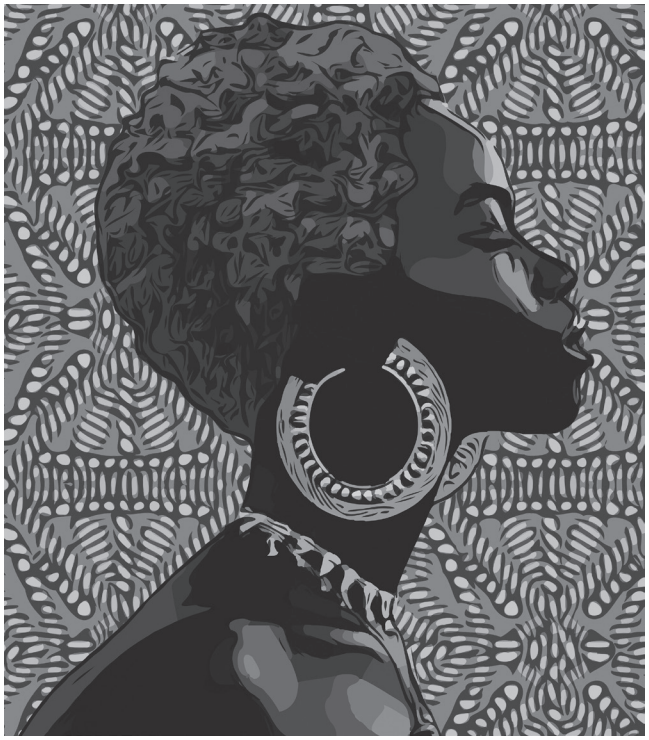
You are producing the calendar yourself, through your small business, right? Are the calendars printed on demand when they are ordered?

Yes, the calendars are printed on demand. I knew that I didn't have the space or capacity to handle inventory, so I found a vendor who has been amazing.

Where can people buy the calendar?

The calendar and all of the other created products can be found at www.blackforwardshop.com.

Your business is called Black Forward. What does



Elizabeth (left) and Hannah (right)

your company do?

Black Forward was founded in September 2020. After the deaths of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd, I felt compelled to use my gifts to help bring awareness to the injustices going on in our country and to bring empowerment to the Black community.

We sell apparel, accessories, greeting cards, tote bags, a calendar, and more that have a strong aesthetic and proud messages. Each piece has been either crafted or curated by me.

I have also collaborated with Black artists and writers to promote products with a strong aesthetic and a proud message.

But you have a full-time job at a marketing company, is that right?

Up until January 1, I was the creative director at Innovairre Communication, directing the marketing of products for our non-profit clients.

I was asked if I would head up our new Diversity and Inclusion Department because the company knows how passionate I am about diversity, equity, and inclusion and they also realize how important this is for our organization. So for the first time in my corporate career, I have stepped out of the creative field and on to something that I am equally passionate about.

You were an art director for Hallmark Cards for eight years. What was it like to work for Hallmark? What were some of the projects you worked on there?

Working for Hallmark was one of the most amazing experiences that I've ever had. I was hired right out of school and started working as a graphic designer.

In 2005, a writer colleague, Dierdra Zollar, and I created a collection of cards called "Uplifted!" for the Hallmark Mahogany line. It featured my artwork, and she did the writing. The collection performed well, and I still get people asking about it more than 15 years later.

After that, I began art directing many different card

Jill Scott and Erica Keith have fun after a work session

Black Forward was founded in September 2020. After the deaths of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd, I felt compelled to use my gifts to help bring awareness to the injustices going on in our country and to bring empowerment to the Black community.

lines, including many years directing the Mahogany card line, celebrating Black culture. It was pretty cool that I even worked on some Dayspring cards (the Hallmark card line celebrating faith) as well.

One of my most exciting experiences was partnering with singer, songwriter, and Grammy winner Jill Scott to create a collection of cards. She is so talented, and she was a pleasure to work with.

I also was blessed to create products for Dr. Maya Angelou, Iyanla Vanzant, and T. D. Jakes.

It seems that in all of your work, you have tried to raise up Black women. You have worked to make Black women more visible and more represented. Do you feel like things are changing for the better, since the time you began working? How do you feel things have changed during the last few years in our culture and society?

In my earlier years, the raising up of Black women was something that I did unconsciously. Being surrounded by five sisters and living in the girls' dorm at Pine Forge Academy, it was natural for me to illustrate and create images of Black women.

When I worked as a designer and art director for the Mahogany card line, we had specific strategies that we followed to make sure we represented Black people with significance, with strength and beauty.

It wasn't until recent years that I felt it was my own responsibility to not only elevate and represent Black women in a positive light, but to also do the same for Black men and children.

Recently my focus has been on social justice, not because it's been a topic in the news of late, but because I am raising three Black children to see themselves and know their worth, value, and rights in this country. I feel as though people are waking up to finally recognizing the racial disparities.

This global pandemic and the way our lives have changed dramatically has put us all in a position to slow down and look at things differently. The unarmed deaths of Black people have been an alarm for people all over the country. Awareness is the first step, but change is going to be a continuous process and must be a united effort for all of us.

It's my hope that putting images of women in the Bible who look different than what has been the norm is a step in the right direction.

What do you think the Adventist Church can do to further this work? What can the Adventist Church do better when it comes to raising up Black women?

Furthering the work will require this issue to be addressed at every level of the church—from the local church, regional conference, union, and General Conference to the global level.

Much of our church is still organized and functions from segregation and a racially separate standpoint. Our Sabbath School and book publications still are unequal in the images that they include. They need to represent Black people and women even more. It's important because if our books and images do not represent the landscape of our country and world, we as a church will not be relatable.

The Pew Research Center states that by 2050, the nation's racial and ethnic mix will look quite different than it does now. Non-Hispanic whites, who made up 67% of the population in 2005, will be just 47% in 2050. Hispanics will rise from 14% of the population in 2005 to 29% in 2050. Blacks made up 13% of the population in 2005 and will be roughly the same proportion in 2050.

Asians, who were 5% of the population in 2005, will be 9% in 2050.

A 2014 Religious Landscape Study also states that Black women are more religious than any other group in the U.S. So, if we as Adventists are not mindful in representation now, we could be on a path to losing members.

Can you tell us more about your family?

My husband Germaine, my parents, grandparents, siblings, and friends have been the most supportive of me as I have embarked on creating this calendar and other projects that I've been working on. They believe in me so strongly that they are the ones who truly keep me going. When I am up late at night drawing, editing my website, or doing something else for my business, I hear their voices encouraging me to keep going.

What other projects are you working on?

I am also a freelance art director and graphic designer. One of the projects that I have been working on for the last year-and-a-half is all of the branding and promotional materials for the National Pine Forge Academy Alumni Association. I feel it is important to give back to the institution that poured so much into me for four of the most important developmental years of my life. Pine Forge Academy is one amazing Historically Black Co-Educational Christian Boarding School and if I can help to promote the school then I want to do my part.

Erica Keith with her family

Erica Keith is the founder and CEO of Black Forward

Where do you see yourself in five to ten years' time?

In the next five to ten years I see myself continuing to do work that elevates the Black community and to bring us into the foreground in a positive way.

This country was founded on racism and every system was born out of that very thing. There is so much reconciliation, healing, and restructuring that needs to happen, and I feel that I need to be a part of that movement. I don't know exactly what that will look like for me, but I am going to use the gifts that God has given me to further this important work.

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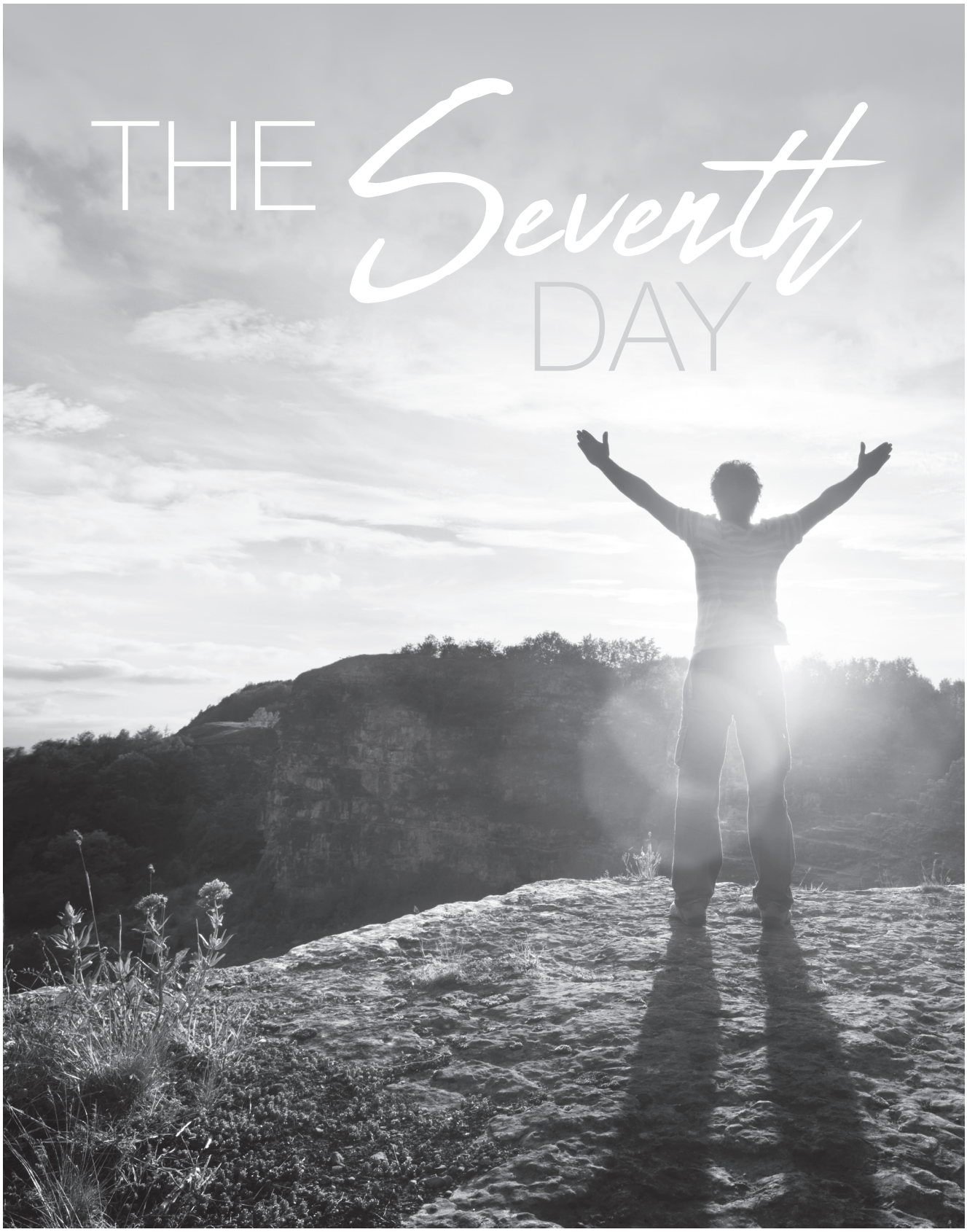

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KEYWORDS: Sabbath, the female slave, *nafash* (breathe, refresh), *hager* (the stranger)

THE ART OF REMEMBERING: *It Matters How We Tell the Sabbath Story*

BY MATHILDE FREY

Mathilde Frey's presidential address at the November 2020 meeting of the Adventist Society for Religious Studies

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This year's conference offers us the opportunity to explore the biblical theme of the Sabbath. At the same time, we acknowledge that we are on sacred ground of a millennia-old tradition of Shabbat belonging to the Jewish people who, even in the face of great tragedy, held to the customs of Sabbath-keeping. We honor their commitment as we examine the Sabbath, contemplate its meaning, and benefit from their legacy.

I remember the girl, 8 years of age, standing before a towering, gray-haired madman teacher, trembling. To the left of her outstretched arms the classroom held its breath; "1 … 2 … 3," the voice thundered as his thin stick struck her palms, "8 … 9 … 10." It happened only on Monday mornings. She swallowed her tears as she walked to her seat in third row. With her fingers sore and throbbing she picked up the pencil. Each letter had to be neat, legible, and on the line; the numbers had to fit perfectly inside the small, square boxes in the math notebook. He came to check. And, in her mind was Sabbath. When she arrived home, she told mom and dad. Mother's eyes turned sad and worried. How could anyone do that to her daughter? The father took the girl's hands, blew a kiss into her palms, and held them close. He did not speak, but from that day on he held her hand, always, and everywhere. And so, Monday mornings happened again.

Sabbath is a remarkable thing. Sabbath comes from a place which no human commands nor conquers. My furious teacher of the 1970s in Romania never got a hold of her. But neither have I. So, today, as I speak to you about Sabbath, I fear I may bring insult on what God called holy first, for I have no command over her, and I have not conquered her.[1] However, if I knew how to

search out Sabbath, how to let her channel my thoughts, speak my words, and sing my songs, I would listen to her rhythmic beat more often.

I was compelled, as I was preparing for this address, to open my German Bible. I have a Luther Bible: the 1984 edition. It is the classic German translation. The language is still somewhat archaic, and it includes the apocrypha. The year of publication coincides with my family's emigration from Romania to what then was West Germany. I acquired this Bible a few years later when I was a student in the Seminary in Bogenhofen, Austria. I received the news that my father needed surgery for a malignant brain tumor, and I wrote on the first blank page in my Bible, "Broken, to be made beautiful." He passed away too soon, and for a while Sabbath slipped away too. It is easy to go about without missing her, because Sabbath does not come to us like an intruder, forcing its way in, nor does she occupy space like a frozen stone in the landscape, a sculpture celebrating hero-like triumphs of centuries past.

The Sabbath's memory is of a different kind of texture. She objects to and mocks our long-held claim that "history belongs to the victors." Sabbath has built its own memorial of an anti-heroic, self-effacing aesthetic, multi-faceted, open and complex, retelling her story again and again with slightly ironic nostalgia, yet pushing us toward a grander narrative than one has ever envisioned. If it were not so, I contend, she would not have lasted through the madness of the ages. It is this Sabbath memorial, rich in paradoxes, that is able to link historical structures to ahistorical notions, merging the past with the future in a committed, all-embracing pledge to the present world. Reading her story in the ancient language of biblical eras is not then a technical, aseptic act to acquire more information, but a demanding vision that transforms our fears into joy and our apprehensions into resilience. Is such a Sabbath voice present in the biblical account? How would such a Sabbath story speak into a world that seems more alienated than ever, headed with giant leaps toward an unsustainable life? These are the questions I attempt to examine in this paper.

"The reason that God refrains from further activity on the seventh day is that he has found the object of his love and has no need of any further works."[2] These are Karl Barth's words about the Sabbath in his treatise on the doctrine of Creation in the first chapter of Genesis. By "resting on the seventh day, He [God] does not separate Himself from the world but binds Himself the more closely to it."[3] Barth defined the relationship between God and humans as the covenant of grace: "It was with man and his true humanity, as His direct and proper counterpart, that God now associated Himself in His true deity. Hence the history of the covenant was really established in the event of the seventh day."[4] Barth then interpreted the covenant between God and humanity "as a covenant of grace and redemption to be fulfilled in Christ."[5] In his treatment of the Sabbath commandments in the Pentateuch, Barth concluded that the Sabbath commandment is the fundamental command of all of God's commandments. It combines law and gospel; it is inclusive of all human beings;[6] and it reminds the Sabbath observer of God as the Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier. In addition, Barth recognized an eschatological aspect in the Sabbath, a hidden relationship between the Sabbath and the day of YHWH as judgment day.[7]

Gerhard Hasel, the late Adventist theologian, echoes Barth's assertions:

> The Sabbath is grounded in Creation and linked with redemption. It is an agent of rest from work and confronts man's religious and social relationship. It is a perpetual sign and an everlasting covenant. It relates to the meaning of time. Its nature is universal, and it serves all mankind. It is concerned with worship as well as with joy and satisfaction. The themes of Creation, Sabbath, redemption, and sanctification are inseparably linked together, and with the Sabbath's covenant aspect, they reach into the eschatological future.[8]

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Sabbath has built its own memorial of an anti-heroic, self-effacing aesthetic, multi-faceted, open and complex, retelling her story again and again with slightly ironic nostalgia, yet pushing us toward a grander narrative than one has ever envisioned.

While Barth's and Hasel's expositions on the Sabbath cause a theologian's mind and heart to soar to ever greater heights because she recognizes every other biblical-theological doctrine in the Sabbath (especially the Adventist theologian), the question is whether the 20-year-old college student's mind—the mind we are in the business of shaping—does that as well. Which, I am sure, we all understand is not the case. How then are we to go about telling the Sabbath? Should the doctrinal enterprise continue? Making it more precise in its wording, supporting it with another lengthy parenthesis list of biblical references taken out of context?

An award-winning film I greatly enjoyed shortly before I moved from the Philippines to the US was *Life of Pi*. The movie is a marvelous achievement of storytelling combined with scenes of visual mastery. The protagonist is "Pi" Patel, an Indian Tamil boy who explores issues of spirituality and metaphysics from an early age. After a cataclysmic shipwreck, he finds himself stranded with a ferocious Bengal tiger in a lifeboat. Together they face nature's majestic grandeur and fury in the Pacific Ocean on an epic survival journey of 227 days. The intense preoccupation with practical matters, and the problems Pi must solve, form the dramatic heart of the film. How will he secure food and clean water for himself and for Richard Parker, the tiger? How will he stay sane and hopeful? How will he be able to train the tiger so as not to be devoured by him? Pi has realized that caring for the tiger is also keeping himself alive. After his eventual rescue, the insurance investigators who listen to his fantastic story are reluctant to write it up for their report. It cannot be possibly be true. "Fine," Pi says, "let me tell you a different version of what happened." This other story also tells of the storm and everyone perishing in the ocean except for Pi, but it contains the brutal details of cannibalism committed by humans fighting for their self-preservation, and so becomes the more "believable" story. As Pi Patel, years later, relates all this to a writer, an intriguing dialogue sets the end of the film:

> Patel: "So which story do you prefer?"
> Writer: "The one with the tiger. That's the better story."
> Patel: "Thank you. And so it goes with God."
> Writer: "It's an amazing story."

Sabbath has no other record of origin or witness than the Bible. This is the general agreement among Bible scholars and ancient Near Eastern authorities. Likewise, the scientific quest for Sabbath in the field of source criticism has basically come to a standstill, which feels so fittingly ironic in the context of a day that derives its meaning and possibly its name from stopping one's labors. In other words, the "believable" story searched for with great vigor in the modern academic world is now unavailable, left with a blank page. Therefore, postmoderns have every reason to be disappointed. Alternative explorations did open up over the course of the last century. These approaches provided for a more favorable treatment of the biblical text, as well as allowing for the voice of the age-old Jewish scholarship to be heard on its own tradition. Nonetheless, in academia, the Sabbath is considered an unresolved item, rather ineffective for the serious and intellectual biblical scholar. Despite that, the same scholarly works have accomplished meticulous and comprehensive studies on the biblical Sabbath texts and recognize, and, may I also say, admire the Sabbath's prestigious place and function in the biblical

text. It is for this reason then, that scholars of other fields as well as non-scholars provide us with a wealth of literature on the topic of the Sabbath.

Among Adventist scholarship, Sabbath suffers, but for a few outstanding contributions, among them Sigve Tonstad's *The Lost Meaning of the Seventh Day*, Sabbath has become a safeguarded but unexplored matter of study. I say this with great sorrow, as I think of the proposals and guidelines I have received to produce work that would defend the day's rightness in terms of its placing in our "Adventist" calendar, in terms of its beginning and ending time, or to confirm the kinds of things one would be allowed and not allowed to do on Sabbath, to name just a few such requests.

I believe Sabbath in a confined space, including a religious space, lasts for a while, for a few generations. Beyond that, Sabbath will stand as a signpost of deliverance, a freedom road worth travelling even under duress. For Sabbath is not like a fixed monument of stone but of spirit matter "never to pass away," as Heschel so insightfully writes.[9] Freedom is its essence.

> To set apart one day a week for freedom, a day on which we would not use the instruments which have been so easily turned into weapons of destruction, a day for being with ourselves, a day . . . of independence of external obligations, a day on which we stop worshiping the idols of technical civilization, a day on which we use no money, a day of armistice in the economic struggle with our fellow [humans] and the forces of nature—is there any institution that holds out a greater hope for [humanity]'s progress than the Sabbath? [edited for gender neutrality][10]

Let Sabbath Speak

In the second part of this paper, I will address one Sabbath text, Exodus 23:12. The intent is to let the voices lying dormant under or inside an age-old text be heard as witnesses to the Sabbath in a world in much need of spirit.

Exodus 23:12, reads: "Six days you are to do your work, but on the seventh day you shall cease [*shabat*] for the sake of your ox and your donkey that they may rest, and the son of your slave woman be refreshed, as well as the stranger" (my own translation).

The rarely used verb "breathe, refresh" (*nafash*) in the Hebrew Bible sets this Sabbath commandment apart from the Decalogue versions in Exodus 20:8–11 and Deuteronomy 5:12–15. When this verb occurs again in the Hebrew Bible (Exod. 31:17; 2 Sam. 16:14) it designates the catching of one's breath during a time of pause.[11] In 2 Samuel 16:14, the verb speaks of king David and his people recovering from fatigue during their flight from Absalom. In Exodus 31:17, God is described as being refreshed after the work of creation. Scholars suggest that the anthropomorphic language employed for God's refreshment on the seventh day is used as an example for human Sabbath rest and refreshment.[12]

The context of Exodus 23:12 provides a particular aspect to understanding the verb "breathe, refresh" in relation to the Sabbath. Only three verses above, the text reads "You shall not oppress a stranger, since you yourselves know the feelings [*nefesh*] of the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Exod. 23:9, NASB). The verb *nafash* relates to the cognate noun *nefesh*, which is often translated as "soul," but regards the whole life of a person. The resonance between the verb and the noun highlights the experience of the Israelite Sabbath-keeper who has been a stranger in Egypt and knows of weariness and depletion, and therefore, s/he will give opportunity for the slave and the stranger to breathe.

Just a few verses further into the context of Exodus 23:12, the law code calls for compassionate concern

When this verb occurs again in the Hebrew Bible (Exod. 31:17; 2 Sam. 16:14) it designates the catching of one's breath during a time of pause.

The Decalogue versions list "your stranger" (*gercha*) among those who should not work on Sabbath. Exodus 23:12 reads "the stranger" (*hager*). By eliminating the pronoun "your" and placing the definite article *ha* before the noun *ger,* the allusion to Hagar, the stranger and slave from Egypt, is unmistakable.


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Hagar and Ishmael as a sculpture in Linköping, Sweden

toward the oppressed, whose social and legal status made them potential victims of injustice: the poor, the widow, the orphan, the resident alien, and the slave. The law provides an analogue to God's empathetic listening to the people's cries during their sufferings in Egypt (Exod. 22:21–27; 23:6–11).[13] The cry and compassion motif is fundamental to the entire book of Exodus, functioning like a trigger device: "The Lord said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have given heed to their cry" (Exod. 3:7). Voices cry out and God listens: voices we easily ignore, or pretend not to hear. As I wrote this last sentence, I almost made the mistake of using the German verb *überhören*, which would turn the sentence on its head when saying "voices, we overhear." But, as the exodus story confirms, it is not we who "overhear" in English, it is we who ignore, and God who listens. But it is we who *überhören* in German and God is the one who does the *zuhören*. It is always God who listens, no matter the language we speak, or even when we do not speak.

Furthermore, Exodus 23:12 defines who is to catch a breath when the Israelite Sabbath-keeper rests, namely "the son/child of your slave woman." This slave child is not mentioned in the Sabbath commandment of the two prominent Decalogue versions (Exod. 20:10; Deut. 5:14), but only the male and the female servant.[14] Scholars have shed light on the slave son based on comparative Near Eastern studies. Ancient Near Eastern slave laws stated that the children issued from unions between a male slave and the wife given to him by the master belonged to the master (Exod. 21:4) and were identified as children of the male servant.[15] However, in Exodus 23:12 the slave child is a slave woman's son. Evidently, there is a divergence to be noted in the phrase, "the son of your slave woman."

Intertextual and linguistic study on references to slave women and their children sheds more light on the Sabbath commandment in Exodus 23:12. The slave woman, the *amah* of the Sabbath commandments (Exod. 20:11; 23:12; Deut. 5:14), is the discarded one of Genesis 21. She has become useless, for the rightful heir has come. Hagar, the slave woman, the *amah* in Abraham's house, was pushed out, together with her child.[16]

In Genesis 21, during Hagar's expulsion from the household of Abraham and Sarah, Ishmael is not named,

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but twice identified as, "son of the slave woman" (Gen. 21:10, 13).[17] Furthermore, the contextual motif of God who hears the cry of the weary and oppressed appears in Hagar's story when the angel states that "God has heard the voice of the boy" (Gen. 21:17; cf. 16:11). Note, again, follow closely, listen: there is the cry; it was Hagar crying out in distress. We become acquainted with that cry when we hear about it the first time; "the Lord has listened to your affliction" the angel said in Genesis 16:7. Now she is in the same situation and worse, and she cried. There is the boy, no word or sound is coming from his lips, but "God heard the voice of the boy."

The punch word in Exodus 23:12 comes as the last, with "the stranger." Whereas the Sabbath commandments in Exodus 20:11 and Deuteronomy 5:14 mention the "stranger," there is a difference to Exodus 23:12 that may be minimal to us but all the more important when read in the Hebrew language. The Decalogue versions list "your stranger" (*gercha*) among those who should not work on Sabbath. Exodus 23:12 reads "the stranger" (*hager*). By eliminating the pronoun "your" and placing the definite article *ha* before the noun *ger,* the allusion to Hagar, the stranger and slave from Egypt, is unmistakable. This deviation is even more interesting because of the previous three nouns, "your ox, your donkey, and the son of your female servant," which all have the pronominal suffix "your" (*cha*) following the Decalogue texts. Only *hager*, "the stranger," is different, and brings the sequence to an unexpected end. *Hager*, "the stranger": she is living in Abraham's house, carrying his child, but without name.

The context of Exodus 23:12 has done diligent preparation work to sensitize the Hebrew audience in recognizing the pun: "You shall not wrong a stranger [*ger*] or oppress him, for you were strangers [*gerim*] in the land of Egypt" (Exod. 22:20 [20:21]); also, "You shall not oppress a stranger [*ger*], since you yourselves know the feelings of the stranger [*hager*], for you also were strangers [*gerim*] in the land of Egypt" (Exod. 23:9 NASB).

The Sabbath commandment of the Covenant Code is clearly put in the context of the theological motif of God's compassionate listening to the cry of the oppressed. While we identify Hagar as the paramount "stranger" in the biblical text, an even more subtle rhetorical aspect of the narrative is that she is not the one doing what a stranger in good biblical language expresses as sojourning through the land. She is taken from her land Egypt, but Abraham is the one who "sojourns" (*gur*) in the land promised to his descendants, and then comes to acknowledge himself "a stranger [*ger*] among you" (Gen. 23:4).

Moreover, in a household where the stranger slave girl with child was faced with utter disgust, Sabbath disrupted the patriarchal world of Israel and called for equality among the members. In that sense, the Sabbath urges the redeemed Israelite to distance himself from the power structures of society and receive the stranger and the outcast as his own kin. In so doing, the Sabbath-keeper identifies with the slave woman, Hagar, the archetypal "the stranger" (*hager*). The Sabbath-keeper will bring good news to the afflicted mother, bind up her broken heart, and provide space for regeneration to her and the dying child (Isa. 61:1; Luke 4:18).[18]

Tonstad introduced his monograph on the Sabbath with the words, "The seventh day is like a jar buried deep in the sands of time, preserving a treasure long lost and forgotten."[19] The mysteries of the jar are some of the most amazing stories in need of being recovered. Hagar, the stranger, the slave woman, is part of it; Ishmael is crying out with unspoken words. Who will hear their cries? Will

we let Sabbath tell its own stories?

Elie Wiesel, the holocaust survivor, teaching in a classroom of 20-year-old college students about life in the presence of tragedy, spoke of wounded faith, "I believe in wounded faith. Only a wounded faith can exist after those events."[20] What is wounded faith? In Wiesel's case, he became a witness to humanity for being human despite inhumaneness.[21]

I still remember the girl. She has accompanied me across the continents. She stood by as I searched for the meaning of the Sabbath, one who is able to hold sore palms, aching souls, and crying voices. Faith began in that classroom in a small town in Romania.

Endnotes

1. The feminine pronoun is in reference to the Talmud, speaking of the Sabbath as queen and bride, Shabbath 119a, "Rabbi Hanina would wrap himself in his garment and stand at nightfall on Shabbat eve, and say: Come and we will go out to greet Shabbat the queen. Rabbi Yannai put on his garment on Shabbat eve and said: Enter, O bride. Enter, O bride."

2. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III-1 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1961), 215.

3. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 223.

4. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 217.

5. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 222; Hans K. LaRondelle, "Contemporary Theologies of the Sabbath" in *The Sabbath in Scripture and History*, ed. Kenneth A. Strand (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1982), 280.

6. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III-4, 53–55.

7. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 56–58.

8. Gerhard F. Hasel, "The Sabbath in the Pentateuch," in *The Sabbath in Scripture and History*, ed. by Kenneth A. Strand (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1982), 21.

9. Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2005), 98.

10. Heschel, *The Sabbath*, 28.

11. Daniel C. Fredericks, "נָפַשׁ," *NIDOTTE* 3: 133. The Akkadian napasu has a similar meaning, i.e., "to blow, breathe (freely), to become wide." Cf. *HALOT* 1: 711.

12. Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1967), 245, 404; John H. Sailhammer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 309.

13. Paul Hanson, "The Theological Significance of Contradiction within the Book of the Covenant," in *Canon and Authority; Essays in Old Testament Religion and Theology*. ed. George W. Coats and Burke O. Long (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 110–31; Eduard Nielsen, *The Ten Commandments in New Perspective* (London: SCM, 1967), 113–14; Felix Mathys, "Sabbatruhe und Sabbatfest: Überlegungen zur Entwicklung und Bedeutung des Sabbat im AT," *Theologische Zeitschrift* 28 (1972): 246.

14. The Samaritan Pentateuch replaced the anomalous reading of Exodus 23:12 with the standard "your male servant and your female servant" as indicated in the apparatus of the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*.

15. Calum Carmichael, *The Laws of Deuteronomy* (London: Cornell University Press, 1974), 87.

16. Hagar's story as slave woman is recorded in Genesis 16, 21, and parts of 25. However, it is only in Genesis 21 where she is called *amah*. Genesis 16 and 25 refer to her as a *shifcha*. For a discussion of the semantics of the two Hebrew terms אָמָה and שִׁפְחָה, see Alfred Jepsen, "*Amah* und *Schiphchah*," *Vetus Testamentum* 8 (1958): 293–97.

17. The Hebrew Bible uses the phrase "son of the female servant" again in the book of Judges regarding Abimelech, the son of a slave woman (Judg. 9:18), but more significantly in the book of Psalms (Pss. 86:16; 116:16). The Psalmist seems to allude to both Genesis 21 and Exodus 23, calling himself "son of your female servant" (Ps. 116:16) who cries out in distress and danger of life (116:8) and the Lord inclined his ear (116:2) and "loosed my bonds" (116:16). The Psalm culminates in the words, "Return to your rest, O my soul [*nefesh*], for the Lord has dealt bountifully with you" (116:7). All significant characteristics of the Sabbath commandment in Exodus 23:12 and its context are included in this Psalm: the theological motif of God's compassionate listening to the cry of the one who is about to die, as well as the terminology of the Sabbath commandment—"rest," "soul," and "son of your maid servant."

18. See Hans Walter Wolf, *Anthropology of the Old Testament*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974), 139: "These are people who are particularly without redress against any orders given to them. Though a master might not dare to exact work on the sabbath from his adult woman slave, he was much more easily able to exert pressure on her son, or on the foreign worker, who was all too easily viewed as being outside the sphere of liberty set by Yahweh's commandment. This version of the sabbath commandment therefore picks up the borderline case: the sabbath has been instituted for the sake of all those who are especially hard-driven and especially dependent."

19. Sigve Tonstad, *The Lost Meaning of the Seventh Day* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2009), 2.

20. Ariel Burger, *Witness: Lessons from Elie Wiesel's Classroom* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2018), 82.

21. Burger, *Witness*, 240.

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KEYWORDS: the degeneration of Sabbath observance, sacrament vs. ordinance, divine presence in the Eucharist

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BEING, HOLINESS, AND FREEDOM:
On the Sacramental Character of the Sabbath

BY DARYLL WARD

In the August/September issue of the journal *First Things*, Albert Mohler explains, "Why I am A Baptist," in part by noting that Baptists do not believe that baptism and the Lord's supper are sacraments, they are rather "ordinances," practices commanded by God.[1] Charles Scriven has frequently made the important point that we Adventists are lower-case baptists. Indeed, it was a Seventh-day Baptist who bequeathed to the Millerites the practice of recognizing and honoring the Sabbath. Moreover, we Seventh-day Adventists share the Baptist designation of these rites as ordinances and not sacraments. It could, therefore, be reasonably concluded that the proposal I advance in this paper is misguided at best, slightly daft at worst. Perhaps it is. But my love of the Sabbath, my conviction that it is holy, and my concern that its celebration is degenerating in our midst prompt me to offer witness to the character of the Sabbath, the character which cannot be discerned so long as the Sabbath is understood primarily as the litmus test in some great controversy or as definitively a matter of obedience to a divine command.

Whatever other significances the Sabbath may have, they all derive from its character. In so far as the Sabbath is not holy, it does not exist. Since it is holy, every human

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being has the possibility, in the Sabbath, of enjoying the freedom to be with and for the one who cannot fail to be, the beauty of whose holiness is infinite.

However, recognition, honor, and celebration of the Sabbath is rendered thoroughly problematic by the secularization of our culture's consciousness, a phenomenon that exhibits itself in the status accorded individual or collective autonomy in construction of reality, and far more profoundly than that, in forgetfulness of the one from whom all that is originates.[2] Sacramental realism in the form presupposed here rejects the individualism, nominalism, and nihilism that are, in part, definitive of secular consciousness. The faithful are not immune to the secularization of their experience. They may even have greater difficulty in discerning the invisible in the visible because their spiritual formation has given them some degree or other of appreciation for the infinite difference between creatures and the Creator. A vivid sense of divine transcendence can evacuate common experience of any sense of the divine. Paradoxically, religious sensibility can kill spiritual awareness. It can give birth to practical atheism. In spite of the threat the command to remember poses of translating enjoyment into compliance, that command may serve to disrupt our practical atheism and enable reception of communion with that which exceeds the ordinary.

In his widely appreciated, thorough, and creative book, *Sacramental Theology*, Herbert Vorgrimmler, the prominent Catholic colleague of Karl Rahner, writes that

> "sacramental thinking" is a way of understanding. The word "sacramental" in this sentence is broadly conceived. It refers to the faith experience that tells us that a reality perceptible to the senses, an external object or event, is "more than," "deeper than" the surface reveals at first glance. The word "sacramental" was consciously chosen, in reference to a point of view proper to Christian faith, because the deeper, interior reality that makes use of the external as its mediator is the reality of the transcendent God.[3]

Awareness of depth in the mundane is attested in the religious and scientific truism "there is more to reality than meets the eye." One might consider the whole Christian tradition (in all of its variations) regarding sacrament as a witness to transcendence and attempts to both enjoy and understand it. The importance of this conviction regarding plenitude may be appreciated by noting that one way to distinguish faith from its negation is to understand faith as a conviction that there is difference, that not everything there is, is alike, God being the one and only one who is truly different. As Vorgrimmler's recent work attests, in its sacramental thoughts and practices, the Church confesses that the one who is different is present and the presence of that one is liberating.

Holiness is one name fitting the infinite divine difference, a difference expressed in the familiar contrast between the sacred and profane: in other words, the difference between what is not the same and what is the same. The church's audacity in announcing the presence of holiness in the mundane arises in the first instance from its experience of the embodied living one who was crucified, and in the second from the Nazarene's declaration accompanying the gift of the Passover bread, "this is my body." The majority in the church hears that declaration, "this is my body," as assurance that there is more to the eucharistic bread than meets the eye.

The being that is bread, not just any bread, only the eucharistic bread, is incarnate being itself. Sacramental presence is possible because of difference and its presence differentiates the otherwise undifferentiated.

Claims to have had an experience of holiness tend to excite controversy. Witness to the holiness of the Sabbath provokes conflict. Similarly, the theology of the Eucharist remains contested. How the divine is present in the Eucharist has divided and continues to divide the Christian church, and Adventists remain divisive in our insistence that the seventh day of the week is holy. The divisions are signs of the gravity of the affirmations involved. It can escape notice, when adverting to the divisions in the body of Christ, that there is unity in the conviction that how one understands the supper is of critical importance.

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Adventists were, for some time, all but alone in their provocative insistence that how one understands the Sabbath and whether one enjoys it are also of critical importance. Happily, that is no longer the case, as a growing number of voices are calling everyone to discover the liberating grace available in the Sabbath.[4] Oddly, these calls insist on the obligatory nature of the commandment, while claiming quintessential, individualistic, modern autonomy in naming what day is Sabbath. Timothy Keller, famous founding pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York, "sabbaths" on Tuesday. A. J. Swoboda, author of the book *Subversive Sabbath*, "sabbaths" along with friends on Wednesday. Liturgists do not consecrate the elements of the supper and individuals are infinitely incompetent to consecrate the Sabbath.

Confusion about what gives the Sabbath its holiness ensures that one cannot and therefore will not fully participate in it. One purpose of the present proposal is to highlight the fact that, absent an accurate understanding of the sacramental character of Sabbath grace, its loss is all but assured under the pressures of secularization. The degeneration of Sabbath observance among Adventists, which treats the day as leisure time and a ready opportunity for good works we are unwilling to do on our own time, exemplifies such loss. Similarly, diminution of the conviction that God is present in the bread and wine has resulted in relative indifference to enactment of the supper. Recall the *quarterly* celebration of non-sacramental communions.

What, then, does offer us an accurate understanding of the character of the Sabbath? The effort of the Church to understand the supper discloses what is ultimately important. Despite deep conviction that what happens in the celebration of the Lord's supper must be properly conceived, it has proved impossible up to the present for

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the Body of Christ to unify around an understanding of the Lord's body. The challenge is, of course, two-fold. One must attempt to faithfully *bear witness* to what happens when we "eat this bread and drink this cup," and one must attempt to facilitate *unity of understanding* regarding what happens. With the exception of our Baptist brothers and sisters, there is unity in a confession of specific divine presence in the Supper. What divides is what can and must be said regarding understanding that presence. Universal agreement obtains in the conviction that divine presence is what is of ultimate importance.

Divine presence, then, is constitutive of sacramental character. How can divine presence be discerned? There are several widely accepted criteria for recognizing sacramental character. A sacrament must be instituted by Christ. A sacrament is, in the words of Augustine, "a visible form of an invisible grace." And finally, a sacrament is efficacious for salvation.

Provided that one understands the crucial importance of framing a Christian doctrine of creation on the basis of the Johannine testimony to the creatorship of the incarnate Logos, one can take Jesus's declaration that He is the Lord of the Sabbath as authorization for understanding Genesis 2:3 as scriptural revelation of Dominican institution of the Sabbath. So long as one is clear that the content of the term God is supplied by the incarnation, one can affirm that the one who was born in Bethlehem, reared in Nazareth, crucified and resurrected in Jerusalem, did indeed institute sanctity of the Sabbath as the crown of His gift of the creation. The Sabbath meets the first test of sacramental identity in that it was instituted by the Lord.

The Sabbath meets the second test of sacramental identity as well. A day is as surely a spatio-temporal reality as bread and wine are. Moreover, the specific tangible character of the Sabbath actually protects against a misunderstanding of sacramental identity, namely that the liturgist is the sanctifier of the sacrament, a misunderstanding not countenanced in the official teaching of any Christian communion. Unlike the production and consecration of bread and wine, the Sabbath appears independently of any immediate human agency. Neither priest nor lay person consecrates the Sabbath. It arrives consecrated by the Lord's announcement of His sovereignty over and in it.

Scriptural authorization of understanding holiness as specific divine presence is found in the story of Moses at the burning bush. Exodus 3:1–7 reads as follows:

> Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight and see why the bush is not burned up." When the LORD saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." Then he said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." He said further, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

That God can be locally present, divine omnipresence notwithstanding, is widely attested in Scripture in the many stories of divine epiphanies and definitively and most extensively in the incarnation of God in the Palestinian Jew, Jesus, in the first thirty years of the common era. What has proved intractably contentious is how to fittingly confess local presence.[5] And the focal point of that conflict about confession is what can and must be said about *how* Jesus Christ is present. It is instructive to notice that the disputing parties do not contest *that* Jesus Christ is locally present in the Eucharist. For some, the locality of presence is the event of celebration, but that confession just as surely insists on local presence as confession that the bread and wine change and the change is the advent of divine presence. It is not just any celebration in which Christ is really present. It is in the celebration of the supper.

The most durable and widely used conceptual means of confessing how Christ is present is the doctrine of transubstantiation. The concept offers admirable clarity about how the body of Jesus is literally present in the bread and the blood of Jesus is literally present in the wine. The admirable clarity is owed to Aristotle's categories created

If one cannot imagine a distinction between what a thing is and the particulars of its existence, a facility apparently lost to both modern and post-modern sorts of minds, then one will not be able to deconstruct a particular individual in order to intuit a substance differing from the form of its appearance.

by him to answer the question about individuals, "what is it?", and to specify how the answer to that question is related to change in particular individuals. But the doctrine does not merely adopt those categories, since the substance for Aristotle is that which endures through change, while the substance affirmed in the doctrine is precisely that which does change. The doctrine of transubstantiation is then a lovely example of Christian faith spoiling philosophical Egypt. Furthermore, the doctrine satisfies a thoroughly normal curiosity about how it can be that the bread and wine do not appear changed to the senses and yet they are confessed to be transformed into the body and blood of the Lord.

Unfortunately, the more that curiosity is indulged the more problematic the teaching becomes. Indeed, the clarity has proven to be a vulnerability for sustaining faith that the Lord is present in the Supper. If one cannot imagine a distinction between what a thing is and the particulars of its existence, a facility apparently lost to both modern and post-modern sorts of minds, then one will not be able to deconstruct a particular individual in order to intuit a substance differing from the form of its appearance. In that case, the concepts employed to facilitate intellection of divine presence make discernment of it impossible because, to borrow a phrase from Denys Turner, the concepts have migrated off of the semantic map. If they did not migrate off of the semantic map, they would be an occasion of committing the quintessential sin of exchanging the Creator for the creature. There is no univocity of language about the perceptible and God.

As with the Roman Church's teaching on birth control, so, with the doctrine of transubstantiation; the sizable majority of contemporary American Roman Catholics report that they do not believe the bread and wine are the body and blood of Jesus.[6] I wonder if the majority of American Adventists do not believe the Sabbath is holy in the sense that the day is literally a different kind of day from the other days of the week. My guess is, if asked they, like their fellow Catholic Christians, would deny that there is anything literally different about the Sabbath. We should greet the degeneration of Catholic conviction regarding the presence of the Lord in the sacrament with the same sort of sadness that is fitting with respect to Adventist failure to discern the transcendent in the Sabbath as literal and not merely as an echo in the form of a religious rule.

Even superficial consideration of the concept of transubstantiation leads me to conclude that the conviction that the Sabbath is literally holy should not seek to express itself in a specification of properties of the day that constitute its holiness or that supply the means of discernment of its character.

The third characteristic shared by the sacraments is that they are salvifically efficacious. Again, we may learn from sacramental teaching regarding the Eucharist. The experience of holiness, of being itself, of God, in the eucharist is received through an act of obedience to the command, "this do in remembrance of me." It is precisely the remembering of Jesus that imparts to the experience of being, consciousness of liberation. The story of Jesus is the record of abundance, the fullness of being, that liberates from sin, suffering, and death. Obedience to the command to remember is already the beginning of liberation from the alienation of disobedience that is isolation of the self in itself, isolation that is an act of denial suppressing consciousness of difference. As Jesus taught, it is just in the loss of the self in submission to the command to remember that infinite being is given to

the self. Importantly, and herein is a profound truth of sacramental faith, it is not the obedience that returns the self to itself. Rather the possibility of obedience is created in the gift of holiness which commands remembrance. "This is my body" precedes "this do in remembrance of me." If holiness were not given, remembrance could not exceed nostalgia. Experience of the transcendent God uniquely present in the Sabbath is likewise not an achievement of obedience. It is the reception of a gift.

The Sabbath is salvifically efficacious through the power of its saving grace, which is the presence of the holy. The Sabbath commandment enshrines grace in the law.[7] The command is to cease from work. One cannot work on the Sabbath and taste its liberty.[8] And one cannot make not working a work of observance and taste the liberty available in it. The life of Jesus reveals both that the human condition is corrupted by sin, suffering, and death, and that the will of God is to liberate humanity from the conditions of its bondage. The Sabbath offers the experience of liberation now. Indeed, the saving grace of the Sabbath is, in an important sense, superior to, more fundamental than, the saving grace of the Eucharistic food. Those who do not exist cannot eat. The Sabbath is the gift of being from the one for whom time is the inalienable possession of every possibility. The one who never fails to have time gives time to us. To be is to have time. To not have time is not to be.

This ontological character of the Sabbath, that in it the God who is the one who cannot fail to be, allows us to participate in the necessity of His being, has psychological significance as an experience of liberation. All our work is exertion devoted to possession of being, something which sin makes us negate, which suffering makes us regret, and which death finally takes from us. Sabbath gives us being and calls us simply to be. We are able to rest from the labor of clinging to being because the God of creation shares being, which requires no labor, with us.

It is to be expected that if one were to accept the central claim of this paper stated in summary form in the preceding paragraph, then one might seek to achieve explicit awareness of the liberating divine presence defining the Sabbath. In other words, they might seek to realize the real presence of God. A note of caution can be sounded with reference to C. S. Lewis's autobiography, titled *Surprised by Joy*. Lewis came to attribute his period of atheism in part to his agonizing efforts at prayer when at boarding school. Every night he would kneel by his bed and seek a "realization" of the presence of God. He would not allow himself to sleep until he had achieved a realization. He exhausted himself by this practice and dreaded bedtime as a result. Eventually he quit praying. We may learn from him. Just as we cannot supply a delineation of the specific divine presence in the Sabbath, so we also cannot master that presence in a realization of its truth. We may keep the Sabbath holy, because it is holy. Remembering that gives us liberty now from the labor of being.

Endnotes

1. R. Albert Mohler Jr., "Why I am a Baptist," *First Things*, no. 305: 48.

2. Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age,* (Cambridge: Belknap, 2018) may be the definitive study of this cultural phenomenon.

3.. Herbert Vorgrimmler, *Sacramental Theology* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1992), 27.

4. See Walter Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance: Saying No to the Culture of Now* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2017); Joseph Lieberman, *The Gift of Rest: Rediscovering the Beauty of the Sabbath* (Howard Books, 2012); Judith Shulevitz, *The Sabbath World: Glimpses of a Different Order of Time* (Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2011); A. J. Swoboda, *Subversive Sabbath: The Surprising Power of Rest in a Nonstop World* (Brazos Press, 2018).

5. It is very important to recall that the same set of issues inhere in the task of Christology. Appropriately, therefore, a recent proposal advances the idea that the incarnation be the model for understanding the Eucharist. See James M. Arcadi, *An Incarnational Model of the Eucharist* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

6. https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/08/05/transubstantiation-eucharist-u-s-catholics/

7. My wife, Adele Waller, taught me to see that the Sabbath is the grace in the law.

8. A word to the doers of good works on the Sabbath, deck builders, house painters, street sweepers, and performers of elective surgery, to name work friends of mine have engaged in on the Sabbath that they justified with reference to Jesus's claim that His father worked, and He works, on the Sabbath; when you can speak, and by speaking produce the fruits of your labor, then I will have no quarrel with your "working" on the Sabbath as Jesus worked.

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KEYWORDS: Sabbath healing-as-theological-performance, illness vs. disease, Pilch-Crossan model, structural and societal change

WHY DID JESUS HEAL ON THE SABBATH?:

What Jesus's Most Controversial Miracles Mean for Us Today

BY ANDY BLOSSER

Anyone who has been an Adventist (or a member of a Sabbath-keeping religious group) for long enough knows that there are myriad views about what types of things should not be done on Sabbath. Every cultural niche of Adventism has its list of taboos, along with legions of forward-thinking (and mostly younger) critics who seek to upend them.

These debates are all very fascinating, but they may have one major detrimental feature; obsession with determining what not to do on Sabbath may distract us from the more important task of figuring out what we *should* be doing on the day. "Rest" is the obvious answer. But what does resting mean, especially in the complex twenty-first-century world where one person's "rest" might be another person's hard labor? (A personal example: As a person with a sedentary job, I like to indulge in physical exercise as "rest." Meanwhile, my partner—who works on her feet in the medical field all week—finds "rest" to be more literal.) What, then, should Sabbath's positive agenda be?

These debates are all very fascinating, but they may have one major detrimental feature; obsession with determining what not to do on Sabbath may distract us from the more important task of figuring out what we should be doing on the day.

Surprisingly, most of the Bible says little about positive recommendations for Sabbath-keeping. The Pentateuch commands rest and rest-giving (Exod. 20:8–11; Deut. 5:12–15) and calls the day a "holy convocation" (Lev. 23:3), but gives few details about what people were expected to spend their time doing on the day. Nevertheless, there is one category of texts that seem to give Christian Sabbath-observers a specific recommendation for what Sabbath-keepers should aim to accomplish. Furthermore, I will argue that the deeply practical implications of these texts have not been fully grasped by most Christians.

Jesus's Sabbath Healings

Controversies over Jesus's Sabbath healing are found throughout the Gospels (Matt. 12:1–14; Mark 2:23–3:6; Luke 6:1–11; John 5:1–18; 9:1–41). The basic narrative in every instance is always the same; Jesus stands in public view of all the religious authorities, and He deliberately—in the cheekiest way possible—heals someone, provoking outrage from the officials. Consider, for example, Luke 6:6–11:

> On another Sabbath He had gone to synagogue and was teaching. There happened to be a man in the congregation whose right arm was withered; and the lawyers and the Pharisees were on the watch to see whether Jesus would cure him on the Sabbath, so that they could find a charge to bring against Him. But He knew what was in their minds and said to the man with the withered arm, "Get up and stand out here." So he got up and stood there. Then Jesus said to them, "I put the question to you: is it permitted to do good or to do evil on the Sabbath, to save life or to destroy it?" He looked round at them all and then said to the man, "Stretch out your arm." He did so, and his arm was restored.

Note that Jesus is not asked by anyone to perform this miracle—even by the disabled man himself. Jesus seeks him out to heal him precisely because He wants to make a point about Sabbath, for "he knew what was in their minds." Jesus aims at presenting a particular theology of Sabbath before His viewers. The same type of Sabbath healing-as-theological-performance is also visible in Luke 14:1–6.[1] In these passages, Jesus's praxis shows that healing on the Sabbath is not incidental, but is central to the purpose of the day. It is not that Jesus is "caught" healing and contrives a justification for why it was acceptable to do it. Rather, Jesus deliberately makes healing an integral part of the ritual of Sabbath.

The fact that Jesus's Sabbath healings were intentional—combined with the fact that they appear frequently within the Gospels—suggests that they are ripe with theological and ethical meaning. Clearly, both Jesus and the Gospel writers wanted to make a point about how Sabbath should be observed. What is that point? It seems straightforward; Sabbath is a time for healing. If, as Jesus says, "the one who believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and even greater works than these" (John 14:12), we should imitate Jesus by using Sabbath as a time to heal. But this raises another question—an absolutely essential one. What were Jesus's healings all about in the first place?

Defining Jesus's Healings

In the modern world, influenced by the development of scientific medicine, there is a specific meaning to the word "healing." We tend to think of healing as solving biological problems. Even when we refer to "mental illness" we typically reduce it to various chemical imbalances, some of which can be repaired by correctly administered therapeutic drugs. However, this was not always the case.

In their work, Bible scholars John J. Pilch and John Dominic Crossan assess the meaning "healing" might carry in non-Western societies, particularly in ancient Mediterranean peasant communities.[2] To illuminate what Jesus was doing through His miracles, they make a key distinction between *disease* and *illness*, a conceptual binary first formulated by Arthur Kleinmann.[3] Diseases are bodily malfunctions that impair physical health, resulting from pathogens, chemical imbalances, or toxins. Modern medicine, as a rule, attempts to cure diseases. Illnesses are different, though closely related. An illness is a broader

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The story of Jesus healing the man crippled with dropsy on the Sabbath in Luke 14 is followed by several stories in which Jesus advocates welcoming disabled persons ("the blind, the crippled, and the lame") into banquet celebrations.

form of social or political toxicity that often gives rise to disease. You cannot cure an illness with a drug or surgical procedure. Illnesses can only be cured by changing a person's social standing or personal circumstances.

Pilch points out that "biomedical specialists (who address disease) tend to ignore the sick person's account of the experience and prefer to rely on laboratory tests for 'the truth.'"[4] To a large extent, this method works. By separating subjective factors from the analysis and treatment, modern medicine formulates general practices that can correct numerous ailments. The only flaw is that this process is incomplete. Pilch observes that this is where non-Western cultures—like the ancient eastern Mediterranean culture of Jesus's time—may do a better job. For such cultures, the act of "healing" aims at doing more than just curing the disease; it also attempts to change the symbolic meaning of the suffering person's experience, as well as that person's life circumstances. Pilch describes the role of healing rituals in these societies, contrasting them with the modern medical approach:

> Healing is directed toward illness—that is, the attempt is made to provide personal and social meaning for the life problems created by sickness. Treatment, of course, can be concerned with one or the other aspect of a human problem (disease or illness) and either or both can be successfully treated. The complaint against modern biomedicine is that it is concerned only with "curing the disease" while the patient is searching for "healing of the illness." This dichotomy separates what nearly all human societies view as essential in healing—that is, some combination of symptom reduction along with other behavior or physical transformation that reflects that society's understanding of health and the provision of a new or renewed meaning in life for the sick person.[5]

In this framework, shamans, witch doctors, and other folkhealers are engaged in a symbolic process of societal restructuring. By "casting out a demon," placing a sacred substance on a person's diseased body part, or touching a person with a skin disease, they may not create a biological remedy, but they change the person's social position. In ancient honor/shame societies, this type of action could be pivotal for helping the person at every level of her/his life.

According to Pilch and Crossan, Jesus's healing miracles addressed illness, not disease. Of course, this could be a misleading distinction, because the two categories feed into each other, and the heavy dichotomy between disease and illness that Pilch and Crossan insist on is probably—in my view—overstated.[6] One might cure an illness, but that illness could be so closely connected to a specific disease that curing the one could look like curing the other. To give a contemporary example, a child might be suffering from migraines and vision problems as a result of bullying in school, and removing the child from the toxic situation (the illness) could result in an immediate cure from the physical malfunctions (the diseases). Nevertheless, I think the distinction remains helpful, because the technological bent of modern society easily forgets about the significance of illness. Returning to the example of the child bullied at school, one can easily imagine a temptation to give the child medications to address the diseases, rather than directly tackling the illness itself—which may in fact be a more difficult task.

According to Pilch, through His healing rituals Jesus "restored meaning to life and the sufferer [was] restored to purposeful living."[7] How did this happen exactly? Because Pilch and Crossan allow for the unreliability of the textual accounts in the Gospels, there is no solid answer

to this question from their work.[8] Nevertheless, using the anthropological insights they offer, we may infer that Jesus performed some type of symbolic actions which effectively changed the social status of the persons suffering from illnesses. In other words, healing restored their identity. For example, by putting His hands on people with severe psoriasis or women with menstrual disorders, Jesus was exercising a power to transform their socially imposed lack of dignity.[9] Healing also created a renewed functioning for the individual within the social system. This happened through radical table fellowship—what Crossan calls "open commensality." As David F. Watson points out, the story of Jesus healing the man crippled with dropsy on the Sabbath in Luke 14 is followed by several stories in which Jesus advocates welcoming disabled persons ("the blind, the crippled, and the lame") into banquet celebrations.[10] These persons could not contribute to the banquet. Some might argue that they were parasites (Ayn Rand would call them "looters"). But by honoring them at the banquet table, they would be designated as human beings whose value did not depend on their productivity.

Crossan also points out that healing illness could take the form of social resistance against an oppressive authority system that fosters indignity.[11] For example, the exorcism that took place in the region of the Gerasenes in Mark 5:1–17 clearly appears to be an act of coded anti-Roman resistance, given the unmistakable identity of the demons as "Legion."[12] The Roman governmental system was built around physical and financial force, instrumentalization of the poor, "lording it over" the unlucky multitudes, and simultaneously posing as a philanthropist (Mark 10:42). Jesus's regime overtly rejected all these features. By affirming the value and significance of people that the existing regime portrayed as worthless, Jesus expelled the "swine" mentality that typified the Roman government's ruling protocol.

Application: Healing Sabbath Observance

If Pilch and Crossan's model of healing holds weight (whatever its inadequacies), the implications for Sabbath are clear. If the Sabbath is made for healing, and healing is (at least in part) about addressing the structural and social illnesses that grip humanity, Sabbath must be intended for structural and social change. By healing on the Sabbath, Jesus showed that this day is a time in which inequalities should be remedied and the types of negative conditions that threaten life should be fixed. Sabbath and repairing the world are integrally related.

In Seventh-day Adventist theology, discussion has largely swirled around what day Sabbath is and what the origins of Sabbath are. Sabbath has been often framed as a *theonomous* institution to which we owe our allegiance. The problem with this focus is that it sidelines practical reflection on what Sabbath-keepers should accomplish for the world. Jesus's Sabbath observance indicates that the day serves a purpose: correcting those deeply entrenched circumstances that create illness.

This model of Sabbath observance has particular relevance for the current ecological crisis human beings face, as well as for smaller-scale crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic. When examining either of these problems, it may be tempting to focus on the diseases they create. Curing diseases is enormously important, of course. But even more important is addressing the social and political structures that give rise to these diseases—the complex of wellbeing factors that, in the Pilch-Crossan model, constitutes illness. In our world, Sabbath should be a time dedicated to addressing these structures.

For example, climate change functions as a disease. Its symptoms are poverty, inequality, mass migration, reduction of biodiversity, and others. Scientists who wish to cure the disease have one primary agenda—reducing greenhouse gas emissions. From a scientific perspective, this is all that is necessary. If emissions can be reduced, the symptoms will disappear, and the disease will be cured. However, this approach may not adequately address the illness itself, which is an unhealthy relationship between human beings and the earth. This relationship arises from an attitude in which humans take it as their responsibility to coercively manipulate earth's resources for the purpose of economic "advancement." Because our societies function through exploitation of the earth, we find ourselves unable to step outside of the matrix of ecological oppression in which we live. Every time we buy or sell (Rev. 13:17), we participate in this fundamentally unsound set of circumstances. We need scientists to find cures for this disease, but if we want a permanent fix, we also need healing miracles to address the illness itself.

Sabbath could be a time for healing this illness. Modeling themselves after Jesus, Sabbath-keepers could

intentionally employ the day as a time that changes the fundamental attitude of earth exploitation that frames nearly all our actions. In part, this may happen simply through the cessation of human activity. Even unintentionally, by desisting from shopping and excess driving, Sabbath-keepers may exert a healing influence. But if Jesus's actions are a guide, we should do more than this. We should also create rituals that explicitly challenge the illness of earth exploitation. For example, some Sabbath practitioners associated with the "Green Sabbath Project" have used rituals such as ecologically friendly communal meals and other consciousness-raising events to highlight Sabbath's relevance to our environmental illness.[13]

This type of direct Sabbath healing could also involve focused actions to help those who suffer from ecological illness. For example, Sabbath-keepers could use the day to offer locally sourced, carbon-friendly food to individuals and families who normally could not afford it. Sabbath-keepers could offer "greening" services such as insulating houses or repairing bicycles. These activities would operate on the level of curing the disease (reducing carbon emissions), but they would also function to heal the illness, by highlighting a different mentality toward the earth, time, and human relationships.

It is important to realize that this activity may look like "work" and traditional Sabbath-keepers might balk at doing them. This is why it is crucial for theological educators to emphasize that they are activities that fall in line with Jesus's own healing activity, which was itself criticized as "work" by some traditionalists of His day. This is another place where the distinction between disease and illness becomes crucial. If we think of Jesus's miracles as simple cures for diseases, we might argue that "work" on the Sabbath is only acceptable if we are faced with an urgent form of suffering that needs immediate repair. (Some Sabbath-keepers might use the classic phrase, "If it could be done on any other day of the week it shouldn't be done on Sabbath.") But once we realize that Jesus's actions went beyond simply curing diseases, we discover an ethical summons to make Sabbath a day for total transformation of the circumstances that lead to suffering.

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Sabbath-keepers could use the day to offer locally sourced, carbon-friendly food to individuals and families who normally could not afford it.

These ethical applications could extend to other areas besides climate change, which I do not have space here to fully address. The COVID-19 pandemic has obviously involved a disease, but at the same time, its severity partly results from a societal illness. This is demonstrated by the fact that infection and death rates have been much higher among minorities and the poor. The virus has also functioned as a result of a disconnected social culture in which responsibility for the collective welfare of others has been sidelined in favor of unfettered personal freedom. Sabbath has immense relevance for healing these dimensions of illness as well.

Conclusion

The idea that Sabbath healing should take the form of social restructuring might seem strange to modern readers. Perhaps part of the reason this understanding of healing could seem foreign to us is that we tend to think in a spiritual/physical binary. As Chris Doran points out, "The radical dichotomies between body and soul or heaven and Earth or human and nonhuman have caused such deep schisms in our ways of thinking and living that it appears to many outside of Christianity that Christians have forgotten the very nature and effect of Jesus's healing ministry on people."[14] The type of healing Jesus conducted embraced the entire person, drawing together the physical, political, and spiritual aspects of that person's life. This idea of healing is perhaps best captured by the KJV's translation of the Greek *hugieis* as "whole." For example, when Jesus encountered a paralyzed man on the Sabbath in John 5:6, He asked him "Wilt thou be made whole?" From a socio-political perspective, the man's response is fascinating: "Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool: but while I am coming,

Once we realize that Jesus's actions went beyond simply curing diseases, we discover an ethical summons to make Sabbath a day for total transformation of the circumstances that lead to suffering.

another steppeth down before me." In other words, the man's problem is not merely a biological infirmity. He is marginalized—left out of the standard structures of wellbeing. Jesus heals him not only by repairing his body but by making him "whole." In like manner, Sabbath observers should aspire to Sabbaths of "wholeness"—days on which we heal the broken relationships we have with each other and with our planet.

Endnotes

1. The passage reads: "One Sabbath He went to have a meal in the house of a leading Pharisee; and they were watching Him closely. There, in front of Him, was a man suffering from dropsy. Jesus asked the lawyers and the Pharisees: 'Is it permitted to cure people on the Sabbath or not?' They said nothing. So He took the man, cured him, and sent him away. Then He turned to them and said, 'If one of you has a donkey or an ox and it falls into a well, will he hesitate to haul it up on the Sabbath day?' To this they could find no reply." Once again, Jesus appears to be conducting the healing precisely as a demonstration of proper Sabbath observance.

2. See John J. Pilch, *Healing in the New Testament: Insights from Medical and Mediterranean Anthropology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000) and John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1991). Crossan's work draws extensively on Pilch's—thus some scholars refer to their approach as the "Pilch-Crossan Model." See Jan-Olav Henriksen and Karl Olav Sandnes, *Jesus as Healer: A Gospel for the Body* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016), 25–40. For an overview of the different approaches to Jesus's healings in New Testament scholarship over the last century see Bernd Kollmann, *Neutestamentliche Wundergeschichten: Biblisch-theologische Zugange und Impulse für die Praxis* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2002), 137–166.

3. According to Kleinmann, "Disease refers to a malfunctioning of biological and/or psychological processes, while the term illness refers to the psychological experience and meaning of perceived disease. Illness includes secondary personal and social responses to a primary malfunctioning (disease) in the individual's physiological or psychological status." See Arthur Kleinmann, *Patients and Healers in the Context of Culture: An Exploration of the Borderland between Anthropology, Medicine and Psychiatry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 172.

4. John J. Pilch, "Insights and Models from Medical Anthropology for Understanding the Healing Activity of the Historical Jesus," *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 52, no. 1 (1995), 317.

5. Pilch, "Insights and Models," 320.

6. This is a common criticism of Pilch and Crossan, offered most trenchantly by Pieter F. Craffert, "Medical Anthropology as an Antidote for Ethnocentrism in Jesus Research? Putting the Illness-Disease Distinction in Perspective," *Harvard Theological Studies* 67, no. 1 (2011): 12–13. Craffert alleges that the Pilch-Crossan model too easily dismisses the legitimacy of bodily malfunction as a problem for ancient collectivist societies. One could not simply heal an illness in a strictly separate way from healing a disease. I tend to agree with Henriksen and Sandnes, who argue that "Pilch and Crossan were simultaneously right and wrong. Their observations on health and a collectivistic culture are basically relevant, but they oversimplify complex and complicated matters" (Henriksen and Sandnes, *Jesus as Healer*, 31). It could be that the claim that Jesus ignored the body when performing healings is itself an imposition of a type of bodily/social dualism

7. Pilch, *Healing in the New Testament*, 14.

8. Crossan points out that "no single healing or exorcism is securely or fully historical in its present narrative form, although historical kernels may be discernible in a few instances." See John Dominic Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity: Discovering What Happened in the Years Immediately After the Execution of Jesus* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1999), 302.

9. This aspect of the healing stories is noted by Wendy Cotter, especially with regard to the story of the blind beggar Bar-Timaeus and the various stories of leper healing. See Wendy Cotter, *The Christ of the Miracle Stories: Portrait through Encounter* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 19–75.

10. David F. Watson, "Luke-Acts," in *The Bible and Disability: A Commentary*, eds. Sarah J. Melcher, Mikeal C. Parsons, and Amos Yong (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2017), 315–317.

11. Crossan proposes that "besides *supportive companionship* and *religious faith*, the practice of *covert resistance* can contribute to healing" (Crossan, The Birth of Christianity, 301).

12. Crossan notes: "The demon is both one and many; is named Legion, that fact and sign of Roman power; is consigned to swine, that most impure of Judaism's impure animals; and is cast into the sea, that dream of every Jewish resister. And it may be left open whether the exorcist is asked to depart because a cured demoniac is not worth a herd of swine or because the people see quite clearly the political implications of the action." See John Dominic Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994), 90. Crossan's understanding of exorcism healing is connected to anthropological work on demon possession that points to political oppression as a key factor in the rise of possession disorders. For an example of this work see Ian M. Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion: An Anthropological Study of Spirit Possession and Shamanism* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1971), 31, 35.

13. See www.greensabbathproject.net

14. Chris Doran, *Hope in the Age of Climate Change: Creation Care This Side of the Resurrection* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2017), 11–12.

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KEYWORDS: Sabbath, disability perspectives, ableism, the cult of normalcy, the present-in-between

DISABLING SABBATH:
Practical Theological Possibilities in Calibrating Sabbath Time to "Crip Time"

BY VAUGHN NELSON

The question that animates this paper is, given critical insights from disability theology, how has Sabbath time become miscalibrated by its participation in ableist culture? Toward a partial response, I introduce general themes from disability studies and disability theology, followed by an illustrative summary of a disability hermeneutic applied to a Gospel healing story. I then turn specifically to a scholar who engages "crip theory," proposing that her notion of "crip time" disrupts and recalibrates Sabbath practice in ways that deepen Sabbath's faithful witness and liberative promise.

My drawing on disability theory is a result of my Adventist(ly) habituated self's encounter with Sharon Betcher's *Spirit and the Politics of Disablement* (2007) during my first semester of doctoral coursework. I literally caught my breath while reading her critique of the way religious discourse around "wholeness" can too easily slip into complicity with consumer capitalism's never-ending quest for self-improvement and fixing "brokenness."[1] (I repeated to many listeners that, until that moment, I thought the only questions prompted by the mission statement of my neighborhood medical school—"To Make Man Whole"—were about gendered language.) My attention captured, I then started hearing echoes of another Adventist pillar in the disability literature—but this time as a potential untapped partnership. I heard, and saw, Sabbath all over the place. Disability theorists and theologians, for example, make strong critiques of productivity as an explicit or implicit measure of worth; they might as well be referencing Walter Brueggemann's *Sabbath as Resistance* (2014) (and a few are).[2] Or, even more provocatively, Alison Kafer explains that crip theory (to be defined below) draws on "eccentric economic practices" that challenge "normative modalities" of "productivity, accomplishment, and efficiency."[3] Eccentric economic practices seem a tantalizing resource—or conversation partner, at least—for a *peculiar people's* Sabbath practices!

While there are occasional nods to Sabbath's potential *for* disability theology, my interest here is to reverse the interdisciplinary direction and explore what I think is the deep well of possibilities *in disability perspectives* to inform Sabbath theology and practice. This seems to me an advisable step prior to any (unsolicited) formulation of *Sabbath's* resources *for disability*. So, strange conversation

partners as they seem to some readers, I here propose a "cripped" calibration of Sabbath practice.

Theories and Theologies of Disability

Disability theology is a large umbrella term that points generally to theological reflection that begins with the experience of disability. Less theology about disability (as a theological problem[4]), it is, rather, theology that positions disability as a critical and creative source for theological knowledge.[5] Like the disability-studies scholars on whom they draw, disability theologians push back against a "medical model" of disability, which locates disability in the individual's physical difference, and which then posits a physiological cure as the preferred (and obvious) solution. Instead—or perhaps, in addition—they adopt something closer to a "social model" of disability, which locates disability in the ableist social norms and structures that narrowly define what is "normal." In this view, the problem is less with paralysis in itself and more with the lack of ramps.[6] Disability theorists have had productive partnerships with critical theories of the social construction of identity and the body.[7] From Foucault's *biopower* to Judith Butler's *performativity*, theories that uncover how socio-political systems shape the materiality of the body, and how identities like gender are constituted in repeated performance of social norms (rather than arising from some prior biological human "essence"), are powerful allies in disability theory's attempts to show how disability is more about social definitions of *normal* and *abnormal* than about physical and mental differences.

But not only has disability theory gained from social constructionism, it also pushes back in generative ways. Disability scholars contribute to a broader critique that strong constructionism, with its incisive focus on discourse, risks losing sight of materiality and bodily agency. As Tom Siebers puts it, "The disabled body seems difficult for the theory of social construction to absorb: disability is at once its best example and a significant counterexample."[8] The experience of physical pain that accompanies many forms of disability—and, in cases of chronic pain or illness, may itself be the disabling impairment—provides the clearest trouble for an un-nuanced social model.[9] To be sure, psychic pain is often the result of ableist constructs; but some bodies carry a surplus of pain that exceeds discursive boundaries and "hovers over innumerable daily actions."[10] This nuancing of social constructivist conceptions of identity is one place where I find disability theory particularly promising as theory. Disability theorists keep bodies always in view, while still attending to the social and power discourses that create unlivable[11]/disabled realities.[12]

While Nancy Eiesland's 1994 book, *The Disabled God*, is an important starting point for disability theology, Tom Reynolds's book, *A Vulnerable Communion*, is a somewhat more recent example. Reynolds helpfully sets the stage by framing disability as a "physiologically rooted social performance."[13] As noted above, disability theory wants to hold together social construction and real physiological differences. In that mode, Reynolds offers the following definition:

> [D]isability is a term naming that interstice where (1) restrictions due to an involuntary bodily impairment, (2) social role expectations, and (3) external physical/social obstructions come together in a way that (4) preempts an intended participation in communal life.[14]

Reynolds draws on themes from disability studies to focus attention on the "cult of normalcy" at work in

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In both the Synoptics and the Fourth Gospel, Sabbath is often "a day for healing," but healing narratives are, for many disability readers and scholars, uncomfortable sites where sin and disability are too easily conflated—in the history of interpretation, but also likely in the imaginary of the biblical world itself.

Lawrence's crip-tic reading exemplifies the resistance in disability theory and theology to an "ideology of cure," or a "curative imaginary," or even the "politics of rescue"—the refusal, or inability, to imagine anything other than full restoration of "normal" body function as constituting healing.

society and often by extension the church. These norms set the rules of the game in which bodies gain recognition and value ("body capital") in the "economies of exchange" that make up our social interactions and expectations.[15] Because the norms in our society are so aligned (pressured in no small part by market capitalism) with values of productivity, individual achievement, beauty, and efficiency, they not only reinforce the marginalization of persons constituted as disabled, but they deeply impoverish us all.[16]

Reynold then turns to center disability's themes of vulnerability and interdependence as the norm of his theological anthropology—the norm that is revealed in the "weakness" of God in Christ. In doing so, he also repositions self-sufficiency, independence, efficiency, productivity, and achievement as potential distortions of which to be wary, rather than as norms to which to aspire. Already, I suspect the resonance with Sabbatarian values are evident—and these sorts of recurring themes are what drew me to disability theology in the first place. To push further, though, I turn to an author who works in a space that is a cousin of disability theory, called "crip theory."

Crip Interventions in Sabbath Space and Time

In contrast to a version of disability-rights activism that primarily aims at inclusion and access of persons with disability within social norms and institutions, crip theory aims more at deeply questioning, troubling, and disrupting those norms altogether, rather than gaining inclusion in them. The use of "crip" represents a reappropriation of the pejorative term "cripple." I begin with a summary of a "crip-tic" reading of the story of the man at the pool in John 5. Louise Lawrence's use of a "crip hermeneutic" provides a helpful entry into some critical themes of disability studies generally and crip theory specifically, and her reading of this particular Sabbath healing hints at some potential connections to Sabbath that I will further explore below.

A "Crip-tic" Sabbath Healing

In both the Synoptics and the Fourth Gospel, Sabbath is often "a day for healing,"[17] but healing narratives are, for many disability readers and scholars, uncomfortable sites where sin and disability are too easily conflated—in the history of interpretation, but also likely in the imaginary of the biblical world itself.[18] John 5:1–18 narrates the story of the man by the pool near Jerusalem's Sheep Gate who had been "ill" for thirty-eight years.[19] He has no one to help him get to the water, and someone else always gets there first. When Jesus encounters the man on the Sabbath, he tells him to "rise up," take up his mat, and walk.

As Lawrence notes, the history of interpretation is replete with casual (and extra-textual) diagnoses of the man's moral failings. A compilation of cherished scholars makes for a disappointing, if not disturbing, caricature of this disabled person: With the man's "crotchety grumbling" (Brown), he makes a "feeble excuse" to Jesus (Dodd) and blames others (Culpepper) for his situation that is really (according to Westcott) the result of his apathy.[20] No doubt, a disability hermeneutic is in order. Proceeding with her crip-tic reading, which she admits may be somewhat "against the grain" of the text,[21] Lawrence questions whether a "cure" of the man's illness is required by the text. She notes that Jesus's imperative to get up (ἔγειρε) appears elsewhere as "raise up," "stir up," "bring into being," or even" "rise up in arms." Resisting what might be ableist assumptions, Lawrence suggests this imperative could be read as a "provocative invitation to display his disability rather than a demand for curing it."[22]

Lawrence also zeros in on the slow pace of the man's movement, a reminder that a body's moving through

space is connected to time. Others are always faster, he confesses, and this has persisted for thirty-eight long years. To great effect, Lawrence pulls in a story of the performance artist Noëmi Lakmaier's 2012 day-long public crawl from London's East End to the downtown Gherkin building and imagines the possibility in the text that the healed man continues to move slowly away from the pool, perhaps limping, carrying his mat. Explicit mentions of walking and leaping are, indeed, absent from this pericope.

When the man is confronted by the religious leaders, their complaint is about his carrying the mat on Sabbath—an offense, Lawrence points out, only if the bed is empty; carrying the mat would be fine if the lame man were in it.[23] Is the implied offense, then, a limping man who is moving on his own beyond the bounds of the pool, Lawrence wonders. He has transgressed spatial boundaries, and in doing so has also transgressed predefined categories of aesthetic (Sabbath) possibility. A lame man could be carried on a mat, or he could be begging by the pool, or he could be walking and leaping and cured, but he cannot be *limping away healed*. "In this hypothesised crip-tic enactment," Lawrence writes, "the man at the pool defiantly leaves his marginal space, and purposefully displays his disability to move slowly but subversively to the temple to stake his place within it."[24] This "embodiment of slow time" is "a protest against . . . cur[ative] normalisation."[25]

Lawrence's crip-tic reading exemplifies the resistance in disability theory and theology to an "ideology of cure,"[26] or a "curative imaginary,"[27] or even the "politics of rescue"[28]—*the refusal, or inability, to imagine anything other than full restoration of "normal" body function as constituting healing*.[29] That this subversively slow and public bodily movement happens on Sabbath is something Lawrence leaves unexplored, but points to precisely the Sabbath potential I want to develop. First, though, I turn to crip theory to further nuance and develop a critique of a curative imaginary, its relation to time, and an alternative in "crip time."

Curative Time and Crip Time

Alison Kafer works creatively at the intersection of feminism, queer theory, and crip theory. Though admittedly not the most likely source to which many readers would turn for a Sabbath theology, I find her analysis of "curative time" and "crip time" brimming with possibilities for a *peculiar* Adventist imagination. Bringing disability to bear on matters of time, Kafer notes how extensively biomedicine utilizes time-oriented terminology in classifying disease, illness, and disability: chronic, intermittent, acquired, congenital, developmental, and delayed; frequency, incidence, occurrence, relapse, remission, prognosis, and diagnosis. In a sense, then, *disability* is marked by a deviation from what *should* happen when, according to "normal" time.

As a response, Kafer deploys the notion of "crip time" to trouble these normative conceptions of time. Disability, in practical ways, demands reimagining what *can* and *should* happen in time, calling for a reorientation to time. Kafer proposes, "Rather than bend disabled bodies and minds to meet the clock, *crip time* bends the *clock* to meet disabled bodies and minds."[30] One simple example of such reorientation is what she calls "anticipatory scheduling," a time-oriented practice of people who live with chronic pain or fatigue. She explains:

> For those who live with chronic fatigue or pain . . . the present moment must often be measured against the moment to come: if I go to this talk

istockphoto.com/lizkes

One simple example of such reorientation is what she calls "anticipatory scheduling," a time-oriented practice of people who live with chronic pain or fatigue.

> now, I will be too tired for that class later; if I want to make that show tomorrow night, I need to stay home today.[31]

This is more than mere time management; in these cases, the costs of ignoring bodily limits are extraordinary. Another example of heightened negotiation of scheduling is practiced by those who depend on the schedules and availability of personal attendants. Kafer writes, intriguingly: "This idea of conserving energy, of anticipating . . . bucks American ideals of productivity at all costs, of sacrificing one's body for work." She insists that we understand "these practices of self-care not as preserving one's body for productive work but as refusing such regimes in order to make room for pleasure."[32]

There is much here already that resonates with Sabbath's resistance to the idols of productivity, but Kafer pushes crip time further. She describes a liminality, a disorienting suspension between past and future that disabled people are thrust into when a) it is assumed that they must long for a(n ideal) past body that they may or may not have ever had (she calls this "compulsory nostalgia"); or b) when it is inconceivable to others that disabled people might not wish for a future fix or cure ("curative imaginary"). Being caught between pasts and futures discursively constructed for them, disabled persons are offered presents that are unlivable, as she laments:

> [W]e lost what we had in the past, we exist in a present consumed by nostalgia for that loss, and we face futures far unlike the ones we had previously imagined. . . . The only culturally acceptable—culturally recognizable—future in this context is a curative one, one that positions a medicalized cure as just around the corner, as arriving any minute now. But this kind of cure-driven future positions people with disabilities in a temporality that cannot exist fully in the present, one where one's life is always on hold, in limbo, waiting for the cure to arrive.[33]

I want to press and carry forward this image of people with disabilities being caught up in a disorienting tug-of-war between past and future, memory and hope—between the compulsory nostalgia for "whole" bodies remembered and the curative imperative of "fixed" bodies wished for. Such limbo creates an "elsewhere and otherwise"[34] that can, in effect, deny disabled persons the pleasure of appreciating their bodies' present. Kafer is careful, however, not to invalidate the longings of those who would genuinely prefer a cure. Importantly, she directs her critique at the "curative imaginary" as distinct from "cure," so as not to preclude disabled people from navigating and forming their own unique relationships with medical intervention. The problem, she insists, is "an understanding of disability that not only *expects* and *assumes* intervention but also *cannot imagine or comprehend anything other than intervention*."[35] An imaginary, we might say, in which a healing story cannot possibly end happily with a limping man.

The problem, she insists, is "an understanding of disability that not only *expects* and *assumes* intervention but also *cannot imagine or comprehend anything other than intervention*.

This critical insight from crip theory sensitizes us to the ways in which a Sabbath imaginary may sometimes be framed precisely as oscillating between past and future, between a Paradise remembered and a Paradise regained.[36] And while I do not want to let go of the powerful impulses for justice embedded in an eschatological hope ("on Earth as it is in Heaven"), I do think that "crip time" and disability perspectives provide a useful opportunity to examine where our Sabbath ideals are truly proleptic Good News in-breaking from God's future, and where these ideals might reflect more our ableist projections onto God's future. We might ask, prompted by Kafer, whether the ideal pasts and ideal futures with which we construct our Sabbaths (inadvertently?) impose unlivable presents on some—for instance, those who do not easily perform the body capital that gains them recognition in

the cult of normalcy. In fact, along with several disability theologians, we might be particularly wary when the stories we tell in theological terms move so directly and so linearly from brokenness to wholeness, from illness to healing, even from death to resurrection, that they start to sound suspiciously similar to global capitalism's ideology of constant, eternal progress.[37]

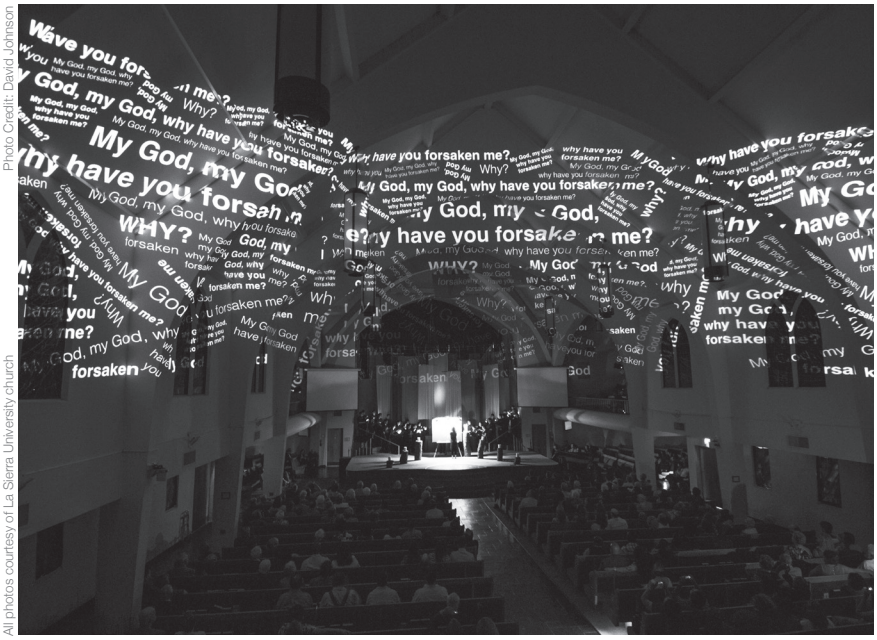
Again, I am not proposing that we abandon central and hope-filled elements of our Gospel story that celebrate both memory and hope. Rather, in the same way that Kafer moves with care so as not to foreclose on a disabled person's unique relationship with cure,[38] I want to push back on a *curative Sabbath imaginary*—that is, to disrupt a way of practicing Sabbath and Sabbatarian theology in which only certain narratives of healing, progress, and resolution are imaginable, in which bodies and their faith stories must bend to certain "normal" conceptions of what *should* happen *when* (and where)—whether in the construction and arrangement of our church buildings or the construction and arrangement of our theologies.

Sabbath Time Recalibrated: Patience and the Present-In-Between

As a modest gesture in that direction, I offer one possible way in which Sabbath practice and theology might be responsive (calibrated) to crip times and bodies. In terms of practice, I have been deeply shaped by the yearly "Silent Sabbath" service at La Sierra University Church. Each year since 2011, the congregation has participated in a four-day remembrance of the Passion, from Thursday to Sunday. And not surprisingly, given the liturgical habits of an Adventist congregation, the most-attended moment in the weekend is not Resurrection Sunday, but rather Silent Sabbath. Now, one could worry, pastorally or theologically, that such a habit reenforces forgetfulness of the end of the story—the cross is not the last word, after all, resurrection is. But this La Sierra congregation, led from the practice's beginning by lead pastor Chris Oberg and associate Dewald Kritzinger, has instead opened itself to the tension and asked what such a Sabbatarian peculiarity might offer.

In the more recent years that I was a member of that pastoral team and experienced that practice myself, what I found compelling is the gift that arrives from this strange reversal of Easter emphasis. Rather than simply shifting resurrection celebrations to Sabbath service (as is common in Adventist churches), Silent Sabbath pauses and leans into the very darkness, and indeed trauma, of that day in between cross and resurrection. The Sabbath service is neither quite Friday nor Sunday, but rather a slow remaining with tragedy intertwined with joy, loss interlaced with hope. This is an experience that resonates, I think, with a cripped intervention into simple, "normal" time.

In terms of theology, this practice converses



All photos courtesy of La Sierra University church

Photo Credit: David Johnson

Photo Credit: Daniel Bazan

Photo Credit: Karen Lancaster

Left: The La Sierra church sanctuary is covered with the words "My God, My God," projected on the ceiling for the Silent Sabbath service in 2014. Top right: Pastor Chris Oberg preaches at the program in 2016. Bottom right: Crosses are used for the program in 2012.

Sabbath time, when calibrated to crip time's resistance to compulsory pasts and futures, carries within itself rich potential to hold space in time for such a habituating practice that contributes to "bodily as well as cognitive"—and, I would add, affective—"shaping."

generatively with Shelly Rambo's work at the intersection of trauma studies and theology. In her book *Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining*, and subsequent work, Rambo seeks a theology that attends adequately to experiences of trauma, in which the repeated reliving of past pain haunts the present, rendering experiences of time as disrupted and disorganized. For Rambo, experiences of trauma—like crip interventions—challenge the adequacy of straight, linear conceptions of death-to-life redemption stories.[39] In a creative resourcing of the Farewell Discourse in John's Gospel and von Balthazar's theology of Holy Saturday, she proposes a theology, and indeed redemption, read "from the middle"[40]—a theology done while *remaining* and *abiding* in the in-betweenness and uncertainty of Holy Saturday.[41] In doing so, not only does she provide a way forward between the excesses of narrow atonement theologies or triumphalist resurrection accounts, she also opens up the sort of theological space attuned to cripped presents—a theological space that resists compulsory pasts and futures.

While I want to be careful not to equate trauma and disability—there are significant non-overlapping areas of each—I do think both discourses point in a common direction in terms of Sabbath's liberative potential. They suggest that we engage Sabbath's in-betweenness—not as an impatient and disorienting oscillation between paradise past and paradise future, but rather as a slow, embodied engagement with the present as *itself in some sense complete and good and holy*. Sabbath as a sacred palace in present time is obviously not new,[42] but crip- and trauma-informed scholars add critical attention to the ways in which normative frames that inscribe some bodies and some stories with a fundamental lack may indeed deprive those persons of the very present rest which Sabbath proclaims as a gift for all. *Bending bodies to meet normative frames—of time or space—risks, then, being profoundly anti-Sabbatarian.*

Instead, if Sabbath is to constitute a blessed moment in present time, we will need to include in its aims what Sharon Betcher envisions as a "restful openness" to the present, an ability to "forgiv[e] life . . . for not being ideal."[43] Far from abandoning the prophetic call to be restless with the *status quo*, such Sabbatarian slowness aims at reorienting our very beings, our affective and aesthetic responses, which—if Betcher is right—are at the root of our ableist aversion to the monstrosities of disability and other Others.[44]

Conclusion

I suspect that my pre-commitments about Sabbath are evident: that Sabbath practice and theology can be profoundly liberative gifts to a church and world marked by struggles for peace, justice, hospitality, and holy living. I am proposing that Sabbath time, when calibrated to crip time's resistance to compulsory pasts and futures, carries within itself rich potential to hold space in time for such a habituating practice that contributes to "bodily as well as cognitive"—and, I would add, affective—"shaping,"[45] cultivating capaciousness to the world. My argument is that engaging a spiritual practice of Sabbath time aligns with a cripped imaginary's expansive view of human interdependence and individuality—if Sabbath time is calibrated to crip time.

Looking forward, such calibration will include employing a "crip/tographical"[46] analysis to uncover where habits of hiding pain or disability might be present, whether in metaphorizing disability when reading Scripture and preaching or in the configuration of worship gathering space that marginalize or exclude. We will also need to attend to the ways in which our communication or our architecture habituates body/minds toward ableist conceptions of efficiency, productivity, and convenience and privileges bodies that can move more quickly than

others—and imagine ways of reconfiguring in order to rehabituate us in slow, cripped Sabbath time. We can ask how Sabbath might, as an *impractical* "palace in time,"[47] instill a certain patience in the way we move and the ways we arrange our bodies. My contention, my hope, then, is that the countercultural practices and perspectives of disability studies and the disability community help calibrate and bend Sabbath to realize more fully its witness to the God who seeks "a vulnerable communion"[48] with us all.

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Endnotes

1. Betcher, *Spirit and the Politics of Disablement*, 154.

2. For example, Betcher, "Crip/tography," 315.

3. Kafer, *Feminist, Queer*, Crip, 39.

4. Disability-as-theological-problem takes at least two forms: In one form, individual disabilities are identified by their divergence from (ableist) norms and as evidence of a created order broken by sin. Ignoring, shunning, or eradicating such individuals (often by the Church) is one tragic response to this framing, but a focus on faith healings and miracles (medical or otherwise) is another.
In another form, disability is employed as interesting test cases that trouble the edges of theological puzzles, perhaps stretching theological anthropology to be a bit more inclusive in defining "human nature," or pushing theodicy to account for otherwise "unimaginable" circumstances. While this approach may help to trouble various doctrinal formulations that have not adequately taken disability into account, the problem is that disability is always already positioned at the margins by such theologizing. The fact that the intellectually disabled person, for example, is placed as the subject of a debate about who/what counts as human does little to decenter, much less dismantle, ableism. See Creamer, *Disability and Christian Theology*, 97

5. In general, disability theology in this form follows other theologies of liberation in taking a praxis-oriented approach to theological method. Nancy Eiesland, whose *The Disabled God* pioneered an explicitly "liberatory theology of disability," draws in her method on Rebecca Chopp's "critical praxis correlation." Such a practical theological orientation works at the "interplay" of lived experience and prior theological knowledge. For Eiesland, this includes a "deliberate recognition" of disability experience; critical analysis of social theory, Church institutional practice, and Christian theology: and "the proclamation of emancipatory transformation." (Eiesland, 22) As a practical-theologian-in-training, I seek to do theological reflection at the intersection of theory and practice, and in this paper I aim to correlate critical questions raised by disability theories and theologies with my Adventist commitments to Sabbath theology and pastoral practice. See also Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 9

6. A note on terminology: Though language and terminology are always in renegotiation, it is common in disability literature to distinguish between an impairment, a disability, and a handicap. An *impairment* generally refers to a physical or mental difference itself that contributes to a *disability*, and disability is the limiting functional consequence of that impairment, which "interferes with a person's ability to walk, think, hear, learn, or see." Covey, *Social Perceptions*, 3. According to the Americans with Disabilities Act, a disability is "a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, a person who has a history or record of such an impairment, or a person who is perceived by others as having such an impairment." "Introduction to the ADA." If used at all, *handicap* refers to "the social disadvantage that results from an impairment or

disability." Covey, *Social Perceptions*, 3.

7. Siebers, "Disability in Theory," 739.

8. Siebers, "Disability in Theory," 740.

9. Creamer, *Disability and Christian Theology*, 27.

10. Siebers, "Disability in Theory," 744.

11. My reference to "unlivable life" recalls Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 14.

12. Such a return to material bodies aligns with the new materialism in theologian Mayra Rivera's *Poetics of the Flesh*.

13. Reynolds, *Vulnerable Communion*, 28.

14. Reynolds, *Vulnerable Communion*, 28.

15. Reynolds, *Vulnerable Communion*, 56.

16. Reynolds, *Vulnerable Communion*.

17. Brunt, *A Day for Healing*.

18. See Grant, "Reinterpreting the Healing Narratives"; Wilder, "On Christ and Healing."

19. ἀσθενείααὐτοῦ is weak, sick, ill; perhaps one of the blind, lame, or paralyzed, or something else

20. Lawrence, "Vital (Johannine) Signs," 261; Carter, "The Blind, Lame and Paralyzed," 131.

21. Lawrence, "Vital (Johannine) Signs," 258.

22. Lawrence, "Vital (Johannine) Signs," 266–67.

23. Lawrence, "Vital (Johannine) Signs," 268.

24. Lawrence, "Vital (Johannine) Signs," 268.

25. Lawrence, "Vital (Johannine) Signs," 271.

26. Clare, *Brilliant Imperfection*.

27. Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip*.

28. Betcher, *Spirit and the Politics of Disablement*, 81.

29. Importantly, Lawrence's reading also resists merely metaphorizing healing; instead, she insists that the subversive (and proud) "rising up" of the man to display his limping body is an embodied socio-political healing, resisting the either/or choice usually presented. For a more explicit critique of metaphorizing in this same passage, see Carter, "The Blind, Lame and Paralyzed."

30. Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip*, 27.

31. Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip*, 39.

32. Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip*, 39.

33. Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip*, 44.

34. Capon, *Bed and Board*, 152.

35. Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip*, 27. [emphasis mine]

36. I am confident that I am indebted for this language to Sigve Tonstad's memorable phrase "oscillates between memory and hope" (59) in *The Lost Meaning of the Seventh Day*—though I do not necessarily intend to reference that work here. In my reading of this chapter of Tonstad, he helpfully wishes to resist at least a nostalgic return to a paradise "before conflict" between God's "very good" and the serpent's "not good" (58). That said, it could be interesting for Kafer's analysis to push for language that allows for a more restful (Sabbath) present than "oscillation" evokes.

37. See Betcher, *Spirit and the Politics of Disablement*; Reynolds, *Vulnerable Communion*; and Eiesland, *The Disabled God*.

38. See also disability activist Eli Clare's profound reflections on learning nuance his critiques of and relationship to cure in *Brilliant Imperfection*.

39. In a section entitled "Redemption from the Middle," she writes: "Trauma studies challenge us to think about recovery differently and, in so doing, return us to its theological correlate—redemption. The temporality of trauma and the reality of its return make it difficult to conceive of recovery in linear terms, as something to get over or get beyond. . . . Dominant interpretations of salvation and redemption, filled with images of God's rescue and restoration, can easily join the chorus of voices that tell [Hurricane Katrina survivor] Deacon Lee and others to get over it. 'All things work together for good.' 'This is part of God's will.' These familiar assertions emerge from dominant redemptive narratives and may be complicit in covering over and eliding the suffering that remains." Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 156.

40. Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 156.

41. Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 161.

42. Heschel, *The Sabbath*.

43. Betcher, *Spirit and the Obligation of Social Flesh*, 133.

44. Betcher, *Spirit and the Obligation of Social Flesh*, 18.

45. Fulkerson, *Places of Redemption*, 49.

46. Betcher, "Crip/Tography"; Betcher, *Spirit and the Obligation of Social Flesh*.

47. Heschel, *The Sabbath*.

48. Reynolds, *Vulnerable Communion*.

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KEYWORDS: Sabbath, "God-fearers," restorative connection, let's keep talking about our doctrines

TIME TO START OVER:

Reconceiving Sabbath — A New Case for the Seventh Day

BY CHARLES SCRIVEN

In 1861, at the first step of church organization, Adventist pioneers J. N. Loughborough and James White stuck up a big red flag: a creed, said Loughborough, is "the first step of apostacy." A creed, said White, bars the way "to all future advancement." This perspective prevailed, and delegates to the Michigan Conference organizational meeting agreed, not on a statement of beliefs, but on a simple pledge: "We the undersigned," they said, "hereby associate ourselves together as a church, taking the name, Seventh-day Adventists, covenanting together to keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus Christ."

It would have been better, I think, if the pledge had begun with a phrase like "Thanks to the grace of God." Commitment *follows* divine initiative, after all. But if Loughborough, White, and other meeting delegates were nevertheless on to something, their wisdom fell from favor. Today, General Conference leaders support an official Statement of Fundamental Beliefs some 4,400 words long, and expect us to agree on all of them. But if in age, education, and culture we have different vantage points, and if in any case we "see through a glass darkly," that's bound *not* to happen. To expect sheer uniformity of doctrine can only arise from self-deception; it can only result in complacency, fraud, and intimidation.

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So, it's best to keep talking about our doctrines, best to think it normal to be aiming, always, at the "future

So, it's best to keep talking about our doctrines, best to think it normal to be aiming, always, at the "future advancement" James White was counting on. Doctrines are, to Christ's disciples, the *premises we live by*, and corrective attention to these premises is indispensable for the "building up of the body of Christ."

advancement" James White was counting on. Doctrines are, to Christ's disciples, the *premises we live by*, and corrective attention to these premises is indispensable for the "building up of the body of Christ."

Based on all this, I've been arguing in this series of short essays that it's time to "start over." As is perhaps always the case for religious communities, we are fragile, imperiled from within and without. Yet we are drawn together, many of us, grateful for purpose and hope, glad of the lifelong friendships and shared mission that Adventism seems to foster. Now, in this and one more essay, I want to illustrate how corrective conversation might renew and enliven two doctrines. Here I take up the Sabbath, later the Second Coming. Both pertain to our distinctiveness, both cry out for re-examination, and both offer strong stimulus to discipleship, the true point of Christian existence.

As to the Sabbath, let's begin with what we conventionally teach. My life-long participation in Adventist life, backed up by recent inquiry and conversation, leads me to suggest the following summary:

- At the culmination of creation week, God blessed and hallowed the seventh-day Sabbath. The Bible asks us to keep this day holy—by resting, worshipping together, and embracing a certain Sabbath asceticism. The seventh-day Sabbath is thus a requirement of divine law.
- According to the New Testament, Jesus and early believers, including Paul, honored the seventh-day Sabbath. Nothing in the New Testament indicates a shift from seventh-day to first-day observance of the Sabbath.
- Later, the Roman Catholic church, abetted by Constantine, made Sunday the Christian Sabbath, thereby instituting a practice directly contrary to God's will.
- Bible prophecy teaches that this same Catholic church, supported by apostate Protestantism and American political power, will in the Last Days compel Sunday observance. But the true Sabbath is, and will then come to prominence as, the crucial test of loyalty to God. Anyone who complies with the false Sabbath while fully aware of God's true intent will receive the "mark of the beast" and lose eternal life.

At least as early as the 1960s and '70s, a few Adventists began to read Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel's *The Sabbath*. The book lit a flame of humility and self-correction that was very nearly thrilling. In one part of the church—not a large part; one centered at some of our colleges and universities—Adventist reflection turned to Sabbath as a kind of emancipation. It put aside obsession with arithmetic, whether of the proper rest day or of the long apocalyptic timeframes that were said to culminate in a Last-Days Sabbath crisis. Reflection focused instead on the *point*. Over the decades since, agreements have emerged about the *meaning* of the seventh day, about how Sabbath rest and celebration constitute a *gift*, not just an obligation. To me, these agreements—what amount to a New Case for the Sabbath—have shed a healing light. Among more than a few, they have awakened deeper, if also less unquestioning, loyalty to the Adventist heritage. Here is my own summary of these agreements:

- The Sabbath is first of all a matter of *grace*. It is a blessing from God, offering rest, festivity, and contemplation against soul-crushing busyness and the deadening tyranny of things. Keeping it, as God

asks us to do, is thus reception of a gift that sustains human betterment.

- Embracing the Sabbath does not require *literalism* with respect to the Genesis creation account. The story conveys a spiritual point; namely, that the God-made world is "very good" and that humans receive an honored place and role in that world.
- According to the Ten Commandments (Deut. 5 as well as Ex. 20), Sabbath rest memorializes not only the goodness of creation but also the divine commitment to rescue from forced labor. Sabbath-keeping awakens passion and hope with respect to liberty from oppression and justice for all.
- The proper link between the Sabbath and apocalyptic prophecy is that the Sabbath strengthens the very posture apocalyptic prophecy encourages. Such prophecy has a meaning that, unlike mere prediction, is both moral and motivating. It opposes unchecked human power and affirms the ultimate victory of God. Both apocalyptic prophecy and the Sabbath experience stimulate resistance and renewal, not resignation and escape from responsibility.
- It is wrong to stigmatize all of Roman Catholicism for a tragic, early mistake. Without surrendering responsibility for theological critique (and for considering critique directed to us), the New Case for the Sabbath affirms the value of mutual respect and cooperation among the varying strands of Christian commitment.

But a development that goes beyond these five agreements, one that concerns the *seventh-day-ness* of the Sabbath, is now a-borning, and I have begun to immerse myself in the historical scholarship that undergirds it. In this light I now state an argument that may be new for many.

- Jesus was an observant Jew whose witness stood within the Jewish tradition of give and take concerning the meaning of the covenant. He certainly embraced the Sabbath. Paul and first-century Jewish Christians were also observant Jews.
- Many synagogues at the time of Christianity's beginnings welcomed gentiles. These gentiles could become Jewish converts, or, if they did not undergo circumcision, participate in the Sabbath and the synagogue experience as "God-fearers." A substantial number of God-fearers joined Christian assemblies within their synagogue communities, becoming *eschatological* (and Sabbath-observing) gentiles in accordance with the prophetic vision (Is. 2:1-2; Mic.

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4:1-2; Zech. 2:11; see especially Is. 56:6,7.)

- By early in the second century, hints of Jew hatred appeared in now-dominantly-gentile Christian assemblies. A shift away from the seventh-day Sabbath began. In the fourth century, Constantine threw the weight of empire behind Sunday as a universal (not only Christian) day of rest. (His legislation did not even mention Christ and the resurrection.)
- Eventually, Jews and Christians fully separated. Christians rationalized this as "supersession," or replacement of God's Chosen People, even though the apostle Paul had said (Romans 11) that the covenant with the Jews never expires, and that gentile Christians, as "branches" grafted onto the supporting "root," should "stand in awe" of the Jews.
- As a sign of grace and reminder of essential biblical conviction, the Sabbath fosters connection—*restorative* connection—with Christianity's Jewish heritage. Despite Christian oppression, the Chosen People have excelled, after all, not only in partnership with God toward creative transformation, but also in resistance to abusive power. By contrast, Christianity, especially since Constantine, has lapsed often into otherworldliness—escapism, resignation, irresponsibility—or even worse, into unscrupulous partnership with political authority.
- Conventional Adventist teaching on the Sabbath evokes proud separation *from other Christians*. The New Case for the Sabbath evokes humble solidarity *with those who constitute the "root" of Christian existence*. Christians who (along with Jesus and Paul) celebrate the biblical Sabbath thus give indispensable witness not only to the wider world but also to other Christians. Just how witness to the Christian movement's essential Jewishness could bear fruit may elude our full understanding. But suppose that, by God's grace, it helped cleanse Christianity of disdain for others; or impede disastrous drift into "Christian nationalism"; or transform pious pessimism into active hope. Any of these would make such witness a blessing to all humanity.

The seventh-day Sabbath, properly conceived, thus opens one pathway—not a shortcut, but still a pathway—to what in this skeptical age must be a singularly important goal: the redemption of Christian community and witness.

**My remarks are informal and not footnoted, but I may here mention, as examples, Amy-Jill Levine, Paula Fredriksen, Gabrielle Boccaccini, and Jacques Doukhan.*

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KEYWORDS: civil rights, Martin Luther King, Selma, Vietnam War, injustice

SPIRITUAL AUDACITY: *Abraham Heschel's Prophetic Role*

BY BARRY CASEY

In Martin Doblmeier's new documentary, *Spiritual Audacity: The Abraham Joshua Heschel Story*, Heschel emerges not only as the foremost interpreter of the Hebrew prophets in the twentieth century, but also as a prophet himself. With his cloud of white hair, his expressive eyes, and his rabbinic beard, he looks every inch a latter-day Micah bearing witness to walking humbly with justice in one hand and mercy in the other.

"Remember, in a free society some are guilty but all are responsible." Heschel's ringing words plunge us into the tumult of the civil rights struggle of the '60s, the protests against the Vietnam War, and the turnabout toward the Jews by the Catholic Church during Vatican II. Heschel plays a leading role in all three of these history-making social movements.

Doblmeier's documentary approach surfaces the formation, the passion, and the legacy of his subjects. We learn about Heschel's birth in Warsaw, Poland in 1907, his family's long lineage of distinguished rabbis, his move to the University of Berlin at twenty to study philosophy

All photos courtesy of Journey Films

Martin Doblmeier (left) interviews Pulitzer Prize winning historian Taylor Branch.

With his cloud of white hair, his expressive eyes, and his rabbinic beard, he looks every inch a latter-day Micah bearing witness to walking humbly with justice in one hand and mercy in the other.

All photos courtesy of Journey Films

Top left: Heschel at Hebrew Union College (© Susannah Heschel) Left: Heschel teaching class at Jewish Theological Seminary (© Jewish Theological Seminary) Above: Martin Luther King, Jr. with Heschel at Selma March, 1965 (© James Karales)

in 1927, and his deportation in 1938 at the hands of the Nazis. Although the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati brings him to America to teach in 1940, he is forced to leave his mother and his three sisters behind. They are exterminated in the Holocaust.

In 1945, Heschel leaves Hebrew Union College to join the faculty of the conservative Jewish Theological Seminary in New York City. He remains there for the rest of his career, even as his influence begins to extend far beyond the campus and the scholarly world.

In March of 1965, Martin Luther King, Jr. invites Heschel to march with him in Selma, Alabama. Many of the Black pastors in the movement had read *The Prophets*—King's copy was underlined and annotated throughout—and, as Andrew Young says, "He was the authority on the prophets. But on this occasion, he was the prophet."

Footage of the march shows Heschel on the front line with King, Andrew Young, Jesse Jackson, and John Lewis, his white hair and beard flowing. Despite the misgivings of local rabbis, Heschel marches in solidarity with hundreds of others, ready to face the brutality of the police.

His passion is to explore the nature of God's deep compassion for humans and the extent to which God is

Footage of the march shows Heschel on the front line with King, Andrew Young, Jesse Jackson, and John Lewis, his white hair and beard flowing. Despite the misgivings of local rabbis, Heschel marches in solidarity with hundreds of others, ready to face the brutality of the police.

As an introduction to Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Spiritual Audacity* is an inspiring and enjoyable guide. In just fifty-seven minutes, Martin Doblmeier's sensitive eye vividly portrays Heschel's Hasidic roots, his remarkable career, and most of all, his moral witness.

willing to partner with us for the cause of justice. For the prophets, says Heschel, injustice toward one person is injustice to everyone, a message that resonates deeply in the Black community.

Heschel's growing influence thrusts him into another controversy—the attempts within Vatican II to create a rapprochement with the Jews after centuries of hostility. When a conservative faction within the Vatican calls for the conversion of the Jews, Heschel is incensed. "They must understand," he argues, "that I am willing to die for my faith."

In an arc that entwines with that of Martin Luther King, Heschel grows increasingly critical of the war in Vietnam. "My father was not a pacifist," says Susannah Heschel. "And he was not a communist sympathizer, by any means. But killing civilians—that was unacceptable." Heschel asks, "How can I pray, knowing that I am co-responsible for the death of innocent people in Vietnam?"

In April 1967, at the Riverside Church in New York City, Martin Luther King, at Heschel's urging, makes a major statement against the war—and is roundly denounced by *The New York Times, The Washington Post*, and other influential news sources. In an address following King's speech that Sunday, Heschel adds his own voice to the growing critique of the war by major religious figures. Susannah Heschel comments that, "My father wouldn't be quiet. No one could silence him."

His final cause is to speak out for the Jews in Soviet Russia. Despite suffering a heart attack in 1969 that keeps him in the hospital for three months, Heschel is tireless in advocating for Soviet Jewry. It is exhausting. On a Friday night in December 1972, at the age of sixty-five, Heschel dies at home. "To die in your sleep," says Susannah Heschel, "especially on the Sabbath, is a kiss from God."

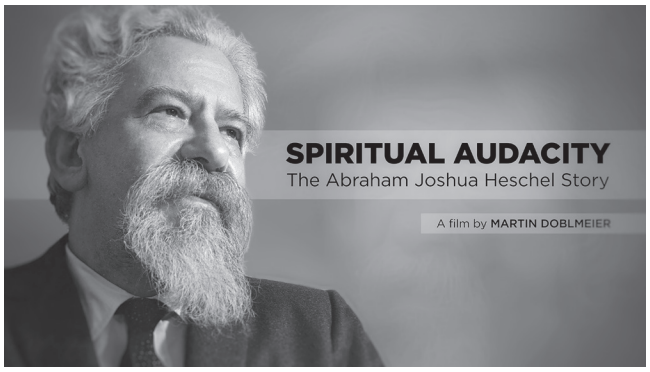
As an introduction to Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Spiritual Audacity* is an inspiring and enjoyable guide. In just fifty-seven minutes, Martin Doblmeier's sensitive eye vividly portrays Heschel's Hasidic roots, his remarkable career, and most of all, his moral witness. Paintings by Marc Chagall woven into the narrative add to the visual beauty of the film.

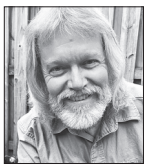
Those familiar with Heschel's written works—*The Prophets, God in Search of Man, The Sabbath, Man is Not Alone,* and *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*—will appreciate seeing and hearing this passionate twentieth-century prophet, a witness for the awe and wonder that is faith in the living God.

Martin Doblmeier's documentary work includes films on Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Reinhold Niebuhr, Howard Thurman, Dorothy Day and, familiar to readers of *Spectrum*, *The Adventists*, an award-winning film that portrays Adventists as some of the healthiest people on the planet.

Further Reading:

Dwyer, Bonnie. "Filmmaker Martin Doblmeier Talks About Forgiveness." *Spectrum* website. May 12, 2008. https://spectrummagazine.org/article/interviews/2008/05/13/filmmaker-martin-doblmeier-talks-about-forgiveness





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KEYWORDS: reorganizing for mission, "Church Structure Review," mission or economics?, organizational culture issues

AUSTRALIAN CHURCH EXPLORES *New Governance Models for the 2020s*

BY GILBERT M. VALENTINE

From its very beginnings, the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the South Pacific has been innovative and unconventional in seeking an effective organizational form through which to effectively progress its mission. Growing a church from nothing, in a sparsely settled land ruled by the "tyranny of distance," presented unique challenges. Later, the wide South Pacific, with its scattered islands, would pose similar problems and constraints. The first conference in Australia, organized in 1888, covered the vast entire continent and began with just four churches stretched across huge distances in three different states. The first conference in neighboring New Zealand (1,200 miles from Australia) was established a year later and, while separated by a four-day ocean crossing, it did not face the same domestic distance challenges. Nevertheless, the numbers were just as small. The New Zealand Conference began life with three churches and 155 members. Within a decade, church leaders down-under broke with North American Adventist tradition and moved beyond being just "district" number 7 of the General Conference to become a new "union" conference, embracing both the Australian and New Zealand local conferences. The new entity had its own constituency, elected its own officers, and made its own decisions about what was best for mission in the South Pacific (with advice, of course, from Battle Creek if it came in time). In 1897, in another iconoclastic move that broke with tradition, delegates in the Central Australian Conference

Within a decade, church leaders down-under broke with North American Adventist tradition and moved beyond being just "district" number 7 of the General Conference to become a new "union" conference, embracing both the Australian and New Zealand local conferences.

Recent survey data indicates that managing the school and aged care homes by themselves can take up more than a third of a local conference president's time. Overseeing church life and the work of ministers in such circumstances can readily become a lower priority.

disbanded its para-church auxiliary organizations like the Sabbath School Association and the Religious Liberty Association and incorporated them as departments within the conference structure. This initiative would not have been adopted if church officials had had their way. Both A. G. Daniells and W. C. White saw the move as promoting only "anarchy" and "confusion." Lay activists, however, saw merit in the idea, insisted the plan be adopted, and had the votes.[1] The idea worked efficiently, and it was soon being implemented elsewhere, with Daniells's enthusiastic endorsement.

Shaping organization to most effectively achieve mission in its local context continued to be the goal. Even though the General Conference established the wider Australasian Church as a "division" in 1922, for the next quarter century the Church in the South Pacific functioned as only one expansive union—the "*Australasian* Union"—which continued to exist with its own constituency and elected its own president and officer team. The GC Session nominated a vice-president of the GC for the division, but he was in fact the same person as the local union president and needed to be voted into office back home at the local union session. The GC Session nominating committee, on a legal basis, only dealt with naming the union president as GC vice president. Only in 1948, after the war, when three other union entities were created in the South Pacific, did the General Conference formally extend itself organizationally into the territory as a regional office of the General Conference. This establishment of "a closer tie-up" and a "stronger link" with the General Conference involved long consultations over several years. Eventually the conversations brought about a situation where the full Australasian leadership team was formally appointed at a GC Session.[2] And even then, for a while, in order to meet local legal requirements, the entity down-under was labeled as an "inter-union conference" not a "division." Flexibility and the need to meet the requirements of local law and local mission were the driving principles. Of course, none of this meant that the church in the South Pacific was less "loyal," or lacking in "love for our brethren." Nor was it less committed to mission or headed in a different direction from headquarters in Washington. Rather, it simply meant that the church had adopted an organizational structure to meet local mission needs and local legislative and cultural requirements.

Over the years since World War II, the configuration of both unions and local conferences within the division territory has changed from time to time in response to membership growth and the complexities of national developments in the island fields of the South Pacific. Mission unions and the two homeland unions have all reconfigured their territories at various times. The increasing complexity of legislative requirements in both Australia and New Zealand in the late 1990s required further changes in the legal configuration of constituent and legal bodies, and evolving mission imperatives at that time led to redrawing union territorial boundaries.

Since 2000, the Adventist Church within the Australian continent has again, as at the beginning, operated under one conference—but now as one Australian Union Conference (AUC). (New Zealand, together with some nearby independent island nations, form a separate New Zealand Pacific Union Conference and there are two large union missions. One embraces Papua New Guinea and another, the Trans Pacific Union, embraces the more scattered islands of the broad Pacific.)

TABLE 1 **Australian Union Church Membership[5]**					
Year	**2001**	**2005**	**2010**	**2015**	**2019**
End of Year Membership	50,696	52,254	56,110	59,112	62,838
Number of Congregations	481	489	518	527	546

Currently, the AUC, with its 62,838 members meeting in 546 congregations (churches and companies), is organized as nine regionally based local conferences.[3] It oversees a complex network of twenty-nine local conference incorporated and unincorporated legal bodies within these nine organizations. Five entities underpin seventeen retirement villages and aged care facilities, while another nine entities provide the legal structures for forty-seven school campuses. Other legal entities represent the aspects of the worshipping church itself.[4] Recent survey data indicates that managing the school and aged care homes by themselves can take up more than a third of a local conference president's time. Overseeing church life and the work of ministers in such circumstances can readily become a lower priority.

Once more, in 2021, the church on the Australian continent is exploring ways of re-organizing in order to meet the challenges of mission more effectively. Once again, lay activists have been involved. This time the initiative for change has been prompted by stagnating membership growth, new technologies that have conquered the "tyranny of distance," and new demands from congregations for greater resources to be made available at the front line for local mission. Since 2014, Australian union leaders have been engaged in a thoughtful, creative, and focused consultation with church members across the continent to find an effective way forward. It has not been an easy journey.

TABLE 2	
Census Date	**People Identifying as SDA**
2006	55,300
2011	63,000
2016	62,900

Low Growth or No Growth—A Problem

Church growth in the AUC, according to the Church's internal reporting systems, has been slow but steady during the almost two decades since its establishment. Up to the end of 2019, the Church added 12,142 members and 65 new churches or companies. (See Table 1.)

Nevertheless, public evangelism now generates fewer baptisms than it did in earlier times and the rate of departure of youth from the church is increasing. When compared with quinquennial, government-census data that reports the number in the population self-identifying as Adventists, church growth appears to have stalled. Between 2011 and 2016, census data indicated that the number of Adventists self-identifying as such had actually declined in raw numbers over the most recent five-year period.[6] (See Table 2.)

When compared with the rate of growth of the general population, church growth appeared even more problematic. Growth from this perspective could be interpreted as decline. Between 2006 and 2016 the general population grew at 17.9%, while church membership grew by 13.7%. Census data also indicated that during the fifty-year period since 1966, the proportion of the population in Australia identifying as Christian had dropped from 83% to 50% and the proportion identifying as having no religion at all had increased to 30%. Australian society was changing. It was becoming more secular.[7] Furthermore, church leaders were also concerned when figures from the annual church-attendance survey revealed that church attendance among Adventists was declining. This survey indicated a drop in attendance in 2017, down to just 67%

https://record.adventistchurch.com/2017/05/26/senior-leadership-changes-at-the-auc/

The AUC leadership team, as published in the *Adventist Record* in May of 2017: from left, Peter Cameron, Jorge Munoz, Michael Worker, and Ken Vogel.

of official church membership on the survey Sabbath.[8] AUC President Jorge Munoz acknowledged the problem publicly in 2018 when he commented on a church website report, "We do not see the growth in our churches that we once enjoyed. This is an urgent issue that we need to address, without delay."[9]

The Problem Addressed

The uncertain growth patterns, and a sense that more resources were being invested in maintaining church structure than in church frontline mission, worried activist laity on the union executive committee. They urged that more attention be given to resourcing local church needs. According to committee member Lindsay Borgas, such voices began calling for a formal study and review of the situation.[10] Under President Chester Stanley, in 2014, the business department at Avondale College was requested to undertake a "desktop" analysis of conference governance structures and their associated costs. In their report, the business department suggested that if a restructuring of governance was envisaged, there would need to be "a long-term commitment" that would also need to give attention to important "organizational culture" issues. This would be necessary to "ensure the sustainability" of any changes that might be implemented.[11] Upon considering the Avondale document at its meeting on November 15, 2015, AUC leaders report that the committee resolved "to seek the services of a change management facilitator to arrange focus groups to identify the main issues driving the need for change." This they saw was a "logical" next step.[12] Some on the union committee apparently understood this development differently. They viewed the Avondale report as too limited in its scope, which was why it had not been acted on.[13] It had not undertaken any stakeholder consultation, nor had it considered the complex Adventist school system and the extensive network of Adventist aged care facilities, both of which also came under conference administration. Because of these inadequacies, Borgas observes, it was felt to be inadequate and the AUC executive committee chose not to act on it. Nevertheless, the issue of a church structure review had been incorporated into the AUC's strategic plan. In early 2016, under the new administration of President Jorge Munoz, lay activists on the executive committee continued to urge the issue and a decision was taken at the end of 2016 to undertake a more extensive review under the broad theme of "How Can we Do Church Better?"[14] Even though the project was entitled "Church Structure Review," it was apparently envisaged that the study would look at both quality of church life issues and at conference organizational matters. Views about which of these were more important would later give rise to serious misunderstanding.

Data Gathering

In early 2017, the union executive established a Structure Review Committee (SRC) and committed to a multi-stage process of assessment and change. The SRC comprised the union conference officers, the nine conference presidents, and an initial sprinkling of lay persons. Retired business professional Lindsay Borgas, an AUC executive committee member, was asked to chair the SRC, which was later expanded to include one lay person from each of the nine conferences, to make a group of almost twenty-five, five of whom were women. With initial planning completed, in May 2017 the AUC authorized a task force of three to undertake an unprecedented data collection exercise that would initiate the structural review and shape its agenda. AUC associate secretary, Elder Kenneth Vogel, represented the union officers on the leadership trio and had been tasked with overseeing the structure review project on behalf of the union officers. Borgas, as SRC chair, served on the group

along with Anthony Mitchell, a respected management consultant with ten years' previous experience as an Adventist minister, who had been engaged as "Change Management Facilitator." Mitchell had established a highly regarded consulting practice and had assisted many global clients through the processes of organizational change. Both Borgas and Mitchell volunteered their time. Although the AUC executive had also recommended the employment of a communication specialist to assist the team, this role was not implemented until much later.

Between June and November 2017, the three-person team conducted over seventy consultation workshops with a variety of church stakeholder focus groups in twenty-one different locations in Australia. Each workshop lasted two to three hours. They also opened a Facebook page to facilitate feedback and received more than 26,000 reactions during the five months. The leadership team made clear that their task was to listen. There was no pre-established "agenda" for any specific preferred change, explained Borgas. The process was designed to "engage" with stakeholders in an "open, transparent" way.[15]

Early in the process, workshop feedback and Facebook comments indicated that stakeholders felt as strongly, if not more so, about organizational culture issues, both in local churches and in church employment settings, as they did about efficiency issues in regard to the configuration of church governance. Borgas reports that the data-gathering team alerted the AUC executive to this unexpected development.[16]

The Report

In November 2017, the data-gathering trio presented a detailed, 137-page PowerPoint report to the AUC executive. A draft had earlier been circulated to the nine conference presidents for review and thus the executive committee felt able to vote unanimously to receive the report with its recommendations.[17] As change facilitator, Anthony Mitchell explained to *Adventist Record* readers that the final report "not only considered organizational structural issues but, importantly, highlighted practical day-to-day operational factors at schools, aged care facilities and local churches."[18] Framed under six main findings, the report affirmed that "stakeholders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church across Australia have spoken and made it very clear that 'mission' must be the agenda that drives church structure." Stakeholders also gave "strong direction that, the local church must be the hub on which all operational and governance structures must focus." According to Mitchell, "The review revealed that the local church, the local conference and the Seventh-day Adventist Church nationally are in need of a significant overhaul." The report identified "duplication across the corporate Church system" resulting from "multiple layers of Church governance" and concluded that a "greater focus," on efficiency and effectiveness in "mission," was not only possible but imperative.[19]

Much of the emphasis in the Structure Review Report focused on problems with organizational culture referred to as "operational issues." These reflected employee and church member angst about a perceived lack of good HR practice and organizational politics, as well as a lack of attention to quality-of-life issues within congregations and organizations. Unhappiness about pastor-congregation relationships was apparently a significant issue. The final report noted that about 70% of churches could be considered "unhealthy" and there was a lack of really effective cooperation between schools, other entities, and congregations in the task of mission.[20] This unexpected data "turned the review on its head," observed Ken Vogel, the AUC member of the data-collecting trio.[21]

The first five findings in the report discussed the perceived need to seek greater spiritual depth in congregational life, to better integrate organizational entities in central mission, to focus the various entities more closely on the task of making disciples, and to concentrate their combined effort on the local church,

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The uncertain growth patterns, and a sense that more resources were being invested in maintaining church structure than in church frontline mission, worried activist laity on the union executive committee.

The summary concluded by noting that the Structure Review Report had outlined "a landmark cultural and operational shift in the church," that would require a commitment for the church to move forward "as one."

with a focus on being "excellent at everything we do." Only the sixth finding dealt specifically with governance matters, outlining the need for structural initiatives such as developing single organizational entities for education and aged care, experimenting with a "network model" for local churches to focus on mission in their regions, and then exploring local conference governance realignment.[22] The emphasis on first developing networks of churches in "districts" would provide performance evaluation for ministers by trusted mentors close to hand and would help improve the effectiveness of ministers and thereby the quality of church life. On the matter of broad governance, stakeholders had "overwhelmingly asserted" that the church in Australia was "over governed and over managed," and that "layers of governance" needed to be reduced.[23] As already noted, twenty-nine different legal entities underpin the work of the church across the nine conferences. In responding positively to the report, the AUC executive resolved to move promptly to the next phase of the process and framed five definite recommendations for further action. The executive noted that each of the governance reforms being proposed would require consultation with local conference executive committees and constituencies, for they were ultimately the entities that had legal jurisdiction and the power to act. The five recommendations were to:

1. Explore developing a single Adventist aged care system;
2. Explore developing a single Adventist school system;
3. Explore and develop an implementation plan, and conduct trials of the district/network model for churches;
4. Develop and implement, under the banner of "Mission Excellence," an action plan for resolving the "operational issues";
5. Explore ways to create greater efficiencies and/or reduce the management and governance of the corporate administrative structure.

A short, eleven-page summary of the final report was prepared by Mitchell and the five recommendations for action were attached at the end. The summary concluded by noting that the Structure Review Report had outlined "a landmark cultural and operational shift in the church," that would require a commitment for the church to move forward "as one." In December 2017, the AUC posted the summary on a new website dedicated to providing information about the Church Governance Review.[24]

Implementation and Conflict

Following the adoption of the 2017 Structure Review Report, the AUC executive determined to share the full report with each of the nine local conference executive committees as early as possible and commissioned the union officers, together with the SRC leadership trio, to meet in person with each local conference between February and April in 2018. The report needed to be explained and discussed.[25] This task was completed with all local conference executives voting to accept the report recommendations.[26] The AUC was also requested to write up an action plan to address the "operational" problems. Disciple-making initiatives and concerns were acknowledged to fall in the province of local churches, which were the responsibility of local conferences. While these were being addressed, the AUC administration would progress the structural reforms that had been called for in the report.

During this second consultative stage, conflict developed among the key players when the AUC leadership felt the need to take control of the process rather than leave it in the hands of the facilitator and the

chair of the SRC. The AUC officers declined to publish the full 137-page report, feeling that its content was too negative and that elements in it were too strongly critical of ministers. Borgas and Mitchell felt that the AUC officer team was not giving enough attention to the dominant problem of "operational issues" but had begun to focus on the governance restructuring task instead, with an emphasis on reducing the number of conferences in the union in order to achieve financial savings. The lay activists perceived the union officers to have developed their own "agenda" for a particular model of change and to be promoting this. According to Borgas, some feared that the union officers had become enamored with the union of churches model of governance, which, while certainly reducing the overlay of administration, would nevertheless remove church administration even further from frontline church members and the role of their churches as "mission hubs." Stakeholders, they asserted, had urged closer links not more distant connections. Considering that the project was beginning to "go off the rails," the professional facilitator initiated discussions with the AUC administration to get it "back on track." This led to difficulties in personal relationships.[27] As a result of these tensions, in November 2018, Borgas resigned from his chairmanship of the SRC following discussions with the AUC president. He felt that change-management principles were not being properly followed.[28] Subsequently, the contracted, professional change-facilitator was discontinued amid distrust and misunderstanding. The AUC executive appointed another lay chair of the SRC with whom they were more comfortable.

Frustrated by what he saw as lack of progress and a perception that the AUC was focusing on economics and issues not recommended in the initial report, Lindsay Borgas resigned his membership on the AUC executive in September 2019. He cited the failure of the AUC to implement any trials of church districts and a preoccupation with "investigating conference boundaries" before addressing the need to "restore the gap between Lay Members and Ministers," as reasons for his disengagement.[29] Nine months later, in mid-2020, he went public with his discontent, sending a detailed letter of complaint to the right-wing, independent Fulcrum 7 website.[30] His burden was that the full report had not been published and that the AUC officers were pursuing structural change and ignoring the more important issues of cultural change.

The AUC would explain that work was, however, proceeding in the background with town hall meetings and efforts to address the "operational" issues, while work groups were assigned to specific projects and the AUC administration focused on the conference restructuring issue. The arrival of COVID-19 in early 2020 forced the postponement of further town hall meetings that the AUC officers had planned around Australia and further consultations with the local conference executives.

Around the time of Borgas's Fulcrum 7 letter, the AUC created another Facebook group in an endeavor to enhance communication. Feedback to surveys on this platform swung heavily in favor of the "no change" option for restructuring and a demand that the full report be published.[31] In response, the church's governance website published the full SRC PowerPoint report and a communication specialist was engaged to assist the overall project. Beginning in mid-2020, a regular stream of informative posts has been issued, keeping the church informed on progress of the review project, with clear diagrams of the change process involved, sequences in decision making, and who the responsible entities are who need to make the decisions.

Progress

Although there had been little fanfare, from late-2018 to early-2020, in-depth consultations were undertaken to address the five recommendations. The AUC executive approved the setting up of various working or "reference" groups and a new consultative forum to process feedback and advice on the entire project. One reference group, operating under the rubric of Quality Adventist Churches (QAC), was established to consider approaches to support and assist local churches. One reference group was assigned to work on the single-entity option for the schools, while another was assigned to develop designs for a new approach to governing the aged care facilities. Conference education directors and aged care CEO's met on a regular basis. By late-2018, a feasibility study for the single aged care entity had been completed and further work was being undertaken to ascertain how the entity should be structured before proceeding to wider consultation. Issues involved consideration of the value of a single identity

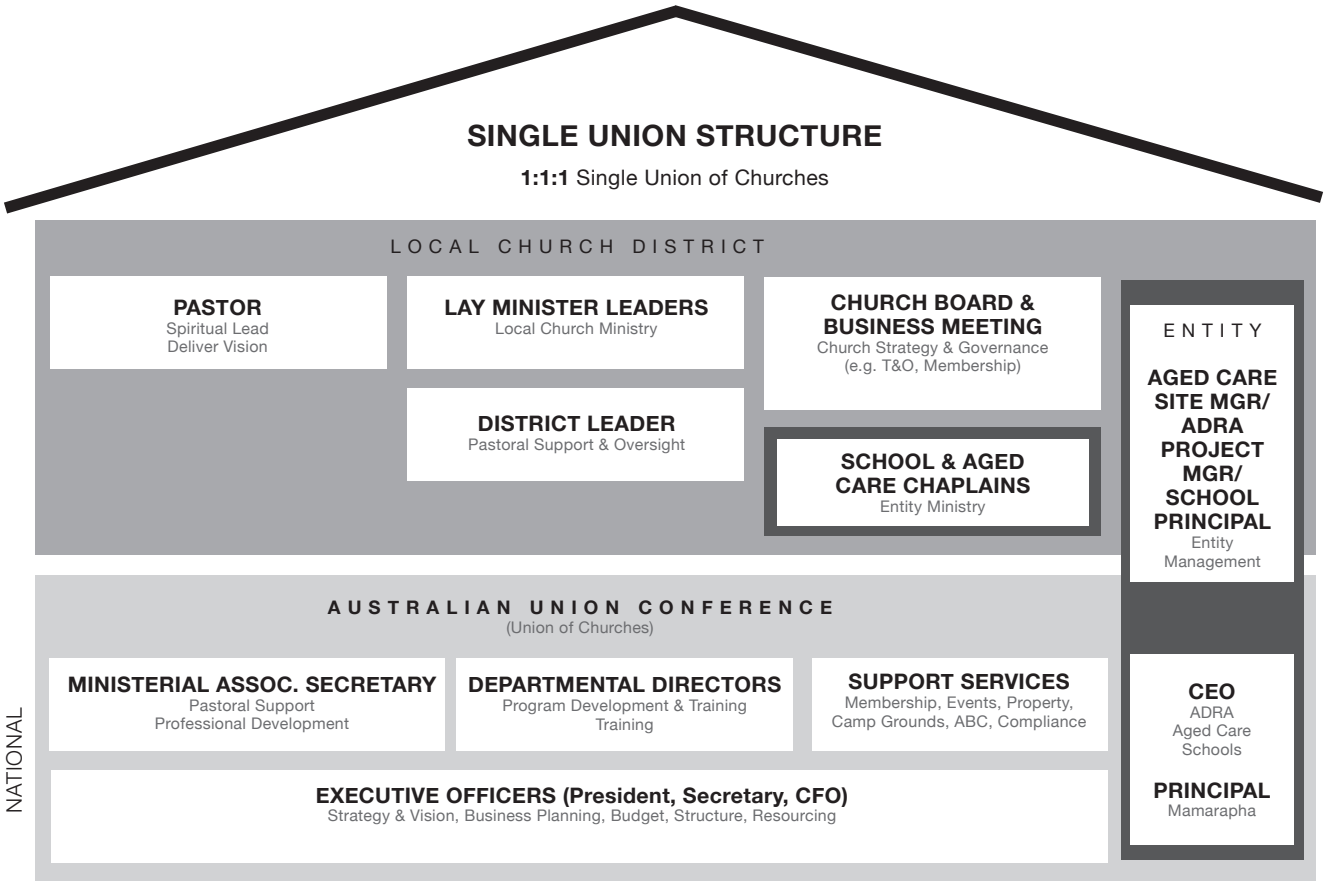

FIGURE 1 **Single Union Structure**

balanced by the need for regional responsiveness. A centralized CEO working with a distributed leadership team seemed to have the most advantages. Consolidation in the industry in response to changing government regulations provided both an important context and a stimulus for change in the aged care area. Similar research and design work was being done with the school systems by the schools reference group.[32]

To address the church organizational structure recommendation (#5 in the executive summary report) the AUC executive set up a sub-committee called the Church Structure Reference Group (CSRG) to guide the initiative. Following the early 2018 consultations with the local conference executive committees, the AUC executive agreed to engage another Melbourne-based consulting firm, Allegra Consulting, to assist CSRG with the development of different models for the configuration of conference organization and to assess the merits and demerits of each. The specialized governance framework and design skills of Allegra consultants Tim Robinson and Cat Hefernan, though expensive, proved particularly helpful. The arrival of COVID-19, with its lockdowns and travel restrictions, complicated the consulting process even while the economic impact of the pandemic on conference finances gave added urgency to the overall task.

Beginning in late-2019, the CSRG gave careful study to a range of proposed models designed for a reconfigured conference structure. These involved possibilities for four or five new conferences to be created out of the present nine, which would be dissolved. The November 2019 AUC executive committee meeting considered these options and identified the three models for reconstructed conferences they deemed most suitable. Then, in early 2020, following further consultations with the conferences, they began sharing with all stakeholders across the union information about the three models that had emerged as being the most feasible. This very professional communication

exercise consisted of a series of postings accompanied by diagrammatic presentations.[33] The options being considered were:

1. The "1:9:9:5 structure," which was the existing structure without change. It comprised one union, nine conferences, nine school systems and five aged care systems. Diagrams highlighted how the current organizational structure reflected the presence of the church across the six Australian states and how it related to the division and General Conference.
2. A "1:4:1:1 structure" comprised one union, made up of only four conferences. One school and one aged care system would be operated under the union, not the local conferences. This model envisaged that departmental ministry support functions would be offered only at conference level and that districts would be created where district leaders would be able to provide more localized support to churches and local pastors. A diagram was provided for the model.[34] A configuration of "1:4:4:4." was offered as a variation of this slimmed down model but with one school system and one aged care system in each of the newly chartered conferences. The church districts idea would also be utilized.
3. A "1:1:1 structure" involved dissolving the existing nine conferences into one reconstituted entity as one "union of churches" with single legal entities for both education and aged care. It was noted that eleven such "union" entities already operated in the wider Adventist world, although most of them, if not all, were smaller in dimension. Under this model it is envisaged that there would be distributed leadership, with four vice-presidents located in four regional locations around the country to minimize the barrier of distance. Again, this model would also rely on the formation of localized district "networks" of adjacent churches, each with a district supervisor. This model, it was claimed, would enable a major shifting of resources from administration to front-line churches, enabling them to function more effectively as "mission hubs." An accompanying diagram illustrated the governance design.[35] (See Figure 1.)

Modelling for options 2 and 3 envisaged between twenty-six and thirty-five districts across Australia, with approximately fifteen pastors per district in urban areas and ten per district in rural areas, depending on geographical proximity.

Additional communication postings to stakeholders during September explained, with diagrams, how church districts would work, the relationships between churches and conferences that would be involved and, in the case of the 1:4:1:1 model, how the new conference boundaries might be drawn across the six states. Maps for seven possible territorial configurations were provided based both on natural geographic regions and on membership distribution.[36] In October the postings gave details on the governance structures and lay representation that would be involved in the proposed arrangements, again accompanied by careful diagrams. The postings also reported on the decision-making process that would be involved for implementing each of the models. Careful thought had been given to the different options and it was clear that AUC leadership placed high importance on keeping church members informed.[37]

The key concern of Quality Adventist Churches that had figured so prominently as a priority in the 2017 report was addressed in two very detailed postings in late October 2020. These reported on extensive creative work that had been done by the AUC ministerial director, Brendon Pratt, in partnership with colleagues in the South Queensland Conference, with much new material being provided both for local churches and for pastoral ministry

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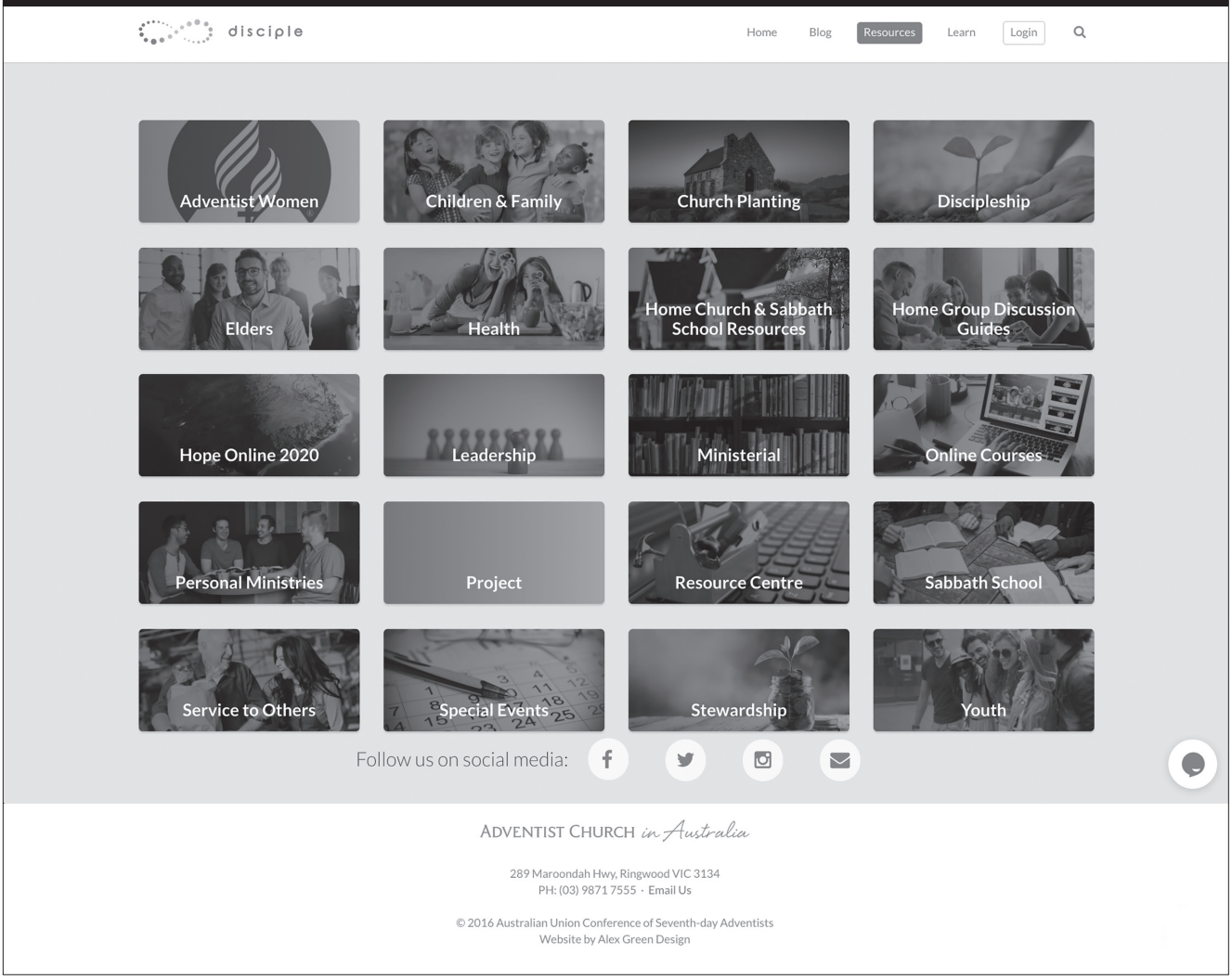
Nine months later, in mid-2020, he went public with his discontent, sending a detailed letter of complaint to the right-wing, independent Fulcrum 7 website. His burden was that the full report had not been published and that the AUC officers were pursuing structural change and ignoring the more important issues of cultural change.

development.[38] A framework of support developed for local church improvement involved the sophisticated use of new information technology to provide a range of quality data on church life. Pratt and his team created a platform for generating healthy conversations and made resources available to improve strategies for discipleship. A new data dashboard was developed that enables church leaders to get "a clear snapshot of who their church is," and this linked into a Ministry Development (MD) portal that included "a whole suite of helpful strategic and refocusing tools" to support pastors in their planning. The AUC also made further developments to their existing disciple.org.au resource website to make it easier for pastors and leaders to find relevant resources to help achieve their goals. (See Figure 2.) Church members have been assured that "whether there is a change to the governance structures of the church or not, Quality Adventist Churches will be developed."[39]

Change—An Elusive Goal?

In October 2020, the ACU officers were able to report that many churches across Australia were already working through strategies and plans for a healthier and more effective ministry using the tools provided under the QAC rubric. Achieving change in church structure, however, was more uncertain and AUC administration acknowledged that it would prove more difficult. Consultation with conference executive committees and town hall meetings with stakeholders had been slowed by the travel restrictions imposed by state governments to contain the spread of COVID-19. Zoom meetings had helped to overcome the restrictions to some degree. As

FIGURE 2 **Discipleship Resources Webpage**[40]



the AUC executive approached its November 2020 end-of-year-meeting it anticipated a comprehensive report on the design work and consultation feedback undertaken during the year on the restructuring proposals. In-depth discussion would be undertaken with CSRG in the hope of determining what would be the most feasible and appropriate of the three design options for restructured governance. Once these decisions were undertaken, further extensive consultation was planned with the nine conferences involved.

The enormity of the challenge facing the AUC was reflected in the last posting for 2020, following the end-of-year executive meetings. Several conferences protested about the process that the AUC was using, and some felt that AUC officials should not be involved in visiting local conferences without meeting with conference officials. A consensus on a way forward had not emerged, but AUC administration still held out hope. Authorization was given for pilot testing the church district models and undertaking case studies where such trials had been undertaken elsewhere.[41] The AUC committee recognized that "a significant amount of time and effort had been spent on the Church Structure Review process so far and that the potential changes which could result from this process were too important to give up now." The AUC officers reported that further consultation was going to be needed and that the committee had agreed the process should continue and "a full exploration of the structure options be undertaken." Feedback would help further shape the models, while reliance on the help of Allegra Consulting was to be reduced. The resources were to be sought on a daily, "as needed," basis rather than on the basis of a long-term contract.

Adventist historians observe that the track record of local conferences merging with each other or being discontinued is not good. Not mission but economics has been the driving force when mergers have been achieved. Adventist experience on this journey has never been easy and whatever has been achieved has not been without considerable pain. In the early 1930s, when the church in America experienced a drop of 25% in tithe income, the dire economic distress persuaded the Annual Council meeting in Omaha, Nebraska to recommend reducing the number of union conferences from twelve to nine, and fifty-eight local conferences to forty-seven, plus five missions. The resultant closures and reconfigurations were not accomplished without heated charges of apostasy and shrill accusations that a desire for control was the driving motive. Slander and vilification were the weapons of resistance that made life very difficult for General Conference President C. H. Watson.[42] In the late 1990s, Southeast Asian Union College in Singapore merged with Mission College, which had two campuses in the Thailand Mission. Economic exigency drove that successful merger, but it was not accomplished without much ill-feeling and charges of theft made against the union. Economic exigency has not yet been strong enough to achieve the merger of unsustainable colleges in the United States. Vested local interests have always posed strong barriers to such change. Political factors such as these had led to the shelving of the more recent restructuring plans in the North American Division and the AUC was aware of this.

Among the last postings for 2020, the AUC officers also acknowledged resistance and that ultimately, in the area of governance, the executive is only able to make recommendations.[43] Any decision to merge or to restructure needs to be an action taken by local conference constituencies. The AUC can study, consider options, advise, share information, and facilitate the process through communication but it will be up to local conferences whether to proceed with any recommendation for structural change. Whether such change will happen remains to be seen. Resistance already appears to be mounting. Misunderstandings and conflict are inevitable. Despite a leadership team's endeavor to be transparent, innovative, and even realistic, priorities will yet differ. Will the commitment to achieving a sense of common purpose and a church-wide desire to "do church better" bring results that will please all? Will sufficient political will and commitment to change be generated? In what ways will Adventists in Australia move forward to meet the challenges of mission for a new generation and a radically different world? Watch this space.[44]

Endnotes

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17. Mitchell, et al, "Urgent Change Needed."

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19. Mitchell, et al, "Urgent Change Needed."

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22. Finding # 6 included considerations of "advantages" and "caveats" in its suggestion for unified school and aged care systems.

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Impressionistic Eschatology Meets Jesus

BY CRISTINA WILLIAMS

Wars and rumors of war
On Cheerios' boxes and
Izzy pop locks is
Coated with remnants
Of Little Horn trumpets
Perilously sounding in the dark.

Cast your bread upon the water.
Make sure to make it rye.
Give your bread to one in need
And watch it fly

Past the yawning maw
Of Ostrogoths and Visigoths
And out past the wide
To the narrow paths

That lead through the brush
Plush against the river's edge,
Into the deep. Jordan's razor
Primed to cut you down

All around the scaly skin
Reach up and let Him in
To the tender pink
Underneath the crusted shell.

The remnant is in you.
It wiggles and smooths you
Till even your pain is folded
Past knowing: origami butterfly.

istockphoto.com/Thanyathon

Cristina Williams has been jotting down her thoughts since she was eight years old. Just about as long, she has been kept awake at night by visions of "the end times" playing out in her head. Poetry is helping her to cope with the current state of the world and make sense of the legacy of Adventism on her soul.