

 community through conversation

SPECTRUM



Red Cross | Art by Janell Brauer

THE GOD OF THE GEOLOGIC COLUMN, THE CROSS, AND WORSHIP

Reading Genesis in Light of the Cross

Worship in Exile: The Perils and Promise of Virtual Church

The Last Secrets of the White Estate

community through conversation

SPECTRUM

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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.

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ABOUT THE ART

I see hints of many aspects of the one who shed His blood for us. Perhaps the cross shines out with His redeeming blood. I see evidence of the bars holding Him back for a short time, and yet God the Father is still shining through in the somewhat obscured background, as the Holy Spirit hovers above. They all are One, suffering the same humiliation. Is that Mary lingering, devastated, at the foot of the cross? The blue container is about to open and free the hostages trapped inside of it, and trapped inside themselves by the "accuser," as they realize that they have forever been freed from the prison of their own guilt and unworthiness. Praise God!



ABOUT THE COVER ARTIST: JANELL BRAUER

Creating has always been a passion in my life. I remember painting rocks at 4 and hand sewing doll clothes at 5. I took art twice in college, first as a minor then a major. Thanks, in a large part, to my husband's support, I have been able to continue to explore and grow as an artist. My most loved and valued art experience has been teaching art from kindergarten through college. I am so thankful to be given the gift of creativity by the ultimate Creator God and I want to glorify Him with the gift that He has given me.

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EDITORIALS

GREAT *Conversations*

BY BONNIE DWYER

They define Adventism, earnest conversations about Scripture. That search for Present Truth. They are characterized by people with different views coming together, sharing knowledge, and all leaving energized by the discussion. Whether minds are changed is not really the point. It is the growth in understanding of each other, as well as the issue, that makes them electric, provides an “Aha” moment, binds us together. And how blessed we are by those ties. Today, they continue in Sabbath Schools, in classrooms, in our pages, particularly in this issue.

We begin with a look at Sabbath Schools and how the pandemic has changed them. The country may be opening up, but we’ve come to love our Zoom Sabbath Schools that bring together people from across the world, as well as from across town.

Revelation scholarship provides the second example. We are fortunate to now have many Revelation scholars writing not only for the Adventist community, but also for the larger Christian world. Reinder Bruinsma takes us through three recent books about Revelation, showing the variety of ways to read and experience that great book of the Bible.

Conversations about creation have marked our pages since the very first issue. Our articles have reflected the heated conversation within the community in the battle for the narrative between science against religion. Rather than expecting readers to pick a side, however, we hope these articles add to our understanding of each other. For instance, in this issue, in the article about the geologic column by John Baldwin, Leonard Brand, Felix Cortez, Randy Younker, and Elaine Kennedy, the authors seem to take a position very similar to those of the Ancient Hebrews in that God is seen as the originator of all things. The

actions of the natural world are not viewed independently. In contrast, Ronald Osborn sees the atonement of Christ as not only providing freedom for the human world but for the animal world, also. Can our understanding of the cross allow for a broader view of science? To add to the conversation about the flood, science, and God, James Hayward tells the story of two geologists, and we have two insightful book reviews. By the way, this topic will also headline a June conference at Avondale. If anyone is interested in Zooming in on the Age-of-Life Conference that Lynden Rogers is coordinating in Australia (Friday evening, June 11 to Sabbath, June 12) the person to contact is Lynden Rogers. (lynden.rogers@avondale.edu.au)

Book reviews provide the starting point for each of the topics in this issue. A recent psychobiography of Ellen G. White gives Jonathan Butler the opening for an illuminating piece not only about Mrs. White, but also about how we as readers bring our own story to hers. Ellen White biographer Terrie Aamodt writes about the greatest challenge to a biographer, and Ron Graybill lets us in on the last secrets of the Ellen G. White Estate.

Ellen White, creation, and Revelation have been conversation starters throughout Adventist history. With each generation the discussion changes, grows, and becomes new again, refreshing our bonds of friendship. Are you humming “Blessed be the tie that binds”?



BONNIE DWYER is editor of *Spectrum*.

Reflections, Plans, Gratitude

BY CARMEN LAU

Bonnie Dwyer, editor of *Spectrum* magazine and executive director of Adventist Forum, has announced to our Board her plans to retire at the end of 2021. We shared that news with the Adventist Forum community earlier this spring. Since then, Alisa Williams, managing web editor for www.spectrummagazine.org, informed us of her intent to resign. Her last day on the *Spectrum* website was May 19.

Alisa's diligent commitment to the use of social media, including comprehensive tweeting during General Conference and North American Division business meetings, helped build *Spectrum's* audience. She has been responsive to those who write for the website. A diligent reader, Alisa brought a passion for social justice and relevance to her work. We are grateful for her work and wish her well.

Bonnie wrote her first article for *Spectrum* in 1976 when she was a senior journalism major at La Sierra University. As an investigative reporter, she wrote many more articles over the following twenty years. She was named editor of the journal in 1998.

During Bonnie's twenty-three years in a leadership role, *Spectrum* has been transformed to be a place for art and poetry and to include a web presence, as well as social media engagement. In addition, Bonnie has overseen innovative reporting strategies at General Conference sessions and independent investigative reporting on relevant church



Bonnie Dwyer and Alisa Williams

matters at numerous levels of the organization around the globe.

In December 2020, the Adventist Forum Board approved a new strategic plan, which will be used to guide the search to ensure that its priorities and key initiatives will be embraced by Bonnie's successor. The strategic planning process took into consideration much input from an array of voices while framing the guiding purpose that will inform the structures, processes, and decisions of Adventist Forum, and then circulated draft versions for more feedback.

The Adventist Forum Board is now mobilizing resources and organizing actions to attain its major goals in the next few years.

During Bonnie's twenty-three years in a leadership role, *Spectrum* has been transformed to be a place for art and poetry and to include a web presence, as well as social media engagement.

Here are a few excerpts from the Strategic Plan:

The Mission of Adventist Forum

Adventist Forum's purpose is conversation toward Seventh-day Adventist renewal. Adventist Forum affirms both our Movement's calling and its (imperfect) humanity. True renewal, we believe, involves both honest self-correction and fresh imagination. . . .

Adventist Forum is a fully independent advocate of SDA renewal that is beholden to readers but not to any official administrative structure. The point is to challenge apathy and to advance Adventist faithfulness and mission. The work of Adventist Forum is fluid—reminding people to attend to that which is timely—rumbles, fractures, trends, creations, powers, alliances, losses—as well as that which is transcendent and timeless.

Overarching Goals

1. Adventist Forum will create the premiere web presence in Adventism. The *Spectrum* website will host conversation on a variety of topics, including those not addressed in traditional church spaces and will be a place where visionaries and opposition can respectfully speak. The historical contributions of Adventist Forum will be visible on the website.
2. Adventist Forum will continue to expand its independent reporting of news relevant to the Seventh-day Adventist Church via all its media choices including *Spectrum* journal, *Adventist Voices* podcast, and the *Spectrum* website.
3. Adventist Forum will take steps to increase the number of members and broaden its reach through its website, journal, books, convocations and increasing the use of video and digital media.
4. Adventist Forum will seek to be a space where each person will be respected and empowered, and Adventist Forum will advocate the bedrock biblical principles found in Micah 6:8 and Galatians 3:28 in the context of the life and teachings of Jesus.

5. Adventist Forum will prioritize strategic partnerships with local Adventist Forum chapters.
6. Adventist Forum will seek strategic partnerships with groups which have common values and with those for whom there would be benefit to both groups in the form of shared content and broadened reach. Partnership will not mean the two groups are in total alignment.

Inspired by the clear role our Strategic Plan articulates for us, the Board and staff is aligning all its decisions and activities with the six major goals.

There will be time later for a more formal recognition of Bonnie's efforts; for now, we would like to say thank you to her for sharing her passion, intelligence, and creativity with us for over two decades. A special committee convened by the Adventist Forum Board has begun the search for a new journal editor and executive director.

Especially during these challenging times, change is never easy. But Adventist Forum/*Spectrum* has a very strong foundation that includes many talented writers and contributors. We are confident that our values-driven search will identify a great candidate to edit *Spectrum* and provide leadership for the many activities of Adventist Forum. Your prayers for the success of this search process would be much appreciated.

Our hope is that you will join us in these commitments in whatever ways you choose. With the added power of your support, our unified efforts will enable us to fulfill Adventist Forum's potential.

Thank you for your partnership with us during the journey. Please reach out to me with your ideas as we move forward.



CARMEN LAU is board chair of Adventist Forum.

NOTEWORTHY

KEYWORDS: General Conference, secretary and treasurer, elections, Spring Meeting

Erton Kohler and Paul Douglas

CHOSEN AS GC OFFICERS

BY BONNIE DWYER

The General Conference Executive Committee elected two top General Conference officers on Wednesday, April 14: Erton Kohler as secretary and Paul H. Douglas as treasurer/chief financial officer.

Kohler is presently the president of the South American Division. When he was elected to that position in 2006, he was, at 36 years of age, the youngest regional president. During his fifteen years of leadership, the division has grown significantly and today has 2,542,834 members and 14,382 churches. He will begin his new duties as secretary for the General Conference on June 1, 2021.

“Expect Excellence!” has been Paul H. Douglas’s admonition to the auditors he oversees in his position as chief executive of the General Conference Auditing



Erton Kohler



Paul H. Douglas

Services, a position he has held since 2007. He began working at GCAS in 1986 as an audit manager. He will transition to the treasurer’s position on August 1, 2021.

Both Kohler and Douglas have continued to pursue additional educational goals while working full-time. Kohler is currently in the Doctor of Ministry program at

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“Expect Excellence!” has been Paul H. Douglas’s admonition to the auditors he oversees in his position as chief executive of the General Conference Auditing Services, a position he has held since 2007.



GT Ng



Juan Prestol-Puesán

Andrews University. He earned his bachelor’s and master’s degrees in theology and pastoral theology from Brazilian Adventist University. Douglas expects to complete his PhD dissertation this year. He holds a bachelor’s degree and an MBA in accounting, as well as a professional certificate in strategic management and leadership. In 2020, he developed a “Roadmap to Resilience” to help church leaders “be prepared to sustain mission in times of crisis and provide an agile response to rapidly emerging realities.”

The current secretary and treasurer, GT Ng and Juan Prestol-Puesán, respectively, announced their retirements in the days leading up to the Spring Meeting. A nominating committee of sixty met on Wednesday, before the day’s business session, to consider whose names should be put forward for selection. GC President Ted Wilson said that four names were considered for the secretary’s position and six names for treasurer.

A native of Singapore, GT Ng’s “journeys with God,” as he calls his career, began after college when he and his wife Ivy went to Phnom Penh, Cambodia as missionaries in 1973. They were evacuated in 1975 when the Khmer Rouge took over the country. Additional missionary service

in Thailand and Malaysia followed, then work as a hospital chaplain, union conference youth leader, theology professor, and division secretary, before he was called to the General Conference to be an associate secretary. He was elected secretary of the General Conference in 2010.

Prestol-Puesán was elected GC treasurer/chief financial officer at the 2015 General Conference Session in San Antonio, Texas. His denominational service began in 1969, when he worked as an accountant in the Dominican Conference, located in his hometown of Santo Domingo. He became treasurer of the North Dominican Mission in 1972, then left to attend Andrews University, graduating with his MBA in 1980. He then went on to serve as treasurer of the Greater New York Conference, Atlantic Union Conference, Euro-Asian Division, and North American Division, before joining the General Conference as undertreasurer in 2007.



BONNIE DWYER is editor of *Spectrum*.

Worship in Exile:

THE PERILS AND PROMISE OF VIRTUAL CHURCH

BY TOMPAUL WHEELER

A grey and white cat wanders in front of Malisa's camera. "I think on the prayer front let's add a praise for cats and their existence," One Track Sabbath School class leader, Grace Criteser, announces. "Because that's glorious."

It's Saturday morning, and across the Midwest—and beyond—the Zoom screen is filled with familiar faces. The One Track class is part of the Lincoln New Creation Community Church in Nebraska's capital city, but thanks to the COVID-19 pandemic, its scope has stretched much further. Grace moved away from Lincoln shortly before the pandemic started, but the sudden use of Zoom enabled her to continue enjoying the class she's led for a decade. This morning, Grace asks people whether they've had their first round of COVID vaccines and inquires about a class member's health.

Since its inception, One Track has studied its way through several books of the Bible, including two years in Romans. The group has been studying Isaiah for "a couple years" now and, as of this particular Sabbath, has made it to chapter 40.

"I'm a huge [Handel's] Messiah fan," Grace says. "I want to hear this in the King James Version, because poetry."

The first few verses ring out as some of the most uplifting words ever written. The words "Make straight in the desert a highway for our God" sparks a comment about Nebraskan roads. Verse 5, however, takes a decided

turn—and even reading it in *The Message* doesn't help.

"These people are nothing but grass," Trena Reed reads. "This is a seriously cheery passage of Isaiah."

"Comfort ye my people . . . You're like grass that blows away," Grace recites. "Seriously comforting."

What Now?

The pandemic left congregations scrambling to continue meeting in some form. Many congregations have live-streamed their services on the internet for years now, typically offering a pretty static view of the worship hour. For such churches, the pandemic meant a scaled down version of the same, often with just a sermon beamed out. The most successful churches, however, found new ways to connect and involve people despite the challenges.

"We started off doing some prerecorded services and sermon, with people submitting videos of special music and children's story," says Kristy Hodson, associate pastor of the Stoneham Memorial Adventist Church in Massachusetts. That plan slowly transitioned into a livestream of the sermon to an empty church. In July 2020, the church went to in-person and continued the livestream, often including special music or a children's story. A late-2020 spike in local COVID cases sent them back to a completely online service—live but with prerecorded elements.

Stoneham Memorial conducted an online communion service, distributing prepackaged communion packets in the church parking lot ahead of time. Senior Pastor

Fredy Reinoso officiated at the church, while members gathered on Zoom. “We had time at the end if people wanted to do foot washing with family, with some music playing,” says Hodson. “For singles we suggested they find an opportunity to do service for someone else.”

Response to the socially distanced ritual was overwhelmingly positive. “Some people who hadn’t [otherwise] participated came on. Parents of a church member joined in from Australia and said it was one of the most moving communions they had ever participated in.”

The ability to attend meetings virtually has opened new doors for churches, as seen in Stoneham Memorial’s Wednesday-night Bible study. “When we had it in-person we were maybe getting four people,” says Hodson. “Now it’s 12–15 people and whole families come on, so you’ll have fifth graders, teenagers. It’s really been great seeing the interaction, and now people aren’t facing the back of each other’s heads during the discussion.”

Even as the church has reopened, challenges and differences of opinion have continued. “My father is a transplant patient,” says Hodson. “[My parents] live an hour away and I see them about once a month. In February we started singing again in our church, with the windows closed. And I said, ‘I’m not comfortable with that and I’m not coming. So, I’ll do our chat online when we do our live stream.’ People understand why I’m not going, and I think that helps them feel okay with their own decision. I’ve learned that I’m not going to please everybody. It’s okay for people to be upset at me. Some people were upset that we didn’t have church over the holidays, but [the issue was], ‘We’re in a spike, we’re not going to meet.’”

“When you tap into people’s creativity, you’d be amazed at what people can do,” Hodson says. “That’s how we got our virtual choir. We’ve seen some creative children’s stories, and some different ideas of what church can look like. It’s been great to see people use their creativity on how to connect.”

Rubber Meets Road

“When the Virginia governor said, ‘You can’t meet in person any longer,’ we threw everything up in the air and recreated it,” remembers Dr. Heather Ripley Crews, pastor of the Courthouse Road Adventist Church in



Pastor Heather Crews, Courthouse Road Church

Richmond, Virginia. “Thankfully, I had Lawrence Landa, my media team leader, who already had a dream for what it would be like to stream our services, so we had all the infrastructure. But it’s very different to have an in-person-focused worship service vs. an online one.”

At first, Courthouse Road was restricted to just ten people in the building. “We started having a sermonette, about fifteen minutes, and then a panel discussion with everyone there,” says Crews. “We had a couch up front, and when I watched it later, [I saw that] everyone sunk into the couch. They just disappeared from the camera shot.”

The Courthouse Road team invited members to share videos for scripture reading, offering, or special music. “Nine out of ten people said yes,” says Crews. “A whole bunch of people who wouldn’t normally be open to leading worship were willing because they knew they wouldn’t trip over their words. They could record it as many times as they wanted.”

Streaming over Facebook Live, Courthouse Road has used polleverywhere.com to involve viewers at home. Reflects Crews, “My goal is engagement—not to entertain or be another content-generator, but to engage people in their relationship with Christ.”

What Plays in Peoria

It’s 9:54 on a Sabbath morning, and a fast-paced quiz game through the Kahoot app is running neck and neck between participants HeroElephant, RapidQuail, LivelyFox, DazzledLizard, and WittyGoose. Led by Peoria, Illinois Adventist Church Pastor Matthew Lucio, the game is just the start of over two hours of colorful and engaging Sabbath School and church service.

Peoria is a medium-sized congregation in a mid-sized

city, but it aims to “punch above its weight,” with just three people running the sound, streaming, and camera switcher. The congregation decided way back in January 2019 to build a digital church, so they started a YouTube channel with the goal of cultivating community. They started out sharing part of their service but, when the pandemic hit, they started live-streaming everything—with the goal that viewers at home will feel just as involved as anyone in a pew. Viewers from as far as Spain and Australia have tuned in.

Pastor Lucio, known for his far-too-entertaining-for-its-own-good *Adventist History Podcast*,¹ has a vision for where church may be headed. “Technology has eradicated the need to say, well, ‘This church is Peoria, Peoria is your territory,’” he reflects.

You can go online and everything is your territory. There’s no geographical limit. We see ourselves serving both a local and global community. We see a future where a member in Australia can be a member of our church.

It’s also a survival thing. We used to conceive of space like, “We’ve got to send missionaries to China or Ethiopia,” but the digital space is also a space. It’s also a territory that needs missionaries. Maybe by trying to reach the people online—and those tend to be a little more irreverent and funny and whatever—maybe that will change church cultures as well. Maybe if you’re communicating creating memes and whatever, maybe that’ll help the church loosen up a little bit.



Matthew Lucio, Peoria Adventist Church

Many remote attendees find a digital version of church more interactive than the in-person ones they’re used to. “We don’t want the audience to feel like a fly on the wall,” says Lucio. “We encourage people watching online to send questions in. Communication is a two-way street. We change them and they change us.”

The Peoria congregation has created videos and resources showing what it takes to set up online services, and given direct assistance to over a dozen other churches. “It’s unreasonable to expect that the church hierarchy is going to figure this out,” Lucio says. “It’s got to start with local churches doing things. You have a pastor in such a such a place and people grumble and then there’s success and they’re put on the stage and get speaking appointments. This is where R&D happens. I don’t know that it’s going to be us that cracks the code, but I want to see this church thrive and be part of the contributing factors to churches being healthier in the future.”

Connection and Community

Over their sixteen years at Albuquerque Central Adventist Church, Kim and Steve Williams have grown close to the members of their Sabbath School. “We share each other’s burdens,” Kim Williams says. “When COVID happened, we said, ‘What can we do to keep that going?’”

A class member offered to pay for Zoom. “We are the only old people class that’s been Zooming in this whole time,” Williams notes. “We started inviting other people who don’t usually come to our class. Because everyone misses having fellowship, misses talking to another church member. We have some members who, due to health issues, can’t come to church, so we still have Zoom.

“It’s very challenging, even though now the church is opened up,” Williams reflects. “We just sit far away from each other. We can no longer hug each other and say Happy Sabbath. It takes tremendous discipline to stay engaged.”

Laura Wibberding, an adjunct professor at Pacific Union College, loves the opportunity Zoom provides to hear experts and scholars guest-teaching from across the continent. Her family sometimes listens to an East Coast class during breakfast, then logs on to the Choir Room Sabbath School at PUC. Attendance for the Choir Room has roughly doubled with Zoom, and the class is

considering staying virtual as an online ministry, while meeting slightly earlier to facilitate in-person church attendance and planning regular potlucks and face-to-face fellowship.

“It turns out that accessibility is not just beneficial to those with a disability,” says Wibberding. “It really is a gift to everybody.”

Jennifer Jill Schwirzer, director of the Abide Network counseling ministry, started a Sabbath School class on Facebook Live in early 2020. She soon switched to Zoom “so people could see each other,” and eventually from studying the official lessons to a focus on mental health and spirituality.

“It’s talking about depression and anxiety, and how a relationship with God improves our state of mind,” Schwirzer says.

How to deal with shame and cope with anxiety. That has made it more evangelistic than it would have been. I think a lot of people are bringing their friends because they know that the kind of material is going to be relevant and it’s not going to be esoterically Adventist. And people seem to get a lot out of that. And I think it’s some people who aren’t going to church not just because of COVID but for a lot of other reasons—they’re mad or they’re hurt, or burned in some way or the other.

“I do a 25-minute presentation with slides, then we have a 30-minute group discussion,” says Schwirzer. “Then there are a few breakout groups. The breakouts help give people more chance to bond and speak up.” A 90-second time limit for comments ensures everyone has a chance to share and no one monopolizes the discussion. “What I’ve found is that giving ‘permission’ to talk about mental health enables people to bond more deeply and quickly, even in spite of the challenges of technology, because people are talking about what’s happening inside them instead of just about ideas.”

At the Courthouse Road Church, the Sabbath School Joanna Whitaker and Becky Goodermuth lead has faced repeated technical issues. The technological barrier has cut their attendance from 25–30 to an average of 12–17. Their church’s media team has set them up with Meeting

Owl, a video conferencing camera that tracks who’s speaking.

“I have a feeling we’ll continue to have the combo in-person and Zoom,” says Goodermuth. “One of our couples has health issues with her knees, and getting back and forth is uncomfortable. It’s easier for them to use Zoom, so I think that is something we will always want to be available.”

“When I was hit by a car and not able to come for sometime [*sic*], one of my friends used to call so I could listen on the phone,” says Whitaker. “But it would have been wonderful if I could have accessed on Zoom. People get sick and go out of town, but they can still join. We are definitely going to keep using this.”

“Faith &”

When churches started shuttering in March 2020, Andrews University Associate Professor of Mathematics Anthony Bosman had an idea. It’s grown into the Faith & Sabbath School (live on Zoom and archived on YouTube). The class grew to focus on such topics as social justice, politics, and examining scripture, secularism, and science.

“A number of the participants had been somewhat estranged from their local congregation,” Bosman says.

They found it really refreshing to be in a group that engaged on issues they cared about. It was a way to reengage faith. Probably the typical profile [is] graduate students at non-Adventist universities that may have a small local Adventist congregation but that isn’t always able to address these issues.

We’ve typically had a 20–30-minute presentation followed by small group discussion, then come back at the end with a wider discussion. Especially during lockdown when there was so much social distancing, a lot of people [appreciated] a consistent medium for uplifting, encouraging conversations.

Renu

“Are purpose and calling synonymous?”

The Meadow Glade Adventist Church, in Battle Ground, Washington, is closely tied to a local church

school and academy. The dozen participants in this morning's Renu Young Adult class are watching the *Humans of Adventism* documentary series,² digging into the ideas and themes its stories explore.

A class member tells how he studied the Bible and felt like God was calling him to do something, wondering, *does this mean I'm supposed to be a pastor?* "Then I felt like God was telling me to be a teacher, and now I'm a librarian. And I wonder, am I still answering that call to minister? And hopefully I am."

The Renu class, launched in January 2021, has chosen to meet virtually, even as others have begun meeting in person. "I think in some ways our church has struggled emotionally with COVID because everything is so intertwined," says Heather Moor, a filmmaker and audio producer, and wife of Discipleship Pastor Johnny Moor. "Church services were outside in the summer but now they're indoors, spaced out, and everyone's masked."

The Renu class always starts out with a video to spark discussion. "The Portland area has almost 40 Adventist churches, but it's a very secular city," says Moor.

I think a lot of people around here are open to some form of spirituality. We're hipsters, but we're hippies as well. There's potential there, but because Adventism is a traditional kind of worldview, sometimes we have a difficult time having an impactful presence outside of our little bubble. I think a lot of people who maybe grew up Adventist or went to Walla Walla [University] wind up here.

I've noticed with my friends an expression that what we're doing at church doesn't scratch



Alex Portillo, Renu Sabbath School, Meadow Glade Adventist Church

the itch that they have. I think we can be vulnerable with each other and have real crucial conversations. We've been longing for a certain kind of safe conversational space in Adventism for a long time.

Atlasville

"What is your favorite plant?"

Connecting through Microsoft Teams, the adult Sabbath School members of the Atlasville, South Africa Adventist Church, not far from the Johannesburg airport, always start class with an icebreaker question. "Mine is the sunflower," offers Khethiwe Sithole. "Sometimes you'll see one on the side of the road, and you'll wonder where it came from . . ."

Sithole loves the opportunities her virtual class gives to interact. "[There's] more participation," she says. "I love how we get to know people in ways we never would have known during regular church."

The diverse group of members undertakes an in-depth study of the *Adult Bible Study Guide* each week. This week, they're examining God's covenants with Adam and Eve and with Noah. The question is asked, "Why did God need a remnant?"

"I think a remnant is necessary because it carries on the DNA of the original created people," says class member Rene. "We were made to show the galaxies the love of God."

"In order for prophecy to be fulfilled, there has to be a remnant," offers another.

"There is a mission for us to fulfill."

"Are only Adventists part of God's remnant?"

"Membership of a group doesn't get you into heaven. That's the bottom line. You can be an Adventist, you can be an office bearer at any level of the church, and still miss God. Your relationship with God is what determines your final destination. Full stop."

Youth

It can be challenging to get teens to participate in Sabbath School in person. On Zoom, the silence can be deafening.

Middletown Valley, Maryland Adventist Church youth leaders, Jeff and Becky Scoggins, minister to a mixture of public school, Adventist school, and home

school students locally, plus some teens who've joined from afar. They've found that the same approach that works to draw out and involve teens in person works virtually as well—meet them where they are, and treat them like adults.

Becky is usually the first to lead out each week, drawing the youth in through an interactive activity. “She finds ways to get them to jump up and find three things, something to get them moving and to talk about it,” Jeff says. “Becky’s rule is to just start asking them about things they are interested in. *Where are you at? What’s happening in school?* Just helping to draw them out a bit. If you don’t care about the kids themselves, you’re not going to get anywhere.”

At the end of each class, the Scogginses give an art or photo challenge to share the next week. Once a month the class has collaborated to create a video for children’s story, a highlight for church members missing seeing the youth growing up. They’ve also added a Monday-night Bible study for youth interested in more in-depth Bible study.

The youth class is looking forward to meeting in person again, yet hesitant to lose some of the youth who, though long-distance, have nonetheless become part of their group.

Think of the Children

Kellyville, one of Sydney, Australia’s northwestern suburbs, is part of the city’s “Bible belt.” Due to Australia’s strict measures to quash COVID, Kellyville Adventist Church closed in March 2020 and didn’t meet in person again for several months.

“We’re blessed to have a really incredible media team,” says Kellyville member Michelle Bowman. “They immediately started recording music, putting together videos, and broadcasting a prerecorded church service. The Zoom sessions for the kids were a little bit loose and not clearly defined at first, but very quickly they started having videos the team recorded themselves, videos they got from other places, and time to sing together—which is always a bit of a disaster but hilarious.”

The Kellyville church split its children’s Zoom classes into ages 5 and under and 6 to preteen. “What didn’t work for us was more of a coincidence of when it shut down,” says Bowman. “My older daughter had just finished the

previous group at the end of 2019. The Zoom sessions for the older kids were much more of a ‘Let’s sit and do a little Bible study and chat.’ We gave up within a few weeks, because it wasn’t connecting for her as a 6-year-old who had just learned to read. I think that may have been the case for a number of families, because one of the first things to come back in person was that age group.”

Every few weeks, Orchard City Adventist Church Children’s Ministries leader Shannon Gerber makes a Friday-afternoon run to take art supplies to children’s homes, and mails out several boxes as well. Shannon teaches ages 0–6 at the Kelowna, British Columbia church, while her mother, Cherri Gerber, teaches ages 7–12.

“When everything shut down here, we knew that we wanted to be able to continue the connections with the kids,” Shannon says. “We also knew that a lot of children who attend our VBS every year would be interested. Some attend our Adventist school; some are community members. The first week about 25 kids joined us. Then we saw an increasing need as none of the other five area churches had anything online for kids. Now we have about 35 who attend weekly.

“One really pleasant surprise is the way the kids engage differently than they do in-person,” Shannon observes.

There are more kids to bounce off of since it’s a larger group. We’re also seeing kids who attend the Adventist school interacting with those who don’t in a way they might not often otherwise. The kids have been able to build those relationships.

It’s changing the way we plan to restructure Sabbath School when we do go back in person. Our goal is to find ways for the six local churches to work together. We’re hoping to use this to kind of jumpstart the togetherness, rather than all six churches having people burning out trying to do too many things.

“Teaching on Zoom is not awesome,” says Corinne Hamstra, children’s leader at the Detroit Oakwood Adventist Church in Taylor, Michigan. “It can be super-



Oakwood Detroit Church kids' Zoom Sabbath School

challenging, and singing is almost impossible—but we do it anyway because it's a really important part of Sabbath School."

Corinne teaches alongside her sister, Christie Hamstra, engaging an energetic group of kids from toddlers to middle-schoolers. "We have more participation online than we ever did in person," Corinne notes. "Sometimes the kids come in their pajamas and they're eating their cereal, but that's ok. That's why there's mute."

"We've had babies born who've never been to in-person class," says Christie. "We have a couple kids who were old enough to come to class, but it never fit into their parents' Sabbath morning routine—but they're faithful attenders of the Zoom class."

"People are enjoying streaming other people's churches," Christie observes. "It's not going to go back to church as usual. There will always be this sort of hybrid presence. I think people need it. Our thing when we first started was to provide something that was safe for the kids that's specifically for them. Having the interaction—'What'd you do this week?' 'I got a new dog' 'How's your cat?'—Kids thrive on routine. It's definitely my favorite Zoom of the week, I'll tell you that."

Worship in Exile

Back in the One Track class, two new members tune in, live from their car, as the class reads Isaiah 40 in different versions. Grace reads from a commentary and reflects on the participation of non-Israelites in the new Zion—and how God wants everyone to come together and worship Him, no matter their background.

"That's where they'd have said, we may be suffering now, but God made the promises to us," Trena observes. "People in exile may feel like they've been blown away, but

God has still made these promises."

"We live in a world with people who are in charge—or who maybe make policies—who hurt people," says Grace. "You have empires that cause destruction and ravage other nations. Those don't last forever. Israel's exile in Babylon won't last forever either. However, God does."

"We know that we're mortal and we know that we're going to die," says Trena. "But the comforting part is that God will redeem us. A lot of people suffer in this life. Israel's suffering as a nation wouldn't last forever. I wouldn't want to live in this sinful world forever."

"I wouldn't want to take comfort in transientness," says Stuart. "For me it doesn't come across as comforting."

"I disagree," says Randy. "I take great comfort in knowing there's something beyond."

Endnotes

1. <https://adventisthistorypodcast.org/>
2. <https://humansofadventism.com/epk>



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



Love Sorrow and Joy | Art by Janell Brauer

Just a short time before, the disciples had climbed the stairs to bask in the love of Christ one last time before His great sacrificial gift. Perhaps we see memories of that precious upper-room experience lingering painfully, and yet bringing a hint of light and comfort to the disciples as they witness, at the cross, the blood and water flowing from His heart. Soon the disciples and followers of Jesus will see and understand The Gift. They will pass on the Good News of that Gift to us.

ADVENTIST SOCIETY FOR THE ARTS SEEKS A CREATIVE CURE WITH ART IN THE AGE OF COVID:

An Interview with ASA Editor Rich DuBose

BY BONNIE DWYER

Bonnie Dwyer: We're excited to be featuring art and an artist from the Adventist Society for the Arts' 2021 Show on our *Spectrum* cover. How many artists submitted work for this year's show?

Rich DuBose: Thank you for the opportunity to talk about art and creativity within the context of faith and spirituality. This was the first art show/contest we've sponsored since the formation of ASA (Adventist Society

for the Arts). Over the last eight years we have conducted contests under the inSpire moniker, which I'll say more about in a few moments. With this year's event there were forty submissions by seventeen different artists/photographers.

Can you tell us about the various kinds of art that were submitted?

Most of the submissions are paintings or photography. One piece came in as fabric art. We categorized them all as

visual art and put them in the same show.

There was a virtual show on May 16; can it still be seen?

Yes. There is a section on the ASA website called “Galleries” where viewers can find links to a number of galleries, including the 2021 ASA Art Show. (<https://adventistsocietyforthearts.org/asa-gallery/>)

What was the theme for this year’s contest?

The COVID pandemic has disrupted our lives in so many ways, it seemed appropriate to call it, *Creative Cure: Art in the Age of COVID*.

You are the editor for the Adventist Society for the Arts. Please share a little about the history of the organization: When did it begin? How many artists are members? Are there other activities in addition to the annual art show? What is inSpire?

Adventist Society for the Arts is the next step of an evolving effort to affirm and engage Adventist creatives in sharing their gifts. We started about eight years ago with inSpire—which consisted of annual weekend gatherings at select churches where the entire Sabbath was focused on celebrating the gift of creative expression. We featured guest speakers, TEDtalk-like presentations, art, and music. These have been held twice in Berkeley, CA, at the local Adventist church, then at the La Sierra University Church, Carmichael Adventist Church in Sacramento, and the Kaleo Adventist Church in Arcadia, CA. We were scheduled to do one in Phoenix, AZ in 2020, when COVID struck.

As director for Church Support Services for the Pacific Union Conference, my role is to find new ways to encourage Adventist members and churches to engage in mission. Our mission is to share hope in a hopeless age. Whatever we say better be good or it will be ignored. To reach today’s culture, the message must be compelling and enchanting (with great writing, art, drama, film, and music).

ASA is a virtual and real community that provides opportunities for Adventist Creatives to share their ideas and creations in a collaborative way. Songwriting, drawing, painting, photography, sculpture, poetry, videography, and more can be used in powerful ways to convey stories of faith to our churches and surrounding communities. While the art is not always religious, we seek to reflect ideals that are enduring and spiritually engaging.

We need fresh music, art, photography, videography,

and poetry to convey who God is. In a world of false messaging and alternative facts, people need to know that, as children of God, we are about treating each other with civility, compassion, and grace. With the arts, this can be conveyed in powerful ways.

There is no membership or fee with ASA. The way people join is by participating. We’ve decided not to formalize it, at this point.

We are focused on Adventist members because we want to be intentional about promoting the arts within our church. However, we are not opposed to connecting with other artists outside of the church. At one of our gatherings, we featured art by a young Catholic woman who has created a series of paintings that promote stewardship of the earth.

The Society’s website includes material on art in Scripture; are there artists in the Bible?

Yes, it’s everywhere in Scripture. The record says, “In the beginning, God created.” Then He fashioned creatures in His image with limited, yet similar, capacities to create. We create because it is in our DNA.

Creation week was a bonanza of divine creative expression. God, the Master artist, created hundreds and thousands of different species of animals, insects, and birds.

The first reference to art in Scripture is in Exodus 31, where God instructed Moses to create a tent for the ark of the covenant. Several artists are mentioned whom God had chosen to create “artistic designs” to beautify the tent. God says, “In the hearts of all who are skillful I have put skill.”

What plans does the Society have for next year?

We take it one year at a time. Undoubtedly there will be more shows, and eventually some in-person opportunities to share art in church and community settings.

We’re eager to connect with those who feel the need to create art and music that brings good to life!

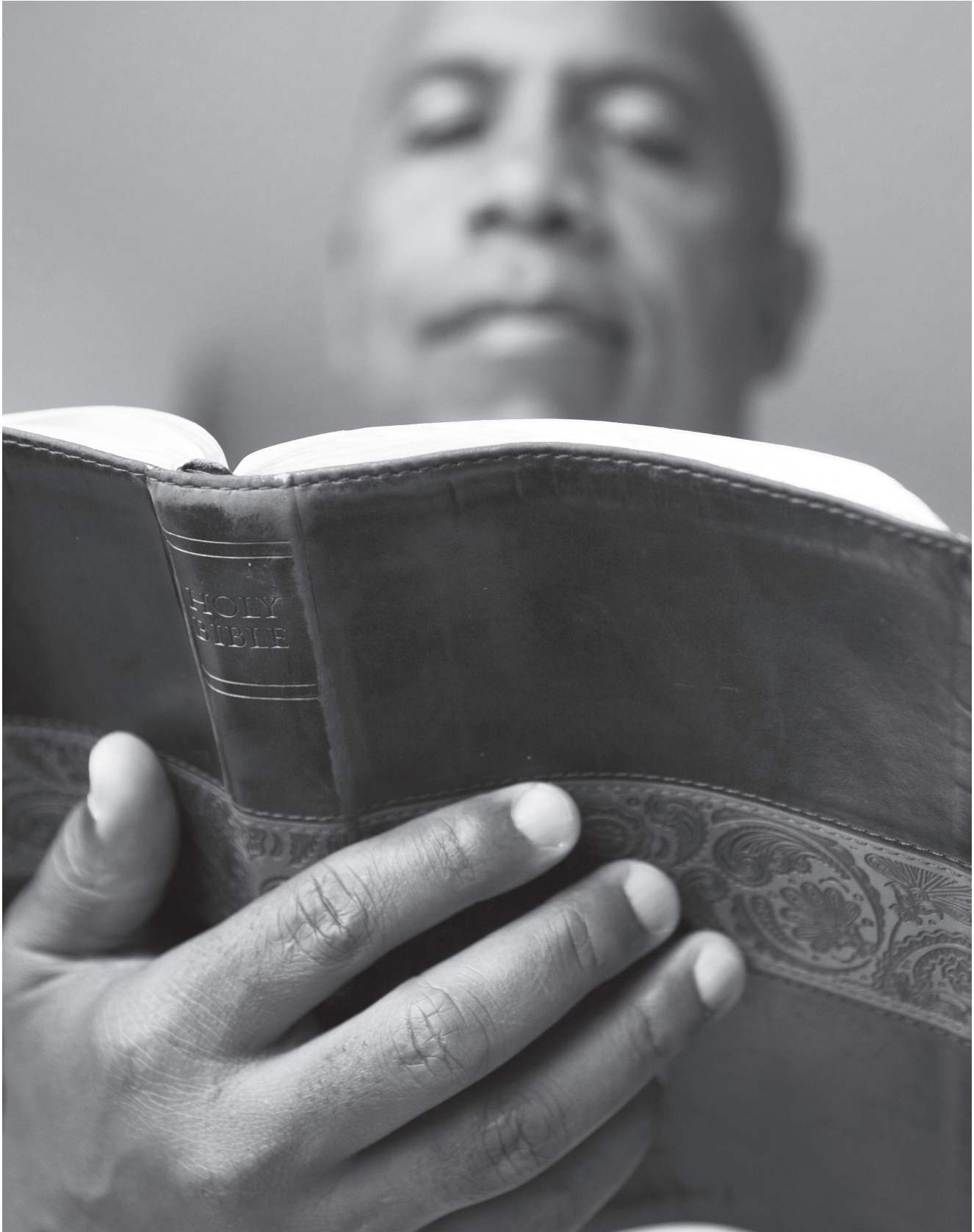
Visit us online at: adventistsocietyforthearts.org and subscribe to our e-letter at <http://eepurl.com/dMIFII>.



BONNIE DWYER is editor of *Spectrum*.

BIBLE READING

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KEYWORDS: prophetic messages, historicist/preterist/futurist/idealist interpretations, apocalyptic texts, the “Mud-slinger”

WHAT DO RECENT BOOKS *on The Revelation Reveal?*

BY REINDER BRUINSMA

Ranko Stefanovic. *Plain Revelation.* Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2013. 253 pp.

Sigve K. Tonstad. *Revelation (Paideia: Commentaries on the New Testament).* Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2019. 398 pp.

Herold Weiss. *The End of the Scroll: Biblical Apocalyptic Trajectories.* Gonzalez, FL: Energion Publications, 2020. 349 pp.

Seventh-day Adventists have inherited an enduring fascination with the books of Revelation and Daniel from Protestant interpreters in past centuries, and especially from their Millerite forebears. Countless books have been written about the prophetic messages in those Bible books, which provided important elements for the “present truth” of the “remnant church.” Many of the older books on this topic may still be found on the shelves of Adventist Book Centers, and many evangelists continue to use the Revelation seminars as a tool to recruit new members. On the right fringe of the Church, the traditional views, with their scary end-time scenarios and their aggressive anti-Catholicism—often tied to weird conspiracy theories—continue to hold sway.

Adventist biblical scholars who want to look with new eyes at the traditional views, and publish their findings, tend to face serious hurdles. The official denominational standpoint that the Church’s leadership wants to see

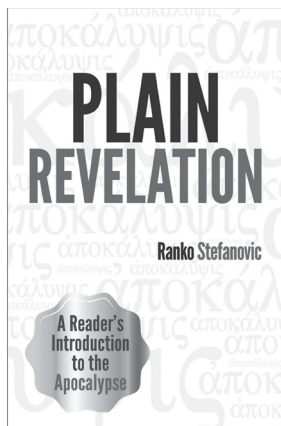
stressed demands that these scholars reject “higher-critical” approaches, strictly apply historicist principles, and follow the trajectory that Ellen G. White solidified into doctrine in *The Great Controversy* and some of her other writings. Many professors at denominational colleges and universities are reluctant to teach courses on Revelation, or, if they speak and write about it, they are very careful, lest they jeopardize their employment status. However, we definitely see developments in Adventist approaches to Daniel and the Revelation. The three books that I review in this article are proof of this; although it is important to note where these books were published. Ranko Stefanovic’s book was published by Andrews University Press, which is less restricted in publishing material that moves somewhat beyond what other presses, like Pacific Press, would feel able to print. Both Sigve Tonstad and Herold Weiss found non-Adventist publishers for their books!

Stefanovic uses the historicist approach and links the Bible text to historical periods, but also allows for a wider application.

Stefanovic: *Plain Revelation*

Dr. Ranko Stefanovic has taught New Testament at Andrews University since 1999. In 2002, Andrews University Press published his *Revelation of Jesus*, a 654-page commentary on the Book of Revelation. Without any doubt, it is one of the most significant Adventist publications on this topic to appear in the last few decades. Writing about the last book of the Bible, Adventist scholars must decide to what extent they want to follow the traditional historicist interpretation. In the introduction to the 2002 edition of his commentary, Ranko Stefanovic noted that he found the historicist approach “sometimes problematic,” because of the difficulty of fitting every detail of the text into a historical fulfillment (11), and, therefore, he did not totally abandon other approaches (preterist, futurist, and idealist), but called for making a case-by-case judgment how the text should govern the interpretation (12). This resulted in substantial negative criticism, and, in the later revised edition, the author somewhat modified this eclectic approach without, however, fully retracting his earlier position. And, although the historicist approach would, to a major extent, guide Stefanovic in his exposition of Revelation, the reader finds that, in many cases, he is not as specific in linking the symbols of Revelation to particular historical events and persons as most traditional Adventists authors.

When the leaders decided that the world Church would study the Book of Revelation during the first quarter of 2019, they turned to Dr. Stefanovic, who was considered one of the Church’s experts on this topic. In the process of preparing his manuscript for worldwide translation, production, and distribution, serious problems emerged, and twice the manuscript was recalled for “major revisions to correct numerous errors.” The main



objections seem to have focused on ensuring that only a strict historicist interpretation would be followed and that the traditional adversity toward Roman Catholicism would be maintained in full vigor.

In 2013, the leadership of Andrews University urged Stefanovic to produce an introduction to his 2002 commentary. Its purpose was to explain Revelation in “plain language.” This book is the first part of this combined review. It stands to reason that its content very much resembles that of Stefanovic’s earlier work.

In the introduction of *Plain Revelation*, the author discusses such elements as authorship, date, and structure, but focuses, in particular, on the various interpretative schools. He concludes that they all are inadequate, but that the historicist approach “does the best job of discovering the Revelation’s message for all generations, even until the end of the age” (16). This includes also the rule concerning prophetic time, in which a day is believed to stand for a year.

Right from the beginning, Stefanovic emphasized that the theme of John’s book is that “the Revelation is Jesus Christ” (22). It is “gospel as much as the four gospels are” (23). The purpose of the Apocalypse is not to provide us with a “fortune-telling book. Nor are these prophecies given to satisfy our obsessive curiosity about the future. Their primary purpose is to assure us of Jesus’s presence with His people, throughout history and its final events” (25).

The treatment of the letters to the seven churches (chapters 2 and 3) follows the interpretation that Adventists have traditionally espoused; the messages apply to seven periods of Christian history: from Ephesus, which stands for the apostolic first-century church, to Laodicea, which pictures a church that is “self-sufficient and lukewarm, struggling with its authenticity. Christ’s warning to this church has a far-reaching implication for all who are part of that church at the closing period of this earth’s history” (65). It is noteworthy that the author refrains from making a direct application to the Adventist Church. Furthermore, every one of these messages is also applicable to other churches and to “different types of Christians in certain

periods of history and locations” (42).

In Revelation chapters 4 and 5, the focus is on how Christ has overcome the evil one and joins the Father on his throne. The next chapter, about the seven seals, describes God’s people in the process of overcoming, so that they may share the throne with Jesus, which culminates in chapter 7, where we see how God’s people share the throne with Jesus (74).

The sealed scroll is a symbolic reference to the divine plan of salvation, which is gradually “unsealed” in the time between John’s writing and the Second Coming (76). Seals 1–4 picture “the means God uses to keep His people on track”; seal 5 refers to God’s people being “harmed and martyred by hostile enemies”; while seals 6 and 7 concern God who comes “in judgment against those who harmed his people.”

“There is a correlation between the seven seals and different epochs in Christian history,” but “it is important not to limit the realities of the four horsemen (seals 1–4) to one particular period” (92). This parallels the approach to the seven churches; Stefanovic uses the historicist approach and links the Bible text to historical periods, but also allows for a wider application. This is seen time and again in his commentary, but the historicist interpretation is dominant. And thus, the supernatural events connected with the opening of the sixth seal are linked to the Lisbon earthquake of 1755, the “dark day” in New England of May 19, 1780, and the meteor shower of November 13, 1833 (96).

The seven trumpets “refer to God’s intervention in history in response to the prayers of His oppressed people.” They are a warning that the final judgment will come. Like the churches and the seals, they cover all of Christian history (110). But, while Stefanovic attaches timeslots to the first four trumpets, the temporal application of the sixth and seventh trumpet is not specified—in stark contrast with many earlier Adventist commentaries. However, in chapter 11 the traditional historicist interpretation returns.

With chapter 12 we are at the core of the Revelation: the great cosmic controversy between Christ and his church and Satan and his rebellious allies. John refers to the beginning of the controversy—the war in heaven—and points to the efforts of Satan to kill the Redeemer and, later, to persecute the church. Chapter 13 introduces the powers that Satan enlists in his devious campaign against the people of God. The beast from the sea,

which is identical with Daniel’s little horn, is identified as the medieval church (157). The “deadly wound” that is inflicted on the beast symbolizes the serious reduction of the power of Roman Catholicism at the time of the French Revolution (158). Stefanovic remains much vaguer about what comes next. “The religious-political power that Satan used in the Middle Ages, which came to an end in the French Revolution, will rise again and exercise its oppressive power over the world at the end of time” (158). The “beast from the earth” is identified (in just a short paragraph) as the United States of America. It will play a key role in the distribution of the “mark of the beast,” which is a sign of allegiance to the Satanic forces. Sunday observance will eventually become that “mark” (164). The traditional Adventist interpretation of 666 as a Latin title of the pope is rejected. The number has a Babylonian connotation and refers symbolically to “humanity apart from God” (167).

After this, the pace of the book picks up. The author needs only about seventy pages to deal with the last nine chapters of Revelation. From a traditional Adventist perspective there are but few surprises. He interprets the judgment in the message of the first angel as the pre-Advent judgment (175). “Babylon,” in the message of the second angel, represents “the satanic trinity” (Satan, the beast from the sea, and the beast from the earth)—an expression that several Adventist interpreters have begun to use (175). The seven plagues of Revelation 16 are “reserved exclusively for those who rejected God and received the mark of the beast” (183). We must expect these future plagues to be literal but should be reluctant to be specific about the details (186). However, somewhat inconsistently, the battle of Armageddon is clearly spiritual (196, 207).

John continues with a section about the Fall of Babylon. This is followed by a depiction of the contrasting futures for the saved and the lost through the image of the two suppers, and by Christ’s glorious Second Coming, and the thousand-year period—with Satan bound, the earth in utter chaos and the saints in heaven, and the execution of the final judgement at the end of the thousand years. Finally, John gives glimpses of the recreated new earth, with its capital, the new Jerusalem. Contrary to the symbolic interpretation of “Babylon,” this cube-form city will be “a real place inhabited by real people” (237). The Revelation ends with an affirmation of the Second Coming.

This “introduction” to the author’s more comprehensive commentary on the Revelation might, perhaps, be better characterized as an *abbreviated* edition of the commentary, since it offers far more than just an introduction. Whether the reader of the book feels that it does full justice to its title (*Plain Revelation*) probably depends on whether or not he/she has an Adventist background. For a novice in apocalyptic subjects, it may pose quite a challenge.

Stefanovic is in line with other recent Adventist authors who wrote books on the Revelation (e.g., Jon Paulien and Jacques Doukhan and, to a lesser extent, Norman Gulley) in being more circumspect in referring to historical events and persons than earlier generations of interpreters were. Direct references to Roman Catholicism and negative comments about other churches are avoided and sensationalist speculation about end-time events are left to writers and DVD-producers on the right fringe of the Church. But, as we shall see below, Stefanovic’s views differ very much from those of Sigve Tonstad and Herold Weiss.

Sigve K. Tonstad, *Revelation*

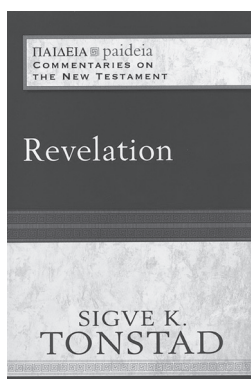
Sigve Tonstad, who hails from Norway, is a medical doctor as well as a creative and competent New Testament scholar. He earned his doctorate in theology from St. Andrews University in Scotland. In recent years, he taught at the School of Religion of Loma Linda University. Tonstad has written a number of thought-provoking books. His most notable publications are a book on the Sabbath (*The Lost Meaning of the Seventh Day*, Andrews University Press, 2009) and a commentary on the Book of Romans (*The Letter to the Romans: Paul Among the Ecologists*, Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2016). But he has also written numerous articles (notably in *Spectrum*) and is active on Facebook, where he frequently publishes poems. He is one of the truly innovative thinkers in Adventism, for whom I have a great admiration.

Many Adventist readers may wonder

whether Tonstad’s book *Revelation* is in fact an *Adventist* commentary, or how it should be classified. Tonstad was invited to write the commentary for the *Paideia: Commentaries on the New Testament* “that sets out to comment on the final form of the New Testament text in a way that pays due attention both to the cultural, literary, and theological settings in which the text took form and to the interests of the contemporary readers to whom the commentaries are addressed” (p. ix in the Foreword to Tonstad’s book). The series is aimed students in theological studies programs, seminarians, and upper-division undergraduates.

Tonstad does not follow one of the traditional models for interpreting the Revelation, applying it neither to the first century, with the Roman Empire as the great villain, nor to the end of time with some monstrous Antichrist as the world’s ruler. He shies away from the view that sees the prophecies of the Apocalypse fulfilled in the course of history and puts the papacy in a sinister “beastly” role. That certainly is a break with the Adventist tradition. In doing so, he follows a path where many of his scholarly colleagues in the Church still fear to tread. Openly denying the historicist approach to the Revelation usually spells trouble for Adventist theologians who work within an Adventist academic environment, even though many of them have their doubts about the validity of many of the traditional explanations of the prophecies of Daniel and the Revelation.

To follow this non-orthodox path was a difficult choice, considering the fact that Tonstad was connected with the School of Religion at Loma Linda University when he wrote his commentary (and continues to have this connection). Would he come under heavy criticism from church leaders and conservative Adventist academics, who regard the historicist approach as a *sine qua non* for denominationally employed scholars? Tonstad is to be admired for his courage to deviate from the traditional Adventist approach and suggest a different way of



Tonstad is not a historicist, but neither is he a preterist or futurist. He is adamant that Revelation “does not specify a certain roadmap of events” but “claims a temporal horizon that covers all of history, past, present and future.”

understanding the Apocalypse. However, it may well be argued that Tonstad's commentary is definitely within the Adventist tradition. It consistently emphasizes how the great controversy theme is the thread that runs through this entire Bible book. He sees one overarching theme in John's revelation: the great conflict between God and Satan, God's accuser, whom he refers to as the *Mudslinger* (23).

Tonstad is not a historicist, but neither is he a preterist or futurist. He is adamant that Revelation "does not specify a certain roadmap of events" but "claims a temporal horizon that covers all of history, past, present and future" (28). After careful analysis, Tonstad concludes that the content of Revelation "surpasses historical contingencies" (xiii). What it describes is much bigger than the exploits of the Roman Empire, and Emperor Nero in particular, and the characterization of the false worship that Revelation focuses on cannot be made to fit the historical realities of the cult of emperor worship (5–11). The perspective in Revelation is cosmic rather than Roman (19).

After addressing such introductory matters as authorship and date, language and literary structure, and the role of Old Testament allusions, the book takes us, section by section, through the text of Revelation, often providing the author's own translation of the Greek original. The message of Revelation is addressed to the seven churches, which are "types and representatives of the condition, needs and aspirations of the church universal" (54). The issues that John enumerates in these letters are "internal, intra-Christian issues" and have been relevant throughout Christian history (101).

After these first chapters, the reader is introduced to the heavenly drama of the opening of the scroll, which is sealed with seven seals. The subject matter of the scroll is one of "the most vexing realities in human experience" (103). It shows the archenemy at work. God allows the *Mudslinger* to take away the peace from the world and to show his true colors (125). But this permission is only "temporary and apparent" (128). The seals show "what happens to the cosmos if God steps away" (129).

Revelation 7 reports that the saints are "sealed." Tonstad argues that "to receive the seal of the living God is best understood as an inward matter" (132). It is a prelude to the "homecoming of the 144,000 and the great multitude" of the saved. The "exposé of the demonic agency then continues in greater detail in two

more cycles" (140), namely that of the trumpets and the bowls with the plagues.

Wherever the *Mudslinger* "moves, destruction and mayhem follow" (148). The trumpets show "a power at work other than God. The author of the Revelation spares no effort to bring out the demonic identity of this power" (171). The bowls with the plagues, in chapter 16, parallels the "trumpet sequence point by point, except for being more severe" (217).

Chapters 12 through 14 are the center of the Revelation. Tonstad's chapter that deals with these chapters is appropriately titled "The Cosmic Conflict from A to Z" (174). There is no tidy timeline (179) for this battle of ideas (180). We should refrain from attempts to put historical labels on the demonic powers that are depicted. Even the "number of the beast" does not allow for that. "The number 666 signifies an imitation that is stunning incompleteness" and shows "the fake, ersatz character" of the demonic project (198). The modern reader must always remember that "Revelation operates at the level of symbols and representations. Drawing lines from the symbols to historical realities is a fraught enterprise, as all dominant schools of interpretation prove" (215).

In chapters 17 and 18, the story of the dragon's war against "the woman" and "the rest of her offspring" continues, with an alliance of political entities (the beast and Babylon, "the seductress-in-chief" (266). However, this is followed by the good news of Revelation, with the marriage feast of the Lamb, the arrival of the Rider on a white horse, who is "called Faithful and Truth," and the ensuing judgment over the wicked. Then follows the millennium of chapter 20 and the arrival of a new creation. Satan's plot of deceit is coming to its end and the "final showdown in the cosmic conflict will take place" (289). In the end, there will be a "new" world, which is more easily described in terms of what will no longer be, than in terms of what this renewed reality will be like (304). "The earth is damaged, but it is not doomed. Revelation does not envision a replacement earth. *Renewed* is the meaning of *new*, *healed* is the remedy for *broken*. Even more important, *heaven* is not the address at journey's end. The final address, resoundingly, is *earth*" (305).

Tonstad has had the courage to read the Revelation with new eyes. The book he has written gives evidence, page after page, that he is thoroughly conversant with the

relevant literature. After carefully weighing the different viewpoints, he proposes his own interpretations, which results in a fascinating book, full of new insights. If his views will not replace the more traditional views of an Adventist reader, at the very least they will deepen his understanding of the spiritual meaning of this often so enigmatic part of the Scriptures.

Herold Weiss: *The End of the Scroll*

The third book in this combined review differs in many ways from the other two. Where the studies of Ranko Stefanovic and Sigve Tonstad deal exclusively with the Book of Revelation, *The End of the Scroll: Biblical Apocalyptic Trajectories* by Herold Weiss devotes just under forty pages to the last book of the Bible. The aim of Weiss is to analyze all Bible books that have a significant interest in apocalypics, and to sketch the different approaches that are taken by the different biblical authors.

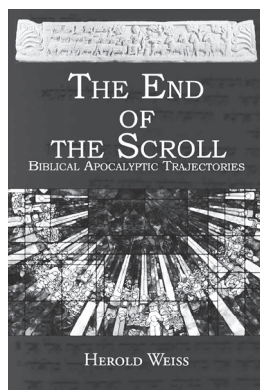
The fact that Weiss follows the consensus of most New Testament scholars about the dating and authorship of the New Testament writings, rather than adhering to the conservative views of traditional Adventist scholarship, with its dislike for the methods of historical-criticism, was no surprise to me. When I attended the theological seminary at Andrews University in the academic year 1965–1966, I thoroughly enjoyed the class in New Testament Introduction, which was team-taught by Sakae Kubo, Earle Hilgert, and Herold Weiss, who was the youngest of this gifted trio. All three of them came under heavy criticism and left Andrews University at the end of that academic year. Kubo was demoted to a post in the seminary library of Andrews University, and Hilgert and Weiss went to pursue their academic careers elsewhere: at St Mary's College (Notre Dame University) and McCormick Seminary, respectively.

It was in their class that I first became acquainted with the views of most scholars regarding the origin and development of the biblical (especially New Testament) writings. In his tracing of the apocalyptic trajectories in

the Bible, Weiss follows what he considers the most likely chronological sequence. After looking at apocalyptic sections in the prophetic writings, with special attention for Jeremiah, Deutero-Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Zechariah, he takes the reader to the “Book of the Watchers.” This apocalyptic document is incorporated in the First Book of Enoch, which most Protestants now consider as apocryphal, but was very popular among early Christians, and related to 1 and 2 Peter and the letter of Jude. From there, the author moves on to Daniel, an unknown writer who tried to establish his credentials through Daniel's reputation, whom (unsurprisingly) he dates in the second century BC, in the time of the troubles caused by the Seleucid king Antiochus Epiphanes IV.

Weiss recognizes only seven letters as Pauline (Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, and Philemon.) The other letters traditionally attributed to Paul, the essay that was addressed to “the Hebrews,” and the “general” letters, which are mostly dated later in the first century or even a little later, follow, after the “apocalyptic trajectories” of the three synoptic gospels have been discussed. And towards the end of this apocalyptic tour through the Bible, the book of Revelation is put under the magnifying glass.

Throughout the book, Weiss points to several common characteristics of the apocalyptic Bible portions. But his main intention is not to search for similarities, but to show how apocalyptic thinking developed as circumstances changed. His fundamental thesis is that the apocalyptic writers did not have foretelling the future as their goal. They want “to tell confused believers who cannot make sense of their present in a fallen world to persevere with patience so as to receive their just award in the end” (28, 29). The “trajectories,” which are sketched in different times, under differing circumstances, differ significantly from each other. In the earlier Old Testament apocalyptic texts, the focus tends to be on Israel's national restoration, often after dramatic end-time military battles. Although we find as a common thread in the various apocalyptic agendas that God is just and powerful, Paul's apocalyptic theology “does not culminate in gory battles with armies led by a Dragon coming out of a bottomless pit, but in the love of God that never ends” (132). “His apocalypticism is radically transformed by his certainty of the resurrection of Christ as the already established foundation of the New Creation” (127). The author of Hebrews draws the future



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into the present and emphasizes how the believer can already access the new reality, in which Christ as the High Priest officiates in a heavenly sanctuary (152). For John the Revelator, the conflict that is going on is not a cosmic conflict. The battle is in the minds of the people who must decide whether or not they are going to worship the beast and its image (259).

In the section that is devoted to the Book of Revelation, there is very little that reminds the reader of the traditional Adventist interpretation of this Bible book. Weiss disagrees with the basic premise of both Stefanovic and Tonstad. Weiss does not mention the term preterism, but in fact he supports a form of preterism. John does not write for later generations. “To read the Book of Revelation as a chart with which to find the meaning of historical events in the twenty-first century, or in any previous century, is a travesty of its message” (289). This applies to the other “apocalyptic trajectories” as well; their goal is not to offer an escape from present hardships, or inform about the future, but to provide “guidance for how to live well in the present” (334). John wrote for his contemporaries in the Roman world of emperor worship and periods of persecution. He wanted to “give comfort and warnings to those who are being tested and have to decide who they are going to worship” (264). God is just and is powerful. The “throne” is the central icon of the Revelation. And believers have received the promise that they will sit on the throne of the Lamb and rule over the nations (281).

What does an Adventist reader take away from reading Weiss’s fascinating book? The way in which the author explains how “apocalyptic trajectories” change over time and must always be understood against the background of the time in which the prophets spoke and wrote, is something members of the Adventist Church do not always realize. And when reading the book of Daniel and John’s Apocalypse it is important to appreciate that their messages are first and

foremost not to predict a future end-time scenario, but to assure God’s people that God is in charge and will ensure that, “in the end,” justice and divine mercy will prevail.

I do not claim to have the expertise to judge whether all standpoints of the three authors whose books I reviewed are fully defensible. However, I applaud any attempt, by any Adventist scholar, to take a fresh look at this part of the Bible that is so important to our faith community. For those who want to survey the “official” Adventist position, but have it presented in a more positive, irenic, and spiritual way than they find in many older books, *Plain Revelation* by Ranko Stefanovic is highly recommended. For those who are willing to be challenged with respect to what they used to hear, and who perhaps have wondered what alternative approaches to Revelation might appeal to them, and which they might find intellectually more acceptable, the two other books have much to offer. I hope these books will stimulate many of my fellow Adventist believers to take a new look at old views and traditions and gain a new understanding of which are relevant for their spiritual journey in the twenty-first century.



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THE FLOOD AND THE CROSS

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The God of THE GEOLOGIC COLUMN, THE CROSS, AND WORSHIP

BY JOHN T. BALDWIN, LEONARD R. BRAND, FELIX H. CORTEZ, ELAINE G. KENNEDY,
AND RANDALL W. YOUNKER

In the discussion of origins, we see the geologic column prompting an important question: Is the geologic column a record of divine creation or divine judgment? And how does the answer to that question impact our worship of the divine?

Stephen Jay Gould coined the term “deep time” to refer to the discovery of the geologic column and its representation of millions of years of life on earth.¹ Did Christ, who created “all things” (John 1:3), use deep time to create? Or is the geologic column a rock record of divine judgment, revealing how Christ, saddened in view of human wickedness (Gen. 6:5–8; Ezek. 33:11; Mic. 7:18), sent the *mabbûl*, the global Genesis Flood over which He sat as king (Ps. 29:10; Gen. 6–9)?

Does your answer impact your view of God's worship-worthiness?

While some modern theologians, such as Longdon Gilkey, fault Genesis's *cosmogony*, or theory of the origin of the universe, as being mistaken or in error, others, such as John Walton, hold that biblical cosmogony was only meant to teach about God—theology and not science.² Gilkey insists that Genesis 1–11 must be translated into categories of myth or symbol.³ Another theologian,

Rudolf Bultmann, a New Testament scholar, claims that no evil, personal Satan, or fallen angels exist.⁴ The mythical nature of biblical eschatology leads him to also suggest that the faithful will not meet Christ in the air.⁵

Removing evil, as Bultman does, from the equation would mean that supernatural agencies of evil neither impact earthly animals, plants, and people,⁶ nor wage war against Christ as has been described biblically and by Ellen G. White.⁷ The Scriptures teach that our world is a fallen planet, implying that it is now Christ's Creation Plan B, having been subjected to futility (Rom. 8:20–21), to three divine curses, one each upon the animal, vegetable, and mineral kingdoms.⁸

Even within Adventism there are differences in opinion on how to view the geologic column. Jim Hayward has pointed out the need to distinguish between field data and worldview-informed interpretation of data.⁹ On this we concur. Plus, there is a need to treat our colleagues with whom we disagree kindly, as Hayward and Joe Galusha have demonstrated. But while we strongly agree on these two points, we suggest a contrastive approach on how to facilitate a dialog between “consensus” scientific conclusions on origins by the secular world and the origin

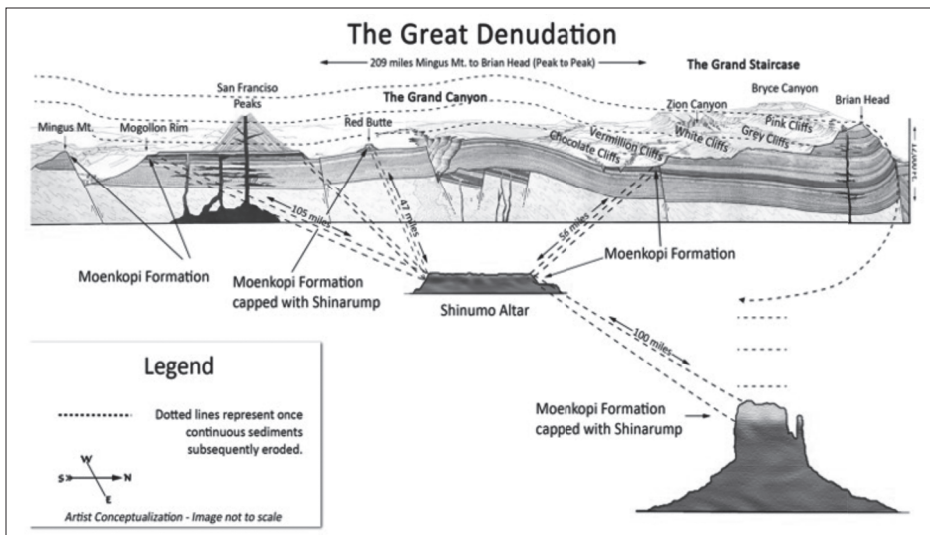


Fig. 1. Geologic cross-section map, used with permission of Zion National Park, with information added by Reed Richardi, team assistant. The map depicts the Grand Staircase, the Grand Canyon, and the Great Denudation. The viewer is looking westward, with the Grand Staircase to the right edge of the diagram. Note that no corresponding staircase appears on the left side, or to the south of the Grand Canyon.

statements of the Bible. While theological implications of data do not refute empirical data, they may prompt the reinterpretation of a standard scientific interpretation of the data, while still affirming the existence of the data itself.

Purpose

In light of these perspectives, the purpose of this piece is to explore: 1) If the geologic column represents His deep-time handiwork, how the character of the Creator and His worship-worthiness may be impacted, as evaluated particularly in light of Calvary, which points to the remedy of natural evil;¹⁰ 2) how Revelation 14:7 responds; and 3) how geomorphological data is consistent with what would be expected in the receding waters of a global Flood.

The Deep-Time Rock Record and Christ's Character

The raw contents of the geologic column should not be overblown, ignored, or bowdlerized to obtain desired results. Four points about the column do need to be made as we begin our exploration.

1. *Extinctions in the Column.* Does the God of deep time abandon lower creatures like pawns, roadkill on a developmental path toward desired animals, as Del Ratzsch has questioned?¹¹ God abandons no one (Deut. 31:6).

2. *Diseased Fossils.* Can disease form part of a deep-time Creation¹² in light of Christ's healing ministry (Isa. 61:1; Luke 4:18), that no animal groaned in Eden (Rom. 8:20–23)¹³ and that sickness is absent in the new earth (Isa. 33:24; Rev. 21:3)?

3. *Predation.* Can cruel predators, preserved as fossils, represent the original will of God? In Eden, no land animal or bird was to serve as another animal's food, since they all consumed "green herbs" (Gen. 1:30). Here the question of overpopulation arises. We

believe the entrance of the sin problem prohibited God from revealing to us His method of addressing the serious question of overpopulation, which will be explained to our biological satisfaction in the new earth.

4. *Meteor Impacts and Violent Twisting Strata.*¹⁴ Surely these phenomena do not represent a God of peace and order (Isa. 9:6; 1 Cor. 14:40).

The Elephant in the Room

John Stuart Mill observes, "Killing, the most criminal act recognized by human laws, Nature does once to every being that lives," often in a cruel manner.¹⁵ Replace Mill's "Nature" with "God" and the deepest problem of this paper is evident. Does the God of long ages kill living things He creates? Since Christ creates and *upholds* creatures (Heb. 1:3; Col. 1:17), they should live indefinitely, but they die. Why?¹⁶ For lower life-forms to die in the deep-time model, Christ must originally and intentionally program these creatures to live, lose quality of life, and die,¹⁷ before sin on this earth, thereby becoming the Author of death, the very characteristic of the wicked one (Heb. 2:13; 1 John 3:12).

The Cross reveals the image of God as known to Himself, the basic criterion of His worship-worthiness, which He does not contradict. We assume within God, as known to Himself, there exists what we could describe as

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no darkness (evil) at all, but only light (truth and goodness). God is wholly good.¹⁸ Motivated by unconditional love¹⁹ for His creatures, and abhorrence of death, Christ perished to perish perishing, thereby guaranteeing that the originator of perishing would himself perish.²⁰ Does God create through death, the enemy He died to eradicate?

For theologian Thomas Torrance, the Cross shows that death, disease, and natural evil are “an outrage” against God’s love.²¹ Evil is not compatible with God,²² the “Lamb who was slain” (Rev. 5:12), who grieves when a sparrow falls wounded to the ground (Matt. 10:29–31),²³ the lover of beauty,²⁴ who is “righteous in all His ways,

gracious in all His deeds” (Isa. 145:17).

Christ’s love for lower animals is supremely exemplified after His crucifixion, when the sacrificial lamb escaped death, implying that Christ did not wish even one sacrificial lamb to die needlessly.²⁵

Thus, the elephant in the room is the God of long ages creating through death. John Polkinghorne, theologian, raises the key question about this elephant: “*Why, if the new creation is to be free from death and decay, God did not bring such a world into being from the start?*”²⁶ Polkinghorne, accepting Genesis 1–3, and Revelation 12:7–9 as myth, must claim that God created and tested free moral humans



All Images Courtesy of the Author

Fig. 2. Team photo of the Chocolate Cliffs, the bottom cliff (riser) of the Grand Staircase. The capping stratum is the lighter Shinarump, which is conglomerate composed of pebbles and fossil pieces of broken tree limbs, suggestive of rapid, high energy, flood-stage deposition.

Art Chadwick, vertebrate paleontologist, identified additional small fossil-wood pieces and sticks embedded into this same flat, relatively thin Shinarump stratum located in Canyon de Chelly, approximately 200 miles from the location pictured here. Such widespread, high-energy flood deposition is consistent with what would be expected to occur in the rising waters of the global Flood.

at a distance over millions of years through suffering,²⁷ then stepped into time to show that He suffers with us.²⁸ By contrast, Scripture teaches that God tested free moral beings in perfect environments,²⁹ invalidating claims to the contrary.

Finally, since Darwin assesses nature as “horridly cruel”³⁰ but blind to it,³¹ how much more cruel for an “all seeing” God to create Darwin’s nature! Evolutionist David Hull concurs. The “God implied by evolutionary theory” is “almost diabolical . . . not the sort of God to whom anyone would be inclined to pray.”³² Hull’s God exhibits no image of the God of Calvary,³³ rather that of Christ’s adversary. For all the above reasons, the Christ of Scripture cannot be the God of the long-age model.

Since the God of Scripture alone is Creator (Isa. 44:6–8), the basic geologic column was either created by materialistic processes alone, or by Christ’s judgment Flood.

Does Scripture imply the origin of that pesky column? We turn to God’s final message to humanity for clarification.

God Is Worthy of Worship: Revelation 14:7

The angel urges us to worship God. However, in the post-Darwinian era is He really worthy of worship? Christ anticipated, and skillfully addressed through His angel, the challenge to His worship-worthiness brought by the claim of the existence of a fossiliferous column. We have seen that *how* God created the column—briefly, or over



Fig.3. Google Maps view of the northeastern escarpment of Black Mesa with hanging valleys draining in parallel fashion to the southwest.

long ages—determines whether He is worthy or unworthy of worship.

The angel does not say, “worship your Maker”; that would not tell how God created. Instead, he says, “Worship him [*tō*, the (One)] that *made heaven, and earth and the sea, and the fountains of waters*” (Rev. 14:7, KJV). This reveals a merciful, temporal method of creating. How? The italicized words in Revelation 14:7 copy the same italicized words in Exodus 20:11, which reads: “For in six days the Lord [YHWH, Christ, 1 Cor. 10:4] *made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them.*” Jon Paulien, the New Testament scholar, indicates that these italicized words constitute an allusion to the cosmogonic portion of the Sabbath commandment (Exod. 20:11).³⁴

By referring the divine “Him” of Revelation 14:7 to the Lord of Exodus 20:11, the allusion *equates* the “Him”

If God created all things, he is able to judge them and
to recreate them. If he did not, there is no universal
basis for accountability or hope.

The Hebrew Bible implies that the original creation was not local but, in effect, all earth encompassing, global in extent, as we say today. The Flood was an *undoing* of the original whole-world creation.

and the “Lord” who created in six days. Therefore, the “Him” of Revelation 14:7 created mercifully in six days, not cruelly over long ages! This is good news, showing that the God of Revelation 14:7 is worthy of worship due in part to His brief, merciful method of creating.³⁵

What about the idea that the deep-time fossiliferous column disproves a recent creation? In *Exodus 20:11*, the words, “made the heavens and the earth, the sea,” are followed by, “and all that is in them.” However, in the judgment setting in *Revelation 14:7*, Christ’s angel inserts, “fountains of waters”³⁶ (a configuration found only in Revelation 14:7³⁷) instead of the expected, “and all that is in them,” for spiritual and earth history reasons expressed in the text.

Importantly, neither “trees” nor “humans,” for example, are inserted. Why? Reference only to the “fountains of waters” recalls the previous divine-judgment Flood, when the “fountains of the deep” burst open.³⁸ Readers who are reminded that the God of Creation is

also a God of Judgment should be encouraged to accept the Creator’s pre-advent judgment message for their salvation. If God created all things, he is able to judge them and to recreate them. If he did not, there is no universal basis for accountability or hope. Therefore, the understanding of God as creator is foundational to the hope of Christian eschatology.³⁹

Reference to a mythical Flood cannot establish the Lord as a God of judgment. Its recall for this purpose means this Flood was historically true! This invites us to factor a global flood into the model of earth history in response to the worship challenge of a deep-time column.

A global flood deposits basic portions of the column sequentially, which has the effect of suggesting that the deep time column is real. However, a global flood deposits basic portions of the geologic column sequentially, and rapidly, over a period of more than a year, and thus does not undermine the biblical account that Christ employed a brief, six-day, merciful method of creating, demonstrating that He is worthy of worship. Here, we gently differ with Jack Hoehn, who has written that the angel of Revelation 14 mentions nothing about the days or methods of creation, only the fact of creation.⁴⁰

Regarding the biblical Flood, Charles Lyell declared, “We should not expect to find any monuments of that catastrophe.”⁴¹ Had he known about and had access to the detailed geomorphological information regarding the landforms in places such as Southern Utah and northern Arizona perhaps the evidence might have encouraged him to alter his dictum. Now we turn to geomorphological field data that may be interpreted as evidences of a few “monuments of that catastrophe.”

Geomorphology and the Flood

The Hebrew Bible implies that the original creation was not local but, in effect, all earth encompassing, global

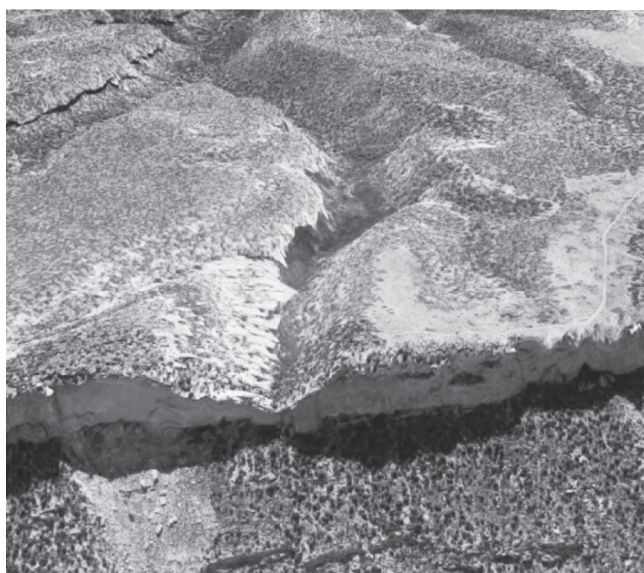


Fig. 4. Google Maps image documents a fully formed Black Mesa hanging valley beginning abruptly at the cliff’s vertical edge.

From a position combining scientific thinking with the biblical account of the Flood, these sculpted landforms represent formidable “monuments” of that Catastrophe.

in extent, as we say today.⁴² The Flood was an *undoing* of the original whole-world creation. *Undoing* a global creation with water requires a global Flood.⁴³

Although academic skepticism against a global flood remains, the stigma for invoking hypotheses involving flood processes unobserved today is dissipating, thankfully, due to the discoveries of megaflooding on Earth and Mars.⁴⁴

Michael Lamb, Caltech geomorphologist, indicates that identifying distinctive morphologies of a landform can suggest its formation. For instance, he identified rim scour on a Snake River cove, suggesting it was not made by slow undercutting seepage, but by overland megaflooding from the breaching of ancient Lake Bonneville, Utah.⁴⁵

Leonard Brand has turned to the Grand Staircase and its missing stairs to make a case for scientific thinking from a Biblical worldview.⁴⁶ How were the five massive stairstep cliffs of the Grand Staircase in southern Utah formed (Fig. 1)? Figure 2 displays the bottom stair, the

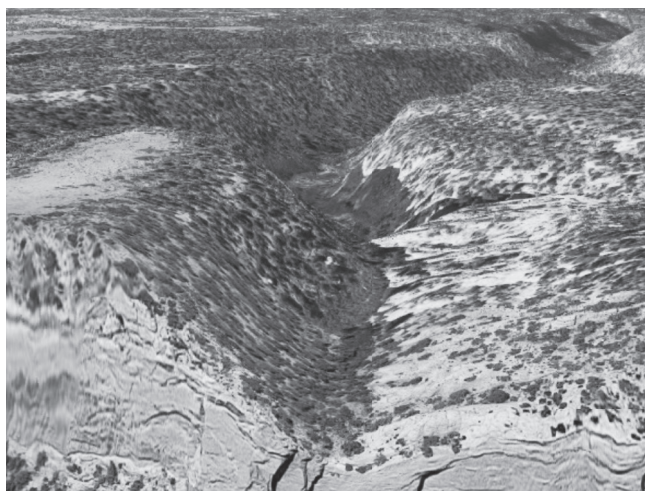


Fig. 5. Close-up of Fig. 4, showing how a vertical cliff underlies the bottom of the hanging valley, which underscores the “beheaded” nature of the hanging valley, and the massive amount of catastrophic overland flooding necessary to sculpt these hanging valleys and to cut the vertical escarpment.

Chocolate Cliffs capped by the Shinarump.

If the Grand Staircase were formed by river action, a valley, narrow or wide, would be formed, with cliffs or banks on both sides of the valley. However, this distinctive morphological configuration is not displayed by the Grand Staircase. Only northern cliffs exist. No matching southern cliffs are present (Fig. 1).

This striking, *incomplete* overall morphology of the region suggests that the Grand Staircase was formed by “a massive catastrophic flow of water across the southwestern United States.”⁴⁷

This hypothesis is strengthened by the fact that the cliffs of the Grand Staircase (~10,000 feet thick) once extended over the Grand Canyon (Fig. 1). Minimally, 40,000 cubic miles of these rock strata have since been eroded away by “The Great Denudation,” leaving the Grand Staircase behind as an erosional remnant.⁴⁸

In comparison, the approximately 1,000 cubic miles of the Grand Canyon render the Canyon only a *little ditch*. Ariel Roth, former director of the Geoscience Research Institute, suggests that the receding waters of the Flood best explain the “Great Denudation.”⁴⁹

Our next illustration comes from the lengthy, major hanging valleys (or beheaded valleys) that appear on the top of Black Mesa, in northeastern Arizona, and drain across the mesa in parallel fashion in a southwesterly direction for over 60 kilometers (37 miles) (Fig. 3). They begin abruptly at the top cliff edge of the northwest escarpment of Black Mesa (Fig. 4 and Fig. 5). A view of the hanging valleys from the valley floor is shown in Figure 6.

The hanging valleys were established when Black Mesa extended farther to the east, before Chinle Valley was eroded. We propose that following the formation of the hanging valleys by massive overland flooding moving to the southwest, additional catastrophic flooding, perhaps channelized flow moving to the north, removed the former

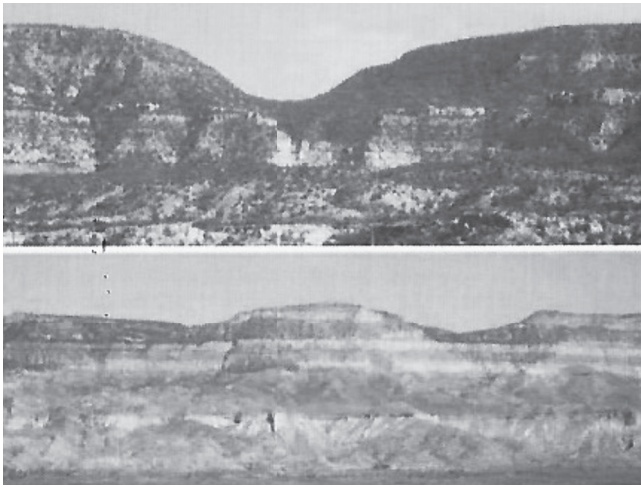


Fig. 6. Additional images by Brand of hanging valleys on Black Mesa, looking upward from the floor of Chinle Valley.

extension of Black Mesa, leaving the hanging valleys as erosional remnants of the original drainage pattern.⁵⁰

The catastrophic erosional processes evident in the Grand Staircase and the Hanging Valleys on Black Mesa are consistent with what would occur in the runoff phase of the Flood.

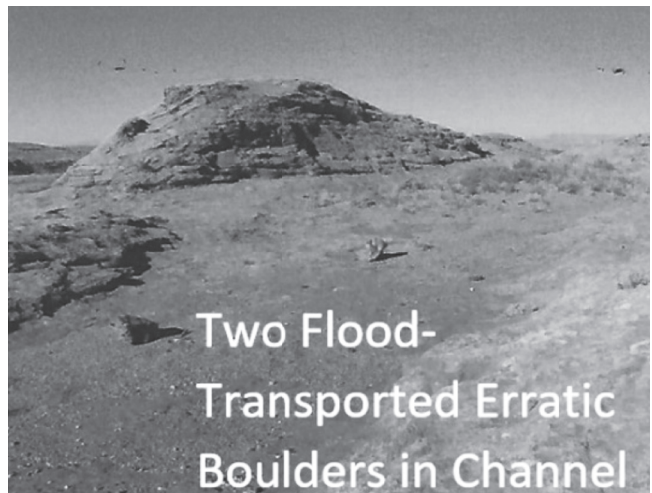
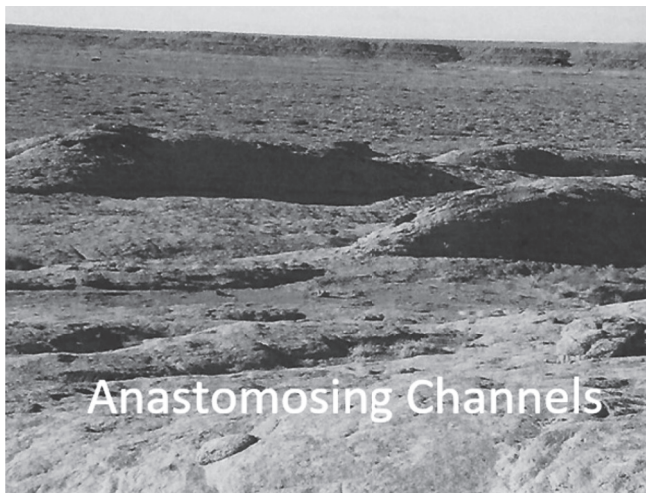
From a position combining scientific thinking with the biblical account of the Flood, these sculpted landforms represent formidable “monuments” of that Catastrophe.⁵¹

Discussion

We began by asking, if Christ were linked to the deep-time geologic column as its Creator, how might its contents impact His character and worship-worthiness in light of the Cross and other Scriptures describing His character? We offer seven conclusions:

- Were Christ to create over long ages, as a “necessary” best method of choice, involving extinction, predation, and disease, Darwin’s “horridly cruel” assessment of nature would apply, rendering the Creator unworthy of praise.
- The gravest implication of the developmental model is that God creates through death, its Author prior to sin on this earth, a serial Slayer of species, revealing this Creator contradicting His revealed nature.
- For the deep-time God to create a future world free of death, sickness, and pain but not to do so at the start, constitutes indefensible, ungodly omission.
- Christ died in part to abolish death, establishing that He would never create through death.
- Since neither the God of Scripture, the only God available, nor materialistic evolution alone, created the deep-time geologic column, God’s Flood must be responsible for the basic column.
- Revelation 14:7 endorses God’s brief creation and global Flood, which show the deep-time column never existed, making a brief creation possible, underscoring the goodness of Christ and His worship-worthiness.
- Geomorphology is yielding field data suggestive of megaflood erosional processes consistent with what would be expected in the receding waters of the Global Flood.

In sum, the God of the geologic column is the Lamb that was slain, thereby eternally worship-worthy (Rev. 5:12–13). Because He recently created original life-forms on earth mercifully, over six days, later flood-depositing



of the basic column renders possible a recent creation, showing the central importance of these two events for worship. The findings also provide a better account, geomorphologically, for the formation of the landforms studied than offered by the deep-time model.

And there is more to come on this topic. In his dissertation, Monte Fleming identifies further geomorphological projects. One would be to investigate a network of crossover bedrock channels having no established channel (anastomosing channels), suggestive of erosion by megaflooding, in Chinle Valley, northeastern Arizona.⁵² *These are only the beginning!*

Endnotes

1. Stephen Jay Gould, *Time's Arrow, Time's Cycle: Myth and Metaphor in the Discovery of Geological Time* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 1–20.
2. Darwin came to see that the Old Testament presented a “manifestly false view of the world,” and that it “was no more to be trusted than . . . the beliefs of any barbarian.” Nora Barlow, ed., *The Autobiography of Charles Darwin 1809–1882* (London: Collins, 1958), 58; Langdon B. Gilkey, *Religion and the Scientific Future* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1970), 9; John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009).
3. For Gilkey’s seminal piece on category translation see, Langdon B. Gilkey, “Cosmology, Ontology, and the Travail of Biblical Language,” *Journal of Religion* 41, no. 3 (July 1961): 194–205.
4. Rudolf Bultmann, “New Testament and Mythology,” in *Kerygma and Myth*, ed. Hans Werner Bartsch (London: S.P.C.K., 1956), 4–5.
5. Bultmann, “New Testament and Mythology,” 4.
6. In the New Testament, demon possession is affirmed by Christ’s actions (Matt. 8:28). For, “The reality of supernatural agencies of evil,” see Ellen G. White, *Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1940), 678. God “never made a thorn, a thistle, or a tare. These are Satan’s work, the result of degeneration.” Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1948), 186.
7. An important festschrift in honor of Angel Rodriguez addresses the final disposition of evil in relation to theodicy and the Great Controversy. Gerhard Pfandl, ed., *The Great Controversy and the End of Evil* (Silver Spring, MD: Review and Herald, 2015).
8. In a forthcoming study on *ktisis* (“creation”) in Romans 8:19, 20, Younker shows that this term refers to the entire creation—animals, plants, and humans.
9. James L. Hayward, *Dinosaurs, Volcanoes, and Holy Writ: A Boy-Turned-Scientist Journeys from Fundamentalism to Faith* (Eugene, Oregon: Resource Publications, 2020), 104. He also gives a laudable example of how we need to treat colleagues kindly with whom we may differ (60). Joe Galusha, Walla Walla College, also leads in exhibiting these needed qualities. See also Michael F. Younker, “The Theological Significance of the Relations of Freedom and Time in The Sciences and Humanities: An Evaluation of the Contributions of David Bohm and Pauli Pylkkö” (PhD diss., Andrews University, 2019), 108–146.
10. L. James Gibson and Zdravko Stefano, “Nature in the Light of the Cross,” (sermon) apply the statement by Ellen White: “In the light shining from the cross we can rightly interpret nature’s teachings.” Ellen G. White, *Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1948), 461; Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol 8 (Mountain

View, CA: Pacific Press, 1948), 324–325. The cross points to the remedy of natural evil, thus showing that these evils do not reflect the principles operating in the original creation.

11. Del Ratzsch, *The Battle of Beginnings: Why Neither Side Is Winning the Creation-Evolution Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 189. Ratzsch says he does not know the answer to the roadkill question.
12. Bruce M. Rothschild and Larry D. Martin, *Paleopathology: Disease in the Fossil Record* (Ann Arbor, MI: CRC Press, 1993), 303–306.
13. John C. Peckham, *Theodicy of Love: Cosmic Conflict and the Problem of Evil* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018), 114–118; see also note 6 for a forthcoming study by Randall Younker on *ktisis*; Denis O. Lamoureux, “Toward an Evangelical Evolutionary Theodicy,” *Theology and Science* 18, no. 1 (2020): 12–30.
14. L. James Gibson, “A Catastrophe with an Impact,” *Origins* 17, no. 1 (January 1, 1990): 38–47; David M. Raup, *The Nemesis Affair: A Story of the Death of Dinosaurs and the Ways of Science* (New York: W. W. Horton & Company, 1986); Smithsonian, *Violent Earth: Volcanoes, Earthquakes, Hurricanes, Mudslides, Tsunamis* (New York: DK Publishing, 2011).
15. John Stuart Mill, *Nature: The Utility of Religion and Theism* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1923), 28–29.
16. Jacques B. Doukhan, “Where Did Death Come From? A Study in the Genesis Creation Story,” *Adventist Perspectives* 4, no. 1 (1990): 16–18.
17. Philip Clayton observes that the deep-time geologic column may render God less compassionate than we have thought. Philip Clayton, “Metaphysics Can Be a Harsh Mistress,” *Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences Bulletin* 18, no. 1 (Winter 1998): 18.
18. 1 John 1:5.
19. Fritz Guy, “Interpreting Genesis One in the Twenty-First Century,” *Spectrum* 31, no. 2 (Spring 2003): 12.
20. John 3:16; 2 Timothy 1:10; Hebrews 2:14.
21. Thomas Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 139.
22. Daryll Ward, “Identity and Temporality: Exploring Perfection and Incarnation” (paper read at the Open and Relational Theologies Consultation, AAR, Chicago, IL, November 2008), 2, note 6.
23. White, *Desire of Ages*, 356.
24. See Jo Ann Davidson, *Toward a Theology of Beauty: A Biblical Perspective* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2008); Tim Standish, “Design in Nature,” *Adventist World—NAD*, July 2015: 29; Charles Kingsley, “Beauty Is the Handwriting of God” and “The National Gallery,” in W. Harrison and Charles Kingsley, *Selections from Some of the Writings of the Rev. C. Kingsley, M.A.* (London: Strahan and Co., 1873), 362.
25. Matthew 27:50–51; White, *Desire of Ages*, 757.
26. John Polkinghorne, *Science and Religion in Quest of Truth* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011), 106.
27. Polkinghorne builds upon similar principles expressed by John Hick in *Evil and the God of Love* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 1966).
28. John Polkinghorne, *Science and Religion*, 106.
29. José M. Bertoluci, “The Son of the Morning and the Guardian Cherub in the Context of the Controversy between Good and Evil” (PhD diss., Andrews University, 1985).
30. Darwin to J. D. Hooker: “What a book a devil’s chaplain might write on the clumsy, wasteful, blundering low and horribly cruel works of nature.” Quoted in Richard Dawkins, *A Devil’s Chaplain* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2003), 8. Here Dawkins endorses evolution, but, laudably, explains why we must fight against its cruel method (8–13).
31. Dawkins, *A Devil’s Chaplain*, 11.
32. David L. Hull, “The God of the Galápagos,” *Nature* 352 (August

8, 1991): 486.

33. Thane Hutcherson Ury, “The Evolving Face of God as Creator: Early Nineteenth-Century Traditionalist and Accommodationist Theological Responses in British Religious Thought to Paleo-Natural Evil in the Fossil Record” (PhD diss., Andrews University, 2001).

34. Jon Paulien, “Revisiting the Sabbath in the Book of Revelation,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 9, no. 1–2 (1998): 179–186.

35. John T. Baldwin, “Revelation 14:7: An Angel’s Worldview” in *Creation, Catastrophe & Calvary: Why a Global Flood Is Vital to the Doctrine of Atonement*, ed. John T. Baldwin (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 19–39.

36. “Fountains” are rendered *pēgas* in Greek.

37. This deviation constitutes a *hapax legomenon* configuration.

38. Genesis 7:11. Here, “fountains” of the “great deep” (NKJV) are also *pēgai* in the LXX, the Greek Old Testament. For the role of allusions to the Genesis flood and their relationship to the end-time judgment in the argument of Revelation 11–21, see Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 51–53.

39. Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 48. See also Félix H. Cortez, “Creation in Hebrews,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 53 (2015): 316–318; Craig R. Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 612–613; Gerhard May, *Creatio Ex Nihilo: The Doctrine of “Creation out of nothing” in Early Christian Thought*, trans. A. S. Worrall (London: T&T Clark International, 2004), 148–178.

40. Jack Hoehn, “Freeing the First Angel and Reopening the Doors of Adventism” *Adventist Today*, General Conference Special Issue, Summer 2015: 42.

41. Norman Cohn quotes Charles Lyell’s famous dictum from *Principles of Geology* (1833–34) in his book *Noah’s Flood: The Genesis Story in Western Thought* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 118.

42. Richard Davidson, “The Genesis Account of Origins,” in Gerald A. Klingbeil, ed., *He Spoke, and It Was: Divine Creation in the Old Testament*, Creation Series Volume One (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2015), 61–62; Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1972), 128; David Carr, “Genesis,” in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Books of the Bible*, Vol. I, ed. Michael D. Coogan (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 317, 318; Tikva Frymer-Kensky, “Pollution, Purification, and Purgation in Biblical Israel” in *The Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth: Essays in Honor of David Noel Freedman in Celebration of His Sixtieth Birthday*, eds. Carol L. Meyers and M. O’Connor (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 410.

43. Randall W. Younker and Richard M. Davidson, “The Myth of The Solid Heavenly Dome: Another Look at The Hebrew,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies (AUSS)* 49, no. 1 (2011); Davidson, *He Spoke and It Was*, 25–38.

44. Victor R. Baker, “Overview of Megaflooding: Earth and Mars,” in *Megaflooding on Earth and Mars*, ed. Devon M. Burr, Paul A. Carling, and Victor R. Baker (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 1.

45. Michael Lamb, et al., “Amphitheater-headed Canyons Formed by Mega Flooding at Malad Gorge, Idaho,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 111, no. 1 (January 7, 2014): 57–62.

46. Leonard Brand, “The Grand Staircase: A Case Study in Scientific Thinking from a Biblical Worldview,” *Origins* 65 (2018) L 7–29; Leonard Brand, *Secrets Uncovered* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2020); Leonard Brand and Art Chadwick, *Faith, Reason, & Earth History* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2016); Michael Oard, *Flood by Design: Receding Water Shapes Earth’s Surface* (Green Forest, AZ: Master Books, 2008); Sean D. Pitman, “The Fossil Record,” *Detecting Design* (blog), <http://detectingdesign.com/fossilrecord.html> (updated 2012).

47. Leonard Brand, “The Grand Staircase,” 7.

48. Clarence Edward Dutton, *U. S. Geological Survey Annual Report, 1881: The Physical Geology of the Grand Canyon District* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1881), 49–166. See chapter IV, “The Great Denudation,” in which Dutton states that the thickness of the strata removed was “around 10,000 feet.”

49. Ariel Roth is former director of the Geoscience Research Institute. See, Ariel A. Roth, *An Introduction to Some Geologically Significant Localities of the Colorado Plateau* (Loma Linda, CA: GRI for the Loma Linda Councilors, 1999), 38.

50. Brand, “The Grand Staircase,” 22–24.

51. Cohn, *Noah’s Flood*, 118.

52. Monte Fleming, “Geomorphology of the Potholes of Rock Window Mesa, Chinle Valley AZ” (PhD diss., Loma Linda University, 2018), 129–135. Text on images by team.



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Reading Genesis

IN LIGHT OF THE CROSS

BY RONALD OSBORN

“Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth?” the Creator of Hebrew Scripture asks the “scientific” creationist and the Darwinian evolutionist alike (Job 38:4). “Have the gates of death been opened unto thee? or hast thou seen the doors of the shadow of death? Hast thou perceived the breadth of the earth? declare if thou knowest it all” (Job 38:17–18). The God who speaks from out of the whirlwind “caused the dayspring to know his place; That it might take hold of the ends of the earth, that the wicked might be shaken out of it” (Job 38:12). Yet there is no hint of wickedness or “natural evil” in the wildness and even ferocity of the animal kingdom. These aspects of his creation God seemingly delights in.

The Lord is the one who has carved “a way for the lightning of thunder” (Job 38:25). He causes “it to rain on

the earth, where no man is; on the wilderness, wherein there is no man; To satisfy the desolate and waste ground”

(Job 38:26–27). The Creator provides meat to the ravens, which are both scavengers and predators (Job 38:41). He is the one who helps wild donkeys to escape their masters and gives them “the wilderness, and the barren land” for a home (Job 39:6). The ostrich “is hardened against her young ones” and does not tend to her eggs because God has not “imparted to her understanding” (Job 39:16–17). The Lord commands the eagle to “make her nest on high” from where “she seeketh the prey” so that “Her young ones

also suck up blood: and where the slain are, there is she” (Job 39:27, 29–30). We see God’s grandeur and wisdom in “the treasures of the snow” and “the treasures of the hail,” in fearless warhorses whose necks are “clothed with

The God of the whirlwind—the God who takes responsibility for all the creation, in all its strange, bewildering, endlessly innovative and untamed processes—may leave us perplexed and dismayed.



Job and his friends. Wood engraving after a painting by Max Michael (German painter, 1823 - 1891), published in 1882.

thunder,” and in the Behemoth and the Leviathan (Job 38:22; 39:19).

The God of the whirlwind—the God who takes responsibility for all the creation, in all its strange, bewildering, endlessly innovative and untamed processes—may leave us perplexed and dismayed. But lest we question the justice or goodness of God’s ways in creating the eagle, the lion, and the great sea monsters, we should ponder the verse that follows closely after the poem’s vivid description of eagles feeding their young the blood of other animals.

“Will the faultfinder contend with the Almighty?” God demands of Job (Job 40:2, NASB). It is a question we must continue to ask ourselves today. Classical rabbinical hermeneutics, especially during the period of the Babylonian exile, included a method known as targum that involved imaginatively retelling and expanding upon the ancient biblical texts in more contemporary idioms. Without calling it this by name, William Brown offers the following targum on the final chapters of the book of Job:

Job . . . fasten your seatbelt and let us travel, you and I, into the dark, cold depths of another world, free from the propellers and harpoons of the surface, free from the “toil under the sun.”

. . . Behold the enigmatic *Grimpoteuthis*. Humans call it the Dumbo Octopus, though they are quite confounded about what it does in the deep. It simply rests on the bottom, wrapped in its mantle. Job, do you know what it does sitting so still and quietly in the dark? Answer me, Job, for surely you know! No? All right, then, I’ll let you in on a secret: It’s meditating on the Torah! . . . But my favorite creature of the deep is the one that humans disparagingly call *Vampyroteuthis infernalis*, “the vampire squid from hell,” so named because it so repulsed its first discoverers. But it is my mascot of the deep: half-squid and half-octopus, dating back to 200 million years ago. Oh yes, you were born before then, weren’t you Job? This creature can do something no other complex creature can: it can dwell quite happily in the oxygen-depleted layer of the ocean because of its special respiratory blood pigment. Being the slowest cephalopod of the sea doesn’t hurt either.

And yet there remains a deep scandal in death and suffering in nature that we must not allow the inspired poetics of the book of Job to cause us to forget or to become comfortably adjusted to. There are things under heaven and in earth that we should not be at peace with, and the jaws of the Behemoth, I would submit, are one. I have seen crocodiles on the riverbanks of Masai Mara in Kenya, near the end of the wildebeest migrations, their bellies distended from feasting. It is said they continue to kill even after they are engorged, without any interest in eating their prey. There is a turn in the Mara River where the wildebeest herds often cross and where, by early November, desiccated carcasses litter the banks, to be picked over by Marabou storks, maggots, and flies. One can smell this open graveyard and hear the din of the birds from some distance. Some of the corpses lie partially submerged, their horns protruding from the fetid brown water where they were trampled in the stampede

The most constructive approach to the theodicy dilemma of animal suffering, it seems to me, is the one taken by those theologians who have come to read Genesis and the evidences of natural science through a theological paradigm centered upon Christ's *kenosis* or self-emptying on the cross, and the ancient patristic understanding of *theosis*—the view that God's purposes in creating included his desire, from the beginning, for the divinization of humankind through the hominization of Christ.

or ravaged by the massive reptiles. Calves sometimes manage to cross the river only to find themselves trapped by its steep banks. They drown in exhaustion amid the bellowing of thousands of their kind preparing to plunge after them into the murky water. These are the realities we must add our "Amen" to if we grant the God of the whirlwind who glories in the Behemoth and the Leviathan the final word. But on the banks of the Mara River, one's conscience might very well balk.

Perhaps Slavoj Žižek has discerned a vital truth in his provocative rereading of the book of Job not as a story of divine power over the creation but instead, in a certain sense, of divine impotence within it. God "solves the riddle by supplanting it with an even more radical riddle, by redoubling the riddle," Žižek declares, "he himself comes to share Job's astonishment at the chaotic madness of the created universe." God's answer from out of the whirlwind amounts not to a negation but an intensification of Job's protest. What God is in effect saying, Žižek proposes, is that he too has no rational answer for the creation, that he is suffering along with Job. If God sounds slightly irritable it's because he's really just trying to hold it all together! But Žižek (a self-described atheistic materialist) goes still further, pressing the final chapters of Job in the direction of a radically Christocentric interpretation that sees Job's silence at the end of the book as being filled with the pathos of one survivor bearing prophetic witness to the sufferings of another:

What Job suddenly understood was that it was not him, but God himself who was in effect on trial in Job's calamities, and he failed the test miserably. Even more pointedly, I am tempted

to risk a radical anachronistic reading: Job foresaw God's own future suffering—"Today it's me, tomorrow it will be your own son, and there will be no one to intervene for him. What you see in me now is the prefiguration of your own Passion!"

Whether or not we accept this interpretation, we must confess that there is nothing in the reading of Job I offered earlier that a devout Jew or Muslim could not affirm. But Christianity—the faith whose central event is the brutal execution of the God-forsaken God on a Roman cross—greatly complicates and deepens our understanding of the divine response to suffering, whether of humans or of animals. It also denies us any stoical pact with the cruelties of death as divinely fated necessities of life. Death is the final enemy.

The most constructive approach to the theodicy dilemma of animal suffering, it seems to me, is the one taken by those theologians who have come to read Genesis and the evidences of natural science through a theological paradigm centered upon Christ's *kenosis* or self-emptying on the cross, and the ancient patristic understanding of *theosis*—the view that God's purposes in creating included his desire, from the beginning, for the divinization of humankind through the hominization of Christ. The creation was never a static golden age but always an unfolding story with an eschatological horizon. And the divine love has always willed that the journey of creation and pilgrimage of humanity should end in our final adoption as coheirs of God's kingdom and "partakers of the divine nature." The destiny of humankind is not simply a recapitulation or recurrence, paradise lost,

paradise restored. Rather, the end is greater than the beginning—and was always meant to be so through the mystery of the incarnation.

One striking implication of biblical literalism is that Genesis tells us everything we need to know about God’s way of creating, without any reference whatsoever to the Christ of the New Testament. God’s stupendous might, God’s total control, God’s complete domination of the creation by sheer fiat—such are the divine attributes that most impress the literalist and fundamentalist religious imaginations when they open the book of Genesis.¹ Yet there is in fact nothing intrinsically *Christological* in these “plain” reading approaches to Genesis 1 or in the sorts of “scientific” and lexical arguments most often used to advance them. One can be a strict literalist on Genesis without possessing a trinitarian understanding of the divine nature and without any reference to the God who walked

among us, whose power and glory are paradoxically revealed in his weakness and agony. Literalist logic is strictly linear, requiring no rereading of what comes first in the light of what comes after. Perfect creation (C), we are told, is followed by fall (F) is followed by plan of redemption (P) is followed by the cross (though in his foreknowledge God’s plan of redemption is sometimes said to be prior to the creation event as well). The cross is thus turned into the final proof in a theorem, the first variable of which does not include or require the God of the cross at all, except perhaps through an additive process ($C + F + P = \dagger$). For orthodox Christians this is surely a grave theological problem.

Literalists will respond that their approach is the only one that preserves the classical doctrine of the atonement. Hence the title to one creationist book, which boldly wagers the entire significance of Christ’s life, death, and resurrection not simply on the duration

of the days of Genesis but on the fathoms deep of Noah’s deluge: *Creation, Catastrophe, and Calvary: Why a Global Flood Is Vital to the Doctrine of Atonement*. But while these ways of relating the New Testament to the Hebrew Bible might have a certain simplifying clarity for many believers, they also reflect a highly questionable set of assumptions about the narrative arc of Scripture. They fail to see (or refuse to acknowledge) that strictly penal-substitutionary readings of Christ’s death and resurrection rest upon a relatively late and individualistic turn in Christian thinking, replacing a more ancient tradition of “ransom” or *Christus Victor* theology that emphasized not human “genetic” sinfulness but rather Christ’s co-suffering and copresence with all of creation, and his battling against and gaining victory over powers holding all finite creatures in bondage to decay. Such a ransom theology (Nancey Murphy points out) is clearly amenable to evolutionary frameworks in

ways the individualistic legal-forensic model is not.

God’s way of creating, in this understanding, cannot be separated from God’s way of redeeming and never could be separated from the beginning. God creates as he redeems and redeems as he creates so that the two are always part of the same act, $C\dagger$ or $\dagger C$. But what if we will never understand either Genesis or natural history properly if we do not begin with a radically Christocentric understanding of the *character* of God and the *governance* of God as revealed in the Jesus of history who is the crucified Savior of the world? This is the possibility that kenotic theology would have us wrestle with—that what literalists have long charged is theistic evolution’s greatest weakness is in fact its greatest



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strength. As Polkinghorne writes:

Christian theology has never simply equated

The world that God calls into being does not have the character of a “perfect” contrivance or complex invention to be disassembled using techniques of reverse engineering so as to prove God’s existence (in the manner of “intelligent design” theory). A god who could be so trapped beneath a microscope would not be the self-revealing and self-concealing God of Jewish and Christian faith at all.

God with Jesus, nor supposed that the historic episode of the incarnation implied that there was, during its period, an attenuation of the divine governance of the universe. The incarnation does, however, suggest what character that governance might at all times be expected to take. It seems God is willing to share with creatures, to be vulnerable to creatures, to an extent not anticipated by classical theology’s picture of the God who, through primary causality, is always in total control. [I]n allowing the other to be, God allows creatures their part in bringing about the future.

This response to the problem of animal suffering and “natural evil” will of course be hard for believers in conservative wings of the Reformed tradition to accept. Christians who insist that God’s omnipotence entails his absolute predestination of all events, including even human choices, will see little reason to grant nature any space of authentic freedom or indeterminacy either. Some Barthians who insist upon an unbridgeable chasm between God and his creation will also struggle with Polkinghorne’s embrace and reformulation of the task of “natural theology.” I have no stake in defending such pictures of God. Whatever its difficulties, the only position that makes any moral, religious, or rational sense of human moral evil to my mind is the one that declares that the divine will *wills* human free will, and is both powerful enough and self-giving enough to create beings with the capacity to make meaningful, self-defining choices that are morally and spiritually significant. And in the same way we speak of moral evil as resulting from human

free will, we should now somewhat analogously speak of natural evil and animal suffering as emerging from free or indeterminate processes, which God does not override, and which are inherent possibilities in a creation in which the Creator allows the other to be truly other. God grants the creation the freedom of its own being. “The Creator wills that his creation itself should affirm and continue his work,” writes Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “he wills that created things should live and create further life.” And God continues to create in and through these processes, while still allowing the creation to be as it is, each element and organism working out its inner principles according to its kind.

The Creator God revealed in the *kenosis* of Christ is neither the remote Designer or Grand Engineer (*deus otiosus*) of Enlightenment deism, nor what Polkinghorne calls the “Cosmic Tyrant” of classical theism who utterly dominates animals not simply once but twice, first in the act of forming them without allowing them to participate in their own making, and second in the act of cursing them without granting them any understanding of their own suffering. Instead, a kenotic picture of the Creator insists that God’s creative might and sovereign rule are always expressed in harmony with his character as revealed in the historical person of Jesus, whose way was one of co-suffering humility, nonviolent self-limitation, and liberal self-donation. As John Haught writes, a Christocentric theology that places such a high premium on creaturely freedom awakens us not so much to the *design* of creation as to its *drama*. The world that God calls into being does not have the character of a “perfect” contrivance or complex invention to be disassembled using techniques of reverse engineering so as to prove God’s existence (in

the manner of “intelligent design” theory). A god who could be so trapped beneath a microscope would not be the self-revealing and self-concealing God of Jewish and Christian faith at all. Rather, the creation is best seen as an improvisational theater or musical performance in which the director invites the actors—and not human actors alone—to join in the writing of the script, with all the danger and all the possibility that this implies. “A God of freedom and promise invites, and does not compel, the creation to experiment with many possible ways of being, allowing it to make ‘mistakes’ in the process,” Haught writes. “This is the God of evolution—one who honors and respects the indeterminacy and narrative openness of creation, and in this way ennobles it.”

Or, as Terence Fretheim writes of “natural evils” such as earthquakes and floods, “the created moral order” is best grasped as “a complex, loose causal weave.” God “lets the creatures have the freedom to be what God created them to be.” At the same time, “the looseness of the causal weave allows God to be at work in the system in some ways without violating or (temporarily) suspending it.” This opens the door to the possibility of suffering, whether from the sheer randomness of plate tectonics and bolts of lightning that set forests ablaze or from the rise of adaptations in some creatures that are harmful to others. We might summarize this view of the natural world (although, as Cunningham points out, theologically all natural/supernatural dualisms are problematic and only defensible from the standpoint that the creation is supernatural and God alone *natural*) by saying that God’s way of creating and sustaining primarily takes the form of divine *providence* working within history, including natural history, rather than absolute *miracle* radically interrupting history from without (which is by no means to deny the possibility of what to human eyes might appear as “interrupting” miracles in other contexts, or even as punctuating parts of the creation process/event itself).

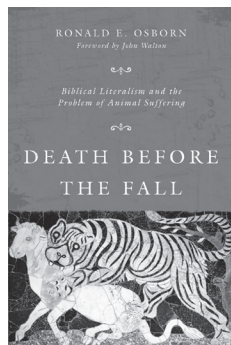
Such a paradigm of creation fits well, some have found, not only with the evidences of biology and geology—helping to make both theological and scientific sense of those unsettling parts of nature creationists seldom care to linger upon—but also with the cosmology of the new quantum physics. In place of the old billiard ball model of causation in Newtonian physics, and even contra Einstein, who attributed all seeming indeterminacy

to our incomplete knowledge of the processes at work (“God does not play dice,” Einstein famously declared), the quantum factor of the new physics says that there is *real* indeterminacy in the universe, that at the most basic level of existence—the level of elementary particles and atomic structures—there is radical uncertainty, so that there can even be effects without causes. The theological implications of Heisenberg’s celebrated uncertainty principle are as disturbing to the Designer God of classical theology as Darwin’s theory of natural selection. Is there not something defective or weak or negligent, we might well ask, in a Creator who would inscribe such lawlessness, such lack of predetermined order, at the very heart of material existence? Or is it in fact we ourselves who have long held defective notions about God’s character, which must be completely rethought in the light of the self-emptying Christ of the New Testament—the One who draws all of creation ever deeper into his own fullness of life with an implacable yet noncoercive and infinitely patient love, the King who scandalously creates and rules the universe from a throne in the form of a cross? And are we prepared to follow this Creator who neither prevents nor rationalistically explains but instead *enters into* the suffering and contingency of his creation and in so doing redeems it?

There is still another sense in which we must learn to read Genesis in radically Christocentric theological terms rather than as mere historical chronicle. For orthodox Christianity, Cunningham points out, it is not Adam but *Christ* who is the first true human, the axis mundi by whom we must now re-envision all that came before as well as all that comes after. Some have insisted that without a historical Adam the life, death, and resurrection of the historical Jesus would be devoid of meaning. But this claim amounts to a denial (even if unintentionally so) of the centrality of Christ; for it gives the fallen Adam of Genesis an interpretive primacy over the Jesus of history that Paul and the Gospel writers do not allow. For disciples of Christ, it is only *in Christ* that the ancient story of human origins and destiny can be rightly understood—not the other way around. We do not read the story of Christ “Adamically.” We reread the story of Adam *Christologically* in the light of the second Adam who is also the *first* Adam, the first fully human being of whom the ancient story is only a type, a dim shadow and longing, a “figure of him

that was to come” (Rom 5:14). In the Common English Translation, those passages in the Gospels in which Christ refers to himself as “the Son of Man” are translated “the Human One.” The New Testament proclamation is not that the Adam of Hebrew Scripture must now be greatly elevated as the father of humankind lest Christ have died a pointless death. It is that He who comes last is first. The Christian *euangelion* is not an accentuation or amplification but, in a real sense, a subversion of the first Adam’s theological and historical significance (whether or not a historical Adam existed). It is only through the *kenosis* of Christ—his self-emptying death upon a “tree”—that our eyes have at last been opened to the real nature of good and evil for the first time. The cross is at once the two trees in the Garden of Eden, the tree of knowledge and the tree of life. When Christ cries, “It is finished” on Easter Friday, the creation of the world is at last completed. Nor is Christ’s rest in the tomb an observance of Jewish Sabbath law. It is the *first* Sabbath to which Jewish law and the creation story proleptically pointed. Genesis is not science or journalism but *prophecy*. And it is by entering into Christ’s way of self-emptying love and reposing with him in his Sabbath rest that we bear witness to this hope: that one day we will also share in our Lord’s resurrection and glorification. Only then will Christ be all in all. The Sabbath, as Cunningham writes, “is therefore the meaning of creation”—we are “a species of the sabbath.”

This article is taken from Chapters 12 and 13 of *Death Before the Fall* by Ronald Osborn and republished with permission.



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Endnotes

1. Tellingly, the same literalists who vehemently oppose theistic evolution on theodicy grounds are no less adamant when we arrive at the book of Joshua that we must accept without question YHWH’s commanding the Israelites to commit genocide of the inhabitants of Canaan—women, children, the elderly and animals. While there may be significant differences between the two problems, this seeming volte-face in moral concern for the suffering of the innocent (what did Canaanite cattle have to do with the sins of their masters?) suggests that it is an essentially divine command ethic rather than deep anguish at the realities of human or animal suffering that is driving literalist interpretations in both cases.



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THE FLOOD

Geologists

BY JAMES L. HAYWARD

No epic tale captures the human imagination better than Noah and the Great Flood—all those animals marching two by two up to the ark, all that rain and the rising floodwaters, all those questions about what the animals ate and how they all fit into the big boat, all those claims about the discovery of Noah's Ark on Turkey's Mount Ararat.¹ In fact, flood stories are nearly universal, showing up among diverse peoples of the world—the Mokens, Greeks, Hindus, Chinese, Native Americans, and many others.² And now, in the twenty-first century, American and Dutch evangelicals flock by the thousands to ponder full-scale replicas of Noah's Ark, designed and built to bring the biblical narrative to life for the faithful.³

Not so well known is the fact that current interest in Noah's Flood can be traced back to the writings of a peculiar, but linguistically gifted, armchair philosopher, George McCready Price (1870–1963). Price enjoyed little scientific training and avoided geological fieldwork, but he invented what today is called “Flood geology,” based on selective gleanings from the geological literature and absolute confidence in the writings of a nineteenth-century prophet whose visionary experiences influenced



Model of Noah's Ark at the Ark Encounter, Grant County, Kentucky. The Ark Encounter, a young earth creationist theme park, opened in 2016 by Answers in Genesis.

her writing on many topics, including the Flood. Price's 726-page tome entitled *The New Geology*, published in 1923, made little impact on the scientific community. But because *The New Geology* squeezed earth history into a few thousand years, Price's views became a central plank in the platform of “young-earth creationism,” held sacred by large segments of the US population.⁴

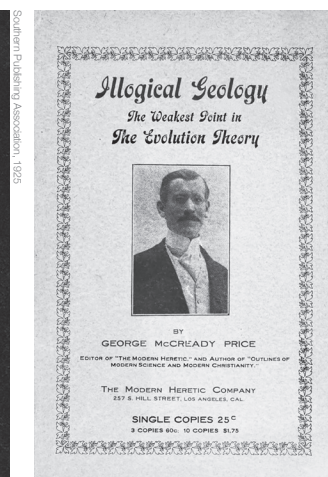
Just as Flood geology was taking shape, the work and

Not so well known is the fact that current interest in Noah's Flood can be traced back to the writings of a peculiar, but linguistically gifted, armchair philosopher, George McCready Price (1870–1963).

writings of another twentieth-century maverick, J Harlan Bretz (1882–1981), a University of Chicago-trained geologist with no religious faith, precipitated a sea change in the way professional geologists viewed the past. His 33-page paper entitled “The Channeled Scabland of the Columbia Plateau,” published the same year as Price’s *The New Geology*, provided evidence that a humongous flood had shaped much of the eastern half of Washington State. This and subsequent publications by Bretz, who enjoyed extensive field experience, sent repercussions through an initially skeptical scientific community, long accustomed to thinking in terms of slow, gradual, earth-modifying processes.

Despite enormous differences in their training, philosophy, temperament, and conclusions, both Price and Bretz claimed evidence for the impact of one-of-a-kind megaflooding in the distant past, both vigorously challenged the doctrine of strict uniformitarianism, and both set into motion views that would foster opposing perspectives in large segments of the American population nearly a century later. Ultimately, however, the views of only one of these two iconoclasts would stand in the face of evidence from the earth itself.

George Edward Price was born the eldest son into a New Brunswick farm family.⁵ When his father died, his mother, with her two young sons, converted to Seventh-day Adventism, a fledgling apocalyptic sect that had emerged from the ashes of the Millerite Movement.⁶ Adventist apocalypticism was hitched to a belief that the seventh day of the week was to be kept as a sacred reminder of God’s creative handiwork and as a sign of



Left: George McCready Price (1870–1963), father of modern “Flood geology.” Frontispiece from *The Predicament of Evolution*
Right: Cover of Price’s second book, *Illogical Geology*

commitment to God and his kingdom in the end times.⁷

As young George matured, he aspired to become a man of letters. In 1891, he enrolled at Battle Creek College (now Andrews University) in southern Michigan. Although the college offered a “scientific course” of study, George chose the “classical course.” But after two years at Battle Creek, he was forced to drop out for lack of funds. He sold Adventist literature for a time, and earned enough to complete a one-year teacher-training course, including a class in mineralogy, at Provincial Normal School of New Brunswick (now the University of New Brunswick). In 1897, with his only science course and his formal education behind him, George Price launched a teaching career, a stepping stone, he hoped, toward his dream of becoming a literary figure.⁸

One of Price’s first jobs was teaching at a small high school in Tracadie, New Brunswick. There he was befriended by Dr. Alfred Corbett Smith (1841–1909), a local physician and one of the few educated, English-

speaking people in the little francophone community. Upon learning of Price's religiosity, Smith informed the young teacher of his evolutionary views. Price expressed ignorance about evolutionary theory, so Smith loaned him several volumes on the topic.⁹

Price read the books and, despite his limited exposure to science, came close to being persuaded by the force and logic of evolutionary arguments. The geological evidence impressed him the most. If the fossils "occur in a definite sequence . . . there must be something to the geological ages," he reasoned; and if the fossils were arranged in a definite sequence and the earth is very old, evolution must be true. Finding himself in the untenable position of either acceptance of science or loyalty to his faith, he appealed to the writings of Ellen G. White (1827–1915).¹⁰

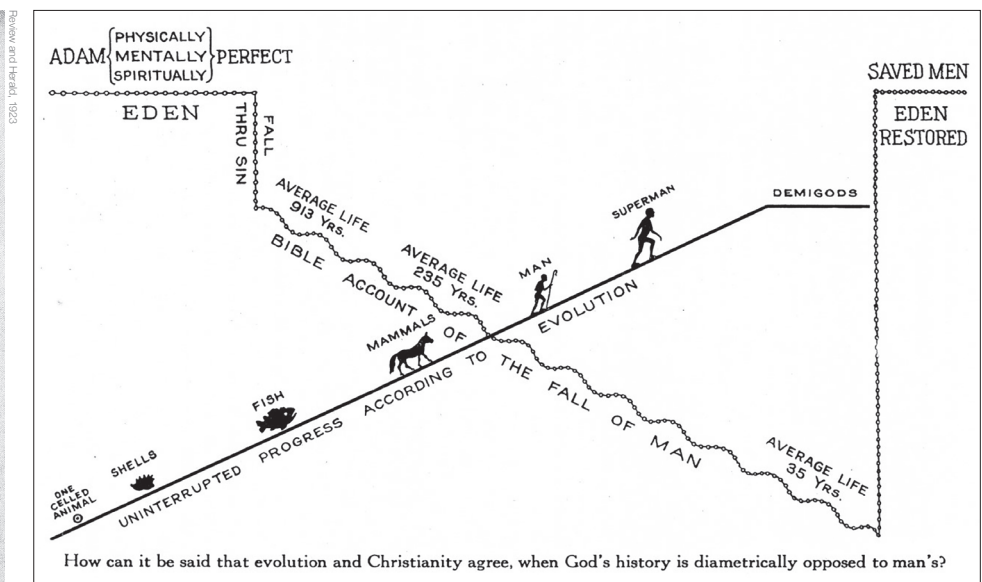
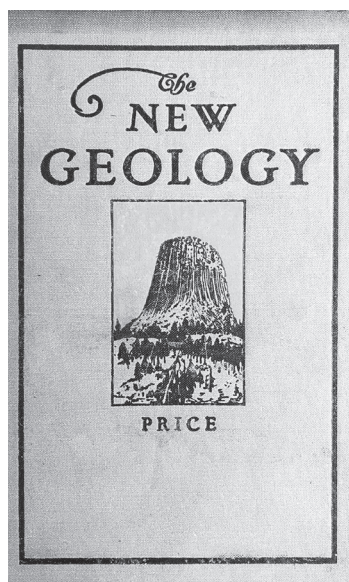
White's comments on the Genesis Flood were unequivocal—and horrifying. She reported that the "muttering of thunder and the flash of lightning," mingled with "large drops of rain," caused beasts to roam "about in the wildest terror, and their discordant cries seemed to moan out their own destiny and the fate of man." She described water bursting "from the earth with indescribable force, throwing massive rocks hundreds of feet into the air." She wrote of parents who "bound their children and themselves upon powerful animals, knowing that these were tenacious of life, and would climb to the highest points to escape the rising waters. . . . Often man and beast would struggle together for a foothold, until

both were swept away."¹¹ Then, as if anticipating Price and his doubts, she told readers that "Geologists claim to find evidence from the earth itself that it is very much older than the Mosaic record teaches. . . . But apart from Bible history, geology can prove nothing."¹²

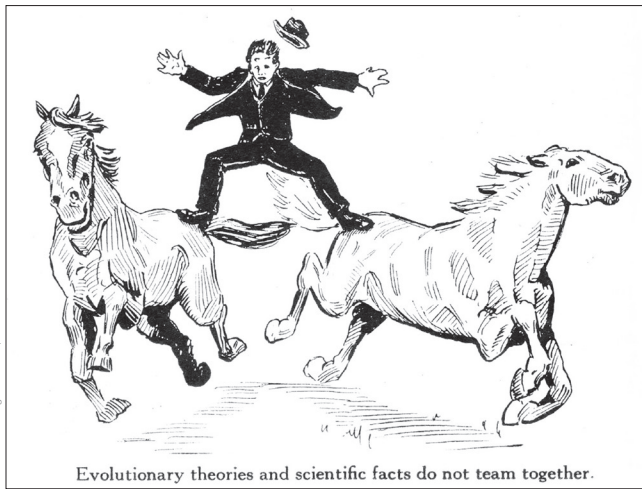
Convicted by White's graphic descriptions, assertions, and claim to divine insight, Price determined to find a way to interpret the geologic record in line with her views and his fundamentalist assumptions. As he read more geology, he convinced himself that "the actual facts of the rocks and fossils, *stripped of mere theories*, splendidly refute this evolutionary theory of the invariable order of the fossils, *which is the very backbone of the evolution doctrine*" (italics his).¹³

Determined to share his new-found discovery with the world, Price drafted what, over the next fifty-three years, would be the first of twenty-five books, *Outlines of Modern Christianity and Modern Science* (1902). In this small volume, he stated the hope that Christians would return to the "primitive principles" of their faith, especially that the worldwide Flood described in Genesis was responsible for the geologic record. He denied the notion that the fossil record proved there had been a succession of life, a denial that would recur again and again in his writings. He identified himself on the title page as "Geo. E. McCready Price." In later works he would drop the "E" for "Edward" and use his mother's maiden surname in place of his actual middle name.¹⁴

From 1902 to 1906, Price moved from job to job in



Left: Price's magnum opus, *The New Geology*, a 726-page textbook written from the perspective of "Flood geology." Right: Price believed the biblical story of human history was diametrically opposed to the history of life proposed by evolutionists. From Price, *The Predicament of Evolution*, page 104



According to Price, no common ground exists between evolutionary theory and scientific fact.
From Price, *The Predicament of Evolution*, page 96

Canada's Maritime Provinces, and then on to a series of jobs in the United States, eventually landing in Loma Linda, California. During this time, he tried his hand at evangelism, teaching, school administration, writing, and construction work—experiencing failure after failure, even at one point contemplating suicide. But writing remained his passion.¹⁵

In 1906, using borrowed funds, the oft-defeated but persistent Price self-published his second book, *Illogical Geology: The Weakest Point in Evolutionary Theory*, priced at 25 cents. The front cover featured the bespectacled author sporting a trim mustache, high collar, white vest, and dark jacket—a scholarly visage belying the author's paltry training and desperate last few years. In Part I, Price “examined critically this succession of life theory.” He asserted that “It is improper to speak of my argument as destructive, for there never was any real constructive argument to be destroyed. It is essentially an exposure . . .” He then brashly offered “a thousand dollars to any one [*sic*] who will, in the face of the facts here presented, show me how to prove that one kind of fossil is older than

another.” In Part II, he endeavored to “build up a true, safe induction” that the fossil record, which depicts a “sudden world-wide change of climate . . . [and] marked degeneration in all organic forms” provides evidence “beyond a reasonable doubt that our once magnificently stocked world met with a tremendous catastrophe some thousands of years ago, before the dawn of history.” And then, “With the myth of a life succession dissipated once and for ever, the world stands face to face with creation as the direct act of the Infinite God.”¹⁶

Swagger—born out of naiveté—became a trademark of Price's writings. He boasted that “the Lord providentially led me to work out a scientific demonstration that these geological ‘ages’ based on the fossils are artificial and untrue.”¹⁷ In apparent compensation for his own lack of scientific acumen, he skewered those with more legitimate credentials. Of trained scientific investigators he wrote, “Some day [*sic*] it may appear that the reigning clique of ‘reputable’ scientists have never had a monopoly of the facts of nature.”¹⁸ Of literary people with no interest in science, he sniffed, “Such people may as well sleep on, amusing themselves in their dreams with the scholastic pedantries of a bygone age.”¹⁹ And of his ultimate nemesis, Charles Darwin, he wrote, “His mind was of the slow, unimaginative type so frequently found among English country squires . . . singularly incapable of dealing with the broader aspects of any scientific or philosophic problem.”²⁰

Price mailed the slim 93-page *Illogical Geology* gratis to some 500 scientists and theologians, attracting widely divergent responses. William G. Moorehead, for example, of conservative Xenia Theological Seminary, found Price's arguments sound and unanswerable. By contrast, David Starr Jordan, the famous ichthyologist and founding president of Stanford University, suggested that Price should get into the field and learn some real geology.²¹

At the very least, notes historian Garry Wills, “Price deserves some kind of award for creative imagination, and for economy of argument: He countered all the Darwinian arguments with one simple chess move of the mind,” Noah's Flood.

In 1907, when a language professor at the College of Medical Evangelists (now Loma Linda University) took another job, Price, who during the past year had worked there as a handyman, was asked to teach the professor's courses in Latin and Greek. And drawing on his meager science training, Price also taught chemistry and tutored incoming medical students who, upon arrival, were deficient in one course or another.²²

Price spent the next five years teaching at the College of Medical Evangelists. Upon his departure in 1912, the medical school gifted him with a Bachelor of Arts degree, based in part on his writings. A few years later, a second Adventist institution, Pacific Union College, awarded him an honorary Master of Arts degree. These perks, along with 18-hour days, fundamentalist zeal, undeniable intelligence, and a decided flair for writing, were his tickets into the world of opinion and publication.²³

Price's *The New Geology* (1923) was his *magnum opus*, even reviewed—albeit unfavorably—in the prestigious journal *Science*.²⁴ Crafted as a textbook, this vast expansion of his earlier works described the major principles of geology and hammered away at his major theme, that because fossils from presumptively earlier organisms sometimes occurred in strata situated conformably *above* layers with fossils from presumptively later organisms, the progression-of-life view held by evolutionists fell apart. Although conventional geologists explained these instances of out-of-order fossils to be the result of the well-established process of overthrusting,²⁵ Price insisted this was a lame excuse designed to prop up evolutionary progression. He declared, instead, what he called his “great law of conformable stratigraphic sequences . . . by all odds the most important law ever formulated with reference to the order in which the strata occur.” The so-called “law” asserted that “Any kind of fossiliferous beds whatever, ‘young’ or ‘old,’ may be found occurring conformably on any other fossiliferous beds, ‘older’ or ‘younger.’” That is to say, the supposed order in the fossil record—regardless of the fact that it was carefully built on nearly two centuries-worth of field data collected by armies of seasoned geologists—was no more than a thinly veiled attempt to support the notion of evolutionary change, a plot to make null and void the plain scriptural teaching of the real source of all those fossils, Noah's Great Flood.²⁶

Price's descriptions of the Flood were even more

chilling than Ellen White's. He postulated “a jar or a shock from the outside,” perhaps an asteroid, which knocked the earth's axis of rotation 23½ degrees from right angles to its plane of orbit and caused the earth to wobble. Twice each day, the wobble would cause the oceans to “sweep a mighty tidal wave around the world, attaining a maximum, every 150 days, of about six miles in height at the equator.” The wave would travel “at a rate of 1,000 miles an hour at the equator, and proportionately in the other latitudes.” The “enormous ebbs and flows of the tides, the latter rising a little higher each day over the ever-narrowing lands, [drove] the men and animals before it, until, after over a month of this agony long drawn out, those who still survived looked out from their pinnacles of mountain tops over a shoreless ocean.” The lives of these survivors were eventually snuffed out as the raging waters rose still higher.²⁷ At the very least, notes historian Garry Wills, “Price deserves some kind of award for creative imagination, and for economy of argument: He countered all the Darwinian arguments with one simple chess move of the mind,” Noah's Flood.²⁸

It would take two mainstream, albeit fundamentalist, Christians in the early 1960s, both with earned doctorates, to bring Price's perspectives front and center within society. John C. Whitcomb, Jr., an Old Testament scholar, and Henry M. Morris, a hydrologic engineer, were dismayed by a rising anti-Price sentiment among Christian scholars interested in earth history. Their critique took the form of the 518-page *The Genesis Flood*, first published in 1961, two years before Price died, and still in print. More biblically based than Price's *The New Geology*, Whitcomb and Morris's tome nonetheless reiterated Price's primary assertion that the rock record provided testimony of the worldwide Flood depicted in Genesis, and it resurrected his primary arguments. *The Genesis Flood* led directly to the development of “scientific creationism” or “creation science,” a religiopolitical movement with worldwide adherents, and for which Pricean arguments in support of a worldwide Flood loom large.²⁹ As Bernard Ramm, a prominent critic of Price, noted, “the influence of Price is staggering.”³⁰

Ironically, Price's final post within Adventism during the 1930s was a teaching position at Walla Walla College (now Walla Walla University) located at the edge of Washington's famed channeled scablands, a

topographic region replete with evidence for enormous flooding events, and one destined to provoke a shift in the perspectives of geologists to make allowance for singular catastrophic events like massive floods in the past. There is little indication, however, that Price ever consulted the work of the well-trained, idiosyncratic, pipe-smoking contemporary who first brought this evidence to the world's attention in 1923, J Harlen Bretz.³¹

Harley Bretz was born a few miles east of Grand Rapids, Michigan to the farming family of Oliver and Rhoda Bretz.³² Young Harley was a lad of insatiable curiosity who pummeled his parents with questions: “What is under the ground? . . . What makes it rain? . . . Why did it rain today and be sunny yesterday? . . . What makes the wind blow? . . . How does a hen make an egg out of a straw nest?”³³

In 1905, Harley graduated with a degree from Albion College in southern Michigan, having earned the distinction as the institution's highest achieving student. Not only did he stand out in the sciences, but he also excelled as a writer. He soon began to sign his name, “J Harlen Bretz,” with no punctuation following the “J” and “Harlen” instead of the informal sounding “Harley.” He simply added the J, which stood for nothing but sounded

erudite, to the front of his name.³⁴

In the fall of 1906, Bretz was hired to teach biology at the Flint high school, where he quickly developed a penchant for “enthusing youngsters with my own enthusiasm for bugs, snakes, rocks, minerals and the local flora.” On weekends he bicycled around the surrounding county, studying its natural history and mapping its glacial features. These became the first published geologic maps of the Flint region. While attending the annual meeting of the Michigan Academy of Science in 1907, he met several field geologists to whom he shyly displayed his glacial maps. The scientists were impressed, and as a result of these interactions, Bretz was intensely drawn to field geology. He decided to find work in a region of the country where he could prove his potential in that discipline. Thus, when a job opened up at Franklin High School in Seattle, Washington, he applied and was accepted for the position.³⁵

During the four years he taught in Seattle, he read everything he could find that dealt with geology, including about the local landforms and deposits. He spent his spare time happily engaged in mapping the numerous ice age features found in the area and publishing scientific papers describing his discoveries.³⁶

By 1911, Bretz had saved enough funds to enter the graduate program in geology at the University of Chicago.



Courtesy of the Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library



Aerial photo: Google Earth

Left: J Harlen Bretz (1882–1981), the University of Chicago geology professor who postulated the occurrence of a colossal flood that swept across eastern Washington State during the Pleistocene Epoch. Right: Potholes Coulee, the topographic map of which caught Bretz's attention in 1910. Note the deep east-west-trending channels that open west into a nearly two-mile-wide coulee before emptying into the Columbia River. At the east end of each channel is a once-receding cliff over which flowed the raging Missoula flood waters.

Of particular interest to Bretz were the curious U-shaped cross section of the canyon, which shared little resemblance with the typical V-shaped valleys carved by other rivers, enormous sand bars located hundreds of meters above the river level, marks of tremendous erosion high along the nearly vertical canyon walls, and the presence of large erratic boulders unrelated to the native rock of the canyon itself.

He was well prepared, having already completed much of the reading required of incoming graduate students. This preparation allowed him to focus on his dissertation. The data he had collected on the glacial history of the Puget Sound region while teaching in Seattle formed the topic of his paper. He graduated with his PhD, *summa cum laude*, in 1913, only two years after moving to Chicago.³⁷

After a one-year teaching stint at the University of Washington, Bretz assumed a professorship at the University of Chicago, where he would remain until retirement. Washington State's geology continued to exert a strong attraction on the young Chicago professor, however. Back in 1910, when he taught high school in Seattle, he had seen a newly published topographic map of the Quincy Basin of eastern Washington. Upon seeing the map, his eyes immediately fell on contour lines that depicted an enormous notch in the basaltic rocks bordering the eastern shore of the Columbia River. At the far end of the notch were what appeared to be huge dry falls and plunge pools where colossal cataracts once emptied into a much larger river than what is seen today. But where would all the water have come from to form such features in this now arid region?³⁸

For one month each summer, 1916 to 1919, Bretz organized field courses to study the geology of the Columbia River Gorge, which forms the border between Washington State and Oregon. Of particular interest to Bretz were the curious U-shaped cross section of the canyon, which shared little resemblance with the typical V-shaped valleys carved by other rivers, enormous sand bars located hundreds of meters above the river level,

marks of tremendous erosion high along the nearly vertical canyon walls, and the presence of large erratic boulders unrelated to the native rock of the canyon itself. What forces could have generated these features? Was canyon formation somehow related to the enormous notch he had noted years before on the map of the Quincy Basin, a feature located some 125 miles to the northeast?³⁹

During the summer of 1922, Bretz and his Chicago-based students visited eastern Washington's "channeled scablands," an odd topographic region bounded by the mighty Columbia River to the north and west. The region consists of thousands of bare drainage channels—"coulees"—cut through the Columbia River Basalt and trending in a generally southwesterly direction, with individual channels diverging into separate passages, then converging once again. Today, many of these anastomosing channels are dry, or nearly so, but they provide evidence for the existence of powerful erosional forces in the past. High areas bordering the channels are covered by deep soil tilled by farmers for growing dryland crops. The walls of some of the larger coulees feature "hanging valleys," cross-sections of ancient V-shaped river channels that once carried water crosswise to the direction of the coulee before there was a coulee. The coulees themselves range from tiny canyons a few meters deep to enormous three-mile-wide chasms, many miles long, constrained by 1,000-foot-high walls. The mind-boggling Grand Coulee, one of these chasms, contains the magnificent Dry Falls. With a width of three miles and a 400-foot plunge, this enormous cataract dwarfed present-day Niagara Falls.⁴⁰

On this trip, Bretz finally got an opportunity to inspect

Potholes Coulee, the massive notch he noticed on the Quincy Quadrangle map twelve years earlier. Scientific reports typically convey little emotion, but Bretz scarcely contained himself when describing this incredible gash. “The Potholes’ is the best example mapped of a receding waterfall over lava flows which is known to the writer,” he gushed. “The ancient stream spilled over the Columbia cliffs at an altitude of about 1,200 feet above tide and descended at least 400 feet over two great rock terraces.” Much of the water that drained from the anastomosing channels to the east flowed into the Columbia River over this receding notch—the same way the Niagara River flows over the diminutive but similarly receding Niagara Falls today.⁴¹

By 1923, Bretz was ready to make public his discoveries and cogitations. His first paper on the topic, published in the *Bulletin of the Geological Society of America*, contained detailed descriptions of the scablands and coulees. He reasoned that meltwater from the Cordilleran ice sheet carved out the eastern Washington landscape. But this notion begged an important question: How could meltwater alone, cutting and grinding even over many years, account for the dramatic features he described?⁴² A second paper, published the same year in *The Journal of Geology*, faced this question directly:

The magnitude of the erosive changes wrought by these glacial streams is nothing short of amazing. The writer confesses that during ten weeks’ study of the region, each newly examined scabland tract reawakened a feeling of amazement that such huge streams could take origin from such small marginal tracts of an ice sheet, or that such an enormous amount of erosion, despite high gradients, could have resulted in the very brief time these streams existed.⁴³

He concluded *The Journal of Geology* paper with a bold but prescient declaration:

Fully 3,000 square miles of the Columbia plateau were swept by the glacial flood . . . More than 2,000 square miles of this area were left as bare, eroded, rock-cut channel floors, now scablands, and nearly 1,000 square miles carry gravel deposits derived from the eroded basalt. It was a debacle which swept the Columbia Plateau (*italics his*).⁴⁴

But where on earth did all the water come from—and seemingly all at once? This was the question that would plague Bretz for years to come and result in rejection of his views by skeptical mainline geologists.⁴⁵

Despite his inability to identify a source for the water, Bretz pressed on with his exploration of eastern Washington and continued to collect data on anastomosing channels, huge gravel bars, giant ripples, enormous dry falls, hanging valleys, erratic boulders, and all the other bits and pieces of evidence that supported his novel hypothesis. In addition, he worked on linking the evidence from eastern Washington to the flood features he had identified to the west in the Columbia River Gorge.⁴⁶

Bretz’s publications had created a significant stir in the geological community—so significant that he was invited to present his flood hypothesis to the January 12, 1927 meeting of the Geological Society of Washington at the elegant Cosmos Club on Massachusetts Avenue in Washington, DC. He was hopeful his presentation would convince the geological elite in attendance that his hypothesis was worthy of further consideration. He carefully prepared a veritable legal defense of his views, optimistic that his rationally minded colleagues would endorse his position once they understood the evidence.⁴⁷

Pardee provided stunning evidence that an ice dam, which held back the water in Lake Missoula, broke, releasing about fifteen cubic miles of water per hour over the surrounding landscape.



J. L. Hayward



J. L. Hayward

Left: View into the Columbia River Gorge from about 1,000 feet atop the west side of Wallula Gap, Washington. Note the rounded basalt boulders, indicative of water erosion, in the foreground. Missoula flood waters, more than 1,000 feet deep, overflowed the steep sides of Wallula Gap. Right: Moses Coulee, one of several large gorges carved out by the Missoula floods. Note the steep canyon walls displaying V-shaped hanging valleys, cross-sections of old river channels that once carried water perpendicularly to the orientation of the coulee before the coulee was formed.

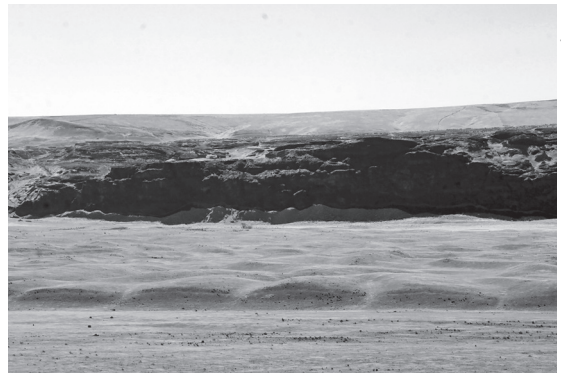
To say that his listeners, mostly prominent leaders within the US Geological Survey, gave his views a cool reception would be an understatement. One after another, they raised their objections. Bretz did his best to defend himself against the salvos hurled at his model, but in the end, he felt defeated. He had failed to convince the very people he needed most to convince. Perhaps sensitized by the claims of fundamentalists like Price, who attributed nearly every rock formation and fossil to the action of Noah's Flood, the geological establishment could not yet swallow the possibility of a catastrophic flooding event of the magnitude suggested by Bretz. Bretz knew, however, that most of his detractors had never even been to eastern Washington, and, privately at least, he realized that he still was the expert. After a few months of nursing his wounds, he resumed his visits to the scablands and continued to make his case in the literature.⁴⁸

The solution to Bretz's water-source problem actually had been suggested to him two years before in a brief letter from a fellow geologist, Joseph T. Pardee (1871–1960). An employee of the US Geological Survey, Pardee had spent years gathering evidence for the existence of a huge Pleistocene lake in a region surrounding present-day Missoula, Montana. In his letter, Pardee suggested that glacial Lake Missoula might have been the source for the water. Bretz, however, was cautious. At the time of his Cosmos Club presentation, he seemed more inclined to pin the blame of the flooding on jökulhlaups, subglacial

outburst floods created by geothermal melting of the ice, phenomena well known in Iceland.⁴⁹

Years went by, with Bretz's opponents continuing to hold their views and Bretz his. Weary of the battles, Bretz moved on to other topics, including studies of cave and karst formations in Missouri, Illinois, and Bermuda.⁵⁰ Almost imperceptibly, though, as more and more geologists visited eastern Washington and viewed the evidence for themselves, Bretz's megaflood hypothesis gained traction. An important contribution to this reassessment was a talk by Pardee at a 1940 American Association for the Advancement of Science meeting held in Seattle. In both the talk and in a paper published two years later, Pardee provided stunning evidence that an ice dam, which held back the water in Lake Missoula, broke, releasing about fifteen cubic miles of water per hour over the surrounding landscape. Although Pardee did not explicitly link the water release from Lake Missoula with the scablands, Bretz and others made the connection.⁵¹ And further evidence strongly suggested the ice dam reformed and broke multiple times, each time releasing huge volumes of glacial meltwater over the scablands.⁵²

A mechanism for Bretz's flooding had been found and he could now claim victory for his interpretation. As James Gilluly, a one-time skeptic who had been present at Bretz's Cosmos Club talk, exclaimed years later when he viewed the eastern Washington evidence for himself, "How could anyone have been so wrong?"⁵³ After a 1965 field trip



Left: This enormous granite boulder was brought into position on a block of ice floating in Missoula flood waters surging through the Grand Coulee at speeds of more than 60 miles per hour. The ice melted, dropping the boulder atop Steamboat Rock in the middle of the coulee. No native granite exists in this region. Note the nearly vertical, 800- to 900-foot-high canyon wall of the Grand Coulee in the background. Above: West Bar giant current ripples created by the Missoula flood waters near the town of Trinidad, Washington. The ripples stand 250 to 300 feet apart, crest-to-crest.

to eastern Washington, sponsored by the International Union for Quaternary Research, the 82-year-old Bretz received a telegram from the group stating, “We are all now catastrophists!”⁵⁴

In 1979, at age 97, Bretz was awarded the ultimate prize of his profession, the Penrose Medal of the Geological Society of America.⁵⁵

The year 1979 also was the year I began doctoral dissertation research on a narrow lake occupying a deep, Missoula-flood-carved channel in eastern Washington; I completed my study there in 1981, the year Bretz died.⁵⁶ Since then, I’ve continued to explore the wonders of this region. Among other treats, I’ve hiked to the edge of the

ancient waterfall bordering Potholes Coulee; perched atop Steamboat Rock to enjoy Grand Coulee’s gaping vista; peered into the Columbia River Gorge from the top of Wallula Gap; traversed the gorgeous rocky corridor of Moses Coulee; stood with awe at the base of the vast Dry Falls; watched rainbows shimmer in the foreground of Palouse Falls; and viewed with amazement the giant ripple marks bordering the Columbia River—all stunning evidences of the megafloods that scoured this region. Each time I explore this area’s stark but informative topography, I ponder the disparate legacies of George McCready Price and J Harlen Bretz.

Both Price and Bretz were born during the “gilded age” of the late nineteenth century, both were drawn into geology from other interests, both directed the attention of their readers to the role of raging waters in earth

Price, the armchair philosopher and master of hubris, exhibited little interest in field work and rejected the predictable order of fossils in the geologic column, thrust faulting, and continental glaciation—concepts underpinned by massive quantities of data and universally accepted today, even by knowledgeable young-earth creationists.

history, both exhibited a flair for writing, both altered their birth names upon becoming authors, both suffered the wrath of professional geologists for their catastrophist views, and both lived to be nonagenarians. Beyond these superficial likenesses and their obvious intelligence, the two men shared little in common.

Price, the armchair philosopher and master of hubris, exhibited little interest in field work and rejected the predictable order of fossils in the geologic column, thrust faulting, and continental glaciation—concepts underpinned by massive quantities of data and universally accepted today, even by knowledgeable young-earth creationists.⁵⁷ One of his former students, Richard L. Hammill, recalled that “Often in class, while showing us pictures of some geological feature high on a mountainside, he would remark, ‘Why should I risk my neck trying to climb up there when the pictures show it very clearly?’”⁵⁸ When a group of Walla Walla College students invited Price to join them on a fossil-collecting fieldtrip to northern Oregon, they were shocked to discover his inability to identify the fossils they bagged.⁵⁹ Would Price have defended the views he held if

he had taken an opportunity to view firsthand the features he wrote about? Would “creation science” have developed into such a cultural juggernaut had Price not made his uninformed assertions so authoritatively? Would creationist museums draw the flocks of followers they do today?

Bretz, the crusty empiricist who spent every spare moment with his beloved landforms, lived to see his evidence-based views confirmed and embraced by virtually all professional geologists. Unlike Price, “Bretz was more than a book geologist. He had field experience—lots of it . . .”⁶⁰ Ironically, young-earth creationists have looked to Bretz as a source of inspiration for their data-challenged models of Flood geology, constructs far removed from his evidence-based views.⁶¹ Unlike young-earth creationists, however, Bretz contributed in a major way to his chosen field, with the result that today’s earth scientists support a more nuanced, data-based, “neocatastrophist” view of earth history: one that allows for gradual change punctuated by catastrophic change.⁶²

If the tale of these two men teaches us anything, it is that belief about physical reality—regardless of how



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Giant potholes on Harper Island, Sprague Lake, Washington, formed by underwater vortices called kolk. Potholes occur widely in the basaltic rocks of eastern Washington.



T. M. Thompson

Layered lake sediments called rhythmites are common in eastern Washington. This photo is of Burlingame Canyon, located 10 miles west of Walla Walla University, the final teaching post of George McCree Price. Each rhythmite was deposited in a temporary lake formed by back-flooded water waiting to get through the constricted Columbia River Gorge on its way to the Pacific Ocean. The forty or more layers constitute primary evidence for multiple flooding events which are thought to have occurred over a period of about 2,000 years.

fervently held or dramatically presented—will stand the test of time only when derived from a set of patiently collected and honestly evaluated data. The story of how the scablands of eastern Washington came to be, along with all the other findings of genuine science, stand as perpetual reminders of this fact.

Endnotes

1. Norman Cohn, *Noah's Flood: The Genesis Story in Western Thought* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996). In this article, I capitalize "Flood" when referring to the event described in Genesis, but use "flood" when referring to other such events.

2. David R. Montgomery, *The Rocks Don't Lie: A Geologist Investigates Noah's Flood* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2012), 8, 158–59, 171–72, 212–215.

3. Laurie Goodstein, "A Noah's Ark in Kentucky, Dinosaurs Included," *The New York Times*, June 26, 2016. https://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/26/us/noahs-ark-creationism-ken-ham.html?_r=0; "Noah's Ark Full-Size Replica Opens in Netherlands," The Associated Press, December 10, 2012. <http://www.cbc.ca/news/world/noah-s-ark-full-scale-replica-opens-in-netherlands-1.1289548>

4. In 2007, a Gallup poll revealed that 66% of Americans polled said they believed that the statement that life was created by God less than 10,000 years ago was "Definitely true" or "Probably true." "Evolution, Creationism, Intelligent Design," Gallup. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/21814/evolution-creationism-intelligent-design.aspx>

5. George Edward Price's father and mother were George Marshal Price and Susan McCree Price. From a previous marriage, George Marshal had produced nine children, who were thus half siblings to George Edward. Harold W. Clark, *Crusader for Creation: The Life and Writings of George McCree Price* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1966), 11.

6. Clark, *Crusader for Creation*, 11, 13; Jonathan M. Butler, "The Making

of a New Order: Millerism and the Origins of Seventh-day Adventism," in *The Disappointed: Millerism and Millenarianism in the Nineteenth Century*, eds. Ronald L. Numbers and Jonathan M. Butler (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987), 189–208.

7. J. N. Andrews, *History of the Sabbath and First Day of the Week*, 3rd ed. (Battle Creek, MI: Review & Herald, 1887), 14–32, 44–50; *Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . . : A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines* (Washington, DC: Ministerial Association, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1988), 248–66.

8. Clark, *Crusader for Creation*, 13–14; Ronald L. Numbers, *The Creationists: From Scientific Creationism to Intelligent Design* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 89–91.

9. Clark, *Crusader for Creation*, 14–16.

10. Numbers, *The Creationists*, 90–92.

11. Ellen G. White, *The Story of Patriarchs and Prophets as Illustrated in the Lives of Holy Men of Old* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1958), 99–100. First published 1890.

12. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 112.

13. Numbers, *The Creationists*, 92.

14. Geo. E. McCree Price, *Outlines of Modern Christianity and Modern Science* (Oakland, CA: Pacific Press, 1902), ix, 123–53.

15. Clark, *Crusader for Creation*, 19–21; Numbers, *The Creationists*, 94–95.

16. George McCree Price, *Illogical Geology: The Weakest Point in Evolutionary Theory* (Los Angeles, CA: The Modern Heretic Company, 1906), 9.

17. George McCree Price, *Theories of Satanic Origin* (Loma Linda, CA: Self-published, n.d.), 8.

18. George McCree Price, *The Phantom of Organic Evolution* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1924), 8.

19. Price, *Phantom*, 9.

20. George McCree Price, *Modern Discoveries Which Help Us to Believe* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1934), 118.

21. Clark, *Crusader for Creation*, 29; Numbers, *The Creationists*, 106.

22. Clark, *Crusader for Creation*, 30–32.
23. Numbers, *The Creationists*, 98, 107.
24. Charles Schuchert, “The New Geology: A Text-book for Colleges, Normal Schools and Training Schools; and for the General Reader. By George McCready Price. Pacific Press Publishing Association, Mountain View, California,” *Science* 59, no. 1535 (May 30, 1924): 486–87.
25. Overthrusting occurs when a mass of older rock is pushed over a mass of younger rock by a horizontally induced force. Examples of overthrusts are relatively common and found at many locations throughout the world.
26. George McCready Price, *The New Geology* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1923), 296, 637–638.
27. Price, *The New Geology*, 682–88.
28. Garry Wills, *Under God: Religion and American Politics* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990), 121.
29. Numbers, *The Creationists*, 208–38. See also Kurt P. Wise, “Contributions to Creationism by George McCready Price,” in *Proceedings of the International Conference on Creationism*, ed. J. H. Whitmore (Pittsburg, PA: Creation Science Fellowship, 2018), 683–94.
30. Bernard Ramm, *The Christian View of Science and Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1954), 125.
31. I have found only one reference by Price to the region affected by the Missoula floods. In *Genesis Vindicated* (Takoma Park, MD: Review and Herald, 1941), he wrote that the “so-called ‘Dry Falls’ of the old Columbia River, near the Grand Coulee Dam in the State of Washington, constitute a good illustration of former conditions vastly different from the present” (p. 270). When referring to Dry Falls, he made no mention of Bretz, seemed to endorse a hypothesis for their formation rejected by Bretz, and made no mention of eastern Washington’s scablands.
32. John Soennichsen, *Bretz’s Flood: The Remarkable Story of a Rebel Geologist and the World’s Greatest Flood* (Seattle, WA: Sasquatch Books, 2008), 6.
33. J Harlan Bretz, *Memories: Some Recollections of a Geologist on Entering His 90th Year, Parts I, II, and III* (Homewood, IL: Self-published, 1972–1974).
34. Soennichsen, *Bretz’s Flood*, 12–13.
35. Soennichsen, *Bretz’s Flood*, 13–16.
36. Soennichsen, *Bretz’s Flood*, 16–17.
37. Soennichsen, *Bretz’s Flood*, 26–33.
38. Soennichsen, *Bretz’s Flood*, 21–26, 33–41.
39. Soennichsen, *Bretz’s Flood*, 52.
40. Soennichsen, *Bretz’s Flood*, 79–97.
41. J Harlan Bretz, “Glacial Drainage on the Columbia Plateau,” *Bulletin of the Geological Society of America* 34 (September 30, 1923): 597.
42. Bretz, “Glacial Drainage,” 597.
43. J Harlan Bretz, “The Channeled Scablands of the Columbia Plateau,” *The Journal of Geology* 31, no. 8 (Nov–Dec 1923): 621.
44. Bretz, “The Channeled Scablands,” 649.
45. J Harlan Bretz, “Washington’s Channeled Scabland,” *Bulletin No. 45, Division of Mines and Geology, State of Washington* (Olympia, WA: State Printing Plant, 1959), 1–57; see especially pages 51–52; Soennichsen, *Bretz’s Flood*, 161–68; David Alt, *Glacial Lake Missoula and Its Humongous Floods* (Missoula, MT: Mountain Press, 2001), 21–22; John Eliot Allen, Marjorie Burns, and Scott Burns, *Cataclysms on the Columbia: The Great Missoula Floods*, rev. 2nd ed. (Portland, OR: Ooligan Press, 2009), 52–65.
46. Soennichsen, *Bretz’s Flood*, 143–87.
47. Soennichsen, *Bretz’s Flood*, 189–91.
48. Soennichsen, *Bretz’s Flood*, 191–94; Allen, Burns, and Burns, *Cataclysms on the Columbia*, 52–55.
49. Soennichsen, *Bretz’s Flood*, 176–78, 185–86, 206–10; Allen, Burns, and Burns, *Cataclysms on the Columbia*, 51.
50. Soennichsen, *Bretz’s Flood*, 215–16; J Harlan Bretz, “Solution Cavities in the Joliet Limestone of Northeastern Illinois,” *The Journal of Geology* 48, no. 4 (May–June 1940), 337–84; J Harlan Bretz, “Vadose and Phreatic Features of Limestone Caverns,” *The Journal of Geology* 50, no. 6, part 2 (Aug–Sept 1942): 675–811; J Harlan Bretz, “Bermuda: A Partially Drowned, Late Mature, Pleistocene Karst,” *GSA Bulletin* 71, no. 12 (December 1960): 1729–54.
51. Soennichsen, *Bretz’s Flood*, 221–29; J. T. Pardee, “Unusual Currents and Glacial Lake Missoula,” *Bulletin of the Geological Society of America* 53 (1942): 1569–1600.
52. Richard B. Waitt, Jr., “About Forty Last-Glacial Lake Missoula Jökulhlaups Through Southern Washington,” *The Journal of Geology* 88, no. 6 (November 1980): 653–79.
53. Soennichsen, *Bretz’s Flood*, 228.
54. Soennichsen, *Bretz’s Flood*, 231.
55. “Penrose Medalists,” Geological Society of America. Accessed August 11, 2020. <https://www.geosociety.org/awards/past.htm#penrose>
56. Bretz died on February 3, 1981. Soennichsen, *Bretz’s Flood*, 248. My research involved a study of the behavioral ecology of two species of gulls that nested on Harper Island, a little land mass scarred by large potholes gouged out by the Missoula floods. The impact of the floods on this island is dramatic and unmistakable.
57. George McCready Price, *Evolutionary Geology and the New Catastrophism* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1926), 105–46, 258–74. For acceptance by knowledgeable, young-age creationists of the predictable order of continental glaciation, fossil order, and overthrusts, see Leonard Brand and Arthur Chadwick, *Faith, Reason, & Earth History: A Paradigm of Earth and Biological Origins by Intelligent Design*, 3rd ed. (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2016), 337–44 (continental glaciation), 344–49, 374–79, (fossil order), 371, 373 (overthrusts). There is some evidence that Price softened some of his more extreme positions later in life. See, for example, Numbers, *The Creationists*, 113, 156–57.
58. Richard J. Hammill, “Fifty Years of Adventist Creationism: The Story of an Insider,” *Spectrum* 15, no. 2 (August 1984): 33.
59. Numbers, *The Creationists*, 107.
60. Allen, Burns, and Burns, *Cataclysms on the Columbia*, 40.
61. See, for example, Michael J. Oard, “The Lake Missoula Flood—Clues for the Genesis Flood,” *Creation* 36, no. 2, (April 2014): 43–46; Brand and Chadwick, *Faith, Reason, & Earth History*, 333–34.
62. G. H. Dury, “Neocatastrophism? A Further Look,” *Progress in Physical Geography: Earth and Environment* 4, no. 3 (September 1, 1980): 391–413; Olav Slaymaker, “Neocatastrophism,” in *Encyclopedia of Geomorphology*, Volume 1 & 2, ed. Andrew Goudie (London: Routledge, 2004): 709–11; Cassandra Tate, “Bretz, J Harlan (1882–1981),” HistoryLink.org Essay 8382. Accessed August 11, 2020. <https://www.historylink.org/File/8382>



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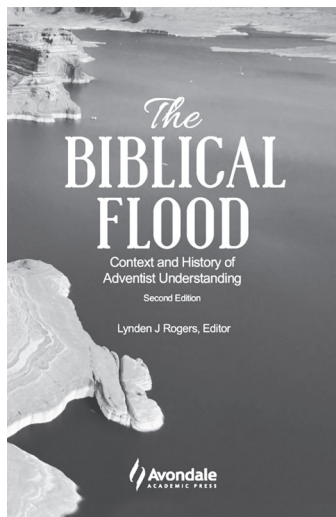
Book Review:

THE BIBLICAL FLOOD: CONTEXT AND HISTORY OF ADVENTIST UNDERSTANDING

BY LAWRENCE T. GERATY

The Biblical Flood: Context and History of Adventist Understanding (2nd Edition), edited by Lynden J. Rogers, with contributions by Laurence A. Turner, Lynden J. Rogers, Cornelis Bootsman, and Kevin de Berg

If the Adventist Church believes in “present truth” it should welcome this book. If Ellen White’s fear that in the church “there will be many now as in ancient times who will hold to tradition and worship they know not what” (5T 707) still resonates, the church should value this book. Ellen White might be anxious that a time would come “when no new questions are started by investigation of the Scriptures, when no difference of opinion arises which will set men to searching the Bible for themselves to make sure they have the truth,” but this book shows that that time has not yet come. In the arena of the relationship between Bible and science, this book is one of the best, if not the best, in relating what Genesis says about the Great Flood with what we now know from science. Furthermore, any such book that goes into a second edition within three years has to have found an appreciative readership!



The chapters in this book grew out of a conference on the subject held by the science faculty at Avondale University College in 2016. The first edition of the book was published by Avondale the very next year but contained several errors, so the second edition is not only corrected but considerably updated (and available from Amazon). In the book’s recommendation, former college president (and head of its science department) Geoffrey Madigan says, this book “provides a wealth of information about how Seventh-day

Adventists have interacted with the flood narrative and its relation to geology. It traces how emphases have shifted and how focus has changed. It also shows that we miss much if we confine our ‘flood thinking’ to geological questions.”

Telling is the fact that the book is dedicated (in the Preface) to the memory of another previous president of

In the arena of the relationship between Bible and science, this book is one of the best, if not the best, in relating what Genesis says about the Great Flood with what we now know from science.

the institution (1971–1980), Eric Magnusson, himself a noted scientist, who, in the mid-1960s, “was instrumental in setting up a unit of study at Avondale in which senior students of science and theology could be exposed to the sometimes contentious interface between these two disciplines in a safe and supportive environment.” Commendably, “this unit continues at Avondale to this day and over the 40-odd years from its inception until Eric’s death in 2009 he retained a keen interest in its presentation and maintained a continuing attentiveness to all aspects of the dialog between informed Christian faith and responsible science.” So it is no accident that this important book comes out of Avondale.

Chapter 1 (“The Historical Development of Theological Perspectives on the Flood”), by Laurence Turner, outlines different approaches to the book of Genesis that have been used by biblical scholars over the last two centuries, right up to the present, including a comparative study of ancient Near Eastern Flood traditions. In Chapter 2 (“The Theology of the Flood Narrative: Literary Structure, Biblical Allusion and Divine Characterization”), the same author describes some of the various theological understandings of the Flood that have resulted from a rethink, not only of biblical myth countering Mesopotamian myths, but of the *historical* relationship between the law and the prophets, and also of their *theological* relationship. Speaking in theological terms, he presents the Genesis Flood as the undoing of a universal creation; in other words, as an anti-creation narrative. I found especially interesting his proposal that the “entire Flood narrative is a well-conceived palistrophe, or elaborate chiasm, centering on the *theological* affirmation that ‘God remembered Noah’ (Gen 8:1).” Another interesting observation by Turner is that while American evangelical and Adventist reflection on the Flood narrative is still dominated by historical questions (was it global, what is its date), we are largely missing the fact that it is primarily a theological account,

and a profound one at that.

Chapter 3 (“Responses by Christian Scholars to Extra-Biblical Data on the Flood from 1500 to 1860”), by Lynden Rogers, discusses the three major attempts made by well-informed and largely conservative Christian scholars to reconcile a growing body of extra-biblical geographical and scientific data with the biblical Flood narrative. “The heroes of this account did their best to explain the data within a paradigm guided by their presuppositions,” but when their “attempt failed they were able to outgrow those presuppositions. Most importantly they were able to respect and accommodate the scientific data while at the same time retaining their Christian faith.” These attempts, incisively covered by Rogers, constituted a major impetus in the formation of modern geological science and provides the context in which the Seventh-day Adventist Church would later form its understanding of the Flood. Theirs was not the model, however, followed by most Adventists, who insisted on keeping their historic presuppositions.

Chapter 4 (“Early Adventist Understandings of the Flood: Ellen White and other 19th Century Pioneers”), by Cornelis Bootsman, Lynden Rogers, and Kevin de Berg, examines the writings of Seventh-day Adventist pioneers, including Ellen White, Uriah Smith, and Alonzo Jones, exploring the sources from which their ideas may have been derived and their effect on the ongoing Adventist understanding of the Flood. By 1900, the distinctive Adventist views on the Flood had been clearly established by Ellen White and, to a much lesser extent, by other Adventist pioneers, none of whom were educated in, or even familiar with, the geological science of their day. “In fact,” say the authors, “the prevalent attitude to science seems to have been one of disdain.”

Chapter 5 (“Seventh-day Adventism, Geology, and the Flood: An Historical Perspective from 1900 to 2015”), by Kevin de Berg, reviews the twentieth-century outgrowth and development of these early understandings. The

author's thesis is that there were five major nineteenth-century events which would determine how Seventh-day Adventists would react to the findings of geological science in the twentieth century and beyond: 1) Ellen White's vision on Creation and the Flood in 3SG, 1864; 2) the geological discovery that the Earth appeared to be much older than Ussher's 6,000 years; 3) the growing recognition that one great catastrophic Flood could not explain the surface features of our planet; 4) the reliability of the geologic column; and 5) the publication of Darwin's *The Origin of Species* in 1859. Into this portentous situation stepped George McCready Price, the Adventist tone-setter for the twentieth century, defined for geologists by his *New Geology* (1923). Later, in 1958, came the founding by the General Conference of the Geoscience Research Institute; important leadership names include Harold Clark, Harold Coffin, Leonard Brand, Robert Brown, Ariel Roth, and others. De Berg says three major hurdles to a biblical interventionist worldview include: 1) the apparent time scale for the Phanerozoic portion of the geologic column; 2) evidence for the development of life by natural processes without informed intervention; and 3) the evidence for the mega-evolution of new life forms.

Finally, in Chapter 6 ("What a Catastrophe! — Science Abandons Uniformitarianism?"), Lynden Rogers evaluates the validity of the "uniformitarianism" charge often leveled at geology over the last century by Flood apologists. The manner in which this story has been told by Adventist authors is described and the key role played in this narrative by Price is noted. Have recent shifts away from uniformitarian paradigms and toward the recognition of violent episodic events as agents of major geological change ("neo-catastrophism") reflected scientific support for a universal Flood? Rogers says,

Data that indicate violent, even widespread catastrophic events are certainly of interest. They deserve mention and need further study. But even if they are perfectly consistent with what could reasonably be expected from a worldwide Flood they do not uniquely, or even strongly, imply it as the favored option among other widespread, perhaps violent depositional events. More useful for the purpose would be consistent evidence from around the globe,

drawn from a range of erosional or depositional phenomena, a very substantial portion of which demonstrated consistencies which suggested a single, recent event.

Rogers recommends considering what Galileo picked up on Copernicus's idea of judging competing scientific models on the basis of the three Cs: coherence, cohesiveness, and consistency—i.e., those involving the least amount of special pleading.

As Rogers, the book's general editor, says, "There are clearly tensions between some of the viewpoints presented in these chapters. . . . The authors of this book have to live with such tensions. They are not to be apparently resolved either by doing poor theology in order to accommodate science, or by doing bad science in order to be reconciled to a particular reading of scripture. Instead, we are invited to do more and better work in each area." And that is what the authors have done and what makes its suggestions and conclusions so valuable.

The book is full of useful tables and figures and has a valuable index; each chapter has copious and well-researched notes. The book will be especially appreciated by those who found useful *Understanding Genesis: Contemporary Adventist Perspectives* (eds. Brian Bull, Fritz Guy, & Ervin Taylor, 2006) and *God, Land, and the Great Flood* (Brian Bull & Fritz Guy, 2017), but need something more recent and comprehensive. It should be helpful especially to Christians interested in discovering more about the interrelationship between science and their faith, academics who follow the interaction between science and religion, teachers of science in both secondary and tertiary education, and church pastors and leaders in local churches. For those who wish for an even more comprehensive relating of Genesis to science, many of the same Avondale authors are putting on the upcoming Sydney Adventist Forum Conference (June 11–13, 2021) on "The Age of Life on Earth." Stay tuned!



LAWRENCE T. GERATY is president emeritus of La Sierra University.

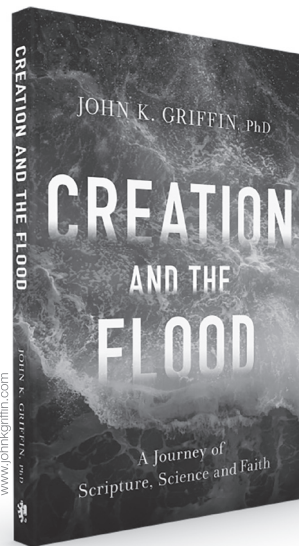
Book Review:

CREATION AND THE FLOOD: A JOURNEY OF SCRIPTURE, SCIENCE AND FAITH BY JOHN K. GRIFFIN

BY BRYAN NESS

When I saw this book, which was just published in the fall of 2020, my first thought was, do we need another book on this topic when there are already some excellent books available? As I began reading, however, I found Griffin's first-hand account of confronting his crisis of faith in the Bible refreshing. John Griffin is not a trained scientist, nor is he a credentialed theologian. Ordinarily I cringe when I read material written by less well-informed authors about the creation/

evolution and Noachian flood debates. So often, such authors have not educated themselves enough to grasp the scientific data, which overwhelmingly support an old-age earth and provide no support for a global flood. So often, such authors have just enough theological knowledge to sound confident in defending traditional views and far too little knowledge of science to recognize the glaring clash between Young Earth Creationist (YEC) models and modern science. Griffin is



well educated, with a PhD in economics from Fordham University, and even though he does not possess a science degree, thankfully he seems to know his science well enough to recognize the long-overdue need for Christians to confront fundamentalist dogma about creation and the flood. Usually, such confrontations are left to outsiders who are more intent on tearing down belief in God than in finding ways to be true to the well-established scientific facts while preserving a genuine, Bible-based faith in God.

The book should be refreshing to the average reader, as Griffin presents his ideas in the form of his own experiences of researching these difficult topics step by step. He begins by recounting a question his son asked him about whether dinosaurs existed. He was about to blurt out that they did exist 65 million years ago, when he stopped himself, concerned about how his son might relate to such information, considering he was attending a Christian grade school that taught YEC views. Griffin

The book should be refreshing to the average reader, as Griffin presents his ideas in the form of his own experiences of researching these difficult topics step by step.

grew up attending a church that had more flexible views about interpreting Genesis, but more recently had joined a conservative, non-denominational, evangelical church which holds to a 6,000-year age of the earth, literal seven-day creation week, and recent worldwide flood. He found the community very spiritually invigorating, but given what he knew about science, was troubled by its support for YEC and a worldwide flood. He had also recently married a woman from the same faith community and was concerned that his looming crisis of belief could affect their relationship. The confluence of his church's insistence on reading Genesis literally, his limited knowledge that science suggests such an interpretation is untenable, and his deep faith in God and the Bible, led him to study carefully to see if there are ways of interpreting Genesis that preserve the Bible's integrity but that are also true to science.

Griffin's approach is primarily grounded in Fundamentalism:

I trust that the Bible is true in all that it intends to teach—that the Bible is God's Word, spoken through human authors, and that the authors were inspired by the Holy Spirit. This is ultimately a matter of faith. I believe that God gave us the Bible so that He could reveal Himself to us, and that He therefore gave us a Bible that is free from error in its teachings. He achieved this through miracles of the Holy Spirit, both inspiring the human authors and later directing which books made it into the Bible.¹



*John Griffin, author of *Creation and the Flood: A Journey of Scripture, Science and Faith**

Griffin claims inspiration for his approach from Galileo, who considered that God reveals Himself through both the Bible and His creation, and that when a well-established scientific fact seems to contradict scripture, it likely means scripture needs to be reinterpreted. He also references Augustine's famous quote in which Augustine cautions Christians against using Scripture to argue against things generally known to be true about the physical world, thus making Christians a laughingstock. Like many before him

who faced such a crisis, he began systematically to explore alternative ways of interpreting Genesis to preserve his faith.

Griffin is up-front from the beginning that science cannot support the YEC model or a worldwide flood. He acknowledges that the Bible is complex and that it is not always easy to interpret its meaning, but that its primary goal is to teach theological truth, not science. Genesis can be especially difficult, since there is such a long tradition of interpreting it literally, rather than figuratively. In fact, a slight majority of pastors interpret Genesis literally and adhere to YEC views,² and 40% of the American public support YEC.³ Even though Griffin himself sees such views as untenable, he does not believe they need to be rooted out, since many sincere believers are fully convinced of such views, but he does believe that churches need to allow room for a diversity of views. Many believers, when confronted with the choice between YEC and science, are put in a bind. They must either adhere to unscientific views they cannot accept intellectually, or they must assume that since the Bible is clearly wrong on these things, they have no choice but to discard the Bible. Griffin proposes that churches

allow for more figurative interpretations of Genesis that could prevent such damaging crises of faith. He also sees the acceptance of non-literal interpretations of Genesis as making evangelism more effective. When potential converts are confronted with a requirement to interpret Genesis literally, knowing what science says about earth history, they may decide the Bible is not a valid source of truth, leading them to discard the Bible's teachings about the plan of Salvation, Christ's resurrection, and the Second Coming as well.

After his broad introduction in Part I, Griffin divides the remainder of the book into a Part II, which covers creation, and a Part III, which covers the flood. In Part II, Griffin briefly gives the evidence used to support YEC, which, in a nutshell, is simply the tradition of interpreting Genesis literally. Given that not even all the early church theologians agreed about how to interpret Genesis, and given their lack of access to the scientific information we have today, Griffin believes tradition is a weak basis for insisting on a literal approach. The primary evidence used in support of a young earth age is the genealogies as interpreted by Bishop Ussher, and later revisionist views that have expanded the potential age of the earth to maybe 10,000 years if the genealogies in the King James Version are assumed to be incomplete. Griffin contends that the genealogies were never intended to be used this way and were placed there for the more culturally important tracing of Israel's origins as a people. The long lives of many of the earlier individuals are symbolic, rather than literal, similar to long lifespans seen in the kings lists of other Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) creation epics.

Then he lays out the evidence that shows that the universe and the earth are much older. Much of this will be familiar to scientists and informed lay people and includes evidence from cosmology that the universe is approximately 13.8 billion years old and radiometric dating of asteroids that estimate the age of the earth to be 4.58 billion years. He lays out a good layman's explanation for why radiometric dating is dependable—an important exercise, since simplistic YEC arguments are sometimes used to imply that radiometric dates are wildly inaccurate. He includes other kinds of evidence that do not depend on radiometric dating, such as sediment layers in lakes that can be dated by counting the layers giving ages of over 50,000 years, and the analysis of coral reefs that, using

known growth rates, can be dated to as old as 800,000 years. He dispenses with the “apparent age” theory used by YEC proponents to explain away all the evidence of an old earth by pointing out that such a theory would require God to do things like embed the bones of dinosaurs that never lived in the appropriate sediment layers.

The remainder of Part II outlines why a figurative interpretation of Genesis 1 is the only interpretation consistent with the scientific evidence for an old earth. To make his case, Griffin ponders the appropriate genre of Genesis 1:

From my own standpoint, Genesis 1 is not quite poetry, but not quite narrative prose either. It has a lyrical aspect to it and is deeply concerned with theological questions. The author does not show concern with imparting precise scientific knowledge and has not offered a detailed and scientifically precise account of creation. The account here is similar to narrative, but the language and structure are artful, and the content is highly symbolic. Perhaps it is best described as *sui generis*—its own unique class or type. Whatever the best generic descriptor is, I am confident in naming one thing that it is not: modern journalism. Once I made that determination, I allowed myself to consider figurative interpretations.⁴

To be thorough, he also shows why he believes that the Old Earth Creationist (OEC) model does not work either. In brief, the OEC model postulates that the earth and universe are as old as scientists estimate and that the creation account in Genesis 1, although a literal telling of the events, takes place over billions of years rather than seven literal days. Both the YEC and OEC models assume that the author of Genesis is giving an historical, scientifically accurate account of creation. Griffin sees both approaches as failures, because he believes Genesis is intended to teach theology, not science. The cultural world in which the story was written was pre-science, and even if God were intending to teach them science, which era's science would he teach them?

Rather than teaching science, God instead uses the pre-scientific understanding of the ancient Hebrew culture

to tell the story of creation. This is why the descriptions in Genesis of the separation of the waters above from the waters beneath, and the dome of heaven, sound so odd to modern ears—God was using the cosmology of ancient cultures where, looking up at the blue sky, it was obvious that there is water above, which is held back by a solid dome, and there are waters beneath, on which the solid ground “floats,” which represents the middle ground between the waters above and beneath. God is not endorsing their ancient cosmology, he is simply using their understanding of the universe to teach them the theological truths of Genesis, that there is one God, the creator of all things, who was before all things.

The theological truths of Genesis become even more apparent when compared with the origin stories of other ANE cultures. Griffin compares the Genesis account with the other ANE narratives such as the *Gilgamesh Epic*, *Enuma Elish*, and *Atrahasis*. The many similarities between Genesis and these other accounts suggest that the author of Genesis knew of them, and may even have borrowed some elements, but intended Genesis to be distinctly different in ways that spoke truth about the God of Israel. Instead of the many Gods of the other accounts, Genesis has one God who, instead of working with already existing material, created the universe ex nihilo. Humans in the other accounts were created to be servants to the Gods, whereas Genesis places the creation of humans at the apex of creation, and God provides for man and wants to develop a loving relationship, rather than the consistently confrontational relationships in the other ANE accounts. A proper understanding of the role of Genesis should focus on these differences and what they say about God.

The remainder of Part II is a verse-by-verse analysis of Genesis 1. Griffin seems to have done his homework well and often references dependable sources such as John C. Lennox,⁵ John H. Walton,^{6,7} and Tremper Longman⁸ to buttress his points. One compelling figurative interpretation endorsed by Griffin is the “universe as God’s temple” model. Many ANE temple dedication

ceremonies were planned to last over a seven-day period, with the deity entering the temple on the seventh day. The temple/cosmos connection is used by the author of Genesis 1 to organize the events in the creation process, with the climax of the seventh day being the blessing of that day by God as a day to rest from the work of creation. This lends power to God’s command in the fourth commandment to honor the Sabbath day and rest on it, and even though the Genesis account is figurative, the way the story is told gives no less weight to the sanctity of the Sabbath. This is an especially important point for Seventh-day Adventists, who often claim it is essential that Genesis 1 be a literal creation account spanning seven literal days, or the Sabbath is not properly established. Griffin and other scholars see no such dilemma; the Sabbath is just as well established, even if the account is interpreted figuratively. As an additional proof of this, Griffin points out that the second version of the fourth commandment in Deuteronomy makes no mention of creation at all, yet still holds Sabbath observance as binding.

Part III deals with the Genesis flood. Griffin takes much the same approach as Longman and Walton in *The Lost World of the Flood*, recognizing that although a worldwide flood clearly did not happen, the author of Genesis still portrays it as a universal flood, but does so as a literary device to emphasize its importance. The descriptions of the size of the boat (larger than any wooden boat ever made, and according to shipbuilding engineers not even remotely seaworthy), the gathering of animals of all kinds, the depth of the floodwaters, and the destruction of all living things not on the ark, are all examples of hyperbole in service to making it an epic story. Since so many aspects of the flood are simply impossible, the story must be interpreted in a figurative fashion, much like the creation account, where the story is to teach theological truths not history. Also like the story of creation, many other ANE sources contain a flood narrative with many parallels to the Genesis version, including a single man and his family building some sort of boat, gathering animals together, all

Many of the truths taught by the flood story are the same whether the account is taken literally or figuratively.

other life being destroyed by the flood, the sending out of a bird to look for land, a sacrifice after the flood, and a vow by the gods to never allow another such flood. The author of the Genesis flood account almost certainly knew of and likely borrowed elements from these other stories, many of which predate Genesis, but, as for the creation account, changes certain elements to teach theological truths about Israel's one true God.

Many of the truths taught by the flood story are the same whether the account is taken literally or figuratively. Mankind had become impossibly sinful, to the point that God decides to destroy them all, but He finds one man who is true to Him and shows him a way to survive the coming flood, by building a boat to weather the storm and preserve his family and animals. The story is on the age-old theme of sin and redemption writ large. The destruction of the earth by flood, as portrayed in the story, allows God to, in a sense, recreate the earth. Remember, God's original creation began with water, then dry land, and the filling of the dry land with plants and animals, as does the end of the flood story when Noah and his family leave the ark and walk again on dry land, allowing the animals from the ark to repopulate the earth. Probably more disturbing than whether the story is literal or figurative, is the picture it paints, of a God who is so vindictive He is willing to destroy all living things except a single family and what animals they can save on an ark. This very dark image of God is clearly troubling to Griffin and he spends many pages arguing that the story emphasizes not just God's sovereignty and divine justice, but also His mercy and forgiveness. No matter what is said to take the edge off the raw vindictive nature of the story, the flood story is troubling and seems to paint a picture of a less than loving God.

After concluding that both the creation and flood stories, in light of modern science, must be interpreted figuratively, Griffin meticulously visits other Biblical references to these stories and concludes that none of them endorse or require that these two accounts be interpreted literally. Nowhere in the Bible does God intend to teach science, Scripture is for teaching truths about God, not about the natural world. God has given us brains and other tools with which to understand the natural world.

Griffin concludes the book with a discussion about what to tell children about these two epic stories. Do we

present a literal telling of creation to children, because children do not possess the intellectual tools to understand figurative interpretations, and then as they get older help them recognize the figurative nature of the stories? Do we tell our children that the flood was worldwide, or do we tell them the truth, as known by science, that there has never been a worldwide flood and that Noah's flood was just a local, albeit unusually large, flood? And if we do begin by telling young children the stories in a literal sense, at what age should they be informed about the more appropriate figurative interpretations? Griffin tells of his own personal struggles with what to tell his own children, and ultimately is uncertain how best to proceed. One thing he does believe is certain, however—at some point young people will likely be ready to explore the alternative ways of interpreting these stories, and we should help them with this to assure them that the figurative approach does not negate the truths of the Bible. The Bible is still God's word, written by the prophets and apostles, and is valuable for teaching us the truth about God. That the Bible might fail as a science or history textbook is no reason to distrust its relevance as a guide to salvation.

Endnotes

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SECRETS AND CHALLENGES IN THE WORLD OF ELLEN G. WHITE

Courtesy of the Ellen G. White Estate, Inc.



KEYWORDS: Ellen White, amalgamation, racism, slavery, abolition, a complication of the plot, how to deal with the flaws

The Hardest

QUESTION

BY TERRIE DOPP AAMODT

October 22, 2009, marked the opening of the working conference in Portland, Maine, that would begin to put together the manuscript of *Ellen Harmon White: American Prophet*, which was published five years later by Oxford University Press. The choice of date was not what you are thinking, whatever that may be; rather, it marked the convergence of post-peak-color-season hotel rates in Maine and the away schedule of the University of Wisconsin-Madison football team. We did not explain all of this to our keynote speaker of the evening, Joan Hedrick, the Pulitzer-Prize-winning biographer of Harriet Beecher Stowe. She had learned the date's significance by the time she arrived in Portland, so it was with some trepidation that she entered our discussion of Ellen White studies. Before her conference invitation was given, Hedrick had never heard of Ellen White, a feature she shared with many other scholars of American literature, history, and religion. And yet that night, as she described the joys and challenges of writing a woman's life, everyone present could resonate with her task. She spoke of women's expected place in nineteenth-century America, the challenges of women assuming unconventional roles outside of their domestic

sphere, and tensions between innovative women and the power structures they encountered. When she concluded, we were still digesting the rich possibilities she had laid out for us when Ciro Sepulveda, a professor of history at Oakwood University, jumped up with the first question of the discussion session:

"It's clear from hearing your talk that you have profound admiration for your subject, but how do you deal with the flaws?"

The people in the room with ties to Adventism—well over half—were all ears.

How *do* you deal with the flaws? Before I describe Hedrick's response, I want to reflect on the question. What is the biographer *supposed* to do? In the 1930s, during the heyday of literary and intellectual modernism, the historian and cultural critic Lewis Mumford described the role of the modern biographer. Earlier generations had, he said, been satisfied to assemble available documents and "a well-modeled clay mask" into something "called a 'character.'" Any traits out of character would be discarded, and the biographer could proceed to create a bronze sculpture from the selected materials and, "in an excess of piety, would often gild the bronze head."

“It’s clear from hearing your talk that you have profound admiration for your subject, but how do you deal with the flaws?”

In Mumford’s day, modernist thinkers were telling biographers to skip the moral mask and go straight to the facts. But identifying the facts, even before the advent of postmodernism, was easier said than done. No, Mumford said, the biographer is not a sculptor but is more like an archaeologist, trying to make sense of the bits left to her, even if all she is given is a shoulder blade and part of a foot.¹

Compared to some biographical tasks, though, the one facing this biographer includes a plethora of detached skeletal pieces with which to attempt reconstructing the person of Ellen White and telling her story whole. But *more* does not necessarily mean *easier*. Because I am foolish enough to stand in front of a roomful of people with acutely developed critical faculties and try to explain my task, I’ll just go straight to the hardest problem this biographer has encountered: what to make of Ellen White’s statements on amalgamation and how to determine their relationship to her various statements on racial issues. To identify this issue as the hardest problem is not to trivialize the others, such as the use of sources, inconsistencies, veracity, statements about science, or the chasm between empirical evidence and visionary phenomena. This topic of amalgamation and race is highly controversial, it attracts strong opinions from every angle, it lays open some deeply troubling and persistent issues within the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and it touches on national, even worldwide, matters as fresh as this morning’s newspaper.²

There are many ways to deal with this problem, and they have all been tried: explain it away, gloss it over with rhetorical analysis, contextualize it to death, create a framework of coherence—a controlling narrative—into which selected details may be conveniently fitted, or ignore it completely and claim that the allotted number of pages in the volume under construction precludes even bringing up the issue. Conversely, one could expect a

subject to behave according to cultural expectations that did not yet exist and use deviations from that standard to discredit the subject, or one could identify this issue as the Gordian knot that, once undone, unravels every claim the subject made and every action she ever took. Mumford describes these latter activities as an attempt “to strip off the moral mask,” usually leading “not to a clear reading of the character, but to the building-up of a sort of negative moral mask, as artificial and arbitrary as the one that it replaced—or rather more so, because the original mask was a work of art produced by the subject himself and it bore his own veritable imprint.”³ I am not sure that any of these strategies aid us in our attempt to understand this person whole. So let me lay out the box of skeletal remains on the topic and see what we have to work with.

First, the amalgamation quotes. White used the term twice in troubling ways. The quotes appeared in July 1864, when *Spiritual Gifts*, Volume Three was published. In her preface, White lamented the scarce details on Old Testament spiritual heroes and promised an accurate expansion: “Since the great facts of faith . . . have been opened to me in vision,” she stated, “I have been more than ever convinced that ignorance . . . and the wily advantage taken of this ignorance by some who know better are the grand bulwarks of infidelity.”⁴ And then she proceeded to pump oxygen into groups like American Atheists (one of whom wrote to me some time back on this very topic). In Chapter Six, “Crime Before the Flood,” she described vividly the extent of sin and perversion that incited God to destroy the earth with water. People luxuriated in material goods, denied the existence of God, and worshiped what they had made with their own hands. Stoked with a meat diet, which “increased their ferocity and violence,” they murdered their neighbors with impunity, appropriated their wives in polygamous

profusion, and stole their cattle. “But if there was one sin above another which called for the destruction of the race by the flood,” White continued, “it was the base crime of amalgamation of man and beast which defaced the image of God, and caused confusion everywhere.”⁵

What did she mean? What does a plain reading of the text reveal? The words say that man and beast became mixed together via serious criminal acts, creating mass consternation and distorting the image of God that had been built into Adam and Eve. If she had left it there, the words would have provided plenty of room for head-scratching and discussion. But she went further. After vividly recounting the Flood’s destruction, she described the rainbow, a sign of God’s “mercy and compassion” to “repentant man.” In the next breath, she returned to amalgamation. “Every species of animal which God had created were preserved in the ark,” she went on. “The confused species which God did not create, which were the result of amalgamation, were destroyed by the flood.” But those sinful distortions returned after the Deluge, she asserted: “Since the flood there has been amalgamation of man and beast, as may be seen in the almost endless varieties of species of animals, and in certain races of men.” And that is all she said. No further explanation, no development, no additional use of the term as applied to human

beings in any of her other writings, although these quotes would be replicated in 1870 in *The Spirit of Prophecy, Volume One*.⁶

White did not indicate which races she was referring to, but the potential implications were the final straw for B. F. Snook and William H. Brinkerhoff, two disgruntled Adventist pastors from Iowa who already doubted the validity of Ellen White’s visions and cast a hearsay-fueled parting shot on their way out the door. Deploying their penchant for hyperbole, they declared this statement signified that White had taught that Negroes were not human. “But what are we to understand by certain races of men?” they asked, “She has . . . left us to fix the stigma of amalgamation where we may see fit. But

the interpretation has come to light. She told it to her husband, and he made it known to Eld. Ingraham, and he divulged the secret to the writer that Sister White had seen that God never made the Darkey.”⁷ Shaky though this purported evidence may have been, Snook’s and Brinkerhoff’s pamphlet acquired a life of its own and still circulates on the Internet.

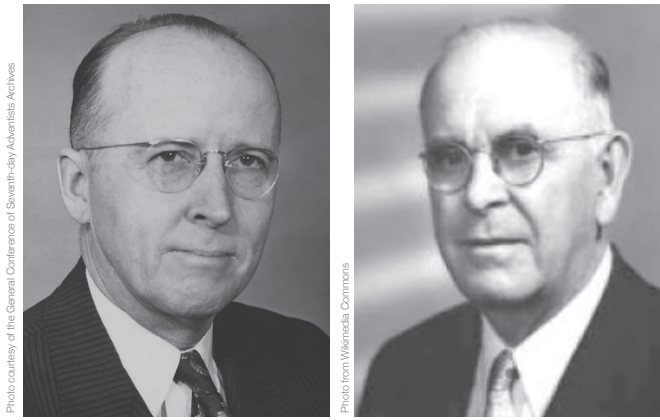
Within a few months, Uriah Smith, the first in a long line of mansplainers, sprang to Ellen White’s defense in the pages of the *Review*, digging the hole even deeper. To describe what for him constituted the still-visible effects of amalgamation, Smith, reflecting popular racist polygenesis theory, listed the “wild Bushmen of Africa, some tribes of the Hottentots, and perhaps the Digger Indians of our own country, &c.” as examples.⁸ Over the years since then, explanations have multiplied: her grandson-in-law, D. E. Robinson, said in 1931 that the passage fulfilled

her prefatory intent to counter skepticism about creation and that her statements helped refute the recently published ideas of Charles Darwin. “Mrs. White’s statement, if accepted, will solve the problems connected with the close physical resemblance between man and some of the apes,” Robinson claimed, oblivious of his racist overtones. He saw greater structural differences between apes and the tailed monkeys “than

between [apes] and man. Anyone who observes the chimpanzee, the gorilla, or the orang, would not find it difficult to believe that they had some common ancestry with the human race. . . . As far as the evidence goes, it is far more reasonable to believe that the apes are descended from man, than to regard them as his ancestors.”⁹

In his own attempt to redeem the quote, George McCready Price stated that what she meant to say was “amalgamation of man and of beast” (in other words, of man with man and of beast with beast), although he did not explain how such activities constituted a “base crime.” F. D. Nichol adopted Price’s grammar and created a rationale for it in 1951, maintaining that a plain reading of the passage would require accepting an “assumption”

The biographer is not a sculptor but is more like an archaeologist, trying to make sense of the bits left to her, even if all she is given is a shoulder blade and part of a foot.



Frank Marsh (left) and Harold W. Clark (right)

that “has marshaled against it the whole weight of scientific belief today.” Although he focused primarily on defending creationism, he did offer that “Certainly there is nothing in the savage races of some remote heathen lands that even suggests a cross between man and animals. And if the most degraded race of men does not suggest such a cross, much less do any species of animals suggest it.”¹⁰

Adventist scientists Frank Marsh and Harold W. Clark carried on a spirited dialogue in the 1940s, with Marsh adhering closely to Price’s grammatical analysis and Clark dangling the possibility that White may have meant what she appears to have said. In 1947, Clark carried out the most systematic analysis I have seen among the early defenders before he drew his conclusions. Along the way he hopefully picked up on the comment of one unnamed scientist who suggested that perhaps apes were descendants, rather than ancestors, of man. He concludes that “while there is . . . no positive evidence that man and animals have crossed in modern times, there are certain facts which indicate very strongly that such may have taken place at some time in the past.”¹¹ Like Ellen White, Clark was careful not to mention any specific races in his

analysis. Through all of these explanations, the scholars involved focused on issues of science and anthropology, usually staying away from racial arguments.

Before I draw my own conclusions about these statements, I will turn to the related skeletal pieces in my box: the references White made to race and slavery in the context of contemporary events. Her musings on amalgamation occurred in the middle of fiery discussions on slavery in the context of the Civil War. During the 1850s, as the nation argued about the Fugitive Slave Act and the spread of slavery into the territories, Adventists piled on, adopting an antislavery point of view, and eventually taking up the rhetoric of the most extreme opponents of government policy, the abolitionists.¹² Adventists tended to be apolitical, but the slavery issue dovetailed neatly with their prophetic interpretation of Revelation 13. In 1857, Uriah Smith equated the lamb-like aspects of one of the beasts described in the chapter with the principles of equality in the Declaration of Independence, but the draconic side of this “hypocritical nation” proceeded to “hold in abject servitude over 3,200,000 of human beings, rob them of those rights with which they acknowledge that all men are endowed by their Creator, and write out a base denial of all their fair professions in characters of blood.”¹³

“The moral influence of the nation has passed away,” thundered J. H. Waggoner in 1858, as Abraham Lincoln and Stephen Douglas warily circled each other during the US Senate election campaign in Illinois, and the Adventist writer saw all organized religion as complicit. “The churches hold themselves bound to obey the laws of the land, unjust and wicked as they may be,” he continued, and “thus, instead of being ‘the light of the world,’ . . . their light is become darkness.”¹⁴ Some Adventists insisted there was no point in fighting slavery,

During the 1850s, as the nation argued about the Fugitive Slave Act and the spread of slavery into the territories, Adventists piled on, adopting an antislavery point of view, and eventually taking up the rhetoric of the most extreme opponents of government policy, the abolitionists.

as it was too enmeshed to remove before the end of time, but Uriah Smith, the Whites, and others harshly criticized the federal government and prodded their fellow church members to take action.

After Abraham Lincoln was elected to the presidency on November 6, 1860, the incumbent James Buchanan, a northern doughface Democrat in the thrall of southern white supremacists, dithered until Lincoln's inauguration the following March, while slave states prepared to secede. On November 20, the *Review* reprinted an article by Harriet Beecher Stowe, an antislavery supporter of colonization who had earned the admiration of abolitionists in 1852 by publishing *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Uriah Smith's headnote to her article connected the United States with the majestic, terrifying description of the last days of Babylon in Revelation 18, noting part of the wealth of that decadent kingdom was invested in the "bodies and souls of men." Stowe's article, originally published in the *Independent*, was as critical of organized religion as Waggoner had been in the pages of the *Review*. Both writers knew that although all the mainline Protestant denominations in the US split over the slavery issue before the war began, none of them called for the immediate abolition of the peculiar institution. "When a great moral question is made a test-question before the public mind, or a great evil is threatening to spread in a community," Stowe declared, and when "any body of men professing eminently to be the representative men of Christianity, decline publicly and clearly to express any opinion about it, this want of assertion is immediately received by the powers of evil as the strongest affirmation."¹⁵ Adventist leaders were on board with the antislavery and abolitionist opinion that the impending civil conflict had cosmic dimensions, and unlike their formally organized counterparts, their official journal included abolitionist viewpoints.

They saw it as a matter of the survival of Christianity. Another Adventist, John Fee, spoke out in the *Review* a few days after the Confederate States of America organized its government in February 1861. Fee quoted a statement the Presbyterian theologian and abolitionist Albert Barnes had made several years earlier: "The Christian church, if right, would break the bonds of the slave in a year." Voltaire had won over public opinion in France because he stood up for the poor and oppressed while the French church remained silent, Barnes noted; the same thing

could happen in the United States. Fee took Barnes's cue: "Four millions of native-born Americans of 'one blood' with ourselves," he fumed, are "despoiled in the sacred rights of husband and wife, parents and child; yet most of the professed ministers of Him who came to . . . preach deliverance to the captives, and to set at liberty them that are bruised, dispose of the claims of these millions by a 'single paragraph' in their sermons. . . . [and for] the colored man in the free States, there are but few churches where he is treated as a brother. Most treat him as Pharisees did Gentiles in the time of Christ."¹⁶

Ellen White jumped into this strident context in late August 1861. By this time, the Confederates had captured Fort Sumter; Lincoln had called up 75,000 troops for 90 days, and inexperienced soldiers on both sides had stumbled toward a flawed Confederate victory at the First Battle of Manassas. White reflected both the ardent discussions on the pages of the *Review* during the previous few years and the attitudes of the larger antislavery and abolitionist communities, which chafed at Lincoln's refusal to violate his Constitutional oath in order to free the slaves. Radical Republicans in Congress and their allies in the press, echoed by Horace Greeley of the *New York Tribune*, excoriated Lincoln for his timidity in returning to their owners the slaves freed by abolitionist generals in the early weeks of the war.

White, like some Northern clergymen, asserted that this timidity was precisely why the Union lost at Manassas. "God is punishing this nation for the high crime of slavery," she railed. "All heaven beholds with indignation, human beings, the workmanship of God, reduced to the lowest depths of degradation, and placed on a level with the brute creation by their fellow-men."¹⁷ Angels were recording this "grievous sin," she continued. God's anger "burns against this nation, and especially against the religious bodies who have sanctioned, and have themselves engaged in this terrible merchandise." She marveled at how professed Christians could weep over the agonies of early Christian martyrs while inflicting suffering on their own slaves. "It will be more tolerable for the heathen and for papists in the day of the execution of God's judgment than for such men," she warned. Several months before Julia Ward Howe penned the "Battle Hymn of the Republic," White expressed similar sentiments: "God's anger will not cease until he has caused the land



Manassas National Battlefield Park, the site of two Confederate victories during the American Civil War. Henry House Hill is now part of Manassas National Battlefield Park.

of light to drink the dregs of the cup of his fury.” She described how, while attending a church conference in Roosevelt, New York, on August 3 (about two weeks after the Battle of Manassas) she experienced a vision in which she was shown “the sin of slavery.” It had been expressed in the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850, a statute “calculated to crush out of man every noble, general feeling of sympathy . . . [and executed in] direct opposition to the teaching of Christ.”

Then she described her vision of “the late disastrous battle at Manassas, Va.” She recounted the Northern charge against Henry House Hill, which was succeeding despite high casualties until “an angel descended and waved his hand backward . . . and a precipitate retreat

commenced. . . . Then it was explained, that God had this nation in his own hand, and would suffer no victories to be gained faster than he ordained, and no more losses to the Northern men than in his wisdom he saw fit, to punish the North for their sin.”¹⁸ Here she expressed the common belief on both sides that even if their cause was fundamentally right, God would chasten them for their sins before he would allow them to proceed to victory. In fact, supporters of both sides used similar language after this first major battle.¹⁹

Throughout the early years of the war, the pages of the *Review* were filled with refutations of biblical arguments supporting slavery, as well as fervid debates on the draft, pacifism, and the theory of just war. After the Emancipation Proclamation went into effect, however, the subject of slavery faded, along with the expectation that time would end with slavery intact. The church pivoted toward spreading its mission to Europe and elsewhere, typically bypassing debates about Reconstruction, the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, and anti-black violence. Although many one-time abolitionists became Radical Republicans and sought to enforce racial equality in the South, Adventists took a pass. There were virtually no Adventists in the South during or just after the war, and the region fell off the denominational radar. Like some other antislavery activists, once the peculiar institution was ended by the Thirteenth Amendment, they assumed their work was done.

It was nearly twenty-five years before Ellen White revisited the subject in detail. In 1889, the General Conference drew up resolutions on the “color line” in South Africa, and she drafted a manuscript on Jim Crow racism. A year later, as she worshiped with white congregants and former slaves in St. Louis, Missouri, she knelt with them in prayer. Just then, she recounted, “these words were presented to me as if written with a pen of

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fire: ‘All ye are brethren,’” (Matthew 23:8). She wanted the congregation to know that “the God of the white man is the God of the black man, and the Lord declares that His love for the least of His children exceeds that of a mother for her beloved child.” She drew on her own experience as a mother and the maternal imagery of scripture to describe God’s love for His black children as that of a mother for her child, particularly one who has been mistreated: “As soon as a mother sees reason for others to regard her child with aversion or contempt, does she not increase her tenderness, as if to shield him from the world’s rude touch? ‘Can a mother forget her sucking child? Yea, they may forget, yet I will not forget thee’” (Isaiah 49:15). God loves His children equally, she said, “except that He has a special, tender pity for those who are called to bear a greater burden than others.”²⁰

The General Conference session in 1891 turned its attention to the work beginning in the South, a region that had been whipsawed politically: Radical Republicans had installed their people in Southern statehouses and forced whites there to accept political, legal, and social equality with their former slaves, often at the point of the bayonet. The active phase of Reconstruction had ended in 1877, and by the 1890s, Jim Crow legislation installed by white supremacist southern Democrats had swept over the former Confederacy. White people who consorted with blacks in any way, including evangelists or educators, did so at the very real peril of their lives.

At the 1891 General Conference, R. M. Kilgore, superintendent of the church’s District Two in the United States—later the Southern Union—reported on this brand-

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new field within Adventism. The denomination had made “no provision . . . for the development of workers to labor especially among the colored people,” Kilgore reported.²¹ He described the needs and asked the church to recruit black teachers to work with black students in the South,

acknowledging the realities of Jim Crow racial separation.

While this was going on, White polished her 1889 manuscript on race, and it circulated for years, until her son Edson published it in *The Southern Work* in 1898. Meanwhile, when *Patriarchs and Prophets* went to press in 1890, the references to amalgamation were gone—and the descriptions of meat-eating before the Flood were toned down significantly. When *Desire*

of Ages appeared in 1898, she used the conclusion of



Courtesy of the Ellen G. White Estate, Inc.

R. M. Kilgore



Courtesy of the Ellen G. White Estate, Inc.

James Edson White, c.1870

Her premillennial pessimism led her to believe that the problem would continue (which it has done, longer than White thought the world would last), and her apocalyptic urgency put the gospel before racial remediation. A tragic result of this strategy was the church's willingness to apply this pragmatic, time-specific advice as if it were a long-term principle.

the Good Samaritan story to make a point about race. Christ's command to the inquisitive lawyer, "Go, and do thou likewise," said White, forever answered the question, "Who is my neighbor?" and, she continued, "Christ has shown that our neighbor does not mean merely one of the church or faith to which we belong. It has no reference to race, color, or class distinction. Our neighbor is every person who needs our help. Our neighbor is every soul who is wounded and bruised by the adversary. Our neighbor is everyone who is the property of God."²²

That statement would make an elegant denouement to the series of events described here, but it is not the end of the story either. In addition to preaching ideals, White gave practical advice. As she watched Edson and his associates risk their lives to minister to blacks in Mississippi, she became aware of the intransigent racial prejudice and hatred in the former Confederacy and of the helplessness or unwillingness of governments to check it. Thus, she advised that black congregations function separately from whites "not to exclude them from worshipping with white people, because they are black, but in order that the progress of the truth may be advanced. Let them understand that this plan is to be followed until the Lord shows us a better way." She advised against interracial marriage in consideration of its effects on the children produced by these unions. Through all of this she continued to emphasize equality to both white and black congregations: "Let us as Christians who accept the principle that all men, white and black, are free and equal, adhere to this principle, and not be cowards in the face of the world."²³ Her pragmatism in this regard placed her closer to the accommodationist language of Booker T. Washington in the Atlanta Compromise than the furious idealism of W. E. B. DuBois, his intellectual rival in the African-American community. Her premillennial pessimism led her to believe that the problem would

continue (which it has done, longer than White thought the world would last), and her apocalyptic urgency put the gospel before racial remediation. A tragic result of this strategy was the church's willingness to apply this pragmatic, time-specific advice as if it were a long-term principle. That tendency crippled the church's ability to respond to the racial turmoil of the mid-twentieth century and into the civil rights era.

So, the pieces have been taken out of the box. How to assemble them? I'll return to *Ciro Sepulveda's* question of *Joan Hedrick*: How do you deal with the flaws? Here is what she said that evening in 2009 regarding her subject's problems:

I view them as great complications of the plot, as good material for biographers. . . . The flaws . . . bring a person into sharp focus. Nobody is human without having flaws. To see the flaws as well as the virtues, and how they intersect—we can all see in ourselves that our strengths also have a downside. Seeing the human is seeing the human being whole. I don't see it as a problem but I see it as a possibility. I see it as great literary material and sometimes as great didactic material. I see the greatest problem of *Harriet Beecher Stowe* . . . that in her own relationships with black women she was not the egalitarian that I would have hoped she was. That has to be said about most abolitionists in the 19th century. They wanted to abolish slavery, but that did not mean they wanted to be social equals with black people. They just wanted to have that legal institution gone, but they did not want to have lunch with them. The North segregated the lunch counters and the trolley cars and so forth. I was very aware

at various points that Stowe was seeing black people through her middle class white eyes and wasn't really seeing the people that were right in front of her, in spite of writing that wonderful story of a life.²⁴

That is all well and good, you may say, but Ellen White was not just a famous novelist; she was a self-proclaimed messenger of the Lord who was accepted by her coreligionists as a prophet. Stowe may have seen Uncle Tom's death in vision, as she claimed to do, and she may have spoken prophetically to the nation in her fiction and journalism, but shouldn't a divinely inspired prophet be held to a higher standard? What do *we* do with the flaws?

As you can probably tell, I see the amalgamation statements as a flaw, as a complication of the plot. If Ellen White is indeed a flawed prophet, she has a good deal of company. The story of a prophet is a human story as well as a divine one.²⁵ Reading White's amalgamation statements and reading widely in her explicit comments about slavery and race from the Civil War era until the end of her life, I can also say that the amalgamation quotes, whatever may have been their intent, were not normative. The principles she expressed in her theology of race are remarkable, particularly in light of that fact that by the 1890s almost every white person had given up on the fight for racial equality. Years earlier, the Radical Republican Charles Sumner and the fiery abolitionist Horace Greeley made their peace with the white supremacist South. Some Republicans who had forced the black vote on the South for a few years were unwilling to grant it in their home states in the North. When Henry Cabot Lodge Sr.'s civil rights bill failed to pass the Senate in 1890—it was literally bargained away to gain support for silver currency—the federal government gave up on enforcing the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments until 1957. No president would publicly condemn the practice of lynching, and anti-lynching legislation remained a dream. The Republican Party abandoned its black constituents and pursued its vision of prosperity, accepting the white South's narrative that the Civil War was not fought about slavery and Reconstruction had been nothing but a corrupt power grab.

Bucking mainstream American politics, Ellen White

insisted that there was no color line in heaven and blacks and whites were spiritually equal on earth. Was Ellen White a racist? Yes, she was, in the sense that racism is part of the fallen human condition and affects us all. Was she a through-going, out-and-out Anglo-Saxon-favoring racist like Ralph Waldo Emerson (also an abolitionist), Louis Agassiz, and a host of other nineteenth-century American intellectuals? Certainly not. Did she go against the American grain in the 1890s by insisting blacks and whites were equal in the sight of God? Absolutely.

I do not know why White made her statements about amalgamation in *Spiritual Gifts*. As a biographer who believes she had something to say to the world, I wish she had not said them. It is possible that she grew to regret them also. I find no value in trying to explain them away. She made them, and that fact should be noted in the context of the other things she said about slavery and race over the years. What is more disquieting to me is the way subsequent supporters of White have sought to redeem those statements. My take on this and other controversial issues involving Ellen White is to let her say what she said, try to understand the context from which her statements arose, and try to see the person whole. Ellen White was a remarkable woman with a powerful spiritual message for her own world and for subsequent generations. She deserves to speak for herself.

Endnotes

1. Lewis Mumford, "The Task of the Modern Biographer," *The English Journal* 23, no. 1 (Jan. 1934), 1–3. Accessed August 8, 2018. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/804887>

2. This article is a transcript of a lecture delivered to the annual conference of the Association of Adventist Forums in September 2018. In it I described how I worked through the biographical problem of White's amalgamation statements, in the context of racial attitudes of the time and her subsequent statements on race, as well as statements from her defenders, primarily in the 1930s and 1940s. After doing so, and after delivering the lecture, I examined recent scholarship and commentary that form the historiographical record on this topic, and I describe several of those sources here. The Ellen G. White Estate provides an excerpt from Francis D. Nichol's book, *Ellen G. White and Her Critics* on the topic of amalgamation: <https://whiteestate.org/legacy/issues-amalg.html/>. It also includes a brief summary of a similar position at <https://whiteestate.org/legacy/issues-faq-unus.html/#unusual-section-c1>. *Spectrum* has published two articles on the topic: Gordon Shigley, "Amalgamation of Man and Beast," *Spectrum* 12, no. 4 (1982) 10–19; and Ronald Osborn, "True Blood: Race, Science, and Early Adventist Amalgamation Theory Revisited," *Spectrum* 38, no. 4 (2010), 1–29, 62. Ronald L. Numbers, in *The Creationists: From Scientific Creationism to Intelligent Design* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), discusses the controversial passages primarily as they were defended by Adventist creationists. Shigley discusses in detail the 1947 Adventist summit that featured presentations by Adventist scientists Frank Marsh and Harold W. Clark; I have cited in this lecture transcript preliminary versions of

their discussions, which went on for several years.

3. Mumford, "Modern Biographer," 7.
4. Ellen White, *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 3 (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Power Press, 1864), v–vi.
5. Ellen White, *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 3, 64.
6. Ellen White, *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 3, 75; *The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 1 (Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald, 1870), 68, 78. This multi-volume series was renamed *The Great Controversy* in 1871.
7. B. F. Snook and William H. Brinkerhoff, "The Visions of E. G. White Not of God" (Cedar Rapids: Cedar Valley Times Book and Job Printers, 1866). Accessed August 15, 2018. <http://www.nonegw.org/snook/visionsc.htm>
8. Uriah Smith, "The Visions—Objections Answered," *Review and Herald*, July 31, 1866: 65. We have no record of Ellen White's thoughts on Smith's remarks, although she and James endorsed the booklet he eventually published defending her visions, which included this commentary. The historian Ibram X. Kendi describes the segregationist theory of polygenesis and racial hierarchy, which incorporated the notion that hypersexualized West African women cohabited with apes and produced offspring. Kendi traces how the concept was developed and promoted by John Locke (*An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* in 1689), Carl Linnaeus, and Voltaire, among others; see *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America* (New York: Nation Books, 2016), 50–51, 84–86. In 1853, Josiah C. Nott and George Gliddon produced *Types of Mankind* to honor their mentor, Samuel Morton, author of *Crania Americana*, and to present American polygenesis science theory to the world (Kendi, 198–199). Gordon Shigley, cited above (13–14), notes that Uriah Smith's views harmonized with Morton's. Polygenesis was typically used to promote segregationist support for slavery; the amalgamation references by Smith and White do not harmonize with their typically abolitionist views.
9. D. E. Robinson, "Amalgamation vs. Evolution," unpublished paper [1931], Heritage Room, Pacific Union College.
10. George McCready Price, "The Amalgamation Question Again," unpublished paper, [ca. 1940], Heritage Room, Pacific Union College; F. D. Nichol, *Ellen G. White and Her Critics* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1951), 306, 315.
11. Harold W. Clark, "Amalgamation: A Study of Perplexing Statements by Mrs. E. G. White," (A rerun of a paper issued March 1, 1942), unpublished paper [1948], Heritage Room, Pacific Union College, 8–9; Frank L. Marsh, "A Discussion of Harold W. Clark's Paper 'Amalgamation,'" unpublished paper (1948), Heritage Room, Pacific Union College.
12. I use "antislavery" to describe individuals who objected to slavery but wished to see it gradually eliminated and often supported relocation of freed slaves via colonization. "Abolition" refers to individuals who believed the immorality of slavery demanded its immediate extinction. Examples of both attitudes appear in the pages of the *Review* just before and during the Civil War.
13. Uriah Smith, "The Two-Horned Beast—Rev. XIII," *Review and Herald*, Mar. 19, 1857: 156.
14. J. H. Waggoner, "National Degeneracy," *Review and Herald*, Aug. 12, 1858: 101.
15. Harriet Beecher Stowe, "The Church and the Slave Trade," *Review and Herald*, Nov. 20, 1860: 2–3.
16. John G. Fee, "The Church, Slavery, and Caste," *Review and Herald*, February 19, 1861: 107. Kendi (p. 85) notes that Voltaire, like many Enlightenment intellectuals, supported polygenesis while opposing slavery.
17. Ellen White held slave owners responsible for the souls of their slaves; for those who "kept in ignorance" their slaves, "all the sins of the slave will be visited upon the master." Slaves prevented from achieving spiritual accountability, she said, could not be taken to

heaven, given that they knew "nothing of God, or the Bible, [and feared] nothing but his master's lash, and [did not hold] so elevated a position as his master's brute beasts." According to her theology, God "does the best thing for him that a compassionate God can do. He lets him be as though he had not been," while the master had to suffer the seven last plagues and then be raised at the second resurrection "and suffer the second, most awful death" for both his own sins and those of his slaves, *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 1 (Battle Creek, MI: Seventh-day Adventist Pub. Assn., 1858), 193. This teaching has raised eyebrows and charges of racism, although it should also be noted that White described a similar destiny for others who, through no fault of their own, had not had the opportunity to learn of God, salvation, and heaven, while she also described slaves in heaven who had been given the opportunity to claim salvation.

18. Ellen White, "Slavery and the War," *Review and Herald*, Aug. 27, 1861: 100–101.
19. The Rev. Horace Bushnell, a Northern abolitionist clergyman, noted a week after the battle that God had allowed the North to experience adversity early in the war, *Reverses Needed: A Discourse Delivered on the Saturday after the Battle of Bull Run* (Hartford: L. E. Hunt, 1861); Stephen Elliott, the Episcopal Bishop of Georgia, preached that if the Confederate soldiers dying at Manassas had been able to see spiritual things, "I feel sure that they would have seen horses and chariots of fire riding upon the storm of battle." *God's Presence with Our Army at Manassas!* (Savannah: W. Thorne Williams, 1861), 20. See also Terrie Aamodt, *Righteous Armies, Holy Cause: Apocalyptic Imagery and the Civil War* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2002), 50–60.
20. Ellen White, "Our Duty to the Colored People," MS-6, 1891.
21. R. M. Kilgore, "Report of Superintendents of Districts," *General Conference Daily Bulletin* 4, no. 2 (March 8, 1891), 21.
22. Ellen White, *Desire of Ages* (1898) (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1940), 503.
23. Ellen White, *Testimonies*, vol. 9 (1909), 206–207; *Selected Messages*, vol. 2 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1958), 343.
24. Joan Hedrick, "Writing a Woman's Life," University of Southern Maine, Oct. 22, 2009.
25. White, in describing how people inspired by God get their point across, noted that "Inspiration acts not on the man's words or his expressions but on the man himself, who, under the influence of the Holy Ghost, is imbued with thoughts. But the words receive the impress of the individual mind." See "Objections to the Bible," MS 24, 1886. I am indebted to Alden Thompson for bringing this quotation to my attention.



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The Last Secrets

OF THE WHITE ESTATE

BY RON GRAYBILL

If you have the money to fly to Baltimore or Washington, DC, rent a car, and pay for meals and lodging for a couple of months, you might be able to explore the last secrets of the White Estate: the secrets embedded in the handwritten pages of Ellen White's letters and manuscripts. Before you make the trip, you would likely want to prove yourself an objective researcher with relevant qualifications. It might help if you have a positive record of support for the belief that Ellen White was a true prophet of God. The White Estate should not be expected to welcome someone who had already written articles or books full of gratuitous vilification of Ellen White.

I have long been fascinated by Ellen White's handwritten letters and diaries. Back in 1991, I even published an article in the scholarly journal, *Documentary Editing*, which I titled "The Meaning of Misspelled Words." Among other things, I pointed out that even

Ellen White's phonetic spelling was significant.

Ben Franklin was as insightful as he was humorous when he said: "As our Alphabet now Stands, the bad Spelling, or what is call'd so, is generally the best, as conforming to the Sound of the Letters and of the Words." It is in part because White's spellings "conform to the sound of the letters and words" that they contain historical data. The extraneous "r" she puts in words like "friverless" and "idear" allows us to hear her speaking in her native Maine accents.

Over the years, the White Estate has made access to Ellen White's letters and manuscripts steadily more open. At first, after her death, the Board of Trustees did not allow anything to be published that had not already been published during Ellen White's lifetime. The original Board had themselves received rebukes they probably did not want revealed. In 1932, *Medical Ministry* was the first compilation to include

Finally, in 2015, 100 years after Ellen White's death, all her published and unpublished writings were placed online at egwwritings.org. However, those were not the original Ellen White texts. They were the edited versions.

previously unpublished material.

A manuscript release policy was established in the 1930s, but very little was released until after Arthur White moved the White Estate to the General Conference in Washington, DC in 1938.

In those early days, researchers had to rely on an old card index to locate documents they might want to examine. That index was expanded as previously untranscribed letters and diaries were added to the file of typed copies. Even so, the index only noted topics that seemed important to staff members at the times the entries were created. No browsing was allowed. Researchers generally saw only the typed transcriptions of the original holographs (handwritten documents), not the handwritten drafts Ellen White herself created.

In the typed transcripts of Ellen White's letters or manuscripts, a researcher might find a sentence or paragraph he or she wanted to quote, then could request a manuscript release for that passage. Both the White Estate Board and the General Conference Spirit of Prophecy Committee had to approve the release. Later, the Board voted that if any portion of a letter or manuscript were requested for release, the entire document would be released, thus maintaining the original context.

Finally, in 2015, 100 years after Ellen White's death, all her published and unpublished writings were placed online at egwwritings.org. However, those were not the original Ellen White texts. They were the edited versions. Her secretaries had deciphered her handwriting as best they could, corrected her grammar, added punctuation and paragraphing, dropped words or added words, and thus created coherent, complete sentences. These were handed back to Mrs. White. She then reviewed, approved, and sometimes signed them. These edited documents were what was put online.

Ellen White seldom made corrections to those typed

copies, and if she added anything, it was often just to fill in blank space at the end of a paragraph where the line had only one or two words on it. Over the years, some of those handwritten emendations have been added to the online file enclosed in angled brackets.

There has been no systematic release or publication of Ellen White's handwritten documents, but over the years more than 200 facsimile pages have been published in various research papers, articles, and books. When the White Estate put Don McAdams's 1977 paper "Ellen G. White and the Protestant Historians" online, the seventy-seven facsimile pages of the handwritten Huss manuscript were also included.

What is needed now? All the handwritten letters, manuscripts, and diaries need to be scanned in high-resolution color. But should those digital images then be placed online for all to see?

One point of view would say yes. If, as the Church believes, Ellen Gould Harmon White is the only individual after the close of the New Testament canon to receive special revelation, the only divinely inspired prophet, then every scrap of evidence that would confirm or discredit that claim should be open to the world.

It is likely, however, that vicious, scornful critics would seize on some poorly expressed handwritten passages to vilify Ellen White or the Church's view of her. Accommodating such critics hardly seems necessary. Furthermore, if the handwritten drafts were accessible to everyone without careful, accurate, literal scholarly transcriptions, a morass of variant transcriptions would soon plague Ellen White scholarship.

A better plan would be to enlist several scholars to create scholarly literal transcriptions. These scholars could check each other's work and thus arrive at an agreed-upon, high-quality transcription. Subsequent readers or scholars could later question passages in that "official"

transcription so it could be annotated with variants or revised and improved.

Next, these holographs and their scholarly transcriptions could be placed on stand-alone computers in all twenty-two of the White Estate branch offices and research centers around the world. These computers would not be equipped with modems or connected to the internet in any way. Scholars studying them could be forbidden even to photograph the screen with a mobile phone or camera. Only handwritten notes would be allowed.

Then these scholars could request the release of any holograph and its transcription they want to quote in their book or research paper. After a number of these requests were granted, those holographs and their transcriptions could be published in hard-copy volumes.

Meanwhile, as progress on the annotated volumes of Ellen White's letter and manuscripts progressed, each volume could incorporate the holographs and literal transcriptions, as well as the polished, edited transcriptions, of all the documents it annotated.

To speed the process of releasing these "last secrets" of the White Estate, the editors of these annotated volumes could recruit volunteer researchers to assist the paid staff in collecting information for annotation.

Even if all the holographs were placed online, and even if a host of objective scholars studied and transcribed all of them in detail, it is doubtful that opinions and beliefs about Ellen G. White's claim to divine inspiration either inside or outside the Church would be significantly altered. But in the absence of widely available access to the holographs, that cannot be known for sure.

And quite apart from any possible impact on Ellen White's claims, she is still a significant and interesting figure in American religious history and further insights into her life, her beliefs, her attitudes, her practices, her writing skills, and her relationships are worth pursuing. And it is simply an axiom of good historiography that the earliest extant copy of any document needs to be examined.

The haphazard discoveries of the secrets the holographs harbor has already shown that there are more to be discovered. For instance, in *Testimonies for the Church*, Volume 9, Ellen White was made to say that blacks and whites should not mingle in "social equality."¹ I say she was "made to say" that because that is not what her original handwritten draft said. That term, "social equality" was provided by her literary assistant, Clarence Crisler. What Ellen White wrote by hand in the original document was that whites and blacks should not mingle in "free and easy association."² This was stated at a time when to hold integrated church meetings invited mob violence. Ellen White was probably unaware of how inflammatory it would be to insert the term "equality" into the text.

Significant theological insights can be gained from the holographs. In 1892, Ellen White wrote in her diary: "I greatly desire a clear and distinct ideas of the righteousness of Christ imputed to us through faith." The passage was not transcribed until 1911, when the same sentence was rendered to read: "I greatly desire a clear, distinct idea of the subject of righteousness by faith in Christ." Ellen White takes responsibility for both sentences, but the sentences are clearly different and reflect the different emphasis of different periods of her life. The original passage, which includes the word imputed, puts

greater emphasis on Christ's own righteousness, extrinsic to the sinner.³

There may be other significant wording changes like this introduced by the literary assistants. We will discover these when the holographs are more readily available.

When I first examined the 1890 "Salamanca Diary" and noted backdated passages there, Arthur White was incensed. He

came to my office and declared, heatedly, "Ellen White would not lie." I responded by saying that I did not say she lied, I merely pointed out that the dates on certain entries were not correct, that those entries could not have been written on the dates Ellen White assigned to them. To this day I insist we do not know what was in Ellen White's mind or what her intentions were when she wrote those

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entries. She may not have intended to deceive anyone, but the document she created did deceive Arthur White into believing she described detailed events before they occurred.

What happened is that events occurred during the 1891 General Conference in March of 1891 that recalled to Ellen White's mind a vision she had had in early November 1890, in Salamanca, New York. Convinced she had seen these events before they occurred, she inserted entries back into her 1890 diary, described those events in detail, and dated the entry November 3, 1890. She even interlined the words "A letter written from" so that the passage began "A letter written from Salamanca, N.Y. Nov. 3, 1890."

But the entry was placed on blank pages that remained in the back of the 1890 diary after the last original entry, the entry for December 31, 1890. Without access to the original holographic diary, one would not know that the entry was added well after the date assigned to it. Perhaps when all the holographs are readily available, scholars will identify cases of genuine prescience, but this was not one of them.

Back in the 1970s, while I was working at the White Estate, Alta Robinson, another staff member, complained to me about a case in which Arthur White had suppressed the fact that in a letter to her daughter-in-law in 1882, Ellen White had requested "a few cans of good oysters."⁴ When the letter was typed for the first time in the 1950s (under Arthur White's supervision), the reference to oysters had been omitted from the sentence without ellipses. When we carried the complaint to Arthur White, he had the letter retyped to include the oysters.

When the word got out that Ellen White had ordered oysters, the story expanded until workers in the Pennsylvania Conference were claiming that Ellen White ate oysters until the day she died. Robert Olson wrote the president of the conference, Gordon Henderson, admitting Ellen White ordered the oysters, but claiming, in the same letter "we have no record that she ever ate oysters."⁵ He also explained "We have never advertised the fact that Mrs. White ever even discussed oysters, because we felt it was not necessary." What was, necessary, however, was that the transcription of Ellen White's holographic letters be honest and complete. Alta Robinson and I saw to it that that was accomplished.

It may be that these few scattered instances of misdated, altered, or suppressed textual passages are themselves the last secrets of the White Estate. When the holographs are more readily accessible, diligent study can demonstrate that there are no more secrets to be revealed.

Endnotes

1. Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 9, p. 205.
2. Ellen G. White, Diary entry, March 2, 1903.
3. Ellen G. White, Diary entry for August 9, 1892, Manuscript 20, 1892.
4. Ellen G. White to Mary K. White (May 31, 1882), Letter 16, 1882.
5. Robert W. Olson to Gordon Henderson, February 13, 1979. Later in the letter, Olson said: "It may well be that Ellen White ate some of the oysters in those cans. This I do not know."



RONALD D. GRAYBILL holds a PhD degree in American religious history from Johns Hopkins University (1983). He has worked as a pastor, university professor, historical researcher, corporate communications specialist, journalist, and editor during his career. He spent 13 years as an associate secretary at the Ellen G. White Estate at the General Conference headquarters, where he assisted Arthur White in writing a portion of the six-volume biography of Ellen G. White (1970–1983). He wrote the introduction to the current *Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal* (1985) and the original draft of the "Preamble" to the *Seventh-day Adventist Statement of Fundamental Beliefs*. His many articles on Adventist history made him one of the most frequently cited sources in the *Ellen G. White Encyclopedia* (2013). His most recent book, *Visions and Revisions: A Textual History of Ellen G. White's Writings*, is available in paperback and Kindle on Amazon, as is his 1983 dissertation, *The Power of Prophecy*.

KEYWORDS: book review, Ellen G. White, psychobiography, The Irony of Adventism, Old Testament model of prophets



Ellen G. White: ALL OR NOTHING?

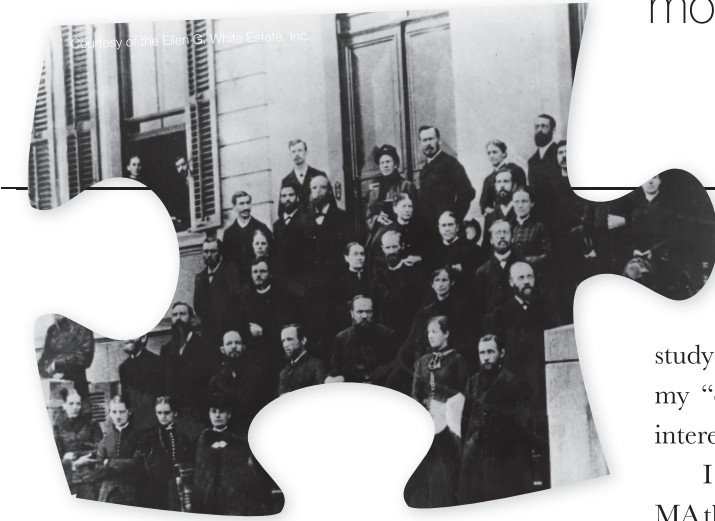
BY JONATHAN BUTLER

Steve Daily and I met in the 1980s, about forty years before he wrote *Ellen G. White: A Psychobiography*, at what was then Loma Linda University-La Sierra campus. He served there as a chaplain and I taught history. I first saw him pulling on his tennis shoes in the choking humidity of a locker room by the university pool. We had both been swimming laps. He was some ten years younger than I and looked another ten years younger than that. He brought up an article I had written in *Spectrum* on Ellen White's eschatology. He also talked about tennis.

We would become friends on and off the tennis court. His confluence of intellect and athleticism struck me as unusual, even incongruous. Hunched over a wooden bench, talking ideas with the broad back of a middle-weight boxer, he might have been Rodin's "The Thinker," except in bronze you would not have seen his striking blue



In the midst of a historiographical tsunami on women in American history, Daily turned to women in Adventist history. He found the “irony of Adventism” to be that a charismatic female held such a dominant place in a movement permeated with misogyny.



eyes and blonde hair.

As relaxed and laconic as he seemed as a twentysomething, I would never have predicted the frenetic level of accomplishment that awaited him. He would produce more than 20 books in a varied and lustrous career in religion, church history, and psychology. In SDA circles, his most prominent work has been *Adventism for a New Generation* (with a foreword by Tony Campolo), a progressive reimagining of Adventism, which he dedicated to his three children and his wife (“Tweek, Bear, Bowser & the Babe”). His six grandchildren would come along later. He earned an MA in history at LLU (under me in fact), a DMin with an emphasis in church history at the School of Theology at Claremont, and a PhD in psychology at Alliant University. Steve left La Sierra—and eventually Seventh-day Adventism altogether—and founded KEYS Family Resource Center, as well as GraceWay Community Church in Riverside. The ferocity of his forehand on the tennis court should have alerted me to the fact that Steve had a fire in his belly; he was driven, passionate, intellectually curious, and tirelessly productive.

As multi-faceted as his life has been as a pastor,

counselor, historian, and writer, one motif has remained a constant for Steve: his historical study of Ellen White and Seventh-day Adventism. It’s my “canon within the canon” of his writing that most interests me.

I was there for his first historical effort—a 201-page MA thesis through the LLU History Department, on which I served as his chief advisor. It was entitled “How Readest Thou: The Higher Criticism Debate in Adventism and Its Implications Relating to Ellen White” (1982). In his first look at Adventist history, Daily examined Adventist views of inspiration through the prism of the 1919 Bible Conference. He delved deeply into the primary sources, including Ellen White’s writings, and he told the Adventist story within the larger historical context of an emergent Fundamentalism. American religion had polarized over higher criticism of the Bible, with inerrantist conservatism at odds with modernism’s secularist and naturalistic approach to the Scriptures. Seventh-day Adventists experienced the same conservative-modernist polarization, though the vast majority of Adventists were indistinguishable from the Fundamentalists. But, in one respect, Adventists were notably distinctive: the writings of Ellen White rather than the Scriptures were central to their debate on inspiration. In his mapping of Adventism’s place in Fundamentalism, Daily impressed me as a neophyte historian.

It seemed that in no time at all he completed a DMin in the School of Theology at Claremont. His doctoral project focused, once again, on Adventist history. In 1985,

he produced a 351-page study entitled “The Irony of Adventism: The Role of Ellen White and Other Adventist Women in Nineteenth-Century America.” In the midst of a historiographical tsunami on women in American history, Daily turned to women in Adventist history. He found the “irony of Adventism” to be that a charismatic female held such a dominant place in a movement permeated with misogyny. He noted that Adventism had never escaped its Fundamentalist view of inspiration, together with its Fundamentalist antipathy to feminism. This had a profound effect on the church, not only in White’s time but for subsequent generations. While Ellen White was elevated onto a lofty pedestal among Adventists, other women in the movement had not benefited, for the most part, in their own personal or professional lives.

Never faint of heart in taking on the Gordian knot of Adventism—Ellen White’s life and teachings—Daily argued that it had been White herself who had failed to promote egalitarianism within her community. Adventists had “opposed women’s rights and suffrage largely because of the testimonies of their prophetess.” Daily observed the discrepancy between Ellen White’s talk with respect to women’s role and her own actions as a wife, mother, and career woman (pp. viii–ix). It is a controversial argument, even today, but, in my opinion, it is the best of his four historical studies. Daily benefited from working under the renowned American religious historian, Ann Taves, his chief advisor at Claremont. For those wrestling with the issue of Adventist women’s ordination, it should be required reading.

In his preface to “The Irony of Adventism,” Daily laid out his personal convictions about doing a historical study of Ellen White, both for his professors at Claremont to read and for anyone else looking over their shoulders. He affirmed that White was “a visionary and a recipient of the prophetic gift.” He also believed, even while engaged in an academic exercise on history, that “divine truths are revealed through supernatural means which are not subject to naturalistic explanations or understood

apart from faith.” His other “convictions” could have been reached “apart from faith,” as simply sociological observations. He had concluded, for example, that Ellen White had “done more to benefit the Adventist community, than misrepresentations, and misuse of her

writings have done to harm the community.” He also felt that the Adventist church relied on White more for doctrine and personal ethics than on social ethics. He believed, too, that White’s writings were of most value for the church “when they are realistically seen to be fallible works,” products of their era, and not timeless blueprints by which to live. Daily concluded that his study was “not intended to be a critique of Ellen G.

The author of “The Irony of Adventism” has come to personify ironies of his own with respect to White. It is necessary to unlock them to understand Daily’s difficulties with White.

White or Adventism. This writer is” he declared, “heavily indebted and committed to both the church and the prophet.” (pp. vi–vii) He had offered here anything but a mindless testimony; this was a complex and sophisticated attempt to integrate faith and history.

No one should fault Daily for changing his view of White, especially over several decades. His third work, a 301-page, two-volume study on White and Adventism, was entitled *The Prophetic Rift: How Adventism Has Historically Misunderstood and Misapplied the Prophetic Gift, Vol. 1: 1840–1900; Vol. 2: 1900–2000* (2007, 2008). Here, Daily took to task the prophet and her followers, but he had not yet fully taken the gloves off as he would do in the psychobiography. The subtitle of *Prophetic Rift* suggested that he laid responsibility for problems with “the Spirit of prophecy” within Adventism largely on White’s followers, not on White herself. He referred to ways in which Adventists have “misunderstood and misapplied the prophetic gift.”

But this mischaracterized what Daily did in *The Prophetic Rift*, and in all his historical writings, for that matter. Unlike most in-house SDA historians, he has consistently blamed White herself, not just her misguided supporters, though not as searingly as he does in his latest book. Notably, Graeme Bradford, in *Prophets Are Human*, similarly recognized White’s shortcomings. Daily criticized Adventists, including White, for favoring the magisterial

Old Testament model of a prophet, such as Isaiah or Jeremiah, and slighting the more modest New Testament prophet, such as the Corinthian women. Relying on the evangelical scholar Wayne Grudem, in *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today*, Daily argued, “In the Old Testament, the prophets were often raised up to address specific abuses and had roles that were harsh, corrective and filled with reproof.” He noted a sharp contrast with prophecy in the New Testament. There “it is primarily the Scriptures (2 Tim. 3:16) and the Holy Spirit itself (John 16:8) that are called to play these corrective roles. The gift of prophecy by contrast is primarily for encouragement and comfort.” Daily believed that “Adventism imposed on Ellen White an Old Testament role that was inappropriate for her and for the body as a whole and she in turn imposed this role on herself” (pp. x–xi). In his view, this was a mistake. This is crucial for understanding Daily’s complaints against White and her place among Adventists.

I think Daily has a point, though he might have gone further. Any student of Ellen White, even the most admiring one, must wonder if the prophet fully understood the moving of the Spirit in her life. Along with many other Adventists, she simply lacked an adequate theory of inspiration—and feared that admitting any nuance or complexity into her crude explanations would play into the hands of unbelieving critics. White’s understanding of inspiration can certainly be a valuable starting point for

Adventists, but it is far from adequate as the final word.

That said, there is certainly more to Daily’s problems with Ellen White than her channeling of Old Testament prophets rather than New Testament Corinthian seers. The author of “The Irony of Adventism” has come to personify ironies of his own with respect to White. It is necessary to unlock them to understand Daily’s difficulties with White. In the first place, rather remarkably, he made his supernaturalistic affirmations of faith in the Adventist prophet just after a decade and a half of relentless, naturalistic assaults on her authority. He had clearly witnessed all that historical revisionism and made his own contributions to it. His faith had been quite obviously changed by it but not lost to it. In the second place, the same Daily who once declared himself “heavily indebted and committed to both the church and the prophet” has now, rather ironically—and from outside the church no less—produced a psychobiography of White that mixes history and exposé in a kind of poisonous brew. This is not a wholesale reversal for Daily. He has always pushed the envelope on White, and for this he should be congratulated. We are in his debt. But, in the psychobiography, he has taken things further. He forces us to ask ourselves how far along this path we can travel with him.

With Steve Daily’s earlier work as deep background, we can now turn to his latest book, the 332-page *Ellen G. White: A Psychobiography* (Conneaut, PA: Page Publishing,

His narrative anthologizes every bad day the woman had in her 87-year life and 70-year career and rubs her face in it, and our faces too. He writes with a historian’s version of Tourette’s Syndrome. As he lays out his story, he blurts out epithets such as “liar,” “hypocrite,” “narcissist,” “con artist,” “sociopath,” and “fraud.”



2020). In his introduction, he acknowledges that this book is a departure for him. In the past, he has been critical of “an all-or-nothing approach to Ellen, either glorifying her as a saint or denouncing her as a fraud.” But he claims to “have found new material” and can “no longer deny that her life contained patterns of premeditated fraud and deception that cannot easily be dismissed or rationalized.” He goes on to admit that his psychobiography is “polemical,” as well as “highly controversial and challenges traditional views of the prophethood” (p. 11). He delivers his polemics by way of a persistently negative tone. While the earlier Daily may never have liked Ellen White, he seems to have respected her and given the prophet her due. The new Daily appears flat-out antagonistic toward her and disavows her for numerous reasons. His narrative anthologizes every bad day the woman had in her 87-year life and 70-year career and rubs her face in it, and our faces too. He writes with a historian’s version of Tourette’s Syndrome. As he lays out his story, he blurts out epithets such as “liar,” “hypocrite,” “narcissist,” “con artist,” “sociopath,” and “fraud.” There is no ignoring that White had her problems, but Daily comes across as having his own problems. Often the “evidence” he cites does not warrant his historical—or psychobiographical—assessments. He becomes a historian not so much with a sound argument as with a verbal tic.

Biographies of Ellen White—from her defenders to her detractors—have a way of getting personal about the subject matter. This should surprise no one. The prophet is, after all, a “fundamental belief” of Adventism and, at the same time, a flesh-and-blood person who lived her life among Adventists. On the one hand, she is the manifestation of the “gift of prophecy,” emblematic of Adventism’s special place in the world. On the other hand, White is a person who ate meals with Adventists, preached sermons to them, made their lives healthier but could also lash out harshly in letters, offending or embarrassing them. The “gift of prophecy” was anything but an abstract doctrine. To reject *it* was to reject *her*. White took any opposition to her “spiritual gifts” personally, and her critics often meant it personally. There was an *ad hominem* edge to the defense of her and to the attacks on her. It was therefore the people closest to her that risked the conflicts with her—house guests or landlords, colleagues and their wives, literary assistants and editors, and even, or perhaps

especially, her spouse. They all understood that prophets were human; they knew this better than later generations, who lacked the personal contact with her. But there was, for some, such a thing as too much exposure to her humanity. In a way, those who study her history—such as Ronald Numbers and George Knight, Walter Rea and Steve Daily—come to know White up close and personal, warts and all, like her contemporaries did. It can be hazardous work for a devout Adventist. The *Didache*, a second-generation Christian document, warned that a prophet who stayed in your home as many as “three days” had to be a “false prophet.” The Canrights lived with the Whites much longer than three days, and D. M. Canright notoriously did dismiss White as a “false prophet.”

Daily has been personally close to several prophets in congregations he has pastored, and has been quite supportive of them. Drawn to the Vineyard movement in his thirties, he took a Pentecostal turn. As a result, where many of his fellow Adventists, confronting live prophets in their midst, call for an EMT or a psychiatrist, Daily integrates them into the life of his church. In a small congregation in Redlands, he had one prophet for years. I met another one, the wife of a teaching colleague of mine, and recommended she join Daily’s church because I knew she would feel welcome there. From a Pentecostal background, she traveled with her brother, an evangelist, and offered a prophetic “word of wisdom,” one-on-one, to people in his evangelistic audiences, after her brother had preached. At a Christmas party, she offered me a “word of wisdom.” I was wary at first but was pleasantly surprised. I found it to be unexpectedly inspirational, positive, and ego-boosting, in a good way. Not what I had been used to from a prophet. Daily welcomed her warmly into his congregation. She knew I came from an Adventist background, and she told me once, “In the history of your church, you have just one prophet; there should be several in every congregation. God’s message should not pass through the filter of one personality. It can distort your picture of God.” I have often pondered that “word of wisdom.” She had a Corinthian style of prophecy in mind for the church. In this new addition to his congregation, Daily may have found another reason to think negatively about Ellen White yet positively about living prophets he knows. He has enjoyed their contribution to his church far longer than the *Didache*’s “three days.”

Adventism has had enough of hagiography, which went out of fashion for the church in the 1970s. But the obsessive insistence on turning hagiography inside out to find nothing but bad in the historical figure is not an improvement on hagiography. It is a mirror image of it.

In reading the biography of a prophet, whether that prophet thunders from the Old Testament or speaks softly from the New, the reader hopes for even-handedness from the biographer, good judgment, fairness and, perhaps most important, empathy. There will be a difference, of course, if the prophet is more like a Winston Churchill or an Adolf Hitler. It is a problem, however, when the biographer confuses the two. In opting for a simplistic polemic rather than a complex, nuanced biography, Daily loses his way as a historian. He is less interested in understanding Ellen White than in casting aspersions on her. At times he is so off the mark that one suspects he would like to make her a cellmate of Margaret Rowan, who truly was a “con artist.” She sought to succeed White as the Adventist prophet, but instead was convicted of attempted murder and incarcerated in San Quentin.

Like good biographers, good actors understand empathy. The actor cast to play an evil character looks for the good in the person; the actor playing a good character explores the darker side of that goodness. It is bad acting as well as bad history to think of people as only good or only evil. Adventism has had enough of hagiography, which went out of fashion for the church in the 1970s. But the obsessive insistence on turning hagiography inside out to find nothing but bad in the historical figure is not an improvement on hagiography. It is a mirror image of it.

My metaphor for thinking of this is my maternal grandmother (“Granny”). Granny may have been bi-polar with schizoid affective disorder, but she lived her life before we knew about such a diagnosis or medications that might have dealt with her problems. For us she was simply a colorful character about whom we all could tell stories, first-

hand and second-hand, of her erratic behavior, bizarre rages, insults, and abuse. My mother recalls, as a child, the time Granny threw a hot pie at her, straight from the oven, burning her forearm. She also remembers being told by her mother to do the dishes without getting one drop of water on the newly remodeled kitchen counter. When she inevitably failed, Granny chopped up the counter with an axe. But I should also say of Granny—and this is why she comes to mind as a metaphor—there was a wonderfully gracious, deeply respected, highly intelligent, well-read, widely traveled woman whom no one would have believed was the Granny we knew. My most vivid and enduring memory of her is not her chopping up the kitchen counter; that was mere folklore for me. It was the way she sat me down in the living room, in my early teens, and read me Shakespeare—*Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*—and took me to an Old Vic theater production of *Hamlet*. Granny, I am sure, had far greater psychological problems with which to contend than Ellen White and would have made a ripe subject for the psychobiographer. But Daily may have been as ill-suited to do Granny’s biography as he is Ellen White’s. For Granny, Daily would recount, with relish and relentless redundancy, the scalding pie incident and the demolished kitchen counter, but would leave out her reading *Macbeth* in the living room.

Do not misunderstand my criticism of Daily. I found the book well worth reading. I scribbled copious notes to myself in its margins in places where I agree with him, and other places where he serves as a foil for sharpening my disagreements. But many of Daily’s difficulties with White are well-grounded and cannot be ignored or summarily dismissed.

Daily is right that White did insist that her visions were untainted by humanity—hers or anyone else’s. He is also right that she lacked mothering skills. She had a troubled marriage, too, though neither James nor Ellen was blameless as a marital partner. He is also right that the prophet had a mean streak. And she did plagiarize other authors more substantially than she admitted to her contemporaries. In light of all this—and most of it has been in full view for some 40–45 years—no biographer should gloss over the flawed humanity of Ellen White. It is very much part of her story, but it is not the whole story. My complaint with his history in *Ellen G. White: A Psychobiography* is that Daily is far too close to his subject to tell that story in all its complexity. He lacks the detachment necessary in a good biographer, much less psychobiographer, necessary to the task. In the ultimate irony, he tells the story more from White’s point of view than his own. He takes her views of the visions, and her inspired writings based on them, quite literally. He then holds her to those claims rather rigorously. When she fails him, he hoists her on her own petard. She was not the woman she made herself out to be—not because she was flawed but a fraud. Ellen White and Steve Daily are joined at the hip on who she ought to be. They part company on who she turned out to be. Here I would like Daily to develop a little distance from White to help us understand her more deeply and insightfully as historians—and psychobiographers—attempt to do. Daily short-circuits

that analysis by taking a sharp right turn into incessant name-calling, however he dresses it up theologically and ethically, sociologically and psychologically.

I am pleased to add Steve Daily’s biography to my bookshelf. We need a dozen more biographies of White, a score more of them. She deserves that kind of attention. But I came away from reading Daily’s psychobiography—always a high-risk venture in the best of hands—with

a number of questions. Daily concludes that White’s “visions,” which he puts in quotes, were not from God and, even worse, she knew this and was conning her followers with a big lie. Daily sours on White’s “visions” because, for example, they contain inaccurate information; or they pass on borrowed material; or they serve White’s self-interest. This smacks more of the simplistic argument of a believer—or ex-believer—than a sophisticated psychobiographer. There are many ways of thinking about visions short of flimflam. Psychobiographers might decide White was self-deluded but not deliberately deceptive. They might note White immersed herself in historical or devotional reading and then dreamed about it. She might have engaged in conversations and dreamed about those. It has to be taken into account that women in the nineteenth century did not easily get a hearing; visions

were one way White got a seat at the table. So, whether or not White “had” visions in a way that satisfies Daily, where is his evidence that she did not *believe* that she did? This viewpoint may create another problem for the believer, but it does not make her into a fraud.

Daily is troubled by the fact that James and Ellen White prospered financially from the publication of her books and this undercut her claims as a prophet. But is this a fair criticism? Seventh-day Adventism has been a socially mobile religion, in no small part due to White’s writings. White’s promotion of health, education, and medicine, as well as a good

old-fashioned work ethic, would seem to have made Adventism’s economic prosperity inevitable. White made a good income over her lifetime, though Daily exaggerates her wealth. But she gave a great deal of her money away and died in considerable debt.

Daily hammers the prophet for her plagiarism. But he seems satisfied with reminding us of this dubious practice—and blaming White for it—without doing

In the ultimate irony, he tells the story more from White’s point of view than his own. He takes her views of the visions, and her inspired writings based on them, quite literally. He then holds her to those claims rather rigorously. When she fails him, he hoists her on her own petard.

Daily's psychobiography is an ambitious and, for some, a provocative undertaking. It is hard to determine whether this is so much a "psychobiography" as a prickly, narrative history packaged as one.

much to illuminate for us why she may have done it. The psychobiographer would want to explore this in depth. Obviously, there was a yawning gap between her rudimentary skillset as a writer and what she actually published. Should we explain this as a crushing case of "author's anxiety," resulting in her wholesale borrowing, but not a prophetic pyramid scheme to defraud her followers?

White clearly had her flaws. Is there any prophet who did not? But does rejecting her based on the fact that she was a flawed human being back us into a kind of Donatist or perfectionist heresy? She cannot be a vessel for God if there are chips in the clay. And yet who makes the decision to throw out the vessel?

Daily's psychobiography is an ambitious and, for some, a provocative undertaking. It is hard to determine whether this is so much a "psychobiography" as a prickly, narrative history packaged as one. I do ask myself what we have learned about White from this approach that we did not already know. He cites the "Goldwater Rule" that you cannot make psychological judgments on someone unless you are able to examine them in a therapeutic setting. But then he often overcomes his hesitance and does diagnose White.

Daily claims to have uncovered "new material," which resulted in his iconoclastic take on Ellen White. I am at a loss to identify much, if anything, that is new in his book. He surveys familiar ground and dredges up no new facts, only a new perspective—new for him at least—on old facts. The value of his study is to force Adventists to come to terms—in their own way, if not in Daily's way—with White's humanity. I think the study is marred, however, by forcing White into a prophet-fraud polarity. Historians view demarcating between "prophets"

and "frauds" as above their pay grade. That is more of a theological than a historical designation. Historians find nothing useful in the all-or-nothing paradigm; history is too messy for it. Daily seems uninterested, however, in strictly adhering to historical canon. He comes at White from too many angles, but his intentions are clear. Though he left the church a decade ago, he is determined to justify his decision in classic "exit literature." I wish he had written a different book—something like the subtle, complex history he once wrote.

All or nothing? Give me another choice.



JONATHAN BUTLER, PhD, studied American church history at the University of Chicago and has produced a number of historical studies on Ellen White and Seventh-day Adventists. He contributed two chapters, entitled "Portrait" and "Second Coming," to *Ellen Harmon White: American Prophet*, edited by Terrie Dopp Aamodt, Gary Land, and Ronald L. Numbers.

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Between

BY BRYAN NESS

A daily walk along the ridge of compromise is what the doctor ordered—apparently, we both retain the same taste in medicine, or maybe insurance cast the die—and so here we are attempting to

traverse this winding, dusty path dividing oak and Douglas fir on one side and chaparral all dry and brittle on the other, all the while noting the safest path between the rocks and roots

prepared to trip us up—not so much to cause a fatal fall, but neither of us wants to sprain an ankle and spend some weeks on crutches, or to bang our brains against a rock and spend a week

in bed to watch the room spin around our solitude—and in the effort, eyes down, we miss the views of heaven/hell whose wet/dry nature both deserve response. To me, a botanist, both have their charm,

enough to spend an afternoon identifying each example with a Latin name, while you, with rocks a greater draw, would pontificate on the myriad shades of serpentine, basalt and obsidian, whose fragments peek

out here and there among the tangled underbrush or more dangerously beneath the sheer face of a crumbled ridge face, talus fanning out below. We both know the need for vigilance

in places where the path so closely skirts these accidents of topographic history; one slip and oblivion, I'm sure the reason some will always doubt our sanity in hiking here unroped, or even at all.

istockphoto.com/momnoi



Bryan Ness has BS and MS degrees in biology from Walla Walla University, and a PhD in botany (plant molecular genetics) from Washington State University. He is currently a professor of biology at Pacific Union College (PUC), where he has been teaching for 30 years.