

 community through conversation
SPECTRUM



Galápagos Memories | Mark Dwyer

CHANGING TOGETHER | A GALÁPAGOS PILGRIMAGE

Seeing Simon of Cyrene | Adventist Writing on Environmentalism and Conservation

Creation Stories “Then” and Creation Stories “Now”

Origins Museum of Nature

community through conversation

SPECTRUM

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ABOUT THE ART

Galápagos Memories

I was thrilled with the variety of wildlife on display during my recent lucky voyage to the Galápagos Islands. My drawings from the trip seek to emphasize the magnificent abundance of life witnessed during the journey, and the sheer joy of being in nature's colorful presence.



ABOUT THE COVER ARTIST

Mark Dwyer is an artist and an experienced elementary school art educator from Sacramento, California. A graduate of Pacific Union College, he enjoys painting and fishing in his spare time.

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CHANGING *Together*

BY BONNIE DWYER

In the very first issue of *Spectrum*, volume one, number one, Ariel A. Roth addressed the problems in Darwinism with a review of *Mathematical Challenges to the Neo-Darwinian Interpretation of Evolution*. In issue two, Richard Ritland wrote on “The Nature of the Fossil Record in the Rocks of Eastern Oregon.” Earle Hilgert addressed the “Theological Dimensions of the Christian Doctrine of Creation” in issue number three. By issue four in that first volume published in 1969, Ian M. Fraser was writing about “Problems of Creation and Science.” We’ve been writing about the subject of creation and evolution ever since. Search our journal archives and you will find seventy-five articles that have creation in the title; thirty-seven include the word “evolution.” Poetry and art about Genesis 1 have filled our pages. Kendra Haloviak Valentine and Gil Valentine even went through the Adventist Church hymnal to write about the songs of creation. We have published four books on the topic.

What is there left to say? Has the Adventist conversation about creation changed at all over the past fifty years? Having been designated as the originators of creationism within the scientific community, how are Adventists presenting our current understanding of creation to the world? Those were the questions that came to mind when I read a news note in the *Adventist Review* about an Origins Museum that was set to open in the Galápagos Islands in 2020. Curiosity about the museum, and wanting to publish a story about it, morphed into a journey to the islands that is featured in this issue of the journal. Because I was interested in the larger community



Boarding the plane to Baltra, Galápagos

conversation about creation, this spiritual journey would be an experience with a small representative community, meant to be shared with you, our readers.

On the plane from Quito, Ecuador to Baltra, Galápagos, the flight attendant concluded his instructions to the passengers with gratitude for their choosing Avianca Airlines, “where we are changing together.” The six of us on the back row of the plane looked at each other and said, “Yes, that’s our theme for the trip (and our challenge as a denomination).”

“How does change happen in Adventism?” is perhaps the pertinent question. Has our understanding of creation changed? Isn’t it all right there in Genesis 1? And if our understanding does change, does that mean that we don’t believe in a Creator God anymore? In this issue, Jerry Winslow and Larry Geraty speak eloquently about this aspect of our journey. James Hayward and Brian Bull show us the scientific story. Alita Byrd shares ideas from personal conversations with some of the trip participants. For me, one of the lessons from the various birds and animals that we viewed on the islands was adaptability.



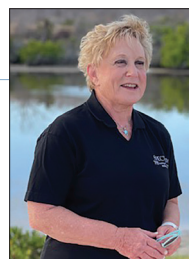
A group reflection of the Galápagos trip

Our guide, Omar Medina, emphasized the adaptations made by marine iguanas, for instance, to live on an island bereft of their normal food. They went into the water, and their bodies responded by exhaling the salt from the ocean, giving them white crested heads. Walking across vast lava fields that looked like moonscapes and then suddenly coming across a green oasis with a pool of water and flamingos, one saw the persistence of life. Such persistence and adaptation were the key to survival and how change happened. At the Origins Museum, we appreciated the positive approach of the displays, and the warm hospitality of the personnel. It seems to me that we do talk about creation differently now in some ways. We celebrate it more—we even have an official Creation Sabbath—and argue a little less, although our differences in understanding it are probably expanding, not contracting. We’re more generous in acknowledging the differences among us.

Change is a challenging word within our community, and not only in the conversation about creation and science. How about discussing changes in the way that we read the Bible? That is currently a hot topic. In this issue, Kendra Haloviak Valentine demonstrates how multiple kinds of readings can enrich our understanding of the biblical text. James Londis draws parallels between our discoveries about Ellen White and her writings and how the Bible was composed. Recognizing the role of the Holy

Spirit in our reading, our listening, our conversations, is the key to applying the text to the current context.

Finally, with this issue, I conclude my editorship of *Spectrum*. My gratitude to my supportive family, the board of directors, staff, writers, readers, members, and donors, overflows. Contemplating the past twenty-three years, and asking myself the question about how my mind has changed and stayed the same regarding Adventism, I’d have to say that I’ve come to love the Church in a way that I never thought possible in my youth, when every perceived blemish within the community hurt like a dagger. There are incredible, generous people/minds among us. I know that because I’ve met them and worked with them, developing copy and reporting stories. I’ve learned that forgiveness is how we move forward. Change comes slowly, almost imperceptibly, but it does come. Look for it in your heart. That’s where it begins. From there, when it is shared, we change together.



BONNIE DWYER is editor of *Spectrum*.

A Galápagos Pilgrimage

BY CARMEN LAU

In August, tangled strands of fate brought a *Spectrum* pilgrim group to San Cristóbal, gateway to Galápagos paradise, where we navigated to places famous for being the soil in which Darwin's curious mind found a context to form the theory of evolution: a proposition which many believe is an existential threat to Seventh-day Adventism.

For eight days, we basked in companionship, hiking, snorkeling, talking, and listening while our boat, the *Archipel I*, sailed from island to island. Eight days is not enough. There is more to see.

The trip gave solitude with landscapes unfettered by roads, resorts, signs, or buildings. We were detached from the internet but tethered to a reality show that exhibited a palette of nature's adaptations. I found the journey to be a celebration of survival. Having survived fifteen months of pandemic, sixteen people, with different backstories of how they came to join the adventure, formed a congenial, energetic team of sojourners.

Galápagos wildlife inspired us when we learned how it thrives, harnessing nature's epigenetic tool kit, through storms, pestilence, and human encroachment. Beaks change morphology. Iguanas adapt to terrain as necessary.

Our hearts were full as we noticed the fearless, Eden-like attitude of Galápagos creatures. Sea lions were like playful pups, and schools of fish surrounded us, oblivious to our clunky underwater cameras and flailing arms. Blue-footed boobies and frigatebirds humbled and amazed our beloved community when we saw how they allowed our troupe to traipse through ground that had been sanctified for nesting and raising the young.

Many sights, sounds, and stories from the trip percolate in my mind, but what stands out is the God-given ability for adaptability and the resilience to thrive in seemingly difficult environments. We saw this each day of the journey, and we heard about it from each



Carmen and Yung Lau

other when we shared personal stories or heard informal lectures from the professors with us.

After the Galápagos pilgrimage, we re-enter the stark reality of disease, division, and fear. I pray that the memory of the eight-day sojourn will not merely cause us to yearn for the promised day to come, but also remind us anew of a God-given fortitude available to us each moment.



CARMEN LAU is board chair of Adventist Forum.



LETTER to the Editor

Disappointment in Not Printing Full Response

Dear Editor (*Spectrum*),

I was surprised and disappointed to read your email, that *Spectrum* will not be publishing my response to Jonathan Butler's lengthy review of my new book *Ellen G. White: A Psychobiography*, in either your magazine or on your website. I found your request, that I try to limit my response to 500 words in a letter to the editor, to be totally unrealistic, given the amount of material to which I was responding. I hardly think that a 3,300-word response to a 4,500-word book review is excessive. It is obvious that your real goal is to prevent your readers from seeing that I fully dealt with the criticisms you published. The response I sent you simply took Jonathan's points, positive and negative, and concisely replied. I can understand the limitations on space that you must consider in the magazine, but your failure to allow for a full and fair response on your website raises major questions about your commitment to fairness and journalistic integrity. I believe you owe it to your readers to let them decide for themselves if what I have to say is valid or not, without you playing the role of censor. I do have to say that, given the very sad dishonesty that I have experienced dealing with some of the most influential members of your boards

(*Spectrum* and Forum), I can only assume that they must have played a role in this decision. Of course, I would not expect that this would ever be acknowledged, because that is not the SDA way. You prefer to hide from the truth and play passive-aggressive games, exerting control at the cost of integrity.

In any case, I will be publishing the full response on my website (egwpsychobio.com - see: more.../articles), on my Facebook page, and sending it to Christian Scholars Forum, SDAQ&A, and other interested parties. If *Spectrum* had any interest at all in fairness, I would expect it to provide a link from its website, but I am not holding my breath. If you as a reader would like to see my response, go to the above website, email me at sdailycc@gmail.com, or message me on Facebook messenger. I find it very sad that *Spectrum*, which was once seen as the forum for honest debate about controversial issues relating to the Adventist Church, has degenerated to the point where you are not only unwilling to publish all

sides of important issues, but deliberately deny even a fair response to someone who is unfairly attacked. I encourage the reader to join in the daily discussions on my Facebook page, which actually allow all sides to present their views without censorship.

Sincerely, Steve Daily, PhD



NOTEWORTHY

KEYWORDS: Seventh-day Fundamentalists, *koinonia*, theological status quo, church life re-imagined

Part VII: Time to Start Over

THE QUEST FOR COMMUNITY: CHURCH LIFE RE-IMAGINED

BY CHARLES SCRIVEN

Imagine you are at sea in a boat with leaks and other structural problems. You have tools and materials for addressing the problems, but the shore is far off; you'll have to stay afloat in the boat even as you try to re-build it.

This is a famous analogy for how challenging it is to make genuine advances in knowledge and understanding.¹ All of us are caught up in already existing ways of life, so when it comes to perspective and know-how, we never begin from scratch. There's no unbiased objectivity, only making do from a given starting point, only making adjustments toward deeper truth while we are in the midst of the journey.

The Bible knew nothing, of course, of modern theories of knowledge, but when you think of the ark, or of Jesus and the disciples on the Sea of Galilee, you realize that boat images, with their suggestion of difficulty and risk as well as protection, have resonated among the people of God. Over six previous essays during the past year, I have argued that the ship of Adventism is at sea and in theological distress. I have argued, too, however, that

divine generosity has granted us the tools and materials for needed repair. On a sea of graceless, self-indulgent cynicism (whether religious or secular), truth, hope, and Sabbath rest remain, all as crucial as bread, each a gift beyond price.

But if we have the right tools and materials, do we have the will?

We can all think of pastors, teachers, and others who are eager for the repair of church life. They are hungry for Christian authenticity; they believe our community, however imperfect, can be a renewing home and bear a healing witness. We know others who are either committed to the status quo or resigned to it. But if the ship is distressed, the status quo, uninterrupted, means disaster, and those who consent to it—or worse, *insist upon* it—are themselves a danger. Nevertheless, on a boat at sea, all must be ready to forgive all, and move on. Self-satisfaction and sheer disdain, like bowing to the way things are, can only destroy.

Many challenges confront Christianity. The most

dangerous, perhaps, is fundamentalism. This is the fearful, rigid interpretation of the Christian tradition that boiled up in reaction to cultural upheaval—not least the rise of science and secularism—that came to a crisis with the Great War of 1914–18. Christians felt beleaguered. Many, led by conservative Presbyterians, set out to protect their heritage by focusing on interpretation of the Bible.

The written Word, they said, must be read just the way it was before science came on the scene—as having, all the way through, a plain meaning that supersedes merely human knowledge. It is all God’s truth or none of it is—God helped human authors deliver wholly accurate information. They argued, too, that the Bible itself supported them; its claim to “inspiration” (2 Tim. 3:16) was proof. The metaphor of “inspiration” indicated not just divine influence but such control over the authorial mind as to produce biblical “infallibility.”

This was fundamentalism, and the whole effort was defensive; it was response to an *attack* on convictions fundamentalists held dear. The persistence of a defensive posture meant that the movement was always watching its back, always looking to protect current beliefs. Such a preoccupation meant, furthermore, that fundamentalism forgot, or effectively forgot, the teaching function of the Holy Spirit (John 16). Instead of welcoming guidance into fresh understanding, such guidance was resisted. In fundamentalist hands, the Bible became, contrary to its own spirit, a weapon *against* fresh perspective, a *sanctifier* of the status quo. So, in the American South, for example, fundamentalist upholders of Scripture long remained fully at home with segregationist Jim Crow laws, just as earlier Christians had long remained fully at home with slavery.

Michael Campbell has shown that at Adventism’s 1919 Bible Conference, the Church’s divided leadership finally settled on a perspective that reflected the fundamentalist

turn. The Church has been hobbled by that perspective ever since. Influential White leaders—two editors of the *Review and Herald*, for example—resisted the Civil Rights Movement; worldwide, many leaders, no matter their color, still resist full equality for women.

The point I now want to insist upon is this: *just to the degree that we sanctify the theological status quo we not only assure spiritual failure, we assure the ultimate demise of the Church, at least as a substantive prophetic force.* A witness of this sort may last for a time, perhaps a long time. Someday, though, it will peter out. It is unfaithful and certain to become irrelevant, so how could it be otherwise?

Scripture itself knows nothing of intellectual frozenness, let alone sheer doctrinal uniformity. In the spirit of the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament envisions ongoing conversation (Matt. 18). New light is not feared but expected. It does not, moreover, await official declaration but grows out of the intellectual *engagement* of ordinary members in ordinary congregations. At the church’s beginnings, no supervisory body with authority to regulate Christian speech even existed. The faithful



This image of the *Archipel I* creates memories of adventure in a way that images of the ark spoke of safety in biblical times.

When you think of the ark, or of Jesus and the disciples on the Sea of Galilee, you realize that boat images, with their suggestion of difficulty and risk as well as protection, have resonated among the people of God.

instead counted on the presence and oversight of the Holy Spirit.

So, if the ship is distressed—crippled by a turn toward fundamentalism—what shall we do?

In both testaments of Scripture, remember, God gives so we may act. Grace generates *covenant partnership*. Under God, therefore, it is *our* responsibility to repair the damage. What I propose is that the key to exercising such responsibility is re-imagining *church life*. How can we become newly *engaged* in learning and acting toward renewal? Everything hangs on empowerment through Christian community *rightly conceived*.

As a people for whom baptism is voluntary commitment to a way of life, Adventists belong to the Radical Reformation, whose progeny includes Mennonites, Baptists, and Brethren, along perhaps, though less directly, with Methodists. One leading scholar in that stream has argued—arrestingly—that *koinonia*, the Greek word for fellowship or sharing, denotes the characteristic form of love in post-resurrection faith.² God has “called us into the fellowship,” or *koinonia*, of the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 1:9). Again, our walk with Christ is a “fellowship,” or *koinonia*, with one another. Participation in the communion meal, moreover, is a “sharing,” or *koinonia*, in the blood and body of Christ (1 Cor. 10:16). Generous acts are themselves a “sharing,” or *koinonia*, in the work of Christian ministry (2 Cor. 8:4).

God, it turns out, sets travelers on their Christian journey *in equal relation to one another* (Gal. 3). Radical Reformation thinkers have suggested that this relation may be thought of as “solidarity.” Christian life, or *koinonia*, is life together; each must *watch* and *care*, just as God does. In Sabbath gatherings, shared meals, and service together, in readiness to give and receive counsel, to offer and accept forgiveness, to listen and contribute to the Church’s dialogue, we must ourselves embody God’s own “watch-care.” Only by so loving one another do we fit ourselves for a resurrection journey that in the end serves all others, even our enemies.

How, then, would fresh embrace of *koinonia* entail a church life *re-imagined*? Here are just two ways.

First, it would *end* the hegemony of the status quo. Fear and complacency would metamorphose into the courage and spiritual hunger to which Christ calls us. To the degree, moreover, that the Church’s administrative

arm now fosters a “hierarchy-knows-best” approach to theological dialogue, that emphasis would shift into full embrace of the Holy Spirit’s perpetual teaching function, a gift to all, not a privileged or favored few. Top-down control of conversation, so often attempted after the fundamentalist turn, fortifies the status quo instead of resisting it.

Hierarchical treatment of Desmond Ford may be the paradigm case of top-down overreach. We need not think that Ford had the last word on Paul, nor even that his own efforts were blameless in every way, to acknowledge that this episode of attempted control was both cruel and disastrous. Embrace of *koinonia*, with its emphasis on caring as well as watching, on forgiveness as well as truthfulness, would surely have prevented much of the suffering and discord that ensued.

The point is not to disparage administrative structure. A structure true to the *koinonia* ideal could surely help us function as a worldwide movement. It could surely promote a vision, surely exhort and exemplify growth into deeper spirituality. But it could *not* claim theological authority over the rest of the Church. Leaders who make such a claim are misleaders. Even if the New Testament reports leaders from a range of communities consulting together and coming to persuasive consensus (Acts 15), it still authorizes local dialogue and local resolution of conflict (Matt. 18.) There is no permission to override either of these.

Now the second thing: fresh embrace of *koinonia* would open the door to unabashed Christocentrism. The 1919 fundamentalist turn, with its defensive, backward-looking tendencies, blinded Adventism to Radical Reformation hallmarks that twentieth-century historians began to uncover. With so much of that movement’s early spiritual and intellectual leadership silenced by persecution and martyrdom, these hallmarks had substantially faded from memory. One thing the new scholarship brought to light was that Radical Reformers stressed the ultimate authority of Christ. Even Scripture (by Scripture’s own witness, they said) was subject to Christ’s authority. That point was overlooked in Reformation and later fundamentalist accounts. Our own official doctrine of Scripture—belief no. 1 in the Statement of Fundamental Beliefs—contains no reference, nor even allusion, to Christ. Nor does it acknowledge the several New Testament passages

Only by so loving one another do we fit ourselves for a resurrection journey that in the end serves all others, even our enemies.

(Gospel Transfiguration stories, Matthew 28:18, Hebrews 1:1–3, etc.) that give unequivocal expression to Christ’s overarching authority.

As of 1919, we effectively became, with respect to the Bible, Seventh-day Fundamentalists. To this day, conventional Adventism, oblivious to its true Reformation heritage, ignores or even resists the biblically unassailable doctrine that Christ is the measure of Christian truth. By the Bible’s light, Scripture in all its parts can (and must) illuminate Christ’s authority. No piece of it, however, may *compete* with that authority. Still, key texts did compete with it when Christians were comfortable with slavery or segregation or Hitler’s agenda for Germany. And key texts do now compete with it when Christians insist that women are second-class in their potential for spiritual leadership.

The idea of *koinonia*, or solidarity with Christ and one another, overcomes all this, and can still overcome it. But efforts to this end continue to be resisted, sometimes by refusal even to acknowledge the point at issue. The General Conference Biblical Research Institute’s recent volume on biblical interpretation, nearly 500 pages long, gives no consideration, let alone rebuttal, to the New Testament claim of Christ’s final authority, even relative to Scripture. In 2015, leaders of the Adventist Society for Religious Studies invited members (mostly religion teachers and scholars) to consider what then seemed an auspicious motion. The 2015 General Conference session had ended with an indication that in the upcoming quinquennium top leaders would pay new attention to biblical “hermeneutics.” So, would ASRS members throw their weight behind a recommendation that further General Conference consideration of hermeneutics explicitly invoke the authority of Christ? The members, whether from conviction, deference to hierarchy, or fear of reprisal, declined to say Yes. In no society business

meeting since has that decision been reconsidered.

Adventism is theologically distressed, and the status quo is still winning.

Jeremiah (chapter 30) portrays a God so exasperated by the Judean people as to exclaim that there is “no medicine for your wound, no healing for you.” But soon comes a strange “therefore.” God continues: “Therefore . . . I will restore health to you, and your wounds I will heal.” It’s not so much the “therefore” of logic as the “therefore” of solidarity; God cannot help but watch and care, cannot help but speak hope to brokenness.³

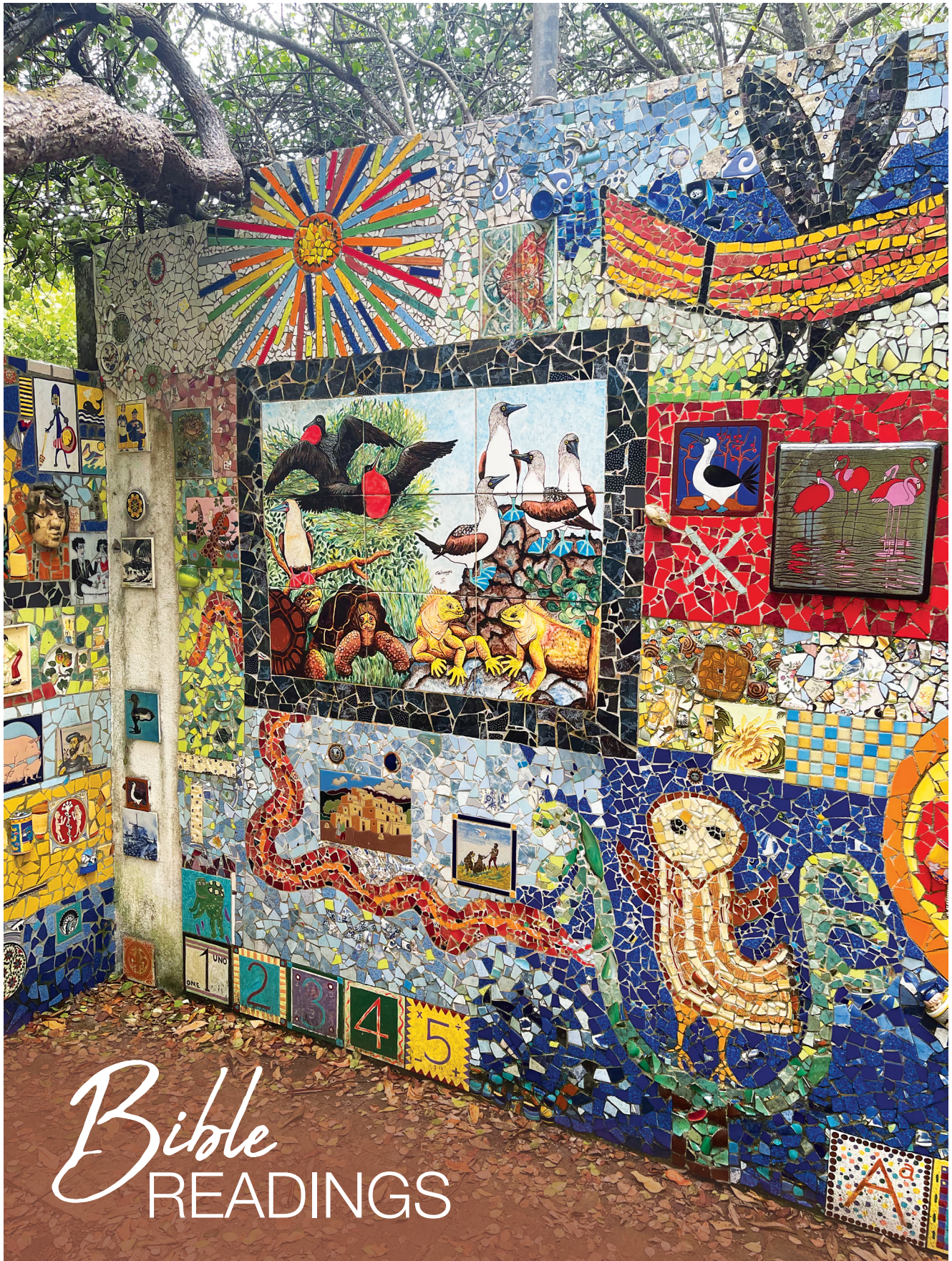
Perhaps Jeremiah’s reading of God can be medicine for us. It’s hardly plausible, after all, that official Adventism will soon reverse its tragic turn toward fundamentalism. But biblical hope defies the odds. So, if some foci of Adventist energy—some congregations, some institutions, some truth-telling visionaries—persist like Jeremiah in covenant partnership with God, cannot some good fruit come forth? If some persist, cannot the hegemony of the status quo begin to wear down? If some persist, cannot Christ, along with the Spirit who bears ever-surprising witness on his behalf, yet become, unmistakably, our one true center?

Endnotes

1. My debt is to Willard Quine.
2. James Wm. McClendon, Jr.
3. Here I learn from Walter Brueggemann.



CHARLES SCRIVEN is the former board chair of Adventist Forum, the organization that publishes *Spectrum*.



Bible READINGS

Mosaics across the street from the Charles Darwin Research Station in Puerto Ayora show us how multiple Bible readings function like a mosaic.

KEYWORDS: Mark 15:21; historical, literary, postcolonial, Black theology, and feminist/womanist frameworks; hermeneutics

SEEING *Simon of Cyrene*

BY KENDRA HALOVIK VALENTINE

“If only Adventists could agree on how to interpret the Bible it would solve so many conflicts!” Perhaps you have heard or even spoken similar sentiments. The sequence of assumptions goes something like this: if we could agree on how to read and interpret the Bible, then we would all interpret the Bible similarly, which would lead to unity on various issues. Worthy goals, right? But what if what we *actually* need are *more* interpretations? “What?!” I can hear someone respond. Is it not in Adventism’s DNA that we seek a single correct interpretation? How else can we share the truth with others? But what if we get closer to truth with a mosaic? What if we need more opportunities to read the Bible together from various perspectives—letting that rich diversity of perspectives change us together? To illustrate the value of this approach, this article will take one verse from the Bible—Mark 15:21—and attempt to show how multiple intentional interpretive frameworks allow for various readings and therefore textual richness. Here is the passage in English (NRSV):

They compelled a passer-by, who was coming in from the country, to carry his cross; it was Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus.

The “they” refers to Roman soldiers who had tortured Jesus (15:16–19) prior to leading Him to the place of crucifixion (15:20). Simon of Cyrene is forced to carry the crossbeam to Golgotha (Mark 15:22), where the vertical poles permanently stood as deterrents to political insurrection and other crimes against the Roman state. After hearing that he is father to Alexander and Rufus, we learn nothing more of this Simon in Mark’s (or any other) gospel.

This article proposes various readings of this verse using different frameworks: historical, literary, and four other contemporary reader frameworks. Rather than have as a goal to limit our readings to one, simple, final interpretation that everyone should (must) agree to

embrace, how might multiple interpretations illustrate the richness and wonder of Scripture even as they call us to respond faithfully?

An Historical Framework for Mark 15:21

Approaches to reading Scripture that take seriously the history of the received tradition notice different stages in a gospel's composition. For example, during the time of Jesus (early 30s CE), that a man carried Jesus's cross for Him would be one of hundreds of details observed and known about that horrible Good Friday. Later, at the time of the early church (30s–60s), this detail would be particularly meaningful to those who had come to know Simon of Cyrene and his sons Alexander and Rufus (details only possible to know after Jesus's crucifixion and resurrection). Much later, at the time of Mark's writing (66–70), as Jews and Jewish Christians were being forced to leave Jerusalem as refugees of war, the detail that Simon was from Cyrene (and therefore a Hellenistic Jew of the Diaspora) might give hope—perhaps new places (like Cyrene) will provide protection. Believers will wait for Jesus's reappearance in the Galilean hills (Mark 16:1–8a) and in other places where they could relocate.

What else can we learn from history about Mark's day that might give insights into his inclusion of the details in 15:21? Since Simon was a Hellenistic Jew, whose sons seem to have been known to Mark's audience (had they become Jesus followers?), perhaps this would encourage hearers of this gospel to share the story with other Hellenistic Jews they encountered. Mark sometimes translates Aramaic words (e.g., 15:22, 34) to benefit those who knew Greek but not Aramaic. How might Mark 15:21 be a window into ways the early Christian community was expanding?

One could also imagine that the English word

“compelled,” with its emphasis on the force and control of the Roman occupiers, reminded Mark's audience that Simon of Cyrene had no choice in the matter. He *had* to carry Jesus's cross and participate in a system of oppression against his own people. Since Mark most likely wrote at the time of the Jewish-Roman War (66–70), what other acts were early Christians being “compelled” to do? Would this verse remind them that, as followers of Jesus, they might be compelled, but must not voluntarily choose to participate for or against Rome? If one must walk to Golgotha, it should be because of being “compelled” to carry a cross in commitment to Christ while going about one's daily work—“coming in from the country”—not as punishment for joining fellow zealots in a rebel army.

The history behind this verse also reveals Mark as a pastor-theologian to his first readers as he presented Jesus the crucified Messiah. By emphasizing Jesus's suffering (8:31; 9:31; 10:33), followers were reminded that long before *they* knew suffering and persecution, Jesus certainly had. Mark's audience should not be surprised by their feelings of despair, for even Jesus felt abandoned by God (15:34). Yet, as they followed the way of Jesus, God was with them. Mark's audience might be displaced from their homes (like Simon of Cyrene), they may have witnessed (even participated in?) numerous crucifixions, but they held on to the promise that the crucified one would return and meet them in Galilee (16:7)!

This historical framework, locating and exploring Mark's gospel in light of the situation of the author and first audience, allows for a richness of interpretation, including the call to share the gospel with people like Simon of Cyrene and his sons. Mark and his audience would have understood Jesus's ministry in light of their present experience; the Roman Empire could be a place to proclaim the story of Jesus, and to follow the one who

What if what we *actually* need are *more* interpretations? “What?!” I can hear someone respond. Is it not in Adventism's DNA that we seek a single correct interpretation? How else can we share the truth with others? But what if we get closer to truth with a mosaic?

was killed by the oppressive system rather than participate in it. Their fears could become faith in the one who knew suffering and persecution. They were called to follow a crucified Messiah, one who also knew suffering yet whose suffering was not the end of the story.

A Literary (Narrative) Framework for Mark 15:21

If historical frameworks emphasize the importance of the socio-historical context when interpreting texts, literary frameworks focus on the literary context—that is, the world being created by the gospel itself. A literary (narrative) framework considers Mark 15:21 as part of a larger story that begins with the first verse of Mark 1, and concludes with the last verse of Mark 16. While an historical framework considers what *external* events were shaping the author, a literary (narrative) framework considers the story’s *internal* integrity—things like point of view, character development, plot movement, and structure.

When one considers Mark 15:21 within the overall narrative of the gospel of Mark, one cannot help but be reminded of another Simon. Long before we see Simon of Cyrene, readers meet Simon Peter. At first (and for a while), he is just Simon, whose brother is Andrew (1:16). When Jesus calls them to leave fishing for fish to start fishing for people, both brothers immediately follow Jesus (1:17–18). “Peter” is added to his name in the scene when Jesus appoints the twelve disciples (3:13–19). For the rest of the gospel, Simon Peter will be called just “Peter” by the narrator (5:37; 8:29, 32, 33; 9:2, 5; 10:28; 11:21; 13:3; 14:29, 33, 54, 66, 67, 70, 72; 16:7) and often alongside the disciples James and John (5:37; 9:2; 13:3; 14:33). However, on the only two occasions when Jesus actually speaks this disciple’s name, He does not use “Peter.”

The first instance when Jesus directly addresses this man occurs in Mark 8, which is also a turning point in the story. In the first half of the book, Jesus’s ministry includes teaching and preaching and healing and casting out demons in the Galilean countryside and fishing villages. Jesus is constantly on the move and acting in just the kinds of ways a first-century Jew might expect the Messiah to act. However, in chapter 8, Jesus shifts His focus to the suffering He will endure when He is crucified (8:31–38). Even as Peter proclaims Jesus as the Christ (8:29), Peter also rebukes Jesus’s emphasis on suffering (8:32). In the

exchange, Jesus calls Peter “Satan,” since Peter is not on God’s side (8:33). Jesus rebukes him. Then Jesus says to those present, “if any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me” (8:34). To follow Jesus is to follow Him to the cross; to take up a cross. To follow Jesus when His ministry is popular (Mark 1–7) is one thing. But Jesus calls people to take up a cross and follow Him the rest of the way (Mark 8–16). Precisely what Simon Peter was called by Jesus to do, Simon of Cyrene actually did. There is still hope for Simon Peter, who is invited (specifically by name!) to meet the resurrected Christ again in Galilee (16:7). But of all the characters in Mark’s gospel, only Simon of Cyrene does precisely what Jesus asked: “if any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me” (8:34).

The second instance when Jesus addresses Simon Peter directly occurs in Gethsemane when Jesus asked Peter, James, and John to remain with Him, to watch, and instead they sleep. Jesus says, “*Simon*, are you asleep? Could you not watch (stay awake) one hour?” (14:37). Why does Jesus return to the name used at the beginning of this gospel—when Simon was first invited to follow Jesus? When temple police arrested Jesus, Peter ran (14:50). As Jesus was questioned by the Jewish Council (Sanhedrin), Peter followed Jesus at a distance, staying close by, but also denying any connection to Jesus (14:54, 66–72). Later, when Roman soldiers led Jesus to be crucified, Simon Peter was nowhere to be found. But at the moment of Jesus’s agony, actually following behind Him was another Simon—Simon of Cyrene.

Many might make this Simon of Cyrene a minor (mentioned in only one verse!) character in Mark’s gospel. However, he is crucial to the overall plot, causing readers to reflect on his courageous act. Within the story, *this* Simon can be seen as an example of faithfully responding to Jesus. A literary (narrative) reading of Mark 15:21 encourages readers to see Simon of Cyrene in continuity and in contrast with Simon Peter and to learn from both Simons what it means to follow faithfully.

So far, we have seen Simon of Cyrene through an historical framework and a literary framework. What if we now frame Mark 15:21 using particular questions brought from the contexts of contemporary readers? What if we ask questions about social constructions of power, race,

and gender? What other insights might such questions help us see when looking at Simon of Cyrene?

A Postcolonial Framework for Mark 15:21

Readers of texts are not disinterested. We come to them with our biases and our questions and our hopes for a better world. Texts are not disinterested either. A postcolonial framework considers the ideology of empire as it is assumed and challenged in texts. For example, how are the values of the ruling class assumed in this section of Mark's gospel? How are events and actions depicted? And what does their depiction suggest about the Roman Empire: that is, the world in which Mark wrote his gospel? Does Mark resist empire or (perhaps inadvertently) endorse it by ignoring the empire's assumptions? Does Mark's gospel threaten or entrench privilege and power? While these complex questions deserve careful and nuanced study, this section will briefly highlight several ways one can see Mark resisting empire in his inclusion of Simon of Cyrene.

Empires take land and other natural resources by colonization; by identifying and subjugating its current inhabitants as "other" and "lesser" than the occupying force. The first description of Simon of Cyrene is as a "passer-by," an innocent description used earlier of Jesus, who passed by the sea of Galilee and a tax booth and invited men to follow Him (1:16; 2:14). But such mundane activity in an occupied land can be deadly. For colonized people, "passing by" can quickly turn into carrying a cross; into participation in the execution of a fellow Jew. The phrase "coming in from the country" is better translated as "coming in from the fields." Given his status as an immigrant in occupied lands, Simon would not have been the owner of the fields that he worked that day. Roman soldiers did what colonizers often do—appropriated the brute strength of the colonized. Such lesser humans did not need rest. They should be capable of continuous work for the purpose of benefiting the empire. Simon, still covered with the sweat and the dirt of his work in the fields, was forced to do yet more hard labor. After all, it is the colonizers who decide when the day finishes for the colonized—not when the field work ends, but only when the rulers no longer need anyone to do the day's dirty work. Colonizers take over both land and people. After working occupied land, Simon must still labor for

the oppressive, occupying military force.

Empires and their colonizers recruit collaborators from among the colonized in order to expand the colonizers' authority and assure their safety. In first-century Palestine, Rome did this by recruiting Jewish urban elites. Herodians and the priests (Sadducees) in Jerusalem benefited from the occupation. In Mark's gospel, except for chapter 5, Jesus challenged these collaborators more than the occupiers (8:31; 10:33; 11:15–19). In Mark's telling of Jesus's arrest by Jewish religious leaders (14:43–52) and Jesus's presentation before the Jewish Council (14:53–65), Mark includes mistreatment of Jesus's body that is very similar to the way His body will later be treated by Roman soldiers (15:15–20). In both scenes, Jesus is declared worthy of death or condemned to death (14:64; 15:15), spit upon (14:65; 15:19), mocked for His claims (14:65; 15:17–18), struck (14:65; 15:19), and taken away for yet more torture (15:1, 20). Is Mark intentionally aligning the occupiers and the collaborators? Is he unwilling to show any difference between those who oppress as colonizers and those who oppress as collaborators? The violence of the empire spreads through the hands of local elites. As Jesus stands before the local Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, it is unclear whether Pilate is playing the Jewish elites or they are playing him (15:6–15). Either way, Jesus does not stand a chance in this system. A king is more dangerous to both colonizer (Pilate) and collaborators (priests) than an insurrectionist and murderer (15:7). Even while appealing to "law and order," chief priests stir up the crowd (15:11) and Pilate wants to appease it (15:15). Barabbas is freed. Jesus crucified. And Simon, the colonized laborer, will be forced to carry Jesus's cross.

While colonizers claim superiority over the colonized, they also fear them, and so they rule with the constant threat of violence. Their cruelty betrays an anxiety about their claimed superiority. Thus, colonial anxiety often caused greater cruelty in a sick cycle of escalating violence. Crucifixions were terrorist acts. Jesus's death on a cross tells us that, however else we may interpret it, Jesus was killed as a warning to others not to challenge the empire and its claims to superiority and power; its occupation of land and resources, and its assumptions about the colonized people. Carrying a cross to an execution site was a big, traumatic deal. It was a bloody and messy business that would be terrifying and terrorizing to all who witnessed it,

especially for the one forced to carry the cross. If we begin to read this as an everyday event, it becomes acceptable. It was *not* acceptable. This scene was not OK. While the narrator described the scene, he gave no voice to Jesus and Simon. Victims' voices were silenced. And Mark did not speak for them. Was Mark himself a collaborator? Did he accommodate the occupiers? After all, he had to find a way for himself and his community to survive.

I would suggest that in 15:21, Mark subtly subverted the imperial powers and colonial systems of control. In his gospel, Mark exposed Rome's treatment of Simon the laborer. Mark exposed the chief priests' treatment of Jesus. And Mark exposed the violent system needed to silence Jesus. By having Simon, in the face of such terrorism, do precisely what Jesus called disciples to do (8:34), Mark destabilized the system. Simon of Cyrene might be compelled by soldiers to carry Jesus's cross, but future followers of Jesus would voluntarily "take up their cross" and in so doing exposed the colonizers' frailty, challenging the empire's very foundation. Mark provided a counter-narrative to the dominating claims of Rome's glory. Mark ignored Rome's "achievements" and instead exposed its atrocities. It may look like just another crucifixion—a condemned man going to his execution; an immigrant day laborer carrying a cross. But to those who look at this scene with the eyes of faith, there's a crack in the system; God, in Jesus, identified with the colonized against the empire and all its collaborators.

A Black Theology Reader Framework for Mark 15:21

It is probably easier for some of us to consider ways Mark's gospel challenged the first-century Roman Empire than to ask similar questions closer to home. Yet, how can an American reading this verse about a Black man from North Africa (the location of Cyrene) who was "coming in from the fields" and forced to do something against his will, not think of the time of slavery in the United States? Black biblical interpretation, with its emphasis on theology, liberation, and action, provides a framework for this verse that calls readers to hear it in dialogue with the Black experience. This framework often begins with the question: who is doing the reading/interpreting? As a White woman, my reading of Mark 15:21 using this framework must be carefully scrutinized, for it is shaped

by an experience very different from a Black person's. Is it possible for me to use this framework at all? (Some would say "no.") The following reflects my attempt to better understand Mark 15:21 using a Black theology reader framework.

While some interpretations claim neutrality on the part of readers when coming to the texts, Black theology exposes the sham of such a claim while intentionally and enthusiastically embracing the Black experience as pivotal for understanding biblical texts. Recently I read a first-hand account of a Black sharecropper, Nate Shaw [Ned Cobb], reflecting on his life after slavery ended in the United States. Mr. Shaw remained on the land he had long known, trying to make a new start for himself and for his family. Reflecting on sixty-five seasons of picking cotton, he spoke frankly of systemic racism. Blacks were often rented the worst land. But when they made even that land flourish, they were cheated in other ways. They were refused loan notes or taken advantage of when unable to read loan notes. They were forced into perpetual debt at the local store (which was also owned by the landlord). They were forbidden to send their children to school. They were robbed of their government money by local Whites in positions of power. They were refused new technology (even seed) for farming, so were always forced to compete at a disadvantage. They were not allowed to sell fruits and vegetables in the markets for extra money. They were brutalized when attempting to organize unions. They were arrested for protecting their own property. They were given prison sentences that included hard labor. All this while being terrorized by the possibility of lynching. In the words of Mr. Shaw, referring to the White man, "he's makin his profit but he aint goin to let me rise." How do we understand this text if we see Simon the Cyrene as a Black sharecropper coming in from the fields in the *pax Americana*?

A Black theology framework speaks candidly about systemic oppression by Whites against Blacks. Jesus's story is embraced for He, too, understood systemic injustice—including the arrest of the innocent, stacked juries and false witnesses at trials, prison and death sentences. When Christians advocating White supremacy attempt to place Jesus on *their* side, Black theology exposes the lie by remembering Jesus's actual story of identifying with those who suffer injustice. What did Simon of Cyrene see

when he was forced to carry Jesus's cross? Did he look directly into Jesus's bloodied face? What did Simon hear and smell and touch? What was Simon feeling (in addition to exhaustion and fear) as he followed Jesus, a tortured man heading to his agonizing death by an unjust system? Did Simon see himself as similar to Jesus (a Black man and a brown man)—part of a rigged system of oppression with no way out? Was it so “normal” that Simon could not even imagine another possible social structure? Simon had every reason to fear that he would be crucified that day too; after all, who would remember that he was compelled to carry a cross—that it wasn't his own?! Identifying with the condemned is risky business.

In addition to identifying systemic oppression and those suffering under it, a Black theology framework speaks about the God of Scripture as a God of liberation. Beginning with the Creator God who creates all humans in God's image, Black theology considers the universal kinship of humanity and its challenge to all attempts at human hierarchies. God creates humans for freedom. Slavery is never OK—not for the enslaved; not for the enslaver. Any structures of inequality and oppression cannot be God-ordained. Liberation is what God is about! So all God's children must resist oppression. To say “yes” to God is to say “no” to injustice. The God of creation and liberation hears humans cry out, hears the prayers of hurting people. And God responds. Simon can hope that Jesus's journey to Golgotha somehow ends the cycle of prejudice, violence, and hate.

A Black theology framework also calls for critical engagement. Confronted by oppression and a God of liberation, a believer must act. An African American Spiritual asks, “Were you there when they crucified my Lord?,” and we all know that the answer is “yes,” either as an oppressed person hanging next to Jesus or as an oppressor of the innocent at the foot of the cross, spear in hand. The same is true of the question: “Were you there when they lynched him on a tree?” What does Jesus's identification with the tortured and murdered mean for believers seeking to live righteously today? How does one follow Jesus faithfully and so challenge current oppressive social structures? How does one's life reflect a God of liberation and justice? With whom do we identify? Like Simon of Cyrene, what risky business must we embrace? How do we spend our money? How do we vote? What are we *doing*?

Part of the richness of a Black theology framework for reading Mark 15:21 includes a focus on those who suffer (including Jesus), the God of liberation we find in Scripture, and a call to action in our world. As a postcolonial framework considers social structures of power when reading the Bible, a Black theology framework considers racialized people and social structures. In the next section there is a brief consideration of social structures of gender.

A Feminist Reader Framework and a Womanist Reader Framework for Mark 15:21

Where are all the women? What about Simon of Cyrene's wife? After all, Alexander and Rufus would have had a mother at some point. Why isn't she mentioned? A feminist reader framework asks such questions. It notices and critiques the patriarchal nature of the Bible and scenes in Scripture that limit the presence of women, silence their voices, and thereby legitimize their continued sidelining and oppression. This framework also works to recover stories of women and to reconstruct the social backgrounds of texts so as to better understand how various factors shape their meanings. Rather than assume centuries of Western White male readings of gospel passages, what happens when both women and men—representing a wider diversity of perspectives—read them?

Mark describes the trials and torture and crucifixion of Jesus as “men's work.” Jesus was arrested with only men mentioned (14:43–52); brought before the Jewish Council where only men would be present (14:53–65); brought before Pilate, where “crowds” perhaps included both genders, but where characters were only male (15:1–15); and tortured by (presumably) all-male Roman soldiers prior to being taken to Golgotha (15:16–24). When the actual crucifixion of Jesus takes place, only men were described as writing Jesus's offence or mocking or deriding Him (15:25–32). The vertical poles of the crosses were permanently placed “outside the gates” of cities. Did most women stay “inside” the gates, away from crucifixions where condemned men were crucified naked to greater humiliate them? Probably so. But what about poor women and female slaves who had no choice but to pass the gates going about daily tasks? Did they walk by quickly while averting their eyes and staying as far away as possible from the men finding delight in slowly killing the

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condemned? In the scenes where Jesus is twice stripped naked (15:20, 24), would some readers think of Jesus being humiliated like a woman at the mercy of a bunch of predatory, violent men?

Only after Mark's crucifixion scene describes Jesus crying out and breathing His last (15:37), and a male Roman voice proclaims Jesus as son of God (15:39), do we learn that "There were also women looking on from a distance; among them Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. These used to follow him and provided for him when he was in Galilee; and there were many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem" (15:40–41). So, women *were* present, if at a distance. At least three stood watching on the day of Jesus's crucifixion. If they served Jesus in His Galilean ministry (Mark 1–8), and followed Him as Jesus started to Jerusalem (Mark 8–15), why do Mark's readers hear about them so late in the story?

Five times in Mark's gospel the word translated in English as "serve" is used. The first time, it refers to angels serving Jesus in the wilderness (1:13). The second time, it is Simon's mother-in-law who serves Jesus and others with Him (1:31). Twice the verb refers to Jesus who "came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many" (10:45). The fifth and final time, it refers to the women who followed Jesus all the way to the cross—who "provided for him" (15:41), the same word as "served him." These had even planned to take care of His dead body, serving Jesus until the very end (15:47–16:3).

During Jesus's and Mark's day, serving was "women's work." Yet, Jesus is described as taking on this work—"not to be served but to serve." How is the crucifixion scene a contrast between "men's work" and "women's work" with Jesus clearly embracing what women do? Noticing these women highlights Jesus's radical work leading to Golgotha.



A tree becomes part of the mosaic wall in Puerto Ayora.

Photo: Bonnie Dwyer

Simon of Cyrene follows Jesus, carrying a cross out of compulsion. These women chose to follow Jesus all the way to Jerusalem, even after hearing the repeated warnings of what would happen when they got there (8:31; 9:31; 10:33). They followed Jesus and they served Him.

A womanist (Black feminist) reader framework would remind us of power relations between people of the same gender; women can also be victimized by other women. In addition to gender, how do factors such as race, education, sexuality, class, health, and age factor into our readings of biblical texts? Historically, the feminist reader framework could be just as racist as other frameworks. All women do not experience the same oppression. A womanist framework calls on readings that ask: what women are *still* being ignored? Who experiences multiple oppressions, ignored even by other (privileged) women? For example, why do we only learn the names of three women who followed Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem? What about the

“many other women” mentioned (15:41)? Were they of a lower social status and so remained nameless? Even when Mark includes those on the margins of society (women watching “from a distance”), how do those on the margins also create hierarchies of humans? And might an emphasis on serving (and silent suffering) further oppress society’s marginalized?

All the women watching the Golgotha scene would have seen Jesus and would have seen Simon carrying Jesus’s cross. These frameworks challenge readers to notice who is missing in the story—who are on the edges? Even, who are on the edges of the edges? And how does Mark’s description of the ministry of Jesus as what was typically women’s work challenge readers’ assumptions about the work of service so many women do today?

Biblical Authority and Multiple Interpretations

The six frameworks above see Simon of Cyrene in different ways. Seeing Simon as a Jew of the Diaspora can mean Mark’s first readers—persecuted and suffering refugees of war—can enlarge their understanding of Christianity as they find new homes while sharing the gospel in new places. Seeing Simon as a counterexample to Simon Peter can encourage more witnesses to follow Jesus faithfully. Seeing Simon as a colonized person can mean, with Mark, pushing back against Rome’s imperial project and any imperialism. Seeing Simon as a Black sharecropper can mean that in Jesus, God identifies with and liberates the oppressed. Seeing Simon from afar, along with women who served Jesus, can remind readers of all the people left out of biblical stories because of their gender, class, age, ethnicity, sexuality, education, and health.

Which reading are you most drawn to? Which

ones are unfamiliar to you but you may wish to explore further? Which ones leave you unpersuaded? What other frameworks are needed? For example, if we considered the people who work in our country’s fields today, how might we see Simon? What if we used an ecocritical (concerns about nature) framework? What might we notice when it comes to the treatment of land and environmental resources? Intersectionality (how race, class, and gender can be used to privilege or oppress) alerts us to multiple layers of systemic oppression. Was Simon marginalized both as a Jew and as a Black immigrant? What if Simon had a limp or only one eye, either before or after being compelled to carry Jesus’s cross? Might disability studies (reading from the perspective of disabled persons, an approach known as “Crip Theory”) provide a helpful framework? What psychological trauma did Simon continue to carry with him after this experience? Having felt so devoid of power on the day Jesus died, did Simon take out his sense of helplessness on someone *he* had power over? Might trauma theory be a helpful framework? What about rhetorical analysis? Cultural studies? The social sciences? What other questions do people (do you) bring to the texts of Scripture? What other embodied identities can help us see Simon of Cyrene? What future tools will further enhance interpretative possibilities? How deep a dive are we willing to make in order to experience the meanings possible in the study of Scripture?

This article argues for multiple readings of biblical texts. Given the richness of Scripture and our communities of faith, many *more* interpretations are needed, rather than having as a goal the finding of the one best reading—the right one. As if there were such a definitive reading. Does this, however, mean

What other embodied identities can help us see Simon of Cyrene?

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that any interpretation goes? Are there any checks and balances on a given interpreter's agenda? Might multiple interpretations further distance us from each other? Do we come together just to share our different perspectives and then return to our homes affirmed in our biases? Or might we learn from each other in shared approaches and those miraculous if infrequent moments of consensus?

A few reflections on these important questions. First, if we say that *the Bible is inspired* (and that is what the text claims for itself), then we begin with God—with the ways that the works of Scripture are God's gift to humanity. The Bible begins with a good God reaching out to people. God, as the ultimate authority in our lives, invites people to experience the texts graciously given, which must not themselves be made into gods (idols). It is important to acknowledge that the words of Scripture were written by humans living in particular contexts, yet with a richness of insight beyond their time and place. At the same time, we see limitations and shortsightedness, given their time and place. The Bible itself contains multiple voices, which give a richness to the texts.

Second, *the Bible is interpreted* by readers who have their own assumptions that can, we hope, be challenged by their readings. The Judeo-Christian tradition claims that the best interpretations take place in community with readers wrestling with texts, while using their imaginations to interpret the "living" word in contemporary situations. These texts then live again in surprisingly new ways. That Scripture is always interpreted should cause readers to be always humble. No one reading is adequate or serves as the last word. Some interpretations must be resisted and relinquished. Readers reading together gain awareness of their own ideologies and how they need to be open to the way Scripture challenges them. *All* interpretations must be reevaluated, for our best interpretations remain inadequate before our holy God.

Third, *the Bible is inspiring*. As people attend to the texts—their artistry and authority—we get a glimpse into the goodness of God. We see the richness of the testimonies of those who have gone before us and we testify ourselves to the wonder of God's Word. Inspired through the experience and committed to a long engagement with the texts, we are called to obedience. While there is never the "last word," readers of Scripture

are called to act on current convictions gained through Bible study.

Like the authors of the New Testament, Christians today are called to read Scripture through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Seeing Simon of Cyrene is really about seeing Jesus, our ultimate framework for biblical interpretation. But this also requires a caution—which Jesus? A White supremacist and a Black Lives Matter marcher can both claim a Christo-centric approach to their lives. Two suggestions for ways to read in community come to mind. First, the radical way of Jesus must be the way we cross the gap between the time of Scripture and our own day. His is the surprising (unanticipated) way that helps us forgive the unforgivable, serve the weak, and identify with the oppressed. If we are serious about Jesus, we must be serious about the way He lived His life; Jesus loved His enemies, was willing to die for them.

Second, multiple meanings should make us even more humble before our God and before Scripture. Since every reader has much to learn, every reading is both inadequate (what biases and oversights must be identified?) and important (does it give insight into kingdom living?). How does each interpretation embrace the rich and ever-expanding tapestry of our faith? What might happen within a denomination if its convictions about interpreting Scripture focused first on Jesus's love for His enemies and a humility before the richness of our sacred texts? How might admitting the failures of our past interpretations lead us to a better place as believers in Scripture? How might multiple interpretations lead believers to multiple ways of living the text?

When it comes to biblical interpretation, it is a gift to be part of a global church full of people from all "nations, tribes, people and languages" (Revelation 7:9)! While this approach must challenge the hypocrisy that claims a one and only interpretation for our church, it is also deeply committed to belief in located, faith-full readings and the actions such readings call us to do in our specific locations of life and ministry.

Conclusion

Multiple interpretations of Mark 15:21 and its one-sentence description of Simon of Cyrene are examples of the richness of Scripture and the possibilities of our

readings. Listening to each other's readings and how they will shape our behavior, truly makes Bible study an experience of the "living word."

This article includes a reading of this verse that uses an historical framework, a literary framework, and four contemporary reader frameworks. Rather than have as a goal to limit our readings to one, final interpretation that everyone should embrace, how might multiple interpretations illustrate the richness and wonder of Scripture even as they call us to respond faithfully in our world?

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KEYWORDS: an echo of the old, old stories, Gideon, the fleece, the stories of people of faith

The Echo OF A STORY

BY BRUCE RAFUSE

My father had a very large presence. Naturally. He lived his life with the knowledge that he was living in a very exciting time of history. And while he wouldn't be classified as pious or religious, I believe he understood his God more clearly than many of his "religious" friends.

Like the time he was clearing away some trees from behind his cabin. The axe head came off and flew over to the creek that flowed through his place. Dad shouted (and he could shout) "Elisha! Elisha!", and the axe head landed in the water with a big splash—but did not sink. He wouldn't admit it, but I think he was as surprised as the rest of us. But then again, maybe not.

I think an event like this is an echo of the old, old stories we have that are handed down to us. Many of the stories of people of faith gently remind us of similar challenges and results that we read about in the old stories. My quotidian life seemed devoid of any opportunities to reverberate to an echo of those old, old stories. Until this year. It came quite unexpectedly, but it happened this way.

My lady and I had some land in a rural area and had jumped through the hoops of bureaucracy until we were ready to build a small house to retire in, with a garden and a grape trellis and a fig tree or two. The pandemic was upon us and the building trades, rather than being out of work, were booking their jobs three and four months down the road. Our specific need was to find someone to do our foundation.

Since the land was sloping, the basement wall on the high side was a 10-foot concrete wall with a small section just over 14 feet high. The foundation trades had much easier foundations lined up for months and wouldn't even



The Gideon wall at the Rafuse property

price our job, and not one would look at the project.

My lady and I talked it over together and talked it over with our God—and went to sleep. I woke up thinking of an old, old story—the one about Gideon. So, I got out the book and read it over again (Judges 6:11–16). I re-read the first part, the introduction to the story.

Gideon, and his contemporaries, were in a place of "Bad" with no exit in sight. But Gideon has a visitor who greets him, "The Lord is with you, O mighty man of valor" (Judges 6:12 ESV).

Gideon's reply sounds like one of mine, "If the Lord is with us why is all this "Bad" happening to us? We have the old stories—but that was "then." The "Now" is empty!"

Then the Lord turned to him and said, "Go in this might of yours and save Israel from the hand of Midian; do not I send you?" (v 14).

Gideon comes back with, "Please, Lord, I am a Nobody!"

The pandemic was upon us and the building trades, rather than being out of work, were booking their jobs three and four months down the road. Our specific need was to find someone to do our foundation.

The Lord replies, “But I will be with you and you shall strike the Midianites as one man.” (v 16).

Two phrases seemed highlighted: “Go in this might of yours . . .” and “But I will be with you . . .”

When the visitor disappears, Gideon realizes this wasn’t just a human being; it must have been a visitor from the Lord—the same Lord as in his old, old stories. So, Gideon prepares to do the impossible, but doubts keep surging through his thoughts. But he had a fleece . . . Once he was fully convinced that, yes, a real messenger from the Lord had visited him, he never slowed down. And the rest is history.

Well, I didn’t have a fleece. And the story of Jesus on the pinnacle of the temple started flashing (the temptation of presumption). But going back over the previous year, and how smoothly the bureaucratic hoops had been passed, convinced us that Gideon’s story was the more relevant. “Go in this might of yours . . .” and “But I will be with you. . .”

And so, we began.

Oh yes, let me introduce myself. I am in my eighth decade of life. I have worked a variety of jobs—including carpentry. I have had to work with concrete, but never with dimensions such as I now faced. And concrete walls present some special challenges—with every vertical foot of wall increasing the bursting pressure on the forms by 145 pounds. This means that the pressure on the bottom of a 10-foot wall is 1,450 pounds per square foot, in both directions, and the short section of 14-foot wall would have a bursting pressure of over 2,000 pounds per square foot at the bottom.

With a sheet of plywood weighing about half as much as I do, the physical challenge was real—and there were about 120 sheets of plywood in the finished forms. The first level wasn’t so tricky, but the higher parts of the wall required a careful approach.

“Go in this might of yours . . .” and “But I will be

with you . . .”

After the footings were poured it took me, working “alone,” two months to be ready to pour the walls. Many times during those two months I would come up against some challenge and mutter, “How now, Lord?”, and ideas would come. And they would work! One of these was how to lift the upper levels of plywood into place; just lift them up gently and put them into place—after placing stops to keep them from crashing over to the other side.

The day of the pour was a day of rejoicing! My lady brought a basketful of goodies including strawberry tarts and whipped cream. Four persons helped me pour, plus the concrete-truck drivers and the concrete-pump operator. In three hours, the pour was completed, and we could relax and rejoice.

With the forms off, the concrete is standing very strong, solid, and good. The people that know concrete say good things about it. But I call it my Gideon wall.

As an echo is a faint reflection of the original sound, so our stories are not exact duplicates of the original stories. When my father walked over to retrieve his axe head, he found a cluster of bushes just under the water where the axe head had landed—but deeper water was just inches away. . .

Gideon’s story is a resounding echo of the story of deliverance from Egypt. My story is a faint echo of Gideon’s story, but it is my story, my echo, and I am encouraged.

“Go in this might of yours . . .” and especially, “But I will be with you . . .”



BRUCE RAFUSE is retired and enjoys the countryside and the family surrounding him.



Photo: Bonnie Dwyer

Sea water rushes under the lava in the Galápagos.

“HOW DO WE TELL THIS TO OUR PEOPLE?”:

From 1919 to the Present

BY JAMES J. LONDIS

Unlike other fundamentalist, ultra-conservative denominations, the story of the Seventh-day Adventist Church includes a commitment to the divine inspiration of the Bible *and* the writings of Ellen G. White. Portraying her as an inspired prophet in the biblical tradition, Adventism assumed we fully understood what biblical inspiration meant: it is propositional (thoughts, words), supernatural (sent by God to the person), and not to be questioned. If Ellen White received the biblical “gift

of prophecy,” her inspiration is no different, nor can her authority be doubted. We gave Ellen White an *almost* equal authority in Adventist faith and practice, even though she warned against equating her importance with the Bible. So profound a leader almost demanded we lean in her direction. Since questioning one would undercut both, we questioned neither.

However, our traditional assumptions about the nature of inspiration are no longer sustainable. Their

Terrified of what might happen to the movement if her “prophetic identity” was modified, they decided to say nothing. Their silence lasted more than fifty years.

collapse began well over one hundred years ago.

In Ellen White’s case, it started with our early leaders, whose proximity to her life and work raised questions they dared not examine until *four years* after her death. By 1919, concerns were so intense they convened an unprecedented “Bible Conference,” during which administrators, editors and pastors came together in prayer and study to understand the “facts” as some viewed them.

Was she given thoughts, words, and propositional content in her visions and dreams? Were her writings a virtual transcription of her experiences or something else? Had she borrowed from others and been edited extensively? If she borrowed from uninspired writers, are they also to be granted special authority? After several agonizing weeks, they could not unify around a theology of her inspiration. Terrified of what might happen to the movement if her “prophetic identity” was modified, they decided to say nothing.

Their silence lasted more than fifty years.

Archived and forgotten, Adventist perceptions of her inspiration were frozen. While less intense, those who ask questions even now risk discipline, loss of employment, even separation from the Church. But the issues will not go away. Adventist historians (circa 1970), after meticulous research, *again* raised the 1919 concerns: this time with unassailable specifics. While discretion prevented many (not all) from walking through her inspiration minefields, their findings spoke for themselves.

We now *must* reassess Ellen White and, by implication, the Bible.

The Bible

Beginning in the latter decades of the nineteenth century and continuing to this day, the formation of the Bible and the meaning of its inspiration have also been extensively researched. Scholars, examining the nature of

scriptural materials and the processes by which they were formed, asked questions reminiscent of those raised about Ellen White. Without living eyewitnesses who wrote in English (as was the case with Ellen White), they mastered ancient languages from distant cultures. For most of them it was a sacred task. However, some exposed to this research found the traditional assumptions and beliefs about biblical inspiration troublesome. For this reason, Adventist leaders convened additional Bible Conferences in the 1970s to look at not Ellen White, but the Bible itself.

Understanding why this happened requires additional history. In the ’60s and ’70s, significant numbers of our college and university professors earned advanced degrees from many of the most prestigious universities. Adventist higher-education accreditation had become increasingly dependent on terminal degrees, including our biblical and theological professors. When they returned, they raised the many issues raised in 1919, only this time, it was about the Bible. Surprised, alarmed, and impressed by what they had learned about the Bible, Church leaders felt that their concerns had to be explored.

As attendees tackled the agenda, their tables covered with Bibles, note pads and pens, differences began to surface. To their credit, somewhat startled administrators listened intently. It is important to note that administration provided years of support to most of them, hoping they would return to strengthen the Church and its mission. Better scholarship should enhance the mission of the Church, especially to young people and questioning members. So, they cheerfully “minded the store” while they were gone. Deeply grateful, many pastors and teachers believed that their experiences would strengthen the Church.

However, not all were convinced. Caught flat-footed by what they heard, and unable to respond, some just listened. Others questioned major points vigorously. As

the hours went on, it became obvious that our traditional approaches to the Bible were misleading, that not every word or thought expressed or historical record should be treated as infallibly delivered. At the conclusion of the first day, a thoughtful leader I admired and trusted, leaned over and asked me: “*How do we tell this to our people?*”

1919 and 2019: Ellen White and Biblical Inspiration Joined Together

On November 21, 2019, approximately 200 Adventist scholars immersed in and knowledgeable about both Ellen White and biblical research, attended the Adventist Society for Religious Studies annual meeting in San Diego, California. Dr. Denis Fortin, professor of Historical Theology and former Dean of the Theological Seminary, delivered the Presidential address. His title itself raised eyebrows: “I Have Had To Adjust My View of Things—Lessons from the 1919 Bible Conference.” In it, he outlined the theological and moral disquiet of the 1919 attendees who, given their recorded comments, probably linked Ellen White’s inspiration issues with the same issues in Scripture. Fortin said:

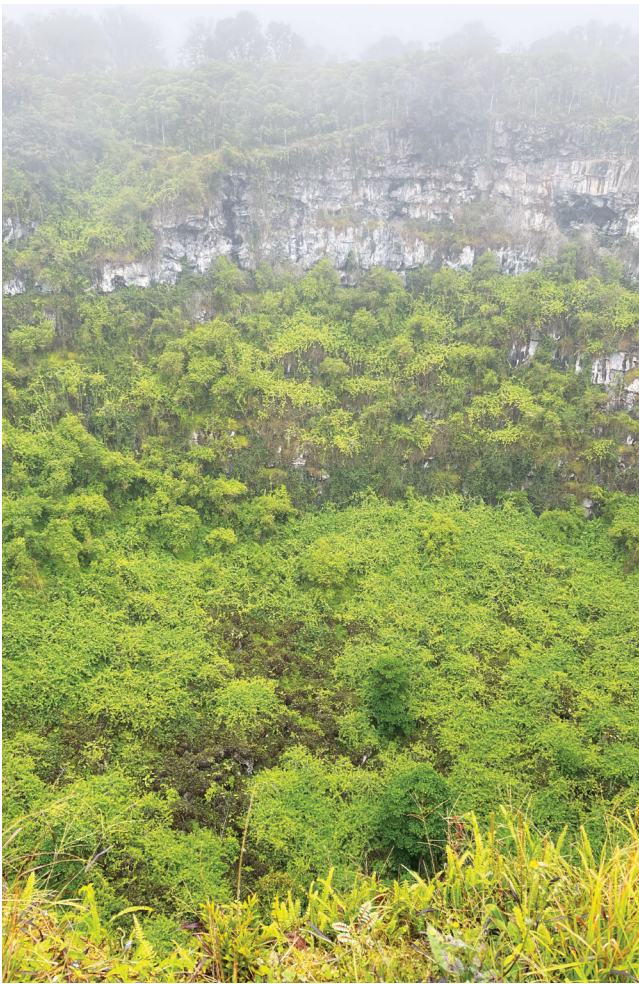
But there were some attendees in the room at this Bible Conference who knew better than to ascribe inerrancy and infallibility to Ellen White’s writings. The problem though with this opinion is that if one were to say Ellen White’s writings are not infallible or inerrant, what does this imply for the Bible? Holding the view that there is no degree of inspiration between canonical and non-canonical prophets inherently posed this unavoidable comparison and consequent conclusion. If one is not inerrant or infallible than neither is the other. As evangelical fundamentalism sought to organize a resistance to inroads made by modern critical biblical scholarship, for Seventh-day Adventists to challenge the inerrancy and infallibility of Ellen White’s writings was tantamount to side with modern critical methodologies. Thus, almost inevitably, Seventh-day Adventist teachers and evangelists had no other moral and religious choice than to ally with the evangelical fundamentalist perspective. What else could they do? But, how honest would this position be?¹

Fortin sympathized with their dilemma: “How will we tell our believers we need to modify our views of Ellen White’s inspiration and authority?” Presented as the “last word” on doctrine, lifestyle, and biblical interpretation, wrapped in a “triumphalist infallibility” that “dominated Adventist ethos and mindset by 1919,” what approach will now rescue her place in our history? “Wouldn’t our members feel that the ‘brethren’ had themselves lost faith in the gift of prophecy? Would they not feel deceived, even betrayed? Could any imagined outcome keep the Church intact?” As already indicated, in the end it seemed prudent to “agree to disagree” and say nothing. For much of the 1919 conference, doctrinal honesty and personal rectitude wrestled with the consequences of being truthful with the Church.

Fortin sees one comment clearly identifying the challenge before them. On August 1, 1919, G. B. Thompson, also serving as a field secretary for the General Conference, said this:

It seems to me that if we are going to preach the Testimonies and establish confidence in them, it does not depend on whether they are verbally inspired or not. I think we are in this fix because of a wrong education that our people have had. . . . If we had always taught the truth on this question, we would not have any trouble or shock in the denomination now. But the shock is because we have not taught the truth, and have put the Testimonies on a plane where she says they do not stand. We have claimed more for them than she did. *My thought is this, that the evidence of the inspiration is not in their verbal inspiration, but in their influence and power in the denomination.*²

Because the implications of Ellen White’s writing and publishing processes are now recognized, is it not time to be candid about the nature of her inspiration? Perversely enough, we may discover that one of our original assumptions about her was correct; there may be little—if any—essential difference between the Holy Spirit’s cultivation of the Bible, Ellen White, and many others in the history of faith.



Endemic sunflower trees in the highlands
on Santa Cruz Island, Galápagos

Where We Are

To understand the tensions between the more traditional understanding of inspiration troubling some 1919 participants, and the recent challenges to it, see the following officially approved quotations by Adventist leadership.

Interpreting the Scriptures properly is both a privilege and a humbling responsibility. The special focus of this chapter is to discover biblical and theological principles that relate to the place of faith, reason, spiritual powers and the Holy Spirit in the hermeneutical process. The following approach rests upon the concept that *the entire Bible is the propositional, infallible Word of God. It assumes that what the text meant originally is, in principle, what the text means for us today* [italics mine].³

Using military metaphorical language, Paul admonishes his hearers to bring “every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5, NKJV). The implication is that the teachings of Christ, as found in the Scriptures, are to be elevated in authority over competing claims of human reason. In other words, all thoughts, whether geological, philosophical or theological, will resonate with and thus be “captive to” the teaching of Christ.

Placing faith above reason in this fashion prepares the Christian to be willing to *deny the evidence of the human senses if empirical phenomena appear to dispute some teachings of Scripture* [italics mine].⁴

Dr. Frank Hasel warns that we cannot allow “evolutionary presuppositions” to color our understanding of the Bible. We must always see it as “supernatural,” meaning that each writer, copier, editor who contributed to Scripture must be seen as participating in a “supernatural process” each step of the way.⁵

Professor Fernando Canale puts it this way:

With the arrival of the modern and postmodern ages many Christians have concluded that the existence of a special cognitive revelation from God is impossible. Unfortunately, these theologians attempt to interpret Scripture from the assumption that it was written only by human beings. They are dogmatically persuaded that God cannot communicate knowledge to human beings. Scripture and theology, then, are the product of ever-changing human imaginations. Thus, these theologians deny Peter’s conviction that in Scripture we do not find myths but truths (2 Pet. 1:16).⁶

Dr. Angel Rodriguez, former director of the Biblical Research Institute of the General Conference, introduced a major publication on the Bible with these words:

This volume introduces the readers to a series of principles of biblical interpretation that is

compatible with the Adventist high view of the Bible as the Word of God. By including chapters dealing with the nature of revelation, inspiration, and the authority of the Bible, it reveals the scriptural presuppositions that Seventh-day Adventists bring to the text as they seek to obtain a better understanding of the Bible and of their own presuppositions.⁷

Lastly:

In general, however, those who hold to the historical-critical method would find it necessary to reject the idea that God imparted to the prophet specific objective knowledge regarding Himself, the nature of the world, and historical events. *Even if the historical critic accepted that possibility it would be necessary for him to verify it on the basis of historical science* [italics mine].⁸

Adventist Scholars Who Defend a Revised Approach to Scripture

Adventist scholars who defend what is called a “modified historical-critical approach” to inspiration recognize that it is a revision of the Church’s established position. While dozens of books and articles explaining the revision by well-known Adventist teachers are available,⁹ I wish to highlight three articles in *Spectrum*. The first was written by an Old Testament biblical scholar who taught at Southern Adventist University many decades ago, the second by a systematic theologian at Loma Linda School of Religion, and the third by a New Testament scholar who currently teaches at Washington Adventist University.

While teaching at Southern Adventist University, Jerry Gladson earned his doctorate from Vanderbilt University in Old Testament. In his article he outlines the tensions between scholars like himself and those resistant to any use of this method. He suggests that we can we selectively adopt the benefits of modern scholarship, *and* preserve biblical inspiration and authority.¹⁰ Gladson’s studies were initially bewildering, obliging him to question the General Conference position that “The historical-critical method minimizes the need for faith in God and obedience to His commandments . . . [and] de-emphasizes the divine element in the Bible as an inspired book.”¹¹

Flummoxed, Gladson asks: Is it really that dangerous?

Are we justified in all the ado we are making over historical criticism? Is there something we can find in the method which will help us in our mission? Or must we totally reject it out of hand as a tool of the devil to distract and confuse our faith in Scripture?¹²

He reviews its historical rise and then clarifies, in his view, what “critical” does and does not mean to scholarship.

Criticism in biblical study does not mean an attack on the Bible. Rather, to cite the dictionary, it signifies the “art, skill, or profession of making discriminating judgments and evaluations, esp. of literary or other artistic works. *Historical criticism means to make careful and discriminating historical judgments about the biblical text.*”¹³

If users of the method arbitrarily dismiss those parts of Scripture that testify to divine activity, that is a separate issue and can be rejected. No Adventist supports a method that limits historical events to the “natural” alone. At issue for Adventism is whether or not the current “propositional” model of God’s revelation emerges from the Bible itself. There can be no doubt the Bible contains miraculous reports. Gladson’s focus is on the “critical” task of comparing the *literary conventions of ancient documents with scriptural documents*.

For instance, ancient documents were more commonly shaped by the community than by single individuals, so modern ideas of strict authorship do not fit well with ancient texts; even sacred documents were commonly edited; reinterpretation and typological assignment frequently took place.

These literary conventions at work in the Bible are discovered by comparing the Bible with ancient nonbiblical documents. Such investigations help us see if there is objective evidence of similar literary conventions in the Bible. *In the same way we examine the literary customs of Ellen White’s day and then peer into her corpus to see to what extent she has followed them* [italics mine].¹⁴

Is there room for divine transcendence operating in and through them? Is there room for inspiration operating in, through, and under ancient literary conventions? This is the real issue at stake.¹⁵

Gladson laments that Adventist scholars must claim they do not use the “new” method if they wish to mine it for its rich insights. He refers to Dr. George Rice’s illuminating study of Luke, which offered new insights into that Gospel,¹⁶ and still received some negative reactions.

Loma Linda University professor Richard Rice mirrors Gladson’s concerns. The fundamentalist view of inspiration (“The Bible alone, and the Bible in its entirety, is the Word of God written and is therefore inerrant in

its autographs”¹⁷), while technically extreme for Adventist conservatives, still has an appeal to them: namely, the *aura* of “inerrancy.”

While Adventists typically avoid the expression “inerrancy,” a good deal of the language and logic employed by those who advocate inerrancy appears in Adventist discussions of biblical interpretation. Notable examples include the document “Bible Study: Presuppositions, Principles and Method” voted by the 1986 Annual Council, and Richard M. Davidson’s essay on “Biblical Interpretation,” which appears in the *Handbook of Seventh-Day Adventist Theology*. Both documents affirm God’s direct influence on the authors of biblical writings and insist that human reason must stand under the authority of the Bible. Most importantly, they reject historical criticism and insist that any reliance on its methods is inappropriate for Adventist Bible scholarship.¹⁸

Professor Olive Hemmings, our third scholar, has written more recently, not about the method itself, but about the Bible.

“All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction” (2 Tim. 3:16, NRSV). A large and influential sector of Christendom tends to make claims for the Bible that it does not make for itself—claims that assert or even approach verbal inspiration. There is a particular world religion whose sacred text is said to have come directly from heaven to its single author. We should never be tempted to make such a claim for the Bible because it makes no such claim for itself. This does not in any way mean that the Bible is not inspired or supernatural. . . . Many have made the loose and irresponsible claim that the author of the Bible is God. Such statements tend to issue from a narrow view of inspiration that falls flat when one views it in light of the history and transmission of the manuscripts which comprise the Bible.¹⁹



An oasis amid the lava fields on Isabela Island

Why do so many Adventist scholars oppose *any form* (some insist they can define which ones are “safe”) of a “critical” approach? One can only surmise that if we allowed that some biblical materials were not written under a direct divine influence, it might lead to the intolerable view that “we have elevated human reason above the Bible,” or that *nothing supernatural* was involved. Neither assumption necessarily follows. We must not ignore the facts or bury our questions under presuppositions affirming faith alone. “A simple faith is not the faith of a simpleton.” Its robustness relies on honestly facing any and all challenges to it. The phrase “human reason or the Bible” pulls a grenade pin to halt discussion, and especially surfaces when biblical events do not seamlessly correspond with other records from a specific period.

Rice also remarks that earlier statements from the 1974 Bible Conference approved the “many positive results” of the Enlightenment (historical-critical) approach to history. Such methods have provided us with a “flood of light” on our background knowledge of the Bible.²⁰ He finally notes that *not all Adventist scholars agree with the official Methods of Bible Study Document, partly because some who contributed to that document follow it inconsistently.*

To more fully understand our challenge with the Bible, Rice (like Gladson, Fortin, and others) looks back to the 1919 Bible Conference disagreement. All concur that distancing the Church from our near-fundamentalist position on inspiration provides the sturdiest defense against challenges to Ellen White’s “authority.” Even General Conference President Elder Neal C. Wilson once acknowledged that “originality is not a test of inspiration.

... A prophet’s use of sources other than ‘visions’ does not invalidate or diminish the prophet’s authority.”²¹

A Better Understanding: Paul J. Achtemeier

Other conservative scholars support a modified view, which leaves room for our Adventist conviction that “inspiration” belongs to the Bible as well as Ellen White. Concerned that fundamentalist dogmatism would impede the biblical witness in the modern world, New Testament scholar Paul Achtemeier wrote:

The history of the church has shown clearly enough that to enter this realm [of “inspiration”] is to enter a place where passions run high and invective is close at hand. Yet perhaps there is a place for a book that seeks to express a conviction about the inspiration of Scripture that is able to accommodate the discoveries of modern scholars of the Bible. It is that place which this book seeks to fill.²²

He agrees that Christianity’s claim that the Bible is “inspired” (*as other historical documents are not*) distinguishes it from a number of philosophical and religious systems. Nonetheless, disputes over the meaning of “inspiration” have separated Lutherans from each other and altered the focus of major conservative seminaries. Imposing on the Bible our preconceived opinion about near-inerrancy (plenary or verbal) offers the Church no hope of agreement. Listening to the Bible itself is the only approach that offers a credible solution.

Why do so many Adventist scholars oppose *any form* (some insist they can define which ones are “safe”) of a “critical” approach? One can only surmise that if we allowed that some biblical materials were not written under a direct divine influence, it might lead to the intolerable view that “we have elevated human reason above the Bible,” or that *nothing supernatural* was involved.

What does “listening to the Bible itself” mean for the concept of inspiration? For starters, it affirms that God is speaking to His people *now* through the Bible. “All scripture is inspired [Greek, *theopneustos*, “God-breathed] by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.”

Achtemeier disputes fundamentalism’s claim that this passage provides a systematic, full-blown understanding of what occurred through inspiration. One believes the “words” alone are inspired, another the thoughts, and still another, in some mysterious sense, the human writers.

Toward a Credible View of Inspiration

The Spirit ecstatically seizes biblical writers and provides them either with words, thoughts, or some other form of supernatural “gifting.” All were inspired in the same way. He points to the obvious; a cursory reading of the Bible finds numerous exceptions to this model: poems, histories, proverbs, and Psalms, none of which suggest ecstatic, prophetic-like experiences in the writer(s). If that model cannot be applied to the *entire* Bible, it strains credulity to insist that if a perfect God is the source of Scripture, it too must be perfect: *One mistake nullifies all?*

Since “mistakes” exist, such “absolutism” is impossible. A common example is Peter’s denials of Jesus during His trial found in the Synoptic Gospels. To preserve biblical “perfection,” some suggest that Peter must have denied Jesus on three different occasions, a “too clever” sleight-of-hand for thoughtful readers. Few believe it’s plausible, because a *plausibility explaining the imperfect is more persuasive than the implausible explaining the “perfect.”*

Most scholars appreciate that the Bible was born and nurtured in pre-scientific cultures. For that reason, some parts of the Bible, more “helpful” to believers, may be judged “inspired” *in a different sense* than the prophetic model. The Psalmist praying from the depths of despair is inspired or moved to address God, not “hear” from God as the prophet does. God speaks nothing to him; he speaks everything to God. God is listening, not the prophet. If preserved by the Holy Spirit for canonical purposes, to encourage us when we despair, why can that not also be an “inspired” process?

If, as most scholars agree, the book of Job was not inspired within the prophetic tradition (supernaturally given words and ideas), not “historical” in our modern sense of that term, and yet still in the canon, a believer need not deny it was divinely intended. Notice the elements of one of the greatest literary creations of all time by all accounts. Silently sitting for days on end, Job’s accusers then question and berate him in remarkable poetry? He responds no less eloquently? Frustrated by the cruel injustice of his suffering, he demands Yahweh give him answers? He gets a response, but not the one he thought he deserved. “Behold my creative and redeeming glory in all its fullness and be content!”

This is clearly a contrived literary structure designed to help us understand that the human predicament offers no resolution to unjust suffering. An adequate divine response to Job’s impudent interrogation never emerges. When an awe-filled “revelation” is sent, Job falls back not on an explanation, but on hope and trust in God’s goodness. He learns, and thereby teaches us through the Spirit, that only a revelation of divine power, glory, and redeeming love will shield us from a collapsing faith. God can and will “fix” it all. And it is enough. Job’s author, like Shakespeare and others, likely used the historical events that overwhelmed a historic personage (think Julius



Sunset over a Santa Cruz Island beach

Photo: Bernice Davis

Caesar) and, aided by the Holy Spirit, gave us a profound, enduring understanding of Yahweh and human suffering, which has withstood the test of time. Why is that not “inspired”?

Fundamentalists insist that this view diminishes the so-called “high view of Scripture.” However, Achtemeier explains:

If some writings show a maximum “divine element” others show it as a minimum. If the level of truth in some writings is high, in others it is low. . . . Rather than being in its totality the revelation of God, it is instead the human record of that revelation, carrying with it, as such a record, all the ills to which human accounts are heir.²³

The phrase “human record of that revelation” is anathema to fundamentalist ears. Developed as early as the Reformation, Christians absorbed characterizations of Scripture that precluded the human, such as the “Revelation of God,” “the Word of God,” or the “Infallible Revelation of His Will.” Such uncompromising portrayals of the sacred writings reinforced the notion that each word and idea was “perfect,” even though the letter to the Hebrews implicitly asserts a less-than-perfect biblical revelation prior to God’s “full” disclosure in Christ.

In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through wisdom he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word (Heb. 1:1–3, NIV).

Achtemeier insists that biblical authority must not be sublimated to human achievement, knowledge, and experience. If it were, religious life and experience would not long survive. If one allows human knowledge and experience to be shaped primarily by the present, not the timeless, Scripture cannot be authoritative. Sidling up to “inerrancy,” even from a supposed distance, cannot succeed. Believers who respect scientific research and

biblical scholarship remain quiet, while unbelievers refuse to “hear” a gospel protected by naivety.

Oral and written ancient sources have contributed to the Bible,²⁴ as they have to other ancient writings. Varying accounts of the same events are quite likely due to the copying, editing, and transmission of those documents. Believers must be clear that the Bible is not meant to be a “typical” historical document. If it can use ancient astronomical “mistakes” (the sky is a dome with points of light in it) why must its history be free of error? Because it is *not* error free, it can be more helpful and authoritative to people of faith as they wrestle with the challenges of modern society. Achtemeier says:

First, the point of the biblical material is not primarily historical. It is primarily theological. Such historical accounts as there are, are told for the theological points they help to make. . . . Biblical materials are closer in intent to sermons than they are to textbooks of history. That is not to say that historical accounts are not present and that they are on occasion remarkably accurate. *It is simply to say that the traditions were formulated and the biblical books composed, not to pass on historical information, but to say something about the ways of God with humankind: in the Old Testament through the fate of the chosen people, in the New Testament with the nascent church. To try to make the Bible speak as a historical chronicle is therefore to pervert its intention and distort what it wants to convey [italics mine].*²⁵

Old material can be used in new ways and was used in new ways in the Bible.²⁶

Communal experience produced the Scriptures, including the personal and historical events in which God and the people interacted in a remarkable variety of ways. To limit biblical inspiration to individual experiences written and preserved for all time ignores the textual evidence. Any view of inspiration, therefore, must address the fact that there is an “interrelation of community and Scripture,”²⁷ that God’s activity is within history, and that God became a “wholly historical figure” in Jesus of Nazareth. “To make of Scripture something more supernatural and timeless than God’s own self-revelation

in his Son is surely to withdraw oneself from a serious consideration of the intention of Scripture.”²⁸

How then are we to understand how inspiration may be affirmed as the basis for scriptural authority? How can a human literature persuasively claim the authority of God?

[T]he reading or hearing of it does not necessarily lead to understanding it or accepting its witness as true. What to Paul was sober truth was to Festus sheer madness (Acts 26:24–25). Though the Sadducees revere the Torah, Jesus tells them they do not know the Scripture they themselves have read (Mark 12:24, 26).²⁹

Understanding that leads to faith requires the “inner testimony of the Holy Spirit.” Why else would a lifelong agnostic like C. S. Lewis read the Gospels for the first time and experience faith? It cannot be the words alone.

Unless inspiration continues to the reading and hearing of Scripture, Scripture remains a museum piece, of interest to antiquarians who want to affirm that at one time the Spirit of God inspired a collection of writings, whose present utility is no greater than that of any other object from the remote past. The continuing existence of the community of faith shows that in fact the Spirit has continued to inspire the reading of Scripture and hence inspiration must be understood as a continuing process, not one that ended when the last word of the last biblical book was penned.³⁰

Before Scripture was written down, believers were convinced of its truths in oral traditions, in its “hearing,” not its reading. Therefore, while Scripture itself owns a singular normative authority, there is also a continuing work of the Spirit’s inspiration in the proclamation of the Gospel through preaching, teaching, writing, and all forms of media.

Such interpretation for a new situation of the traditions of the faith is the same procedure by which Amos reinterpreted the traditions

of Israel’s election by God, or by which Jesus reinterpreted the Sermon on the Mount, or by which Paul reinterpreted the way the law had been understood by his religious contemporaries. . . . The inspiring presence of the Spirit, at work as the Scriptures were produced, continues to work as the traditions continue to summon forth responses to ever-new situations. The sermon is thus the essential continuation of the process begun with the foundational events from which the original traditions took their beginning. Preaching is therefore the oral act which repeats the origin of Scripture.³¹

Finally:

[The] Spirit which inspired Scripture has come to dwell in the church. . . . Insights must constantly be tested in and by the life of the community. A life in the twentieth century that exactly replicates a life in either the century before Christ or the first century after Christ would not be a life of faith—it would be a gross anachronism.³²

We should think carefully about assuming Scripture is not similar to the processes that defined Ellen White’s ministry. She too was and is part of a *communal process*. She too is a product of her own cultural milieu and should not be dismissed because she is less than “perfect” in matters unrelated to biblical faith.

If, as some conservative scholars concede, biblical authors used popular views of science in the message they delivered, then Ellen White should not be faulted for doing the same. How can either one be accused of “error” defined in the modern era? Moreover, while scriptural storywriters referred to “historical events” of divine activity and failed to authenticate them by modern standards, why should we be disappointed they reported the same episodes inaccurately? However, does that justify seeing the narrative as no more than an imaginative construct?

Yet, there is also a deeper issue here. It is apparent that the historical traditions contained in the scriptural materials are not so much intent

on reporting the past as they are on anticipating the future. History in the Bible is viewed from an eschatological angle of vision and is more interested in promises and their fulfillment than in sheer facticity of reporting. If history is the arena within which God is at work, a sheerly [*sic*] factual report would completely miss that dimension. . . . The intention of Scripture is to witness to realities larger than minute numerical accuracy.³³

How, then, are we to understand such considerations in terms of the authority of Scripture? On this issue, scholars who agree about inspiration do diverge in some respects. Achtemeier, for example, argues that the *locus of authority must be Jesus Himself*, the one to whom the documents point, and the one beyond Jesus who appointed Him. Believers who read the story of Jesus understand that He exercised “sovereign” authority over people, the forces of evil, and over nature itself.³⁴

Christ is the locus of authority, not primarily the texts that created the church. Like the first believers, the unbelievers who now come to faith experience the Christ of faith. No rational argument about the inerrancy of the canon or its historical reports can awaken that faith; it is the work of the Holy Spirit who still lives in the church. This means that the only “inspiration” we should cite as our authority is neither in the text itself nor in history, but in the astonishing fact that throughout history, the believing community was called into being by the oral and written word. First from Israel, modified in a crowning way by the story of Jesus, and continued in its faith by the written and proclaimed word to the present day! Where

is incontrovertible historical proof of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead? We do not believe because it can be historically verified. We believe because a sacrificial, magnificent community came into being *convinced* that “it” happened, and testified to it at the risk of their lives. Their *faith* gave us the experience of the risen Christ who now lives in us. Their story is like no other in its capacity to awaken reverence and faith.

Where Are We Now?

Therefore, while inspiration (in all its dimensions) continues and thrives in the contemporary church through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, it obviously cannot (and should not) command the normative authority belonging to the Bible. Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, Wesley (and Ellen White) have evidenced their own “Spirit-inspiration” by guiding and strengthening the church in the new communities they guided. Their ministry appropriately enjoys a lesser authority than the Bible, but an authority, nonetheless. They are “formative”³⁵ of the ongoing Christian communities they helped establish and, in some cases (if not all), the entire Christian church, but they cannot be “normative” for all Christians in all times. That authority belongs solely to the Scriptures.

Paul Achtemeier’s conviction that aspects of historical-critical scholarship are helpful to Christian living ought to resonate with scholars not mired in fundamentalism. We can believe in divine revelation within Scripture, even as we differ on how biblical authority and inspiration should be conceived. No relatively conservative Christian scholars, from James Barr to Dewey Beegle, deny that while there are many authors, contributors, and editors to the Bible, behind it all is a single reality:

Job’s author, like Shakespeare and others, likely used the historical events that overwhelmed a historic personage (think Julius Caesar) and, aided by the Holy Spirit, gave us a profound, enduring understanding of Yahweh and human suffering, which has withstood the test of time. Why is that not “inspired”?

The Bible is in its origin a *product* of the believing community. Modern biblical study has made this much more plain to us than it ever could have been in the past. Traditional doctrines of Scripture suggested to Christians over many centuries that the Bible was a message *from* God to the believing community. . . . If the Holy Spirit is willing to authenticate the message of very fallible servants, how much more will he authenticate the extant manuscripts and translations!³⁶

“[T]he attempt to found and maintain a church which will keep strictly to a pure fundamentalism seems doomed to disappointment, for there is no such church, however extreme its conservatism, which does not harbor fears that some of its members, its ministers and its professors may be tainted with liberalism, no fundamentalist body or institution in which there is not some element of compromise, some minor concession perhaps to biblical criticism or some admission perhaps that mankind did not begin with a single man Adam.³⁷

No discerning reader can fail to see the potential earthquake for Adventism if our current leadership decides to face what 1919 leaders would not. Silence can no longer protect us. If we are to remain a cohesive fellowship, time, patience, prayer, and charity are demanded. Are we up to it?³⁸

As I see it, G. B. Thompson’s plea to the 1919 Bible Conference, cited by Fortin in his essay, still points the way forward:

It seems to me that if we are going to preach the Testimonies and establish confidence in them, it does not depend on whether they are verbally inspired or not. I think we are in this fix because of a wrong education that our people have had. . . . If we had always taught the truth on this question, we would not have any trouble or shock in the denomination now. But the shock is because we have not taught the truth, and have put the Testimonies on a plane where she says they do not stand. We have

claimed more for them than she did. *My thought is this, that the evidence of the inspiration is not in their verbal inspiration, but in their influence and power in the denomination.*³⁹

We can be confident that the Holy Spirit cares about the Advent movement and the gospel message. By allowing that Spirit to guide us, Jesus assures us we may meet our challenges honestly and faithfully.

I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you (John 16:12–14, NIV).

Can we believe Jesus’s promise to help us tell our people? Will the Spirit be allowed to guide us to a better understanding of inspiration?

Endnotes

1. Denis Fortin, “I Have Had To Adjust My View of Things,” *Spectrum* 48, no. 1: 17–18.
2. Fortin, “I Have Had To Adjust My View of Things,” 21.
3. John T. Baldwin, “Faith, Reason and the Holy Spirit in Hermeneutics,” in *Understanding Scripture: An Adventist Approach*, ed. George W. Reid (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2006), 15. Note the phrase “propositional” and “infallible” Word of God. What can that mean other than that, in its entirety and in each particular, these terms define the Bible?
4. Baldwin, “Faith, Reason and the Holy Spirit,” 17.
5. Frank M. Hasel, “Presuppositions in the Interpretation of Scripture,” in *Understanding Scripture: An Adventist Approach*, ed. George W. Reid (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2006), 27–46. As we will see, there is no evidence that every contributor to Scripture participated “in a supernatural process every step of the way.” Using the phrase “evolutionary presuppositions” is misleading, almost prejudicially attached to Darwin. If the Gospel According to Luke begins by identifying a research and interview process for his recipient, Hasel wants us to assume that every step of that effort was “supernatural.” If otherwise, he “assumes” that it cannot be normative for the believers. There is no good reason to assume that.
6. Fernando Canale, “Revelation and Inspiration,” in *Understanding Scripture: An Adventist Approach*, ed. George W. Reid (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2006), 47. It should be noted that many scholars do not support the translation or the view of this text which suggests that “inspiration of God”

for Scripture refers to any truths unrelated to the awakening of faith in the community. Science and historical accuracy in every particular are not essential to the meaning of this passage.

7. Angel Rodriguez, *Understanding Scripture: An Adventist Approach*, ed. George W. Reid (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2006), ix. Please note: “Seventh-day Adventists bring to the text . . . their own presuppositions.” Does this approach allow us to adequately honor what the Bible reveals as we read it? Doesn’t this deductive approach rule out taking seriously what the text reveals about its nature? Why is “inductive” thinking not even permitted?

8. E. Edward Zinke, *Historical Criticism*, Biblical Research Institute. <https://adventistbiblicalresearch.org/materials/bible-interpretation-hermeneutics/historical-criticism>

9. Of particular significance are the lifelong contributions of Professor Alden Thompson from Walla Walla University. He has published several books and articles that have been immensely helpful to Adventists.

10. Jerry Gladson, “Taming Historical Criticism: Adventist Biblical Scholarship in the Land of Giants,” *Spectrum* 18, no. 4: 19–34. Other scholars who, in various ways, made the same plea, include John Brunt, “How My Mind Has Changed and Remained the Same with Regard to Biblical Interpretation,” *Spectrum* 34, no. 3 (Summer 2006), republished in *Spectrum* (May 31, 2017); Otilie F. Stafford, “The Bible as Visionary Power,” *Spectrum* 13, no. 2 (December 1982).

11. Gladson, “Taming Historical Criticism,” 19.

12. Gladson, “Taming Historical Criticism,” 20.

13. Gladson, “Taming Historical Criticism,” 20.

14. Gladson, “Taming Historical Criticism,” 22.

15. Gladson, “Taming Historical Criticism,” 23.

16. George E. Rice, *Luke, A Plagiarist?* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1983).

17. Richard Rice, “Inerrancy, Adventism, and Church Unity,” *Spectrum* 42, no. 1 (Winter 2014): 10.

18. Rice, “Inerrancy, Adventism, and Church Unity,” 11–12.

19. Olive J. Hemmings, “The Bible: Paradigm of Liberation, Miracle of Amazing Grace,” *Spectrum* website, April 9, 2020. <https://spectrummagazine.org/sabbath-school/2020/bible-paradigm-liberation-miracle-amazing-grace>

20. Rice, “Inerrancy, Adventism, and Church Unity,” 12.

21. Rice, “Inerrancy, Adventism, and Church Unity,” 14. One would do well to read his entire article since it aptly illustrates the confusion at the General Conference level (as well as in our churches) on how to read the Bible for the greatest blessings it offers.

22. Paul J. Achtemeier, *Inspiration and Authority? Nature and Function of Christian Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1999), foreword to the 1st edition—no page number.

23. Achtemeier, *Inspiration and Authority?*, 30.

24. Achtemeier, *Inspiration and Authority?*, 64–79. For a current Adventist example of using an early source to illuminate the Scriptures see Dr. Jean Sheldon’s *Spectrum* digital essay on the Daniel 2 Sabbath School Quarterly Lesson entitled “The Image and the Rock,” January 14, 2020. I quote: “Modern scholars refer to dream divination as the science of oneiromancy. Various

Babylonian works relate how the gods (not always just the dream god) gave revelations to human beings through dreams. Perhaps the most well-known story relates how Ea sent a dream to Atrahasis, the Babylonian Noah, in which Ea foretells a flood (to the reed hut in which Atrahasis slept) that would wipe out humanity and instructs the building of a boat from the reeds of the reed house. By giving Atrahasis the gods’ secret of the flood to the reed hut, the one man in it will overhear the instructions and preserve humanity.”

25. Achtemeier, *Inspiration and Authority?*, 65–66.

26. Achtemeier, *Inspiration and Authority?*, 69–76.

27. Achtemeier, *Inspiration and Authority?*, 79.

28. Achtemeier, *Inspiration and Authority?*, 82.

29. Achtemeier, *Inspiration and Authority?*, 122–123.

30. Achtemeier, *Inspiration and Authority?*, 123–124.

31. Achtemeier, *Inspiration and Authority?*, 128–129 passim.

32. Achtemeier, *Inspiration and Authority?*, 131, passim.

33. Achtemeier, *Inspiration and Authority?*, 133–134.

34. Achtemeier, *Inspiration and Authority?*, 142.

35. A felicitous expression used by both Herold Weiss and Ron Graybill when contrasting Ellen White’s function in the Church to that of the Scriptures.

36. Dewey M. Beegle, *Scripture, Tradition and Infallibility* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1973), 308.

37. James Barr, *Fundamentalism* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1978), 113.

38. Just one example should make this clear: Some may ask how the importance of the Sabbath can be justified without a literal creation week? That does not trouble me or many I know who believe it can be, but it is only one of dozens of questions to be addressed. To transition to a stronger theological and spiritual future, pastors, members, administrators, teachers, and academics, will need the freedom to disagree without arousing suspicion. And yes, the Fundamental Beliefs will need to be reexamined without calling the loyalty of pastors and leaders into question.

39. Fortin, “I Have Had To Adjust My View of Things,” 21.



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Adventists



AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Adventist Writing

ON ENVIRONMENTALISM AND CONSERVATION

BY DAVID F. GARNER

What attitudes and ideas have Seventh-day Adventists historically held toward environmentalism and conservation? We must be careful asking such questions because our founders and the denomination itself existed before concepts of environmental conservation were popular. The modern conservation movement did not grow in earnest until the twentieth century, and modern notions of environmentalism until the 1970s. Nevertheless, asking this question is vital to understand how Adventists in modern times should address these issues.

In many ways, the lives of those living in the early nineteenth century had a much smaller ecological footprint than the average person today. They did not drive CO₂ spewing cars and hand made nearly everything they owned. The founders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church lived before or near the start of the second, and much more significant, industrial revolution. The modern environmental conservation movement and its values are primarily a result of the destruction left in the wake of this second industrial revolution. So, these negative effects were not known to those living in the first half of the nineteenth century. To impose our modern concepts of

environmental preservation and “green” living on people of past centuries is erroneous.

With that understanding, we can begin to probe their ideas and theology to discover how modern ideas of conservation and environmentalism align with how they understood the Bible, the earth, and their relation to it. Then we can proceed to discover how Adventists have historically reacted to and addressed the concerns raised by the environmental movement in the twentieth century.

In surveying Adventist writings addressing this topic, it becomes clear our denomination has not prioritized environmental issues as highly as others such as lifestyle, education, and financial stewardship. But care for the environment has been in our theology since the beginning and our Church has not been silent on this topic. The Church has taken steps to address modern environmental concerns, although not through means typically employed by the modern environmental movement. Historically, the environmental conservation movement has principally consisted of promoting governmental and political strategies, along with broadly educating the public on the negative impact we have had on nature since the industrial revolution began. The approach of the mainstream

environmental movement could be called a corporate approach and has historically focused on political activism and governmental legislation. The approach the Seventh-day Adventist Church has followed could be called a personal approach.

Since its early days, the Adventist Church has promoted lifestyle choices that are environmentally friendly, including a vegetarian diet, living frugally, shunning materialism, and maintaining frequent contact with the natural world. Adventist authors from the founders to the present day have explicated the benefits of contact with nature for the whole person, including physical, mental, and spiritual aspects. However, the environmental favorability of these practices was not by the design of the Church's pioneers or later leaders. Rather, by seeking to live according to God's standards of stewardship and following the example of Jesus in seeking close contact with God in nature, the founders inadvertently lived and taught environmentally friendly practices. Thus, we see a Christian lifestyle is environmentally friendly. This is by God's design rather than that of a church organization. The Church pioneers simply sought to follow God's principles of stewardship as laid out in Scripture.

The Adventist Church has employed other means to help preserve our environment for the benefit of humanity. For example, in 1976, Loma Linda University offered their first master's degree in public environmental health. This seems to be the first of its kind within the Adventist education system. The degree program set out to train "men and women how to control and improve living conditions in today's crowded, complex world." The timing of this degree offering is partly in response to the environmental movement that exploded in the late 1960s and early 1970s. This is evident through the language used to advertise the new program, which blatantly admitted the dire environmental problems of the era. The ad began, "Population growth and thoughtless damage to the environment threaten the health of man—indeed, his very existence on earth. Skilled persons are needed immediately to solve the monumental problems of air, water, and land pollution in both developed and developing countries."¹

Other efforts have been present within our Church in various areas, including other degree programs, programs to promote sustainable living and farming practices through overseas missions, and through environmental



The rock window at Egas Port on Santiago Island

To impose our modern concepts of environmental preservation and "green" living on people of past centuries is erroneous.

education for students in the Adventist education system at every level down to kindergarten.

The pioneers of the Seventh-day Adventist Church held two ideas in prominence. The first was the sacredness of Saturday as the Sabbath as laid out in the Ten Commandments. They believed the Sabbath was designed by God as a weekly celebration of creation. God identifies Himself as Creator in the fourth Commandment, “the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is” (Ex. 20:11). The second idea was that of the importance of health. Paul declared, “your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor. 6:19).

These two ideas, supported by other biblical texts, led them to put a high emphasis on human closeness with nature. They frequently promoted activity in the sunshine and fresh air to boost health and draw the mind to God. It became so central to their ideology that they built their institutions, schools, and hospitals in rural areas surrounded by much nature.

The first major educational institution opened by the Adventists was Battle Creek College. It opened its doors in 1874. Church leaders purchased a 12-acre tract near the Battle Creek Sanitarium. Feeling they did not need so much property for school buildings, they sold off five acres immediately, feeling the remaining was enough. Ellen White was out of town traveling in California at the time of the purchase and resale. Upon her return and realizing what happened, she is said to have wept. Selling off the extra land was a poor decision in her eyes. In vision she was shown that the school should have large grounds and be in a rural setting to provide plenty of land for students to enjoy and work gardens on. This was the recipe she later laid out for all future Adventist schools.²

Gardens and closeness with nature were not only for Adventist institutions. Individual Adventist families have been repeatedly encouraged to move out of the cities, “that the children might be saved.”³ The goal was to foster spiritual as well as physical health. Church leaders encouraged their members to get outside and exercise in the fresh air. More than that, they petitioned them to move out of the city and into the country to avoid demoralizing influences.

In 1876, Ellen White said:

To live in the country would be very beneficial

to them [children]; an active, out-of-door life would develop health of both mind and body. They should have a garden to cultivate, where they might find both amusement and useful employment. The training of plants and flowers tends to the improvement of taste and judgment, while an acquaintance with God’s useful and beautiful creations has a refining and ennobling influence upon the mind, referring it to the Maker and Master of all.⁴

The first to be considered a Sabbath-keeping Adventist was Captain Joseph Bates. He became a vegetarian in 1843, shortly after accepting the Millerite teachings. He was convinced of this move by the writings of Rev. Sylvester Graham (namesake of the graham cracker). Graham’s dietary advice was primarily health motivated, but he also condemned the cruelty of raising and killing animals for food. He wrote, “Stain not the divine gentleness of your natures by one spark of cruelty to the creatures beneath you. Heaven, to protect them, hath placed you at their head! Be not treacherous to the important trust you hold, by murdering those you ought to preserve!”⁵

This sentiment no doubt resonated with Captain Bates. Bates was responsible for converting the Whites to his beliefs in the Sabbath and a vegetarian diet. Ellen White also read Graham thoroughly. A copy of his book can still be seen in her personal library today. Throughout her writings she emphasizes kindness toward animals. She wrote the following in a letter in 1868:

A man cannot be a Christian and allow his temper to fire up at any little accident or annoyance that he may meet, and show that Satan is in him in the place of Jesus Christ. The passionate belaboring [beating] of animals or the disposition to show he is master is often exhibited toward God’s creatures in the streets. This is venting their own anger or impatience upon helpless objects which show they are superior to their masters. They bear all without retaliation. Children, be kind to dumb animals. Never cause them pain unnecessarily. Educate yourselves to habits of kindness. Then it will

become habitual. I will send you a clipping from a paper and you can decide if some dumb beasts are not superior to some men who have allowed themselves to become brutish by their cruel course of action to dumb animals.⁶

James and Ellen White initially switched to a primarily vegetarian diet after her first vision on health in 1863. Mrs. White occasionally ate meat when other food was difficult to come by for most of her life, up to 1894. After giving a lecture in Australia about health, a Catholic woman went up to her and asked if she still ate meat. Upon learning Mrs. White did on occasion, she fell to her knees and tearfully begged Mrs. White to consider the suffering caused to animals by the slaughterhouses and industrial farms. White reported she never again touched it.⁷

Concern for the treatment of animals became a part of the Adventist argument in favor of vegetarianism. In one 1865 pamphlet, H. C. Jackson, an Adventist doctor, wrote,

It is quite bad enough to eat meats at all, however favorable the conditions of health in which animals are placed while living; but to take an ox, sheep, or swine, and shut him up in a dark place, ill-ventilated, and where exercise is impossible, and thus keep him for months, in order to fit him to be eaten by man, is so thoroughly monstrous to one's moral sense as to admit of no justification whatever.⁸

Similar arguments can be seen throughout Adventist publications over the past 175 years.⁹

Treatment of animals also became a moral issue for Ellen White. She wrote of how Jesus treated animals as a child. Ellen White said of Jesus, "Mary often remonstrated with Jesus, and urged Him to conform to the usages of the rabbis. But He could not be persuaded to change His habits of contemplating the works of God and seeking to alleviate the suffering of men or even of dumb animals."¹⁰

Youth ministry workers seized on this idea to teach children that kindness toward animals is a proper Christian virtue. A special effort was made in youth publications to convey this idea. This goes back to the earliest days of Adventist publication ministry. Examples can be found

as early as the 1870s. M. R. Cady, in the *Youth Instructor*, pointed out that God made the animals to be companions to humans. "In return, man was to treat the animals with the spirit of kindness and love."¹¹

An unknown author dedicated an entire article to this topic titled "Kindness To Animals." He instructed, "It is very wrong to torment them or to keep food away from them. God has given them to us, to help make our homes pleasant, our work easy, and to supply many wants of our lives. And in return for these things, he wants us to treat them kindly."¹²

Another article in the *Youth Instructor* recounted the story of Edward F. Fowler, "missionary to horses." Edward was lauded as a hero. For what? He was a hero because he spent his life advocating for more humane treatment of laboring horses. His greatest accomplishment was convincing several large cities in Europe to replace cobblestone streets with a smoother paving material. He argued the bumpy cobble stone made pulling carts a torturous task for horses as they bounced up and down on every paving stone.¹³

Adventists' instructions on kind treatment were not only for pets or domestic animals. They also strove to teach children that wild animals should be treated with kindness. In one example written in the moral-tale style common to the nineteenth century, an older sister suggests to her younger brother that they should keep their youngest sister in a cage. Throughout their dialogue the brother protests how cruel that would be. In an instructive tone the older sister finally asks the brother, if he knows little sister would not like it, why does he keep the wild animals he catches in a cage? She asks him if they would not be happier free to live with their fellow animals?¹⁴

As early environmental writers made the public aware of threats to nature at large, Adventists quickly took notice. Writers such as John Muir, John Burroughs, Aldo Leopold, and others, brought concerns of disappearing wilderness and polluted waterways to the attention of readers in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Theodore Roosevelt started the National Parks System in 1916 to help preserve natural areas. Adventist writers in this time, and throughout the twentieth century, were overwhelmingly positive toward the efforts of environmental conservation. Although they have rarely encouraged governmental or political action to enforce conservation, Adventist writers have mostly

As the early environmental writers drew national attention to humanity's duty to be good stewards of the earth and its resources, Adventists increasingly strove to educate their readers of their duty as stewards of the land.



A frigate bird, known as the pirate of the Galápagos for stealing the eggs of other birds

Photo: Gerald Wraslow

reacted positively towards such measures. When State or Federal governments have set aside land preserves, Adventists were appreciative.

These early environmental writers helped Adventists see the importance of protecting the land and promoting good stewardship of nature. Adventist writers in the late nineteenth century were already aware of the Bible's instruction that we are stewards of all God's gifts, including the land. A. G. Daniells wrote in 1899: "Christ as owner of the world and all that pertains to it has made man steward over His possessions."¹⁵ They practiced and taught the biblical principles of agriculture for farming that helped to maintain the health and productivity of the soil in the long term.¹⁶ These early statements represent a rare occurrence. Stewardship of the land was a topic Adventists held as significant, yet rarely addressed in print or conversation.

As the early environmental writers drew national attention to humanity's duty to be good stewards of the earth and its resources, Adventists increasingly strove to educate their readers of their duty as stewards of the land. In a 1929 adult Sabbath School Quarterly, it was illustrated how the tithing system of the Old Testament reminded the Hebrews they were owners of nothing, not even the land. God required one-tenth of all that the land produced, including crops, livestock, and even oil. This was a constant reminder of their position as stewards who paid tribute to the owner, God.¹⁷

A 1929 book by LeRoy Edwin, *Stewardship In Its Larger Aspects*, attributed the very idea of individual property ownership to pagan religious philosophy. The

author credits the concept to impersonal pagan deities who had little to no regard for the affairs of this life. This idea has become entrenched in Western philosophy and law thanks to the influence of Roman law. The author believes we have used this idea to excuse our abuse of the land and given no thought to the claims of God as true owner.¹⁸

The concept of land stewardship sounds very modern and innovative in the twenty-first century, as this point of land abuse is often made by environmentalists today. Yet Adventists have been making this critique for decades. They have a long tradition of criticizing the excesses and materialism in modern society. At times they have even denounced environmentalists for being too cautious in their conservation. In one article they even critiqued John Muir for not going far enough in his conservation philosophy.¹⁹

In a 1945 issue of *The Journal of True Education*, an article by Margaret Drown was published on the importance of teaching children an appreciation for nature. The author gave the following as a key reason, "A knowledge of natural resources and wildlife creates an interest in them and a desire to protect them. Future citizens must know the need for conservation and learn what they themselves can do about it."²⁰

In 1946, likely with the destruction of WWII fresh in his mind, Ellis Colson declared in the *Northern Union Outlook*, "Man holds a steward relationship to God for the land, the animals, the resources and the wealth of the world, but most men, in their conquest for wealth and power, have forgotten their dependency upon God."²¹

During the Progressive Era, nature study became commonplace among public schools. Adventists embraced this trend enthusiastically as an opportunity to educate children how to see the Creator in nature and to teach spiritual lessons like stewardship. Numerous “nature study” books were recommended and advertised throughout Adventist publications, starting in the late 1800s.²² Books on scientific nature study, as well as biblical nature study that used nature to teach spiritual lessons, were popular. In fact, Adventists have never lost their enthusiasm for these kinds of books and media. Nature-based content can be found today in Adventist publications such as youth magazines, Adventist TV programs, VBS programs, summer camps, and schools.

Adventists have frequently promoted the idea that we should learn useful lessons from nature: practical, moral, spiritual, general life lessons. In *The Bible Echo*, an article was dedicated entirely to describing the majesty and awe-inspiring power of mountains. It then discussed the significance of mountains in the Bible.²³ Adventists realized that creation was meant to be a revelation of God’s character. In an outdoor sermon overlooking a peaceful grove and lake, Ellen White said, “such scenes should be sacredly regarded by us.” She reminded her hearers that Jesus frequently taught in such settings. “He had special reasons for choosing these natural sanctuaries; the familiar objects of nature were thus presented to the eyes of his hearers, and he used those objects to simplify his teachings.”²⁴ What a contrast to modern times where the artificial indoor sanctuary is regarded with greater reverence than the natural outdoor sanctuary.

A 1907 article in *Good Health* claimed in a bold title that nature is, “Our Natural Birthright.” It stated,

Nature is yours to enjoy, could you but realize it. For you the thrush sings, and the violets bloom, and the trees put on their spring robes of daintiest green. For you the sun shines, and the refreshing showers come down and water the earth. But you need a heart to appreciate and understand this beauty, and you need observing eyes to see it. You need to cultivate the outdoor spirit and endeavor as far as possible to bring it into your daily work.²⁵

This sentiment in no way was meant to embolden or justify selfish use and destruction of nature, but to increase personal appreciation and a desire to enjoy nature.

One of the biggest reasons Adventists were enthusiastic about nature was the health benefits it offered. Along with promotion of the health benefits of vegetarianism, was the promotion of outdoor activity, especially in the garden. It was stated in *Health, or How to Live*, Mrs. White’s first major publication on health from 1865, that, “The healthiness of a dwelling is increased very considerably, by allowing to it a capacious [large] yard, which may either be well paved, laid down in grass, or cultivated as a flower garden.”²⁶ As previously mentioned, this became the ideal standard for all Seventh-day Adventist institutions.

Adventist theology led them to understand, “it is God’s Word, continually spoken to the earth, that makes the harvest.”²⁷ Out of this understanding flowed a logical progression that participation in the process of growing food would bring Christians closer to God. Thus, from its infancy, Adventism has strongly promoted gardening, which offered a practical means of exercise that bore a usable end-product.

Missionary gardens were promoted heavily throughout the late nineteenth century as the most expedient method of doing this. Missionary gardens were popular and heavily encourage in Seventh-day Adventist publications for both adults and youth. These gardens could be grown on your property or on a “vacant lot” near your home. The intention was to sell the crops and donate the money to medical mission work. Many goals were accomplished at once by the missionary garden; outdoor exercise in fresh air improved personal health while also producing a cash crop that could support you and the extra proceeds donated to the Lord’s work. In 1897, J. H. Kellogg wrote in *The Indicator*, “The spare hours spent in the cultivation of such a crop [for mission work] may be as truly hours of communion with God as a church service or a prayer meeting.”²⁸ But gardens were not just for those in the country or used to hard labor. Several articles offered praise of window gardens in city apartments and homes.²⁹ One 1920 issue of *Good Health*, an Adventist health magazine, advocated gardening as a hobby for the average city woman.³⁰

The rise of Pathfinders gives an interesting window into the stewardship philosophy of Seventh-day Adventists.

The Boy Scouts came to the United States in 1911 and spread like wildfire. From the outset, the Boy Scouts placed an emphasis on ethics and stewardship when using outdoor spaces. It taught much stricter standards than those practiced by the typical camper of the time. It taught an appreciation and respect for wild places. Camping was fast becoming a favorite pastime in the United States, which aided the spread of Boy Scouts. Adventist Youth workers quickly adopted both of these trends and immediately saw the value to youth ministry and to imparting Christian and especially Adventist values. While other Protestant denominations also quickly noticed this and started Boy Scout troops in their local church, Adventist youth workers soon felt Boy Scouts did not emphasize Christian teachings as much as they would like.

So, Adventists became one of the first churches to start their own spin-off of the Scouts, Pathfinders. They also wanted girls to have the lessons and so created co-ed clubs. Camping was a central part of Pathfinder groups as early as 1926, as was nature study.³¹ This has always been a central aspect of the program. In fact, “nature” is the largest category of Pathfinder honors today.

Pathfinder programs rapidly spread to many conferences because Adventists have always held a high view of nature. We have often pointed to nature as evidence of God’s character and for lessons on how to become more like Him. Thus, Pathfinders was a natural application of these ideas. Not only were Adventists one of the earliest denominations to adopt a Boy Scout-like program, but they have also been one of the most successful. Pathfinders has a presence in the most countries worldwide, and the largest membership of any similar program the author could identify.³²

Long before minimalism was trendy, Adventists were raising awareness of modern societies’ wastefulness. Throughout its history, the Church has emphasized living a simple life that does not overindulge in materialism. This comes from one of Christ’s most basic teachings, “lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven” (Matt. 6:20). In a critique that sounds surprisingly modern, one author said, more than a hundred years ago, “Civilized peoples have been too prosperous for their own good, and in almost every stratum of society there has been excessive eating and drinking and unnecessary and inexcusable waste.”³³

In a 1910 article in *Christian Education*, titled “True School Economy,” H. G. Lucas, an academy principle, gives advice on how to operate an Adventist school. Among his top advice is, “Do not waste water. Avoid waste in feeding cattle and horses. Avoid waste in fuel.”³⁴ He desired schools to run economically to better carry out their mission to offer affordable Christian education.

As environmental concerns became a prominent issue in the mid-twentieth century, Adventists addressed these topics more frequently. A 1950 article in *The Signs of the Times* warned, “Today’s industrial world is stranger than the fiction of yesteryear. Lamentably, in far too many instances, the wizardry of shop and factory is used to corrupt, pollute and destroy.”³⁵

In a surprisingly insightful article by *Audubon News*, quoted in the *Youth’s Instructor*, and published a full year ahead of Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring*, it was stated that,

Plants are the first link in every food chain. Insects eat plants, but other insects and many animals help control insect numbers. They do it better, and cheaper—we are learning—than man can do it with insecticides. Increasingly, scientists are urging that we let nature do as much of the job of controlling pests as possible. Every plant and animal plays a role in regulating nature’s world. Man is left to regulate himself. Since his actions could deplete the natural world of its riches, he has to think of the future and leave enough for the generations of men to follow.³⁶

The significance of the timing of this article is that Rachel Carson’s book is credited with single-handedly starting the modern environmental movement. Her book made similar points about avoiding insecticides and led to the banning of DDT, the most widely used insecticide at the time. It brought concerns about environmental degradation and mass pollution from chemical farming into the public spotlight. It made going green trendy. Adventists later recommended her book to readers. Additionally, in 1973, Pathfinder leadership at the General Conference released an honor titled Environmental Conservation. Its requirements include studying the effects of pollution and reading and drafting a book report on Carson’s *Silent Spring*.

A different writer gives us more insight into Adventists' understanding of humanity's relationship to nature. Arthur L. Bietz said,

To believe in God as the Creator is to root creation in love as revealed in Jesus. Jesus shows us that the purpose of Creation is holy love, and that His holy love is also the final cause of Creation. In Jesus Christ the ideal reason for Creation is disclosed. The Old Testament narrative of Creation must be understood from the viewpoint of love as it is seen in Jesus in order for it to have meaning. The purpose of the Creation truth is not to provide an argument but to point to a relationship of love with God.³⁷

This explains why Adventists have long put a high emphasis on looking to nature as God's other revelation about Himself. It is second only to the Bible.

As the modern environmental movement became a hot-button political topic in the 1970s, Adventists were sympathetic. When addressing this topic, they confined their influence to writing about the negative health results of pollution. They chose a semi-separatist approach and rarely joined the public discourse on solutions. They did at times educate readers on ways to minimize pollution in their own homes to benefit personal health, but even this was rare. When asked why they did not do more to combat major environmental concerns, Mervyn Maxwell responded, "Adventists are trying to meet people's practical needs; yet they have not become officially involved in the anti-pollution crusade. Why not? Because one denomination cannot do everything effectively."³⁸

While one author's opinion does not represent the whole of Adventism, his response does portray a wider

trend of separation since the 1970s from the mainstream environmental conservation movement. This seems odd given the Adventist commitment to its health message and especially to the Sabbath as a memorial of creation. Celeste Ryan Blyden, a life-long Adventist, summed it up well: "Of all God's people, it seems odd that we would be so silent on the issue. Yet I have not heard one sermon, seen one magazine or Adventist television program, or read any Sabbath School lessons on the topic."³⁹

Adventists have historically chosen to focus a lot of attention on discussing stewardship of money. This is even more true today. Stewardship Ministries, a department of the North American Division tasked with educating church members in stewardship, provides insight in its mission statement, "Our mission is to inspire God's people to fund the message of Hope and Wholeness."⁴⁰ Their primary purpose is to educate members on the importance of paying tithes and offerings into the Church. One might wonder if "stewardship ministries" has simply become a means by which the Church seeks out more money. Stewardship, as defined by numerous Adventist publications, encompasses everything God has given, body, mind, talents, time, natural resources, and yes, our



A land iguana speaks to the visitors passing by.

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money. Why has stewardship ministry become so narrowly defined? Do church members no longer require education on stewardship of other areas? As Blyden noted, “I don’t believe that when God called us to be faithful stewards, He was only speaking about tithes.”⁴¹

A great opportunity is being missed by neglecting to place higher emphasis on educating our church members and non-church members on the importance of creation stewardship. Revelation says Jesus is coming quickly and He brings our reward with Him. He comes to “destroy those that destroy the earth” (Rev. 11:18). We should be shouting this message from the mountain tops. It should be the headline in every major Church publication. If that author’s defense for Adventists’ lack of emphasis on environmental stewardship was true in 1970, that a single church can only do so many things effectively, it is much less of an excuse today. Our Church’s membership has swelled to more than ten times the size it was in 1970; today it is somewhere over 20 million.⁴²

A recent report by the United Nations concluded that faith-based communities can have an “immense” impact on sustainable living and development. They own or control 8% of the earth’s total inhabitable land, a figure of which the Adventist Church is certainly a part. But the size of faith-based communities’ influence is much greater than other institutions or corporations. The way a faith-based community manages its land sets an example to its members. It can support its local community through actions such as providing affordable food through a community garden grown on church property. It can educate its parishioners on better sustainable practices. Investments in green technology such as more efficient appliances and lighting or solar power can reduce operating costs and free up money for missions or outreach. Religious communities can do more than most because they have an enormous audience.⁴³

While some Adventists may still look on modern environmentalism with suspicion, Ernest Steed, in a 1980 *Adventist Review* issue, saw environmentalism as a positive movement that fosters self-control.⁴⁴ Adventists have mostly written positively about the modern environmental conservation movement since its inception. But they have also seen fit to criticize it at times. They have repeatedly pointed out the error of deifying nature. In the late ’70s and early ’80s, New Age philosophy enthusiastically took

up the cause of environmentalism. This sometimes led to far leftist eco-terrorism and earth-over-human ideology. Conservative Christians quickly distanced themselves from all left-wing agendas in the culture wars. Adventists have routinely pointed out that this brand of environmentalism is inconsistent with biblical teachings.⁴⁵

Mainline churches and denominations took up the cause of environmentalism also. Meanwhile, some conservative evangelicals not only denied the problems of environmental degradation but actively fought against solutions. The Adventist Church fell somewhere in-between. Adventist writers since the ’80s have continued to affirm environmental stewardship as a Christian duty.

In 1990, B. L. Vickery wrote in the *Record*:

Scripture repeatedly declares God’s sovereignty of the earth. Granted Adventism’s unequivocal loyalty to the creation account, we would be remiss if we collectively were not strong on the biblical concept of conservation. Salvation entails full restoration and regeneration—and it extends even to the environment. . . . Genesis makes it clear that nature is a precious resource to be used judiciously. Polluting and abusing the earth is tantamount to vandalising God’s neighbourhood! Christians should respect and honour God’s creation regardless of whether Christ’s coming is near or not.⁴⁶

The next year, Bruce Manners wrote,

Reports in the media have certainly helped to raise my awareness of environmental issues. But the real reason I’m becoming more green is because I’m a Seventh-day Adventist. Let me explain. Seventh-day Adventists worship on the seventh day—it’s part of our name. God created the earth and then rested on the seventh day. . . . It’s a memorial to His creative work. The Ten Commandments emphasize the need to remember the Sabbath day. They state that we should keep the day holy because of God’s creative power. And the three angels’ messages of Revelation 14 emphasize yet again the worship of the One who created. The Bible

begins and ends with a call to worship on the Sabbath.

Every Sabbath is a memorial of creation. We who take the time every week to remember the Creator should be concerned about His creation. And we have better reasons than any New Age-inspired activists. . . . every tree felled unnecessarily, every animal killed for vanity, every bit of preventable pollution should concern those who worship the Creator.⁴⁷

Creation stewardship was specifically added to the fundamental beliefs of the Church in the 1980s. It is clearly defined in the sixth fundamental belief. The following statement appears in the classic book *Seventh-day Adventists Believe* on the 27 Fundamental Beliefs of the Church (since updated to 28 beliefs).

Stewardship of the Earth: Modern science has made earth one vast laboratory for research and experimentation. Such research yields many benefits, but the industrial revolution has also resulted in air, water, and land pollution. Technology, in some instances, has manipulated nature rather than managing it wisely.

We are stewards of this world and should do everything to maintain life on all levels by keeping the ecological balance intact. In His coming advent, Christ will “destroy those who destroy the earth” (Rev. 11:18). From this perspective Christian stewards are responsible not only for their own possessions but for the world around them.⁴⁸

The General Conference affirmed the Church’s stance on the issue in a formal statement first made in 1992. “Since human poverty and environmental degradation are interrelated, we pledge ourselves to improve the quality of life for all people. Our goal is a sustainable development of resources while meeting human needs.”⁴⁹ The GC has since reaffirmed this stance with other statements.⁵⁰ When the Church first put forth this statement, they were serious about their commitment.

The Church sponsored a float in the 1992 Rose Parade that was witnessed by one billion people! They decorated it with animals and a slogan that read, “Enjoying and Caring for Nature.” Media commentators pronounced the Seventh-day Adventists bona fide environmentalists.⁵¹

Creation stewardship is considered a core doctrine of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Sadly, little has been done to act on these beliefs, even in recent decades with the popularity of “going green.” Seventh-day Adventists profess to believe in creation stewardship, but in practice it is mostly a back-burner issue. For much of the twentieth century, the Church and most church members have put minimal active effort toward creation stewardship practices and education.

John Baldwin, a prominent Adventist theologian from Andrews, called Adventists to be more active in creation stewardship in 2001. He said, “it’s time to move vigorously ahead on this.”⁵² Little action seems to have taken place across the global Church for at least a decade. Now well into the twenty-first century, things seem to be changing with the Church leadership and local church communities around the world.

In 2009, the General Conference, in partnership with the Geoscience Research Institute at Loma Linda University, designated October 24, 2009, as Creation Sabbath. A website was created, and the word spread. Churches around the world were called to center their church service around the theme of “Worshiping God as our Creator.”⁵³ The website declared two goals of Creation Sabbath: to feature the Creator God, “In our worship times,” and “As we communicate within our communities.”⁵⁴ The goal behind this campaign was to emphasize the Church’s stance on creation-origins theology as opposed to evolution. The timing of the first Creation Sabbath was strategic, as 2009 was widely celebrated as the 200th anniversary of Charles Darwin’s birthday.⁵⁵ But October 24 has since been designated as an official annual Sabbath theme by the General Conference. It provides a prime opportunity to highlight the Church’s stance on environmental stewardship.

In 2009, Bill Knott, editor of the *Adventist Review*, reminded readers of the fallacy of “going green” for its trendiness. He encouraged Adventists to consider and implement greener practices and technology where reasonable. However, we should never lose focus of our

number one goal. He summarized, “our ‘going green’ must take a respectful second place to the crimson story of His cross.”⁵⁶

At the Fourth International Bible Conference in Rome, Italy, held in 2018, many Adventist Bible scholars, teachers, and pastors gathered for the annual meeting. One of the major topics was Adventists’ actions toward climate change. An article by Marcos Paseggi in the *Review* reported that scholars at the Bible Conference concluded, “The fact that the world’s climate is changing for the worse should be a motivation to double our evangelistic and social efforts as God’s remnant church.”⁵⁷ Two speakers that stood out from the conference are noteworthy.

Andrews University Associate Professor of Hebrew Bible A. Rahel Wells pointed out that the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of end-time events acknowledges that after the second coming the entire earth will burn. This understanding has led many to place environmental care on the backburner, “since the earth will be renewed by God anyway.” The *Review* article summarized her thoughts on this rationale, “it is a position that overlooks the clear descriptions of God’s care for the earth and human ecological responsibility in the original creation, the new earth, and all laws for the present.”⁵⁸

Antillean Adventist University Professor Silvia Schimpf-Torresblanca said, “it is usual for the environmentalists’ agenda to be accompanied by a political battle between governments, financial consortiums, scientists, and others.” “It is something,” she said, “that has led Adventists to withdraw and not get involved. But as Adventist pioneers showed, being good stewards of God’s creation should often prompt us to be socially and politically involved . . . because many [of these] issues can be better addressed at broader social levels.”⁵⁹

Spectrum has been especially vocal about this topic since the magazine’s inception. It has wrestled with the nuances and complexities of creation stewardship more than most other Adventist publications. Here are some examples. “Because we believe in God the Creator, we believe we are to love the earth and care for it. But we also know we are to expect and long for the end of the world and the creation of a new earth. How are we to bring these two imperatives together?” wondered Berry Casey in a 1983 *Spectrum* article.⁶⁰ Mark Cimino optimistically hoped in a 1990 article that, “Ideally, we could emphasize

both without compromising either.”⁶¹

In a 2003 intellectual treatise on the theology of ecology, writer Warren Trenchard wrote,

Although God has promised to recreate the physical world in the future, believers may even now begin not only to prepare for that restoration but also to live an environmentally conscious and active lifestyle. God not only acted definitively in Jesus to overcome the deterioration of humans and their world caused by the rebellion but also in the form of the Holy Spirit acts in the interim to provide this hope and to give believers this advance experience of the future restoration of all things.⁶²

In other words, we can participate with God in the restoration of creation even now by working to better live in harmony with nature and restoring it where possible. Rather than waging a war against nature, we can learn to operate within the laws God set up to govern the natural world.

Sigve K. Tonstad has written extensively on this topic, including contributions to *The Earth Bible Commentary*. In an article for *Spectrum*, he addressed the common perspective Western Christians have toward the lower animals. We often treat them as commodity. We see no purpose for them beyond their immediate utility to humankind. We factory farm animals for meat, we kill “pests” we deem unworthy of life. Many point to the blessing in Genesis where God granted Adam and Eve dominion over earth. This view is partly to blame for modern environmental problems. Tonstad points out that God also blessed the nonhuman creatures, (see Gen. 1:22). The Genesis accounts provides nonhuman creation with a “bill of rights.” “From the point of view of the Bible, interest in nonhuman creatures and the earth is not motivated by an ecological state of emergency but by recognition of the dignity and rights of the rest of the created order.” He makes a strong case that an Adventist view of creation stewardship is a ready-made bridge we can use to connect with others. In it we can find common ground upon which to converse in our efforts to share the gospel.⁶³

In yet another article on this topic, David J. B. Trim explored the concept of Adventist political involvement on

environmental issues. He reviewed Ellen White's advice to avoid aligning ourselves with a specific party or candidate and concluded that this does not negate the importance of our involvement in the political sphere, as Ellen White encouraged church members to vote on important issues such as temperance, abolition, and separation of church and state. Thus, our involvement in encouraging environmental solutions, especially where they protect the poor and vulnerable, is paramount.⁶⁴

The best summary of this topic comes from a 1971 *Spectrum* article written by Ervil D. Clark.

What, then, is the Christian's responsibility to his environment? The solution to the problems of man and the environment lies in the fundamental truth of Adventism: Christ's soon return and his promise to make all things new. But only the Godhead know the end from the beginning, and how soon is soon! We must live as if we will be here for but a day, but plan for it to be a hundred years.⁶⁵

Action has been taken by Adventists in recent years to address our ecological footprint and broaden educational efforts regarding creation stewardship.

In 2012, the Pathfinder leadership released two new honors addressing recycling. In 2019, a new honor called Stewardship was added. Several of the requirements are dedicated to helping Pathfinders gain a knowledge of biblical principles of stewardship and practical ways to live those in daily life. These are just a few of several environmental stewardship-oriented honors that have been released in the last decade. They range from alternative fuels to renewable energy and many environmental science topics.

In 2011, Southern Adventist University formed a committee for environmental sustainability that created a Green Campus Initiative with a 12-point process to make the college operations more sustainable.⁶⁶ Fresno Adventist Academy, in California, started a 13-acre farm in 2014. Not only does the farm offer jobs for school students, while also teaching them essential skills for life, but it is also an example to the surrounding community, showing that large-scale organic farming is possible and sustainable.⁶⁷ In 2017, Oakwood University restarted

Some of the young people in my church became frustrated by all the single-use disposable plates and utensils thrown away every potluck. So, they asked the church to switch to regular plates and flatware and volunteered to help wash the dishes so the deaconesses would not be left with all the work.

its farm with a goal of providing fresh organic produce to students and educating local farmers on sustainable practices.⁶⁸ In 2018, Madison Academy in Tennessee started a new agricultural endeavor that provides jobs to students on campus. The produce is sold to local community members through a design called community-supported agriculture. Essentially, a customer pays a subscription for a weekly box of items. This garden is produced sustainably and entirely organically.⁶⁹ Walla Walla University started a community garden project just last year (2020).⁷⁰

Forest kindergarten programs have been started at several of the elementary schools in my home conference in the last 3–4 years. These have also appeared at schools in California, Georgia, Virginia and elsewhere. These programs encourage their students to play outside for hours every week as part of the curriculum. The forest becomes the classroom where lessons are taught. Grades have been shown to stay the same or even go up for most students compared to traditional classroom-only teaching. These programs will create a lifelong connection to the natural world that will foster a relationship with the Creator.

While leaders of our denomination seem to be talking about and making a more considerable effort on this front, efforts are also being made at the local level. Many of our elementary schools, are planting gardens that the students help manage. Some churches have started community gardens on church property. The food is often donated to families in need. My own local church installed paper

recycling bins to collect used bulletins which had previously gone to landfills. Some of the young people in my church became frustrated by all the single-use disposable plates and utensils thrown away every potluck. So, they asked the church to switch to regular plates and flatware and volunteered to help wash the dishes so the deaconesses would not be left with all the work. The money saved is being repurposed toward evangelistic efforts.

Several of our colleges offer ecology and environmental science classes. Some have done so for several years. These classes educate students on the challenges present in the natural world including pollution mitigation, conservation, and public land management. Pacific Union College offers a general education course wholly dedicated to studying pollution and the environment.⁷¹ Loma Linda University offers a full degree program in this area. Other schools offer degrees in biology and other science areas that allow students to pursue a career studying God's creation.⁷²

Things are not only happening in the United States. Adventists in other countries are also making efforts to raise awareness and improve our practices of creation stewardship. Two conference offices in Germany recently released a document calling for Adventists to practice a "sustainable faith." It emphasized the ways its own employees could reduce waste in church offices.⁷³ In 2019, over 5,000 Adventists, including many Pathfinder clubs, participated in a city-wide cleanup day in Tuxtla, Mexico. The church members picked up trash, swept walkways, and held up signs encouraging residence of Tuxtla to keep their city beautiful. Church members saw it as an opportunity to share a message of the importance of environmental care with fellow residents. The COVID-19 pandemic prevented the event happening in 2020.⁷⁴

There are many other efforts being made around the world, too many to list here. These efforts are made by individuals who feel called to fulfill the biblical directive of creation stewardship. However, we should not join the environmental movement because it is a trend. These thoughts from the *Australian Record* are important to keep in mind.

Individual church members should be seen to support such initiatives. Didn't Jesus say, "Let your light so shine . . . that they may see your good works"? God clearly states that He "will

destroy them that destroy the earth." But we don't become green to avoid His wrath. Nor do we espouse such principles because we believe this world will go on forever if we treat it right. We "look for new heavens and a new earth." We adopt conservationism because we have a responsibility as caretakers for what the Creator has given us. But we have a weightier responsibility through our consistent, ethical behaviour to prepare humanity for a better world to come.⁷⁵

Our denomination cares deeply about God's creation and has since its beginning. We Adventists have a responsibility to be good stewards of the earth. Pollution and global warming hurt the poor most harshly as they have the fewest resources to combat them. What is more Christian than helping the poor? If living an "eco-friendly" life means producing less pollution that harms poor individuals, isn't that a worthy goal for Adventists everywhere? Our Church believes in creation care. Perhaps we just need to try a little harder to show that to the world. It is part of our witness to the world that there is still a Creator who cares about the plight of His children and other creatures.⁷⁶ It strengthens our testimony to the importance of the Sabbath, a weekly celebration of creation. Living out the principles of creation stewardship remind us of the soon return of Christ by encouraging us to focus on building heavenly treasure rather than collecting material possessions. In closing, here is a call to action from the *In His Steps* baptismal study guides: "Will I live differently when I totally accept the fact that God has placed me here and given me the responsibility to care for his creation?"⁷⁷

Endnotes

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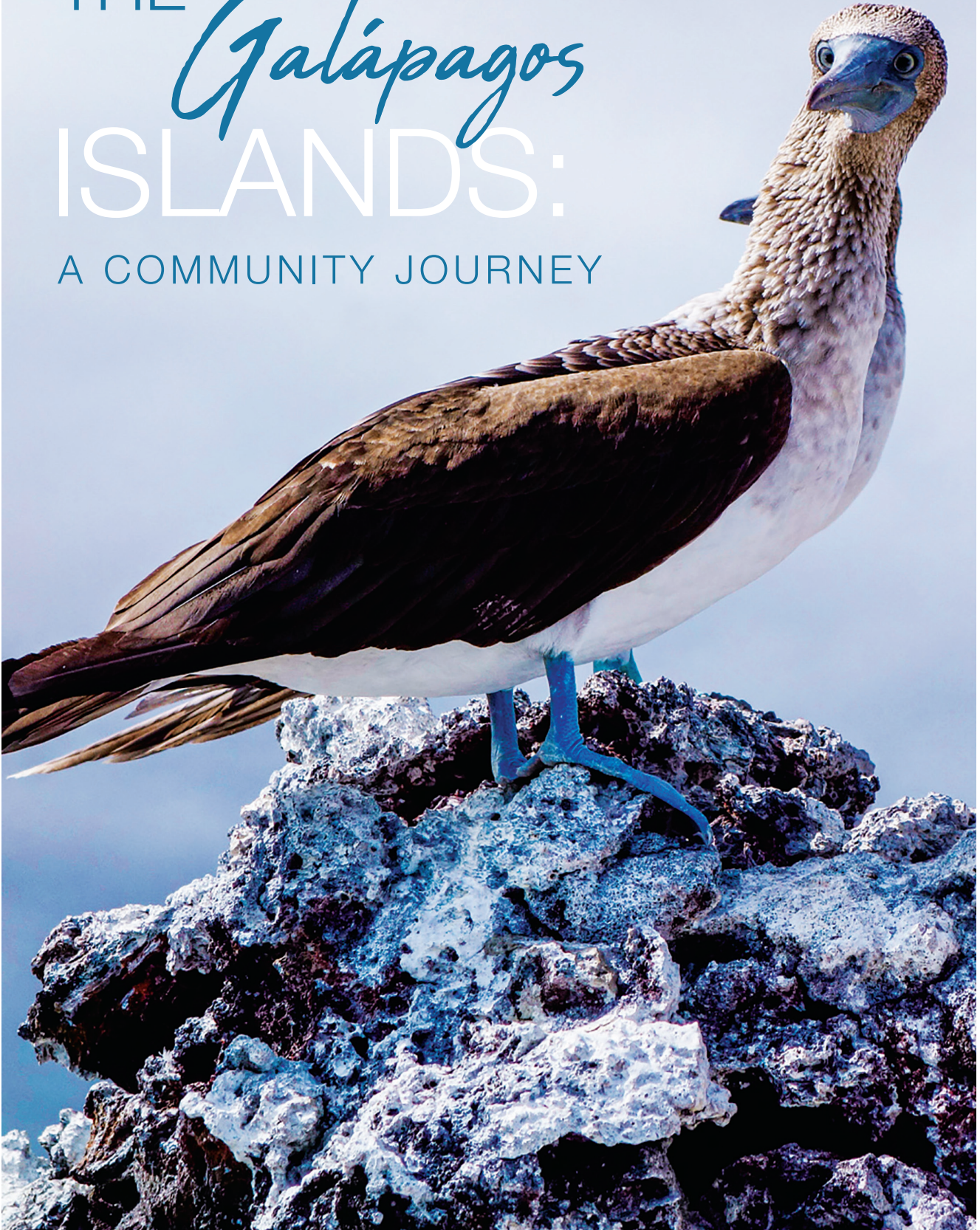
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THE *Galápagos*
ISLANDS:
A COMMUNITY JOURNEY



Wondering

BY GERALD WINSLOW

O Lord, our Sovereign,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!
You have set your glory above the heavens.
Out of the mouths of babes and infants
you have founded a bulwark because of your foes,
to silence the enemy and the avenger.
When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars that you have established;
what are human beings that you are mindful of them,
mortals that you care for them?
Yet you have made them a little lower than God,
and crowned them with glory and honor.
Psalm 8:1–5 (NRSV)

The Psalms are full of wonder—an awareness of majesty in creation, a sense of awe capable of continual renewal. In this poetry, there is also puzzlement.

The restoration of wonder does not require a journey to a place like the Galápagos Islands. Just take a toddler to the zoo, as I did when River, our firstborn grandson, was barely learning to talk. Just inside the gates of San Diego’s Balboa Park, he exclaimed, “Oh Papa, look!” He had been told to expect magnificent creatures, and he spotted one almost immediately. It was not a giraffe, or a hippo, or one of the gorillas we would see later. It was a lowly

pigeon eating popcorn on the sidewalk.

For many grownups, urban pigeons are no source of amazement. They often seem an overabundant annoyance, supplying unwanted decorations. But for a small child expecting wonder, a pigeon is a remarkable work of art—the bright red feet, the grey wings with black markings, the bright orange eyes, the shimmering chatoyance of turquoise and lavender neck feathers in the sunlight on a bird that clucks along, largely unafraid. Add the popcorn, and how could anyone not be in awe of such a creature? Still, it sometimes requires the eyes of a youngster to see such magnificence. Maybe this is one reason the Psalm refers to the “mouths of babes.”

The glory of creation, as featured in our Psalm, awakens two kinds of wonder. First, there is amazement at the splendor of sky above and earth below. This is the reverential awareness of the Creator’s awesome power. It is what some have called the *mysterium tremendum*, a numinous experience of the breathtaking greatness of creation and the radical otherness of its Creator.¹ In the words of biologist Ursula Goodenough, “Reverence is the religious emotion elicited when we perceive the sacred. We are called to revere the whole enterprise of planetary existence, the whole of it and all of its myriad parts.”² Such reverence is wondering *at* creation.

But there is another kind of wonder on display in

this Psalm and elsewhere in Scripture—curiosity about the place of humanity within the magnificence of God’s creation. Just why should the Creator of such grandeur be at all mindful of humans? What does it mean for us to be made in the Creator’s image? How shall we understand our responsibility to the creation of which we are a part? Any careful observer of our planet, its life forms, and the expanding universe of which Earth is such a tiny part, may experience intense curiosity about how things actually work. Such inquisitiveness is wondering *about* creation.

Although visiting the Galápagos Islands is not required to awaken both kinds of wonder, such a visit is certainly more than sufficient. First, there are the islands themselves—an isolated and intriguing archipelago that has arisen at different times through volcanic activity. Some are so new that much of their surface is covered with what appear to be lava flows that have just recently cooled. Others have had time to develop soil that supports a rich variety of plant life. Some are quite arid, while others receive more rain and are lush with vegetation.

More likely to elicit wonder are the distinctive creatures living on the islands or in the waters surrounding them. Because of the absence of natural predators, and protection from humans, the animals exhibit a surprising absence of fear. Most readers have probably heard of the blue-footed boobies, with feet so turquoise blue they appear to have been painted by one who threw caution to the wind. Many of the islands’ animals, like the marine iguanas or the flightless cormorants, live only on the archipelago, and nowhere else on the planet. A personal favorite, unique to the islands, is the Galápagos dove, which sports impressive feathers and light-blue eyeliner. Then there are several unique species of enormous Galápagos tortoises, some weighing nearly 1,000 pounds and living over 150 years.

Being in unusually close proximity to this rich variety of unique creatures is an awe-inspiring experience. It is wonderful. It would seem impossible to be in such a setting and not wonder *at* the rich panoply of life. More than one person has described this experience as being a foretaste of eternity, when life will exist in a never-ending realm of peace.

But hiking through the Galápagos Islands, or snorkeling around them, may also awaken that other kind of wonder—curiosity about how life works. The diverse

species of finches, the beaks of each apparently suited to a particular seed size and seed toughness, still prompts questions, as the little birds did for Charles Darwin in another century. When one begins to wonder about the unique forms of life in these islands, the questions quickly multiply. How did those cormorants lose most of the function of their useless-for-flying, stubby wings? Where did the marine iguanas come from, and how did they (unlike any other lizards known today) learn to swim and eat algae under water. And how have they become more expert than any other lizard species at expelling excess salt through their nostrils? How could anyone not wonder about these questions?

Humans, I believe, were created for both kinds of wonder. We are given capacities, both perceptual and intellectual, to stand in awe and to ask questions. The best of faith and science, in my view, is more likely to mature if these two impulses are held in complementary connection. In addition to Psalm 8, let me call on two diverse witnesses: Ellen White and Albert Einstein. First, White: “God is the author of science. Scientific research opens to the mind vast fields of thought and information, enabling us to see God in His created works.”³ A few sentences later, she adds, “Rightly understood, science and the written Word agree, and each sheds light on the other.”⁴ Then, Einstein: “Science can only be created by those who are thoroughly imbued with the aspiration toward truth and understanding. This source of feeling springs, however, from the sphere of religion. I cannot conceive of a genuine scientist without that profound faith. . . . The situation may be expressed by an image: science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind.”⁵

The scientists I have known personally, and most admire, seem to understand the depths of truth expressed in passages like those just quoted. They are humbled by the immensity of the realities they study and by the indications that there is so much more to learn. Whether their studies take them to subatomic particles or to the outer reaches of the galactic universe, these scientists have a keen sense of the depths of the nature they yearn to understand. Their pursuit of detailed scientific evidence does not diminish their sense of wonder.

A specific source of wonder, mentioned in our Psalm, is the starry heavens of the night sky. It is a marvel



Gerald Winslow photographs the beautiful wildlife of the Galápagos islands, including blue-footed boobies, marine iguanas, a tortoise, Darwin finches, and a Galápagos dove.

wonderfully accessible from the upper deck of a boat in the Galápagos on a perfectly clear night, without the light pollution so prevalent in urban and suburban life. For those of us who live north of Earth's equator, there is the rare privilege of looking far south of the celestial equator to see constellations entirely new to us. Would the joy of that experience be lessened if accompanied by an astronomy lecture from an expert in astrophysics?

One of Walt Whitman's best-known poems seems to answer Yes to this question:

When I heard the learn'd astronomer,
When the proofs, the figures, were ranged in
columns before me,
When I was shown the charts and diagrams, to
add, divide, and measure them,
When I sitting heard the astronomer where he
lectured with much applause in the lecture-
room,
How soon unaccountable I became tired
and sick,

Although visiting the Galápagos Islands is not required to awaken both kinds of wonder, such a visit is certainly more than sufficient.

Till rising and gliding out I wander'd
 off by myself,
 In the mystical moist night-air, and from time
 to time,
 Look'd up in perfect silence at the stars.⁶

While I think I might understand this response, it would not be mine. I was blessed to spend a school year studying physical astronomy, taught by physicist Professor Claude Barnett. From him, I learned to love the mysteries of deep space, to learn the developmental cycle of stars, to think in terms of millions of light years, and to wonder. I have vivid memories of riding in a small bus with Barnett and the rest of the class to find just the right spot to observe an autumn meteor shower. Sitting in a wheat field in a circle, with our backs to the center, like a covey of wary quails, we charted the arrival of each blaze of light. The fact that we were learning what causes meteor showers, that (for example) each appeared to radiate from a central place, did not reduce the glory of the light show. The astrophysicist has even more reason to be dazzled by the starry heavens because she or he understands more.

It is just here that I want to express gratitude for those who, like Dr. Barnett, taught me to wonder *at* and wonder *about* our universe.⁷ I would also invite the reader to recall, with thanks, those who provided such gifts. My list includes Professor J. Paul Grove, who taught me to look far more deeply into the sacred texts of Scripture; Professor Lucile Knapp, who taught me Greek and the truth that texts can be translated and interpreted in many ways, some better and some worse; Professor Robert H. Brown, a physicist who taught me about geochronometers using radioactive decay rates. It was Brown, a conservative Seventh-day Adventist professor and later the director of the Church's Geoscience Research Institute, who introduced me and many others to the reality of deep time. Controversial in the 1960s, Brown's views about the age of the Earth's rocks appear to have become mainstream thinking in Adventism nowadays.

I could add many names to this treasured list of teachers who cared deeply about truth. Despite the vast differences in their scholarly disciplines and in their ways of wondering, there was one distinctive trait shared by all. Because they pursued truth in the context of faith, they were not satisfied with shallow answers to deep questions.

For me, they are exemplars of faith that awakens the fullness of wonder.

For Christians, such faith is founded on the belief that the incarnate Christ, Jesus of Nazareth, is both Savior and Creator. The definitive creation text for Christians is this: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people."⁸ For believers, this is the greatest Wonder. It is also the source of confidence that liberates us to wonder *at* and wonder *about* the world He made.

Endnotes

1. The notion of the "mysterium tremendum" was brought to prominence by theologian Rudolf Otto in his work, *The Idea of the Holy*, first published in English in 1923, and available in several editions.
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6. Walt Whitman, "When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer," available at <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/45479/when-i-heard-the-learn-d-astronomer> (accessed Oct. 4, 2021).
7. Claude Barnett and the other professors mentioned in this paragraph were on the faculty of Walla Walla College (now University) in the 1960s.
8. John 1:1-4



DR. GERALD WINSLOW, pictured here with his wife, Dr. Betty Winslow, is the director of Loma Linda University's Center for Christian Bioethics. He is also professor of religion in LLU's School of Religion and the founding director of LLU's Institute for Health Policy and Leadership. For over a decade he also served as a vice president in LLU's health system. For over fifty years, he has specialized in teaching and writing about ethics, especially biomedical ethics. The couple celebrated their 55th wedding anniversary in the Galápagos Islands.



Photo: Bonnie Dwyer

A beautiful wooden Galápagos tortoise welcomes visitors to the Origenes Museum on Charles Darwin Avenue in Puerto Ayora, Santa Cruz Island, Galápagos.

ORIGENS

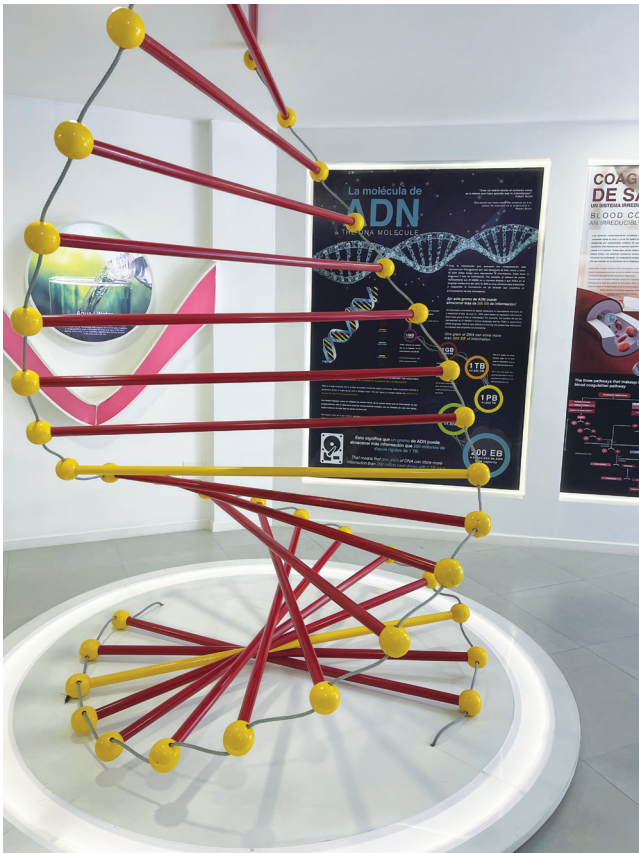
Museum of Nature

BY LAWRENCE T. GERATY

I had never heard of the Seventh-day Adventist Origenes Museum of Nature till I was invited to join a 2021 travel adventure to the Galápagos Islands organized by *Spectrum*. Frankly, before my visit, I thought it would be the height of hutzpah to construct a creation museum on Charles Darwin Avenue, the main street of the islands' largest town, Puerto Ayora, and the headquarters of the Charles Darwin Research Center! I pictured this effort to convince evolutionists of the truth of a seven-day creation, six thousand years ago, to be nothing but a public embarrassment!

But that was *before* my visit. I came away impressed with the Church's presentation, which turned out to be more of a nature walk! There was no mention of time or

mechanism, but rather an appreciation for the intricacies and beauties of nature, together with the importance of environmental stewardship and relating to it in healthful ways. Exhibits, in both Spanish and English, included marine habitats, the most endangered sea creatures, the internal structure of the earth, a map of the Galápagos Islands and how they emerged from a hot spot beneath their moving geological plate, the common types of lava flows, the atmosphere, the different finch beaks on the islands, physical laws, the history of the universe, spectroscopy, the Fibonacci sequence and other examples in nature, the eye of the trilobite, the DNA molecule, blood coagulation as an irreducibly complex system, the sustainable earth, including the imperative for recycling,



DNA comes to life in this Origins Museum display.

etc., and the important values of temperance, sunlight, physical exercise, rest, etc.

Carmen Lau, the chair of *Spectrum's* board, voiced a weakness, however, in the museum's presentation: "While the Origins Museum gave highlights of some of nature's complexities, I did not perceive an adequate acknowledgement of adaptability, a concept that I think would be on the minds of typical Galápagos travelers. The Charles Darwin Research Center, just down the street, showed ways that the most adaptable change to survive, asserting that the only thing we can be sure of is change."

Nevertheless, Chair Lau was also positive about her experience at the museum; she called it "a tasteful, non-commercial space with a peaceful milieu, offering a quiet

meander, ending with an emphasis on the benefit of good habits. I found this to be calming and comfortable. Upon touring the space, I felt a sense of relief when I realized it did not seem to be an in-your-face push for recent literal creation. I liked the Origins Museum."

Another tour participant, Gerald Winslow, noted ethicist, professor, and research professor, School of Religion at Loma Linda University, agreed, saying, "I was pleased to see the high quality of the various displays. The beauty and grandeur of creation were presented artfully and without the distractions of apologetics or polemics. I could imagine that people visiting this place would enter more deeply into the experience of wonder that is awakened at every turn in the Galápagos Islands."

We met Dr. Maura Brandao, the museum's Brazilian coordinator (and interviewed by *Spectrum* editor Bonnie Dwyer elsewhere in this issue), who told us the Origins Museum had an excellent and friendly relationship with the Charles Darwin Research Center down the street. She said her museum's purpose was to celebrate God's gift of creation and not to enter into controversial arguments about time and mechanisms.

James Hayward, retired Andrews University professor of biology, and arguably the most knowledgeable member of our group, since he had pursued his own research on previous visits to the Galápagos, summarized his reactions to the Origins Museum this way:

The museum is small but professionally designed and attractive. I was impressed by the positive message it conveys—there is no bashing of deep time or evolution. Instead, the scientific information presented on the structure of the earth, plate tectonics, the origin of the Galápagos Islands, various resident organisms, and principles of physics is accurate and

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tastefully presented. The overall theme is one of divine design. Pertinent information, however, about how organisms change, the most valuable contribution these islands have made to our understanding of life, was missing. The museum features a section on conservation and another on healthful living, quietly based on principles highlighted by Ellen White. Overall, the museum conveys a positive message consistent with Seventh-day Adventist beliefs.

A display above Dr. Brandao's desk at the entrance to the museum listed the names of individuals (Hipolito Godelha, Anolio Giannini, Socrates Quispe, Adriana Salguero, Sanson Cotrim) and organizations which had contributed financially to making the new museum possible: the South American Division of the SDA General Conference, the Geoscience Research Institute, Adventist Risk Management, the Brazilian Publishing House and South American Association of Publishing Houses, the Council of Faith & Science, the Adventist Universities of Brazil, Argentina, Chile, and Peru, the Adventist High School of Misiones, Adventist Institute of Paranana, South Ecuadorian Mission, Central Santa Cruz Church (which meets above the Origins Museum), along with two departments of education and two Adventist faculties. This very representative facility, which houses not only the Origins Museum but the local Adventist church and mission offices, is one of the most impressive buildings on the main street. Behind the building is the Adventist high school and its facilities, which serves some 270 students. Doubtless all these financial supporters of the Museum would be pleased with the general reactions of our group.

We learned from LLU biology professor William Hayes, who happened to be living behind the Origins Museum for several days while pursuing his own research project on the islands, that the prime land on which the museum stands was procured by LLU (La Sierra Campus) biology professor Lester E. Harris, Jr., back in the '70s, when he thought it would be ideal to bring his students to the Galápagos on regular research trips. On his first flight to the islands, he happened to be sitting next to a local businessman. Harris shared his dream with the businessman, who then replied that he had some land that he'd like to sell! Then and there, even before landing, the

SHARING THE CREATION STORY

Mauro Brandao arrived in Puerto Ayora on January 15, 2020. A doctoral student at the Adventist University of Brazil, she had been chosen to be the director of the new Origins Museum of Nature that was set to open



on February 29. Inside the uncompleted building, there was much to do. The Faith and Science Meeting for the South American Division would be taking place. General Conference officials were coming, including President Ted N. C. Wilson.

She began the work of installing the exhibits that her mentor, Dr. Marcos Natal, had designed. Natal is the director of the Brazilian branch of the Geoscience Research Institute. On February 29, 2020, the Museum opened. *The Adventist Review* did a feature story about the event, as did newspapers in Ecuador. Two weeks later, the museum had to shut down because of COVID-19.

Like everyone else, Brandao turned to technology. She Zoomed to all the countries in South America and connected with 20,000 students in Adventist schools. Secondly, she worked to make the institution relevant for the community. She says the museum has a friendly relationship with the Charles Darwin Research Center down the road. Visitors say they have never been to a place where science and God are both believed in. She is happy to tell them that she believes that species can change, but they were created by God, and he gave them the ability to adapt.

During the pandemic, Brandao finished her doctoral dissertation. Because of restrictions by the Galápagos, she will soon be returning to Brazil and getting married.

Just like its surroundings, the Origins Museum of Nature will adapt.

By Bonnie Dwyer

deal was made! Hayes, when a student of Harris, himself participated in such field trips and they lived in make-do quarters on the property. Harris retired in the '80s and was not succeeded by anyone who wished to carry on the field station which he co-founded with Ernest Booth, so Loma Linda University donated the property to the South American Division. The division recognized the donation by putting the name Loma Linda on the façade of the new museum building, dedicated at a special ceremony on February 29, 2020, and reported online by Andrew McChesney in “State-of-the-Art Adventist Museum Opens on Galápagos,” followed by Pam Dietrich’s March 20, 2020, report on *Spectrum’s* website, “Origins Museum of Nature Is New Adventist Center in the Galápagos.”

Evidently, this association with Loma Linda gave rise to the following passage from Edwin J. Larson’s *Evolution’s Workshop: God and Science on the Galapagos Islands* (Basic Books, 2001), p. 216:

Galápagos schoolchildren learn the tenets of creation science at Loma Linda Academy, just down the road from the Charles Darwin Research Station. Loma Linda is one of the finest schools on the archipelago, built by the fundamentalist Seventh-day Adventist Church to serve students of all faiths on



On an evening visit to the Origins Museum, the *Spectrum* team met with researchers who had just returned from a field trip. Pictured here are Bonnie Dwyer, Thomas Dwyer, James Hayward, Timothy Standish (of Geoscience Research Institute), Brian Bull, David Grellmann, and Larry Geraty.

Santa Cruz Island. Its pupils include several children of Ecuadorian parents employed by the research station. . . . Dominating Loma Linda’s interior courtyard, a building-sized mural depicts Galápagos birds, reptiles and sea lions proclaiming the message in Spanish, “All creation exalts the Creator.”

GC President Ted Wilson was present for the opening of the new museum and is quoted by McChesney as saying, “As Seventh-day Adventists, the source of our understanding of our origins, our reason for being here, and our purpose in helping nature to be preserved is found in our relationship with God. May many people come to know more about origins and God through this museum.” The new museum also made national headlines, with Ecuador’s largest newspaper, *El Universo*, publishing a March 2, 2020 report, with three photos, under the headline “Origins, a New Interactive Museum on the Galápagos.” In an interview reported by McChesney, the South American Division president (now GC Secretary), Erton Kolher, described the Origins Museum as “an invitation to think about something different. Our idea is not to confront people who think differently but to show them some viewpoints that perhaps they haven’t seen. After visiting, they might start to realize that a special hand must be behind the processes of nature.”

No one in our *Spectrum* group of sixteen travelers has thought more about the relationship of science to faith than Brian Bull, Loma Linda University physician, professor, published author, and former key administrator. I asked him to summarize his thoughts about the museum:

I am a museum junkie! Whenever I travel and a visit to a museum is a possibility, I almost always manage to fit it in. Creation museums are my favorite. They are, understandably, quite uncommon. I suppose I like them because I have written, edited and/or co-authored several books on Genesis. In the process I have come to appreciate how markedly our world differs from that in which the Genesis creation narrative was first heard. I am always curious as to which part of that story is going to be presented and exactly how it is going to be done.

If dioramas are going to be used, there is always the tricky question of how to present Adam and Eve. They are described in the Genesis account as “They were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed” (Genesis 2:25, KJV). In static pictures, a tree branch or large tame animal can always be drawn into the picture to ensure modesty, but in a 3-D diorama, which can usually be viewed from many angles, that often fails as a solution. I vividly remember one such depiction of the couple. They were life-sized, up to their waists in a lake with critically placed magnolia blossoms floating on the water surrounding Eve. To finish off the scene there was a cheerful-looking, clearly non-meat-eating dinosaur the size of a large St. Bernard, surveying the scene from a bank nearby!

Given an opportunity to visit the recently opened SDA Creation Museum in Puerto Ayora, Galápagos, I did not hesitate. It was both pleasant and rewarding. The museum displays included no dioramas, no Adam and Eve, and no 3-D dinosaurs! Instead, perhaps as a stand-in for dinosaurs, there were pictures of the fierce-looking, dragon-like, marine iguanas that live in the Galápagos and nowhere else in the world. The museum proper consisted of professionally prepared posters of the physical laws, mathematical equations that characterize the natural world, as well as many of the unique plants and animals that are to be found in these islands. The information was presented with a mixture of pictures and text in both Spanish and English. Several of the presentations towards the end of the exhibit introduced the creation theme unobtrusively, almost hesitantly, by posing the question, “What seems most reasonable, that this unique creature, plant, bird, etc., came into existence by chance—or that it was created by God?”

One of the last displays definitely caught my eye. It was a large, poster-sized explanation of the clotting cascade: that aspect of physiology

that keeps us all from bleeding to death. It too was very professionally presented. Since I, as an MD, spend most of my time seeing patients with disorders of the clotting mechanism, I was both surprised and delighted to find it in a creation museum. This was truly a first! This display, like the others before it, referred to the awe that the intricacies of the created world create in those who study nature thoughtfully. This response of awe can be almost overwhelming in places like the Galápagos where, surrounded by animals that appear completely oblivious to human presence, it is inevitable that the “peaceable kingdom” of that better world comes to mind. Still, since defects in the clotting system will eventually kill about one out of every four of us (strokes, emboli, heart attacks, bleeding disorders) I was left with mixed emotions by that particular exhibit.

All in all, however, I liked the approach of this unusual creation museum and enjoyed it sufficiently so that, when a second opportunity presented itself three days later I returned to the museum to experience it once more.

According to AdventistWorld.org (September 2021), as part of the 2012–2013 Global Church Member Survey, members around the world were asked if they were spiritually moved by the beauty of God’s creation. The response from 24,828 participants indicated that 75% answered “often,” and only 1% answered “never.” Clearly, the hope in founding Galápagos’ new Origins Museum is that that 75% number will even increase for those who pay it a visit, like our appreciative group from *Spectrum*!



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Photo: James Hayward



Fernandina is the youngest island of the Galápagos Archipelago and consists of a single volcano, La Cumbre, pictured here at sunset. Situated as it is directly over the Galápagos Hotspot, La Cumbre is the most active volcano in the archipelago. The most recent eruptions occurred in 2009, 2018, and 2020. Note the relatively fresh lava and sparse vegetation.

Mystery IN THE GALÁPAGOS

BY JAMES L. HAYWARD

As we take our first steps into Galápagos National Park, we enter another world. A land iguana greets us as we enter the walkway. Marine iguanas, seafaring dragons, dive for algae in the nearby surf. Penguins stand like bowling pins along the seaside rocks. Flightless cormorants stomp their way along rocky shores. Giant tortoises lug their ponderous frames through the vegetated uplands. Four types of mockingbird dart rock-to-tree-to-sand in a search for tasty morsels. More than a dozen species of finches flit about in habitats high and low. Sunflower trees tower over all else in the highlands.

These and scores of other species are found nowhere else on the planet.

Over the next eight days our group of sixteen friends will visit eleven of the nineteen main islands of the Galápagos Archipelago. This is my third visit here. I first toured these islands in 2006. Struck by the stark beauty and bizarre wildlife, I vowed to come back. Five years later I did just that with two Andrews University graduate students and a science instructor from Colegio Adventista del Ecuador. We studied the behavioral ecology of marine iguanas and flightless cormorants at Cabo Douglas on

the island of Fernandina, where these animals live free of human interference. Yet another ten years and I'm back again. We board an 88-foot catamaran, the *Archipel I*. Comfortable accommodations, good food, a gracious crew, a knowledgeable guide, and a cadre of kindred spirits will make this a delightful voyage of discovery.

Few places inspire contemplation of change better than the Galápagos Archipelago. Questions about this place are legion: How and when did the islands form? Where did the original colonizers come from? How did they get here? Why are so many of the plants and animals here endemic (found nowhere else)? How come some of the endemic forms split into multiple species? Are new species forming here today? In short, *Why do we find all these unique organisms now, when in the past there was nothing here but the sea?* After visiting these islands in 1835, Charles Darwin acknowledged this query with a perceptive observation: “[I]n both space and time, we seem to be brought somewhat near to that great fact—that mystery of mysteries—the first appearance of new beings on this earth.”¹

To get at the root of Darwin’s “mystery of mysteries,” we must first consider the archipelago’s fiery origins—life, after all, happens at the surface of a dynamic planet. The Galápagos Archipelago is young by geologic standards, much younger than the South American continent six hundred miles to the east. The archipelago is moving atop the Nazca Tectonic Plate over the Galápagos Hotspot.



Bottlenose dolphins (*Tursiops truncatus*) commonly swim alongside ships sailing through Galápagos waters. Dolphins are particularly fond of the cooler, highly productive waters that bathe the westernmost islands.



Aa (“ah-ah”) lava at Cabo Douglas, Fernandina. The base of the La Cumbre volcano can be seen in the background mist.

Intermittently, searing magma from the hotspot burns through the plate to form volcanic islands.

Currently, the Galápagos Hotspot stirs beneath the westernmost islands of Fernandina and Isabela. Because the Nazca Plate slides from west to east over this point, the oldest Galápagos islands occur in the east, whereas the youngest occur in the west, where the volcanoes remain active. Radiometric ages for the emergence from the sea of the various islands range from two and five million years for the eastern islands to less than seven hundred thousand years for the westernmost island of Fernandina. Radiometric ages, however, are unnecessary for us to perceive the relative ages of these islands; the far greater extent of erosion we observe on the eastern islands in contrast to the sterile, fresh aa (pronounced “ah-ah”) lava we stumble over on the western islands reveals the temporal sequence with unequivocal clarity.²

An ever-changing geology is not the only physical feature undergirding the ongoing pageant of life on the Galápagos Archipelago. Ocean currents determine the archipelago’s mild climate. The Humboldt Current and the Peru Offshore Current bring cool, nutrient-rich water north along the South American coast before veering westward and converging to form the South Equatorial Current which, in turn, envelops the Galápagos. These cool waters not only nourish the archipelago’s marine inhabitants but also cool and lower the humidity of the air above. The Equatorial Undercurrent, a submarine current that flows eastward from the central Pacific, brings cool water to the western islands, water in which whales, dolphins, and fish flourish. The complex confluence of these currents, along with prevailing winds, creates two



A pair of Galápagos penguins stands on a rock at the edge of Elizabeth Bay, Isabela. Members of this species are the only penguins with a range that extends north of the equator.

main Galápagos seasons: a warm, moist season from January to April, and a cool, foggy season from June to November; December and May function as transition periods. We are visiting in mid-August during the cool, foggy season, or the *garúa*.³

We are beginning to understand how all the remarkable endemic life forms in the Galápagos came to be—Darwin’s mystery of mysteries. Almost two centuries past Darwin’s visit, we possess a battery of tools and a vastly more complete data set than he had on which to build and test theories about how life unfolded here.

The first thing to recognize is that all organisms on this relatively young archipelago came from related plants and animals elsewhere. Genetic analysis has shown that the archipelago’s endemic organisms are ancestrally linked to relatives living in Central and South America. Giant Galápagos tortoises, for example, are most closely related to Chaco tortoises from Argentina and Paraguay;

the finches are genetically linked to birds called grassquits of Central and South America; and land and marine iguanas are relatives of spinytail iguanas, also from Central and South America.⁴

How did the original immigrants get here? Mangrove seeds most certainly rode the currents from South America. Clumps of vegetation—even whole mini-islands with standing trees—sometimes break away from riparian and coastal habitats and are released into the sea. These floating clumps of terrestrial life have been seen drifting far away from coastal areas. If by chance such clumps docked alongside a newly formed Galápagos island, hitchhiker seeds, propagules, and animals could have set up life. This is the most likely origin for the ancestors of many of the endemic plants, lizards, snakes, iguanas, and insects that reside here.

Tortoises are buoyant and can float and swim for many days in ocean currents without food or fresh water. Alternately, the first tortoise may have been transported here on one of the floating islands. A pregnant female or tortoise pair is all that would be needed to initiate a founder population of these animals. By contrast, birds often get carried by strong winds to places not of their choosing. Birders call such misplaced birds “vagrants” or “accidentals,” which occur often enough that many regional field guides include such anomalies in their listings. This “blown-off-course” explanation is the most likely reason for the ancestors of today’s Galápagos finches and mockingbirds.⁵

Although we have some pretty good hunches, we will never know for sure how each ancestor of the endemic plants and animals got here—but got here they did. Explaining how they might have arrived, however, is only part of the puzzle. The more intriguing question concerns how they changed from the organisms they once were to the organisms we see today.

Some endemic species, like the four species of mockingbirds, are very similar to ancestral forms on the mainland. Others are dramatically different. Take, for example, marine iguanas, descendants of mainland lizards. Not only did these animals change structurally, with the development of vertically compressed tails for swimming, flattened faces for scraping algae from underwater rocks, denser bones that provide ballast for underwater feeding,

long claws for pulling themselves along the algae-covered rocks while feeding, they also changed physiologically and behaviorally. Marine iguanas are the only lizards that feed in the sea. When feeding, they take in salt water. The excess salt is forcefully excreted by salt glands in the nasal cavities.⁶ As we watch the hundreds of marine iguanas hauled out at Punta Espinosa on Fernandina, several of them sneeze out the salty fluid with a hearty hiss.

Due to ocean currents from the polar south, the waters surrounding the Galápagos Islands are many degrees cooler than the optimal temperature range for the poikilothermic iguanas. Our research in 2011 showed that these animals enter the sea to feed when their body temperatures are high and the tide height is low, and they haul out on the beach under the opposite conditions, behavior dramatically different from that of their exclusively terrestrial ancestors.⁷

These adaptive changes, along with those of many other island inhabitants, are due to alterations in genetic composition. Alterations in genetic composition, in turn, are due to a variety of factors, some of which we understand, while others are yet to be discovered.⁸

The first understood factor is *isolation* of the founding island populations from the mainland populations. Isolation prohibits the swamping out of genetic changes that might occur due to processes described below and allows founding populations to follow their own independent paths.

Mutation, a random process, occurs in several forms, including changes in the sequence of nucleotides that make

up the genes, breakage of chromosomes, reattachment of chromosome pieces to other parts of the genome, and the duplication of chromosomes. Mutations create genetic variability in populations. It is sometimes said that mutations are usually harmful and thus could not lead to positive consequences to organisms. Most mutations are, indeed, either harmful or benign, but given the vast number of mutations that occur in all populations, it is not surprising that occasional positive ones appear.

Genetic drift involves random fluctuations in gene frequencies and have the most impact on small populations. Founder populations, like those that landed on the Galápagos, contain only small fractions of the genetic variability found in parent populations. Just by chance, some genes in these small populations will disappear if individuals carrying them fail to reproduce. Favorable mutations occur as well. Gene loss or gain results in significant changes in gene frequencies in small populations, changes that would hardly make a dent in large populations.

Natural selection, a decidedly non-random process, happens when individuals with advantageous genes in a particular environment produce more viable offspring than other individuals in the population. Natural selection thus increases the frequency of helpful traits. Different environments select for different traits, and pioneer organisms reaching the Galápagos Islands faced dramatically different environmental circumstances than in their homeland. Consequently, selection pressure on these pioneers would have been a powerful agent of change.



Photo: James Hayward

An early morning view from Bachas Beach, Santa Cruz, the location of the final excursion on our eight-day tour. The tiny island of Daphne Major, site of a famous, long-term study of adaptation and hybridization among Darwin's finches, appears in the distance, as does the Archipel I.

Over the past few decades, we have begun to recognize the significant role that *hybridization* plays in both plant and animal speciation. In 1981, researchers on the tiny island of Daphne Major noticed the presence of a new, male finch larger than others living there. Not only was it larger, but it sang a different song from any Galápagos finch. The researchers called the new arrival “Big Bird.” Genetic work confirmed that Big Bird was a hybrid from the island of Española, some sixty miles distant. Big Bird successfully mated with at least six of the smaller finch residents on Daphne Major, and the unions produced fertile offspring. Finch offspring learn the song of their fathers, so Big Bird’s offspring learned his unique song and were attracted to it. Thus, his offspring bred with one another and with Big Bird himself. The result was a new population of finches which were morphologically

different and reproductively isolated from the original resident population. In short, a new species was formed.⁹

Geographic isolation, mutation, drift, natural selection, and hybridization are well-studied factors that likely promoted the origin of endemic species on the Galápagos Islands. Less-studied factors also may have been involved. *Horizontal gene transfer*, for example, occurs when genes from one type of organism are shuttled into another type by plasmids, viruses, or by other means. Horizontal gene transfer happens commonly in microorganisms but is also known to occur in plants and animals.¹⁰ *Heterochrony* involves changes in the timing of the development of body parts one to another and in relation to the timing of sexual development. Dramatic shifts in adult body form can occur as, for example, when sexual development is gradually accelerated over the generations so that eventually sexually mature adults look like the juveniles of their ancestors.¹¹

Change has been a good thing for the residents of the Galápagos. The plants and animals live in different environments than their ancestors, and adaptive change has allowed them to thrive in this new environment. The ability to adapt and to change into new species is, without doubt, one of the most remarkable features of life, but we still have much to learn about how this happens. Studying mechanisms of change remains an active area of research. Suffice it to say that new species originated here in the past and continue to originate here today.

Currently known genetic mechanisms seem adequate to transform land iguanas into marine iguanas, to produce cormorants that have lost the ability to fly, and to accomplish all the other adaptive feats we observe here. These changes must have taken place after the Galápagos Islands emerged from beneath the sea, from less than a million years ago for the western islands, and as much as five million years ago for the eastern islands. Given this amount of time, it seems highly likely that genetic changes of this magnitude could occur. This conclusion, however, leaves a question hanging. Are the mechanisms of genetic change described above sufficient to produce life in all its glorious diversity and stunning complexity? That question is not answered by the animal and plant life in the Galápagos, and given the limitations of our present knowledge, it may well continue to be unanswerable for a very long time. To be a theist is to believe in a God who



Currently, eighteen species of “Darwin’s finches” are recognized. They are distinguished by their beaks, which are highly adapted for feeding on various types of food, and their body sizes. The three species pictured here illustrate some of the beak diversity in the group. The top photo depicts a female vegetarian finch (*Platyspiza crassirostris*), which feeds primarily on buds, leaves, flowers, and fruit, and also uses its beak to tear through tree bark to feed on the cambium and phloem underneath. The lower left photo shows a small ground finch (*Geospiza fuliginosa*), which feeds on small seeds and tortoise ectoparasites. The lower right photo is of a male common cactus finch (*Geospiza scandens*), which eats the flowers and seeds of the prickly pear cactus.



Greater flamingos (*Phoenicopterus ruber*) feed with their siphon-like bills in the ponds and lagoons of several islands.



Galápagos sea lions (*Zalophus wollebacki*) are the largest, most abundant, and most playful mammals that live in the archipelago.

Photos: James Hayward

creates. How that happened and when that happened is still shrouded in mystery.

Medieval Christians envisioned a fixed hierarchy of created things. At the base of the hierarchy were rocks, followed by plants, lower animals, higher animals, humans, cherubim, seraphim, Christ, then God the Father. This Great Chain of Being, or *scala naturae*, was held sacred as God's perfect created order. New species were not allowed, nor were extinctions.¹²

During the 1700s, Carolus Linnaeus rejected this linear organization of life. Instead, he believed that God had created nested hierarchies of species within genera, genera within families, families within orders, and so on.¹³ A century later, Charles Darwin agreed with Linnaeus about nested hierarchies, but, based on empirical data, he believed that members of nested groups were linked by common ancestry, just like the younger branches of a tree are linked to older branches. In other words, new species had developed from earlier ones.¹⁴ Many Christians were not happy with Darwin's conclusion because it countered their belief in the unchangeable perfection of God's creation. Even Darwin himself found his conclusion disturbing. He famously wrote to a friend that his admission of species change was like "confessing a murder."¹⁵

We humans are constitutively conservative. We are mighty comfortable with the status quo; we reflexively buck change. Yet change happens all the time, both around us and within us—the universe expands, black holes collide, supernovae explode, tectonic plates shift, mountains rise, volcanoes erupt, winds stir, and the seasons come and go. The most remarkable change of all is our own physical journey from fertilized egg to childhood to adulthood to death and all the psychological changes that go with it.¹⁶

Twenty-five hundred years ago, the Greek philosopher Heraclitus taught his doctrine of universal flux, the view that everything undergoes constant change. His teaching could not have been more perceptive.¹⁷

Adaptive change benefited endemic species in the Galápagos for generations. But generally the process of adaptation is too slow to accommodate the burgeoning forces of human interference and rapacity, including the introduction of invasive species, habitat destruction, overfishing, and climate change. Endemic species live perilously close to extinction on these islands. Several Galápagos endemics already have been lost. Lonesome George, the last of his tortoise ilk from Pinta Island, died in 2012. The Floreana mockingbird is now extinct on Floreana, although tiny, relict populations live on two nearby islets. Other species are threatened—only sixteen

hundred flightless cormorants, four hundred lava gulls, and one hundred mangrove finches remain, the only representatives of their species.

Efforts by the Galápagos National Park, Galápagos Conservation Trust, Galápagos Conservancy, Galápagos Conservation Action, the Charles Darwin Foundation and Research Station, and others, help push back the threat of extinction—an uphill battle involving careful planning, concerted action, and advanced technology. Progress is being made, although it remains to be seen how effective these efforts will be in the long run, especially in the face of human overpopulation and climate change. We shudder to think of losing this unique natural laboratory of change, one that has taught us so much.

An instructive example of a conservation effort here is the attempt to save the mangrove finch, the most critically endangered of all Galápagos life forms. Mangrove finches formerly lived on both Fernandina and Isabela, but the Fernandina population has now been extirpated. Remaining members of this species live in a couple of

patches of mangrove swamps along the western coast of Isabela. Here they are plagued by two invasive species: black rats, brought here centuries ago by ships, and avian vampire flies, accidentally introduced in the 1960s. Rats prey on the eggs and chicks, and fly larvae kill chicks by sucking out their blood. Poisoning rats in finch nesting areas has helped, as has fumigation of nests with a fly-killing insecticide. Mangrove finch nestlings have been successfully reared and released by the Charles Darwin Research Station, and, during the breeding season, experts closely monitor nests in the field. Plans are underway to introduce a parasitic wasp which would find and kill fly larvae. Despite these intense efforts, the future of the species remains in question; the tiny population teeters on the edge of reproductive sustainability.¹⁸

Are conservation efforts like this worth it? The answer depends on one's values. For many of us the answer is yes. The natural world is our home. It cradles life in all its manifold diversity. It is the gift that sustains us, inspires us, and renews us. Mangrove finches, along with all living things, are citizens of the planet, fellow members of the creation—our sisters and brothers.

As we disembark one last time from the *Archipel I*, our minds resonate with the experiences of the last eight days. We have romped with sea lions, photographed feeding flamingos, hiked through lava tubes, swum with white-tipped sharks, boated through mangrove swamps, spied on sea turtles, snorkeled with multicolored fish, toured a tortoise breeding center, shared rocky shores with marine iguanas, gawked at a now stuffed Lonesome George, savored Galápagos chocolate, and conversed about everything from personality types to biblical interpretation. Moreover, we have become more cognizant of the challenges faced by life and find ourselves more inspired to foster the well-being of living forms here and elsewhere. Behind all this inspiration and beauty, however, it is the mystery of change that drew us here, motivates our questions, and makes us ponder life's meaning and history.

Change, we have learned, even large-scale change, need not shock or worry us. It is woven into the very fabric of the universe, part of an ongoing creation. More than any place on earth, the Galápagos Archipelago has taught us the value and necessity of change in the living world.

Photo: James Hayward



Flightless cormorants are among the weirdest, most comical, birds on earth. They are endemic to the Galápagos Islands, where they live in small colonies scattered along the Fernandina and Isabela coastlines. Note the aquamarine eyes, stubby wings, and oversized legs and feet. This pair at Cabo Douglas, Fernandina, is engaged in what seems like a choreographed dance accompanied by twisted necks and unbirdlike grunts.

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Marine iguanas blend in with the lava rocks of the island. Exhaling salt from their noses colors their foreheads.

CREATION STORIES “THEN” *and Creation Stories “Now”*

BY BRIAN BULL

In the Galápagos Islands, a fascinating creature exists that is found there and nowhere else in the world. It is the marine iguana, a lizard that does not munch on cactus pads like the large yellow Galápagos land iguana to which it is genetically related.¹ The marine iguana eats only marine algae—seaweed. It is considerably smaller than the land iguana. It is dark grey or black in color; consequently, it warms up quickly in the sunshine. It sneezes salt crystals out of its nose!

How the marine iguana came to be, its creation story if you will, would run something like this. A few million years ago, there was nothing as far as the eye could see, nothing but water and endless nights following endless days. And then, out of the unbroken water came an explosion. It was an explosion of steam, lava, and ash. A

volcano broke the surface of the Pacific Ocean. The lava and ash mixture cooled and, in time, with more volcanic explosions, an island began to form. The island grew in size as the endless days and nights continued.

Another day, it could have been very soon thereafter or thousands of years later, a raft of logs grounded on the island’s beach. The logs had been living trees that had tumbled into the ocean in a shoreline landslide off the coast of Chile some five weeks earlier. It ran aground on the island’s southeast-facing beach. Attached to that log raft was a jumble of vegetation. Most of the vegetation was dead due to the salt spray it had endured, and to a total lack of fresh water. However, among the dead and dying plants in the salt-soaked soil there was a beavertail cactus. Being a cactus with a waxy, protective coating over

the surface of its pads and having scant need for fresh water; it was still in reasonably good shape. The tide was high that day and there was an onshore wind. The cactus found itself on the decomposed volcanic ash just beyond the beach sand and several of its pads took root. Over the years that followed, it multiplied. Later, when another log raft from northern Chile bearing several iguana lizards grounded on that same beach there were cactus pads for them to eat. They ate and procreated, and the island now had cactus plants—and lizards, large yellow and brown iguanas, eating them.

Time went by, lots of it. And then, at the end of one dry season, the rains failed. The large yellow iguanas had nothing to eat; nothing. A few of the more adventurous among them found algae in the tide pools fringing the shoreline lava-flows. The algae was edible but it was very salty! Nonetheless, it tided them over until the rains returned and they could once again munch on the beavertail cactus pads. Change, however, was under way. A very few of the yellow land iguanas continued to eat the marine algae in the tide pools and as the tide went out each day some of the larger ones followed the retreating water until they were munching on algae under several feet of sea water. As time passed, and generation followed generation, these seaweed-eating iguanas shrank in size, turned almost black in color, and learned that waving their tails from side to side allowed them to swim in the waves that broke on the island's beaches.

That they turned darker in color than their fellow land iguanas was helpful in several ways; while immature, they could more easily hide from the hungry seabirds that ate other small lizards, and when fully grown, they were able to absorb the sun's heat more rapidly. Thus it was that they warmed up rapidly each morning. This was important, for, being poikilothermic, they needed to get their body temperature up before their jaw muscles would operate with reasonable efficiency on the underwater algae that grew on the ocean-bottom rocks. And that meant that they could gather more food during the ten minutes or so of each dive.² Like other lizards, they had salt glands in their nose that enabled them, by sneezing, to get rid of the huge excess of salt in their diet. As the lizards grew smaller and darker, those salt glands became larger and much more efficient.

And that, more-or-less, is the creation story of these

fascinating creatures that live on these islands that are the peaks of undersea volcanoes. The islands themselves have existed for only a couple of millions of years, some for less than one million.³ The smaller, almost black in color, marine iguanas are genetically related to the land iguanas that are to be found throughout the Galápagos islands. They are closely enough related that occasionally the offspring of a land iguana and a marine iguana is identified, a hybrid. The land iguanas, in turn, are genetically related to the land iguanas which populate the coastal regions of Chile. Not surprisingly, for six months each year the Humboldt current flows northwards from Chile towards the equator. It is a conveyor belt that will pick up flotsam and jetsam from the Chilean coast and, a few weeks later, strand some of it on the beaches of the Galápagos islands.⁴

“Duly Constituted Authority”

Let us undertake a further analysis of how the marine iguanas of the Galápagos Islands came to be and why they exist only in those islands. My account of how this probably occurred will likely be accepted as a reasonable explanation: an explanation of how these fascinating—and incredibly fierce-looking—creatures came to exist, when they came to exist, and why they are to be found on most of the larger Galápagos Islands and nowhere else in the world.

I am a research biologist and write mainly about hematology, about tests and measurements of blood cells, molecules, and diseases. Why might my account of how the marine iguanas came into existence be accepted as legitimate by most readers of this magazine? Two possible reasons come to mind:

1. In the course of telling this creation story I have referred to the work of scientists in fields as diverse as radioactive dating, reptile genetics, geomorphology, geology, volcanology, ecology, animal physiology, and several more as well. The data that these scientists have produced are empirical data: data derived from careful, well-documented, repeatable, and repeated experiments. I have cited the findings of these several scientists to back up my assertions. Given the documentation I have provided, my

assertions can reasonably be described as the “facts” of the emergence of the marine iguanas of the Galápagos as best as that process is presently understood.

2. I am a trained biologist. As such, I will likely be granted the status of “a constituted authority” by most readers when I comment on biological matters—and this is clearly a biological matter. Why might my assessment of matters biological, by most readers, be considered reliable? Likely, it is both because I have referenced the work of other biologists and because of my professional status. Thus, this creation story will gain its credibility both from the scientific “facts” I have referenced and from the selection, arrangement, and conclusions drawn from those citations by a “constituted authority.” In this particular case, that would be me!

A tentative but likely conclusion follows. This modern creation story is probably more-or-less correct because of the facts it contains. Some of those facts are buttressed by scientific citations (scientific facts), others are being advanced by a trained biologist who, it is to be hoped, knows what he is talking about (facts attested to by a “constituted authority”).

A Creation Story “Then”

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”

That is how the biblical creation story begins. How it begins now. But was that the way it began then? Is that how those first listeners, three thousand years ago, would have heard it? That is a question shortly to be explored. In the meantime, it is the case that the “then” creation story

explains how light, and then the “sky-vault” (Heb. *raqia*), and then how land and plants came to be, and days later how the first creatures appeared and began to populate the land and the sea. It also explains how birds appeared and began to fly across the “vault of the sky.”

The “then” creation account is a factual story as well. It is full of details about the order in which events happened and about the events themselves. However, it differs from the “now” creation-of-marine-iguanas story in one very significant aspect. It is composed entirely of facts conveyed by a “constituted authority,” it contains no empirical data arrived at by repeated experimentation. It lacks “scientific” details.

The lack of scientific facts is, of course, not at all surprising. Science was still 2,500 years in the future when the “then” creation story would have been heard by that first audience. It would therefore be expected that there would be no equivalent detail such as the effect of water temperature on the rapidity with which a lizard’s jaws can function. (Reptiles are poikilothermic, their bodies quickly approach the temperature of their surroundings. For a marine iguana to survive it must swim out into the Humboldt current, dive beneath the cold ocean waters, hold its breath for ten minutes or so, and crop as much marine algae as possible in that brief period of time.⁵) There is no confirmation of the marine iguana’s genetic similarity to other lizard species. There is no mention of the time that the island on which they live emerged from the ocean as determined by radioactive dating of the oldest lava flows on the island. In short, there are no “factual” data backed up empirically, arrived at by repeated and repeatable experiments. The obvious reason for this difference between then and now is that “then” was 3,000 years ago and the scientific approach to “finding things out” had not yet come into existence.

But both stories contain “factual” information. So

This modern creation story is probably more-or-less correct because of the facts it contains. Some of those facts are buttressed by scientific citations (scientific facts), others are being advanced by a trained biologist who, it is to be hoped, knows what he is talking about (facts attested to by a “constituted authority”).

how were “facts” ascertained before the scientific method of finding things out became commonly employed? It is surprising to us now in the twenty-first century, but for millennia past, “facts” were what we today would call personal opinion. It was the case, however, that it was not just anyone’s personal opinion that was accepted as “fact.” Only certain persons were accorded that privilege—persons in positions of authority; persons viewed in the community as persons of “constituted authority.” In the ancient Hebrew culture, prophets and priests fulfilled this role when the questions being addressed involved religious matters

So, what is the portion in that creation story that is based on constituted authority and what part is based on scientific evidence, on empirical data. The answer, of course, is that all of the story is based on the constituted authority of the author. None of it is based on scientific fact. At no point in the story is empirical evidence adduced.

It will surprise some readers, but it is still the case today that factual documents may be based largely or entirely on facts attested to by constituted authority. These situations typically occur when the scientific approach is just not workable; it may even involve scientific procedures when the discussion relates to the format in which a procedure is to be presented and when it is to be used rather than how it is to be performed. An international body such as the World Health Organization (WHO) serves this purpose, as do others. I was, for a three-year term, the president of the International Commission for Standardization in Hematology (ICSH). It served as a “constituted authority” in the methods to be used for the testing of blood (hemoglobin content, hematocrit measurement, platelet count, etc.). The committee consisted of researchers in blood analysis, as well as representatives from manufacturers of automated instruments that required reference methods (developed and approved by our committee) for calibration. We reported to the WHO. Our constituted authority was enhanced by the WHO, since it clearly represented a higher level of authority, and in that way what our committee said should be done became the standard practice in blood analysis throughout the world. How the analytic methods functioned was, of course, science. Which methods were to be used and when they were to be used were decisions arrived at by ICSH committee members, acting under constituted authority.

When the “then” creation story was first heard, “facts” had not yet acquired their modern meaning. In his book *The Day the Universe Changed*, James Burke underscores the situation. He was describing the pre-scientific, medieval worldview. However, that a “constituted authority” is absolutely necessary in order to undergird “facts” was not only true in medieval times but also true two thousand years earlier. Burke comments:

The concept of the generally accepted “fact” is a relatively new one. It came into existence only five hundred years ago as a result of an event that radically altered Western life because it made possible the standardization of opinion [science]. . . . What medieval man called “fact” we would call “opinion.”⁶

Before the introduction of ascertaining a “fact” by repeatable experiment confirming that something is true empirically, “facts” were simply the written or orally expressed opinions of “constituted authorities.” That was the only possible source for factual information. Nowadays, of course, we all accept it as a fact that airplanes can fly because of empirical (scientific) evidence, not because of a pronouncement from constituted authority—the Wright brothers, Orville and Wilbur.

This lack of scientific “facts,” this entire reliance on “constituted authority,” has been recognized by Bible translators ever since the dawn of science. We know that they have recognized that the Genesis account depends upon constituted authority with no reliance on science because in the process of translation they have repeatedly attempted to rectify the situation! They have, at almost every opportunity, tried to lessen the discontinuity, the divide between Genesis as usually read and science as commonly understood, by making the biblical account appear to be a blend of both “scientific” facts and facts affirmed by constituted authority.

It is entirely possible, even likely, that their word choices in the translation process occurred below the level of conscious awareness. The choices were made nonetheless, and a close examination of those choices will confirm that consistently during the last 500 years, each time the “then” story has been re-told in English (and presumably in other languages as well), translators have

chosen words that would make it seem more “scientific”: words that would make it appear less than completely dependent upon constituted authority.

In almost all English translations, the first sentence of Genesis contains the English definite article, “the.” It most often reads, “In *the* beginning.” “The” is supplied by the translator; it is not present in the original Hebrew. Admittedly, the Hebrew does not smoothly slide into English. If translated word-for-word it would read something like “when beginning, “ or “in beginning” God created. But the Hebrew text could easily be translated in other ways (without inserting the definite article). Other ways, that is, that would not so simply and smoothly inveigle an unwary reader to believe that the text was referring to the awesome singularity of the Big Bang. That, science assures us, was the event that initiated energy, space, and time—indeed all of reality, the beginning of all beginnings. The translator’s choice to insert a “the” in the process of rendering the opening words of Genesis into English has had far-reaching consequences, indeed.

What *bereshith* meant to that first audience we cannot be sure, but we can be certain that it did not mean that they were about to hear how the space-time continuum popped into existence! Yet that is precisely how a considerable number of Bible readers have understood it. They have understood it this way because of the translator’s choice to insert a “the” in front of “beginning.” Admittedly, “to begin with” lacks the grandeur of **In The Beginning** but it more accurately conveys that, in Hebrew, the author is only undertaking to explain how the sky and the land of those he was addressing had come into existence.⁷

And then there is the matter of how to translate the Hebrew word *‘erets*. Typical renderings would be “land” or, much less often, “earth.” Even more rarely it is translated as territory, country, or region. It will be apparent to the reader that only one of these words can be mistaken for the name of the planet on which we live—the planet Earth. Early in Genesis (Chapters 1–11) translators have decided that *‘erets* meant “earth” nine times out of ten. In the remainder of Genesis and the rest of the Hebrew Bible, they have chosen it three times out of every ten occurrences!

It is likely that they have made this dramatic about-face in deciding on the word because, when it is encountered early in the “then” creation story, it creates a patina of science around the narrative—the creation story could

possibly be talking about our home planet, two and one-half millennia before anyone knew we lived on a sphere rotating in empty space—a sphere called Earth.

Statistically, the translator’s change of heart as to what the Hebrew *‘erets* actually means in English is even more surprising than these two dissimilar ratios (9:10 early, 3:10 late) would suggest. Uniformly, *‘erets* in Genesis 1–11 is rendered “earth” in English, except when the translator’s hand has been forced—where the translator has had no option. *‘Erets* can only be translated as *land* in Hebrew sentences such as the *land* of Havilah, the *land* of Cush, and the *lands* belonging to tribes and peoples descended from Noah’s three sons. To translate *‘erets* as earth in such sentences is clearly not an option. Were the translators not forced to render *‘erets* as land in twelve such sentences out of a total of ninety-six occurrences, it is highly likely they would have always rendered *‘erets* as “earth” in Genesis 1–11.

That *‘erets* means “land” and should be virtually always translated in that way is underscored by the promise to Abraham: “This land (*‘erets*) I give to you and your descendants” and by the common appellation of the modern state of Israel; *‘erets Israel*. That, of course, translates into English as “The *Land* of Israel.”

Let us assume for the moment that translators in rendering the Genesis story from Hebrew into English have attempted in some measure to retell the story “scientifically.” Let us suppose that they have translated it as if it were truly a blend of facts from duly constituted authority, as well as facts from scientific investigation. Assuming that they have done this, what has been the result?

The result of the translators’ conscious or unconscious choice has been disastrous. It has, in large measure, both initiated and subsequently fueled the 500-year long discord between “science” and “religion.” That is so because many of today’s readers have accepted the notion that Genesis is a blend of facts from science and from constituted authority, rather than an account based entirely on the constituted authority of the author. This acceptance has led to an entire “creation edifice” made up of creation seminars, creation museums, creation research institutes, creation conferences, and more.⁸ It has deepened the divide between science as commonly understood and Genesis as usually read.

So, what did the opening phrase of the “then” creation story actually promise? It promised a description of reality as it was conceived of 3,000 years ago. It

promises an account of how that reality had come into existence: the reality known by those who first heard the Genesis account. It promised to tell of the God who was concerned enough about humans to prepare the *land* and the *sky* for them, and to place in that sky a *light* to ensure that the land brought forth abundantly.

So, what, then, has the translation process mistakenly made it appear is on offer in the first sentence of that creation story?

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”

This introductory sentence offers a creation story that will convey to the listener a blend of scientific information interwoven with factual information—the opinion of a constituted authority—about how the scientifically verified universe (heaven[s]), and the cosmological entities, our solar system and our home planet (earth) have come to be.

“To begin with God created the sky and the land.”⁹

This introductory sentence offered a creation story that would convey factual information (the opinion of a duly constituted authority) about how the dome of the sky above each listener’s head had come into existence and how the land underneath each listener’s feet had come to be. It also revealed (introduced?) ethical monotheism—a good God committed to human flourishing.

So, after contemplating two creation stories, penned three millennia apart, where do we find ourselves? Looking back now on the more ancient of the two, it seems likely that translators, perhaps unknowingly, have tried to transmute it into a modern creation story as they have translated it from the Hebrew in which it was originally written. And so it is that an account that was written to explain to those first listeners *how* and why their familiar sky and land had been created has become transmuted into a *where* and *when* account of the universe, our solar system, and planet Earth.

The cosmological realities of universe, solar system

and planet Earth were literally inconceivable to the ancient Hebrews to whom the message of Genesis was addressed. It was they who found the text immensely valuable as they understood it. It was valuable because it gave them relevant information about who God was, what God was doing, and what God wanted for them. It was they who began the labor-intensive process of copying it and so preserving it for posterity. If we too understand that we exist because a gracious God chose to make existence possible and further to ensure that humans would flourish upon the land, then we truly are the inheritors of that original creation story.

Endnotes

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Photo: James Hayward



Clouds and the colors of sunset give the impression of a volcano explosion.

RECOUNTING *the Conversations*

BY ALITA BYRD

In mid-August, a small band of intrepid travelers set sail on a voyage of discovery among the legendary Galápagos Islands, an archipelago off the coast of Ecuador, straddling the Equator.

The trip had been long delayed by the pandemic, and many of the travelers had packed and re-packed, read and re-read relevant books, and prepared in multiple ways for both a physical and spiritual journey among the islands.

The Galápagos Islands are famed as a destination that can touch hearts and minds as few other places can. We knew about the revelations Charles Darwin experienced after visiting the islands almost 200 years ago, and we had also read former evangelical pastor Brian McLaren's much more recent book describing the spiritual insights he found there. We were ready for our own spiritual journey.

We were ready to learn, to have our minds expanded, and to come away with a new understanding. Would we find the birthplace of evolution or the natural wonder of God's creation?

Many spiritual journeys are solitary. Think Moses and the Ten Commandments, Jesus in the Wilderness, Paul of Thebes in the third century, or the medieval St. Kevin, who avoided his followers by living in a cave in Ireland's Glendalough. But for many of us, the pandemic has helped us to realize that we really are social beings who thrive in community and have a biological need for the company of other humans. And the August trip to the Galápagos was that rare opportunity to satisfy both our need to escape from the crazy world on a spiritual quest, and to make those discoveries in the company of sympathetic friends.

Welcoming us on board our Avianca flight bound for San Cristóbal—one of two Galápagos airports—the flight attendant proclaimed we had chosen an airline that was “Cambiando Juntos,” or “Changing Together.”

That summed it up. We were ready to change, to evolve, to grow together. Our senses were primed to experience wonder—to be amazed—and to do it together.

The Group

Friends of *Spectrum* all, our group encompassed a variety of pilgrims keen to explore—and find community through conversation.

We were a motley group. An 81-year-old former university president determined to experience his first snorkeling venture was on board. We had a librarian enamored with marine iguanas (adversely dubbed “hideous-looking” by Charles Darwin). An ethicist and a retired nursing professor celebrated their fifty-fifth wedding anniversary on the trip by stepping over a sea lion to see antique sailors’ graffiti dating back almost 200 years, and then climbing to a lava rock lookout over a salty crater lake.

A pathologist, a biologist, and a radiology consultant all carried pendulous super-telephoto lenses on their SLR cameras and captured colorful close-ups of flamingos, land iguanas, and blue-footed boobies. A renowned pediatric cardiologist practiced a new skill of photographing giant sea turtles underwater during the week.



Guide Omar Medina enthusiastically greets the *Spectrum* team as they land on an island for a morning walk.



Photo: James Hayward

Dinghy rides from the *Archipel I* to the islands were a daily routine.

There were several PhDs and authors of multiple books who daily strove to ensure they did not step on some fearless basking creature by accident and struggled to paddle a kayak without going in circles.

We were isolated. Our voyage lasted for seven days, and only one afternoon was spent in Puerto Ayora, the largest town in the islands, with about 12,000 inhabitants. We visited half of the twenty-one islands that make up the archipelago and on only one of the uninhabited islands did we see another tour group in the distance. We had no Wi-Fi—no connectivity to the outside world except during the afternoon we spent in Puerto Ayora.

“It was a long time-out,” said Carmen Lau, chair of the Adventist Forum board. “We didn’t see anyone else. There were no signs. No trash. No boats. I didn’t expect it to be so desolate. There was time to think and re-ground myself. The chance to be with kindred spirits, away from COVID, was a sweet deal.”

Our boat was an 88-foot catamaran, and we were sixteen travelers, sleeping in eight comfortable cabins. It was close quarters—but it felt positively spacious when we realized that the *HMS Beagle*, the boat that Charles Darwin sailed in for five years around the world, was only two feet longer, at 90 feet, and it held seventy-four!

The National Park and government of Ecuador take the preservation and conservation of the islands seriously. Tourists are not allowed to set foot anywhere without a licensed National Park guide. Our assigned guide was Omar Medina, fluently bilingual, with a ready smile and hearty laugh, who was born on one of the islands, and whose son coincidentally attended the Adventist school in Puerto Ayora for four years. Omar has over a dozen years of experience guiding tourists (mostly photographers) around the Galápagos Islands. Ecuador’s program to become

a Galápagos guide is fiercely competitive, according to Omar, with less than 10% of those who apply accepted into a study program that lasts for nearly half a year, and then requires ongoing refresher courses and tests. Omar's knowledge of the geology, history, wildlife, and ecology of the Galápagos Islands is impressive, and he could answer many seemingly esoteric questions. However, there were things that he didn't know, which he readily confessed. Sometimes he was able to look up the answer, which he seemed good at remembering to do. Other times, he was happy to listen to explanations and information from some of the experts among our group, several of whom have researched and published on related topics.

The Conversation

Every day on board the *Archipel II*, and on short walks with Omar to explore the flora and fauna of the islands, we had time to converse with our fellow travelers. Three times a day we sat at two long tables, eating mostly vegetarian food, and talking.

"The nature was spectacular, but the discussion and stories were equally as much fun," said David Grellmann, an urgent care and family practice physician in South Bend, Indiana.

Conversations were sometimes cut short by seasickness, or exhaustion after early morning expeditions—but we learned a lot about each other.

One evening, Brian Bull, a pathologist and research biologist at Loma Linda University whose lab is currently investigating why COVID kills, talked about the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator personality test. He talked us through the main personality types, then helped us to sort ourselves and huddle with our fellow-personality-types in the four corners of the boat's main cabin. It turned out that a majority of us were introverted, scientist types who crowded uncomfortably together in one corner,

a goodly number were the introverted organized get-things-done types, while only three of us were the happy-go-lucky extroverts: editor Bonnie Dwyer, the journalist and bringer-together-of-persons who has always excelled at getting people talking, our gregarious guide Omar Medina, and this correspondent.

Another evening, those of us who weren't felled by an especially bumpy crossing between islands, talked about books we had recently read, from scientific tomes to memoirs to biographies to novels. The group showed a definite predilection for non-fiction, and an especial interest in books examining the intersection between science and religion.

Later, we all played Trivial Pursuit, which included some fairly obscure popular culture questions. The Dwyers, including Bonnie, her husband Tom, son Mark, and daughter-in-law Kathryn Hunt, were undoubtedly the winners, with an impressive expertise in minutiae.

Brian Bull took the figurative lectern again to talk about gut health, another area he has researched extensively, explaining why obesity has become an epidemic in American society. His answer lies in the extreme processing of grains following the introduction



This is the largest statue of Charles Darwin in the Galápagos. It is on San Cristóbal Island where he first landed.

Photo: Mark McKenney

Throughout the journey we talked as a body, we discussed in small groups, and we chatted in pairs. Our conversations ranged from the mundane to the metaphysical, from the quotidian to the celestial.

of new milling techniques at the end of the 1800s, leaving almost no soluble fiber for our large intestine, which it needs in order to function effectively. (John Harvey Kellogg even joined in the new trend by removing the corn germ and fiber from Corn Flakes.) The removal of nearly all of the fiber from the majority of our diet leads to myriad complications, and Bull believes that the current food industry in the US means it is nearly impossible to buy the food that your lower gut needs to stay healthy. This topic led to lots of questions and conversations and clamorous requests for Bull's special recipe for Oat Bran Breakfast Porridge with a goodly dose of fermentable fiber!

Throughout the journey we talked as a body, we discussed in small groups, and we chatted in pairs. Our conversations ranged from the mundane to the metaphysical, from the quotidian to the celestial. We compared the ways we have coped with COVID, we talked about why Sabbath School is crucial, we discussed who has given their bodies to science and why burial is not particularly important.

"The best thing about this trip was the fellowship," said David Grellmann. "There are some great minds on this trip—giants—people I have heard about all my life. It is an immense privilege to be able to go on a trip with them."

The camaraderie was something special, everyone agreed. Without the dimension of conversation with like-minded travelers, the trip would have been an entirely different experience.

"The chance to talk at length about what we are seeing and what bombards our senses here in the Galápagos with people who are very thoughtful and highly knowledgeable" was the most meaningful thing about the trip for Brian Bull. "And then we would go and see something new the next day and talk about that!"

Yung Lau, professor and director of pediatric cardiology at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, also agreed that the "constant learning has been wonderful. Not only from Omar, but from all of our travel band. Listening to stories from our elders—and seeing them stick with the Adventist Church despite its foibles and the trials they have experienced with church leadership, is inspiring. Our heritage has a lot to offer the world."

"The best thing for me was being in the presence of others who share a belief in the Creator and celebrating



Ancient graffiti by sailors who landed on Isabela Island in the 1800s covers the rocks behind guide Omar Medina.

together the grandeur of creation," said Gerald Winslow, bioethicist and professor of religion at Loma Linda University. "The best thing is feeling like we are a part of that creation, together as human beings, and connecting with new friends and reconnecting with people (like Jim Hayward, who was my student at Walla Walla decades ago), and sharing this sense of awe together. If I came here alone it would be wonderful—but not wonderful like this."

The Theories

Evolution, traditional Adventist beliefs concerning a literal six-day creation, and the age of the earth were topics at the forefront of our thoughts, our conversations, and our study every day.

We talked a lot about Charles Darwin, beginning on our very first day when we took a group photo at a large statue of Darwin on San Cristóbal Island, which commemorates the landing site of the HMS *Beagle*. Our ebullient guide Omar showed us several films and explained which islands Darwin had visited, where he walked, which animals he collected, and how his visit helped him to create his theory. Some of us had entirely missed any education about Charles Darwin (basically all of us who were educated in the Seventh-day Adventist educational system).

For those of us with this big hole in our education, some of the things we learned surprised us mightily: for instance, Darwin spent only five weeks out of his famous five-year voyage in the Galápagos Islands, in 1835. That was only a little over a month (not even 2% of his journey) to gather much of the material that gave him his theory



Photo: Mark McKenney

Trekking across South Plaza Island in the Galápagos National Park

about natural selection. Darwin was only 22 when he joined the voyage—a recent university graduate who was headed for a life in the clergy—and he didn’t finish writing *On the Origin of Species* until 1859, when he was 50 years old. In the first edition of the book, the word “evolution” did not appear at all, and even later, Darwin always seemed to favor phrases like “descent with modification” and “natural selection” rather than “evolution.”

“We skipped that chapter in my academy biology class,” said Mark Dwyer, Bonnie Dwyer’s son, who works as a behavioral therapist. “I remember that my teacher told us that we wouldn’t need our biology books for the next four weeks. He told us to bring our Bibles instead, and we read Genesis.”

But several of our number have spent a lot of time musing about Darwin. Brian Bull has written a trilogy with Fritz Guy. *God, Sky, and Land: Genesis 1 As the Ancient Hebrews Heard It*, was published by the Adventist Forum in 2011. Six years later came the second volume: *God, Land, and the Great Flood: Hearing the Story with 21st-Century Christian Ears*. And finally, *God, Genesis, and the Good News: God, the Misreading of Genesis, and the Surprisingly Good News* was published in 2019.

Jim Hayward, research emeritus professor at Andrews University, biologist, and expert in the behavioral ecology of seabirds, published *The Creation/Evolution Controversy: An Annotated Bibliography* in 1998—a collection of 447 volumes published between 1543 and 1996 that provide an overview of the literature addressing the creation/evolution discussion. He also edited *Creation Reconsidered: Scientific, Biblical, and Theological Perspectives*, a collection of

essays that grew out of an Adventist Forum conference about creation and science. Most recently, Hayward published a memoir describing his own journey, called *Dinosaurs, Volcanoes, and Holy Writ: A Boy-Turned-Scientist Journeys from Fundamentalism to Faith*.

A number of us read Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of the Species by Means of Natural Selection* and/or *Voyage of the Beagle* in preparation for the trip. Jerry Winslow listened to *On the Origin of the Species* all the way through twice, and halfway through a third time—read by Richard Dawkins. Bonnie Dwyer listened to Dawkins read *Voyage of the Beagle*.

Some of our conversations brought to light interesting parallels between the nineteenth-century naturalist Charles Darwin and our nineteenth-century Church founder, Ellen G. White. Both were prolific writers, publishing numerous letters, articles, and books. Charles Darwin, born in 1809 in England, was 18 years old when Ellen White was born in 1827 in the United States. Both had a great interest in religion—with Darwin having more education, as he spent three years studying at Cambridge University, with an especial focus on theology and philosophy, preparing to become a clergyman. Both were interested in social justice, and both abhorred slavery and were committed abolitionists. During the time Charles Darwin was traveling on the HMS *Beagle*, slavery was eliminated in Great Britain and all of its colonies. Darwin saw slavery firsthand during the voyage, and this made him more determined to see such practices done away with. Like Ellen White, he supported the Union during the Civil War in the United States, and its fight against slavery. Darwin also saw missionaries and the effect of their work

during his travels, particularly in Tahiti and New Zealand, and he became a firm supporter of religious missionaries and their “civilizing” impact. Ellen White, of course, also was a proponent of missionaries spreading the gospel.

Both Ellen White and Charles Darwin lost children. Darwin’s daughter Annie died in 1851, at the age of 10. By all accounts, Darwin was a devoted father who was constantly concerned about the health of his ten children. Ellen White was the mother of four boys. Her oldest, Henry, died of pneumonia in 1863, at the age of 16. Her youngest, John, had died in 1860 when he was only three months old.

There is no record of Ellen White mentioning Charles Darwin by name—or vice versa!—but Ellen White’s first published statement supporting the belief in a literal six-day creation, followed by a global flood, was published in 1864, five years after the publication of *On the Origin of Species*.

Both Ellen White and Charles Darwin were reformers, preaching new visions of life and espousing new beliefs that were not commonly held at the time.

“Over time, I have completely changed my thinking about Darwin,” David Grellmann said. “Back in my earlier years, I thought he was on the Devil’s side. But with increased understanding, I have learned that Darwin was someone who could move beyond the paradigm of his time and break boundaries. He was a great man.”

Yung Lau said: “Now I think of Darwin as someone with a characteristic I have learned to admire: the pursuit of truth no matter where it leads you. Darwin had to have a lot of courage—anytime you go against the mainstream you risk being completely ostracized.”

“Darwin was a Christian, and a seeker who was trying to make sense of the world,” said Carmen Lau. “I can see how visiting this spot could stimulate a lot of thought and be life changing.”

For some of us, the trip helped our own thinking to evolve.

“I have sailed around islands before, but I was truly in awe at the grandeur of the scenery and the uniqueness of the wildlife here,” said Barbara McKinney, a physician surveyor for the Joint Commission. “I was amazed to see the adaptability of nature in up close and personal terms.”

Bonnie Dwyer, editor of *Spectrum*, said her thinking has changed significantly. “I think you have to be open to change,” she said. “I see speciation and adaptation here.

But I don’t see how that rules out God. I want both. I realize evolution happens. But I believe there is a Creator.”

“The evidence for change and adaptation just knocks you between the eyes,” Jim Hayward said about the Galápagos. “You can’t avoid it.”

What do the islands teach us about evolution?

“That it happens,” Jim Hayward said. “And that the changes can be extensive. We can understand them to a certain degree, especially now that we have genetics (which Darwin didn’t). To me, it says something very powerful about the nature of life: that it has the capacity to change in response to changing conditions. To me that is tremendous evidence of creativity. The marvelous capacity of organisms to change makes me all the more respectful of life and the Creator.”

Possibly of greater interest to the reader would be the story of heated arguments among our merry band about the merits of evolution and the origins of the earth—but this reporter, at least, heard no such debates. Perhaps we were a group of Adventists too tolerant, too open, too polite—too tired—to get into it. Perhaps we were seeing the overwhelming evidence of evolving species too closely. Perhaps, while maybe not all on exactly the same page, we were at least all in the same book.

“Genesis is theology—not science,” said Brian Bull. Bull and Guy’s three volumes set out to answer a basic question: How do you harmonize science as commonly understood with the way that Genesis is usually read? The books are not easily summarized; Bull says there are no CliffsNotes. But the answer Bull and Guy came to was that the biblical creation story has been completely misinterpreted, partly through the fault of those who have translated the Bible from Hebrew into English. “The creation story itself insists that it is not science,” Brian says.



Photo: James Hayward

Ocean breezes quickly dried laundry.

The story is about what God is understood to do and what he is doing in the world—this is by definition theology. But we have turned it into science because it looks like science. And every translator from Hebrew into any other tongue has translated it to make it appear even more like science. The Hebrew word *'erets* in English most commonly becomes either “earth” or “land.” In the first 11 chapters of Genesis translators almost always have chosen “earth.” In the rest of the Bible, they have, almost always, chosen “land,” or nation, as in “the land of Israel.” (God promised Abraham not the world, or the earth, but the land.) But this translation leads English readers to believe that in Genesis the Hebrew Bible must be talking about the planet.

Because, for 500 years, Bible translators have chosen “earth” rather than “land” for the Hebrew *'erets*, Genesis appears to tell the story of the beginning of the earth, or planet, on which we live.

Here in the Galápagos was the place where this notion about the origins of the earth was first confronted by an alternative explanation. And that has now become the accepted explanation by almost everybody except for certain religious groups.

Finding God

We learned about Darwin and the giant tortoises, and his research on the adaptation of the finches. But did our band of pilgrims see God in the Galápagos?

“God is everywhere. I don’t have any worries about how old the earth is. I gave that up a long time ago,” said the pragmatic Betty Winslow, emeritus professor of Loma Linda University’s School of Nursing.

“Absolutely we saw God here in the Galápagos,” said Brian Bull. “The fact that animals can adapt to harsh conditions and survive, the fact that plants like these cacti can undergo such dramatic transformation from island to island because of predation—that speaks to me of an extraordinarily prolific designer. But it has taken longer than 6,000 years.”



On the last day, a final trek across the beach

Photo: Alina Bond

“It’s meaningful to solidify the idea that I can still have God as the Creator while I can see definite adaptations occurring,” said Barbara McKinney. “Those two can sit side by side and I am comfortable with that. It doesn’t have to be either/or.”

Is the debate over evolution still a big challenge for the Adventist Church and its members?

“Yes,” says Yung Lau, “and I wonder why.”

Could a large part be fear—fear that incorrect belief could jeopardize one’s salvation? If we could just stop being afraid and believe in a loving God who loves us unconditionally, we could freely explore, knowing we have the Holy Spirit to guide and help us to follow truth wherever it might lead.

I think that when we get to heaven, part of the joy will be discovering where we were just plain wrong, and then knowing we finally have the capacity to understand the truth in all its complexities. And for all the times we confidently thought we knew what was right, I am sure that God will extend us grace, because he loves each of us unconditionally.

Spending seven days contemplating nature and evolution and seeing animals we had never seen before in such proximity that we could have touched them, was a transformative experience for us personally.

“Having a chance to connect with the animal world—when animals have been so pushed out of modern life—helps us to change our relationship with the earth,” said Bonnie Dwyer. “There is so much that the animals can teach us. When we are at a transition point in our own

lives—realizing that we are changing like it or not—we can learn from the animals and how they adapt so gracefully to change.”

We were amazed and delighted by the fearlessness of the animals—one of the most extraordinary and unique things about the Galápagos Islands. Sea lions, marine iguanas, land iguanas, sea turtles, giant tortoises, sharks, and birds of all sorts, paid no attention to us intruders, calmly letting us watch them. The sea lions actually approached us, seeming to want to play.

Cultivating Wonder

On one of the final evenings of the trip, our group discussion was led by Jerry Winslow, who as well as professor of religion at Loma Linda University, is also the founding director of the Institute for Health Policy and Leadership. He reminded us about the importance of awe and wonder.

“O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! who hast set thy glory above the heavens.”

This is the way the eighth Psalm begins and ends. Visiting the Galápagos is one way you might restore a sense of wonder in your life. But there are two parts of wonder, Winslow contends. First, awe is the overwhelming emotion when you realize you are in the presence of something far more amazing and awesome than you can begin to imagine. The second part is puzzlement. Why does God care about this earth and this galaxy?

As Stephen Hawking put it:

The human race is just a chemical scum on a moderate-sized planet, orbiting around a very average star in the outer suburb of one among a hundred billion galaxies. We are so insignificant that I can't believe the whole universe exists for our benefit.

But to be a Christian is to realize that the master of the universe was willing to risk everything for the little life that we have here.

When we wonder at something, we honor the Creator. When we question it, that can also honor him.

No, science doesn't take away the beauty of the stars, as Richard Feynman explained. “The vastness of the heavens stretches my imagination. Stuck on this carousel

my little eye can catch one-million-year-old light. A vast pattern—of which I am a part. . . . What is the pattern, or the meaning, or the why? It does not do harm to the mystery to know a little about it.”

Faith enhances the dazzlement, Jerry Winslow argues, and science makes that dazzlement even more wonderful. “I think it's our job as people of faith to hold those two things together.”

Science by itself doesn't have the ability to justify its own existence, he said. But here in the Galápagos we have the chance to experience awe—and to ask questions.

We can follow the best evidence and still believe in a Creator.

As the voyage ended and our little band dispersed back to its own communities, slowly losing the feeling of the boat's rocking, and re-integrating into a life of daily tasks and commitments, we strive to keep the conversation going and not to forget the sense of wonder we discovered on our voyage. Every day—nearly every hour—we saw something awe inspiring, something incredible, something unique. We saw these things—so far from our everyday lives—and we were able to dissect and discuss them with our traveler friends. We saw some of the same evidence that Darwin saw and used to create a groundbreaking new framework for life on earth. We also saw beauty and extreme creativity, pointing to a divine hand with unlimited resources. We resolve to continue the conversation with our wider community, to keep an open mind, and to remember to wonder.



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



A giant Galápagos tortoise at a breeding center on Santa Cruz Island

HOW MY MIND HAS CHANGED (AND STAYED THE SAME) *With Regard to the Theory of Evolution*

BY LAWRENCE T. GERATY

This is an account of an Adventist believer who, like many others his age, began life with a traditional, fundamentalist view of the relationship between science and Scripture, but who, within the womb of the Church, has gradually grown and changed his views.

I was born in 1940 to Adventist missionary parents, growing up behind Japanese lines in Central China during World War II. When the Communist regime gained control of the mainland, the General Conference moved my family to Beirut, Lebanon, where I spent my teenage years. I grew up on Sam Campbell and Ruth Wheeler books, believing that my world was populated by two kinds of people: those like my family who believed

implicitly in the literal biblical account of creation, and those unbelievers who rejected “the truth” and put their faith in the materialistic and atheistic origin theory of evolution. There, at Middle East College Academy, my biology teacher was Indra Ashod Greer, who gave me a love of science and a respect for its discoveries. I don’t remember the word “evolution” ever being mentioned.

While a theology major at Newbold College in England, I was privileged to take science classes from Albert Watson and Dennis Brailsford. They fostered a respect for science and alerted me to the fact that the discipline led some serious scholars to alternative views from our traditional interpretations.

It was not till I got to Andrews University Theological Seminary, however, that I was confronted for the first time with serious challenges to the ideas I had inherited about origins. I learned about hermeneutics and that, based on certain presuppositions, one could come to different conclusions about science and religion. To my surprise, Ellen G. White's grandson, Arthur, shared the statements by his father (and approved by his grandmother) that White did not expect people to take her statements on matters of history and science as authoritative. Teachers like Richard Ritland and Sakae Kubo modeled a commitment to the Church with a high view of Scripture but without having to read Genesis 1–11 superficially as history in the simple, literal sense. My esteemed archaeology teacher, Siegfried Horn, assured me that Genesis was more theological than historical and that there were all kinds of problems with numbers in the Hebrew Bible, including with respect to genealogies and the quantity of Israelites. F. E. J. Harder pointed out the symmetry in the days of creation, which suggested poetry and parallelism, not literal history.

When I was assigned to my first church in the Southeastern California Conference, I found well-read graduates of Loma Linda University who wondered how I could defend traditional Adventist views on 6,000 years and a world-wide flood. I was forced to read for answers so I could pastor my flock intelligently. By the time I got to graduate school at Harvard, I bravely searched for support of my traditional views, even trying some of them out in my research papers. I'll never forget my major professor calling me into his office after a seminar paper I had written and saying, "I know you are an Adventist. It is not our purpose to change your views, but what is important to me is that when you leave us you will know all the relevant data and that you know how to interpret them fairly." That sounded reasonable. He surprised me by saying, "By the way, I'm looking for a teaching assistant

for next year; would you be willing to consider helping me?" I was drawn to this world-class scholar whose circle had room for differing views honestly held, if backed up by evidence.

It was during this time that I discovered many other Adventist graduate students, not only at Harvard, but also at MIT, Boston University, Northeastern University, and the University of Massachusetts, for example. Most of us were struggling to relate our traditional beliefs to the new data and interpretations we were discovering. It was natural to turn our newly honed critical skills onto what meant the most to us—our faith. It was in this milieu that the New England Adventist Forum was born. As we learned of other such groups of graduate students across the country, the Association of Adventist Forums was founded in an attempt to "save" Adventist graduate students for the Church. *Spectrum* became the journal where we could try out relevant ideas, and since that time it has continued to serve as a lifeline for many thinking Adventists. Because of Alvin Kwiram's contacts at Harvard, where he was teaching chemistry, we were able to interact, for instance, with world renowned scientists like Ernst Mayr, one of the twentieth century's leading evolutionary biologists. It was during that time that I became acquainted with Peter Hare and the age-dating technique of amino-acid racemization, which he developed hoping to demonstrate the 6,000-year age of the earth but which, to his dismay, disappointed him, proving long ages instead!

When I moved to Andrews University as a professor, I soon found a congenial group of colleagues who were loyal Adventists, true to their heritage as seekers of present truth. In the science and religion arena, these included Ed Lugenbeal and Hal James at the Geoscience Research Institute, and Dick Ritland and Clark Rowland on the faculty. Seminary colleagues like Siegfried Horn in Old Testament, Jim Cox in New Testament, and Fritz

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Guy in Theology, were all excellent conversation partners as I tried to come to terms with the relationship between the Bible and scientific discoveries and how, correctly interpreted, they were complementary avenues to truth. As I later learned from Brian McLaren, I was learning to take the Bible *literarily* rather than *literally*, looking to it for *meaning* rather than just *facts*.

It was during this time that I was asked to make a presentation to an Adventist Forum meeting on the topic, “The Genesis Genealogies as an Index of Time.” There I showed that the genealogies were not complete, nor were they given for chronological purposes. When *Spectrum* editor Molleurus Couperus heard it, he asked me to publish it in *Spectrum*. I remonstrated, saying it was intended as an oral presentation only, but he insisted, so I prepared it for print (my first *Spectrum* article). Unfortunately, it became a lightning rod that “pigeonholed” me for life. In fact, my department chair, Horn, said, “I agree 100% with what you’ve written but I’m surprised you would put it out there and risk becoming a target by the brethren.” Fully a decade later, when I was serving as archaeology editor for *Ministry* magazine, its editor, Bob Spangler, called me into his office one day and said, “I’m sorry to tell you but your name on our masthead has become an embarrassment.” When I inquired as to the reason, he mentioned my *Spectrum* article referred to above. When I asked him if he had read it, he confessed he hadn’t. How then, I asked him, had he learned about its existence and contents. “From the brethren,” he said. I asked him, “How about the articles I supply *Ministry* each month on archaeology and the Bible; have they been helpful?” His face reddened and the editor responded, “I haven’t had time to read any of them.” To make his life easier, I resigned.

Then there were the Geoscience tours planned for Adventist Bible and science teachers. I was privileged to participate in one on which we crisscrossed the Western

United States, looking at evidence that could challenge the standard prevailing views. While interpretations advocated by GRI scientists did give pause on occasion, they were ad hoc, because they would be inconsistent with other solutions advocated elsewhere on the trip. I wrote up my evaluation of this trip for *Spectrum*.

When, a few years later, the denominational Faith & Science Conferences were held at Glacier View, I was honored to participate in the second of the three conferences, where I believe the most honest attempt was made to consider the evidence, both pro and con, for creation and evolution. In fact, my invited presentation, “Archaeology and the Flood,” was later published by the independent publishers of *Adventist Today*, in *Understanding Genesis: Contemporary Adventist Perspectives* (ed. Bull, Guy, Taylor, 2006). I well remember when, at the final session, Ted Wilson, chair of the GC Faith & Science Committee, distributed a statement meant to sum up the conclusions of the conference, but which, after a full discussion, was turned down by the participants. To my dismay, the statement later appeared in the *Adventist Review*, with the claim that it had been voted by the conference; it was not hard to see this as a boldfaced lie. It troubled me that advocates of fundamentalist views had to resort to such underhand tactics.

Another key episode in the growth of my own views relates to the development and subsequent history of the 1980 Statement of Fundamental Beliefs, a topic that is fairly well known. I was among those professors at the Seminary at Andrews charged with drafting the original statements. I was assigned statement number six on creation. Our philosophy was to use biblical terminology wherever possible, inasmuch as all Adventists consider the Bible to be our authoritative source of truth. Our recommendation was adopted at the 1980 GC Session in Dallas. Imagine my disappointment to see, in a

I was assigned statement number six on creation. Our philosophy was to use biblical terminology wherever possible, inasmuch as all Adventists consider the Bible to be our authoritative source of truth.



Sesuvium ground cover turns orange during the rainy season on South Plaza Island.

Photo: James Hayward

subsequent GC Session, the biblical wording replaced by fundamentalist interpretations of biblical wording using expressions about time and mechanisms rather than the actual wording of Scripture itself. It is hard for me to imagine any thinking person with a knowledge of the scientific evidence being able to affirm the current wording of fundamental belief number six. Thus, evangelism among scientists has been dealt a death blow. It has even forced me to reconsider at times whether or not I can be a member of a denomination that intentionally maneuvers its way in a political manner rather than looking for theological positions that recognize that truth emerges from an interpretation of the evidence that honors both sources of revelation: the book of nature as well as the book of Scripture.

During my twenty-five years of administrative responsibilities in higher education, I have not had the time or opportunity to pursue all the reading and research I would have wished, but I have done some reading and been a part of a regular discussion group whose main topic is science and religion. My field of expertise is not science, but the Hebrew Bible and the history of antiquity (archaeology). But I know enough to realize that the increased pace of relevant scientific discoveries

is outpacing the ability of the Church's fundamentalist interpreters to successfully defend their nineteenth-century models.

My latest opportunity to consider these issues was an invitation to participate in *Spectrum's* recent trip to the Galápagos Islands, August 12–24, 2021, about which one can read elsewhere in this issue of the magazine. Needless to say, it was the trip of a lifetime to, in a sense, “re-live” Charles Darwin's discoveries, to consider the subsequent advances in understanding, and to ponder how my own views on origins have changed or stayed the same. I was intrigued that plate tectonics and hot spots best explain the formation and history of the islands (as with the Hawaiian Islands, for instance). In the face of species extinction, I was struck with the importance of biological adaptation—not just based on Darwin's observations but dramatized by the forty-year-long research of Peter and Rosemary Grant on the island of Daphne Major, who were able to measure and document the adaptation of the beaks of finches where DNA has confirmed the interrelationships of these birds going back to a common ancestor.

My questions were certainly not resolved by this trip but, in a sense, they were only brought up anew. One is forced to consider the fact that evidence for survival lies

in a struggle for growth and adaptation. We observed firsthand tortoises, iguanas, and finches—all in the process of adapting. It is not so much the “survival of the fittest” but, as McLaren suggested, it is rather the survival of the best adapted, the most attractive, the best organized, and the most cooperative. Change is obviously inevitable. The question is whether or not we want to have a say in how it will happen. One thinks, in the face of our current extractive economy, of the importance of protecting and saving our environment. Evolutionary theory now has a bridge to ecological theory. Again, I agree with McLaren that “any organism that does not fit harmoniously in its environment will end up as a fossil, as dust blowing across a desert—including the people who submit their brains and chain their lives to inflexible ideologies like contemporary communism and capitalism.” This lesson is not just for our society but also and especially, it seems to me, for our Church and its current commitment to inflexible fundamentalism.

I came away from my Galápagos experience with, as Leonardo Boff put it, “a new perception of Earth as a vast community of which we are members. As members, we are responsible for assuring that all other members and factors—from the energy balance of soil and air through microorganisms and up to the races and to each individual person—may live on it in harmony and peace.”

Again, there are lessons here for our Church. In our quest for spiritual truth, many of us struggle with the relationship between the Bible and science. On the one hand, we hold the Bible as authoritative for faith and practice; on the other hand, we cannot ignore the implications of current scientific discoveries. As I ponder these issues, here are some thoughts I’ve had.

When it comes to origins, I am a creationist. There is just no way that spontaneous generation makes sense!

There is just too much evidence of intelligent design. Because God made the universe with such order and regularity, we can now describe it with reason and logic. It’s like mathematics—I subscribe to the view that it is to be discovered, not invented. Darwin introduced his theory of evolution before we knew anything about DNA, but aspects of his theory have been confirmed by genetics, which suggests that all life forms on earth are related by adaptation through a tree of common ancestry. Could evolution, then, be a scientific description of how God created species, and continues to do so? I find myself drawn to affirm God’s use of evolution in his ongoing process of creation—whatever those processes were and are.

Francis Collins, Director of the National Institutes of Health, and the scientist who led the Human Genome Project, put it this way:

God, who is not limited in space or time, created the universe and established natural laws that govern it. Seeking to populate this otherwise sterile universe with living creatures, God chose the elegant mechanism of evolution to create microbes, plants, and animals of all sorts. Most remarkably, God intentionally chose the same mechanism to give rise to special creatures who would have intelligence, a knowledge of right and wrong, free will and a desire to seek fellowship with him. This view is entirely compatible with everything that science teaches us about the natural world. It is also entirely compatible with biblical Christianity.

When it comes to time, there are several independent measurements and arguments that all point to the same

It has even forced me to reconsider at times whether or not I can be a member of a denomination that intentionally maneuvers its way in a political manner rather than looking for theological positions that recognize that truth emerges from an interpretation of the evidence that honors both sources of revelation: the book of nature as well as the book of Scripture.

conclusion—this world, and life within it, has been around for billions of years, not thousands. I’ve learned from the Bull/Guy trilogy that Genesis is really about the who and why of creation rather than the how and when. For the latter, one needs to go to God’s truth that we find in nature, outside the Bible.

Here’s an important reminder from my biblical-scholar friend, John Walton:

We must keep in mind that we are presumptuous if we consider our interpretations of Scripture to have the same authority as Scripture itself. Nobody is an infallible interpreter, and we must always stand ready to reconsider our interpretations in light of new information. We must not let our interpretations stand in the place of Scripture’s authority and thus risk misrepresenting God’s revelation. We are willing to bind reason if our faith calls for belief where reason fails. But we are also people who in faith seek learning. What we learn may cause us to reconsider interpretations of Scripture, but need never cause us to question the intrinsic authority or nature of Scripture.

As I consider these issues, I want to base my beliefs on evidence—the hermeneutical equivalent of the scientific method. Having to choose between faith and science seems to me to be a false dichotomy. Truth-telling of the Bible supports, rather than undermines, the best scientific investigations. At the same time—in the face of so much I don’t know—I want to maintain humility. After all, it was Jesus who said, “love with your mind” (Luke 10:37).

It is a truism that all truth is God’s truth, whether found in science or Scripture. And the point is not winning arguments but witnessing for him. The Church doesn’t need to be unified in its view of creation, but it should be known for how we treat each other (John 13:35).

The stance taken by the Biblical Research Institute and the General Conference on these matters seems to me to be motivated by fear, fear of losing support for the seventh-day Sabbath. But Christ says to them, “be not afraid.” There are many reasons why we keep Sabbath, chief among them because our Savior did. And as Adventists know, the motivation for Sabbath-keeping

is not only creation (Exodus 20) but because it is a gift of God’s grace based on his—and our—commitment to justice (Deuteronomy 5). Finally, the Origins Museum in the Galápagos (described elsewhere in this issue) had it right: Praise God for the natural world he has given us!

The longer I live, the more I affirm a statement made by Albert Einstein in 1939 and first shared with me by Gerald Winslow:

Science can only be created by those who are thoroughly imbued with the aspiration toward truth and understanding. This source of feeling springs, however, from the sphere of religion. I cannot conceive of a genuine scientist without that profound faith. . . . The situation may be expressed by an image: science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind.

And so, as Desmond Ford would say, “I believe in Heaven, nothing else makes sense of Earth.”

Endnotes

1. Brian McLaren, *The Galápagos Islands: A Spiritual Journey* (Norwich, UK: Canterbury Press, 2019), 215.
2. McLaren, *The Galápagos Islands*, 256.
3. McLaren, *The Galápagos Islands*, 261.
4. Quoted in McLaren, *The Galápagos Islands*, 257.
5. Francis Collins, “Learning the Language of God,” in *Evangelicals Reflect on Faith and Science*, ed. Kathryn Applegate and J. B. Stump (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2016), 73.
6. John Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 167.



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BOOK REVIEW

KEYWORDS: book review, Galápagos Islands, Charles Darwin, spiritual journey

Missing LUGGAGE

BY BONNIE DWYER

***The Galápagos Islands: A Spiritual Journey* by Brian D. McLaren (Fortress Press, 2019), 150 pp.**

“When does a journey begin?”, Brian McLaren asks, as he departs on an assigned trip to the Galápagos Islands. His publisher, who thinks there might be a connection between the spiritual and travel markets in books sales, has suggested the trip. McLaren welcomes the chance to spend time away from the 24/7 news cycle and refresh the outdoor spirit that kindled wonder during his childhood. He dives into the assignment with gusto, not least because the trip includes daily snorkeling sessions with the undersea life that fisherman McLaren loves.

The first half of the book grows out of McLaren’s diary of eight days aboard the *Golondrina*. Swimming with sea turtles, drifting among damselfish, wrasses, and angelfish, he gushes about what he sees. Joy is the title of this chapter, and the word comes from a playful session that he experienced with a sea lion in the water that left him laughing aloud through his snorkel. Later, as he bids his shipmates farewell, his question becomes, “And when does a journey end?” Since we are only midway through the book at that point, the answer, obviously, is not “at the airport.”

Contemplation comes later, sorting through photos, reading books, thinking about the experience, and talking

about it with others. In the book’s second half, McLaren also describes the invisible luggage that he had on the trip—the fundamentalist ideas about creation with which he was reared. The chapter about Charles Darwin is titled “Monster,” although after reading *The Origin of Species*, McLaren describes Darwin as a dutiful man:

He felt the duty of loyalty to his family, his nation, his culture, his tradition—and to the actual observable data presented to him by the world itself, including his memorable trip to the Galápagos Islands.

And where these competing loyalties were in tension, he was loyal to the tension itself. He lived with it, felt it, and refused to resolve it. (161–162)

McLaren surmises that the tension in Darwin’s life contributed to his terrible health, and he comes away from reading Darwin’s books, and biographies about him, impressed with Darwin’s commitment to truth and what that cost him. “That dutiful and agonizing fidelity may not be a Sunday-school definition of faith, but it strikes



The group from *Spectrum* pose with a giant tortoise while visiting the Galápagos Islands in August 2021.

me as a pretty dependable definition of faithfulness, and it portrays dutiful and agonized Charley Darwin not as a monster but as a good and decent man of conscience, struggling to do the right thing at the right time in the right way” (163).

But what about McLaren’s personal spiritual journey on this trip? As he turns to this subject, he first sums up his experience of conservative religion in one word: pressure. Pressure “to avoid being punished . . . to be different and set apart from ‘sinners’ and ‘the world’ and especially ‘the liberals.’ Pressure to evangelize and convert everyone I can so they will go to heaven. . . . Pressure not to question because questioning could lead to doubt and doubt could lead to heresy and heresy could lead to hell. Literally.”

He wrote, “I couldn’t buy it all, but I couldn’t throw it all away either.” Drawing on one of his favorite philosopher/theologians, John Caputo, he says that “whether or not God exists, God insists. In other words, the existence of this or that God may be doubted and debated, but the insistence of God, the refusal of the idea of God to just fade away like alchemy or phlogiston or cassette tapes, can hardly be doubted” (178).

Struggling and sorting through his experiences in the Galápagos, he says, “Finally, a thought takes shape, as sleek and slippery as a cutthroat trout. I realize I can never stop speaking about God, whether or not I use the word, for God is all I ever speak about, all I love, all I seek to save and be saved by” (200). With that said, he looks for his invisible luggage and can’t find it; it has vanished. Six weeks after his trip, he reflects on the experience and says, “Faith? It’s still here, deep within me, as open hands reaching forward. Love for Jesus? Deeper than ever, less pressure, more free.

Belief in good news of great joy for all people? Stronger now, surer now, though understood differently” (268).

He concludes with this observation: “It’s odd. I always thought that one was a human first, and then added Christian identity on top of it. Now the order flips, and I see the purpose of Christian faith, and other faiths as well, as helping people to become more fully human, fully alive, fully members of the planetary neighborhood we share with all other creatures, all our relations” (269).

My first reading of McLaren’s book was in 2019, when it originally came out, and when we at *Spectrum* were in the process of putting together our own trip to the Galápagos Islands. McLaren’s diary of his journey was a helpful guide about what to expect onboard ship. Rereading the book upon my return from Galápagos, the book has again been instructive as I sort through my reflections. I’ve learned that we all pack differently for a trip, take different photos, focus on different experiences.

When we began our voyage through the islands, our guide told us not to touch any of the wildlife or pick up any natural objects as souvenirs. We were to take only pictures and memories. He did not say anything about leaving things behind. But McLaren’s missing luggage has taught me something new about spiritual journeys. They may not be about the destination, or an “aha” experience along the way. There’s also what gets left behind.



BONNIE DWYER is editor of *Spectrum*.

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