



community through conversation

SINCE 1969

SPECTRUM



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SPECTRUM

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SINCE 1969

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ABOUT SPECTRUM

Spectrum is a journal established in 1969 to encourage Seventh-day Adventist participation in the discussion of contemporary issues from a Christian viewpoint, to look without prejudice at all sides of a subject, to evaluate the merits of diverse views, and to foster intellectual and cultural growth. Although effort is made to ensure accurate scholarship and critical judgment, the statements of fact are the responsibility of contributors, and the views individual authors express are not necessarily those of the editorial staff as a whole or as individuals.

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Daniel Weber is a photographer, cinematographer, writer, communication professional, and avid world traveler who enjoys sharing his

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Visit his website at
www.lightlensphoto.com

ABOUT THE COVER ART

Daniel Weber, *The Maiden*, 2018.

This photo was taken in February 2018 in southwestern Iceland. The geyser is called Strokkur and is the most consistent erupting geyser on the island. I took the photo late in the day as the sun was getting ready to set and started to peak through the clouds. The warm colored light provided a nice balance to a scene dominated by blue. I timed the photo to the peak of the eruption, which happens every

six minutes. Strokkur can reach a height of up to forty meters in height. I like the scale of the geyser to the tourists gathered about the pool of water.

Facts about Strokkur and its surrounding area:

1. The geyser first erupted in 1789 after an earthquake opened up a conduit in the earth. Another earthquake closed the conduit around the turn of the twentieth century. In 1963, a group of locals dug down and opened up the blocked conduit, allowing Strokkur to live again.
2. Fifty meters away is the famous Geysir, a rarely active geyser, from where the name "geyser" is derived from. Geysir was the first documented geyser in Europe and the first geyser mentioned in a printed book. It can reach up to seventy meters in height, but in 1845 was measured at a height of one hundred and seventy meters. The frequent seismic activity in the area has impacted Geysir's activity over the past two hundred years.



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Our Past

“Whereof what’s past is prologue, what
to come, In yours and my discharge.”
– William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*

Almost half a century ago, Thomas L. Dybdahl pioneered serious reporting in this journal and in Adventism. The autumn 1975 issue of *Spectrum* featured his article, “Merikay and the Pacific Press: Money, Courts, and Church Authority,” which documented the story of the pathbreaking Adventist women—Merikay McLeod Silver and Lorna Tobler—who tried to work within the Adventist administrative system until their pleas for equality went unheeded over and over.

They had to go outside Adventism to the U.S. justice system, which finally provided an avenue for some equality and restitution. Toward the end of his article, Dybdahl writes, “[The church’s religious liberty defense in court] put the church into the position of making an argument that could easily be understood as the church’s insisting that its constitutional privileges gave it the right to discriminate against women.”

While the names of the men making that argument have changed, the defining desire to discriminate continues in the Adventist story. As someone who cares about Adventist Christianity, it pains me to see these facts unincorporated into the body of Christ five General Conference presidents later.

As you’ll read in Jonathan Butler’s personal history, Dybdahl has lived a fascinating life. Equipped with degrees in theology, journalism, and law, he’s devoted his life to seeking justice. His story is a testament to the founders of *Spectrum*: they knew talent! It’s an honor to have him return to these pages as we celebrate his 2023 book, *When Innocence Is Not Enough: Hidden Evidence and the Failed Promise of the Brady Rule*. It includes a forward by Sister Helen Prejean, author of the book, *Dead Man Walking*.

One of the most oft-quoted Ellen White statements begins, “We have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, and His teaching in our past history.” The more I know about Adventism,

the more I realize that the past, our history, provides less of a straightforward path and more of a guide for the perplexed—a lesson of what to do and what to avoid in order to forge a better future.

As we go to press I just learned that William G. Johnsonson passed away. Last year, out of respect, I sent each of my *Spectrum* editorials to him for his thoughtful feedback. We’ve lost a saint of Adventist publishing who had the inclusive heart of a pastor. Bill understood that our past inspires change.

As we hold on to hope for this future, this spring issue of *Spectrum* provides plenty of thought-provoking ideas, including profound philosophical reflections on being a created being by Abi Doukhan, as well as David Thiele’s question on the ability of Adventists to hold various views on origins. Recognizing the facts of the past, Ronald Lawson investigates the Adventist history of polygamy and shows the non-discriminatory value of historical awareness. Poets A. Josef Greig and Makayla Mattocks provide searing looks into the human spiritual and social condition.

Death is the ultimate conservator of the past. And yet, Christian hope springs eternal. Ralph Waldo Emerson writes in “The Past:” “All is now secure and fast; / Not the gods can shake the Past.” Some believe in a divine shaking. Instead, perhaps the future of the Adventist community remains in an honest understanding of our history.



Alexander Carpenter is the executive editor of Spectrum and the executive director of Adventist Forum.



What's Your Story?

Narratives and stories empower groups and people to do unimaginable things—both bad and good. Eugene “Bull” Connor, commissioner of public safety for Birmingham, Alabama, and Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth, minister of the city’s Bethel Baptist Church, each claimed a Christian identity, and each had a purpose shaped by a story.

Born in Selma, Alabama, Connor’s approach to life was formed by a story that prioritized maintenance of the status quo for white people as a “Christian imperative.” Growing up with a tough childhood and a violent father, Shuttlesworth was formed by words of family and friends that gave him an identity as one whom God was preparing for something bigger.

Undeterred and even emboldened by a 1956 Christmas bombing at his church, Shuttlesworth emerged from the rubble of the parsonage to lead people in a fight for equality. After this first encounter with violence specifically targeted at him, he embraced Psalm 27: “The Lord is my light and my stronghold, of whom shall I be afraid?”

The image of him emerging from his collapsed home unscathed—and the story of his fearless tenacity—motivated parishioners and others to embrace his vision of a disciplined, but peaceful, group identity.

Sometimes called the “un” Martin Luther King—with a gritty style and more cumbersome name—Shuttlesworth was key in establishing and enacting the vision of the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights. This church-based effort was grounded on love for enemies as lived by Jesus Christ.

Jesus’ third way response to evil guided the undertaking,



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Bethel Baptist Church, where Shuttlesworth pastored from 1953 to 1961, was headquarters and a meeting location for the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights (ACMHR). During Shuttlesworth’s time leading the church, it was bombed three times.

which was fully in place a few years later when Dr. King and others realized the potential impact that would come when the world saw the non-violent protestors in Birmingham next to images of Connor’s brutish actions.

Stories give identity. What’s your story? Are you guided by a story that features Jesus’ type of nonviolent power?

ENDNOTES:

1. *Shuttlesworth*, directed by J. Whitson, 56:39. <https://www.pbs.org/video/shuttlesworth-ycjef9/>
2. Walter Wink, *Jesus and Nonviolence: A Third Way* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003).

Carmen Lau is board chair of Adventist Forum.



By Abi Doukhan

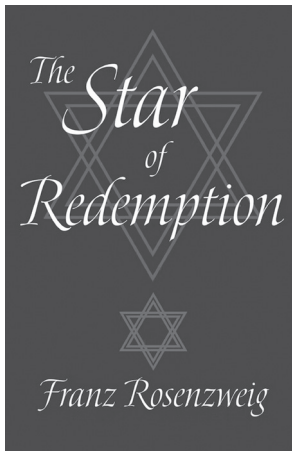
Receiving vs. Grasping:

Rosenzweig and Ecclesiastes on the “Creaturality” of the Human Subject

One of the central tenets of Adventism is creation. We believe in a world that was created by God in seven days and celebrate this event through the weekly seventh-day Sabbath. However, we have not as of yet conducted a philosophical reflection on how this Adventist belief in creation informs our conception of human nature. How does this belief in creation affect how we inhabit the world, how we dwell in the world as human beings? This paper proposes to explore our “creaturality” in light of what nineteenth-century Jewish philosopher Franz Rosenzweig has to say about it, with occasional references to the book of Ecclesiastes.

In his book, *The Star of Redemption*, Rosenzweig offers a powerful critique of the Western concept of an autonomous self as founded in itself, giving rather an account of the subject as “created.”¹ This account of our creaturality in turn deeply affects how we respond to the world. Rather than approaching the world

with an attitude of mastery and control, we ought rather to learn to receive this world as a gift. But what does it mean to “receive” the world, and how might such an attitude give rise to a healthier, more wholesome way of inhabiting the world? What can Adventists learn from this concept of creaturality that would deepen their unique understanding of what it means to be human? But more



Abi Doukhan is associate professor of Philosophy at Queens College of the City University of New York (CUNY), and holds the Pearl and Nathan Halegua Family Initiative in Ethics and Tolerance. She holds a Master of Philosophy from the Sorbonne and a Ph.D in philosophy from the University of Nanterre, Paris, France. Her recent publications include Emmanuel Levinas: A Philosophy of Exile (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), and Biblical Portraits of Exile: A Philosophical Reading (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2016).

essentially, what secret teaching about our creaturality can Adventists discover from the weekly practice of the seventh-day Sabbath?

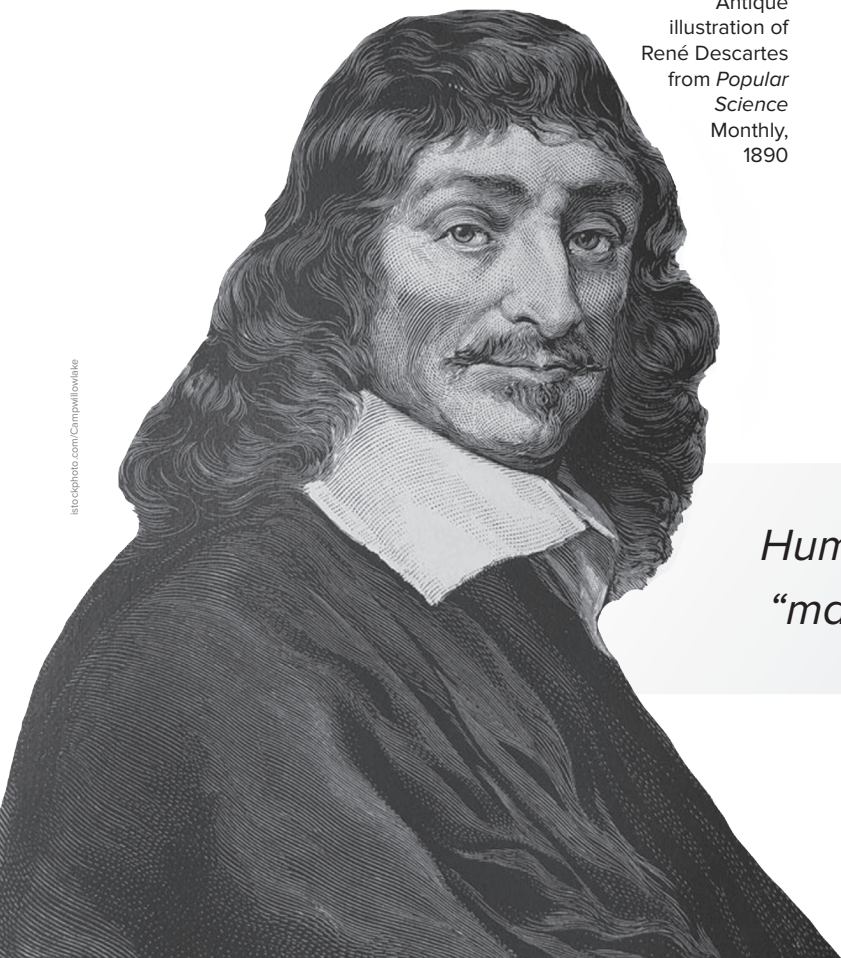
Genesis 2 tells us that God “blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done [*asa'*]” (Gen 2:2). The Hebrew word *asa'* (making or doing) is a key word in the story of creation and is repeatedly used to describe God’s creative making or doing. We in turn are asked to “remember” the Sabbath day and not do (*asa'*) any work on it (Ex 20:8-9). Thus, on this day, we cease doing (*asa'*) in remembrance of all of the work that God has done (*asa'*). In other words, we remember on the Sabbath day that the world and all that is in it is ultimately not something that we have worked for, or earned, but that it was originally “given” to us at creation. The word “given” (*natan*) is incidentally also a key word in the narrative of creation (Gen 1:29, 30) and is used twice in those two concluding verses of the chapter to describe God’s stance toward created man: He is the one who gives. The Sabbath day thus serves to remind humankind

of the *givenness* of the world—that the world is primordially *given* to us. But what does this mean? What does the givenness of the world mean? And how does this sense of the givenness of the world make us dwell in it differently than our contemporaries?

In Western thought, the world is not given; it is conquered. René Descartes, the founder of Western thought, puts it this way: Humankind’s main task is to become “masters and possessors of nature.”² In other words, our principal task is to become conquerors of the world. And we are to conquer it not only conceptually but also technologically. We wrest meaning from the world, just as we wrest resources from it. We are constantly striving, fighting by the sweat of our brow. We are constantly anxious, desperate to make our mark, to find some type of security in a world which seems so out of our control, to fill our lives with what we feel entitled to have. We spend the majority of our time *filling* our void—moving laboriously from scarcity to abundance. This is also the obsession of King Solomon in Ecclesiastes, chapter 2 as he strives to fill his life with wealth, pleasurable experiences, and wisdom.

Most of the time, like Solomon, we succeed, but there are liminal moments in life when we hit a wall—when we cannot wrest meaning, when we cannot wrest our blessing like Jacob did with the angel. We realize that there are things we cannot conquer, master, possess—things that we cannot make happen, things that we cannot un-make happen. And we are forced to admit like Solomon that “all is breath” (*haqol hevel*). Our lives remain a mere exhalation. A mere breath does not fill

Antique illustration of René Descartes from *Popular Science Monthly*, 1890



Humankind’s main task is to become “masters and possessors of nature.”



Conceptual 3D art of the Forbidden Fruit growing in the Garden of Eden.

our chests but escapes, dissipates, does not fill us but momentarily. We cannot retain it; we cannot possess our breath. In these moments, we can resign ourselves to the fact that we will never have certain things, that “it is like it is.” We can become embittered and angry with the Creator for not “giving” us what we feel entitled to have! We can close ourselves up and tell ourselves we will never receive what certain people have and live with simmering frustration and anger. Or . . .

The Gift of Creation

. . . we can remember that we are creatures. But what does this mean? It means that we are capable of remembering that the world is ultimately a gift from God, that our life, all of it, is a gift from God: the moments of pain like the moments of pleasure, the moments of failure like the moments of success. We tend to think that failure or pain is a result of a departure from the life we were meant to have. But what creation teaches us is that ALL of it is good: “And God saw *all* [qol] that he had made and it was very good” (Gen 1:31). We sometimes forget that God did not only create the day; he also created the night. And he proclaimed both to be good: those luminous moments that mark our lives, but also those dark nights of the soul. All of it is “given”—the nights and the days, the successes and the failures,

It means that we are capable of remembering that the world is ultimately a gift from God, that our life, all of it, is a gift from God: the moments of pain like the moments of pleasure, the moments of failure like the moments of success.

the abundance and the scarcity, the blessings and the curses, the pains and the pleasures.

We read in Ecclesiastes 3, “he has made [asa’] all beautiful in its time” (Eccl 3: 11). There is in this passage an oblique allusion to Genesis 1:16, where God “made” (asa’) a time for the night and a time for the day. For Solomon, then, God has made all times beautiful, all seasons with their luminous or dark beauty. Even those seasons defined by scarcity, by lack, by barrenness, have

their own peculiar beauty. The book of Ecclesiastes invites us to receive all of these as from the hand of God. Yet, all too often, we remain indisposed to receiving the night that sometimes falls upon our lives. Instead, we fight it; we refute it; we seek to escape it. We beg God to bring a new day and to take away the night and give us what we are lacking. Now. It is in this sense that Rosenzweig speaks of the sinner's prayer:

Prayer for one's own benefit, the egotistical prayer is not wrong in terms of content for God wants man to have what belongs to him. . . . He has already given it to him even before he can ask. . . . But that man, instead of treating the content of his prayer as already answered and thanking God therefore for his own being . . . he asks for it and thus treats it as something still unanswered. For with this he prays at the wrong time. . . . After he has been created he can only give thanks for what is his own . . . that is when the sinner in us prays. The prayer of the sinner in this way delays the coming of the kingdom.³

The problem with the sinner's prayer, according to Rosenzweig, is that his prayer stems from a mentality of scarcity and of lack. He only sees what he doesn't have and never what has been graciously "given" in the season he is in. As such, he remains unable to receive the "treasures of darkness," the grace hidden in that season. The sinner also prays "at the wrong time." As such, he is not in tune with divine timing. For it is the divine timing which prescribes when it is night, when it is day, when we suffer, when we enjoy, when we have pleasure, when we have pain.

The believer, on the other hand, is just thankful for what she has been given. She praises God in scarcity and in abundance. She sees the treasures in the darkness, the fullness in the emptiness, the rose growing out of the thorns, and she is thankful for all. She sees all that is around her in a mentality of receptivity, of abundance. She is thus always in tune with divine timing, honoring

what is given to her at any given time. For only upon adopting this shift will abundance truly come. Gratitude aligns us with divine providence and positions us in an attitude of receptivity which cannot but incite God to give ever more abundantly.

The Limitation of Creation

Yet the story of creation is not just a story of abundance. It is also a story of limitation. We are not only taught to *embrace* the abundance of life—in all of its seasons—but we are also told to *refrain* from the forbidden tree. But what is the meaning of this tree? Why did God curb our abundance with the forbidden tree? It seems that the story of creation holds an unavoidable tension. And yet, we need not see this limitation within abundance as a contradiction. What if our true abundance was to be found *precisely* within limitation? What if the limitation was not there to put a damper on the abundance but was there to protect the abundance of creation? More poetically, what if the limitation was the fence that was protecting the garden of abundance?

But we must first investigate what this limitation placed by God in the middle of the garden means. If one follows Eve's rationale for taking it, one immediately realizes that the forbidden fruit, more than anything, has to do with the desire for power. Eve's desire to be "like God" betrays a profound lust for power, a desire to control her own destiny, to choose her own life. The forbidden fruit is taken (*laqah*) not given (*natan*). In this moment, everything is reversed. Eve takes rather than receives, forfeiting in this gesture her status as creature for that of a goddess. In taking the fruit, Eve chooses to make a name for herself rather than be given that name. She covets what is not her portion, insists on drawing the blueprint of her own life. And thus we also behave. We, like Eve, desire to make our own lives rather than receive our destiny from God. And as such, we take the place of the Creator and become makers, strivers, graspers, hustlers, rather than receivers.

We see the same move in Ecclesiastes 2 where Solomon endeavors to "make" (*asa'*) his own mark on the world:

“I made [*asa'*] me gardens and groves. . . . I made [*asa'*] me pools of water. . . . I made [*asa'*] myself male and female singers. . . . I turned to all the fortunes my hands had made [*asa'*] . . . to the wealth I had made [*asa'*]” (Eccl 2: 4-11, my translation). The reader will notice how Solomon has, in a way, appropriated for himself the divine “making” (*asa'*) of Genesis 1, forfeiting thereby any sense of the world as already “given” to him. Blind to this givenness, he strives to fill his life, to “make” for himself a life. Only when Solomon finally makes the profound shift from “making” (*asa'*) to “receiving” (*natan*) the gifts of God (Eccl 2:24) does he finally find rest and enjoyment.

Rosenzweig makes a similar point in his description of the mentality of the magician: “The magician actively intervenes against the course of the world . . . wants to snatch, bully and force from it by trickery or force that which is unforeseen, that which is willed by its own will.”⁴ Like Eve, the magician has no use for what is, but rather always seeks to bend reality to her own will and control her own fate. She tries to take what has not yet been given and make it her own. But to do so means that she will miss what she was meant to have. She will miss the miracle. But what is a miracle? It is something that GOD is doing and that can only be done if I am not doing. It is a divine *action* which is only possible when there is human *inaction*. The miracle comes when all human action has ceased or been interrupted. It comes at the liminal space beyond human power. But for it to come, human power must be interrupted. The making (*asa'*) of humans must make room for the “making” (*asa'*) of God.

This is where Rosenzweig’s figure of the prophet comes in—in contrast to the figure of the magician: “The prophet however unveils by foreseeing that which is willed by providence.”⁵ Whereas the magician bends the world, the prophet has come to a still point; he has no words or actions of his own. His will has become God’s will. The prophet is entirely surrendered to the will of another, entirely stretched in listening, in waiting. The prophet can never conjure; he must wait for the divine word and action. And because the prophet is not his own anymore, he is best equipped to receive the divine word

and action; he is best equipped to witness the miracle or bear witness to it.

Thus, the prophet is fully aligned with the rhythms of creation. He is receptive to the divine timing and the divine gifts. He is fully creature, that is to say, a passive vessel for the breath which moves in him and in his life. He moves along the trajectory of that breath, at its rhythm; he dances with that breath—attuned to its next move. He knows the divine tempo, the divine timing, which is why he is able to anticipate when and what God’s next move is—as one would when dancing with a partner. He seems like a magician in his foresight of what God does, but he is just an excellent dancer.

Conclusion

What does it finally mean to truly live as a created being? It means we can relax. We can relax into life knowing that life is abundance, that it is a world of surprises, interesting twists and turns—knowing as the writer of Ecclesiastes did that we can throw ourselves into life without fear. We can cast our bread upon the waters, sow to the four winds, give away our hearts and our bodies, our time, without attempting to predict the outcome of our lives, “for we do not know”—but God is working it out! God is taking the threads of our existence, of our trespasses, of our so-called wrong turns, of our failures, just as he uses those threads of our courageous actions, noble actions, loving moments, to weave—as in the hidden womb of the mother—the beautiful tapestry of our lives. For “as you do not know the path of the breath in the mother’s womb, so you cannot understand the work of God the maker of all things” (Eccl 11:5). To live as creatures is to surrender to the weaver, to the potter, to surrender the tapestry of our lives to the Creator who continues to create out of the *tohu wa-bohu*⁶ of our lives.

ENDNOTES:

1. Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*. Translated by Barbara E. Galli (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005).
2. René Descartes, *Discourse on Method* (Part 6), 1637.
3. Rosenzweig, 291-292.
4. *Ibid.*, 105.
5. *Ibid.*, 105.
6. A Hebrew phrase in Genesis 1:2 that describes the state of the earth before creation begins.



The Awesome Creature Feeling, the Mysterium

On the Bend Of the Little Wind: Poetry of Wyoming,
originally published in 1997 by Little Wind Publications.

Heracleitus, an ancient Greek philosopher, argued against many of his contemporaries that the basic constituent of everything was fire, and that rather than changelessness, change seemed to be most fundamental aspect of reality. Wyoming is undergoing change; it has always been undergoing change, but there is a limit beyond which it cannot go and still inspire the awesome creature feeling, the mysterium, which emerges from the untamed dimension of the state which these poems attempt to grasp.

On The Bend of The Little Wind



On the bend of the Little Wind
While grown men haggled over
Market price for hides and furs
My eyes met your
Dark Arapahoes'
Long hair hanging,
Barefoot.
You drifted off to stand
Beside the cabin wall
Where hides nailed drying
Framed your nomadic past,
A portrait hung reminisced
In photographs
Crumbled into dust.

A. Josef Greig received his PhD in the Theology of the Hebrew Bible from the University of Edinburgh. He is professor emeritus of Religion at Andrews University.



Wind River Peaks

Storm clouds form on high Wind River peaks

Most every afternoon come August.

They gather with the swirling wind

Until full of power and rain they rush

Headlong down the mountain.

They come a herd of bison

Stampeded by the thunder beings;

Dust clouds rise and sweep across the sage,

And tumble weeds are pounded from their rooting.

The rock-churned water of Bull Lake Creek

Meets and surges with the torrent of the spirit world;

Wind whips down between the canyon walls

Until

The driving rain

Sideways

Merges with the frothy flow.

And when the herd has passed,

And faint the herd bull's bellowings,

The sun appears and once again returns the world

To those who have no dreams.



Indian Grave

Bob cat tracks
Pressed in freshly fallen snow,
We followed as we always did,
Up along a cedar ridge
Then jumped out of our view,
Above a sand stone ledge.
A fallen cedar tree
We laid against its face,
And climbed;
A cave's mouth beckoned us to enter
To a burial.
Skulls and femurs,
Scattered beads,
And bits of ancient things
That long in perishing
Awakened our imaginations
To a world we both had missed

By birth's late coming.
Sand and beads fell sifting
Through our fingers.
Whose were these bones,
These trinkets death surviving;
What tribe passed here
To know this hidden place?
We stayed and mused,
Calling up sights and sounds
Of buffalo thundering on the flats
Above the rim;
Warriors, taking up the trail
Of stolen horses.
Returning to that world's replacement,
We hiked back to the truck;
Glad to hear ignition, tires still inflated,
And turned it toward the road.



The Sun Dance

Gebo took me to the center of his world,
In the dimming light
The beat of drums
Throbbing through
The pulse of eagle bone whistles.
Gebo stood entranced,
While dancers shuffled to and fro,
Eyes fixed on the sacraments
Hanging from the center pole:
Facing west the buffalo,
To the east the eagle
Spread its wings.
To me it was the 4th of July,
Indian dances on Main Street,

A carnival, just another wheel.
Then he told me of the center pole,
The twelve good men,
The source of life,
The eagle's flight
Transcending human limits.
The dance endured
The slaughter of the Buffalo,
A people crucified by power.
Then I saw the buffalo Christ
Gazing into darkness,
The eagle flying toward
A rising sun.



Red Desert

A crimson cast infused the sky;
Far away a coyote's cry
The stillness pierced;
That ancient song
O'er desert sent,
As if of wanton crime repent
Expressing sorrow.
In that expanse of sand and brush
Where streams denied their course
To rush,
But merely ooze,
The song was heard,
And soon a score,
Their varied coral strain
Did soar
In morning's break.



**THOMAS L. DYBDAHL
CONTINUES A LIFELONG
PURSUIT FOR JUSTICE.**

GA TROUBLE

WHEN INNOCENCE
IS NOT ENOUGH

HIDDEN EVIDENCE
AND THE FAILED
PROMISE OF THE
BRADY RULE

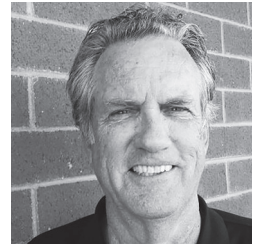
THOMAS DYBDAHL

with a foreword by Sister Helen Prejean



TOM DYBDAHL

**AND HIS LONG
AND WINDING ROAD**



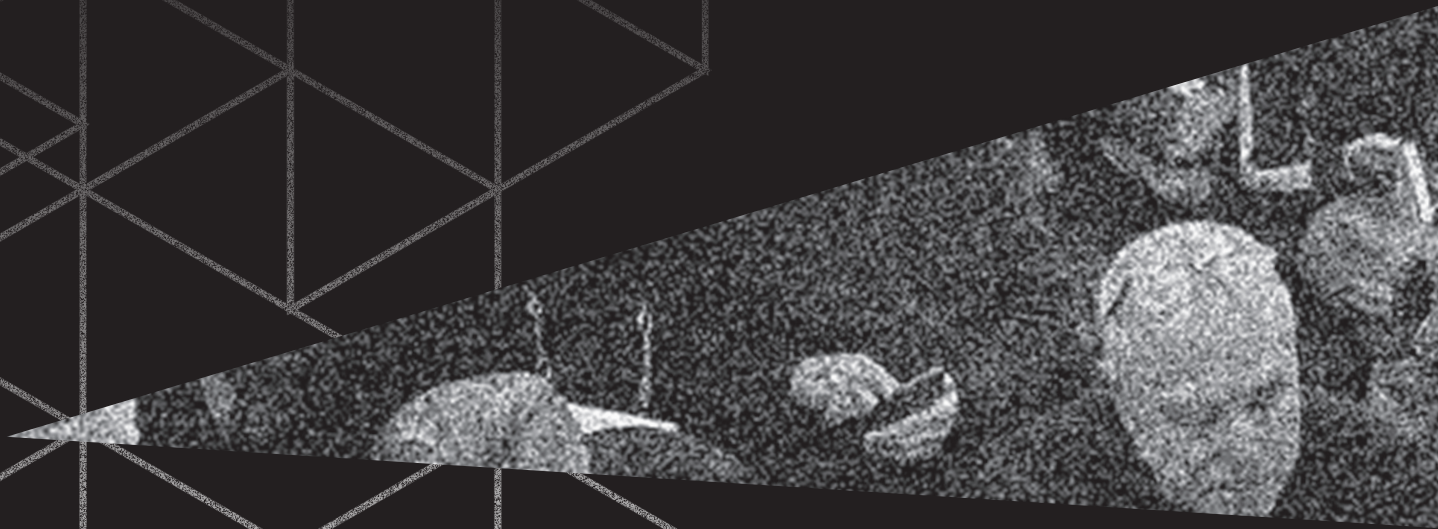
I first saw him in a journalism class at La Sierra College, where our professor, Bill Oliphant, sponsor of *The Criterion*, hoped to harvest writers for the campus newspaper.

Tom Dybdahl exuded a soft charm and a droll wit. From the beginning, Oliphant liked him. We all did, except for the fact that he was the teacher's favorite. The class turned into a conversation between the two of them. Even a self-important but envious sophomore in the class had to concede that this gifted, personable freshman deserved our admiration. And he did not elbow anyone out of the way to get it.

Tom did not work at who he was. He had a naturalness and an ease that drew you to him. In class or outside of it, there was nothing self-promoting about him. You knew he was smart, but it was not the first thing you thought about him. You knew he could do a lot of things well. And he got along with anybody. And he asked about you and listened to you, soaking up what you were saying and who you were. The more you got to know him, the more you realized that, beneath the easy manner and affability, there was a hard core of resolve and integrity. He never told you what to think or do. But when you asked him to put into print how he felt, that is when what really mattered to him surfaced.

Tom did not finish his freshman year at La Sierra. He had been a missionary doctor's son in the Philippines, which left him with lifelong wanderlust. After a semester, he went for a year to Avondale, where he became enthralled with Desmond Ford. He came back from Australia with a deeper but never cloying belief in Jesus. In homiletics class, he preached a sermon adapted from The Monkees' hit: "Then I saw *His* face, now I'm a believer/ Not a trace of doubt in my mind." Using rock-and-roll lyrics for his text, Tom, you knew, was

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



still a young kid, but he knew how to reach his audience. Ford had meant a lot to him. Oliphant still mattered, too. In his first full year at La Sierra—his junior year—Tom was named editor of *The Criterion*. As editor, he more than did his part to extend the golden era of journalism at the college. He oversaw enough investigative reporting to continue the newspaper’s award-winning tradition and to get into trouble, on occasion, with the college president.

Tom was fun to be around—so much fun that you forgot he was a serious-minded theology major. He drove a '64 Mustang. He serenaded girls with a mean guitar and a meaner piano. And he played bass for a popular folk group on campus. In those days he was more moved by the Beatles than Bach, and was more a fan of John Lennon than Paul McCartney. In 1967, *The Graduate*, starring Dustin Hoffman, hit the theaters, and everyone thought he looked like Hoffman, which prompted endless teasing. The students joked about making a film starring Tom called *The Undergraduate*.

For all his comedic veneer, Tom had the soul of a poet and memorized a phenomenal amount of poetry. He could recite poetry for hours without consulting a note—poets the likes of Emily Dickinson and T. S. Eliot, Edna St. Vincent Millay and W. B. Yeats, Dylan Thomas and Robert Lowell. There are now septuagenarians who attended La Sierra and only remember a Stephen Spender poem with the sound of Tom’s voice:



I think continually of those who were truly great.
Who, from the womb, remembered the soul's
history
Through corridors of light, where the hours are
suns,
Endless and singing. Whose lovely ambition
Was that their lips, still touched with fire,
Should tell of the Spirit, clothed from head to foot
in song.
And who hoarded from the Spring branches
The desires falling across their bodies like
blossoms.¹

He was like a real-life character in Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*, but in his case a walking anthology of *The Great Modern Poets*. If you were riding with him in his Mustang to Laguna Beach or Lake Arrowhead, it was just enough time to hear Oscar Wilde's "The Ballad of Reading Gaol."

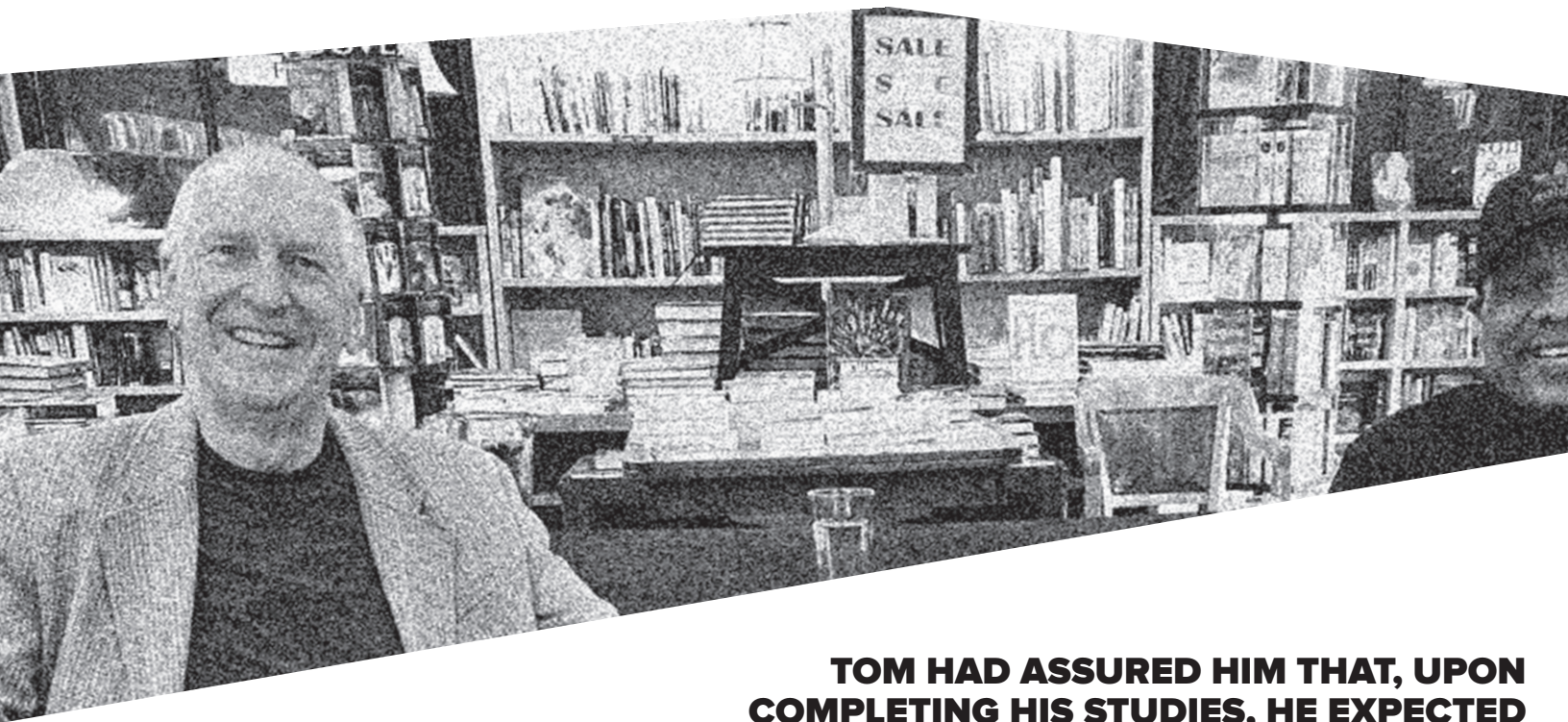
Tom did a year as a student missionary in Hong Kong and still felt it was not enough of a trip to come straight home. He took the Trans-Siberian Railway across Russia for four days and found it to be a great and memorable experience. On a train without a dining car, he shared food with ordinary Russians, who taught him a card game they played for hours. "No one spoke more than a few words of English," Tom recalled, "and I knew no

Russian. But it felt like a family outing."

After a year, the Southern California Conference sponsored him to the SDA Theological Seminary. He traveled to Andrews University in Michigan, where he experienced another sort of odyssey that transformed him spiritually and intellectually. He immersed himself in his studies under the influence of several luminaries on the 1970s faculty, who taught him fresh and profound approaches to the Bible, Church history, missions, theology, and especially ethics. His undergraduate education at La Sierra had prepared him well. At Andrews, he was therefore not a creation out of nothing. But he would leave the Seminary a much different person than he had been when he arrived.

As a student, he broke the mold of the typical seminarian. He created something of a stir on campus for his long hair and scruffy beard. Dean W. G. C. Murdoch and especially his secretary faulted Tom for his grooming. His look may have fit in among the Hebrew prophets but did not conform to the dean's personal dress code. Some years later, Dr. Murdoch had to make peace with the hair and beard at family functions, after Tom married his niece, Judy Rittenhouse.

Though he came from a religiously conservative family and the politically conservative town of Loma Linda, once at the Seminary it did not take long for Tom's faith and politics to match his hair. Having come



TOM HAD ASSURED HIM THAT, UPON COMPLETING HIS STUDIES, HE EXPECTED TO RETURN TO SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA AS A MINISTER. BUT THE PRESIDENT REJECTED THE PLAN.

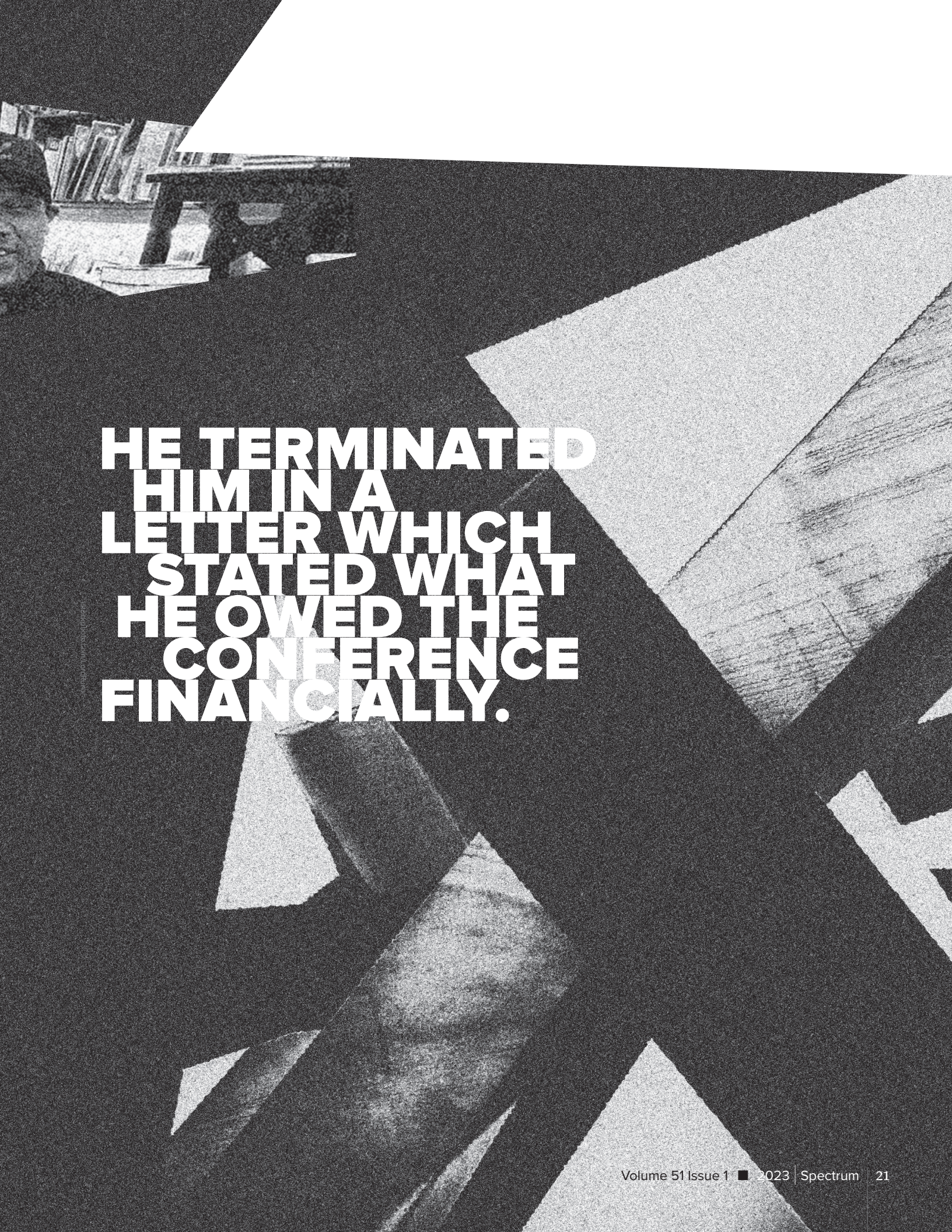
of age in the 60s, he found a kindred spirit in Professor Roy Branson, the Seminary ethicist, who wedded Seventh-day Adventism to social Christianity. This relationship lit an activist flame in him that was never quenched. In his first summer at the Seminary, he joined Branson in an extern program in Mississippi, where they focused less on evangelism than voter registration. The next summer he went with the Branson program to work in inner-city Boston.

In his second year at the Seminary, Tom wanted to take a hiatus from his ministerial studies to attend the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism, the top journalism school in the country. He was among the academically elite at the Seminary, but he had no idea whether he would be accepted at Columbia. By the time he applied, ninety-five percent of the incoming class had been determined, so his chances seemed slim. The lengthy application called for an autobiographical statement, over which Tom labored. He included his missionary background as a formative experience in his life. When Branson read over the statement, he advised

against mentioning the mission field. But Tom left it in his autobiography. He took as an unexpected windfall his acceptance to Columbia.

Neal Wilson, then the president of the North American Division, learned that Tom had gotten into a prestigious school of journalism and congratulated him. He told him that the Church could use his talent and this particular training. He understood, of course, that this was not the usual path for a ministerial student to take, but he saw it as a great opportunity. The conference president who had hired Tom, however, took this news quite differently. Tom had assured him that, upon completing his studies, he expected to return to Southern California as a minister. But the president rejected the plan. He terminated him in a letter which stated what he owed the conference financially.

Looking back on that moment in his life as well as the Church's life, Tom believed the NAD president had it right and the conference president had it wrong. With no hard feelings, however, he was off to Columbia and ended up giving back to the Church, anyway—as



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a journalist. Interestingly, when Tom showed up to a reception for incoming students at Columbia, a professor, seeing his nametag, greeted him warmly, “Mr. Dybdahl, I’m glad to meet you.” The professor indicated that he served on the admissions committee and added, “I’m from a missionary background myself.” In fact, he had written a book about being a Christian and a journalist. Listening to him that evening, Tom got the distinct impression that his early life in the Philippines had helped him get into Columbia.

After the Seminary and Columbia, Tom went to the Boston Seventh-day Adventist Temple, where he served as an assistant pastor. The church had been integral to the Boston community since 1870, when Adventist pioneer Merritt E. Cornell performed the first Adventist baptisms in Dorchester Bay. When Tom got to Boston, he engaged in inner-city ministry, such as a tutoring program, a coffee house, and other forms of community outreach. He wrote about ways of “working the cities” for *Insight’s* youthful audience. He also wrote poignantly of the “sirens to trouble your sleep.”²

After Tom moved with his wife, Judy, from Boston to Washington, D.C., he continued to work for a denominational enterprise that involved social outreach. But it was not inner-city Boston; it was the west end of urbane Georgetown. He was no longer serving the underprivileged but the privileged—not street kids and single mothers and the poor, but the professionals,

the affluent, and the powerful. He and Judy ran The Gate Soup Kitchen, which received rave reviews in *The Washington Post* and drew an upscale clientele from the nearby Georgetown University campus, along with businessmen, attorneys, and politicians in the area—and even a football player on what was then the Washington Redskins. (Like other patrons, All-Pro tight end Jerry Smith loved the hefty and delicious vegetarian sandwiches and the array of soups.) Tom’s typical day at The Gate involved purchasing vegetables from vendors in the morning, chopping ingredients for the sandwiches and soups, serving patrons through the lunch hour and early evening, followed by washing dishes and general clean up. It was a daily grind but rewarding, and it kept him in contact with the wider world beyond Adventism that mattered to him.

After a demanding year at The Gate, however, he was ready to do something else. One day a congressional assistant—who often ate at the restaurant and had gotten to know Tom a little—asked him, “What do you do when you’re not making sandwiches?” Tom told him about Columbia and his writing background, and in no time at all he was the publicist for New York Congressman Ned Pattison. The politician had won his seat as a Democrat in a district that had gone Republican for more than a century, and there was no telling how long he might hold the seat. But soon Tom was running his congressional office and did so for two years. After two terms, Pattison



lost his bid for a third term, and Tom, in his early thirties with a wife and two young children, was looking for work again.

Tom's time in Boston and Washington, D.C., prompted him to think seriously about how religion and politics relate. In 1977, he wrote a thoughtful article for *Spectrum* titled, "We SHOULD Be Involved in Politics."³ It is no dispassionate, academically detached essay; it is a jeremiad. William Blake, whom he cites at the beginning (without needing to look him up), would have been pleased by the article:

And did the Countenance Divine
Shine forth upon our clouded hills?
And was Jerusalem builded here
Among these dark Satanic Mills?

Tom italicized the fact that Seventh-day Adventism, as an American religion, had "virtually become Americanism. We accept America's basic social, cultural and economic values. We support the status quo, favor conservative politics, and eagerly seek our share of wealth and power." He believed that Adventism is another of those religions, which Garry Wills describes, as settling for a very one-sided arrangement with the state: "the state will leave the church alone, so long as the church never criticizes state."

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Tom did not urge the Church to get tangled up in politics, picking political candidates for whom to vote. But he did ask Church members to be faithful to Jesus. "How can we care for a person and have no concern about the laws that affect the life of that person in society?" he asked. "How can we care about the victims of injustice?" We do not involve ourselves in politics to transform the world into a "new Jerusalem" on earth. That is to overreach. "The goal is faithfulness, not effectiveness," Tom wrote. "If we identify ourselves with Jesus, we must also identify with the poor and lonely and oppressed." He noted that we have selectively involved ourselves in politics—temperance, for example, or religious liberty—but only when "we are threatened as a church." Where are we as a Church, he asked, when the civil rights of others are violated? Or when innocent people are tortured or put to death? Tom asked whether an Adventist gospel that "turns away from the concrete political situations of human beings . . . is any gospel at all."

After Columbia, Tom produced for *Spectrum* some remarkable investigative reporting on the Church which may have made Neal Wilson regret he ever encouraged him to attend a school of journalism. To Wilson's dismay, Tom—as still a young pastor at the Boston Temple—seemed to be biting the hand that had fed him. In different ways, each of his investigations over the next decade exposed a soft underbelly to the Church's morality and ethics. He brought politics home to General Conference leaders where it may have mattered to them most—the pocketbook. In a 1973 report on "Stewardship and Securities: A Study of Adventist Corporate Investments," Tom, along with Jere Chapman, documented that the General Conference leadership had \$75 million in holdings.⁴ The only criteria for guiding the G.C.'s investment portfolio was its refusal to invest in tobacco, liquor, and meatpacking. The G.C. leadership, however, did invest in military weaponry, companies involved in oppression and injustice around the world, and corporations contributing to environmental pollution. Church leadership needed a wider view of moral commitment.

When Tom's article on "Merikay and the Pacific Press:

Money, Courts, and Church Authority,” was published in a 1975 issue of *Spectrum*, GC leaders themselves were looking to *Spectrum*, not the *Adventist Review*, for reliable news on the subject.⁵ The Pacific Press had denied Merikay’s request for a raise. She filed a class action suit on behalf of herself and other women in similar straits. The Press argued that its employees were, in effect, “ministers” and the Church should be free to deal with its ministers as it chose, without the interference of the government. This raised the question for lawyers and the Church: “Is there a legitimate Christian use of the courts?” Tom also noted that the Church, in its defense, described itself a lot like Roman Catholicism. He wondered aloud if Adventist opposition to Catholicism was a thing of the past, “now consigned to the ‘historical trash heap.’” If that was the case, the Church had gone to great lengths to protect its cash flow.

Tom’s next high-profile investigation was reported in a 1981 issue of *Spectrum* as “Bad Business: The Davenport Fiasco.”⁶ Businessman Donald Davenport had declared bankruptcy in 1981 and left a number of Adventist church members, Church officials, and Church institutions holding the bag. “Davenport’s empire was an elaborate scheme,” Tom concluded, “which would work only as long as there was cash from new investors coming in to cover the payment to old investors.” The major problem with the Davenport affair was the “conflict of interest” that characterized it. Church leaders, who had made personal loans to Davenport, sat on boards and committees making decisions regarding Church funds. Their fiscal management, it turned out, had little to do with spreading the gospel and everything to do with greed.

After his boss lost his seat in Congress, thirty-eight-year-old Tom applied for work at Rodale Press in Emmaus, Pennsylvania. He later enjoyed telling the story of the Rodale search committee’s discussion about hiring him. Dick Harwood, an Adventist, was at Rodale then as a world-renowned Third World agricultural expert.

He had worked with Tom’s older brother, Jon Dybdahl, in Thailand. Jon, widely regarded as a wonderful guy—both intellectually and spiritually gifted—was an Old Testament scholar fluent in Hebrew, an innovative professor of missions at the Seminary, and later a president of Walla Walla University. Harwood had met Jon in Thailand, where, in the family tradition, he was doing a missionary stint. Harwood heard Jon preach in Thai after just six months of language study. Harwood told the search committee, “I don’t know Tom, but his brother Jon is the smartest man I’ve ever met.” The vice president replied, “So why aren’t we hiring his brother?!” Later, after getting hired by Rodale, Tom heard that story, and he could not have been prouder or more pleased for Jon.

Whatever Tom was doing—studying religion or journalism, serving coffee in the inner city or sandwiches in the swank part of town, working in Congress or playing with his kids—he never wore his social consciousness on his sleeve. You knew what Tom believed less from what he said than simply who he was when you hung out with him. Where there was a piano in the room, it was easier to get him to play the Eagles’ “Desperado” than to talk politics or social responsibility. But he cared deeply about these things.

He got an early start thinking about the social issue which came to mean the most to him—crime and punishment. When he was eleven years old, he read a pamphlet by Faith for Today’s television evangelist William A. Fagal titled, “By God’s Grace, Sam.” It was the story of Samuel Tannyhill, who was on death row in an Ohio penitentiary when he took a Faith for Today correspondence course that converted him to Adventism. When young Tom read about Samuel’s life and subsequent execution, he was devastated, and for the right reasons. He wondered why they would execute a man after he had become a Christian. Wiser than his years, Tom felt that Adventists had no answer to this question.

He had not yet heard of Menno Simons, the founder

of the Mennonites. When he eventually read him as an adult, he saw that Simons had asked the same question he had asked as an eleven-year-old boy. But Simons asked another question, too—not only why would they execute a man who had become a Christian, but why would they execute a man who still *might become one*?

Tom's first brush with the issue of capital punishment was only the beginning for him. He credited Fagal for getting him to think about—and empathize with—death row inmates. But he thanked Simons and the Mennonites for getting him to think with greater depth and breadth about the prison system as a whole and the people on both sides of the law who were part of it. What Tom learned from the Mennonites was that it should not be enough to convert individual prison inmates to Christianity, as important as that was. The Church should be concerned with the entire prison system: the disproportionate number of minorities incarcerated, “white time” being easier and shorter than “non-white time,” the intolerable conditions within prisons, abusive prison guards, and abysmal medical care. It was not enough to turn prisoners, one by one, into Christians. It was necessary to make every effort to transform the prison system itself. The raw realities of prison life confronted Tom with the inadequacy of Fagal's individual conversions without Simons's social transformation.

It led Tom to join the Mennonites and volunteer for them in Louisiana. Rodale Press approved a two-year leave for him to work among inmates in the Louisiana prison system. After a 1976 Supreme Court decision, there had been a moratorium on capital punishment, but when Tom arrived in Louisiana in 1982, the death penalty had been reinstated there. So most of his focus was on death row inmates. He visited them and their families, he recruited attorneys for them, and he looked into complaints about their treatment. During his time in Louisiana, Tom met and became good friends with Sister Helen Prejean. She was the nun who became the spiritual adviser of Patrick Sonnier on death row and later told the story in her best-seller, *Dead Man Walking*.⁷ In relating to Sonnier, she valued

Merikay and the Pacific Press: Money, Courts and Church Authority

by Tom Dybdahl

The events and documents reviewed below raise important issues for the church. It is hoped that publication of the article will stimulate discussion of these issues by persons of varying convictions.
—The Board of Editors

On May 22, 1972, Merikay Silver went to her boss to ask for a raise. Her salary for editorial work at the Pacific Press Publishing Association was not sufficient for her needs. The Press manager, Leonard F. Bohner, refused her request. It was the beginning of a series of events and legal actions that are still unresolved after more than three years. Mrs. Silver went to work for the Press in the spring of 1972. She had not completed her college degree, but because of her talents and previous accomplishments she was hired in the

Divorce, Remarriage and Adultery
New Sculpture by Alan Collins

SPECTRUM

A Quarterly Journal of the Association of Mennonite Editors
Volume 51, Number 2

WOMEN

Merikay and the Pacific Press
Did God Give Women Second Place?
Fascinating Womanhood
Women Preachers: Evangelical Precedents

the way Tom taught her about the law—years before he became an attorney. Tom “had an amazing ability to make complex legal issues plain,” she wrote. “He was the first one to explain how the machinery of death worked.” And she admired him for underscoring “how the system routinely put the poor and powerless—mostly people of color—in prison and on death row.” When Tom spoke recently to Chuck Sandefur's Sligo Sabbath school class about his forthcoming book, he called the talk, “The Crime of Punishment.”

Tom came to see his life in Louisiana as rewarding and life changing as anything he had ever done. But it was a sacrifice for him and his family. There were no screens on their windows, no air conditioning. The heat and humidity made the summer nights a misery, and mosquitoes the size of quarters pummeled them in what passed for sleep. His marriage suffered. But there were good times, too. Sister Helen was a member of the family—another sister, another grandma. She would see to it that Tom and his son got cameo roles in the *Dead Man Walking* film. (Their scene flitted by so quickly that even if you looked for the Dybdahls, you missed them.) Sister Helen also introduced them to real live movie stars Susan Sarandon and Tim Robbins. And Tom and Sister Helen have remained close since their time together in New Orleans. She was happy to write the foreword to his book, *When Innocence Is Not Enough: Hidden Evidence and the Failed Promise of the*

Brady Rule. With that book, Sister Helen got another chance to learn from Tom about the law.

After two years among prisoners in New Orleans, it was time to go back to a “real job.” Tom returned to Rodale Press and, in his spare time, he did his part in building a business: FDR (Fahrbach, Dybdahl, and Rittenhouse). They published a customized periodical for hospitals and, in just under a decade, acquired forty clients and did roughly two-and-a-half-million dollars in business annually. When his marriage ended and his business was sold, Tom found his way to the “door” to which his “long and winding road” had been leading all along: the practice of law. With his share of FDR, he helped out his daughter, a lawyer-to-be, through Mount Holyoke College, and his son, a musician and writer-to-be, through Oberlin College. Tom also put himself through the University of Pennsylvania Law School where, at forty-eight years old, he was their oldest student, double the age of most of his classmates. Tom wanted to be, for the rest of his career, what most lawyers from elite schools do as a stepping stone to career advancement—a public defender.

In twenty-five homicide cases over fourteen years, and dozens of other cases for various lesser crimes, Tom could do the one thing for his defendants that he could not do for the inmates in Louisiana: he could *defend them*. He worked one year as a public defender in Philadelphia followed by thirteen years in the Public Defender Service for the District of Columbia, widely considered the best public defender’s office in the country. It was exciting but stressful work. During the homicide cases, he had trouble sleeping through the night. Nothing prepared him for a closing argument in court as much as learning to preach sermons years before in homiletics class. Standing in court—with graying hair and adolescent-thin in a smart brown suit—he thought of the jury as a congregation of twelve. But the stakes were so much higher in court than in church. The difference between preaching a sermon and arguing a case was that, with an off day in the pulpit, no one went to prison for life or was executed. In court the adrenaline helped provide the fuel for something harder than fighting for his own life—

fighting for someone else’s. He felt blessed that he was not alone in pursuing his passion. Before entering law school in 1995, he met Trisha Steen, a psychotherapist in Washington, D.C. She was lovely, smart, and utterly nurturing, and there were times as a public defender that he could use a therapist.

So much of Tom’s richly variegated and productive life proves reminiscent of the Adventism that spawned him. Tom admits that “Adventism is still in my bones.” But his story found that irenic balance between his debt to Adventism and his distance from it. Like so many Adventists, he chose theology not hedge funds, a calling not a career. He pursued education at the highest and most distinguished levels—two Ivy League schools, one in journalism and one in law. He also gravitated to serving people, not being served. From a print-rich background, he wrote an astonishing amount. And what could be more Adventist than working for a publisher that produced a health magazine? Or himself publishing a periodical for hospitals? He took law to defend the unprivileged and unlucky, not to defend fat cats and corporations.

Among Adventists, there has been a long and respected, if languishing, tradition of being the maverick and the marginal. It is in the Church’s DNA. Tom cut his own swath. He lived a life he could not have imagined as a freshman at La Sierra College. There were so many unexpected turns and new beginnings. There was heartbreak and joy. There were successes that seemed, at the time, as if they were hopeless struggles. There were cases lost and blood on his hands. But always there was meaning to life. He no longer drew on the language of providence to account for it. He never settled, though, for a life of mere prose; he sought to live his life as a form of poetry. His was never reduced to scratching for a resume; he lived the stuff of an eloquent eulogy.

If Seventh-day Adventism created him, however, it did not contain him. Like so many of the great ones within Adventism, he was not content with merely sustaining the Adventist status quo; he wanted to see his tradition transformed. His Adventist past provided many examples of this very thing. Ellen White went her own way after

James White died, and the Church was dramatically different as a result. E. J. Waggoner and A.T. Jones stood up to the old guard, Uriah Smith and G.I. Butler, and helped remake their Church. In time, one after another, the Church came to revere its revolutionaries. But for Tom, his impulse for change was as much sociological as theological. In his twenties, he pursued higher education outside Adventism. In his thirties, he left Church employment for good. As easygoing and good-natured as he was, he found Adventist parochialism had been a poor fit. However fondly he felt toward his individual Adventist friends, he did better at a distance from the community at large. He gradually lost interest in writing to change Adventists. Let William Fagal be William Fagal; do not try to remake him into Menno Simons. He had risen to senior editor status at *Spectrum*, but he looked to an audience beyond the Church. No longer writing for *Insight* or *Spectrum*, he wrote instead for *The Guardian*, *Slate*, *The Marshall Project*, *Longreads*, and *The Appeal*. In shopping for a publisher for *When Innocence Is Not Enough*, first he got an agent and then he landed The New Press, which had published the million-plus bestseller, *The New Jim Crow*.

Ted Wilson, who was his suitemate for a summer at Andrews, no doubt sees Tom's spiritual odyssey as the sad story of a bright light extinguished. Wilson might ask, "So Tom left the ministry and the Adventist Church?" But a simple "yes" would be profoundly misleading. Leaving the ministry for the law just made him another kind of missionary. And leaving the Adventists for the Mennonites made him another kind of Adventist, perhaps even, in his thinking, a better one. In becoming a Mennonite, he did not abandon Adventism as a disgruntled expatriate. He did not live out his days grumbling about Adventism's flaws and how it had betrayed him. He had not left his faith so much as found a way of fulfilling it. For Tom, the "long and winding road" that had been his spiritual journey had transformed him from a boy reading William Fagal to an adult reading Menno Simons. He had redefined his faith as what for him was a new and "present truth": peace, mercy, and justice. He was *for* visiting prisons, as

PAGE 15: TOM DYBDAHL THANKS MEMBERS OF THE AUDIENCE FOR THEIR SUPPORT AND DELIVERS AN ELOQUENT SYNOPSIS OF HIS BOOK.

PAGE 19/27: ABOUT 80 PEOPLE ATTEND THE JANUARY 2023 BOULDER BOOK STORE LAUNCH EVENT IN COLORADO. IT WAS THE STORE'S LARGEST CROWD EVER.

PAGE 20: TOM DYBDAHL INTERVIEWS CHRIS TURNER, WHO SERVED 26 YEARS IN MAXIMUM SECURITY PRISON FOR A CRIME HE DID NOT COMMIT.

PAGE 22: (LEFT TO RIGHT) JONATHAN BUTLER, TOM DYBDAHL, AND CHRIS TURNER

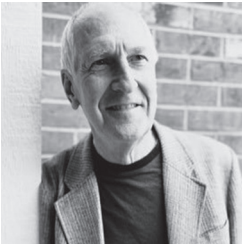
Jesus had told him to do. He was *for* innocent teenagers going free. What Tom was *for* had not made him less of a Christian but more of one.

The three people to whom Tom dedicated his book tell you a lot about him, including just how much he has spread his wings: for Trish, who had little interest in Adventism but loved one particular offspring of it; for Patrice, who researched the Catherine Fuller killing as a reporter for *The Washington Post* and generously shared her findings with Tom; and for Chris Turner, who "lived the story," cruelly served the time, and became a close friend of Tom.

Looking back on his life, is it too audacious to place Tom among those whom Stephen Spender would describe as "truly great"? Tom would be far too modest to think so. "Those who were truly great" for Spender were special people whose "lips still touched with fire,/ Should tell of the Spirit, clothed from head to foot in song." If Tom is not one of them, he is close enough to hear the song, and to play it by ear in his living room.

ENDNOTES:

1. "The Truly Great," Stephen Spender, *Collected Poems 1928-1953*. (New York: Random House, 1955): <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/54715/the-truly-great>.
2. Tom Dybdahl, "Sirens to Trouble Your Sleep," *Insight* 4 (Aug. 28, 1973): 10-14.
3. Tom Dybdahl, "We SHOULD Be Involved in Politics," *Spectrum* 8, no. 3 (March 1977): 33-37. https://www.andrews.edu/library/car/cardigital/Periodicals/Spectrum/1976-1977_Vol_8/3_March_1977.pdf#page=35.
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By Thomas L. Dybdahl

An excerpt from *When Innocence Is Not Enough: Hidden Evidence and the Failed Promise of the Brady Rule* (New York: The New Press, 2023).

WHEN INNOCENCE
IS NOT ENOUGH

HIDDEN EVIDENCE
AND THE FAILED
PROMISE OF THE
BRADY RULE

THOMAS DYBDAHL
with a foreword by Sister Helen Prejean

The Brady rule was supposed to transform the U.S. justice system.

In lofty language, the Supreme Court decreed in 1963 that prosecutors must share favorable evidence with criminal defendants. The rule’s premise was that “the United States wins its point whenever justice is done.”¹

William O. Douglas, who wrote the Brady opinion, hoped it would help remake our adversarial process into a joint search for truth and fairness.

But reality intervened. The opinion itself was poorly reasoned. The rule’s claims to precedent were dubious at best. Key terms in the rule were not defined. It clashed with the foundations of the established system. Three of the justices said the rule was merely “advisory.”

Those flaws would be Brady’s undoing. Over time, its promise not only went unfulfilled, it turned bitter. The rule made a stunning turnaround. The principle intended to promote fairness ended up doing the very opposite.

The effects have been dire. Withholding favorable evidence is now the leading cause of wrongful convictions. Of 2,400 documented exonerations between 1989 and 2019, Brady violations helped to convict 44 percent—1,056 innocent people.²

These infractions also fell most heavily on people of color.

And what were the consequences for the prosecutors responsible for most

of these abuses, the ones who put so many innocent defendants in prison? Eleven were disciplined by their employers.

Three were disbarred. Two were fired. And just one prosecutor— one!—went to jail for breaking Brady. That’s a key reason why the violations continue.

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How could this terrible transformation happen?

No matter what the words of a law may be, they mean whatever the courts say they mean. Period. The course of a law can only be understood through stories—the tales of cases with real people in real situations.

This book tells the winding history of the Brady rule through the cases that created and defined it. The story is anchored by the odyssey of the Catherine Fuller murder, perhaps the most savage and senseless crime in Washington, DC, history. Together, the narratives illustrate the Brady rule's potential, detail its slow demise, describe the human cost of its failure, and point the way to making its promise real.

Love, Death, and the Birth of *Brady*

John Leo Brady was in love.³ In early June 1958, he was also in some trouble. His sweetheart, Nancy Boblit McGowan, had just told him she was pregnant with his baby. Nancy was only nineteen and was married to another man. Brady was twenty-five and was broke.

He'd never had an easy life. He grew up poor in southern Maryland. His young parents, scraping their living from a small tobacco farm, couldn't cope with a fussy baby. They gave him to his paternal grandparents and his aunt Celeste, who raised him. From infancy through his late teens, Brady suffered from serious otitis media. His ears regularly oozed a thick, vile-smelling pus. At school, his classmates called him "Stinkears."

Brady gladly dropped out during the eighth grade to work full-time on his uncle's farm. At nineteen, in 1951, he enlisted in the U.S. Air Force and served as a military police officer at bases in Washington State and Greenland. Over the next four years, his otitis stopped, he got married, left the service, earned his high school equivalency, got divorced, and returned home to Maryland.

In March 1958, Brady met Nancy and her brother, Charles Donald Boblit. Their parents were good friends with Aunt Celeste. Donald Boblit was twenty-five, gawky, lonely, and barely literate.

In the pre-feminist jargon of the 1950s, a friend of Nancy's called her "just a dumb good-looking blond."

Both Nancy and her husband, Slim, were living with her parents, and the couple hardly spoke to each other. Nancy let everyone know she intended to do whatever she wanted. Brady and the two Boblit siblings soon became close. Nancy fell for Brady's "sulky blond good looks," as a biographer later put it. Before long she was pregnant.

Brady was working at a local tobacco packing company for \$1.50 an hour. He had recently bought a used 1947 Ford and was behind on his bills. But he wanted Nancy to know he was committed to her. She had planned a trip to New York to visit family, leaving on Monday, June 23. Brady spent that Sunday with her. They drove around in his car and parked by the Patuxent River.

Sometime in the afternoon he impulsively wrote her a check for \$35,000, postdated to July 6. This was a dream sum—a huge number pulled out of the air. If he could make it real, Brady guessed the money would solve all their problems.

Nancy asked no questions. She put the check in her purse. Brady reminded her to wait, saying, "Somehow, in two weeks it'll be in the bank."

He saw only one way to get that kind of cash—stick up a bank. He knew he could get Boblit to help. Over the next few days, the two men hashed out a sort of plan. Nearby big cities like Baltimore and Washington, DC, had too many cops and guards. They settled on the one bank in tiny Stevensville, Maryland, thirty miles away, just over the Chesapeake Bay Bridge. They'd do it on Saturday morning. Folks would have deposited their weekly pay on Friday afternoon.

Even though he'd bought it recently, Brady worried his Ford was too old to be reliable. Especially if they got in a chase. For a successful getaway, they needed a more dependable car.

William Brooks had one.

Brooks, fifty-three, had known Brady for most of his life. He'd been a hired hand on Brady's grandfather's farm. He'd recently stayed with Brady and Aunt Celeste for a week while recovering from surgery. The two men had shared a room and played checkers. Now Brooks had a good job working the late shift at a small plastics factory in Odenton, about twenty miles southwest of



Baltimore. He was living in a shack in the woods, not far from the plant. His landlady, Mary Elliott, had a house nearby. She worked at the same factory.

Less than two weeks earlier, Brooks had gotten his first new car: a blue two-tone Ford Fairlane. When Brady dropped by to visit, he'd looked it over—and coveted it. Elliott had driven past and seen the two men together.

Brady and Boblit decided to waylay Brooks as he came home from work after midnight. Boblit would blindfold Brooks, since he would recognize Brady. They would tie him up, then stow him in a vacant house Boblit knew about. When the robbery was done, they'd let him go and give him his car back.

Brady was adamant Brooks not be harmed. "I don't want him hurt, not at all," he said repeatedly. "He was good to me when I was a kid."

Late that Friday night, June 27, the two men put a log across the narrow dirt road that led from the highway to Brooks's home. He would have to move it to get by. They waited in the dark.

A Botched Crime

Things went awry from the start. When Brooks stopped for the log, Boblit stepped out of the shadows

with a double-barrel shotgun. He ordered Brooks to get in the rear seat of his Ford.

Brooks seemed confused and started to get back into the front seat. He kept pleading, "Please don't kill me. Please." He wouldn't shut up.

Boblit hit him in the back of the head with the shotgun, knocking Brooks woozy. He forgot about the blindfold. The men laid Brooks on the back seat of the Fairlane and drove away. Brady, improvising, wanted to find dense woods where they might leave Brooks unnoticed.

Boblit had a different thought. "We got to kill him," he said. "He seen me."

"Put that goddam gun away," Brady replied. "Someone might hear a shot."

When they parked near a stand of trees, Brooks started to wake up. They got him out of the car. He was wobbly. Together, Brady and Boblit walked him into the small forest. He was holding his lunch pail from work. They stopped in a clearing.

Brady walked away a little, trying to think. He knew Brooks had recognized him.

Boblit didn't hesitate. He took off his red plaid shirt. He twisted the sleeves until they were tight. He used it to strangle Brooks, who was too frail to resist. When Brady

turned and saw what was happening, he ran back and pushed Boblit away. It was too late.

“He’s dead,” Brady said, staring at Boblit.

“Let’s get out of here, John.”

The men carried Brooks’s body a little deeper into the woods. Before they left, Brady put a few branches over his face and head. On the way back to the car, he picked up Brooks’s lunch box and threw it as far as he could.

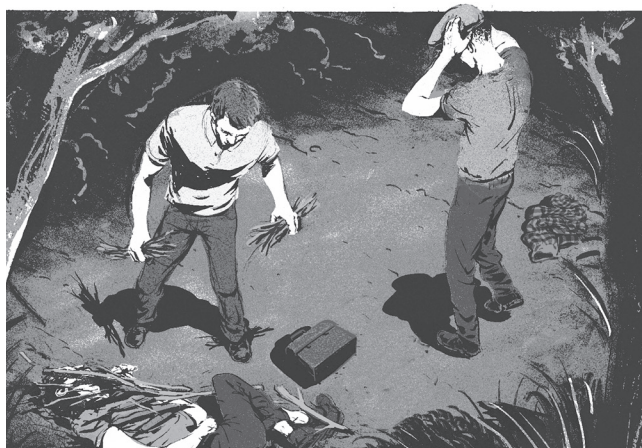
Their escape plan was no better than their robbery plot. The two drove to Chestertown. But when dawn came, they decided not to hit the bank.

“I just can’t do it,” Brady said. “Done enough.” They had gotten \$255.30 from Brooks’s wallet. Brady figured they should head for Washington State, the only other place in the United States where he’d lived.

They made it to Lynchburg, Virginia, about two hundred miles southwest. Already, Boblit was asking to go home. Brady didn’t want to fight. They parked Brooks’s Fairlane on a downtown street, walked to the bus station, and caught a Trailways. They were in DC by late Saturday afternoon. From there they took a cab up to Glen Burnie, a suburb of Baltimore, where Brady had left his car.

Both men thought nobody would miss Brooks for at least a few days. But Elliott, his landlady, reported him missing when he didn’t show up for work at 4:00 p.m. on Saturday. She also told police she’d seen him with Brady, and they might be together.

In the meantime, Brady, dreamer of crazy dreams, had been toying with the idea of going to Cuba and joining Fidel Castro’s rebels in the mountains. He had met a



few Cubans during his time in the Air Force. They had talked up their revolution. Brady had even helped them move small shipments of guns intended for Castro. That Sunday morning, he drove down to DC. He stopped by an aunt’s place just after noon.

When she told him two officers had been there a little while earlier looking for him, his heart nearly stopped. The police must already be on to him and Boblit. After a short pause, Brady handed his keys to his aunt and pointed to his car. “I’m going out of the country,” he said.

From his share of the robbery money, Brady bought a ticket to Cuba on a flight leaving early Monday. He was in Havana before noon. After a good sleep, he walked around the old city, wondering how to contact someone connected to Castro.

At about the same time, Nancy went to the bank in Maryland to cash his check. She hadn’t waited two weeks. It wouldn’t have mattered. There was no money in Brady’s account. She felt humiliated when the teller laughed at her.

But Brady kept thinking about Nancy and her brother. Somehow he convinced himself he was only guilty of a minor crime: stealing Brooks’s car. He loved Nancy. Their child was on the way. If he turned himself in, he could say they just hit Brooks and left him by the road and didn’t know where he was now. That might get Boblit off the hook. Maybe he could still work things out with Nancy.

That Tuesday afternoon, rather than heading off to the Sierra Maestra mountains to seek out Castro, he walked into the American embassy in Havana. A few hours later he was in a Miami jail cell, talking to two FBI agents. Brady said he knocked Brooks out, and he and Boblit had stolen Brooks’s car. He told them where to find it. Sure enough, an agent in Virginia found the Fairlane.

Brady said nothing about any killing.

On Wednesday afternoon, Brady was formally charged with transporting a stolen car in interstate commerce. Bail was set at \$25,000. The next morning, he told the agents he was ready to plead guilty. As a first-time offender, he was hoping for a short sentence, maybe even parole.

Two hours later, the FBI men returned. “Your friend Boblit’s been picked up,” one of them said shortly. “He took us to where the body was.”

Conflicting Confessions

Brady thought Boblit had been in jail since Sunday, when the police were in DC looking for him. And that he had kept his mouth shut. But Boblit had not been arrested until Wednesday, and only after Brady said his name to the legal counselor in Havana. Three officers had come to Boblit’s house late in the afternoon.

In an interrogation room, they started asking Boblit about Brady and the stolen car. They’d hardly begun when he looked at the floor and blurted out: “Well, I might as well tell you. You’re going to find out anyway. . . . The man’s dead.” He didn’t even know Brooks’s name.

Suddenly he said: “Brady did it. It wasn’t me. I didn’t do nothing . . . It was all his idea, and he done it all.”⁴

Boblit told the officers Brooks had not been killed near his home but in the woods close to the Patuxent River. He said he could show them where, and he did. Back at the station, in barely legible handwriting, he wrote a brief statement of what had happened.

[O]n the 27 day to help Jhon B to rob one W M B and to take his body to the river bridge and I sow Jhon B kill hin. I did not no that he was gorin to kill hin. Jhon B say that he was gorin to let him stay a alive just knok W M B out and leve hin.⁵

Boblit signed the document, and two officers wrote their names as witnesses.

Over the next six hours, three detectives questioned Boblit in detail. A transcript of the interview shows he again told them Brady had strangled Brooks. He said he’d tried to stop Brady: “I told him not to do it.” He hadn’t reported the crime because he was “scared to.”

The next day, in Florida, FBI agents told Brady what his friend had said. At first, he wouldn’t believe Boblit had put it all on him. The agents pointed out that what Boblit said fit with what Brady himself told them earlier.



Brady gave his own statement, saying Boblit hit Brooks with a shotgun and later strangled him. When he’d said before that he was the one who struck Brooks, he was just trying to protect Boblit. He said when he and Boblit parted, he told Boblit “to go back to his home, that I would take the blame and for him not to admit anything.”

That night, the front-page, banner headline in the *Annapolis Evening Capital* was “Police Charge Two with Slaying of Severn Man.”⁶ The story reported that “an odd, almost senseless series of events” had led to the murder charge. It said that “astute police work was not needed” to solve the case, because the two men “seemed pathetically anxious to be caught.”

Brady waived extradition and was taken back to Maryland. He soon learned Nancy and her family blamed him for what had happened. She wanted nothing to do with him. He talked to her just once more, when she came to visit her brother at the Annapolis jail. She stopped by his cell and asked: “Did you kill that man?”

“No.”

Nancy began to cry, then turned and left forever. Brady would never speak to their son.

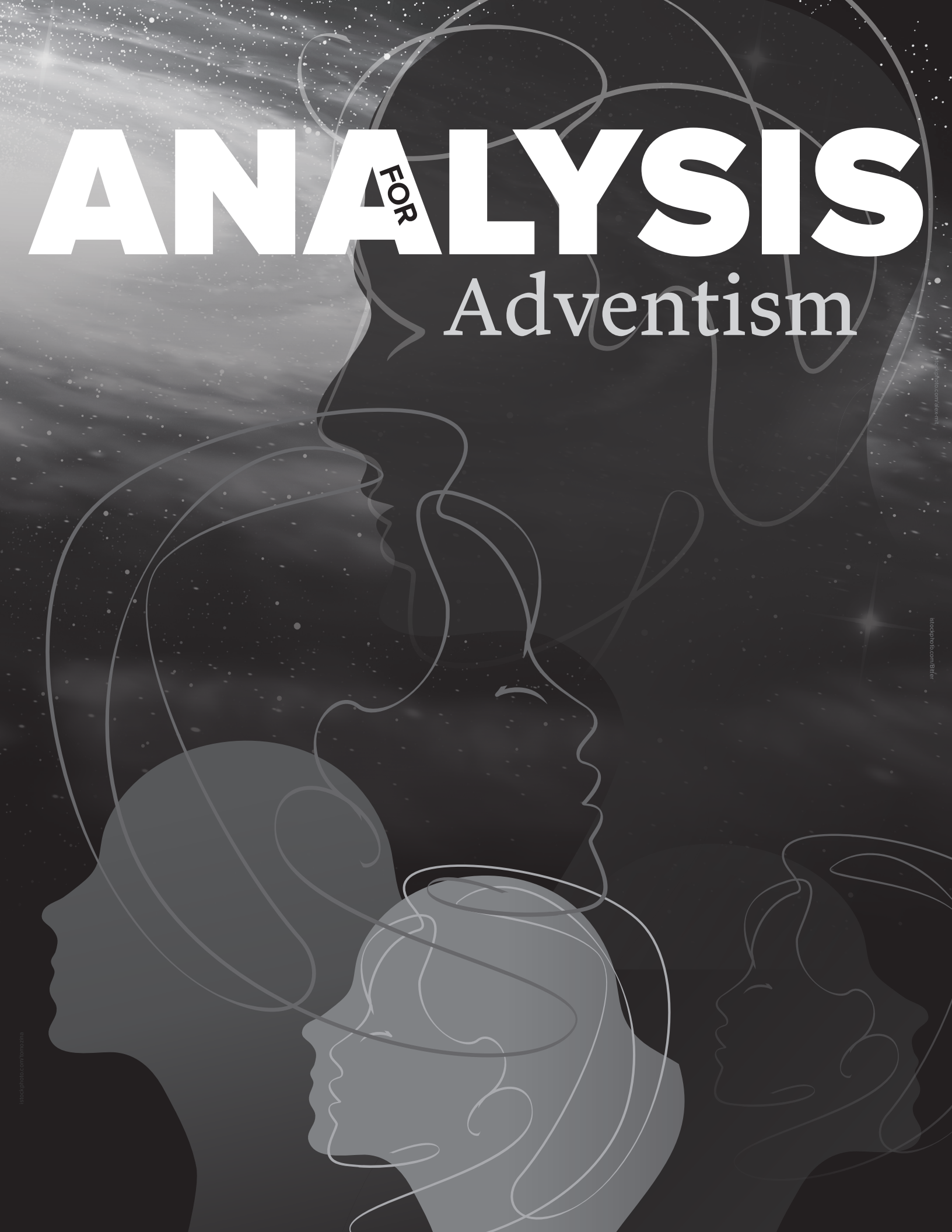
ENDNOTES:

1. An inscription on the walls of the U.S. Department of Justice headquarters; cited in *Brady v. Maryland*, 373 U.S. 83, 87 (1963).
2. Samuel R. Gross, Maurice J. Possley, Kaitlin Jackson Roll, and Klara Huber Stephens, *Government Misconduct and Convicting the Innocent, The Role of Prosecutors, Police and Other Law Enforcement* (report, National Registry of Exonerations, September 1, 2020).
3. The facts about John Brady in this chapter are from Richard Hammer’s biography *Between Life and Death* (New York: MacMillan, 1969), which covers Brady’s life up to 1968.
4. Hammer, 94.
5. Hammer, 97.
6. “Police Charge Two with Slaying of Severn Man,” *Evening Capital* (Annapolis, MD), July 3, 1958.

ANALYSIS

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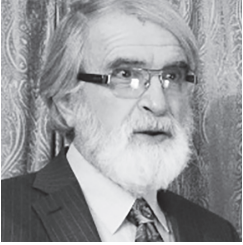
Adventism



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By Ronald Lawson

Church-Sponsored Injustice:

The Adventist Church and Polygamous Converts

Polygamy has been the most complex, perplexing, and persistent marriage-related problem encountered by churches in their missionary enterprise. The most intense and resistant problems have been encountered in Africa, where polygyny¹ has been most widespread. It was estimated in 1970 that more than 20 percent of families were polygynous in 75 percent of African societies, and that the mean number of wives per 100 married males in sub-Saharan Africa was 150.² The prime—and recurring—issue has been how to relate to converts who are already involved in pluralistic marriages.

Although economic and social changes, such as urbanization, are reducing the incidence of the formation of such marriages, polygamy remains a central concern to the churches in Africa. Because it is intrinsic to a traditional society's total way of life, it has economic, social, political, as well as religious ramifications, and it is surrounded by a variety of supporting ancillary institutions.

This paper focuses on the evolution of the policies of the Adventist Church toward polygamy and of the practices it adopted. The evolution of these policies over time reflects important changes in the Church during the twentieth century and, in turn, casts light on them. Although missionaries from Asia also had input in the creation of policies regarding polygamous converts, Africa has always been central to the issue and the focus of the continuing debate. My data suggest that the churches in Southeast Asia, Muslim countries,

and Papua New Guinea (the other main regions where polygamy is practiced today) have been more inclined to merely implement policy.

Adventist missionaries did not enter Africa until 1887, which was relatively

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late in the history of Christian missionary endeavor on the continent. The major missions had by that time largely established their policies and procedures concerning polygamy. Since Adventists saw themselves and were treated by the other missions as rivals and competitors, they had greater freedom to chart their own course.

This paper explores the factors shaping their policies, placing them primarily within a context of church-sect theory, which was developed and has normally been applied to a single society within the developed world, but is here applied to a region of the developing world within global, hierarchically organized Adventism. First, I will summarize the development of the policies of the major African missions toward polygamy. Then I will focus on the evolution of Adventist policy and practices, culminating in an analysis of recent debates and attempts to alter policies, together with an assessment of the current situation.

Research Methods

The research reported here is part of a large study of international Seventh-day Adventism, which has included 4,700 in-depth interviews with Church administrators, teachers, hospital administrators, medical personnel, pastors, students, and leading laypersons in sixty countries in all thirteen of the world divisions. This paper relies mostly on secondary sources for its historical segments and on interviews for its analysis of current practices and of recent attempts at change. My interviews were completed (so far) between 1984 and 2023, with most of the African interviews between 1986 and 1999, with “catch-up interviews” added since. The convention adopted by this study is to refrain from citing the names of interviewees when they are quoted, except when they are major figures in the Church.³

The Development of the Policies of the Major African Missions

Christianity grew up in what was basically a monogamous world. The Catholic Church did not face an extensively polygamous society until missionaries

entered Asia and America in the sixteenth century, and Protestants not until the nineteenth century—first, to a more limited extent, in parts of Asia and then, much more widespread, in Africa.⁴ Both Catholics and Protestants applied what they were used to in their cultures to the new situations they confronted. However, the policies they applied proved destructive.

The first recorded official Christian statement on polygamy dates from 1201, when the Bishop of Tiberius asked Pope Innocent III if polygamous converts should keep all wives or only one, and if the latter, which one. The Pope insisted on strict monogamy, calling polygamous unions adultery, and refused baptism to any parties to such a marriage.⁵ Although it confirmed this position in the sixteenth century, the Catholic Church has found the issue to be a persistent problem ever since.

N. Engelbert Kofon suggests that if the issue had been left to the early missionaries to decide, their solutions would probably have been very different from those sent out by Rome, which could not comprehend the lives of those it labeled “barbarians.” It did not admit the existence of cultural pluralism until the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s.⁶

A Protestant missionary conference in northern India early in the nineteenth century, in which Anglicans played a major role, arrived at a position very different from that held by Catholics. It concluded that people who had formed polygamous marriages before converting to Christianity could be baptized and their families could remain intact, but that they would not be eligible for church office. However, this decision was not well received by the mission boards in the homelands, nor was it implemented widely.⁷

By the middle of the nineteenth century, when the Anglican Church addressed the issue in West Africa, the tide was running in the reverse direction. Missionaries at that time had little theology of marriage and little understanding of the relativity of social patterns. (Anthropologists, for example, had not yet studied marriage.) Their concept of Christian marriage was what they had known at home.⁸ Adrian Hastings surveys their considerable writings and concludes

that “predominantly they appear as moralists, come to preach a strongly moral gospel and with a very clear idea as to how that gospel has to be worked out in the life of individual and group.”⁹ They regarded much of African life as immoral and condemnable, especially the marriage customs, and here most notably polygamy and bride wealth. Missionaries often “presupposed that lust was the real reason for polygamy.”¹⁰ Since polygamous unions were viewed as adulterous, the missions had little hesitation in ruling that these marriages must come to an abrupt end if the partners wished to become Christians. They thus “turned the good news of the gospel into bad news.”¹¹ A meeting in Nigeria resolved “that while the wives of a polygamist, if believed to be true converts, might be received to baptism, since they were usually the involuntary victims of the custom, no man could be admitted who retained more than one wife.”¹²

Shortly after this in 1857, Henry Venn, secretary of the Church Missionary Society, drew up a memorandum which was to influence the debate for the next century: “a polygamist cannot be lawfully admitted by baptism into the Church of Christ.”¹³ However, some individual missionaries “came to understand the human situation better and to have doubts.”¹⁴ Prime among these was John Colenso, Anglican Bishop of Natal, who in 1862 challenged the refusal of his Church to accept polygamists for baptism. When he lost out, South Africa became very rigid on the issue.

So much turmoil surrounded the issue by 1888 that it was brought to the Lambeth Conference. The bishops voted that male polygamists should not be baptized as Christians, but kept under instruction until they were in a position to conform to the law of Christ. This position had great and continuing influence not only among Anglicans in Africa but also over other Protestants there, even though several churches continued to baptize polygamists in Asia, especially China. Church policy thus, in effect, “made polygamy THE unforgivable sin.” Only divorce could “qualify reformed polygamists for entrance and fellowship in the kingdom of God.”¹⁵ The Lambeth document was again less adamant concerning polygamous wives, allowing their baptism in some

circumstances, these being left to local decision.¹⁶

Nevertheless, when, shortly before World War I, the editor of the *International Review of Missions* surveyed missionaries throughout the world concerning their most pressing problems, those from Africa chose those related to marriage. He reported a great diversity of opinion, even within the same mission.¹⁷ This was so in spite of the fact that the International Missionary Conference in Edinburgh in 1910 had confirmed the approach of the Lambeth document.¹⁸

The prevailing policies generally presented a polygamous male convert with one of two choices. The first, which was initially the most common practice, was that he should put away all but one of his wives before being baptized. (There was further variation here, for while some insisted that the first wife be the one retained, others allowed him to choose any of his wives.) This choice was wrenching to the kinship system, often separated the cast-out wives from their children (since in patrilineal societies they belonged to their father’s lineage), and left some discarded wives so destitute that they were forced into prostitution in order to survive. Although cast-out wives were eligible for baptism, the end result of the policy was that they were usually alienated from Christianity.

With the passing of time, Protestants came to view polygamous unions not as adultery but as an inferior form of marriage which, if divorce was demanded, was likely to result in unacceptable dislocation. Many concluded that it was therefore better to maintain them, even though they represented an insurmountable impediment to baptism. Consequently, the pendulum swung increasingly toward the second alternative, under which all wives were eligible for baptism, but the male was kept waiting, without baptism, on the periphery of the church until the death of a wife or wives left him with only one spouse.¹⁹

Catholics, for their part, were more firmly convinced that polygamous relationships were adulterous and therefore not marriages. Consequently, their traditional solution was akin to the first choice listed above: the polygamist must send away all but one of his wives



Photo courtesy of the Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists <https://encyclopedia.adventist.org/article?id=3HU2>

before he could be baptized. “The official documents laying down the policy show little or no preoccupation with the wives. Not only were they abandoned to their fate, treated like things that could be cast away at any time, the question of the possibility of baptizing them, and under what conditions, was not ever raised. The concern was with the man, with his baptism.”²⁰

Catholic practice, as it evolved in Africa, was that the first wife could be baptized, even if other wives were in place, because she was the only one recognized by the Church as a wife, but the others had to leave the man in order to be accepted by the Church. This policy overlooked the consequences of separation for these wives: they were the victims, left with no husbands.²¹

During the twentieth century, the argument moved north from South Africa to East and West Africa, especially once many independent African churches accepting polygamous members began to emerge in West Africa.²² In 1938, African delegates to the International Missionary Council in Madras asked unanimously for a study of a group of social problems, the first of these being Christian marriage in a polygamous society.²³ This indicated that disquiet concerning the handling

of polygamists persisted in the field in spite of the consensus statements issued by missionary conferences.

Policy and practice began to change in the decades after World War II—slowly at first, then with increasing pace. The first mission-connected church to decide to baptize male polygamists was the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Liberia in 1951. An All-Africa Seminar on the Christian Home and Family in 1963 recommended that whole polygamous families could be baptized and admitted to communion. This led to a period of intense discussion and to several of the smaller missions acting on the recommendation.²⁴ However, the larger missions did not yet do so. New articles and books urging the baptism of polygamists began to appear more frequently in Catholic (see below) as well as Protestant circles.²⁵

Meanwhile, anthropological studies had shown great differences between patrilineal and matrilineal societies in both the stability of marriages and the incidence of polygamy, which helped to show why the observations and views of missionaries in different parts of the continent had differed so much. (Marriages in patrilineal societies, which are the most common, tend to be both more stable and more frequently polygamous.)²⁶ Studies

revealed the interdependence of the marriage system and the fabric of traditional society. Polygamy was a means of strengthening the lineage, creating a network of alliances for the kinship group, and securing the labor needed to farm the land. It provided for the needs of women in a society where, because of tribal wars, they heavily outnumbered men; where it was unthinkable that single women and widows would live alone; where divorce was often not tolerated since marriages were contracted by groups of kinsmen rather than individuals; where procreation was valued most highly and was the main object of marriage; and where the burden of childlessness was heavily felt. The system protected the needy and ensured that no child was illegitimate by allowing for the most privileged men to take the surplus women and establish polygamous families.²⁷

Consequently, “when missionaries interfere with the marriage pattern they threaten something that is tied to all the social life of the community, its economic stability and its personal relationships.”²⁸ Kinship groups often refused to permit the divorces churches demand, and efforts to have a husband support his wife (and her children) without having a sexual relationship with her created enormous strains and likely failure.²⁹ When a church refused to allow a member to enter a leviratic marriage with the widow of his brother, this destroyed the social mechanisms which provide for the widow and orphans.³⁰

Recent studies had shown that the traditional family was disintegrating in the mushrooming urban areas. The Christian policy toward polygamy was held partially responsible for this: it had taught many societies the possibility of divorce.³¹ “With the breakdown of the family on every hand it no longer appears so self-evident to the churches that polygamous families should be separated.”³² Instead, a number of churches began to see it as their primary responsibility to promote marital fidelity and stability. They therefore began to rethink the whole issue in the light of contemporary circumstances.

In 1970, the Anglican Archbishops of Africa commissioned a report on Christian marriage in Africa. This defined polygamous marriage as “not a number of

loose sexual relationships, but of simultaneous stable unions contracted under a form of law, recognized as marriage by the people of the country, entered upon with a lifetime intention, and providing both a permanent home and a legitimate status for offspring.”³³ The study found that Anglican dioceses in Africa mostly admitted polygamously married women to baptism and communion, but that the ban on males was nearly absolute. It found that the growing instability of African marriages, including polygamous marriages, and the revolt of the increasingly better educated women against the structured inferiority of the past made the situation more complex, and concluded that the gospel must witness to the dignity of women and the value of Christian monogamy.³⁴ However, to reject and destabilize existing polygamous marriages was to be unjust and to bring misery to women and children. “To end a polygamous marriage in the name of Christ, who said nothing explicitly to condemn it, at the expense of effecting a divorce, which Christ explicitly forbade, is to pay too high a price to achieve a theoretical conformity with one part of the Christian marriage pattern.”³⁵ The study therefore urged the baptism of polygamous families that existed prior to conversion, depending on the true state of the marriage, the likely public consequences of the baptisms, and the agreement of the local Christian community.

The fruits of this study were harvested at the 1988 Lambeth Conference, which, at the initiative of the East African bishops, reversed the ban on baptizing polygamists unless they retained only one wife. The bishops argued that the existing policy resulted either in women and children being abandoned or the loss of converts to other faiths. The resolution voted by the Conference upholds monogamy as the ideal and forbids converted polygamists from taking additional wives. It says nothing about polygamists not being able to hold church office. The decision underlined the new weight of the churches in the developing world within Christianity.³⁶

Meanwhile, others among the larger mission-connected churches had made modifications to their

policies which attempted to overcome the problems, but which thereby revealed the complexity of the whole issue. The Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Cameroon tolerated polygamous families converted in areas untouched by the gospel, but excluded converts in more evangelized areas from the new rules—so that the same problems continued there.³⁷ Consequently, Christian men felt obliged to divorce a barren wife rather than merely add another, thus learning the American practice of serial monogamy. And the rejection of polygamy resulted in much more adultery, venereal disease, and HIV/AIDS.³⁸ While a change of policy would probably have led many to give Christianity a second hearing, it was opposed by many of the church leaders: “There are old childless pastors who never took a second wife in order to be in good standing with the church. They are now more adamant about enforcing a monogamy rule than the present missionaries whose predecessors introduced it. Monogamy has come to represent for some the cross to bear in following Jesus.”³⁹

This ferment among Protestant missions had bypassed the Catholic Church. The latter continued to withhold any legitimacy from polygamous relationships and to demand that a polygamous convert put away all but his first “real” wife before receiving baptism. However, with the independence of the former African colonies and the concern for mission voiced by Vatican II, a renewed discussion of the issue in Catholic circles became inevitable. In 1967, a paper advocating baptizing polygamous persons was presented to the Catholic bishops of East Africa, where it drew heated discussion. After publication the next year, it attracted attention from a broader audience.⁴⁰ A survey of Catholic leaders in East Africa in 1969 found that one of the most serious pastoral problems was “the constant confrontation between African marriage customs and the Christian marriage customs taught by Western missionaries.”⁴¹ In 1970, an African priest requested permission of the Vatican to baptize a polygynous man and his second wife.⁴² At a meeting of sixty-five East African Catholic bishops in Nairobi in 1973, the Bishop of Eldoret called for a rethinking of the Church’s position. In spite of

frantic attempts by the Apostolic Nuncio to cut off discussion, the majority of bishops agreed that the issue needed further study. However, when the proceedings of the meeting were published, they omitted reference to this discussion.⁴³

The Catholic Church faced increasing demands that it alter its position. Michael C. Kirwen’s data give a devastating critique of the failure of the Church’s position to understand and deal with leviratic marriage in particular and, by implication, the whole of customary marriage.⁴⁴ According to Kofon, two alternatives were pressed by theologians. The first, which would have allowed a polygamous man to retain his wives and keep him as an unbaptized catechumen for life, would have moved the Catholic Church to the long-held Protestant practice. Kofon found this realistic, for it admitted that it is very difficult to separate the man from his wives, and it would have found a place in the Church for the whole family (even if this were a second-class place for the man).⁴⁵ The second alternative was much more radical, for it would have made baptism available to practicing polygamists. The solution urged by Kofon was merely a (probably unrealistic) variant on current policy: all the spouses would officially remain married, but those beyond the first coupling must promise to refrain from sex with one another.⁴⁶ The ongoing debate within the Catholic Church led it to participate in the broader search for solutions among Christians.⁴⁷

The traditional position adopted by the Christian churches toward polygamy has proved to be an obstruction to their missionary enterprise. Animists in Africa, and especially in West Africa, are frequently confronted with an option between Islam and Christianity. Muslims argue that their religion is valid for Africans because it permits polygamy.⁴⁸ Christianity, on the other hand, has appeared foreign in its failure to understand the traditional family system and its imposition of rules which present polygamists with almost insurmountable obstacles. Moreover, in communal societies it is appropriate that people become Christians within their extended family groups. But these cannot be won without the elders, who are most likely to

be polygamists. This was an “urgent situation.”⁴⁹

The 1963 All African Seminar on Christian Home and Family Life had been the first Catholic forum to raise with some sympathy the question of how to respond to baptized church members who later choose to enter polygamous relationships.⁵⁰ The Hastings report a decade later clung to the traditional position: “It is not open for a baptized Christian to choose anything but a monogamous marriage.” However, it showed sympathy with those who married a widow because of kinship obligations or who added a wife because the first was childless.⁵¹

To summarize, widespread unity of thought concerning polygamy and in practice concerning how to treat polygamously married converts emerged over time among the Christian missions that entered Africa in the nineteenth century. Missionaries were almost universally repulsed by the institution, interpreting it in terms of excesses of sexual desire and, at least initially, adulterous behavior. Although Protestants came fairly quickly to see it as a form of marriage rather than adultery, this was a form incompatible with Christianity. Catholics continued to view it officially as adultery. However, since both interpretations regarded it as unacceptable, they responded similarly to male converts, typically giving them a choice between putting away all but one of their wives in order to be baptized or remaining with their complete families on the fringe of the Church as unbaptized catechumens. The practice concerning the wives who remained polygamously married was more varied, ranging from baptizing none of them, through baptizing only the first married (since she was deemed to be the only one legitimately married), to baptizing them all on the grounds that each had only one husband and, as the victims of arranged marriages from which extrication was at best very difficult, they could not be held responsible for their status. This general approach was ratified by the Anglicans at the 1888 Lambeth Conference, a formulation which had considerable influence on the positions of the other mission-related churches.

The first break in this unified facade came with the

founding of the first of the independent African churches in West Africa in the 1890s. Although individual missionaries expressed disquiet with the social problems caused by both breaking up families and by the unsatisfactory second-class unbaptized status accorded to men who remained with their wives, the balance shifted over time from a determination to rid converts of their wives to acquiescing with decisions to retain intact families—the general approach held among the mission churches until decolonization. It was then that dissatisfaction with the prevailing practices was voiced increasingly, and smaller missions began gradually to baptize polygamists. Among the major bodies, the Anglicans formally led the way, taking a decision to allow the baptism of intact families at the 1988 Lambeth Conference, and thus reversing the practice endorsed a century earlier. The Catholic Church found it much more difficult to make an official change in its position, but it has been shaken increasingly by controversy concerning the issue.

These changes took place against a background where the situation was becoming increasingly more complex, as traditional kinship and marriage systems deteriorated—a breakdown which anthropologists blamed in part on mission policy toward polygamous families. These undesirable social changes have made it increasingly difficult to accommodate a policy that is rooted in the failure to contextualize the Christian message for the cultures of Africa.

The Adventist Context

Adventism was born in America but has since globalized. At the end of 2019 only 5.5 percent of its membership was located in the United States. It has been especially successful in Africa with 44.4 percent of its 21.6 million members located there.

The history of the Adventist Church in the U.S. is, in many ways, a case study illustrating the transformation of a religious group from a “sect” into a “denomination.” Rodney Stark and Williams Sims Bainbridge suggest that the utility of church-sect theory is enhanced if one key variable—the religious group’s tension with society—is

used as the indicator rather than the usual confusing array of variables. They define a sect as a religious group having high tension with society, which is indicated by tension with government or other religious groups, and behavioral characteristics that are scorned or punished by powerful elites in society. In contrast, a denomination has low tension with society.⁵² Over time, some sects compromise with the world, reducing the tension between themselves and society, and move toward denominational status. This usually occurs as the level of participation by the group in the wider society broadens and as influential members experience upward mobility and then find that the tension between their religious group and society is inconsistent with their interests.⁵³

This has been the experience of Adventists in the land where they originated. American Adventism, as measured by the Stark and Bainbridge criteria, was originally highly sectarian. Marked differences from society, such as the Church's insistence on observing a Saturday Sabbath in a society where a six-day work week was almost universal, its belief that the return of Christ and end of the world as we know it were imminent, behavioral restrictions that made its members different and made it extremely difficult to associate with others, and a refusal to bear arms if conscripted, set Adventists apart. Adventism's view of itself as the true Church bearing God's final message in the last days, its declarations that all other religious groups were "apostate," and its embrace of conspiracy theories expecting persecution from other churches in collaboration with the American state, all tended to create bitter antagonisms. These barriers were reinforced by the close ties that developed among Adventists, whose lives usually centered around their Church, the subculture it created, and its mission. They attended Church schools, often worked for Church institutions, and were frequently drawn by educational opportunities and economic and social ties to live in what became known colloquially as "Adventist ghettos." Not only did Adventist members' differences attract scorn, but their Sabbath observance caused problems with employers, and their refusal to bear arms had legal repercussions.

However, the level of tension between American Adventists and society began to decline soon after their prophet, Ellen White, died in 1915. The chief engines of change were the development of large Church-sponsored educational and health care systems. These encouraged ever-increasing participation in society, as Adventists pursued accreditation for their schools, public funds for institutions, higher education for faculty at major universities, and alliances with other hospitals in order to survive in a competitive market. They have also resulted in considerable upward mobility among members, especially those raised as Adventists. Meanwhile, the coming of the five-day work week removed most of the major problems surrounding Sabbath observance, and Adventist dietary and smoking prohibitions won increasing credibility as a result of medical research. At the same time, Adventist leaders self-consciously lowered levels of antagonism toward others as they sought good relations with governments, switched their position on military service, allowed expectations of persecution to diminish, and began to build better relations with other churches.⁵⁴ This experience has been repeated, though usually less dramatically, in other parts of the developed world.

As Adventism went through this process of transformation from despised sect toward legitimate denomination, its leaders became extraordinarily sensitive to the reputation of their Church and its image with significant others, such as governments, other influential organizations, and the communications media. At the same time, they became increasingly nervous lest differences among church members—in educational levels, international diversity, generations, and those with traditional and progressive beliefs and understandings—could cause disunity.

Such sensitivities showed themselves during World War I, when the U.S. Department of Justice became concerned about the loyalty of Adventists because of the presentation of the United States in the evangelistic book, *Bible Readings for the Home Circle*. The book showed America, which had been a beacon of liberty, as soon to become a persecuting power—a highly sectarian position.

Since eight of the leaders of the International Bible Students (soon to be known as Jehovah's Witnesses) had just been charged with sedition based on the contents of their apocalyptic literature and sentenced to long terms of imprisonment, Adventist leaders feared a similar fate. Consequently, they withdrew the then-current edition of *Bible Readings* and altered the interpretation of Revelation 13 given there.⁵⁵ This was one of the reasons for the calling of the 1919 Bible Conference, where major Church figures also participated in a long discussion questioning Ellen White's inspiration and writing methods that revealed considerable agreement among them in questioning the independence and authority that had previously been accorded to her writings. However, Church leaders then chose to keep the minutes of that discussion secret for fear of shaking the faith of members, a situation that remained until they were accidentally discovered and then published in *Spectrum* in the early 1970s.⁵⁶

Another striking change that occurred against the backdrop of World War I was a shift in the Adventist position on military service. Although Adventists had been very eager to put an end to slavery in the U.S. prior to the American Civil War—having participated, with Ellen White's encouragement, in the illegal Underground Railroad—they had taken a firm position against participation in the war, declaring that they were conscientious objectors and disfellowshipping any member who chose to enter the Union Army. However, by 1917 the Church leaders had decided that Adventists should demonstrate their patriotism by participating in the military forces as noncombatants, without weapons, so that they would avoid responsibility for killing enemy soldiers. By 1971, the official position had changed completely: all positions concerning military service, whether as regular soldiers with arms, as noncombatants without arms, or conscientious objectors doing alternative service if required, were acceptable.⁵⁷

As Adventists began to become less isolated, their initial choice as their reference group, to which they looked for approval, was the fundamentalist movement, which was becoming prominent at that time. This

had the effect of moving Adventism in a generally conservative direction. The Scopes Trial, which pitted fundamentalists and science against each other as creation versus evolution—and where Adventist George McCready Price played a major role—became the symbolic event of the period.

As Adventism globalized and became more conservative, it marked this by compromising and forming mutually helpful relationships with oppressive regimes. These began with Stalin and the Soviet Union in the 1920s, continued with Hitler and the Nazis in Germany in the 1930s, and then extended to the Communist regimes in Eastern Europe and military dictators in Latin America and South Korea after World War II.⁵⁸

Concurrently, Adventism moved to the right on several social issues. It had originally placed women in high places as it endeavored to maximize the size of the workforce pursuing its mission. Its prophet was a woman, and women occupied posts as treasurer of the General Conference and at other levels of administration, and as evangelists and pastors. However, after Ellen White died, the number of women in such roles declined steadily until, by 1940, there were almost none. While women have occupied positions again as pastors since the late 1970s, ordination continues to be denied to them. Similarly, while early Adventists had strongly supported racial equality until after the American Civil War, they had compromised on that as they spread into the American South from the 1870s on. After 1900, and especially after 1920, the inequality of Blacks in the American Church increased, as Blacks were further segregated in churches and excluded from Adventist schools and hospitals—and even refused service at the cafeteria in the General Conference building.⁵⁹ Concurrently, Adventism prioritized rules which it associated with having a good reputation in the eyes of its conservative reference groups ahead of having concern for its divorced and LGBT members. Such trends also impacted its response to polygamous converts.

As shown above, Adventism in the U.S. has traveled a considerable distance from sect toward denomination.

How does Adventism in Africa fit with this model? We would expect it to be much more sectarian because it is newer, its membership is generally quite poor, its growth has been so fast in recent years that a considerable majority of its members are still first-generation converts, and these were often attracted because of eschatological preaching. However, the data suggest a picture which is more complex. The missionaries who planted Adventism in Africa came from Europe and the U.S.—that is, from the developed world. They had experienced the process of transformation from sect toward denomination and inevitably brought many of the new values and concerns with them. Moreover, the rapid growth in recent years has occurred in a situation in which Adventism has already created relationships with governments, established colleges and hospitals, and developed a small but influential educated elite among the laity. The data suggest that in many countries of the developing world, converts are attracted not only by the hope of a pie in the sky, but also by the prospect of a slice of pie here and now. That is, many of the African members of influence are attuned to denomination-like values. As we have seen, these include a concern for the reputation and image of their Church.⁶⁰

Adventism and Polygamy

Seventh-day Adventists entered Africa when the Christian mission enterprise there was already well established. The first Adventist missionaries were sent to South Africa in 1887, and from there they spread north into Southern and then Northern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe and Zambia) during the next fifteen years. They entered English West Africa, beginning with the Gold Coast (Ghana) in 1894, German East Africa (Tanzania) in 1903, Kenya in 1906, and Ethiopia in 1907. The French and Belgian colonies were not entered until after World War I.⁶¹

Adventists thought of themselves as bringing God's last message to the world and therefore kept their mission efforts quite separate from those of other churches. Consequently, they developed their own responses to polygamy. However, because their

missionaries were also drawn from Europe and America, and they were often very conscious of their reputations with the major religious bodies, their policies often reflected the practices of other missions. They developed much better communications with other missions in the developing world than Adventists had with other churches in the developed world.

Adventists steered an erratic course on polygamy for several decades. Their first attempt to reach consensus on a policy toward polygamous converts was made in 1913, when the missionaries present at Church headquarters in Washington D.C. were called to a "round table conference" to discuss a recommendation drafted by a "committee on the question of polygamy in heathen lands."⁶² Their discussion revealed considerable variation in practice. While most Adventist missions refused baptism to polygamists, Adventists in India followed the practice among other missions there, baptizing converted polygamists but not allowing them to hold prominent church offices. There were wide differences in how the wives involved in a polygamous marriage were treated. While most missions encouraged polygynists to put away their additional wives, those in Korea and South Africa required the man to support all his wives while living with only one of them.⁶³ Missionaries from China and Java found fault with their policy of insisting on divorce as being unfair to the women and children.⁶⁴ Those present at the conference felt it was important to arrive at some consensus, which should be in the form of guidelines rather than legislation. There was considerable concern for how other missions treated the problem, lest the standard adopted by Adventists invite criticism for being too low.⁶⁵

The group eventually recommended that when a polygamous man became a Christian "he be accepted into the Church on condition that he support all his wives and children, but that he lives only with his first lawful wife as husband and wife." He would not be eligible to hold church office. Similarly, a plural wife would need to separate from her husband before being granted membership.⁶⁶ That is, no would-be convert who continued to live polygamously could

be baptized. Although the original recommendation coming to the group had allowed wives who could not obtain a divorce from their husbands to be accepted as members, this was rejected when missionaries reported that other mission churches would not tolerate this.⁶⁷ These recommendations were then voted by the General Conference as guidelines for missionaries in the field.

Most of the missionaries taking part in the conference showed sensitivity to the situation of the polygamous convert and to the problems of breaking up a polygamous household. The recommendation made was not “the consensus of the missionaries ... but rather, the most conservative common denominator of the group.”⁶⁸

However, the 1913 guidelines failed to achieve uniform practice among Adventist missions. The extent of diversity in practice was revealed by a second missionary round table conference held in 1926. The main difference there was between two of the Church’s divisions, each of which had a Western-dominated home base and responsibility for a “mission field” in Africa. This conference was called shortly after the African Division, which was based in South Africa with a mission field that extended as far north as the Congo, had adopted a liberal working policy toward polygamous converts. This had been done after W. H. Branson, the president of the division, had realized the weight of opposition among some peoples to the imposition of divorce on polygamous families and had discovered the variety of responses to polygamy within his socially diverse territory. Since the division included both matrilineal and patrilineal societies, in some parts divorce was easy, and in other parts it was impossible: “For that reason we agreed to compromise somewhat, and we agree to baptize those who come to the knowledge of the church straight from heathenism;” however, “according to the Scriptures,” such members were not eligible to hold church office.⁶⁹

In contrast, the European Division, whose mission field encompassed most of East and West Africa, which was mostly patrilineal and highly polygamous, abided strictly by the 1913 statement and therefore baptized no practicing polygamists. Although it was sensitive to the

human and social problems caused by requiring people to break up their polygamous unions—its spokesperson referred to “the necessity of having to refuse baptism to genuinely converted polygamists as one of his saddest experiences in Africa”—they felt that compromise was too dangerous in this “stronghold of heathenism” and that it was imperative that Adventism have a united stand.⁷⁰ Church practice on the issue was also divided in Asia, where polygamists were baptized in India but not in most of the Far Eastern and China divisions.⁷¹

The 1926 conference revealed such a divergence of opinion and practice that Church leaders decided to appoint a committee “to give careful study to the question of polygamy, and the stand that should be taken with regard to it.”⁷² This committee drafted a conservative resolution, countermanding the new policy of the African Division, which was given highest authority when it was passed by the General Conference in session: henceforth, “in no case should a man living in polygamy be admitted into the fellowship of the church.”⁷³

The same committee and General Conference session dealt with another marriage-related issue: the problem of de facto but illegal marriages created in some Latin countries where divorce was not legal. Large numbers of such couples—who had often been together for years and had children—wished to become Adventists but were not legally eligible for marriage. The session voted that members of such families, if they were deemed worthy, could be baptized without the benefit of either divorce or remarriage. “Thus the session sanctioned liaisons that were not legal marriages, while at the same time denying membership to men who were legally married and living in faithfulness to their wives. Here, in striking juxtaposition within the same minutes, is a resounding triumph of grace over law, in the one case, and the withholding of grace, in the other.”⁷⁴

The 1926 decision on polygamy caused upset in the African Division. For example, one of the missionaries there sent to Church headquarters a manuscript arguing forcefully against the policy of breaking up families, stressing the “hardships and the degrading consequences

that the native women endure who are forced to give up their homes, and oftentimes their children, when they are put away by their husbands because of his having accepted the Christian faith.”⁷⁵

The division’s appeal was successful in having a committee appointed to study “Polygamy among Primitive Tribes,” with Branson as one of the three committee members. This committee’s report was treated with such urgency that it was taken to the annual meeting of the leaders of the world Church in 1930 rather than waiting until 1932 for the next General Conference session. The resolution voted there dramatically reversed the 1926 decision, permitting the baptism of polygamous converts in those cultures where tribal customs would result in “great injustice” to innocent castoff wives and their children. However, where separation could be arranged without injustice to innocent parties, only one wife should be retained, with the husband allowed the choice of which one.⁷⁶ This gave the Adventist Church a policy that was much more liberal than those of the major mission churches in Africa and remarkably independent of their views.

However, the European divisions rejected this policy on the grounds that a decision made by the highest Church authority had been overturned by a lower body, and they continued to adhere to the more restrictive 1926 decision.⁷⁷ When Branson, who had been the prime mover in the 1930 decision, was placed in charge of the German African colonies for the Central European Division in 1938, he immediately implemented the 1930 policy in Tanganyika. The result was a storm of protest from the Northern European Division.⁷⁸ The latter claimed that its conservative policy in neighboring Kenya would be undermined thereby, and laid out what it saw to be the danger to the Adventist reputation:

[I]n Kenya considerable work has been done by various large missionary societies, and these societies have stood against any recognition of polygamy. ... If Seventh-day Adventists come to be known in these territories as divided, or unsound in their stand against polygamy, that would be

the greatest disaster to our cause and the greatest triumph our enemies could possibly enjoy. They would accuse us of fatal compromise with the common foe of Christianity.⁷⁹

It was easy for hardliners to arouse opposition to a liberal policy toward polygamy in the U.S. and Europe. Church leaders, moved by this barrage, established yet another study committee, which resulted in the voting of new resolutions at the 1941 General Conference Session. These had the effect of overturning the 1930 policy: “A man found living in a state of polygamy when the gospel reaches him, shall upon conversion be required to change his status by putting away all his wives save one, before he shall be considered eligible for baptism and church membership.”⁸⁰

The resolutions required such men, as far as possible, to provide support for their former wives and their children. Converted polygamous wives who could not gain release from their husbands because of tribal custom were declared eligible for baptism. In order to enforce unity and overcome the previous situation where two rival policies existed, the resolutions declared that the new policy “supersedes all previous policies on polygamy.”

The Adventist Church thus settled on a conservative stance only a few years before such rules came under close critical scrutiny within the broader Christian community in Africa. This policy is still the official position of the Adventist Church.

Current Practice

Almost everywhere the first (and, in some parts, the only) option mentioned by interviewees is for the polygamous man to divorce all wives except one before baptism is permitted. Some referred to an additional waiting period before baptism to ensure that such a man is sticking to his decision. In some areas he is expected to continue to support the cast-out wives.

Because the experience in most of Africa has been that husbands are unwilling or unable to divorce their wives, a second option is usually listed. Under this,

those wives who are converted are baptized (they are usually not regarded as polygamous because they have only one husband), but their husband is kept on the periphery of the Church, without baptism or access to communion, usually as a Sabbath school member. It is this second option which has increasingly become most used. Indeed, in Nigeria it has become the only practice, with no attempt being made to persuade the husband to divorce his wives. In Zimbabwe the policy is interpreted more strictly: if the second option is chosen, only the first wife is baptized on the grounds that she is the only innocent party.

Beneath this pattern lies another level of diversity, which has appeared throughout Adventist history in Africa. This is the degree of flexibility allowed or encouraged by influential Church figures—initially missionaries, later more frequently administrators—in different areas. One missionary reported that “we always tried to not disrupt a family if children were small.” Another told of a division president who had often said to baptize everyone if people were going to be hurt badly—but who never put it in writing. While some administrators have tried to enforce the policy to the letter, others, noting the human disasters such actions have caused, have learned to back off.

When respondents were asked to assess the policy as implemented, their evaluations differed considerably. Although administrators were divided, they were on the whole more positive. Pastors were also deeply divided, often according to age. However, the leading laity, and especially teachers at all levels, spoke negatively of the official policy. Assessments differed most, to the point of being polar opposites, on how well the cast-off wives are provided for and how frequently wives being supported by their former husbands become pregnant by them. Administrators generally tended to give favorable reports, while pastors, who are much closer to the ways that the system is put into practice, cited many examples of former wives becoming pregnant if their former husbands agreed to support them and of abandoned wives being separated from their children (who belong to their father’s kinship group in a

patrilineal society) and being left so destitute that they are forced into prostitution.

When divorce is imposed or chosen, Adventists usually allow the husband free choice in which wife will be retained, and this is often the youngest. The wives have no choice here. In the words of a former union president: “wives must submit to what their husband chooses.” It is very sad for a woman to be cast out in old age, yet for a young woman to be considered no longer a wife, especially where she is not eligible for remarriage, must be devastating.

It is often the more conscientious husband who refuses the divorce option. While his wives are eligible to be baptized, become church members, and to partake of communion, he must remain at best on the fringe of the Church so long as his plural marriage continues. He is always a second-class citizen: his tithes and offerings are expected, but he must leave when it is time for communion. Since he is not baptized, he has doubts about his salvation and worries that he may be eternally lost. The practice leaves him in spiritual limbo, marginalized from the community of faith—an almost impossible situation for a member of a communal society. Communities can never be “one in Christ” when there are two such distinct statuses.

It is not surprising that many husbands tire of their ambiguous situation and disappear from the Church and that cast-out wives lose their conversion experience and often become embittered with the Church. Consequently, the children are also often lost to the Church. The progress of Adventism is slow among polygamists, whether animists or Muslims. Potential converts frequently reject the Adventist invitation once the rules concerning polygamy are explained to them and turn instead to the indigenous African churches or to Islam, where polygamous families are accommodated without problems. This leaves Adventist churches often so short of men that women have to provide leadership—a most surprising situation in societies where women are traditionally seen as very inferior. It also renders the Adventist Church in Africa, although growing rapidly overall, economically poor since women can usually only

give if their husbands are generous to the cause, and the policy on polygamy tends to exclude those men who are most wealthy.⁸¹

Divisions, Debates, and Demands for Change

The deep divisions among African Adventists revealed in these questions reflect a bitter debate in progress since the 1970s. The clearest divide is between the younger and older pastors, strengthened by the fact that the older pastors have received much less formal education. The latter tend to see the policy which keeps practicing polygamists from membership in the Church as a litmus test, without which the Church could not have a pure and noble profile. Since they have a stake in the traditional policy—their own marriage options were shaped by it—they would feel deeply humiliated and betrayed if it were now abandoned. Moreover, enforcing the policy has given them great authority, which would be undermined if it were changed. A majority of the Church administrators interviewed, and also one or two of the educators, supported the policy, being unwilling to admit the magnitude of its problems, arguing that “it is known, biblical and Christian,” and that since the practice is weakening before social change, there is no need to shift position. “We want to keep the standard, unlike the record of the American Church on divorce.”⁸²

Younger pastors, on the other hand, tend to regard the policy as doing more harm than good, as fatally flawed and morally bankrupt: “In my church we have a polygamous man who is faithful in tithing, etc. He asks how could we insist that he put his wives away, how could we ask him to act in this non-Christian way.”⁸³

These pastors told me they talk about the problems with the policy a great deal among themselves, critiquing it for its lack of compassion and its negative impact on the Church’s economy. Their sentiments are shared by educated laypeople who write frequently on the issue to Church papers, by a number of Church administrators, most of the vocal missionaries, and prominent educators. For example, a DMin thesis completed by the then-president of the Adventist college in Nigeria was an impassioned call for change: “Is the proclamation of

the gospel supposed to threaten family stability, disrupt social covenants, and even separate mothers from their children? ... Is it not possible, at the very least, for the church to permit the baptism of a repentant, holy and consecrated polygamist and his wives, if the gospel has reached them in this situation?”⁸⁴

Some students at Adventist colleges voiced a more challenging position, arguing that foreigners had imposed monogamy on them and that as Africans they should revert to their polygamous cultural heritage. They insisted that the new positions being adopted by other churches proved that this was not antithetical to the teachings of the Scriptures: the Adventist Church should follow suit.⁸⁵

Attempts to Change the Policy

The vigorous debate among African Adventists during the 1970s and early 1980s prepared the way for attempts to change the policy. The most dramatic of these was triggered in part by an administrative change which separated the African divisions from their dominating “home bases” in Europe and South Africa and, in the process, realigned the division boundaries within Africa. When what had previously been parts of three divisions were combined into the Africa-Indian Ocean Division (AID) in 1980, it was found that the varying degrees of flexibility allowed by the former administrations had created considerable diversity in practice. The need to clarify the policy in the new situation joined together with the discontent that was being expressed with it. This was articulated initially by the other major African division, the East African Division (EAD), which had elected its first African president, Bekele Heye from Ethiopia, in 1980. He told me: “The policy was wrong—the church was forcing divorce, women were left derelict, deprived of their homes and legal husbands. This was not in harmony with the Bible! We should have accepted polygamists as we found them, with multiple wives, and merely insisted that they add no more. So I brought it to the attention of the General Conference, at Annual Council.”⁸⁶

The missionary president of AID, Robert Kloosterhuis,

joined in the enterprise because of the problems he had found in his new territory, and the president of the General Conference, Neal Wilson, added his support. Wilson knew, from spending years in the Middle East, that the Adventist policy on polygamy was a major problem among Muslims, who were only likely to convert as family units. Moreover, since he had made a concerted push for international growth the hallmark of his administration, he was frustrated by a policy that declared large numbers of converts ineligible for baptism. He was therefore interested in searching for an alternative policy. This search was made the more appropriate by the fact that other Christian churches were beginning to look again at the issue. Adventists showed considerable interest in their policies and in what changes they had made in them or were contemplating. Consequently, a new committee was activated in the fall of 1981 to consider the requirements which Adventism made of new converts who had already entered polygamous marriages.⁸⁷

The committee discussed a paper prepared by Russell Staples, a professor of missions and anthropology at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary who had spent many years in Africa.⁸⁸ Wilson distributed a questionnaire both before and after the presentation, and the latter showed a considerable shift from the traditional position. However, the committee was unable to come to consensus, and there were repeated calls for further study. Staples advocated a cautious approach, experimenting with changes in a limited area. Wilson, however, insisted on a global approach, which then ran into strong opposition on several fronts. The committee continued for several years, during which its polarization deepened.

Few Americans and Europeans understood the issue. They found the thought of polygamy distasteful, and the prospect of admitting polygamous members made them fear for the reputation of their Church. However, when Africans charged that the Westerners had been willing to countenance serial monogamy in the form of widespread divorce and remarriage in their own divisions—even though this clearly contravened statements attributed

to Jesus in the Gospels—but they were now unwilling to support existing polygamous families in Africa merely because these were so foreign to their culture, even though there was some biblical support for this familial form, they softened their opposition.

The strongest opposition to the proposed change came from Adventist leaders in Latin America, even though polygamy was not an issue affecting the Church there directly. However, they had been subject, over the years, to considerable criticism from Catholics for “lowering standards” because of their practice of baptizing converts in legally de facto relationships, and they did not want to give the critics another ground for attack. The issue was considered too volatile in the region for it to be placed on the agenda of the Annual Council of world leaders in 1986, which was held in Rio de Janeiro.

The prospects for a new policy collapsed when African unity eroded. Jacob Nortey, a Ghanaian, was elected president of AID in 1985. Since he came from the matrilineal Ashanti tribe, he lacked empathy with polygynists. His negative inclinations were encouraged by some conservative members of the faculty of the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, with whom he developed close ties, and he subsequently declared himself as opposed to changing the policy on polygamy. He argued that the issue was diminishing with economic change. Furthermore, since polygamy was illegal in Rwanda, Burundi, and northeastern Zaire, a change of Adventist policy risked losing credibility: “We already have to prove we are not a sect—this would be one more nail in our coffin with these governments.” Moreover, in West and Central Africa the mainline churches, apart from the Anglicans, continued to regard polygamy as of the Devil: “Can we afford to go out on one more tangent among Christian churches?”⁸⁹ Even the EAD, which now found itself standing alone, allowed its effort to subside. Its president, Bekele Heye, explained: “Some of our conservative pastors disagreed with our stand, so it became impossible to bring about this change. I supported the change at Annual Council—I am sure our practice is wrong, for I have seen the agony and the bitterness—but a survey of pastors showed opposition to [change].”⁹⁰

Amidst a situation where large numbers of baptized Adventists were being disfellowshipped because they had chosen to marry a second wife, there was increasing fear that a change allowing the baptism of polygamous converts would encourage more of the church members to follow their example. Many African pastors also expressed fear that an about-face on one issue would encourage lay members to question other positions held by the Church, and the result might be so many changes that the Adventist Church would no longer be recognizable. Committee members from other divisions then voiced the same fear. Many therefore opposed the suggested policy change on the grounds of the need for unity of practice (that is, uniformity in monogamy).

The modern forces in Africa proved too weak to win the debate because opportunities for Adventist higher education there had been very limited. Because of the rapid growth of the Adventist Church there since the end of colonialism, these opportunities were—and are still—available only to a small proportion of the membership in spite of the building of additional colleges and universities. As a result of this opposition, the issue was shelved after discussion at the 1987 Annual Council.

Meanwhile, however, Adventist practice concerning polygamy changed gradually in spite of the earlier failure to update policy. Increasing numbers of pastors and evangelists quietly changed their practice, extending the current flexibility with which the policy is implemented in different parts of Africa. For example, American evangelists conducted large crusades resulting in baptisms that were so large that it was impossible to check whether the converts were polygamously married: “American evangelists are after numbers, not saints.”⁹¹ Perplexed administrators explained that it was impossible to disfellowship such converts for situations that were in place earlier once they had been baptized. Increasing numbers of local pastors, who were also under pressure to meet higher goals for converts, also chose to baptize entire families. Some pastors reported to me that they had allowed polygamists to hold office in their churches. A number of pastors reported that they had chosen to baptize polygamous men who had been long-term

Sabbath school members when it seemed that their deaths were approaching. Some added that they did this without informing administrators. Others told me that administrators, when informed, chose to look the other way. The gap between the official policy and actual practice continued to widen.

Interpretation

In spite of Adventism’s separation from other Protestant missions, its policies toward polygamous converts have usually been influenced strongly by the prevailing consensus among them. There were two periods when this pattern did not hold. The first was 1930-1941, when the official Adventist policy was more compassionate and flexible than those of the major missions, although not all divisions chose to follow that policy. In 1941, Adventists retreated from this independent position and adopted the more rigid position commonly held at that time by the mission churches in Africa. The second period when Adventism has been out of step with the major missions is the present, especially since the 1988 Lambeth Conference decision. Other missions have been adopting more caring policies, but the Adventist endeavor to follow suit officially has failed.

What factors shaped Adventist policy and practice? Several, which interact with one another, emerge from the analysis:

1. As American Adventism moved from sect toward denomination, beginning about the beginning of the second quarter of the twentieth century, Church leaders often wanted to speed the process and became greatly concerned with the image and reputation of their Church—with how it was received by others. This concern was always an ingredient shaping policy on this issue; not wanting to appear lax, Adventists felt comfortable when their policies were aligned with those of conservative significant others. When Adventists did choose to adopt a “lax” position during the 1930s, criticism from other missions was important in leading Adventists to abandon it and to get back into line. However, this factor resulted in the image of the Church

being accorded priority over the needs of people.

2. Americans viewed polygamists as being stigmatized; they were both sinful and perverse, rather like the way the majority regarded homosexuals then. Since Adventism is centered in America, its leaders were undoubtedly aware of the disrepute which Mormon polygamy had engendered there. Indeed, when the negative attitude of Ellen White, the Adventist prophet, toward Old Testament polygamy was raised on the Polygamy Committee during the 1980s, Staples argued that the prevailing hysteria concerning the Mormons had led her to misunderstand both the biblical text and the practice. Adventists did not want to abet a sinful practice, nor did they wish to share in the stigma of having polygamous members. Therefore, many Adventist leaders, especially those who were far away from the human suffering caused by their policy, took a hard line. In this they placed their concern for rules ahead of the needs of people.

3. Many, especially some of the decision makers most closely involved, were moved by compassion for the human victims of the policy. While this was the motivation behind the policy changes in the African Division in 1926 and at the General Conference in 1930, it was usually expressed individually more than organizationally. The generally lower priority afforded to compassion for most of the period is confirmed by the fact that although the Church was pressuring polygamous men to cast out their additional wives, it did little to help the outcasts. Indeed, a schismatic movement broke from Adventism in Zimbabwe in the 1950s because its leader was disappointed with the failure of the Church to support its widows, who would have been married polygamously to kin of their husbands if the Church had not outlawed leviratic marriage.

4. When Adventists failed to understand the functions of polygamous unions, and instead labeled them adulterous, when they responded with revulsion to the thought of polygamy and demanded that a husband cast out his wives, they were failing to contextualize the Christian message and imposing Western values on Africans.

5. The history of this issue shows an astonishing number of committees inquiring into the Adventist policy over the years and coming to differing conclusions. It also shows a remarkable amount of individual flexibility within a centralized, hierarchical system. However, with the enormous growth of Adventism in the developing world, and demands from all over for representation in the highest decision-making circles, Church leaders began to fear that the unity of the Church was being undermined. The need for unity—in belief, practice, and policy—has become a continuing theme. In this instance it was invoked most frequently by North Americans, for whom the problems caused by the policy toward polygamous converts were distant ones. Fears that it would cause disunity were significant in the decision not to change a policy that was tearing apart the families of polygamous converts and replace it with a mechanism allowing them to become church members.

The fear of disunity was soon to be turned against American Adventists. In 1990, delegates to the General Conference session from the developing world were central to the defeat of a proposal to permit the ordination of women pastors. In 1995, the North American Division took a proposal to the session that would have allowed it to ordain women without forcing other divisions to do likewise. However, this was voted down on the ground that uniformity of practice was essential, and the Church in the developing world was not ready to follow suit. The most recent attempt to allow differing policies toward women's ordination to be followed in different divisions was defeated at the 2015 General Conference Session when President Ted Wilson allied with the divisions from the developing world against the wishes of those from the developed world. That is, the African delegates were able to turn the North American argument against them.

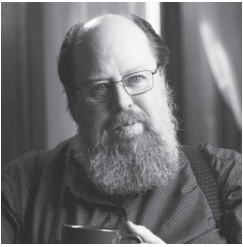
The Adventist policy toward polygamous converts in Africa was, overall, not notably worse than that of the main missions there, and indeed for eleven years it was more humane than average. The contrast changed for the worse after the decision by the Anglican Communion in 1988 to totally change its earlier policy, for attempts

within Adventism to do the same with our official policy toward polygamous converts have failed. The story is, in general, one of Church-sponsored injustice—an injustice which has not yet been corrected.

Nevertheless, when we focus on changes in practice toward polygamous converts rather than the failure to change the Church's official position, the wish to be compassionate is increasingly trumping the rules. This pattern is similar to the issue of women pastors, where changes in practice are increasingly circumventing the rules. It also reflects the gradual unofficial shift toward a compassionate embrace of LGBTIQ members and their relationships and families in Adventist schools, churches, and families in the developed world.⁹²

ENDNOTES:

1. Polygyny is the form of polygamy where one man has multiple wives; polyandry is the form where one woman has multiple husbands.
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4. Adrian Hastings, "The Church's Response to African Marriage," *African Ecclesiastical Review*, 13, no. 3 (1971): 196.
5. N. Engelbert Kofon, *Polygyny in Pre-Christian Bafut and New Moral Theological Perspectives* (Frankfurt-am-Main: Peter Lang, 1992), 70.
6. *Ibid.*, 94.
7. A report written for Anglican bishops in Africa: Adrian Hastings, *Christian Marriage in Africa* (London: SPCK, 1973): 11, 12.
8. Hastings, "The Church's Response," 196.
9. *Ibid.*, 194.
10. Willem A. Saayman, "Intercultural Evangelisation," *Missionalia* 18, no. 3 (1990): 315.
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12. Eugene Stock, *The History of the Church Missionary Society*, vol. II (London: Church Missionary Society, 1899), 111.
13. Staples, "Intercultural Evangelisation in Sub-Saharan Africa," 16.
14. Hastings, "The Church's Response," 194.
15. Pamela S. Mann, "Toward a Biblical Understanding of Polygamy," *Missiology* 17, no. 1 (1989): 12.
16. Hastings, "The Church's Response," 195; *Christian Marriage*, 14.
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18. Hastings, "The Church's Response," 196.
19. *Ibid.*, 195.
20. Kofon, *Polygyny in Pre-Christian Bafut*, 127.
21. *Ibid.*, 128.
22. Hastings, "The Church's Response," 197.
23. *Ibid.*, 199.
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26. Hastings, *Christian Marriage*, 32.
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28. Alan Tippet, *Introduction to Missiology* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1987), 337.
29. R.E.W. Tanner. *Transition in African Beliefs* (New York: Maryknoll, 1967), 95-96.
30. Tippet, *Introduction to Missiology*, 339.
31. Hastings, *Christian Marriage*, 35-39; "The Church's Response," 199.
32. Staples, "Intercultural Evangelisation in Sub-Saharan Africa," 20.
33. Hastings, *Christian Marriage*, 73.
34. *Ibid.*, 76.
35. *Ibid.*, 77.
36. Peter Steinfels, "For Anglicans, Things Stay Bright and Beautiful," *New York Times*, Aug. 7, 1988; A. O. Nkwoka, "The Church and Polygamy in Africa: The 1988 Lambeth Conference Resolution," *African Theological Journal* 19, no. 2 (1990): 139-154.
37. Pamela S. Mann, "Toward a Biblical Understanding of Polygamy," *Missiology* 17, no. 1 (1989): 11.
38. *Ibid.*, 13, 17, 20.
39. *Ibid.*, 22.
40. Eugene Hillman, "Polygyny Reconsidered," in Karl Rahner (ed.), *The Renewal of Preaching Theory and Practice [Concilium Theology in the Age of Renewal, vol. 33]* (New York: Paulist Press, 1968).
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43. Eugene Hillman, *Polygamy Reconsidered: African Plural Marriage and the Christian Churches* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1975), 38.
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51. *Ibid.*, 78.
52. Rodney Stark and William Sims Bainbridge, *The Future of Religion* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1985), 49-51.
53. *Ibid.*, 134, 99, 103.
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63. *Ibid.*, 119-120.
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68. Clifton R. Maberly, "The Polygamous Variant," research project, (Andrews University, 1975), 34.
69. "Round Table Minutes," 1926, quoted by Bouit, "A Christian Consideration," 127.
70. Bouit, "A Christian Consideration," 125-126, 130.
71. *Ibid.*, 126, 130.
72. *Ibid.*, 131.
73. Staples, "Intercultural Evangelisation in Sub-Saharan Africa," 53.
74. *Ibid.*, 48.
75. J. I. Robison, 1928, quoted by Bouit, 135.
76. Staples, "Intercultural Evangelisation in Sub-Saharan Africa," 48, 53.
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78. *Ibid.*, 137-140.
79. *Ibid.*, 196.
80. General Conference policy, voted June 4, 1941, cited by Staples, "Intercultural Evangelisation in Sub-Saharan Africa," 53.
81. Interviews.
82. Interviews.
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84. Adekunle A. Alalade, "Identification of the Factors Limiting the Seventh-day Adventist Missionary Practice in Nigeria and a Design for an Incarnational Missionary Practice," DMin diss. (Vanderbilt Divinity School, 1981), 113.
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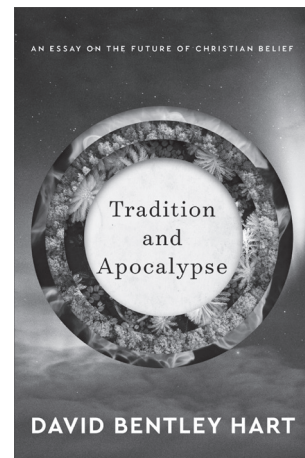


By David Bentley Hart

Chapter 6 from *Tradition and Apocalypse*

David Bentley Hart, *Tradition and Apocalypse: An Essay on the Future of Christian Belief*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002). Reprinted with permission from the publisher.

Once upon a time, Christianity grew and endured and even flourished over the course of many generations in total and blissful ignorance of any officially defined dogma, any single universally recognized canon of scripture, anything remotely like the systematic or dogmatic theologies of the coming ages of Christendom and after. I would add that, for most of that time, there was no single church hierarchy, and that the apostolic lines of succession preserved in later official chronicles were products partly of what one might call retroactive genealogy and partly of what one has to call pious misrepresentations; but we may leave that argument for another time. The point to make here is that, for the first several generations of Christians, anything so precise as a doctrinal symbol authorized by an episcopal council would have been either a curious superfluity of or ponderous encumbrance upon the faith. There had been divisions among Christians even in the apostolic era; the New Testament bears plenteous witness to this reality so much so that the reader can easily get the impression that division was far more common than unity among the early Christian communities. But the principal reason that so many confessional and theological differences of such enormous consequence, on matters so basic to the faith, came to light within the church of the empire only well into the fourth century is that Christian faith and Christian hope had long been sustained by something quite different from official confessional unanimity. The differences had always been there, and in many



respects were more or less as old as the faith itself; but for most of the time they were scarcely noticed, since the guiding concern of most Christians was not some perennial wisdom or immemorial doctrine handed

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down from the past, but rather the rapid approach of the Kingdom of God, the Age to Come, and the final advent of Christ as Lord of all things. Apocalyptic expectation—an eager certainty of the imminence of the full and final revelation of God’s truth in a restored and glorified cosmos and not dogmatic purity was the very essence of faithfulness to the Gospel.

We should therefore never forget that official doctrine is, above all else, a language of disillusionment. Blondel, as I noted, argued that there must have been more to the eschatological beliefs of the early Christians than the literal anticipation of an imminent Parousia and judgment, as otherwise the faith could not have survived and with such seeming insouciance—so enormous a failure of expectations. This is a false supposition, as I also noted; and it begs the question of whether indeed one and the same faith did in fact survive, since that in a sense is the very thing Blondel set out to prove. But, putting that aside, surely there should be for Christian consciousness some element of indelible melancholy not only in the thought of doctrinal history’s disputes and divisions, but in the very fact of doctrinal definition as such. Doctrine is, in some sense—as much as it may be the poetic discovery of a shared language for speaking about God, and about God and humanity, and about the mystery of Christian language of disenchantment, a probationary discourse that tries at once both to recuperate the force of a cosmic disruption in the form of institutional formulae and to create a stable center within history from which it might be tolerable to await a Kingdom that has been indefinitely deferred. Perhaps this is not to be lamented; at least, a believer has to presume the workings of providence, to the degree that he or she thinks they can be discerned in the midst of fallen time. Even so, it should never be forgotten that Christianity entered human history not as a new creed or sapiential path or system of religious observances, but as apocalypse: the sudden unveiling of a mystery hidden in God before the foundation of the world in a historical event without any possible precedent or any conceivable sequel; an overturning of all the orders and hierarchies of the age, here on earth and in the archon-thronged heavens above;

the overthrow of all the angelic and daemonic powers and principalities by a slave legally crucified at the behest of all the religious and political authorities of his time, but raised up by God as the one sole Lord over all the cosmos; the abolition of the partition of Law between peoples; the proclamation of an imminent arrival of the Kingdom and of a new age of creation; an urgent call to all persons to come out from the shelters of social, cultic, and political association into a condition of perilous and unprotected exposure, dwelling nowhere but in the singularity of this event for the days are short.

To be frank, it was a command that left little to no room for such a thing as “historical consciousness.” The church was given birth in something like a state of crisis, of mingled joy and terror, in a moment out of time, as one age was passing and another coming into existence. The Kingdom was drawing near; the Kingdom had already partly arrived; indeed, the Kingdom was already within, waiting to be revealed to the cosmos in the glory of the children of God. Living thus in history’s aftermath, and just on the threshold of eternity, the church could not at first have any expectation that it would soon be required to enter into history again. But it would have to do so eventually, and this meant that it would also have to become everything it thought it had left behind: an institution, a Law, a religion. What had begun as an eschatological irruption of eternity into temporal history would in the end at the far side of a disenchantment so gradual that the initial hope for the imminent Kingdom simply melted, almost unnoticed, into thin air, leaving not a rack behind have to become just another history: that of a particular creed and devotion and institutional heritage, oriented toward an eternity once again rendered abstract, unimaginable, and inconceivably remote. Soon enough, the church would assume the religious configurations provided by its age, adjusted to accommodate a new set of spiritual aspirations. Jewish scripture provided a grammar for worship, while the common cultic forms of ancient society were easily adaptable to Christian use. A certain degree of natural “pseudomorphism” was inevitable—a crystallization of Christian corporate life (with all its novelty) within the

religious spaces vacated by the pagan cults and mystery religions it displaced or outlasted. After all, a purely apocalyptic consciousness, subsisting entirely in a moment of absolute interruption, could persist for only so long. Still, it was an imperfect synthesis; the alloy of apocalyptic longing and historical continuity was never entirely stable. The Christian event proved to be far too refractory to be contained within institutions, even institutions of its own devising. At the very heart of its spiritual rationale there always remained an impulse to rebellion.

Hence, down the centuries, Christianity has proved not only irrepressibly fissile (as all large religious traditions, to some degree, are), but ultimately self-destructive. Of all the religious cultures the world has ever known, only the Christian has naturally incubated within itself an impulse toward total and defiant faithlessness, militant unbelief, ultimate nihilism, not merely as occasional individual states of soul, but as large cultural movements. Even in its most redoubtable and enduring historical forms, Christianity is filled with an indomitable and subversive ferment, an inner force of dissolution that refuses to crystallize into something inert or stable, but that instead insists upon dispersing itself into the future ever again, to destroy what confines it and to start anew, to begin again in the formless realm of spirit rather than of flesh, of spirit rather than of the letter. There is, simply said, a distinct element of the ungovernable and seditious within the Gospel's power to persuade, one that we ignore only at the cost of fundamentally misunderstanding its most essential character. And this element, with its power to generate intrinsic stresses within even the humblest of Christian communities, could not help but produce a far greater and more chronic stress within the church as an enfranchised institution, supporting and supported by the instruments and establishments of a human political authority—an authority now paradoxically allied to a Gospel that consisted to a large degree in the rejection and even damnation of all such instruments and establishments. ("Paradox" is serving here as a euphemism for "contradiction," in case that is not immediately obvious.)

So, as I say, it does not seem foolish to suspect that Christian dogma has always had some quality of disappointment about it, some impulse to anger, some sense that a creed is a strange substitute for the presence of the Kingdom. And certainly the crisis that struck the church as a confessional body in the fourth century had to come sooner or later, and one way or another. The new age of official dogma was required by both the forces of imperial order and the growing intrinsic perplexities of Christian society, as I have already said; but I should add that it was no less necessary for the church understood as an institution capable of surviving the rise and dissolution of any political order, and of establishing an enduring historical presence amid the flux of time. Loisy was right: the Kingdom was preached, but it was the church, with its often almost comically corrupt and divisive institutional form, that arrived. The Kingdom did not come—not in the fashion expected, at least, not in the time allotted, not in the twinkling of an eye—and so the ever more visibly hierarchical and depressingly mundane civic institution of the church became the only concrete, tangible form that Christian hope and expectation could now take in this prolonged interval of indefinite delay. But then the church had also to be one: what it was, what it believed, what words it spoke, what God it invoked, what consummation it longed for—all of this had to be radiantly perspicuous if the church was really to chase away the shadows of doubt, and to provide believers with a durable form of life not burdened by a history of defeated expectations. This might even in some sense be the deepest motivation prompting the notorious *odium theologicum* that characterizes every age of Christian thought. Dogmatic theology has always had something of the character of a pitched battle among the devout. Perhaps, though, the volatility of theological culture has always been, at some level at least, a reflex of fear: the dread that the truth of the Gospel, exposed to the corrosive force of ordinary time, will dissolve into the currents of an inconclusive history—history without a final cause, and so history without redemption.

The only escape from the desperation this prospect induces is the refuge of tradition understood not as the

melancholy memory of a promise that was not fulfilled, but rather as the constant creative recollection of a promise whose fulfillment and ultimate meaning are yet to be unveiled. Tradition thus must be seen as history's secret, redemptive rationale. It is the clandestine counternarrative to the history of the historicists, the inversion of the "pure history" of the critical gaze backward, which cannot—which *must* not—discern any distinction between essence and accident, or between the truth of redeemed history and the falsehood of fallen time. But tradition of this kind is possible only so long as faith is able to descry a future apocalyptic horizon where the tradition's ultimate meaning is to be found, and is able also to refuse any reduction of that final revelation to whatever formulations of belief happen to be available at any given stage of doctrinal development. If Christian tradition is truly the living thing it must be—at least, if it really is anything more than a collection of accidental associations generated by random historical forces—it must be devoted to that hidden end and not rest content with such dim prefigurations of that end as are already present (and which, as ever, can be glimpsed only in a glass, darkly).

II

If Christian tradition is a living thing, it is only as *tradition*—as a "handing over," a passage through time, a transmission, the impartation of a gift that remains sealed, a giving always deferred toward a future not yet known—that the secret inner presence *in tradition* can be made manifest at all. And that gift must remain sealed until the very end, so that the glory will not dissipate into ordinary time, whose atmosphere is incapable of sustaining and nourishing it. The gift is known for now only in and as the dynamic history of the tradition that protects it and bears it onward. Only in the ceaseless flow of the tradition's intertwining variations can the theme subtending the whole music be heard. And in part this is because whatever is imparted must be received in the mode of the recipient, with all his or her limitations and possibilities. In the end, after all, the historical and cultural contingencies of a tradition also constitute the

vehicle of its passage through the ages. They are its flesh and blood in any given epoch, its necessary embodiment within the intelligible structures of concrete existence. Without those contingencies, the animating impulse of the tradition would be something less than a ghost. But, by the same token, once that vital force has moved on to assume new living configurations, the attempt unnaturally to preserve earlier forms can achieve nothing but, at the very best, the perfumed repose of a cadaver bedizened by mortuary cosmetics. True fidelity to whatever is most original and most final in a tradition requires a positive desire for moments of dissolution just as much as for passages of recapitulation and refrain. And the hermeneutical labor needed to understand any tradition requires disruption no less than stability, "progressive" ambition no less than "conservative" prudence, because it is only through the play of tension and resolution, stability and disintegration, that that which is most imperishable in a tradition can be fitfully perceived, or at least sensed. Only in that ceaseless flow of construction, dissolution, and reconstruction is what is truly imperishable in the tradition intuitable.

Alas, there is no single formula for doing any of this well, or any simple method for avoiding misunderstanding. Such rules of interpretation as there are can never be more than general and rather fluid guidelines. They cannot even provide us, when we consult the witness of history, with a dependable scale of proportionality for our judgments upon the past. It is quite possible (and on occasion it has happened) that even the most devout interpreter or community of interpreters, in looking back to the initial moments of the tradition and their immediate sequels and consequences, might reasonably conclude that the overwhelming preponderance of Christian history—its practices, presuppositions, civic orders, governing values, reigning pieties—has amounted to little more than a sustained apostasy from the apostolic exemplars of the church. That hidden source of the tradition's life remains a real and unyielding standard, not a majority consensus, and before its judgment even the most venerable of institutional inheritances may have to fall away. And

yet, by the very same token, that source remains hidden even within that very act of judgment, and thus can be the exclusive property of no individual or age. Anyone who arrogates to himself the power to say with absolute finality what the one true tradition is will invariably prove something of a fool, and usually something of a thug, and on no account must ever be credited or even countenanced. The claim is in itself indubitable evidence of a more or less total ignorance of the tradition, either as a historical phenomenon or as a dogmatic deposit.¹ And, really, if one is to find the safe middle passage between the Scylla and Charybdis of a destructively pure originalism and a degenerate traditionalism, no particular method can be trusted absolutely; one must instead simply attempt to exercise a certain kind of hermeneutical piety. Tacit knowledge, faithful practice, humility before the testimony of the generations, prayerfulness, and any number of moral and intellectual virtues are required; and these can be cultivated only in being put into action. In a very real sense, in fact, this is what “tradition” is when considered as a hermeneutical practice: an attitude of trusting skepticism, hesitant impetuosity; a certain critical hygiene of prudent reluctance, a certain devotion to the limitless fecundity of the tradition’s initiating moment or original principle, a certain trusting surrender to a future that cannot alter what has been but that always might nevertheless alter one’s understanding of the past both radically and irrevocably. It is the conviction that one has truly heard a call from the realm of the transcendent, but a call that must be heard again before its meaning can be grasped or its summons obeyed; and the labor of interpretation is the diligent practice of waiting attentively in the interval, for fear otherwise of forgetting the tone and content of that first vocation.

In this sense, the living tradition, if indeed it is living, is essentially apocalyptic: an originating disruption of the historical past remembered in light of God’s final disruption of the historical (and cosmic) future. One might even conclude that the tradition reveals its secrets only through moments of disruption precisely because it—is itself, in its very essence, a disruption: it

began entirely as a *novum*, an unanticipated awakening to something hitherto unknown that then requires the entirety of history to interpret. Its abiding truth never suffers itself to be reduced to mere propositional certitudes, but rather testifies to itself in large part by its power to disorder even the temporal forms it has assumed in the course of its pilgrimage through time. For just this reason, a wise believer does well to try to marshal within himself or herself a genuine hermeneutical patience when confronted by seeming upheavals of practice or confession in the life of faith, and not merely for the sake of tolerance or forbearance; he or she should make an earnest attempt to recapture in the present something of that openness to the unimaginably new that made the earliest Christians capable of accepting the displacement of normal expectations that first set loose the “line of flight” to which he or she belongs. This is the only true faithfulness to the memory of an absolute beginning, a sudden unveiling without precise precedent: an empty tomb, say, or the voice of God heard in rolling thunder, or the descent of the Spirit like a storm of wind or tongues of fire. In a very real sense, the tradition exists only as a sustained apocalypse, a moment of *pure* awakening preserved as at once an ever dissolving recollection and an ever renewed surprise. Any truly faithful hermeneutical return to the origin of the tradition is the renewal of a moment of revolution, and the very act of return is itself a kind of revolutionary venture that, ever and again, is willing to break with the conventional forms of the present in order to serve that deeper truth. What makes the tradition live is that holy thing within that can be neither seen nor touched, which dwells within a sanctuary into which the faithful cannot peer, but which demands their devotion nevertheless. To return to the source is to approach the veil of the Holy of Holies, to draw near once again to the presence on the other side, even sometimes to enter in—though then only to find that the presence remains invisible, hidden in a blaze of glory or an impenetrable cloud. In this way, tradition sets the faithful free. In its deepest essence, living tradition constitutes a sovereign apocalyptic exception to the reign of pure history, or (better) bare

history: history, that is, understood as a chronicle of sheer consecutive causality, interminable eventuality as such, without term or final cause or import—the history whose only measure and meaning is death. That sort of history—history denuded of all the trappings of great epic or drama or dialectical process, without a secret to be disclosed or a rationale to be comprehended or a consummation to be awaited—is the ultimate prison of the rational spirit.

And so—just as the reiterations and returns of ritual and liturgy displace the empty flow of ordinary time with a closed circle of “completed” time, timeless time, the living eternity of penitential and joyous repetition—a living tradition gathers up the moments for the faithful altogether differently, rises above the ceaseless empty flow of bare history, shapes all things toward a final truth, and thus displaces the rule of bare history with the adventure of a coherent journey through the ages, from a remote beginning to a remote end. It is history reconfigured, retold, now according to a singular if mysterious antecedent finality. Tradition is in a sense the diachronic complement of ritual’s periodic synchrony; it is history as always inflected by a force from outside time’s continuum—history moving forward but with each of its moments bearing an oblique stress that pulls it toward something not confined to time. It is also history as conformed to a final cause that grants it a real rational and organic unity. It is for this reason that the living tradition, if it is indeed living, cannot be properly understood merely as a precious inheritance to be protected and curated. Even the act of reverently looking back through the past to the tradition’s origin is also an act of critique, a judgment on the past that need not be a kind one, as well as an implicit act of submission to a future verdict that might be equally unkind with regard to the present, and even submission to a final verdict in whose light all the forms the tradition encompasses can be understood as at best provisional intimations of something ineffable and inconceivable. The tradition’s life, it turns out, is an irrepressible apocalyptic ferment within, beckoning believers simultaneously back to an immemorial past and forward to an unimaginable

future. The proper moral and spiritual attitude to tradition’s formal expressions, if all of this is correct, would be not a simple clinging to what has been received, but also a relinquishing, even at times of things that had once seemed most precious: *Gelassenheit*, to use Eckhart’s language, release. Only thus can one receive tradition as a liberating counterhistory, as the apocalyptic exception to bare history that promises believers a higher truth than death: by remembering a first interruption, awaiting a last interruption, and attempting to sustain the theme uniting them in the interval. Only thus can the faithful find the meaninglessness of bare history converted into a completed tale of vocation and judgment, of a call heard from far away that nevertheless summons them to a promised homeland. Perhaps, of course, the entire tale is an illusion at the end of the day, a fable Christians have told themselves over the centuries in order to carry themselves through the dark places of this world. Conversely, though, perhaps instead the tradition calls them to itself as an entirely gracious invasion of history, shattering the walls of their prison: a gift awakening them (if they will listen) to the knowledge that the emptiness—the *kenoma*—of bare history is not their true home, and that their true story comes from—and must finally be told elsewhere.

So long, moreover, as the Kingdom of God remains in Christian imagination a Kingdom not of this world, having no possible essential alliance with this world’s kingdoms and empires and historically enduring structures of power, and producing no perfect expression of itself within any age of this world, it perhaps really has the power to impart both a unity and a life to the tradition that neither the implicit nihilism of pure dogmatism nor the explicit nihilism of pure historicism can destroy.

ENDNOTES:

1. One sees an exquisitely pertinent example of this in the behavior of the fiercest of the current pope’s traditionalist Catholic detractors: in how absurdly their hostility exceeds any provocation he has given them, in how eagerly and opportunistically they pounce upon any chance misunderstanding, rumor, or vicious distortion that serves their polemical purposes, and in how staggeringly ignorant they are of the larger Catholic tradition they imagine they are defending. It is all too obvious that what they find most insufferable about him is his commitment to understanding the demands of the Gospel rather than to shoring up the ramparts of the early modern institutions of the Roman communion; what offends them is his Christianity.



By Daryll Ward

Learning Faithfulness to the Gospel

There is something strange, even self-contradictory, about the impulse to determine who is and who is not an authentic follower of Christ. Why would any proclaimers of the gospel who seek to call others to be disciples occupy themselves with writing out of fellowship anyone who answers the call? In his recent book *Tradition and Apocalypse: An Essay on the Future of Christian Belief*, David Bentley Hart suggests an answer to that question.¹ The book is brief but exemplary of Hart's powers of mind and depth of soul. All who care about the fellowship of faith, who dearly hope that Christian belief indeed has a future, will do well to read it. Happily, for those who lack either time or inclination to do so, Hart has published a brief statement of its principal insight in the Summer 2022 issue of *Plough Quarterly*. He writes:

[I]t does not seem foolish to suspect that Christian dogma has always had some quality of disappointment about it, some impulse to anger, some sense that a creed is a strange substitute for the presence of the Kingdom. Dogmatic theology has always had something of the character of a pitched battle among the devout. Perhaps, though, the volatility of theological culture has always been, at some level at least, a reflex of fear: the dread that the truth of the Gospel, exposed to the corrosive force of ordinary time, will dissolve into the currents of an inconclusive history—history without a final cause, and so history without redemption.²

It behooves anyone committed to respect for those with whom they disagree not to indulge the condescending notion that the other is defined by fear. Principled disagreement is possible. Importantly, in this instance, the fear of which Hart speaks is the believer's own fear that the gospel may not be true, that history will run on to oblivion without redemption. The source of that fear is disappointment—disappointment that the Kingdom is no more than provisionally present and if never more than provisionally present, then finally absent. Disappointment is constitutive of the Adventist soul. Our story is a story of a community that knows in its bones the "corrosive force of ordinary time." We awoke on the morning of October 23, 1844, to a world unchanged. And now

we live at a time when, as Loren Seibold has written in *Adventist Today*, "It is too late for Jesus to come soon."³

Hart notes that one attempt to cope with the destructive power of history's passage is to find some identity, "the tradition," that endures. As it happens, logic dooms to failure every attempt to identify a definitive deposit of Christian teaching that originated with the apostles and can be found

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throughout the following two millennia in communities affirming Christian faith. Early Adventist espousal, including Ellen White, of a “shut door” theology may serve to illustrate the point. In his book, Hart traces with admirable clarity the Nicene and Chalcedonian abandonment of earlier Christologies attested in the New Testament and generally accepted during the first two centuries of Christian history, Christologies which had assumed the subordination of the Logos to the Father. But if there is no essence of the tradition that allows for its identification through change, must one simply conclude that the faith is a mere collection of coincidental artifacts which make even posing the question of “the” tradition’s, and by extension the gospel’s truth, impossible? Moreover, this historical fact of logically incompatible forms of Christian teaching not only forecloses any answer to the question of the tradition’s truth, but it also makes unintelligible a question about the future of that faith.

It is tempting to say that Hart’s response to this dread-inducing phenomenon is inspired. He makes its future the essence of the tradition and openness to that future the definition of faithfulness to that essence. Hart does not aim to predict the future of Christian belief. Rather he focuses attention on the future which faith anticipates and which is definitive of the faith. The future that formed and must still form the faith is a revelation, an apocalypse. He describes it thus:

the sudden unveiling of a mystery hidden in God before the foundation of the world in a historical event without any possible precedent or any conceivable sequel; an overturning of all the orders and hierarchies of the age, here on earth and in the archon-thronged heavens above; the overthrow of all the angelic and daemonic powers and principalities by a slave legally crucified at the behest of all the religious and political authorities of his time, but raised up by God as the one sole Lord over all the cosmos; the abolition of the partition of Law between peoples; the proclamation of an imminent arrival of the Kingdom and of a new age of creation; an urgent call to all persons

to come out from the shelters of social, cultic, and political association into a condition of perilous and unprotected exposure, dwelling nowhere but in the singularity of this event—for the days are short.⁴

Of the apostolic Church, Hart writes, “Apocalyptic expectation—an eager certainty of the imminence of the full and final revelation of God’s truth in a restored and glorified cosmos—and not dogmatic purity was the very essence of faithfulness to the Gospel.”

The disappointment of the Adventist soul has, tragically, manifested itself as grasping at dogmatic purity which is, as Hart so pointedly shows, not only impossible but also unfaithful. And yet despite unfaithfulness in the promulgation of its creed with its 27 and then 28 fundamental beliefs, all Adventists may take courage from the fact that their apocalyptic expectation is the very form of faithfulness itself. J. N. Loughborough’s well-known opposition to a creed in the original Seventh-day Adventist community offers a paradigmatic instance of faithfulness to the future—a future that is the promise of mystery revealed.

How might Hart’s theological proposal regarding Christian tradition as an ever transformed and transforming apocalyptic expectation assist Adventists in learning faithfulness? Gilbert Valentine’s recent history of the Robert Pierson presidency of the General Conference is a useful resource for imagining an answer. The title of his study, *Ostriches and Canaries: Coping with Change in Adventism 1966-1979*, signals his designation of clerics who hid their heads in the sand and academics who raised questions as respectively ostriches and canaries.⁴ Valentine tells the story of Adventist leadership’s efforts (both clerical and intellectual) to cope with the “corrosive force of ordinary time.” Those forces were felt during that period of Adventist history in the Church’s confrontation with historical exploration of biblical materials and exploration of natural history. To unfairly oversimplify, it was a confrontation because the clerical response to the challenge was to reject the results of exploration in both domains of inquiry, and the intellectual response was near paralysis born of constant threat of termination of employment.

Can contemporary Adventist leadership, both clerical

and intellectual, improve on the past? Can we learn faithfulness? Yes. More is required by such a yes than it might seem, since one cannot help but notice that the imminence of the defining expectation has been falsified for well-nigh 2,000 years. Intriguingly, Hart does not abandon the revelatory expectation just because its imminent fulfillment has been, as he remarks, “indefinitely deferred.” There is a form of love for tradition—one might even harbor it for the very brief historical period of Seventh-day Adventism’s existence—which Hart perspicuously describes as an alternative only to reject it. He concludes the first chapter of *Tradition and Apocalypse* with the following autobiographical comment:

It would cause me not a moment’s distress to walk away tomorrow from any association with Christian beliefs and institutions if I were to conclude that it is a false or incoherent system of belief. At least, I am not aware of having any appetite for believing anything I do not actually believe to be true. And the institutional trappings of belief would immediately lose any but a purely aesthetic appeal for me in such a situation. My temperamental fondness for certain styles of ecclesial life—the sonorities, shadowy interiors, and senescent stone of high Anglicanism, the austere splendor and hypnotically dithyrambic rhythms of Byzantine worship—would survive well enough on its own without the assistance of religious belief, as would my love of the high arts of Christendom. One can thoroughly delight in Palestrina and Bach, or in Dante and Milton, without any dogmatic commitments (no matter what anyone says to the contrary). Sometimes, in fact, an absence of personal faith might make the aesthetic merits of certain works all the more conspicuous and ingratiating (how hard it is to enjoy Dante’s *Commedia* fully if one actually believes in something like the monstrous hell or the hazy heavens it describes).⁵

Similarly, we might abandon our apocalyptic expectations tout court and remain temperamentally attached to the politically prophetic possibilities of critiques of power and the sanity-conferring benefits of Sabbath observance that were definitive of Adventist believers in our beginnings. But this is a counsel of despair, a despair made explicit by one of Professor Valentine’s “canaries” who declared to a mutual friend near the end of his life, “I have no hope.” Loss of hope is loss of faith. That is not progress.

So how can we be faithful given the relentless march of ordinary time? We begin to exercise faith when we exercise tenacious trust that, as Christ Himself said, the truth will set us free. If I may offer my own autobiographical comment: the darkest years of my spiritual life were bedeviled by the suspicion that we humans actually do have something to fear from the truth. I am happy to say that I have come to understand that we do not. Hart is dramatically counter-cultural in his insistence that the mind’s desire is apprehension of the truth, and he is equally clear that the end of that desire, its final cause, is the infinite beauty which we name God.

Are there any practical implications of this rather exalted commitment? If the soul of Christian tradition is expectation of a revelation of the mystery which eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither has entered into the heart of man, then every effort to understand, affirm, reform, or abandon what has been believed and taught can be measured by its compatibility with and potential for sustaining continued hope for that revelation. Any conclusion whose logical requirement is abandonment of hope will expose its error by its despair. In fact, we have nothing to fear.

ENDNOTES:

1. David Bentley Hart, *Tradition and Apocalypse: An Essay on the Future of Christian Belief* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2022).
2. David Bentley Hart, “Tradition and Disruption,” *Plough Quarterly*, no. 32 (Summer 2022), <https://www.plough.com/en/topics/faith/early-christians/tradition-and-disruption>.
3. Loren Seibold, “It’s Too Late for Jesus to Come Soon,” editorial, *Adventist Today* 27, no. 4 (Fall 2019): 3, https://atoday.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/AT_Fall-2019.pdf.
4. Hart, “Tradition and Disruption.”
5. Gilbert M. Valentine, *Ostriches and Canaries: Coping with Change in Adventism, 1966-1979* (Westlake Village, CA: Oak and Acorn Publishing, 2022).
6. Hart, *Tradition and Apocalypse*, 21-22.



Can a Seventh-day Adventist Hold Non-Traditional Views of Origins?

In addressing the topic of whether or not a Seventh-day Adventist can hold non-traditional views of origins, there are a couple of preliminary matters that must be addressed briefly. There are two fairly obvious and rather silly approaches which need to be dismissed.

First, it may be said that since there are Seventh-day Adventists who hold non-traditional views of origins, it must be possible to do so. This is akin to the response of some when Donald Trump was accused of being un-presidential: “He’s the president and if he is doing something, it must, by definition, be presidential.” End of argument. This reduces the topic at hand to a tautology.

The second view is the polar opposite to the first. It says in effect, “Since a Seventh-day Adventist is defined by the statement of 28 Fundamental Beliefs, and since one of those beliefs specifies a traditional view of origins, then by definition an Adventist cannot hold to non-traditional views on origins.” This elevates the fundamentals to the level of a creed, when, in fact, they are meant to be descriptive, not prescriptive.¹ It further ignores the fact that the statements of fundamentals are voted after sometimes vigorous debate at General Conference sessions. By the nature of this process, there are some who vote no—sometimes a sizable minority.

Neither of these approaches is a serious answer to the question posed here. Is it logically possible to retain a coherent system of beliefs which is recognizably Adventist if one holds

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to non-traditional views of origins? This way of putting the issue may be somewhat imprecise, but I think it is serviceable enough.

A Spectrum of Views

There is another issue to consider before going further: non-traditional views of origins. It is customary to express the alternatives in starkly dualistic terms: creation or evolution. But, in reality, the matter is much more complex than that. I have modified a diagram provided by Eugenie Scott to show an outline of the spectrum of views on origins (relevant to the creation/evolution issue), and it could probably be made more comprehensive.² Scott divided her chart into those views that assume a young earth and those that assume an old earth. I have added a position on the borderline of this division: that common Adventist view of an old earth/universe but a recent creation of life on earth. (The only other change of substance was to divide Scott’s rather unfortunately named category of “Atheistic Evolution” into “Punctuated Equilibrium” and “Neo-Darwinism”.)

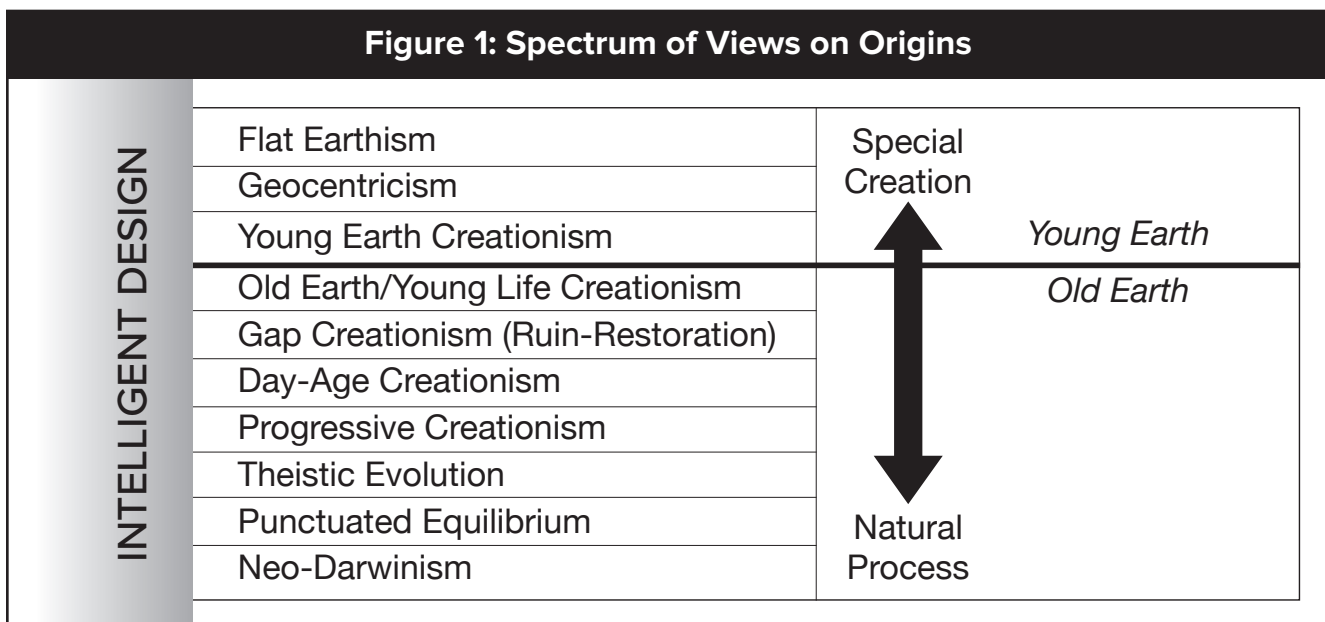
The key designations in this chart (see Figure 1) require, at least, brief explanations:

Flat earthism, as its name suggests, argues that the world is a flat disc, rather than a sphere.³ Some, at least, accept that this earth is covered by a dome (firmament)

into which the heavenly bodies are embedded. This view was common in the Ancient Near East. However, ancient Greek thinkers argued convincingly that the world was a globe. Edward Grant notes that “The earth’s sphericity was a basic truth of Aristotle’s system of the world. . . . So reasonable were Aristotle’s arguments that a spherical earth was readily accepted.”⁴ Indeed, another Greek, Eratosthenes of Cyrene, calculated the diameter of the earth with startling accuracy.⁵ Contrary to popular opinion, the vast majority of people in the Middle Ages did not believe the earth was flat.⁶ However, flat-earth views are experiencing something of a resurgence today, even if they are still well outside the mainstream of modern thought.

Geocentrists insist that the earth, whether conceived of as a disc or a sphere, is the immovable center of the universe (or at least of the solar system). For them, the sun literally moves across the sky in the course of a day. This is the view that Galileo and Copernicus challenged.

Young-earth creationism, in its purest form, insists on a recent creation of the universe, including earth and life upon it, in a period of six literal days.⁷ This is generally thought of as having taken place six thousand years ago, although that chronology is often extended to ten or twenty thousand years, but rarely longer than that. Certainly, a period of hundreds of thousands, or millions,



of years is absolutely rejected. A more moderate variation of this model moves the focus from the universe to the earth and its environs, perhaps to as much as the solar system, which is then seen as having been created in toto about six thousand years ago in six literal days.

Old earth/young life creationism (“soft gap” creationism) is a further variant, which holds that the material universe, including earth, was created in the long-distant past, but life on earth in all its forms was created in a six-day period in the recent past, conveniently designated as “six thousand years” but often thought of as being somewhat longer.⁸ In recent decades this view has become relatively common among Adventists but is rare outside that Church. It is, in effect, a version of the older gap theory mentioned below, but places the gap between Genesis 1:2 and 1:3 rather than between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2.

The gap theory (in classical form, the ruin-restoration theory), dating back to the early nineteenth century, suggests that the world as we know it and the life forms with which we are familiar today were created in the relatively recent past in a six-day period. However, Genesis 1:1—“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth”—refers to the creation of the universe in the long distant past. The fact that Genesis 1:2 indicates that at the time of our world’s creation, it was formless and void and covered with water is taken to indicate that this world had had a previous iteration which had been totally destroyed by a worldwide flood. It is to this previous iteration of the world that the fossils testify. There is, in short, a world history from creation to destruction to be located in the gap between Genesis 1:1 and Genesis 1:2.⁹ Some versions of the gap theory allow for more than one cycle of ruin-restoration.¹⁰

Day-age creationism, also dating back to the nineteenth century, attempts to harmonize science and the creation narrative by suggesting that each of the days of creation represents a long period of time. Adherents of this approach utilize varying degrees of literalness in their reading of the creation event on each of the days.

Progressive creationism attributes the creation to God’s intervention but suggests that God did not

complete this in a single week. Rather, the creation was accomplished in stages over vast eras of time.

Theistic evolution argues that life forms developed on earth through a process of evolution as science has suggested—with the qualification that God guided this process and even intervened in it at various crucial points.

Punctuated equilibrium, a theory developed by Niles Eldredge and Stephen Jay Gould, accepts a long history of life on earth.¹¹ However, unlike classical Darwinian theory, it does not accept that life forms developed through an incremental process of micro-changes which when accumulated amount to macro-changes. The history of life forms on earth is seen to have the pattern of long periods of stability (equilibrium), interrupted (punctuated) by periods of rapid change.¹² However, it should be noted that by “rapid change,” Gould means rapid in terms of the geological time scale rather than the ecological one.¹³

Neo-Darwinism, represented ably today by Richard Dawkins, represents a modern restatement of Darwin’s original theory that the diversity of life comes about through gradual change in response to changes in the environment.¹⁴ The “fittest,” that is, those most able to cope with and thrive in the environment have a survival and reproduction advantage. Adjustments to the environment may be gradual but accumulate over time to the extent that this results in diversification of species and ultimately the vast variety of life forms seen both today and in the world of the past.¹⁵

Intelligent design, in its most general form, insists that the universe shows unmistakable signs of design. The “argument from design” has a long history in the annals of philosophy. However, the diversity of meaning that can be encompassed by the term “intelligent design” limits its usefulness. Traditionally, the argument from design pointed to the complexity in what was known of the world and/or universe. More recently it has been used to highlight what is, as yet, inexplicable in the world/universe. As a purportedly scientific theory, the modern version of intelligent design does not speak of a creator and is capable of covering a considerable range

of ideas. Many, but not all, adherents are fundamentalist Christians. Most, but again not all, believe in a recent creation. Thus, it has been dismissed as “creationism in a cheap tuxedo.”¹⁶ Indeed, as Robert Pennock points out, the very concept of “design” is so amorphous that “natural selection” could theoretically be accepted as the design mechanism.¹⁷ It follows that, in theory at least, intelligent design—in some form or another—could be fitted in at any point on the chart.

Where Does All This Leave Us?

Now it must be admitted that there are texts in the Bible which can be read to support a flat-earth position. The earth is described as having four corners (Isa 11:12; Rev 7:1) and having a tent-like canopy spread over it (Isa 40:22). Similarly, there is biblical evidence which can be adduced for geocentricism. The earth is declared to be unmovable (Ps 93:1), and the sun “stands still” only by divine intervention (Josh 10:12-13). Adventists have generally found ways to read Scripture which justify non-literal conclusions without our faith or theology unraveling. But prior to Copernicus (1473-1543) and Galileo (1564-1642), geocentricism was the standard view held by Christians. Luther is widely reputed to have said of Copernicus, “This fool wants to turn the whole art of astronomy upside down.”¹⁸ Had Adventism been born in the sixteenth century instead of the nineteenth, we could have been discussing a different topic: “Can a Seventh-day Adventist hold heliocentric views?” But this denomination was born in the shadow of Darwin’s scientific revolution, not that of Copernicus, and has struggled to deal with the implications of this instead. This is still the case.

The entire spectrum of views on origins is theoretically open for Christians to endeavor to incorporate into their theology. Obviously, all the young earth views, along with old earth/young life and gap creationism (ruin-restoration), may be immediately seen as compatible with Christian theology because they all purport to entail a literal reading of Scripture. Similarly, the next three views, which incorporate the words “creationism” or “theistic” into their names,

are also obviously options for incorporation into a theological schema that the point requires no further elaboration. The last two options, however, are less obviously available. Both punctuated equilibrium and neo-Darwinism purport to be purely naturalistic theories. However, it is at least theoretically conceivable that God created the universe and the life forms in it by creating natural laws and processes and allowing them to work as designed without further intervention. This would mean that God created by a process of evolution, which worked as intended, rather than—as in the case of theistic evolution—creation by a process of evolution which he guided and in which he intervened at key points.

This state of affairs entails an obvious caveat: the form and characteristics of Christian theological systems which incorporate non-traditional views of origins will vary depending on which particular non-traditional view of origins is being incorporated. A Christian theology incorporating a flat-earth world view will differ significantly from one incorporating theistic evolution, and both will differ from one incorporating punctuated equilibrium.

This leads to another important point: the limits of our knowledge on both the scientific and biblical/theological sides of the discussion. On the science side, the criticism that events like the big bang had no witnesses and we simply cannot be certain what happened are valid as far as they go (which may not be very far). The events are unique and unrepeatable, so how do we know the laws of nature as we experience them applied? None of this should be taken as an attempt to disparage science or dismiss its conclusions as “mere” theories. In science a theory is not a “guess,” but a conclusion reached after careful scrutiny of the available data using the best means available.¹⁹ Science endeavors to account for all the data available in the most satisfactory way. However, certainty is not attainable. Various issues—some of them of profound importance—remain hotly disputed. How much teleology is there in evolutionary process? The answers range from “none at all” to “a considerable amount.” Science endeavors to provide answers, but certainty is unattainable.

The very differentiation between punctuated equilibrium and neo-Darwinism points to this lack of certainty. Kim Sterelny suggests that the difference arises, at least in part, from the different perspectives of the key opposing proponents. Neo-Darwinist Richard Dawkins is a geneticist whose fundamental questions arise from the diversity of life in the world today, whereas Stephen Jay Gould, a leading proponent of punctuated equilibrium, was a paleontologist, whose leading questions arose from the problems of the mass extinction of species in the past.²⁰

We should not think the limits to knowledge are all on the side of science, however. Creationism is able to furnish no more witnesses to the event than science! It may be objected that God himself provides witness in Genesis 1-2. However, this is to assume precisely that which is being challenged by non-traditional views of origins. The point is that if Genesis 1-2 is taken to be a non-literal, non-scientific presentation of creation—whether pictorial, metaphoric, symbolic, theological, or mythic—there is no alternative presentation of the PROCESS of creation elsewhere in Scripture.²¹ Creation is mentioned and alluded to elsewhere, but there is nothing else that could be called a witness to the process.²² This means that anything that an adherent of a non-traditional view of origins says in religious or theological terms about creation must be hypothetical and to some extent speculative. Such speculative reasoning is most problematic when one is doing exegesis and attempting to explain the meaning of a text. The reading of the text should arise from evidence within the text. Thus, allegory is inappropriate as a method of exegesis.²³ Similarly, the day-age and gap theories of creation, which attempt a point-by-point harmonization of Genesis 1 and modern science, are suspect because they are built on nothing in the text (Genesis 1) which they purport to explain.²⁴ However, on broader theological questions, such speculation is to some extent inevitable. The results obviously can never attain to certainty. The words of Albert C. Sundberg Jr., although originally addressed to a different problem, are apt here as well: “Admittedly much in the area must be conjecture. But in an area

where information is almost at a minimum, reasonable conjecture that is consistent with available evidence is not without some value.”²⁵

The Big Bang

In discussing attitudes to origins which might be permissible within Adventism, it is necessary to start at the beginning. The consensus of scientists today is that the universe began around 13.8 billion years ago with the big bang. So pervasive is this consensus that it is easy to forget that it is relatively recent in origin, and the big bang is far from a logical necessity. It is logically possible that the universe is self-existent. Indeed, before the big bang theory gained general acceptance, the prevailing scientific cosmology was the steady state theory, which entailed an essentially eternal universe.

Can an Adventist believe in the big bang? To talk of “the big bang” as if it were a discrete event is actually misleading. It is rather the starting point of the ongoing process of the formation of the entire universe.²⁶ Some have argued that this is contrary to Genesis 1:1 and 2:1. However, it is contextually quite clear that Genesis 2:1 (and 2:4a) refers specifically to the creation of this world (and its environs) as being finished. Of course, the exact meaning of “finished” in this context is open to interpretation. Should the preservation of the world be regarded as an ongoing process of creation, or should the two be kept completely separate? In what sense was the creation of this world “finished” when obviously there were territories outside of the paradisaical Garden of Eden which were not as “complete” as the garden itself? These and similar questions need not detain us now. It is sufficient to say that Genesis 1-2:3a refers to the completed creation of this world, in whatever sense the author intended.

It is highly likely that “the heavens and earth” in Genesis 1:1 have the same referent as in Genesis 2:1; 4a (i.e., this world and immediate environs), giving the beginning and end of the first creation narrative a conceptual balance.²⁷ This supposition is supported by the reference to the creation of a new heavens and new earth in Revelation 21:1, where the phrase again



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is referring quite clearly to this world, rather than the entire universe.²⁸ (The final three chapters of Revelation give numerous conceptual parallels to the first three chapters of Genesis).²⁹ Even if the author of Genesis 1:1 did intend to refer to the universe, his understanding of the scope of that term would have been radically different from ours. Without the aid of telescopes, only about five thousand stars can be seen from earth. Now, in the age of the Hubble Telescope, we know that the visible universe contains two hundred billion trillion stars! The universe we speak of is incomprehensibly vaster than was thought even fifty years ago, let alone in antiquity. To the ancients, “the universe” was far closer in scope to our solar system than it was to the universe we know.

Exactly what Genesis 1:1 means by “in the beginning” is subject to dispute, but the answer which most harmonizes with the rest of Genesis 1 is that it refers to the time of the creation of this world.³⁰ None of this suggests in any way that God is not the creator of the entire universe and all matter within it, but this is not the author’s concern in Genesis 1. If this is true, then there are no impediments to an Adventist believing the big bang theory.³¹

Some scientists have argued the feasibility of the big

bang occurring without any external cause.³² Be that as it may, it is at least equally possible that the big bang was the way in which God created the universe. Thus, Robert Jastrow in considering the big bang, concludes:

Now we would like to pursue that inquiry farther back in time, but the barrier to further progress seems insurmountable. It is not a matter of another year, another decade of work, another measurement, or another theory; at this moment it seems as though science will never be able to raise the curtain on the mystery of creation. For the scientist who has lived by his faith in the power of reason, the story ends like a bad dream. He has scaled the mountains of ignorance; he is about to conquer the highest peak, as he pulls himself over the final rock, he is greeted by a band of theologians who have been sitting there for centuries.³³

More recently, Stephen Hawking makes a similar point, although he avoids overtly religious language (and does not, himself, draw such a religious conclusion as Jastrow did). In concluding his survey of the development of views of space and time from Aristotle to Einstein, he declares:

The idea of an unchanging universe that could have existed, and could continue to exist, forever, was replaced by the notion of a dynamic, expanding universe that seemed to have begun a finite time ago, and that might end at a finite time in the future.³⁴

(It should not be thought the big bang is in any sense the final scientific word on the topic of the universe. Hawking, himself, suggests a model in which the universe is unbounded—having neither a beginning nor an end).³⁵

Stages of Development

A key element in any non-traditional view of creation revolves around the emergence in stages of the world as we know it today. Thus, evolutionary theory speaks of “development,” “evolution,” and “change.” Of course, it should be noted that the Genesis account also speaks of stages in the development of the world—specifically those associated with seven days, on each of which the world is radically changed. This element of creation in stages has long been a subject of discussion. St. Augustine of Hippo, probably the dominant figure in Western theological reflection after the writers of the New Testament, considered it in the fifth century. In “The Literal Meaning of Genesis,” completed in 415 CE, he argues that God created the world in an instant and only presents creation as taking seven days as a concession to our inability to comprehend his greatness. He declares:

In this narrative of creation Holy Scripture has said of the Creator that He completed His works in six days; and elsewhere, where, without contradicting this, it has been written of the same Creator that He created all things together. It follows, therefore, that He, who created all things together, simultaneously created these six days, or seven, or rather the one day six or seven times repeated. Why, then, was there any need for six distinct days to be set forth in the narrative one

after the other? The reason is that those who cannot understand the meaning of the text, He created all things together, cannot arrive at the meaning of Scripture unless the narrative proceeds slowly step by step.³⁶

Thus, Augustine finds the stages of creation in Genesis 1 to be too long to fit into his world view; many modern Christians find them too short to fit into theirs. But it is evident that to the question sometimes asked of progressives by young earth creationists, “Don’t you believe God is powerful enough to have made the world in a week?” Augustine would have answered, “Don’t you believe God was powerful enough to have made it in an instant?” Of course, both questions are misleading: the issue at hand is not whether God has the power to do either of those things, but whether the evidence indicates that he actually did them.

Different Questions on Doctrine

Once the cosmological question proper has been dealt with, the issue of whether an Adventist can hold to non-traditional views of origins tends to revolve around a series of questions which are more or less invariable: “Doesn’t acceptance of non-traditional views of origins exclude the Great Controversy?” “Can the biblical picture of God really be harmonized with non-traditional views of origins?” “Did Jesus die for Neanderthals?” “How can an understanding of the Fall or original sin fit into non-traditional views?” “How can doctrines like the atonement and salvation survive if creation and the Fall are not accepted literally?” “What is left of the Sabbath if creation did not happen in seven literal days?” “What about eschatology? Is the understanding of the end not going to have to be reinterpreted just as radically as the understanding of the beginning?”

It is important to acknowledge that these questions are neither foolish nor trivial, especially when the full implications of the doctrine of creation are recognized. Notice, for example, the extent of the overlap between these questions and the breadth of the doctrine of

creation as outlined by the noted theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg:

The idea of God necessarily implies the comprehension of anything else. If there is one God—and only one God—then everything else is to be regarded as finite and as comprised within his presence. The doctrine of creation explicates this relationship. . . . In traditional theological terminology, the doctrine of creation does not relate only to creation but also to conservation, redemption, and eschatology; in other words, to the entire economy of God’s action.³⁷

The Great Controversy Scenario

So, we ask, can non-traditional views of origins accommodate the Great Controversy, or are the two ideas mutually exclusive? This question is inextricably linked with the problem of death before the Fall, which is unavoidable in any non-traditional view of origins. Two presuppositions incline conservative thinkers to a negative response to this question: 1) the Bible teaches that there was no death before the Fall; and 2) “demonic” involvement on the earth comes only with the temptation and fall of Adam and Eve recorded in Genesis 3 and thus after the creation is complete. But these are both precisely presuppositions and not facts based on evidence.

Having discussed the first point in some detail elsewhere, it is sufficient to say here that the Bible simply does not clearly teach that either animal death or animal predation exist only as a consequence of sin.³⁸ It is difficult to improve upon the words of conservative scholar Wayne A. Grudem: “From the information we have in Scripture, we cannot now know whether God created animals subject to aging and death from the beginning, but it remains a real possibility.”³⁹

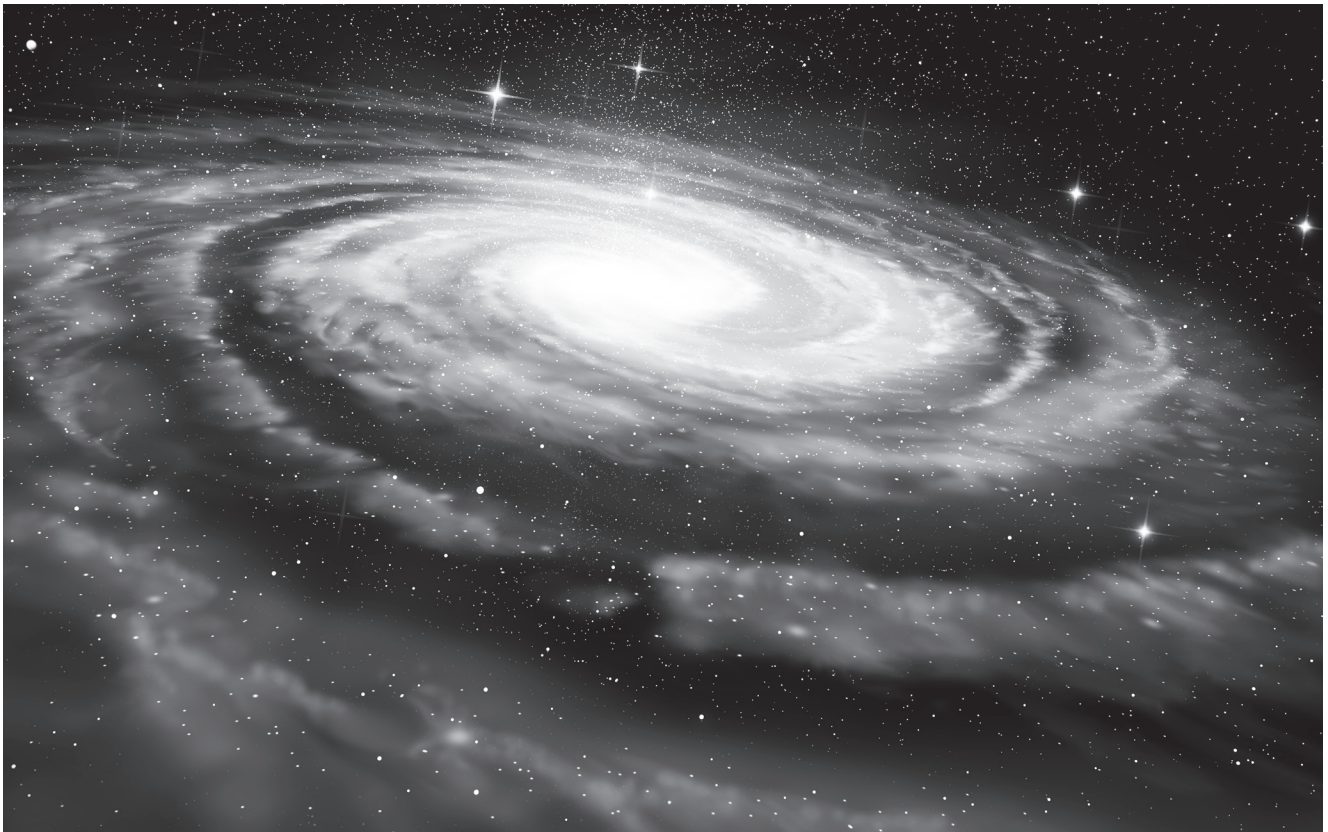
What the Bible teaches, in fact, is that *human* death is a consequence of human sin (Rom 5:12). Death is an intruder, an enemy (1 Cor 15:26)—specifically an enemy of humanity, overcome in the

end by resurrection. But the Bible does not teach the resurrection of animals, only of humans.

The second point requires more attention. There is no question that from a literary—as opposed to historical viewpoint—a “demonic” element is first explicitly introduced into the primordial history with the appearance of the serpent in Genesis 3. The creation narrative is presented in terms of neither divine sexual activity nor divine victory in battle as it is in the creation myths of the ancient Near East. God speaks; it is done. The theological message here is profound and must have been quite revolutionary in the ancient world. But it must be remembered that a great deal here hinges on an argument from silence: no demonic resistance is mentioned in Genesis 1 and 2; therefore, there was no demonic resistance. But are there other possibilities?

Consider this possibility: the Luciferian revolt in heaven happens before or at the time of the creation of the earth. Satanic rage is directed toward God’s creation of the entire earth, not simply against the humans on the earth. God creates the world in stages, over time. He does so by his sheer creative power. However, after each stage of creation, Satan attacks, distorting and marring God’s creation. A battle ensues, not to enable creation but to preserve it. It must be remembered that for the Great Controversy to have gained any sort of traction, Satan must have been “at least somewhere near the same league [as God]” and a “universe-class contender.”⁴⁰ Ultimately, God is still able to declare the result of each day’s creation “good” (Heb: *tôv*). This Hebrew word has a considerable semantic range. It can indicate moral goodness, aesthetic beauty, or even utility—fitness for purpose.⁴¹ The outcome of each day of creation is that what God had created was “fit for purpose”—was able to fulfill the purpose God had intended for his creative act.⁴²

The Genesis narration only describes—and that only in poetic, metaphorical, and pictorial language—the last attack of Satan on the final stage of God’s creation. Thus, Genesis 3 focuses on the humans, who, created intentionally by God to be in his image (Gen 1:26-28), are seduced by the prospect of having the power of God and determining for themselves what is good and what is



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evil in independence from God. The history of the world since has been the history both of Satan's continued marring of the image of God and God's response to undo the Fall and its subsequent results.

What might previous attacks by Satan on the creation have entailed? Environmental catastrophes (storms, floods, etc.)? Meteorite strikes? Plant and animal death? It is impossible to say with any certainty. However, all such things have been posited by scientists as major stimuli for evolutionary change.⁴³ Is there anything at all in the biblical narrative that might suggest the plausibility of any of this? In fact, yes. Adam and Eve were warned that they would die if they ate of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. It is difficult to see how this could be meaningful unless they had seen death and already knew what it was. Their warning would then mean, "Do not let this act mar your fitness for purpose. If you do, you will share the fate of so much of the creation around you." It is perhaps also worth noting that in the Bible "darkness," like "water," is a frequent symbol of chaos and opposition to God and of

death.⁴⁴ In the creation narrative, each "day" of creation is followed by a "night" of darkness. Of course, it would be easy to read far too much historical significance into a literary feature of the narrative! However, on the first day of creation, God said, "Let there be light," not "Let there be light and darkness" (Gen 1:3). Might it not be that forces in revolt against the creator God responded by attempting to bring back the darkness? Before this is dismissed as too fanciful, it should be noted that one of the features of the world, when the controversy is over, is that "there will be no night there (Rev 21:25). Before you say, "But that is symbolic," consider that this is precisely the point I am suggesting with Genesis 1:3.

The scenario here outlined, far from precluding the Great Controversy has it supercharged—on steroids, as it were. If this scenario were accepted, one last point comes into focus. Scripture makes it clear that God frequently thwarts the plans and intentions of Satan and evil human agencies, incorporating those plans and intentions into the schema for the revelation of his glory and greatness.⁴⁵ It would be in perfect harmony with this for God to use

Satan's attacks on his creation as the basis for the next stage of his creation. The creation of this world may not have happened as God originally intended, but rather as it happened in the context of the Great Controversy.

The most telling weakness in this construction is that it appears to involve a considerable reinterpretation of Genesis 1. It is true that the biblical creation narrative is devoid of explicit mention of any conflict in the creation process. God spoke and it was done. However, in order to give the correct weight to this fact, a number of other points also need to be considered. The Old Testament to a large extent de-emphasizes the "satanic." Not even the Fall narrative (Gen 3) identifies the serpent with Satan.⁴⁶ Jewish tradition does not always make that association, although the New Testament does (Rev 12:9; 20:2).⁴⁷ The name (or more correctly, title) "Satan" is used in only three contexts in the Old Testament—two of them (1 Chron 21; Zech 3) are unambiguously late and the other (Job 1-2) undated, but generally regarded as late as well.⁴⁸ The Israelite nation was born in the context of Egyptian polytheism and matured until the time of the exile in the context of Canaanite polytheism. It seems that the Old Testament writers focused on the one great truth—"Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one" (Deut 6:4)—without confusing the people by introducing a non-divine malevolent power who acted like a god and could easily be mistaken for a god. Only after the temptation to idolatry and polytheism had been decisively defeated in the Babylonian exile did the person of Satan begin to be introduced.⁴⁹ With this as the background of the creation story—which has a polemic against idolatry as a sub-text—it is hardly surprising that the emphasis falls on the creatorship of God, and his unrivaled power, and that elements of the Great Controversy theme are omitted.⁵⁰

This Great Controversy scenario has the effect of answering some of the objections raised to a more evolutionary understanding of creation: Some ask, "How can this sort of wasteful, death-oriented approach to creation be reconciled with what the Bible reveals about the character of God?" The fact is that we have no difficulty attempting such a reconciliation of natural evil and the character of God in the period after the

Fall. We assert that God created nature "good," but Satan has perverted this goodness, and the world we see today is an ambiguous blending of the original good and the perverted satanic evil. If the Great Controversy is understood as starting on earth before the Fall of humanity, the same principle applies. Jack Provonsha correctly notes that

The evolutionist's picture looks more like a painting of the devil than it does a portrait of God In the light of the Great Controversy, the one thing we cannot allow is the confusion regarding God's character that is resulting from attempts to make God the author of the evolutionary process.⁵¹

This would mean that God would (presumably) not have created the world via such a death-oriented way—if the rebellion had not occurred and marred his work.

This approach also eases some of the difficulties inherent in other attempts to produce a Christian evolutionary understanding of origins. For example, the view of Nancey Murphy and others is that it is God's respect for the integrity of nature that leads him to create in a developmental and non-interventionist way.⁵² This suggestion provokes Clifford Goldstein to ask:

Will this new heaven and new earth be created by divine fiat—God speaks and it is—something similar to what was unambiguously depicted in Genesis 1 and 2? Or will life have to endure, again, the rigor and joy of natural selection and survival of the fittest for billions of years until a new world, one "in which righteousness dwells" (2 Peter 3:13), finally appears. If God used billions of years to create the world the first time—with the vicious and violent process of evolution as the means—is that how He is going to do it the second time too? If not, why not?⁵³

But if a more evolutionary creation is a result of the Great Controversy, this question becomes moot. God did not create the way he did because of some abstract

respect for nature (over which he is Lord), but in order that the Great Controversy might be seen in its full developmental process from beginning to end. Once that controversy is over, God can create in an instant if he so desires.

Neanderthals and Salvation

But all this inevitably leads to another cluster of questions: “What about the Neanderthals (*Homo neanderthalensis*)? Did Jesus die for them? Will they be saved?” In some ways this is a very natural question; in other ways it is a very strange question. What is it about the Neanderthals that provokes such concern? Presumably it is the fact that they are such close relatives of humans. Indeed, it is generally regarded that East Asians and Europeans all have a small amount of DNA which originated in Neanderthals, suggesting that the Neanderthals did not so much become extinct as much as they interbred with and were absorbed into the *Homo sapiens* community.⁵⁴ So, we ask, were Neanderthals in the image of God? Did they have moral responsibility? Were their lives meaningful?⁵⁵ Were they candidates for salvation? (From a biblical perspective, being in the image of God, having moral responsibility, and being an object of God’s saving activity are directly correlated.⁵⁶ A meaningful life seems to be a natural corollary.)

The underlying issue is the separation of humans from the animals as a species alone made in the image of God. Of what does this separation consist, or to put the question differently, what is the image of God? For some Christians, the problem is solved easily: the image is constituted by the immortal soul in those creatures who are given such by God. Then the question becomes: Did the Neanderthals have immortal souls? Presumably not, but if they did, the image of God and therefore the provision of salvation includes them also. A sharply drawn criterion of differentiation exists; it is merely a matter of where the line is to be drawn. Clearly this solution does not work for Christian holists, like Seventh-day Adventists, who reject the notion of any being “having” a soul. Rather it is argued that humans are souls, and since the same Hebrew word (*nephesh*) can

be used for animals (e.g., Gen 1:20, 21, 24, 30) as well as humans (e.g., Gen 2:7; 12:5; 14:21), this criterion of differentiation vanishes.

However, that is not the end of the matter. Neanderthals and *Homo sapiens* were physically similar with compatible DNA, but it is highly doubtful that the “image of God” should be conceived of in physical terms. Both male and female are created in the image of God (Gen 1: 27), which immediately highlights physical difference within the image of God. Furthermore, human and chimpanzee DNA differs by less than five percent, but no one seems to ask, “What about the chimpanzees?”⁵⁷ Despite the tremendous closeness in DNA between humans and chimpanzees, Genesis 1 makes a sharp distinction between humans and even the highest animals, precisely at the point where humans are defined as the image of God. Indeed, the sharpness of this distinction is regarded by modern animal liberationists, such as Peter Singer, as being one of the weaknesses of the biblical view.⁵⁸ But—and the point needs reiteration—this distinction cannot be substantiated on the basis of a vast physical difference between the humans and the highest animals.⁵⁹

In all likelihood the symbol of the image of God derives from the ancient custom of the emperor erecting an image of himself in conquered territories to signify his rulership of that territory.⁶⁰ The data of Genesis suggest that the meaning of image of God consists, not in human physicality, but rather in human roles and functions—all performed in imitation of God, as his representative and as a demonstration of his rulership of the world. Specifically, the image involved the capacity for ruling creation, subduing it (as God earlier limited the chaos symbolized in the primeval waters and the darkness), and (pro-)creating new life. The creation of the image is the immediate precursor of the seventh-day rest of God, which humanity enters into by worship, for the seventh day is sanctified and blessed. This suggests that worship is also at the heart of what being in the image of God means.

All of this suggests that the image of God should be understood in fundamentally relational terms. Humanity is presented in the creation narrative as

beings who are intended to be in relationship with God—not another divinity, for that is impossible in a monotheistic context—but as close to God as a creature can be. Humans are to do as God does, in a worshipful relationship, within the broad parameters God sets. (There is only one prohibition: not to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil.) How is the basis of this relationship to be understood? In physical terms? Surely not! Does it require an “immortal soul”? No.

Here the work of philosopher Lynne Rudder Baker on the nature of personhood may provide a useful guide.⁶¹ In her work, Baker explores what it is that makes a person. She is concerned with issues such as the continuity of personhood and how that can be understood in the light of beliefs in death and resurrection. She immediately rules out the suggestion that the “body” and the “person” are to be identified with one another. She is just as adamant that it is not a matter of a “ghost in the machine”: personhood does not consist of a “soul” that inhabits a body like a letter in an envelope. Rather, Baker argues the body is a constituent necessity for personhood—there can be no personhood without a body—but personhood resides in the development of a “first-person perspective.” This means that a person has the capacity to think of oneself in the first person. Such a capacity is expressed directly in such questions

as, “I wonder if I will be happy tomorrow?”⁶² Pannenberg speaks in a similar way, although he refers to self-awareness, rather than first-person perspective:

Thus, because the human being is the self-consciously discerning animal, it is also the religious animal. While all creatures are in fact related to God the creator, and the young lions seek their prey from God, they do not do so self-consciously. It is only in human beings that the relationship of creature to God becomes an explicit issue. This, however is intimately connected with the human capacity for self-conscious discernment. . . . It is how the human being is described in the Genesis story as created in the image of God.⁶³

Baker allows the existence of such a thing as “proximate personhood”: there are times and places where a fully formed first-person perspective has not developed or no longer exists. To do justice to Baker’s work would require us to enter into a great deal of discussion, but this is not the place for that. Nor is it necessary for our purpose, which is simply to suggest that if Baker’s constituent view of personhood has validity, then might not a similar constituent view also



provide a key to understanding of the image of God? A certain physicality, a certain DNA, a certain degree of intelligence, or some such thing is a prerequisite for the image of God, but it is not identical to that image itself. Rather, the image is found in a capacity for “God-awareness,” a capacity for worship which goes beyond the physical constituents. This need not reside in a “soul” separate from the body, any more than personhood does. How then does it manifest itself? Presumably by God at some point revealing himself to his creation in such a way as to create awareness that there is a God with whom one can have fellowship.⁶⁴ This “God-awareness” might be expressed in being able to ask the so-called “great questions”: Why am I here? What is the meaning of life? Is there anything more than this life? What happens after death?⁶⁵

Do we need to assume that such God-awareness appeared fully formed in an instant? Not necessarily. If there is “proximate personhood,” might there not also be, as it were, “proximate God-awareness”? We all know of cases where a pet is “almost a part of the family,” and yet we would generally not think of such an animal as fully equal to humans. Is it not possible that Neanderthals reflect a “proximate,” not fully formed God awareness? Did the Neanderthals have the capacity to ask the big questions? Only God knows. If not, then they would be placed over the line with the brute creation rather than on this side having the “image of God.”

Narrative of the Fall

There are features of the Fall narrative which suggest a non-literal reading. A talking snake? A “magic” tree which conferred immortality on anyone who ate its fruit, possibly even once?⁶⁶ (If so, why had Adam and Eve not already eaten of it?) A garden with a single eastern entrance? The fact that the story of the creation and Fall have numerous points of contact with the Hebrew sanctuary likewise suggests a non-literal meaning. The greater the perceived *literary* reason for writing a text in a certain way, the less the likelihood that the text reflects *historical* facts.

This all has a further possible connection with modern

scientific views. The general consensus among scientists is that *Homo sapiens* emerged through the evolutionary process some 300,000 years ago. That is to say that the humans who roamed the earth 300,000 years ago were physically, biologically indistinguishable from us (within the limits of normal human variations of height, skin color, etc.). However, something extraordinary happened 50,000 years ago, when suddenly these humans made what has been called a “great leap forward” and became culturally modern as well as physically modern.⁶⁷ Notice Richard Dawkins’ comment:

As far as we can tell, [before the great leap forward] there were no paintings, no carvings, no figurines, no grave goods, no ornamentation. After the Leap, all these things suddenly appear in the archaeological record, together with musical instruments such as bone flutes and it wasn’t long before stunning creations like the Lascaux Cave murals were created by Cro-Magnon people. . . . Some authorities are so impressed by the Great Leap Forward that they think it coincided with the origin of language. What else, they ask, could account for such a sudden change?⁶⁸

Could this correlate with the emergence of God consciousness? Is this when humans were first in the image of God and first began to ask the “big questions”?

What then is the meaning of the Fall narrative? Humanity develops/is given/has revealed to it “God awareness.” The goal of this is that humans will enter into and remain in a worshipful relationship with God. The Fall narrative tells us that humans either refused to enter this relationship or refused to remain in it. The real temptation was not to eat a piece of fruit, but to “be like God”—and thus in their self-seized autonomy to make their creator redundant and surplus to requirement. Rather than allow God to inform them of what was (morally) “good” and “evil,” the humans chose to define these qualities for themselves. The reality of the meaning of the Fall narrative is seen all around us in the world and all throughout history. Particularly telling is the fact

that the most decent and morally sensitive people are very much possessed of a sense of falling short of their ideals—of knowing that they should do better than they do, that they fall short. When and how did the Fall take place if not literally as Genesis describes it? I do not know. Nor do I need to know. The fact is that both experience and history tell us that we live in a fallen world.⁶⁹

It is interesting to notice that modern theologians looking at the situation of the contemporary world, completely independent of reference to the creation and fall of humanity, highlight the same sort of issues: being fully human entails a relationship with God; a break in that relationship sees humanity become less than it ought to be—less than it could be—having more in common with beasts. Thus, Emil Brunner, writing in the immediate aftermath of the horrors of the Second World War, declares:

We men, and quite specially we modern men, are constantly inclined to think that by our own intrinsic virtue we can be good, upright and human men; if only we are left to ourselves then all will be well. We do not at all, in fact, believe that without God we cannot be truly human. We suppose on the contrary that within ourselves we have the resources of true humanism. In reality, however, the fact is that the more we delude ourselves into thinking that we are independent of God, the more certainly we degenerate and sink to a sub-human level. It is that, of course, which today we are experiencing in a greater measure than ever before. In those states where human society and especially its rulers have emancipated themselves completely from the authority of God, as whole people and states have done to an unprecedented extent, then there emerges a dehumanization to which there is no parallel in previous history. With every step which separates man from God there springs up inhumanity, and the truly human element disappears from life. . . . This destructive severance of our communion with

God the Bible calls sin. And this latter reality lurks in us all like a malignant growth which, unless the transcendent One intervenes, consumes our vitality and health increasingly.⁷⁰

When the question of the image of God has been resolved, all the other questions regarding salvation are also solved in principle. How can there be a fall in this evolutionary model? Well, the Fall does not depend on creation happening in seven days. Rather it depends on humanity's being in the image of God. Obviously, if the creation narrative is understood in a non-literal way, the Fall narrative must also be so understood; the two narratives cannot be separated.

The question of the atonement and salvation are likewise not dependent on the fact of a seven-day creation, but rather have as an essential prerequisite the fact that God is creator and that humans were intended to be in his image. If these two theological pillars are affirmed (as I have done throughout), non-traditional views of origins present no insurmountable challenge to accepting the atonement or a belief in salvation. At this point the traditionalist and the non-traditionalist stand on the same ground. No traditionalist actually bases belief in the atonement and salvation on creation *in seven days*. Rather it is based on the reality of human sinfulness and rebellion against God, rooted in the Fall. But the Fall is still the Fall even if it is understood to have taken place in ways other than a literal reading of Genesis 3 suggests.

What About the Sabbath?

Two last issues remain, specifically for Seventh-day Adventists. First, what is left of the Sabbath, if the world was not created in seven days as Genesis 1 says? There is no question that the Bible writers directly link the Sabbath with a seven-day creation (Ex 20:8-11; 31:17). However, it must be asked whether the “seven-day” aspect is the important part of this formulation. Certainly, there are many instances in Scripture where the God of Israel is presented as creator—in contradistinction to the idols—with absolutely no reference to the seven days of creation (e.g., Isa 40:28;

Rom 1:25). The key issue is that God is the creator.

Surely, the situation is similar within contemporary Adventism: “creation” is often spoken of with the unexpressed presupposition that this means a literal seven-day creation some thousands of years ago. Similarly, the Sabbath is often mentioned but not necessarily in connection with the issue of origins. But the key issue is not the “how” of creation, but the “fact” that God is the creator. The implications of creation are of staggering significance: life is not meaningless, the physical world is not the only—or even the main—reality, but neither is it to be abused; rather it is to be cared for by us as faithful stewards. The meaningful beginning of the earth points to its meaningful end as well. None of this depends on creation taking place in a particular way, at a particular time; it depends on the fact that God is creator. God’s creatorship is easily forgotten as we live in the secular world, and for this reason alone, the Sabbath retains significance even if non-traditional views of origins are adopted.

But even in the Old Testament, the Sabbath’s meaning is not limited to its role as a memorial of creation. Rather the Sabbath is also seen as a memorial of redemption (Deut 5:12-15). Those texts—much cherished by Adventists—which refer to the Sabbath as “seal” are, in fact, set in the context of the covenant made with the redeemed Israel (Ex 31:13-17). As such, they point more to redemption than to creation—although the two themes are not strictly separated in the Bible. Again, the implications are staggering: the Sabbath levels the strata of society; master and slave are alike, equally redeemed. The redemption Sabbath points to the social responsibility of the redeemed for the poor, the needy, the weak, the defenseless. How could this not continue to be relevant in our world?

The New Testament builds on these themes, likening the Sabbath to salvation in Christ (Heb 4:1-3) and to the coming eschatological Sabbath when the battle with sin will be over. The Sabbath of hope is as important today as it has ever been. Again, none of this depends on a literal seven-day creation.

One of the things the first creation narrative teaches

is that the Sabbath was God’s gift for humanity *from the beginning*. In a sinful world that gift is reconceptualized as beneficial command. The biblical story shows its observance and neglect. It outlines layers of interpretation and meaning that it has accrued. None of this hinges on a literal seven-day creation, and none of it is lost if belief in a literal seven-day creation is abandoned—unless the “seven-dayness” of creation has some intrinsic theological value. But it is difficult to see what that would be.

Origins and Eschatology

This brings us to the final issue that might confront Adventists considering non-traditional views of origins: eschatology. If the initial chapters of the Bible are read non-literally, should the final chapters be similarly so read? We have already touched on some of the specific eschatological issues involved: if God created by means of a long evolutionary process, does that mean the new earth must be similarly created by a long, convoluted means? It has been argued that this does not follow if the process of creation was attacked and marred in the Great Controversy. But what of the more general issue: if our views of creation change, can our views of eschatology remain the same?

The biblical picture of the future world is drawn in terms of the ancient cosmology of a three-tiered universe—a flat earth covered with the dome of the heavens, in the middle, with hades below and heaven above.⁷¹ In truth, modern cosmology has made this picture untenable as a literal description. The world is known to be a globe; the Hubble Space Telescope allows us to see galaxies over ten billion light years away. This “almost unimaginably vast” universe is expanding at incredible and accelerating speed and is thus “finite but unbounded.”⁷² Of the suggestion that the heaven where God dwells is “up there, beyond the stars,” there is no evidence at all. Indeed, all the evidence that exists indicates that this is not so. So, has science overthrown Christian eschatology along with our understanding of origins?

It hardly needs to be noted that if the Bible is taken

strictly literally, it demands a vertical relationship between heaven and earth. Jesus “goes up” into the clouds at the ascension (Acts 1:9); Jesus returns in the clouds of heaven (Mat 26:64), and the New Jerusalem descends to the earth (Rev 21:2). But, rather than despair, a better strategy would be to ask, “What does this all mean?”

Clearly, the vertical language serves to emphasize that God and his dwelling place are wholly other than the world humans inhabit. The ascension of Jesus means that Jesus will no longer physically appear among his disciples.⁷³ The picture of the reward of the saints “in heaven” indicates that this reward is not part of this world. The descent of New Jerusalem, linked as it is with the creation of a new heavens and new earth, means that the heavenly reality and the reality of this world have been brought together.

What would be a meaningful way to express this in the twenty-first century, when the Bible’s vertical language has lost its utility? One way is to think of heaven as being a realm outside the space-time continuum experienced in this world—or as the Bible itself says “not of this creation” (Heb 9:11).⁷⁴ (This sort of language is not entirely novel in Adventism today).⁷⁵ This could mean that heaven is right “here”—but currently inaccessible to us. After all, modern physics tells us that, even in this world, there are billions of particles, neutrinos, which pass through us and all “solid” objects without anyone noticing and without leaving a trace behind.⁷⁶ If this is so, the possibility of an overlapping inaccessible reality beyond the reach of physics, outside the space-time continuum, is not far-fetched.

Such an understanding of the relationship of heaven to earth has several important implications which help to solve a number of exegetical puzzles. This approach literally brings heaven and earth into the closest proximity. Biblically, the time it takes to get from heaven to earth can be measured by the length of the prayer in Daniel 9. Gabriel arrives at the end of the prayer (Dan 9:20-21), announcing that he had been sent—presumably from heaven—when Daniel began to pray (Dan 9:22-23).⁷⁷ This is inconceivable

if Gabriel had to travel through the universe without completely negating the laws of physics. Yet it is perfectly congruent with the suggestion that heaven is simply on the other side of a spatial/temporal doorway. The fact that angelic beings are always present but only sometimes visible (e.g., 2 Kings 16:17) also fits this model, as does the idea of a heavenly record being kept of events on earth. In this model “the new heavens and new earth” could already be ready, but not revealed until the current spatial and temporal limitations are destroyed, or at least transcended.

Credibility and Truth

Our exploration, which began with the origins of the universe, ends with a world cleansed of sin and made anew. What conclusions are to be drawn—and not drawn—from this survey? It does seem to me that it is possible to be a Seventh-day Adventist and yet hold to modern, science-informed understandings of creation. Has a proven model been presented? Far from it! Is this a model which everyone must adopt? Certainly not! But if this model is plausible and possible, it—at the very least—opens the door to the possibility of other, better, more convincing models.

Some will feel that the very foundations of faith are being shaken by all of this. I would urge such people to turn their attention away from the question of origins and consider the really important features of biblical revelation: the love of God, the saving death of Jesus, the victory over death at the resurrection, the certain hope of the return of Jesus and immortality in a world without sin, and the practical responsibilities of a loving Christian life in the here-and-now (Mic 6:8). No one should let anything in this presentation undermine their faith in the central biblical message. Turn away from the question of non-traditional models of origins, if you need, but never turn away from the offer of salvation.

For myself, I cannot simply turn away from the issue of origins for two reasons, or perhaps more correctly for one reason viewed in two ways. First there is the pastoral/evangelistic concern expressed by St. Augustine of Hippo that a failure to accept scientific views risked the

credibility of the gospel in the eyes of those the Church was attempting to evangelize.⁷⁸ He declares,

Usually, even a non-Christian knows something about the earth, the heavens, and the other elements of this world, about the motion and orbit of the stars and even their size and relative positions, about the predictable eclipses of the sun and moon, the cycles of the years and the seasons, about the kinds of animals, shrubs, stones, and so forth, and this knowledge he holds to as being certain from reason and experience. Now, it is a disgraceful and dangerous thing for an infidel to hear a Christian, presumably giving the meaning of Holy Scripture, talking nonsense on these topics; and we should take all means to prevent such an embarrassing situation, in which people show up vast ignorance in a Christian and laugh it to scorn. The shame is not so much that an ignorant individual is derided, but that people outside the household of the faith think our sacred writers held such opinions, and, to the great loss of those for whose salvation we toil, the writers of our Scripture are criticized and rejected as unlearned men. If they find a Christian mistaken in a field which they themselves know well and hear him maintaining his foolish opinions about our books, how are they going to believe those books in matters concerning the resurrection of the dead, the hope of eternal life, and the kingdom of heaven, when they think their pages are full of falsehoods on facts which they themselves have learnt from experience and the light of reason? Reckless and incompetent expounders of Holy Scripture bring untold trouble and sorrow on their wiser brethren when they are caught in one of their mischievous false opinions and are taken to task by those who are not bound by the authority of our sacred books. For then, to defend their utterly foolish and obviously untrue statements, they will try to call upon Holy Scripture for proof and

even recite from memory many passages which they think support their position, although they understand neither what they say nor the things about which they make assertion.⁷⁹

Finally, there is the challenge given by Pannenberg to the thinkers and especially to the theologians of the Church: If there is a God—and only one God—then all truth is God’s truth. It follows that those who proclaim such a God have an obligation to try to present truth in a way which is consistent with other truth, thus “to present a coherent model of the world as God’s creation.” If such a model is to have the potential to be understood or considered seriously, it must not be based on authority, experience, or the consensus of Christian believers.⁸⁰

Thus, this presentation is aimed at those for whom the traditional model of origins and the difficulties in harmonizing it with modern science undermines their confidence in the Bible and the message of salvation it contains. To them, the message is that it may be possible for you to abandon that traditional model of origins, if you must, but do not let this issue needlessly destroy your faith in God.

ENDNOTES:

1. The fuller statement of the Fundamental Beliefs includes the question: “Knowing and understanding the fundamental Bible principles as taught in the Scriptures, is it your purpose, by the grace of God, to order your life in harmony with these principles?” The alternative baptismal vow introduced in 2005 has as one of its three questions: “Do you accept the teachings of the Bible as expressed in the Statement of Fundamental Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and do you pledge by God’s grace to live your life in harmony with these teachings?” This would appear to move the Fundamental Beliefs to a more credal position, despite the Church’s long-established antipathy to creeds. Whether or not it is, in fact, credal depends on precisely how strictly it is read and understood.
2. Eugenie C. Scott, “The Creation/Evolution Continuum,” National Center for Science Education, accessed Aug. 30, 2021, <https://ncse.ngo/creationevolution-continuum>.
3. Variants include concave or convex surfaces, as well as squares instead of discs (accounting for the “four corners” of the earth).
4. Edward Grant, *The Foundations of Modern Science in the Middle Ages: Their Religious Institutional and Intellectual Contexts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 57-58.
5. Bernard R. Goldstein, “Eratosthenes on the ‘Measurement’ of the Earth,” *Historia Mathematica* 11 (1984): 411-416.
6. Denis Alexander, *Rebuilding the Matrix: Science and Faith in the 21st Century* (Oxford: Lion, 2001), 24.
7. Sven Östring, “Our Miraculous Planet Earth,” *Ministry* (Dec. 2018): 6-10.
8. Lynden Rogers has outlined some of the conceptual and scientific inconsistencies with this approach. See Lynden J. Rogers, “Old Universe but Young Life?” *Christian Spirituality and Science* 10 (2014): 6-22. Young earth creationist Don Batten criticized it, claiming that “The soft gap, like the older gap idea, does not solve anything anyway.” (“Soft’ gap sophistry,” *Creation* 26, no. 3 (June 2004): 44-47.
9. Ruin-restoration proponents cite Isaiah 45:18 (God originally created good, not chaos); Ezekiel 28:13 (God created Satan as the most noble of his creatures and placed him in Eden); Jeremiah 4:23-26 (describing a time when the earth was formless and void after life on earth had been destroyed); 2 Peter 3:5-7 (interpreted by some gap theorists as describing the destruction of the original created earth by flood, not the

- Noachian flood, as the passage is interpreted by young earth creationists).
10. See, for example, Walter Galusha, *Fossils and the Word of God* (1964) cited in Tom McIver, "Formless and Void: Gap Theory Creationism," *Creation/Evolution Journal* 8, no. 3 (Fall 1988).
 11. The initial publication on this topic was Niles Eldredge and Stephen Jay Gould, "Punctuated Equilibria: An Alternative to Phyletic Gradualism" in *Models of Paleobiology*, ed. T. J. M. Schopf (San Francisco: Freeman Cooper, 1972), 82-115.
 12. See, for example, Stephen Jay Gould, *Wonderful Life: The Burgess Shale and the Nature of History* (London: Vintage, 2000).
 13. Kim Sterelny, *Darwin vs. Gould: Survival of the Fittest* (Cambridge: Icon, 2001), 75.
 14. This restatement takes note of and makes use of advances in genetics made since Darwin's time and as such is distinct from Darwin's original theory. See "Neo-Darwinism," *New World Encyclopedia*, accessed May 4, 2002, www.newworldencyclopedia.org.
 15. See, for example, Richard Dawkins and Yan Wong, *The Ancestor's Tale: A Pilgrimage to the Dawn of Time* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2004).
 16. Adrian L. Melott, "Intelligent Design is Creationism in a Cheap Tuxedo," *Physics Today* 55, vol. 6 (June 2002): 48-50. A more positive evaluation of modern argument from "intelligent design" by an author who in other regards holds to a somewhat similar position to that expressed in this paper can be found in Jack Hoehn, "The Greater Controversy—How Ellen White's Great Controversy Theme May Help Coordinate Geologic and Biblical History," *Adventist Today* 23, vol. 1, (Winter 2015): 14-21.
 17. Robert T. Pennock, "Creationism and Intelligent Design," *Annual Review of Genomics and Human Genetics* 4 (Sept. 2003): 154. Note also this comment from another author: "With fundamental elements, we can conceive of the world as being constructed, whether the Constructor be an active God or the more passive Laws of Nature. A constructed world implies order and design. And the faint suggestion of an intelligence behind that order." See Alan Lightman, *Searching for Stars on an Island in Maine* (London: Corsair, 2018), 56.
 18. Nola Taylor Redd ("Nicolaus Copernicus Biography: Facts & Discoveries," Space, accessed Aug. 8, 2021, <https://www.space.com/15684-nicolaus-copernicus.html>) attributes the statement to Luther's associate Andreas Osiander. Andreas Kleinert ("A Tangible Historical Lie: How Martin Luther was made the opponent of the Copernican world system" in *Reports on the History of Science* 26 [2003]: 101-111; English summary, accessed Aug. 6, 2021, http://www.physik.uni-halle.de/Fachgruppen/history/luther_sum.htm) suggests the entire story is false and has its origins in anti-Lutheran Catholic polemic. Ultimately, it is impossible to improve on the judgment of Sheila Rabin ("Nicolaus Copernicus" in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, accessed Aug. 6, 2021, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/copernicus/>), who while noting "there are differing accounts of what Luther said" concluded that "Martin Luther may have made negative comments about Copernicus."
 19. The American Museum of Natural History website makes this observation: "In everyday use, the word 'theory' often means an untested hunch, or a guess without supporting evidence. But for scientists, a theory has nearly the opposite meaning. A theory is a well-substantiated explanation of an aspect of the natural world that can incorporate laws, hypotheses and facts" (accessed Aug. 23, 2022, <https://www.amnh.org/exhibitions/darwin/evolution-today/what-is-a-theory>).
 20. Sterelny, *Dawkins vs. Gould*, 3-14.
 21. Although the point is subject to dispute, it is not difficult to regard Genesis 2 as being an account of the creation of the Garden of Eden, rather than an account of a creation of the world. Beyond all doubt, Genesis 3—which belongs with and depends upon Genesis 2—indicates that there was more to the world than the garden paradise.
 22. Tremper Longman III lists the most important passages dealing with creation in the Old Testament as Psalms 8, 19, 24, 33, 74, 104, 136; Proverbs 3:19-20; 8:22-31; and, Job 38:4-11. See Tremper Longman III, "What Genesis 1 and 2 Teaches (and What It Doesn't)" in *Reading Genesis 1-2: An Evangelical Conversation*, ed. J. Daryl Charles (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2013), 112-19. However, although these passages are clearly paeons of praise to God as creator, they are equally poetic reflections, rather than a description of the process. Indeed, the striking differences between Psalm 104 and Genesis 1 have been used to argue that Genesis 1 should be read literally rather than poetically. See Todd Beall, "Reading Genesis 1-2: A Literal Approach" in *Reading Genesis 1-2: An Evangelical Conversation*, ed. J. Daryl Charles (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2013), 48. Beall could easily have extended this observation to all the other passages as well.
 23. Rudolf Bultmann, "Is Exegesis without Presupposition Possible?" in *Existence and Faith: Shorter Writings by Rudolf Bultmann* (London: Collins, 1961), 342-52.
 24. This is one of few points of agreement I find with Michael Dowd. He eschews any "interest in a passage-by-passage reconciliation of the ancient story with today's cosmology." See Michael Dowd, *Thank God for Evolution* (New York: Penguin, 2007), 142.
 25. Albert C. Sundberg Jr., *The Old Testament Canon of the Early Church*, Harvard Theological Studies 20 (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1964), 131.
 26. Rogers, "Old Universe," 14-15.
 27. The fact that there are two creation accounts—one focusing on activity over seven days, the other concentrating attention on the activities of a single day—is incontrovertible whether or not one concludes that they derive from two separate sources. The literary question of two accounts should not be automatically conflated with the historical-critical question of the number of sources utilized.
 28. Of course, the author of Genesis did not have the book of Revelation to refer to as we do. The point is rather that the author of Revelation appears to have understood the phrase in Genesis 1:1 in the same way that we have suggested it should be on contextual grounds.
 29. For example, the state of earth during the millennium parallels the pre-creation chaos (Rev 20:2; Gen 1:2); the designation of Satan as "that ancient serpent" (Gen 20:2) directly echoes the Fall account (Gen 3:1-5); the absence of death (Rev 21:4) corresponds to the intention for humanity in Eden (Gen 2:9; 3:22); the presence of God with his people (Rev 21:3) correlates to Yahweh walking in Eden calling for Adam (Gen 3:8-9); the river of life parallels the four rivers that flowed out of Eden and nurtured life throughout the world (Gen 2:10-14); and the presence of the tree of life is explicitly mentioned in both settings (Rev 22: 2; Gen 2:9).
 30. For a survey of the options on this topic, see Paul Copan and William Lane Craig, *Creation out of Nothing: A Biblical Philosophical and Scientific Exploration* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2004), 36-49.
 31. Rogers ("Old Universe," 10) points out that even the denominationally funded Geoscience Research Institute has given "outright support to the old-universe position" in its journal *Origins*.
 32. Paul Davies, *The Goldilocks Enigma: Why the Universe is Just Right for Life* (London: Allen Lane, 2006), 56-98; Stephen Hawking, *A Brief History of Time: From the Big Bang to Black Holes* (London: Bantam, 1988), 121-50.
 33. Robert Jastrow, *God and the Astronomers* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978), 115-116.
 34. Hawking, *Brief History*, 36.
 35. *Ibid.*, 122.
 36. Augustine, "Literal Meaning of Genesis," 4.33.52.
 37. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 39-40.
 38. See the discussion in "Theological Problems with the Old Age for Life".
 39. Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 293.
 40. Jack W. Provonsha, "The Creation/Evolution Debate in Light of the Great Controversy" in *Creation Reconsidered: Scientific, Biblical and Theological Perspectives*, ed. James L. Hayward (Roseville, CA: Association of Adventist Forums, 2000), 305, 310.
 41. Francis Brown, Samuel R. Driver, Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1977), s.v. בֹּיֵט, I. Höver-Johag, "בֹּיֵט" in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, 15 volumes, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), 5:296-317; Andrew Bowling, "בֹּיֵט" ("tób" in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 2 vols., ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr. and Bruce K. Waltke (Chicago: Moody, 1980), 1: 345-46.
 42. Provonsha's ("Creation/Evolution Debate," 303-11) essay, Hoehn's ("The Greater Controversy," 14-21) and this paper represent variants on a single essential theme. Rather than seeing satanic attacks on God's creation as being in the creation process, Provonsha suggests that God allowed Satan to do his best to bring his alternative vision of reality to fruition. Thus, he is responsible for the development of the species up to, but not including, the image of God. At this point, God steps in and the battle is transposed to a different key. Similarly, Hoehn argues that Satan and his fallen angelic followers were present on earth before the creation of Adam and Eve. He sees in the creation a series of battles between the "intelligent designer" and an "intelligent destroyer." These two papers are the only other attempts to integrate more scientific views of origins with the Great Controversy of which I am aware.
 43. Of course, as Richard Dawkins (*Ancestor's Tale*, 646) points out, the nature of DNA and sexual reproduction means that some sort of developmental change was inevitable. (To be strictly correct, Dawkins refers to "the first replicators," which he doubts were formed with DNA. I have opted to refer to DNA in making the same point, for simplicity's sake.) From a Christian perspective, the developmental process in its entirety cannot simply be dismissed as a satanic innovation. To do so would be to give Satan far too much credit. Rather, the evolutionary process evident in the fossil record is better seen as a satanic distortion of God's creative intent.
 44. The wicked are directly said to be "like the troubled sea" (Isa 57:20) and to "walk in the ways of darkness" (Pro 2:13). Darkness becomes a metaphor for the abode of the dead (Isa 47:5; Lam 3:16) and divine abandonment (Jer 23:12; Mat 22:13, 30). Similarly, the "deep"—the word used in Genesis 1:2 for the watery chaos enshrouded in darkness—becomes a poetic synonym for the abode of the dead (Ps 69:15; 88:6). The Greek word used to translate "deep" in Genesis 1:2 later comes to be used for the place of origin of demonic torments (Rev 9:1-12) and the millennial punishment of Satan (Rev 20:1-3). Often the opposition of the darkness and water to God are historicized to specific events in the past or future: the crossing of the Red Sea (Ex 14:20-29), the historical fall of Babylon (Jer 51:13), and the eschatological drying up of the Euphrates (Rev 16:12). By contrast, Jesus is called the "light of the world" (John 8:12). He walks on water (Mat 14:25) and stills a life-threatening storm (Mark 4:39)—both of which happened in the darkness of night. The new earth is described as having neither sea nor night (Rev 21:1; 22:5).
 45. God's sovereignty in the face of opposition is clearly implied in both the Old and New Testaments. Joseph speaks of God's overruling the intention of his brothers and bringing good out of their plan to harm him (Gen 45:5). A similar implication is found in Paul's confident assertion that for those who love God "all things work together for good" (Rom 8:28).
 46. According to Nahum Sarna (*Genesis*, 24) this identification is first found in the apocryphal Wisdom of Solomon 2:24, written in the first century B.C.E.
 47. Jewish tradition tends to see the serpent as human "evil inclination," which was externalized and embodied in the serpent before the sin of Adam and Eve, but is now an internal component of human nature. See George Foot Moore, *Judaism*, 3 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1927; republished Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1960), 1: 492. Furthermore, as Sarna (*Genesis*, 24) points out, Genesis 3 actually downgrades the serpent's status as compared with that given it in the ancient Near East more generally. The serpent was widely "endowed with divine or semidivine qualities; it was venerated as an emblem of health, fertility, immortality, occult wisdom and chaotic evil; and it was often worshipped." But in Genesis 3, it alone is

- sentenced without interrogation; it alone of the three parties involved does not speak at all. Sarna concludes that in this chapter the serpent “possesses no occult powers. It is not demonic. . . . [It] is not the personification of evil.”
48. The books of 1 Chronicles and Zechariah are clearly post-exilic (given that they relate events in the late exilic period or early post-exilic period). The book of Job is undated but its theology is usually seen as reflecting a post-exilic or, at least, late pre-exilic situation, regardless of when Job himself may have lived. It may be significant that while the reader (and the writer!) knows about the dialogue between (the) Satan and God as the root of Job’s woes, neither Job nor his “comforters” take Satan into consideration when discussing his plight. On the date of Job, see Otto Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1974), 470; William Sanford La Sor, David Allan Hubbard, and Frederic William Bush, *Old Testament Survey: The Message, Form and Background of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 561-62; James L. Crenshaw, “Job, Book of” in *Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, 6 vols., ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 3: 863.
 49. Alden Thompson, *Inspiration: Hard Questions, Honest Answers* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1991), 173-86.
 50. Gerhard F. Hasel, “The Polemical Nature of the Genesis Cosmology,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 46 (1974): 81-102. The suggestion of Clifford Goldstein that any attempt to reinterpret the Genesis creation story reduces it to the level of any ancient creation myth is, at best, unfair. See Clifford Goldstein, *Baptizing the Devil: Evolution and the Seduction of Christianity* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2017), 206. The account in Genesis is a rich deposit of biblical theology, teaching as it does profound truths about both God and humanity.
 51. Provonsha, “Creation/Evolution Debate,” 311.
 52. Nancey Murphy, “Science and the Problem of Evil: Suffering as a By-Product of a Finely Tuned Cosmos” in *Physics and Cosmology: Scientific Perspectives on the Problem of Natural Evil. Volume 1*, eds. Nancey Murphy, Robert John Russell, and William R. Stoeger (Vatican City State: Vatican Observatory Publications, 2007), 135; Philip Clayton and Steven Knapp, “Divine Action and the ‘Argument from Neglect’” in *Physics and Cosmology*, 183; Dennis Edwards, “Why Is God Doing This?” in *Physics and Cosmology*, 264.
 53. Goldstein, *Baptizing the Devil*, 235.
 54. Montgomery Slatkin and Fernando Racimo, “Ancient DNA and Human History,” *PNAS* 113 (2016): 6380-87. This view is challenged by some who suggest that commonality of Neanderthal and Homo sapiens DNA is a result of common ancestry rather than later interbreeding. See Anders Eriksson and Andrea Manica, “Effect of Ancient Population Structure on the Degree of Polymorphism Shared between Modern Human Populations and Ancient Hominins,” *PNAS* 109 (2012): 13956-60.
 55. Lightman (*Searching for Stars*, 71-72) seems to suggest that the dividing line between animals and humans is the quest for meaning: “Unless there exists an infinite and permanent observer such as God—some absolute authority or scaffold by which to judge and preserve meaning—then the situation seems hopeless to me. On the other hand, perhaps my starting assumption, that meaning requires permanence, is erroneous. Or perhaps meaning itself is an illusion. After all, why should I insist on meaning? Fish and squirrels get by quite well without it” (emphasis added).
 56. Note Provonsha’s (“Creation/Evolution Debate,” 305) comment: “Only persons commit evil in the sense of SIN, for only they can be responsible through choosing.” Interestingly, philosopher Lynne Rudder Baker—to whom further reference will shortly be made—states quite categorically that only “persons” can be moral agents and that “moral sentiments like guilt and regret” depend on personhood. Animals as such are not moral agents and do not experience such things. See Lynne Rudder Baker, *Persons and Bodies: A Constitution View* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 148, 157. The importance of Baker for the position being argued here will become evident below.
 57. Peter Singer, *Rethinking Life and Death: The Collapse of our Traditional Ethics* (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1994), 177. Dawkins (*Ancestor’s Tale*, 124-26) suggests caution in making such comparisons. He prefers the analogy of two editions of the same book, which can have a very different look and feel about them. In any case, as Dawkins himself (*Pilgrimage*, 127) admits, humans and chimpanzees are “far more similar at the molecular level than expected.”
 58. Singer, *Rethinking Life and Death*, 169-174.
 59. If one regards the phrase “the highest animals” as too question-begging, evolutionary in tone, it can simply be replaced by the more cumbersome “those animals who are closest to humans in their DNA.”
 60. Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis*, rev. ed., Old Testament Library (London: SCM, 1972), 60.
 61. Baker, *Persons and Bodies*. Key elements of her position are presented more succinctly in Lynne Rudder Baker, “Persons and the Metaphysics of Resurrection,” *Religious Studies* 43 (2007): 333-48.
 62. Coincidentally, if the Bible locates the difference between animals and humans in the “image of God,” Baker (*Persons and Bodies*, 4) locates the difference between animals and human persons precisely in “first-person perspective.” She declares, “What marks persons off from everything else in the world, I shall argue is that a person has a complex mental property: a first-person perspective that enables one to conceive of one’s body and mental state as one’s own. We human persons are animals in that we are constituted by animals, but, having first-person perspectives, we are not ‘just animals.’ We are persons.” It is obvious that a dog cannot aspire to be a guard dog or to be less bad tempered; a person, however, knows that they exist as an entity and can conceive of that entity playing a different role, of being “better” than they are. Further highlighting this difference, Stuart Babbage cites G. K. Chesterton: “If I wish to dissuade a man from drinking his tenth whisky and soda, I slap him on the back and say, ‘Be a man!’ No one who wished to dissuade a crocodile from eating its
- tenth explorer would slap it on the back and say, ‘Be a crocodile!’” See Stuart Barton Babbage, *Man in Nature and Grace* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1957), 9.
 63. Pannenberg, *Introduction*, 51.
 64. If any of this were true, it might be more correct to speak of the image of God being created in humans, rather than humans being created in the image of God.
 65. Baker (*Persons and Bodies*, 160) provides her own similar list of questions that only a person can ask: “What am I? Who am I? What kind of life ought I to live?” She immediately follows this list with the comment: “Such questions could not even be understood, much less seriously asked, by a being without a first-person perspective.”
 66. It is impossible to be certain whether Genesis 3:22—“lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever” expresses a concern over a single or repeated eating from the tree. See Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis* תשס"ב, JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 18. On the one hand the language used—“take” and “eat”—echoes the language of the single act of succumbing to temptation in Genesis 3:6. See Kenneth A. Matthews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, New American Commentary 1A (Nashville, TN: B & H, 1996), 256. Furthermore, James Barr is insistent that the text cannot mean that although they have eaten of the tree already, they might continue to do so. See James Barr, *The Garden of Eden and the Hope of Immortality* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1992), 58. Gordon Wenham also sees this as the implication of the text. See Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15, Word Biblical Commentary 1* (Dallas, TX: Word, 1987), 85. Hermann Gunkel highlights an urgency in the text; God has to act “before it is too late,” suggesting a single eating is in mind. See Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1997), 24. John Skinner is explicit “that a single partaking of the fruit would have conferred eternal life.” See John Skinner, *Genesis, International Critical Commentary* (Edinburgh: T & T Clarke, 1910), 89. On the other hand, the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* appears to reject all such views. See “Genesis” in *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 7 vols., ed. Francis D. Nichol (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1979), 1:236. Furthermore, Revelation 22:2 would seem to suggest a monthly eating of the tree on the new earth. It seems most commentaries ignore this particular issue, making no comment on it.
 67. Dawkins (*Ancestor’s Tale*, 48) attributes the title to Jared Diamond, but does not provide a reference.
 68. *Ibid.*, 48-49.
 69. Emil Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1950), 95-100.
 70. Emil Brunner, “Election” in *The Great Invitation and Other Sermons* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1955), 47-48. This sermon was originally presented on Feb. 20, 1949.
 71. There are variations on this theme. Some have attempted to argue that the biblical cosmology is actual two-tiered in distinction from the usual three-tiered cosmology more generally held in the ancient world. For the purposes of this discussion, this is a difference which makes no difference. A two-tiered view has as many problems for the modern reader as a three-tiered view.
 72. Davies, *Goldilocks Enigma*, 22, 44. The rate at which galaxies speed away from each other is directly proportionate to how far away they are. Thus “a galaxy 20 million light years away is receding at twice the speed of a galaxy 10 million light years away” (Lightman, *Searching for Stars*, 166).
 73. C. F. D. Moule, “Ascension 1:9” in *Essays in New Testament Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 54-63.
 74. N. T. Wright uses less technical, but perhaps more accessible, language to make the same point: “[W]hen the Bible speaks of ‘heaven’ and ‘earth’ it isn’t talking about two localities related to each other within the same space-time continuum, nor yet about a ‘non-physical’ world on the one hand and a ‘physical’ one on the other, but about two different kinds of what we call ‘space,’ two different kinds of what we call ‘matter,’ and also, quite possibly (though this does not necessarily follow from the other two), two different kinds of what we call ‘time.’” See N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope* (London: SPCK, 2007), 126-27.
 75. To note but one example: “He [the author of Hebrews] wants to assure us that ‘the best is yet to be,’ that beyond our space-time continuum lies the invisible, eternal order. That is the real; that is to be our goal.” William G. Johnson, *In Absolute Confidence* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing Association, 1979), 157.
 76. Davies, *Goldilocks Enigma*, 103.
 77. More precisely, Gabriel is said to arrive before Daniel has finished his prayer, which shortens the duration of the journey. There is also uncertainty regarding the “word” (*dabar*) which “went out.” See the discussion in Desmond Ford, *Daniel* (Nashville, TN: South Publishing Association, 1982), 224. It is frequently taken, as here, as a command issued to Daniel. See, for example, Zdravko Stefanovic, *Daniel: Wisdom to the Wise* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2007), 351. But it could also refer to the word of revelation outlined in verses 24-27. See, for example, James A. Montgomery, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, ICC (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1927), 371-72. Perhaps the best option is that of Norman W. Porteous, who sees both meanings in this verse: “[A] revelation was given for Daniel which Gabriel had been commissioned to bring to him as one specially favored by God.” See Norman W. Porteous, *Daniel: A Commentary* (London: SCM, 1965), 139. Whichever meaning is adopted, there is a clear impression that Gabriel’s journey from heaven to earth was as quick and simple as moving from one room into an adjacent one.
 78. The fact that Augustine’s understanding of many “scientific facts” has been invalidated by modern research is irrelevant to the principle he is articulating.
 79. Augustine, *Literal Meaning of Genesis*, 1.19.39.
 80. Pannenberg, *Introduction*, 6-10.



By Makayla Mattocks

That Look Like Me

I have seen from the comfort of my tv screen so many
bodies.

Waves of diversity.

Marching for those who can no longer march for
themselves.

I have seen them gassed and killed while calling for the
justice

America ignored when it came out of our mouths.

It is a different era we are living in now.

And each time my eyes widen and cried

at the sight of thousands taking to the streets,
fighting for black lives.

I longed to be with them.

Proudly holding my sign

and chanting the names of those unjustly stolen away.

My heart ached to join the fight!

To be a part of the solution!

The beginning of a revolution!

Like those who walked with King.

And even though my mind and heart were by their sides
my body remained fixed behind the tv screen.

I was too young,

it was too dangerous,

and I know my parents wanted to send me.

Watch me keep up the fight they have been meet with all
their lives.

But they also cared for my safety.

So time and time again I watched the world go up in
heated flames.

Pointing out the deepest and darkest shames of this
country.

Fueled by raging anger I could not express!

But then one day ...

One day, finally, I found myself searching through my
drawers

for what to wear to a protest.

I was excited.

I must confess.

And maybe that was a little vain of me,

for there was a much bigger picture in view.

Much bigger than whether I picked sandals or tennis shoes.

But I had never been before!

My dream of joining the masses was coming true.

Family suited up in our BLM gear.

Eagerly squeezing into the car.

And I knew my safety was not ensured.

Yet, there was a power in the atmosphere!

Standing up for my people's emotional scars.

More than ready to pitch my tent on the frontier of what is
right.

And I am reminded of what I'm fighting for at every pass of a
mirror

or look into my father's eyes.

I'm fighting for my life!

And the lives of so many more alive and dead.

I have all the willpower of my ancestors bottled up inside!

Every emotion I've ever felt!

Every tear I've ever cried!

Then suddenly, my mind begins to flood with anxiety.

Of the scene and what could come to be.

I've seen things turn violent and ugly.

As rightful anger volcanically erupts.

Scorching the city.

I'm afraid!

Afraid of the cops in their riot gear.

Saddened by the reason I'm brought here.

But as I step into the crowd.

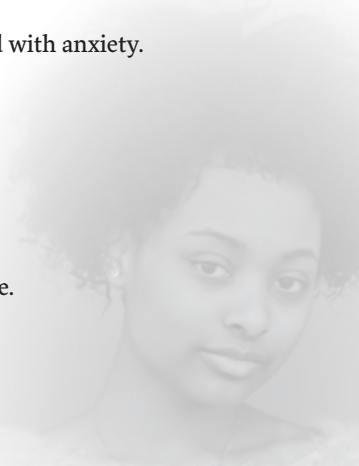
Hearing names called loud and proud.

My worries melt away as love blossoms.

Because you see...

All these people are taking up,

for those that look like me!



Makayla Mattocks is a spoken word artist and the author of What We Fight For (2021), a collection of poetry and prose that highlights the struggles of the African American community. She is now obtaining a degree in Professional Writing at Oakwood University and continues to pull inspiration from her education into her art.

-Thank you to all of those who have fought for justice no matter your race, ethnic background, religion, or sexuality. Our passion for what is right, determination to change what is wrong, and love for each other will heal our world.

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