 community through conversation

SINCE 1969

# SPECTRUM



VOLUME 51 ■ ISSUE 3-4 ■ 2023

**Special  
Double  
Edition**

community through conversation

# SPECTRUM

SINCE 1969

VOLUME 51 ISSUE 3-4 ■ 2023

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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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## ABOUT THE COVER ARTIST

**H. Leslie Foster II** is a Los Angeles-based artist (occupied Gabrielino-Tongva land) using video art and installation to create beautifully strange contemplative ecologies that explore Black and queer futurity through the lens of dream logic. His love for storytelling is inspired by a childhood spent in Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Berrien Springs, Michigan.

He completed his undergraduate degree at Southern Adventist University in 2006, and since then he's shot music videos in Serbia, founded the 501(c)(3) Traveling Muse Pictures, spent five weeks undercover in Jamaica shooting a documentary about violent homophobia, gone to Burning Man eight times, talked Vice Media into saying nice things about his art, and completed an MFA in design | media arts at UCLA in 2022, which was followed by a summer at the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in Maine. Foster is a founding member of the collective MÄARLA, which was formed by members of the 2018-2019 Torrance Art Museum FORUM residency cohorts. He was awarded the LACE Lighting Fund grant in

2023 and has had work exhibited at the Hammer Museum as part of a 2021 digital showcase and twice at the Torrance Art Museum, most recently in 2023 for his collaboration with artist Jack X Proctor, titled "Amniosis." He is assistant professor of time-based media at California State University, San Marcos, and is a 2023-2026 Visual Arts Fellow at the Montalvo Arts Center as part of the Lucas Artist Residency.

## ABOUT THE COVER ART "Heavenly Brown Body"

Leslie Foster's work has been exhibited at numerous film and video art festivals around the world, including Outfest, where his four-channel installation, "Heavenly Brown Body," won the documentary Grand Jury Prize. The work has also been exhibited internationally and includes an exhibition at the Torrance Art Museum and a showcase at the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles.



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# The Future Is Flexible

started thinking about The Shaking again in October, just as the General Conference Executive Committee concluded its Annual Council. Outside of quinquennial sessions, this group constitutes the highest governing body of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The three hundred and fifty or so executives sat for a week's worth of presentations. Like a chiasm, it was punctuated by an eighty-five-minute Sabbath sermon by Ted Wilson, the president many of them voted for three times.

Looking for insider insight, I texted a member of the executive committee and asked about his daily experience sitting there.

"Boring" was the reply. "Per usual."

I asked, "It's an insane waste of time. Does anyone there talk about that?"

"Some of the things need to be worked on."

During an odd moment when Wilson seemed to be referring to something specific, I asked the committee member for clarity.

"Didn't follow it that closely."

I replied, "As a GCEC member, does the GC pay your expenses for travel/hotel just to sit there all day?"

"Basically."

Almost a year earlier, I witnessed the denomination's top leader do something he himself introduced as "a bit different." After an hour of a 2022 Annual Council morning worship that featured two brief and inspiring kneeling prayers, Wilson asked the denominational leaders in the room and online to kneel again. He

prayed for twenty-one minutes. That business session began after an hour and thirty-eight minutes, leaving about the same amount of time for the rest of the morning's work. As almost everyone from Jesus to Ellen White has instructed about spiritual

communication—God prefers quality over quantity.

A day after this year's denominational executive meetings, I took some time in Maryland to catch up with a longtime supporter of this publishing ministry. Decades ago he worked alongside Roy Branson, the legendary former editor of this journal. During our conversation, he shared some anecdotes about Ted Wilson's father—also a GC president—who expressed public irritation with what Branson printed in earlier volumes of this journal.

Curious about the earlier Wilsonian Annual Council connection to this organization, I read the 1984 Annual Council minutes. Sandwiched between "offering promotion" and details about the upcoming General Conference Session in the Superdome, there are six pages with the heading, "Association of Adventist Forums and Spectrum—Neal C Wilson statement." In it, Wilson lists several complaints about this community—too critical of Church teaching, not evangelistic enough.

The story behind the statement is that Branson's long editorial, "A Church Of, By, and For the People"—printed two months earlier—was the real *casus belli*. Perhaps you remember reading his crisp examination of modern authoritative legitimacy—historical, corporate, and representational. Branson, himself the grandson of a GC president, shows that the Church fails each one. Instead, he states, the way its top leadership is elected most closely compares to "the forms of government found in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and the People's Republic of China."

With hindsight, and with apologies to my dear editorial predecessor, I have to side with Wilson *père* on this. The shoe doesn't fit—both of those country's entities have evolved. The passage of time has revealed that while those governmental systems have changed in significant ways, the Adventist denomination has not only remained the same, but

Continued on page 138





## Don't Throw the Second Stone

Compared to other animals, humans have comparably few instincts. Maybe the strongest ones we have are the instincts to scapegoat and to imitate. Scapegoating, often based on fear and resentment, builds and then fixates into a one-dimensional story that blames problems on others. With the human tendency to imitate, scapegoating grows to have an oversized impact. Jesus Christ received the brunt of these instincts when people around him developed a narrative, based on perceived slights and offenses, that eventually led crowds to say he must die.

In ancient times stoning was structured to be a communal response in which no one person would be held responsible for the murder. Jesus slowed the process when he said that the first stone should be thrown by one without sin. But what about throwing the second stone? When the religious elite keep people in a state of fear, they are dabbling with an evil strategy. Cultivating fears within a group will bring unintended consequences, sometimes leading to violence that was never intended by the leaders.

All four Gospels subvert scapegoating by focusing on Jesus's fearless table fellowship. Jesus's customs at the table and choice of table companions always gave offense, but we learn that grace brings good news of unimagined possibility. Jesus began to dismantle mimetic violence simply by living his core identity as Divine Healer. With courage, he visited the sick, and he healed them. Through the lens of Jesus's life, the Bible shows the nature of God and the true nature of humanity and its instincts. When Romans 12 tells us not to be conformed to the world, but to be transformed with a renewed mind, was the true intent to invite us to join him in dismantling human instincts and join him in healing?

How then shall we live? First, we must wake up. Too

often, religion has numbed people to be unconscious pawns, unaware of societal pulls and oblivious to coercion in the name of religion, but God respects us too much for that. In Matthew 26, the disciples are twice told: "Stay awake."

In an epidemic of loneliness, amidst an ethos of information overload, the need for collective belonging makes it easy to be swept into a current. The deep need to belong can affect how one distills and curates facts. How do we know whether we are joining a group who is part of the Jesus team? Maybe one way is to remember that the satanic voice always comes with accusation, while the voice of the Holy Spirit is characterized by advocacy.

Lean into the project of living above the power struggles of partisan wrangling and doctrinal posturing and above the clattering fringe voices that are now pervasive online. Acknowledge the futility of group identity based on fear and what one is "against." Search for a group identity based on the surety of God's faithfulness as described in John 10.

This means looking away from the swirling vortex of victimhood and persecution that threatens to collapse us into collective violence. This is the moment to stand on a platform of healing and collaboration with a commitment to be the voice of the vulnerable and the marginalized. Jesus challenged the domain of human power and was crushed. But then, he arose to be Lord of all and to instigate the greatest influence on human hearts of all time.

Peace and courage.

---

*Carmen Lau is board chair of Adventist Forum.*



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# Waterskiing

## Across Paul's Letters

*John Brunt made this presentation at the Charles E. Weniger Society for Excellence awards ceremony, held at the Loma Linda University Church on Feb. 18, 2023*

I recognize that the title, "Waterskiing Across Paul's Letters," is strange. It is not autobiographical. I am not a water-skier, and I am confident Paul wasn't either. The title comes from a poem. It is not a poem about Paul. It is not even religious. It is poem about poetry or, more specifically, teaching poetry. Poet and university poetry teacher Billy Collins expresses his frustration with his student's attitude toward the poems he has them read, in his poem titled "Introduction to Poetry":

I ask them to take a poem  
and hold it up to the light  
like a color slide

or press an ear against its hive.

I say drop a mouse into a poem  
and watch him probe his way out,  
or walk inside the poem's room  
and feel the walls for a light switch.

---

*John Brunt retired in 2015 after a five-decades-long career in the Adventist Church. A graduate of La Sierra University and Andrews University, he holds a doctorate in New Testament from Emory University. For fourteen years, he served as the senior pastor of the Azure Hills church in California. He also worked at Walla Walla University, where he taught for nineteen years in the School of Theology and served twelve years as vice president for academic administration. Brunt has written twelve books and more than sixty articles.*



I want them to waterski  
across the surface of a poem  
waving at the author's name on the shore.

But all they want to do  
is tie the poem to a chair with rope  
and torture a confession out of it.

They begin beating it with a hose  
to find out what it really means.<sup>1</sup>

I worry that Paul's letters have suffered the same kind of fate as the poems Collins shares with his students. Paul's letters have been tied down and beaten to extract their theoretical meaning in a way that often makes them fodder for intense and sometimes vicious debate. Today I wish to explore how a different kind of approach might get us closer to Paul's original intent.

First, however, I need to make it clear what I am NOT saying. I am not arguing that Paul's letters are devoid of profound theological content. And I am not suggesting that careful, diligent study; close readings; and attention to historical, literary, cultural, and linguistic background are unnecessary for interpreting the letters. All this is vital.

What I do want to say is that this kind of exegetical and theological investigation is only a necessary prelude to understanding Paul's letters. When we view Paul's letters as the fodder for abstract, theological debate, we miss two important features of the letters that are crucial for truly understanding them. It is these two features that I wish to emphasize today.

First, Paul was writing as a pastor, and his purposes were practical. Oh, he definitely includes deep theology because he believed that good theology has practical consequences. Here he agreed with Charlie Brown's nemesis, Lucy. In one Peanuts cartoon, Lucy and Linus are looking out the window as it pours down rain.

Lucy exclaims, "Boy, look at it rain. What if it floods the whole world?"

Linus answers, "It will never do that. In the ninth chapter of Genesis, God promised Noah that would never happen again, and the sign of the promise is the rainbow."

Lucy answers, "You've taken a great load off my mind."  
Linus replies, "Sound theology has a way of doing that!"<sup>2</sup>

Paul would agree.

Paul's letter to the Romans is a good example. It is considered the most theological of all Paul's letters. When I was in seminary, I took a course in Romans that was truly a life-changing experience—a wonderful course with one of the best teachers I have ever known. Over the course of the semester, we delved deeply into the first eight chapters of Romans. Every class period was inspiring. And at the end of the semester, the teacher said, "We have covered the meat of Romans. There are more chapters. I leave you to read them on your own. We have covered the important part."

As wonderful as the course was, I would argue we were just getting to the important part. The first eight chapters are an important theological foundation for the rest of the letter. They lay the foundation of God's grace revealed and made effective in Jesus Christ for our salvation. This puts us all in the same boat with nothing to boast about except God's amazing generosity. But Paul goes on. He moves on to chapters nine through eleven, where he warns Gentile Christians not to get big-headed because they were wild branches grafted into the olive tree of God's people. God has plans for the natural branches as well. God's plan is to save all, both Jew and Gentile. These chapters should have been the antidote to all Christian antisemitism. God loves Jews and Gentiles equally.

The letter doesn't end yet, however. Paul goes on in chapters twelve through fifteen to talk about how Christians should relate to each other, especially when they disagree. In chapters fourteen and fifteen, Paul speaks to those who disagree over specifics standards such as dietary practice. Paul admonishes the more strict not to point the finger of judgment at the less strict, and the less strict not to look down with condescending scorn at the more strict. The climax comes in Romans 15:7: "Welcome each other as Christ has welcomed you for the glory of God." Not tolerate each other. Not put up with each other. But welcome each other. Christian community transcends such differences of opinion.



Yet the letter doesn't even end there. It goes on to chapter sixteen, where Paul sends greetings to Christians in Rome—two lists of names: those in Corinth who send greetings, those in Rome who receive greetings. The names surprise us with their diversity. Jewish names, Greek names, Latin names. Female names, male names. Slave names, like Tertius and Quartus, which is simply to say third and fourth. And the name of a rich city official. All in Christian community, worshiping and serving together.

My friend Rick Rice has written a book titled *Believing, Behaving, Belonging*.<sup>3</sup> That is the way Romans moves: theological foundation of essential belief in God's grace, behaving in love toward each other, even when we disagree, and finally real, live, diverse people belonging together in a worshiping community that becomes nothing less than the body of Jesus Christ. Practical, pastoral concern is what drives the letter from beginning to end.

What a difference it would make in the Church, in our country, and in our world, if we embraced Paul's message and let our common humanity transcend our differences. I received a vivid reminder of this several years ago when I was part of what I must admit was a rather disheartening experience. I was part of the Theology of Ordination Study Committee that met four times over two years. Disheartening, because it did not go as I hoped it would. I have strong convictions about the full participation of women in ministry, and the outcome not only wasn't what I hoped, but I didn't feel that the process generated a level playing field.

There was a moment, however, when I received a lesson in what I think Paul was saying in Romans. One evening at dinner, I sat across the table from one whose views were as opposite from mine as one can imagine. We were having a discussion on the topic when this person said, "Would you do me a favor?"

I wasn't at all sure I wanted to say yes, at least until I knew what he was asking. By the way, he was a physician. He said, "When you get home, will you immediately make an appointment with a dermatologist? I'm afraid that little spot there under your eye is cancer. Please see a doctor."

I did, and it was. The surgeon who cut it out said they were glad they got it early. There are things more important than our differences, even significant differences.

We have not done justice to Paul when we have tied his letters down to beat abstract theological ideas about what he really means from them. We do justice to him when we live the practical, pastoral message built on the theological foundation of God's grace and welcome each other as Christ has welcomed us.

There is a second feature of Paul's letters we need to remember as well. The original context of Paul's letters was worship. The deacon Phoebe, who carried Paul's letter to Rome, didn't have printers or copy machines. She read the hand-copied letter to the house churches during Sabbath worship. We see elements of that original worship context within the letters.

Take Paul's letter to the Philippians, for example. Chapter two contains a passage that has served as the fodder for fierce theological debate about the nature of Christ. But both the context and language show that Paul had something quite different in mind. Paul tells the Philippians they can make his joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Then he quotes what many scholars believe was originally a hymn. He says:

In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

Who, being in very nature God,

did not consider equality with God something to be grasped;

but made himself nothing

taking the very nature of a slave,

being made in human likeness.

And being found in appearance as a man,

he humbled himself

and became obedient to death—

even death on a cross!

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place

and gave him the name that is above every name,

that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,

in heaven and on earth and under the earth,  
and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
to the glory of God the Father.

Who knows, maybe when Epaphroditus, who carried this letter from Paul back to Philippi, reached this point in the letter, they actually sang the hymn together. I find many passages in Paul that reflect this original worship context. For example, in that section in Romans 9-11 showing that God intends to save both Jew and Gentile, Paul concludes with a doxology. I can imagine Phoebe having the whole congregation join in and recite together:

Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and  
knowledge of God!

How unsearchable his judgments,  
and his paths beyond tracing out!

“Who has known the mind of the Lord?

Or who has been his counselor?”

“Who has ever given to God,

that God should repay them?”

For from him and through him and for him are all  
things.

To him be the glory forever! Amen.

This is the language of worship. When we come to worship, we do not say, “Please take out your hymnals and turn to number 232 so we can debate the meaning of stanza two.” We say, “Take out your hymnals so we can sing praises to God.” So much of the language of Paul’s letters is the language of worship. We do not do justice to Paul’s letters when we beat them with a rope to find out what they really mean in the abstract, but when we let them evoke worship as we praise God in community.

Let me make a couple practical suggestions for experiencing Paul’s letters. First, try listening to them to experience them as the original hearers would have. Even better, form a Bible study group and listen to them together. Pretend that you are back there in a first-century house church hearing them for the first time. Then let the letters serve as the basis for worshipping

together. You might even look in the scriptural index in the back of the hymnal and find hymns based on Paul’s letters and sing them together. Let the letters evoke worship. Now you may find questions that will best be answered by going to a commentary. Commentaries can be helpful. But remember, Paul didn’t write so scholars could create commentaries; he wrote so the Spirit could create community.

So I have an unusual conclusion to this lecture. I would like for us to close, not by debating Paul’s theology, as important as that theology is, but by singing Paul’s message. Hymn 232, “At the Name of Jesus,” written in the 1800s by Caroline Noel, is based on the hymn we read in Philippians 2 about Jesus humbling himself and every knee bowing and every tongue confessing.<sup>4</sup>

So let us relive Paul’s message by allowing this Philippian hymn to evoke worship as we sing together [verses one, three, and five]. I’m grateful to Larry Karpenko who will lead us and to Elvin Rodriguez for accompanying us. The words will be on the screens.

At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow,  
Every tongue confess Him King of glory now;  
‘Tis the Father’s pleasure we should call Him Lord,  
Who from the beginning was the mighty Word.

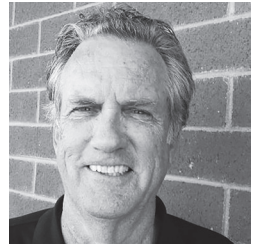
Humbled for a season, To receive a name  
From the lips of sinners, Unto whom He came;  
He is God the Savior, He is Christ the Lord,  
Ever to be worshiped, Trusted and adored.

Surely, this Lord Jesus shall return again,  
With His Father’s glory, With His angel train;  
For all wreaths of empire meet upon His brow,  
And our hearts confess Him King of glory now.

---

#### ENDNOTES:

1. Billy Collins, “Introduction to Poetry: 001,” in *Poetry 180, A Turning Back to Poetry: An Anthology of Contemporary Poems*, ed. Billy Collins (New York: Random House, 2003), 3.
2. Robert L. Short, *The Parables of Peanuts* (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), 246-247.
3. Richard Rice, *Believing, Behaving, Belonging: Finding New Love for the Church* (Roseville, CA: Association of Adventist Forums, 2002).
4. *Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal* (Takoma Park, MD: Review and Herald, 1985).



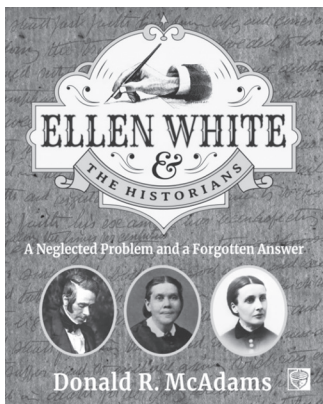
# Back to the Future

## Don McAdams Reopens an Old Question

A review of Donald R. McAdams, *Ellen White and the Historians: A Neglected Problem and a Forgotten Answer* (Westlake Village, CA: Oak & Acorn Publishing, 2022), 280 pages.

Don McAdams's new book—which is both new and old—is titled *Ellen White and the Historians: A Neglected Problem and a Forgotten Answer*. In 1974, McAdams produced a quietly revolutionary study of Ellen White's writing on John Huss in *The Great Controversy*. Historians call what he did "revisionist," though that makes it seem more benign and unthreatening than it was. McAdams had opened a can of worms. He did what he could to make it easier on the Church. The upper echelons of the General Conference knew better, and McAdams therefore modified his study in 1977, with an interest in cushioning its impact on Adventists. Arthur L. White, then director of the White Estate, urged

McAdams not to publish his research, even in its softer and gentler form. More time was needed for the White Estate board to read, evaluate, and formally respond to what the members already knew was problematic and would be difficult for clergy and laity to absorb. In fact, White did more than ask for McAdams's cooperation; he played hardball with the historian. He implied he would deny McAdams further access to the source materials if he circulated or published his document. In return for the historian's silence, White promised to do what he could among Church leaders to lobby for a better understanding of Ellen White, considering what McAdams had discovered.



The young scholar complied with White's wishes to keep his scholarship under wraps. As a testimony to the way times have changed, *Ellen White and the Historians*, too hot to handle a generation ago, is

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*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.*

now available through an official Adventist publishing house, the Pacific Union Conference's Oak and Acorn. Its once-controversial content is now trumpeted in full-page advertisements. In the subtitle to the book, the "neglected problem" is the one the Church has avoided or misunderstood for nearly a century: how were Ellen White's "visions" related to her historical writing? The "forgotten answer" is the one McAdams had offered in the 1970s: her historical narrative was drawn strictly from historians she had read—not visions she had seen.

In his early 30s, McAdams asked the Church for its answer; at 80 he's still waiting for an answer.

### **An Earthquake and Its Aftershocks**

The front cover of his book displays a delicate, feminine hand pinching an inkwell pen, and the photos of three figures who are key to the McAdams story: James A. Wylie, a Scottish historian of religion with a mop of dark hair, along with Ellen G. White, the Adventist prophet, and Marian Davis, her literary

## Thinking of Possibilities

**D**on McAdams's life-long love affair with history began with the "orange books."<sup>1</sup> As a boy he devoured these re-creations of the childhoods of famous people, ranging from George Washington and Daniel Boone to Abraham Lincoln and Jim Thorpe. Long before he read Ellen White's "red books," as they were called in those days, he was digesting these books written for children and thinking of possibilities. He never thought of writing history himself. Instead, he dreamed of making history, like the paragons honored in the orange books.

When he got to what was then Columbia Union College, his most influential teacher was historian Grady Smoot, who changed Don's mind about what he should do with his life. Smoot told his young protégé, "You know, Don, people will pay you to read history books and talk about them." In his senior year, he applied for graduate school to three of the best universities in the nation: University of Virginia, University of North Carolina, and Duke University. He was accepted at all three, but Duke offered him a full ride, paying all his tuition and living expenses. He specialized in eighteenth-century English history because, for him, it marked that fascinating and pivotal time when the West transformed the world—politically, philosophically, technologically, and socially. Don says, "In that era,

England was the cockpit of so much that happened in the rest of the world."

### **A Gifted Teacher and His Good Friends**

When he arrived at Andrews University, a young professor with a glittery new PhD, he quickly stood out as a demanding teacher. Though many students found his expectations to be totally unrealistic, he became a popular teacher among the best students on campus. His essay exams proved particularly memorable to them, provoking reflection for weeks afterward. It surprised no one that this brilliant, highly energetic, superbly educated history professor became the youngest ever "Teacher of the Year" at Andrews University.

When he thinks back on his eight years at Andrews, Don recalls the gifted students he taught there. And he never forgets—nor has he taken for granted—the great faculty that surrounded him. Herold Weiss, a New Testament scholar, was leaving Duke when Don arrived. The two became good friends at Andrews, sharing Sabbath lunches, talking theology and history, and once attending a sitar concert together in South Bend. Roy Branson became a close friend as well. Both Don and Roy had denominational pedigrees: Don's father was the publishing secretary of the General Conference, and Roy's grandfather had been General Conference president. Roy told Don,

assistant—the two women who worked together as closely as their hairdos were similar. The back cover encapsulates the bold thesis of the book and three stellar endorsements. George Knight dedicated his own cutting-edge book, *Ellen White's Afterlife*, to McAdams, who, he writes, “unintentionally initiated the journey that has led to a better understanding of the prophetic gift.” Gil Valentine, author of *Ostriches and Canaries*, which featured the McAdams story, here writes, “It is almost impossible to overestimate the importance of this

pioneering work for our understanding of Ellen White and her prophetic gift.” And William Johnsson, past editor of the *Adventist Review*, refers to the McAdams book as “groundbreaking” but an “inconvenient truth that church leaders put under wraps.”

For anyone who grew up with the Ellen White of a generation or more ago—the Ellen White who received hundreds of visions and seemingly wrote thousands of brilliant, beautiful pages based on those visions—this is a gut-punch of a book. And not just one punch.

“You’ll be president of Andrews someday, if you don’t have a heart attack first.” For Don, much of his time at Andrews felt like a movable feast. There were the countless, spirited, Sabbath school discussions followed by lavish potluck lunches that fueled the conversation long into the afternoon.

### Etching His Own Silhouette

As gifted a teacher as he had been, in his last year or two at Andrews there were hints that Don was growing beyond the classroom. He had looked up from those orange books and wanted to be more than an author describing outsized, historically significant lives; he hoped to be one of those lives. Richard Hammill, Andrews president, had been grooming him for administration, testing his aptitude for it with various assignments. He had also run for county commissioner in southwestern Michigan in 1975. And then quite suddenly and unexpectedly, at the startlingly young age of 34, he was offered the presidency of Southwestern Adventist College. It was there, in Keene, Texas, where he and his wife would raise four children, and Don would revive a faltering, provincial college.

When Don walked on campus, he saw a bleak, demoralized institution where scholars were hard to find and students tougher to recruit. He saw potential, however, where others predicted failure. In nine years at Southwestern, he proved to be a transformative leader who injected his boundless energy and inspirational vision into a college that craved both.

From his success at a small, parochial school, unknown even to most Texans, McAdams launched an influential career as an educational reformer and management consultant. He served as president of the Texas Independent College Fund, trustee of the Houston Independent School District (1990-2002), and president of the Center for Reform of School Systems for ten years.

In addition to his important posts in the Texas educational system, Don published several widely noticed books. Two of them were published by Columbia University’s Teacher College Press, and one by Harvard University Press. These three books did the most to make his case for urban education reform: first, *Fighting to Save Our Urban Schools and Winning: Lessons from Houston*; second, *What School Boards Can Do: Reform Governance for Urban Schools*; and finally, *The Redesign of Urban School Systems: Case Studies in District Governance*.

Through it all, Don never forgot where he had come from. With some satisfaction, he notes, “My Adventist friends think of me as a non-Adventist, and my non-Adventist friends think of me as an Adventist.” McAdams is living proof, however, that you can go home again. A vigorous eighty-year-old, he has returned to a research project of fifty years ago.

### ENDNOTES:

1. The “Childhood of Famous Americans” was a very popular series of easy-to-read and illustrated biographies for children, published by the Bobbs-Merrill Company from the 1940s to the 1970s.

The McAdams study, page after page and chapter after chapter, keeps coming at you with relentless persistence. It contains thought-provoking essays by McAdams, Benjamin McArthur, Ronald Graybill, and Eric Anderson.

The beating heart of the book is the literary exhibit (pages 45-167), which aligns three columns of text: James Wylie's history, Ellen White's handwritten Huss manuscript, and part of *The Great Controversy* (1911) chapter six, "Huss and Jerome." The earthshaking breakthrough in this study is the Huss chapter in Ellen White's own handwriting. McAdams was well into his research at the White Estate when Ron Graybill unearthed this precious, original manuscript. It was as if, in the midst of a tedious, mundane summer of research, lightning had struck. McAdams came to refer to it as "providential." For decades the White Estate practice had been to convert Ellen White's handwritten manuscripts into typewritten form and then discard the original holographs. Of her thousands of written pages, a tiny remnant of them remain in her own hand. The fact that the Huss pages were still in Ellen White's handwriting transformed the McAdams study from a good read into an epiphany. It became a jaw-slackening revelation of how Ellen White "wrote" *The Great Controversy*. In fact, she did not actually write the section on John Huss that McAdams studied; she passed on to her assistants what a historian had written. She interspersed her own theological insights in the narrative which her editors then ignored. What you therefore thought you knew about the Adventist prophet's inspiration, you no longer know. The book changes your mind, changes you.

Over the years, you read Ellen White yourself and were informed by her, impressed by her and, without question, inspired by her. So much so that you were quite sure you understood how inspiration worked. Ministers and Bible teachers made every effort to unlock its mysteries. You also had Ellen White herself, or the prophet's husband or son or grandson, to explain her inspiration to you. Then Don McAdams produced an earthquake of a study in the 1970s, and he has now published a new book in 2022, the aftershock of that original study, and an even larger quake than the earlier one. If you read it with the

care it deserves, you feel the ground move under your feet, and your erstwhile view of Ellen White's inspiration crumbles. In its place, you must build something new. But nothing valuable will come of that new building if we ignore what McAdams did.

### **"Whitewashing" the Problem**

The McAdams story is really two stories. There is the one about the McAdams research into Ellen White's writing practices and the unprecedented conclusions that he reaches. It is a gripping story that we had never heard before, at least not with the cogency of this argument and the astonishing extent of its evidence. There is also the story within the story of how the White Estate responded to this new view of Ellen White. This second, inner story is at least as disturbing as the first. Starkly put, it is the story of the McAdams investigation and the White Estate cover-up.

Taken together they tell us more about Ellen White than we had ever known and, likely, more than we wanted to know about those within the White Estate whose purpose in life it has been to speak for her. It is a story of how stubborn historical facts congealed into the stuff of legend and myth, how a woman who admitted to having modest writing talent became known—and celebrated—as a person with supposedly transcendent literary gifts. We want to give credit where credit is due. But as we peel back the onion of this story, we shed a few tears.

The revisionist core of the McAdams thesis is likely to hold up. It already has. Nearly fifty years since a handful of academics and churchmen first glimpsed his findings, McAdams shows he is "ready for primetime." There is nothing in his boldest claims that requires reining in or moderating. In the opening page of his book, the historian declares his thesis in clear, unmistakable terms: the polished text of Ellen White's *Great Controversy* does not borrow "paragraphs here and there that she had run across in her reading, paragraphs that described what she had already seen in vision." Instead, in her chapter on Huss, she transmitted a shortened version of Wylie's history to her readers as if the words were hers. McAdams uncovers the fact that the prophet followed Wylie's sequence, adopted

his descriptions, copied his words, even repeated his historical errors, and she routinely allowed Marian Davis to excise her original (often irrelevant) language. As the prophet's "bookmaker," Davis was hardly a shrinking violet. She removed about half of the historical material which Ellen White had selected for the chapter. And she inserted material from Wylie that the prophet had not picked.

Apologists for Ellen White could point out that the "Huss and Jerome" chapter was done in haste for the European market, and it was only one chapter of *The Great Controversy*, not the whole book. With that in mind, the White Estate asked Ron Graybill to examine another chapter in the book to see if the same pattern persisted. Graybill found that her approach to writing about Martin Luther was the same as it had been with Huss. McAdams found the same result in Ellen White's chapter on the English Reformation; it was lifted entirely from church historian Jean-Henri Merle D'Aubigne. If critics of McAdams contend that Ellen White's writings on Huss or Luther or the English Reformation were atypical for her, the burden of proof now falls on them to show us any more original historical writing. In the absence of any historical narrative original to White, McAdams has emphatically concluded, "This evidence demolished what I had been taught in my Adventist education: that Ellen White's historical writings were descriptions of what she had seen in visions."

If the more radical aspects of the McAdams thesis—which obliterates what we were taught—are here to stay, there is a conservative side to it that may not fare so well. In the face of his disturbing findings, McAdams re-examined "Ellen White's own statements about her historical work and the historical development of *Great Controversy*," and he decided "that Ellen White had not intended *Great Controversy* to be authoritative history and had never claimed that everything she described had been seen in visions of the night." McAdams's take on Ellen White's methodology, however, does not fully make clear the extent to which she understated her literary dependence on others. In the 1970s, McAdams may have settled for as generous a view of Ellen White's

historical writing as was possible, and the White Estate should have accepted it happily.

The fact is the prophet made higher claims for her historical work than she had any right to make. Indeed, over three generations, the White family typically revealed as little as possible about the human side of the prophet's work. With each new exposure to Ellen White's inadequacies as a writer, it was the family tradition to admit, often grudgingly, only as much as absolutely necessary. Her apologists sought to protect her legend, however removed it may have been from the historical reality. In the face of every new problem, they conceded as little as they could rather than as much as they should. This meant they were repeatedly forced to change their story. McAdams's work suggests, at a minimum, that Ellen White was less of a historian than most Adventists believed. Even more disturbing, a reader finishes *Ellen White and the Historians* suspecting that she was less of a visionary than we thought. That is quite another thing.

### **"To Be Young Was Very Heaven"**

Following his microscopic examination of the John Huss chapter in the mid 1970s, McAdams provided a panoramic survey—and analysis—of the "Shifting Views of Inspiration," an invaluable retrospective on "Ellen G. White Studies in the 1970s" in *Spectrum*. Reading this chapter underscores that his research had not occurred in a vacuum. As McAdams recognizes, the scholarship on Ellen White in this decade owed everything to the existence of a then-new academic journal, *Spectrum*, which provided an indispensable outlet for a revisionist historiography on the prophet. Read by an ever-widening and more-informed intellectual community, it pushed the envelope about Ellen White. It also ensured that this new scholarship, displayed between the covers of a snazzy new journal, would not disappear in a dusty, yellowing archive. McAdams notes how important periodicals were for the "Scientific Revolution" and how Ellen White studies benefitted from the same phenomenon. *Spectrum* was a major factor in the creation of a new view of the prophet.

Nothing figured in more in this story, however, with

respect to McAdams and Ellen White, than Andrews University. Much of the action in this watershed decade for Ellen White historiography resulted from the special, if short-lived, environment created for McAdams at Andrews University, where he arrived in 1967. It was, of course, not the place but the people. This was, in effect, the Andrews spring, and it brought William Wordsworth to mind:

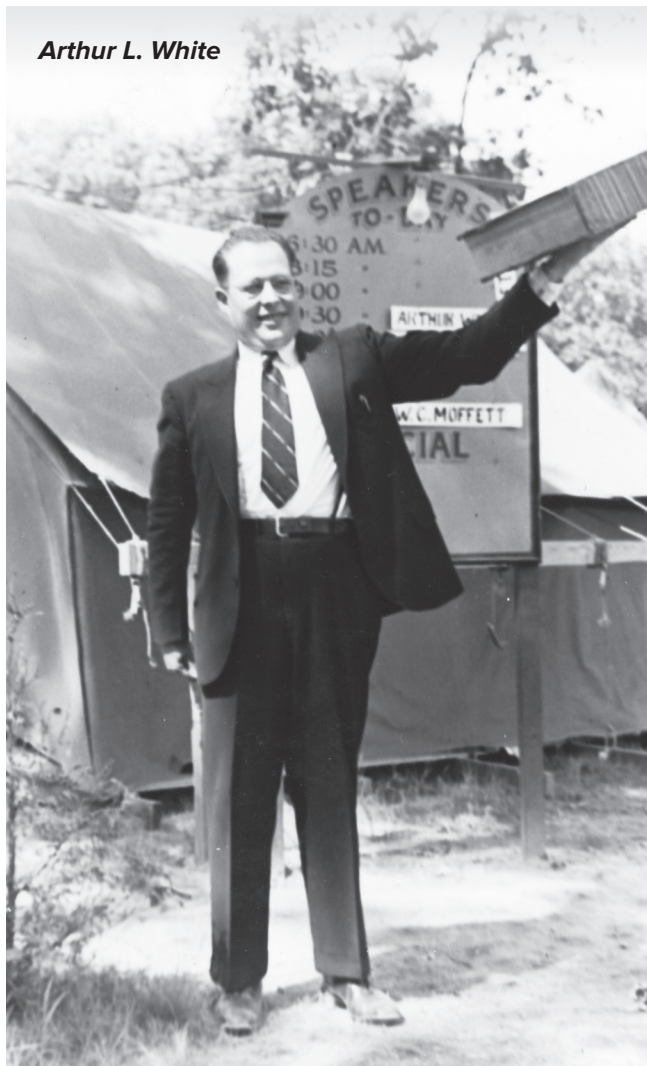
Bliss it was in that dawn to be alive,  
But to be young was very heaven.

No one did more to put the remarkable people in that place than Richard Hammill, university president. This little, unprepossessing man, armed with a doctorate from The University of Chicago, created more intellectual ferment than he intended, perhaps. What Hammill lacked in personal charisma, he made up for with a powerful, higher educational vision for Andrews. He hoped that the word “university” in Andrews University would mean more than it had ever meant for any other Adventist educational institution, and he succeeded as no one else had done before him. To this end, Hammill recruited as many young PhDs as he could from distinguished universities. In practically no time at all, Andrews enjoyed an embarrassment of academic riches.

This faculty, within a single decade, understood Ellen White as a historical and religious figure in utterly new and creative ways. The Andrews campus became a virtual “colloquium” in Ellen White studies, with many of the best minds in the Church fully engaged in—and inspired by—the enterprise. It is striking, too, how many of these academic colleagues were also friends.

When McAdams and Bill Peterson did their literary studies on Ellen White, they admired each other’s work. McAdams, whose research came three years after Peterson’s, saw the firestorm Peterson’s work on Ellen White’s interpretation of the French Revolution provoked as a warning. He therefore handled the prophet with a degree of pastoral care. Peterson, by contrast, had approached her as he would any of the Victorian literary women that he had studied at Northwestern University, without the usual deference afforded her by traditional Adventists. The White Estate’s public response to the two young scholars was a study in contrast: it lambasted Peterson in a series of

Arthur L. White



articles in *Spectrum*, and basically ignored McAdams. Later McAdams decided that it would have been a better strategy for the White Estate to ignore Peterson, too, rather than to carry on a largely losing battle with him.

McAdams had been profoundly influenced by his good friends Roy Branson and Herold Weiss, who argued in *Spectrum* for an academic analysis of Ellen White. This article had an enormous impact not only on McAdams but on all the Ellen White researchers. It provided the blueprint for Branson’s cousin, Ronald Numbers, who would soon begin his study of Ellen White and health reform. In the year Numbers taught at Andrews, McAdams became close enough to him to call him “Ronnie.” Peterson, McAdams, and Numbers met in New York City for academic meetings. Over lunch Numbers expressed his interest in writing what would become



*Prophetess of Health*; Peterson and McAdams encouraged Ronnie to do the book.

Gary Land, a shy and thoughtful intellectual historian, was also close to McAdams. He would produce several important Ellen White studies. None were more pivotal than his review of the White Estate's answer to Numbers—*A Critique of the Book Prophetess of Health*—which gave Adventist historians permission, in effect, to embrace the Numbers book.

F.E.J. Harder, another of McAdams's colleagues, piqued the historian's interest with an essay on Ellen White in *Spectrum*. Before turning his attention to Ellen White, Harder had been a president of Middle East College in Beirut, Lebanon, and had chaired the Board of Higher Education in Washington, DC. In a fresh look at the prophet, Harder drew on his doctoral dissertation at New York University. He argued that the prophet "was not writing history; she was interpreting it." This made sense to McAdams.

Benjamin McArthur and Eric Anderson, who each contributed important chapters to this new book, were proteges of McAdams before studying history at The University of Chicago. Ronald Graybill and I were Seminary students at this time and were drawn by Branson to the Ellen White "colloquium." As a result, Graybill wrote his game-changing book *Ellen G. White and Church Race Relations*, and I vaulted from Branson's Seminar in American Religion to a PhD program in American church history at The University of Chicago. I went on to focus on Adventist history and Ellen White studies.

Of all the major figures in Ellen White historiography in this era, only Walter Rea, author of *The White Lie*, was not part of the "colloquium" at Andrews University, but his work on Ellen White would have been better if he had been. For Rea, his literalism was an advantage in uncovering Ellen White's plagiarism because he had committed vast amounts of the prophet's

writings to memory. But that same fundamentalism made it a steep climb for him to cope with the revelations into the prophet's obvious humanity. Rea had the skills for identifying a major problem, but he lacked the ability to find a solution. Had he been part of the "colloquium," he might have had more to contribute.

### The White Estate and McAdams Part Company

Ben McArthur saw Adventist "liberals" as the "point of the spear" in the Ellen White studies of the 1970s. In that era, Adventist scholars were "wedded to the service of the church." McArthur came to realize, however, that "a rigorous historical self-scrutiny would confront a religious tradition fearful of its conclusions." McArthur saw, up close, his favorite professor caught between history and tradition, and what it cost him personally. Arthur White and his close associate, Robert Olson, stood for the tradition but dealt cordially with McAdams. After reading his Huss manuscript, White conceded that "[I]t became very clear to me that I had failed you, Don. . . . [W]e recognize there are problems. We have always recognized this." Olson could not have agreed more. He remarked, years later: "I recall how shocked I was to see page after page of Wylie's book in Ellen White's handwriting."

With White's and Olson's receptivity to McAdams, it looked as if everything was in place for the Church to come to terms with McAdams's controversial findings. Arthur White's tacit agreement with McAdams, however, to enlighten the Church in exchange for the historian's silence, would ultimately seem to McAdams more like a betrayal. As it turned out, the White Estate

board members never engaged in a massive, concerted re-education of Seventh-day Adventists—from the General Conference level to the laity, from professors to students, from local churches to foreign fields—so that a new generation of Church members could come to a more



realistic understanding of Ellen White without losing her as their prophet. And it might have happened in the mid-1970s—without taking another half century—had not White and Olson come face to face with Gerhard Hasel and blinked.

Hasel was an Old Testament theologian at the Seminary who had not benefitted from the Ellen White “colloquium.” He strongly objected to the McAdams study and to what he saw as the White Estate’s capitulation to it. Hasel reacted to McAdams by regressing to a view of Ellen White’s writings which the prophet herself had opposed. For all practical purposes, Hasel clung to both her inerrancy and her verbal inspiration, even when confronted with McAdams’s convincing findings to the contrary. The Hasel viewpoint was typical of traditional Adventists in this era. In principle he spurned inerrancy and in practice affirmed it. That is to say, Hasel spoke with a theological forked tongue on inspiration. He eschewed the idea of Ellen White’s inerrancy, but only because the prophet said so, and *she never made a mistake!* Hasel should have failed in his case against McAdams and the White Estate. He had taken a position that Arthur White, Olson, and McAdams knew to be theologically false, and McAdams had shown to be historically untenable. But Hasel nonetheless prevailed, at least for a time; in fact, for quite a long time.

Why would this be so? Many keepers of the tradition—both Church-appointed and self-appointed—were eager to preserve the pre-McAdams status quo. Hasel, whether based on firmly held beliefs or simply political opportunism, had offered a defense of Ellen White that was not only absurdly wrong-headed, but it ensured that the White Estate and McAdams took the more traditionalist position on the prophet’s inspiration. Notably, Hasel was never preoccupied with how closely Ellen White adhered to the Protestant historians; the issue of plagiarism mattered little to him. Her historical accuracy, by contrast, meant everything. On even the most picayune of historical details, he acknowledged no errors on her part. His failure to address adequately the plagiarism issue, however, could not have been helped when substantial amounts of plagiarism surfaced in his

own scholarly work. He justified the impropriety in a most peculiar way. It just meant, according to him, that he and the authors from whom he borrowed had been inspired by the same divine source. Whether or not Hasel meant to be taken seriously with his remark, it is unlikely anyone would have expected his answer to hold up.

### Where There Is No Vision

From beginning to end, Graybill’s chapter, “Of Dreams, Visions, and Errors,” has Hasel, and those who share his views, in its crosshairs. Graybill underscores the fact that McAdams successfully proves that the Huss chapter is based on historians not visions. He does note, however, that most critics of McAdams disagreed with another, somewhat offhanded point he had made—namely, that there were historical inaccuracies in the Huss chapter. This secondary aspect of the McAdams study, which he had left buried in the footnotes, became the obsessive preoccupation of his critics. What most concerned them were the historical mistakes. Ironically, most critics did not pay much attention to the main point McAdams made, that Ellen White’s historical narrative was not based on visions. The one notable exception to this was Arthur White himself.

Graybill sides with McAdams against his old boss at the White Estate. In doing so, his gift for probing granular historical detail serves him well. In this regard, his chapter in the McAdams book is vintage Graybill. He combs through Ellen White’s diaries and letters to determine what she was seeing in vision—or rather, by then, in dreams—around the time she wrote about John Huss. Graybill finds, in fact, that she was not shown anything in vision in 1887, when she produced the Huss chapter. In the previous decade—from 1877 to 1887—Ellen White experienced more than twenty dreams, according to Graybill, though no visions, since her open visions had ended by the mid-1870s. Throughout the decade, Ellen White recalled what amounted to mostly mundane dreams, and none of them had anything to do with epic historical events.

The prophet dreamed that a specific Adventist was still using tobacco on the sly; she had a number of

dreams which contained health instructions for her husband James; she dreamed that God would give another trial to M.E. Connell; she dreamed of being in a field of tomatoes; she dreamed of dining with a family that did not practice health reform. After scrutinizing this decade, Graybill comments that there had not been a single dream about Huss in this period. In fact, after further meticulous exploration, Graybill concludes that Ellen White made no reference to a dream or vision about Huss in her entire life. It becomes even more evident to him that the prophet did not use historians to provide “a ready and forcible presentation of the subject” as she had seen it as a visionary. Instead, her historical narrative was based solely on historians.

Graybill’s chapter offers stark, unimpeachable evidence corroborating the McAdams thesis. And for those who find the three-column literary exhibit intimidating, Graybill makes it simple. Though a visionary, Ellen White received no divine help in writing about Huss. If anyone held her hand as she wrote, it was James Wylie.

Both McAdams and Graybill realize the potency of this argument, especially for those who continue to hold a traditional view of their prophet. These historians make their way up Ellen White’s stairway and into her writing room, as it were, and examine, practically firsthand, Adventism’s most prolific and most widely read writer at work. They gaze at her pens and squint at her handwriting; they thumb through her books and periodicals lining her bookshelves and lying open on her desk. They note the literary assistants who go up and down her stairway. Neither McAdams nor Graybill, who know as much about the prophet’s writing life as anyone, seeks to undermine her as God’s Messenger to Seventh-day Adventists. They only want to better understand the nature of her ministry.

Historians, however, are not naïve about the trouble they can cause. When telling the full story of Ellen White, a quintessentially religious, transcendent figure, they expose how human and ordinary she could be. Believers had long imagined their prophet writing, under inspiration, in a room bathed in the light of heaven, with

angels pressing in close to her. But historians have a way of stripping that room of its enchantment. They do not see it ablaze with supernatural light, as Ellen White saw it. They see dim lamps. They see her books firsthand; the visions are less accessible to them. The best historians may capture the magic, a sense of the miraculous, through the eyes of the believers they study. But most fail at this. After his own highly technical probe into the historical sources and factual errors of Ellen White’s Huss study, Graybill assures believers “that the Huss chapter in *The Great Controversy* infallibly fulfills its purpose to inspire readers to stand fast for truth, whatever the cost. The inspiration of the chapter is evident in the inspiration it provides its readers.” With what may be a little theological sleight of hand, Graybill seeks here to protect his readers in the face of troublesome historical discoveries. He gives inspiration his own spin to do so.

He goes on to raise interesting questions about how Ellen White might have experienced dreams and visions and then transferred them to the written page. His speculation on how this happened evokes for me an image of Ellen White experiencing a “great controversy” vision as if she were seeing an epic historical film—or trailers from it—and then writing about it. Of course, attending a “movie” and then translating what you saw to the written page would probably be almost impossible for anyone to do. And it could be even more challenging for her if the Bohemian John Huss appeared to her in what amounted to a foreign film without subtitles. How could the visionary as “filmgoer” sort out questions of chronology or geography, or, most demanding of all, the inner thoughts of the “actors.” If a “feature film” would be hard to turn into a book, how challenging would it be to produce one based on what Willie White described as “flash-light” views? This would be more like a spontaneous “slide show” than a coherent, well-crafted “feature film.” Graybill’s musings on how Ellen White’s visions may have informed her writing are worth pondering.

It is hard to imagine the prophet transforming such impressionistic, visual images received in vision into the dense, complicated, historical narrative of *The Great Controversy*. And, in fact, there is every indication

that she did not do so. Regarding the Huss chapter, Graybill tellingly states that there is “no hint that she knew anything about Huss that she did not derive from Wylie’s book, Foxe’s *Book of Martyrs*, or some other historian.” It was Ellen White’s literary dependence on her favorite historians that prompted Dudley Canright to ask if Adventists should view D’Aubigne and the others as inspired.

### Revisiting a False Prophecy

Eric Anderson takes the wide view of the McAdams subject matter in a superb essay titled, “The Strange Death of the ‘New Orthodoxy.’” It is a deeply insightful analysis, which has less to do with Ellen White’s limitations as a writer than with shortcomings of her community’s belief in her writing. He begins by admitting to a serious error in judgment, which he had made in 1978, when first reporting in print on the McAdams research. He had been asked to provide a summary of the study for *Spectrum* since McAdams was not allowed by the White Estate to publish his own findings. In his *Spectrum* report, Anderson noted that McAdams had assumed the judicious stance of consulting the “brethren of experience,” and had finessed his more provocative conclusions, and he did so in the most conservative way possible. Though his thesis had been, at its heart, controversial, McAdams had not embarrassed the denomination, as some thought Numbers had done with *Prophetess of Health*. As a result, Anderson believed, and he was not alone in his belief, “that McAdams had created a ‘new orthodoxy,’ a skillful reinterpretation that would be accepted by Adventist historians, Church administrators, and White’s literary executors.” This would be the *new orthodoxy*.

Anderson, however, could not have been more wrong. Indeed, he confesses now to a false prophecy. Initially, Arthur White seemed to be “listening” to his late father Willie White, who had memorably commented that “there is a possibility of injuring mother’s work by claiming for it more than she claims for it.” In a more-candid-than-usual series in the *Adventist Review* on inspiration, Arthur White did his father Willie White’s

bidding in admitting to a more human prophet. Neal Wilson, the General Conference president, had “heard” Willie White, too. In the *Adventist Review*, he embraced a cautious revisionism by which he declared “originality is not a test of inspiration” and unequivocally rejected verbal inspiration. But despite this fresh start on re-educating the Church, it turned out to be a false start. The McAdams study was sidelined and ignored for decades. It became nothing close to the “new orthodoxy.” In fact, the McAdams research remained buried nearly as long as the 1919 Bible Conference transcript. *The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia* (2013) memorialized just how little progress had been made toward a new understanding of Ellen White. According to one contributor, the son of Gerhard Hasel, Ellen White’s Reformation history had been without error, and her narratives were based on prophetic dreams or visions. It was as if the McAdams discovery had dropped like a coin into a deep well, and no one heard it hit bottom.

The historiographical revolution of the 1970s and early 80s within Seventh-day Adventism called for a radically new understanding of Ellen White within the Church. Donald McAdams had taken the most pastoral care in making his case to Church leaders, but he was only one among several historians—perhaps less diplomatically skilled than McAdams—who had their own controversial cases to make. Most of these scholars were eager, young, impressively educated, and each of them viewed Ellen White through an arresting new lens: William Peterson and the French Revolution, McAdams and John Huss, Ronald Numbers and health reform, Donald Casebolt and the Waldenses, Desmond Ford and the sanctuary, Ronald Graybill and the White family, my essay on eschatology, Walter Rea and plagiarism, and Fred Veltman’s answer to Rea.

Rather than welcoming this new history as the makings of a “new orthodoxy” on Ellen White, Church leaders tended to do their best to ignore the inconvenient truths where they were not vilifying them. “Most church leaders,” Anderson notes, “avoided the comprehensive, constructive work of creating a more accurate public

understanding of Ellen White’s message and sources.” Instead, they adopted a “timid strategy” that resulted in “a precipitous drop in her influence.” The historians had done their creative work, but Church leaders had “settled for an unimaginative evasion” of the work they should have done. Anderson regrets that no more than “a dwindling band of Adventists . . . invoke [Ellen White] today” as the search for “a useable past” flounders.

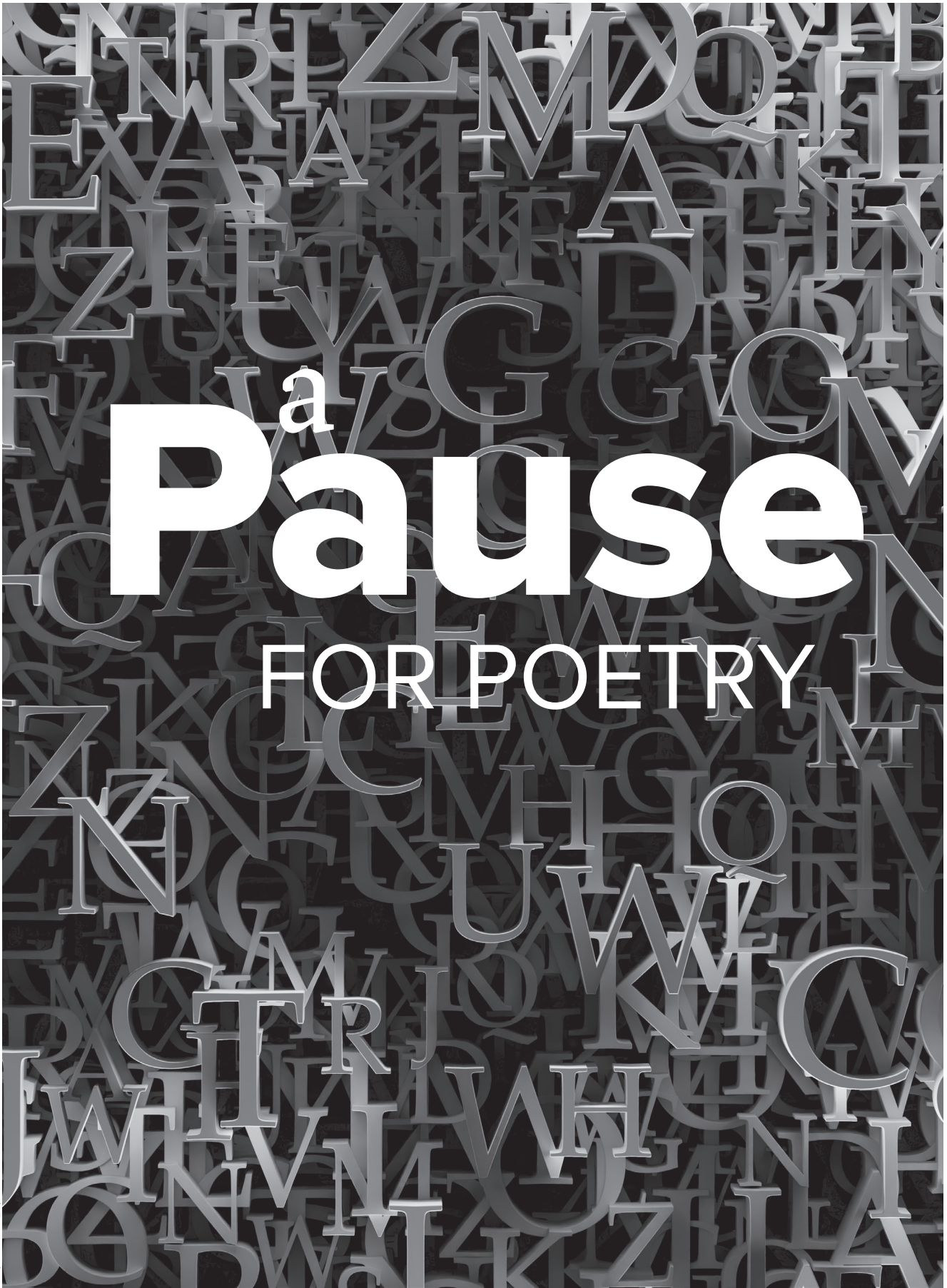
And just when so many Adventists are reading Ellen White less and quoting her less, twenty-first-century Church leaders continue to spend massive amounts of Church funds to distribute millions of copies of *The Great Controversy* to non-Adventists around the world. This means shunting aside the more human Ellen White uncovered by historians while foisting on a vast public the superwoman that Church leaders still claim her to be. In other words, Adventism’s official answer is to blanket the globe, and clog the landfills, with *The Great Controversy*, which Anderson aptly describes as an “unedited, unexplained, uncorrected” book, only to baffle “millions of unsuspecting non-Adventists.” He recognizes that “The book is a treasured symbol, a tribal totem, to Adventist traditionalists, but it is unlikely to be comprehended by typical readers.” In the fourth century, Jerome, namesake of the later Jerome juxtaposed with John Huss in Ellen White’s chapter, translated the Bible into Latin. It might make Adventist Church leaders feel better about themselves to hand out limitless copies of Jerome’s *Latin Vulgate*, but what would it accomplish?

No Seventh-day Adventist, certainly not Donald McAdams or any other revisionist historian within Adventism, is suggesting that Ellen White’s magnum opus be tied to a stake and burned alive as John Huss was. All historians are asking is that General Conference President Ted Wilson listen to his father—honor his father—Neal Wilson. For in 1980, the senior Wilson wrote such a progressive essay on Ellen White’s inspiration in the *Adventist Review* that McAdams called it the “most significant article to appear in the *Review* in this century.” The new understanding, the “new orthodoxy,” however, never came because McAdams’s

study remained high on a shelf at the White Estate, out of the reach of most Adventists.

In a way, *The Great Controversy* itself seems, with the passage of time, increasingly distant and irrelevant to many Adventists. Anderson, as an historian, points out just how culture-bound *The Great Controversy* is within nineteenth-century America. The McAdams examination of Huss as well as the English Reformation, and my study of eschatology, within their literary and cultural contexts, place the prophet squarely within her own times and not ours. But none of us are saying she should remain a relic of the past. There is plenty of room for theological work to draw on the principles spelled out in Ellen White’s great book and apply them, in fresh ways, to the new demands of our times. Roy Branson once said, in effect, there are two ways to kill a tradition: one is ignore it; the other is simply to recite over and over what the founders said in the beginning. No one is arguing that *The Great Controversy* be discarded, nor should anyone want mindlessly to quote the book verbatim. For the book to have meaning for each new generation of Adventists, it must be continually reread and, in a sense, rewritten.

As history, the book looks upon the Western world—not the entire world—as nineteenth-century Protestant historians once did. Its historical gaffe on the so-called Papal Interdict in Prague is trivial when compared to the undeniable and unsupportable anti-Catholic slant of the book that even Ellen White sought to tone down in her Spanish edition. The book’s prophecy, too, fits the social, political, and religious scene of nineteenth-century America, but hardly inspires eschatological urgency among American Adventists a century and a half later. Nor should a robustly global Church have to “turn its lonely eyes” all the way to America to know how the world ends. McAdams argues that *The Great Controversy* was not based on dreams or visions, but this was never to debunk its invaluable legacy. In the very spirit of her prophetic writings, McAdams frees contemporary Adventists to reimagine Ellen White’s history in order to make history of their own.



a  
**Pause**

FOR POETRY

istockphoto.com/Just\_Super



# SHAPERS AND MAKERS

*New Zealand-born Mary Trim, who writes as Marye Trim, has a PhD in English literature (Loughborough, UK, 1998) and studied journalism at the University of Queensland, Australia. She has authored five published books and hundreds of inspirational articles, stories, and poems. Trim was a newspaper columnist for nine years, while also working as a missionary teacher in India and Thailand. She feels called to writing ministry and sees herself as akin to those “out of Zebulun, they who handle the pen of the writer” (Judges 5:14).*

A thoughtful heart may wonder, ‘What is a poem for what, in truth, is poetry?’ Are words constrained by history, or might they flow as does a waterfall cascading down from heights of dedicated vision? Is poesy a sacred whisper stirring in the mind, an ancient form with function of a mirrored stream?

Perhaps it is portrayed already in the childhood drawing of a house, embryonal, naïve in chalk, a four walled box the shape to picture home. A centred door and curtained windows on each side, emblematic roof with chimney, smoke ascending. Within, the furniture—out of sight but clear in memory—portrayal of a metaphoric poem that speaks, composed in innocence from seed of innate knowing and desire before life’s depths of understanding bloom.

Some house designers bear the minds of visionaries, shaping timber, concrete, glass or carbon fibre to lyrics of love, or villas of villanelle, or elegies for martyrs and the slain. Matchless views they hide in frames with pure intention to conceal a smidgen. This magnifies the vision splendid, setting spirits free to soar, to feel, to comprehend, discover beauty, hidden then revealed, even the awesome truth of Omniscient, Omnipresent, Omnipotence.

Composers do the same, with *multo ritardando*, for pause to contemplate life’s major themes in melodies that challenge or are hauntingly sublime. The Master of the Universe, wordsmith and artist, painted story signs along the pilgrim way: The wise man built his house upon a rock.

Shapers and Makers seek building blocks of truth. So too, the poet, choosing gems that shine, especially the crimson cornerstone of Love’s design. Often, the pink-rose quartz of faithfulness, or glowing citrine-gold for blessing; cluster, raw or rough, each polished to perfection. Finally, the maker waits for further wisdom, as do the called from every tribe and nation, who see with faith yet through a glass but darkly.



By Phillip Whidden

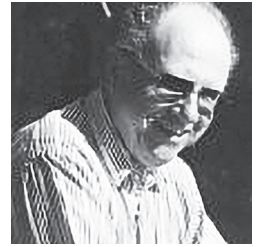
# Indiana Intersections

Indiana,  
I (my  
Eyes) have seen  
Intricate  
Interstices between  
Insistent straight lines  
Imposed upon your random landscapes, landscapes  
Irremediably rolling and rambling.  
Instead of yielding to (y)our  
Involuntary convolutions, your mere  
Idiom, you have developed a rhetoric, an  
Intractable diction of taut yet fructifying furrows,  
Inconspicuously straight-lined barns,  
Innocently straight-lined fences,  
Intersections at what are culpably called right angles,  
I say, jeremiads of junctions of straight roads.  
Indiana,  
I am touched.

---

*Phillip Whidden, a poet from Florida, who has lived abroad after his education in four American universities, has seen some of his poetry in book form, in journals, and online. His prose (such as literary criticism, campaigning literature for non-smokers' rights, news writing, and articles on many topics) has been printed around the world, and his plays have been produced in Michigan and Maryland.*





# What's In Here Out There: What is Conscious When I'm Unconscious?

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*A. Josef Greig is a professor emeritus of religion and philosophy at Andrews University. He holds a PhD from the University of Edinburgh, Scotland. "[As a writer and poet] I write mostly about the past, especially as I journey back through memory and relive my life from the perspective of the present," he said. "I am especially called to my experiences as a young man in Wyoming during the 1940s and 1950s. I grew up on the Wind River Indian Reservation, the Big Horn Flats, Winkelman Dome, at the foot of the Wind River Range of the Rocky Mountains."*

Riding on the Reservation school bus, Gebo told me that everything on earth was alive: the mountains were alive, Medicine Butte was alive, beings like us, only different; the clouds, the rain, and the river were alive. They had their own ways of speaking to us without words; we have to learn their language. For Gebo, it seemed more like gestures, more phonetics than grammar: the wind makes blowing sounds; different, expressed by rustling leaves, than in bare branches; a flooding river tells us something different than ripples given voice by rocks in the creek bed; the sky spoke by rain, thunder, and lightning; these were alive.

If, for Gebo, everything was alive, for me everything was not alive, except for what we call the biosphere; When we killed living things, they were dead. We observed things scientifically to know this; Nothing not alive could talk to us; they had no words or language.

Neither of us had heard of philosophical materialism, or that our realities of space-time, and causation were due to the way we frame them within a philosophy and an attending scientific world view, one in which the universe appears local; that is, reality is restricted by classical laws of physics and the speed of light, and that if framed by the notion of a nonlocal universe, unrestricted by the speed of light, the universe appears holistic and interconnected, reality encompassing meaning, mind, and universal consciousness.

Gebo believed that during the Peyote Ceremony those who sipped the soup were healed of illnesses, discovered their true identity in the world and among other human beings; they saw the ancestors and the buffalo come back from the spirit world; and in a vision one entered the spirit world itself. Gebo's grandfather gave him advice through dreams, which Gebo took seriously; he remained a Traditional. Peyote consciousness and dreams were the way Gebo framed what we call the real material world within which operate laws of cause and effect dependent on the speed of light. Peyote showed Gebo that our world and the spirit world were entangled, to use a term from physics: it was here and he was there; he didn't need time to travel there; after the hangover, which came first, euphoria and peyote experience was instantaneous. In other words, his universe did not appear to be local.

From my perspective, it was illusion, cultural superstition, the effect of mescaline altering the function of a normal brain, distorting reality, the incongruity of



poisonous strychnine in the peyote making  
devotees puke during the ceremony; how seriously  
could we be informed by peyote-dreams and puking?


But, I too was a dreamer, and the way the brain works  
to create what we call reality meets a problem with dreaming.  
Who's to say the dream, while unconsciously framed,  
is less real than the world created when conscious,  
and yielding something adjacent, not fake;  
or, that the world appearing during the Peyote Ceremony,  
due to an altered brain state, is unreal because it offers  
a counterfeit brain-instrument to perform measurements?  
At what point are we justified in suggesting ignorance,  
narrowmindedness, or dogmatic bias?

My brain seems awake while dreaming, and frames events  
in its own acausal and irrational way; I dream I'm conscious  
while being unconscious; that's an enigma.  
Being conscious of danger has saved me from harm or death,  
but I've also been saved from death while dreaming;  
my unconscious brain changing the narrative, awakening me,  
ending the dream, before I fall from a cliff or slip off a glacier.  
My moral sense, while dreaming, is so strong I've been stopped  
in the dream from doing something I'd been taught was wrong;  
others say, that in their dreams they do the wrong and bear  
the guilt. Are the differences only lexical?

Do we demand a new definition of material, something unrecognized,  
something compatible with teleportation-telepathy consciousness?  
To a materialistic neuroscientist, the stuff of dreams and visions  
are not real; they violate laws of nature that frame reality.  
For the logician they contradict the law of the excluded middle.  
Perhaps those laws are incomplete, thus not closed to change,  
open to additional capacity, something suggested by  
quantum entanglement, an interconnection through time and space,  
instantaneous, independent of the speed of light, and remaining  
connected, entangled, long after an initial reaction has taken place,  
a process not independent of the human mind and measurement.  
Electrons are entangled, continuously sharing information  
because of entanglement through the property of their wave function;  
who is to prioritize one rather than the other,  
to discriminate the possible from the actual?  
Local realism is incompatible with quantum mechanics:  
Can a new door be opened by imagination  
that allows us to go through it with Gebo?

Newton panics! His immutable laws seem scattered like pills  
spilled from a bottle: From the world of classical materialism,  
the promise of hidden variables is eliminated;  
purged are anthropocentric aesthetic judgments; metaphysics is  
superseded by something deeper, quantum variables, in physics itself,  
the material weirdly seeming to morph into the immaterial:  
electrons and protons consciously exchanging photons,  
fermions exchanging bosons, sharing information, mutual measurements,  
superpositions decohering, not constraining possible worlds, undetected,  
not subject to human measurement, electrons separated across the universe  
communicating instantaneously. Weirdness, magic, or religion?  
Not to worry, Newton's classical laws still get us to the Moon and back!






But why, by some, the purging of human consciousness mediating observation, or measurement in a non-local universe, with preference to decoherence by environmental factors, measurements by quantum variables, other particles? If the biosphere is alive, and humans are alive, conscious, and one with the universe, shouldn't there be orchestration by and with whatever measurement occurs in the quantum world with which our consciousness is entangled? Would it not be better to admit that consciousness has served to mediate the instantaneous behavior of entangled electrons across space?

If, as some physicists say, consciousness arose in a low entropy universe back at the big bang, providing a temporal frame, then consciousness is considered computational, our evolved material brain functioning as a quantum organ in a quantum universe: an intricate neuronal network obeying the laws of quantum theory, entangled in a universal environment. But what does this mean if the rapid expansion of the universe, big bang, includes consciousness; and in a wider emerged biosphere, than in the micro world of particle physics, an adjacent possible becoming actual? If the collapse of a superposition of wave patterns by human measurement does not mean that other possibilities in the superposition are lost, but rather decohere by the environment, quantum variables, shouldn't this imply that other forms of consciousness are active, performing measurements in the quantum world? And that what is taking place in the evolution of the biosphere, as an adjacent possible becoming actual, is by enablement, and random, rather than a causal or deterministic process; new actuals becoming new possibles by sharing information? Conscious human observation and that of quantum variables, mediate quantum measurement. The living biosphere, possibly becoming an actual, understood as a creation: the place where creative minds find meaning by exercising their artistic nature, contemplating the moral meaning of things, including the moral meaning of non-living matter, a place where living is more important than knowing. What does Gebo's world tell us about living; life had no limits for Gebo: in his dreams and visions he talked to the ancestors, and they to Gebo; the trees talked to Gebo by the wind blowing through their leaves. Call him a liar, or listen to him to know what he learned from the trees about living, or what his grandfather told him during the peyote ritual.

Was Gebo on to something I couldn't detect in what his dreaming mind and peyote enabled him to observe; what are the limits to a non-local universe independent of classical causality and the speed of light? If our universe is non-local, is not the mind as well; the mind a universe, informed by imagination: what is there is here, thus multiple states of consciousness opening doors through which we have not peered nor stepped, being blinded by ego; all contradictions, our sense of good and evil, both there and here, being resolved in our collective states of consciousness.

Do Gebo's dreams awaken us to the poetics of science rather than science, as naked reality, awakening us to a disposable poetics of dreams, metaphors evoking alternate states of human consciousness? Into the mind an abducted metaphor intrudes: "What God has joined together, let no man put asunder."

At last, poetic imagination enables us to be co-creators with the universe, or what some call God, or Being, or in the case of Gebo, the Omnipresent Spirit, creating the here and there, all entangled in Gebo's mind.



Creativity demands freedom; things could be different from what they are. What we call the non-living material features of the world seem not to be empty of moral meaning: particle sharing, or mountains, rivers and wind; exchanging information, entangled, living human consciousness mediating measurement, being measured. But in another state of consciousness, does mediating a measurement of unknown possibles yield anything detectable except to visionaries, or does it matter, and why?

When conjoined with fractals, which appear in nature, but which mathematically repeat themselves infinitely to produce an impossible pattern, a finite area with an infinite perimeter, we get another frame for consciousness. Fractals allow complexity to arise from simple repeated patterns. This suggests a connection with conscious recognition, a property of the brain framed within quantum theory, yielding the mysterious nature of the mind. Then, too, top-down causation suggests mind and consciousness affecting changes in the bottom-up process that expressed it, like software acting downward on all constructed mechanical parts of a computer; and the brain acting top down on other physical components of organisms, or the higher level of organisms controlling lower level gene expressions, lower level genes being informed and corrected by higher level protein and RNA networks. So too with ethics: higher level ethics works down to make changes in lower level ethical positions governing behavior. The point is that the ethical person has to be there at the top before the causal nature of the lower components comes clear. Such an understanding of information acting top down defies exclusive bottom up causation associated with a strict materialism.

Gebo was good at algebra, so I couldn't ignore mentioning the problem of whether numbers really exist behind the sense-recognizable figures that merely express them, and the more beguiling issue spoken of as the irrational effectiveness of mathematics to model the empirical world and make predictions, while in its pure logical form, mathematics exists exclusively as beautiful equations, the most real of metaphysical expressions of reality, but empirically empty, like the world of appearances is in Buddhism. To Gebo, I would insist that the pure logic of mathematics free of empirical reference, but used effectively to model the world of our experience must have some kind of connection with the empirical, though it seems uncanny, or magical; the logical cutting cards with the illogical; in the nature of the world there seems to be enchantment. With this, Gebo would have looked at me with only one eye open.

Having talked about particle sharing in the context of information, and continuing on to every living material thing being information, or an information pattern, actualizing a possible to an actual, I'd go on to explain this in the context of body and spirit, or soul; call it dualism, which by now would seem to be ineradicable, but may be accommodated by framing it within the idea of dual aspect monism: basically information giving form to energy. Maybe I could say that if we think of ourselves as information patterns, we can imagine radio waves spreading throughout the universe, our information, in some way, being brought to physical actuality by means of a very sensitive and powerful receiver, one capable of bringing the signal in; but I'd wonder if the metaphor was apt for Gebo's visions.

By the time I would have explained all of this to Gebo, on the bus, he would have fallen asleep, preferring his dreams to implications of weird quantum theory, entanglement, and forms of information. Would I be there, in his dreams, sipping peyote, or at the Sun Dance; what will happen to us when I wake him up, instantly, across the universe; would I prove to him that I was not his dream, or we, united in a dream?

I've come to confess that the world we claim to know remains the Other, of which we know, as some have said, neither measure nor content. Scientists call it Weird; but in our lives, it is entangled in our illusive metaphors, often randomly configured: we frame our world, live in it, find meaning in it; the ground is shaky; we dance on one instability, then another: that is how the dance goes on, through eons without us, and with us; they beget us, our values; we can't stand still too long thinking about reality. We are enabled by the dance and the song: As a Christian, my Creed is poetry, best sung without words: I sing the Gloria without knowing; by it, reality, as wave, decoheres into imagination, entangled with the Other.

Consciously, I and the Other are the result of mutual measuring. I think I understand Gebo's non-local universe without peyote. I sink and rise; rise higher by imagination. What of life, I feel and share, was shared with me by another dancer, dancing to infinity, entangled with my dreams, entangled with my imagination, my brain: it entangled with the quantum universe, entangled with the Other. Nothing to fear except the wave collapses, the dancing stops; my dreams the victims of reality.

Gebo would laugh and say we both seemed crazy to each other; everything was magical: he already knew about non-locality, entanglement, information patterns, and teleportation; these ideas had all been tested in the peyote ritual: where did the buffalo and the ancestors come from so that they were visible at the Peyote Ceremony; where did they go when the vision ended? They come and go magically. They, and we, are both here and there.

Gebo, like me, didn't know much about science and religion; but we were both religious: For Gebo, the rituals were filled with mystery, religion was there in the Sun Dance, present in the spaces between the Buffalo head and the flying Eagle, the beating of the drum, the symbolism of the center pole, the twelve poles in the canopy, the hypnotic rhythm of the dancer's feet on the earthen floor, the Peyote Ceremony.

My religion was from a book, like learning at school; I ignored my dreams. Gebo had a point: everything seemed magical: the Incarnation was magic; we feel it inside us because it was never outside of us. The future will be magic, our self-assured destruction prevented by magic, something weird, unexpected, beyond understanding, instantaneous, a random action of collective consciousness decohering the possible, into the actual, becoming new metaphors for living.

Gebo was not just someone I knew, he was a personal experience. Forty years after leaving the reservation, I went back to look for Gebo. His cousin told me he was dead. "How", I asked? "In a car wreck!" he replied: "it was his blind spot."



*Alannah Tjhatra is a senior biochemistry major at Andrews University. She was raised in Whitby, Ontario, and enjoys a good summer-sunset run.*

## Why you're having a breakdown in Target:

Because she doesn't need you anymore.  
Because she used to buy the milk for you.  
But now, you're all alone in the grocery store.

Because your heart's been splattered on the floor  
like a peach, carelessly dropped; black and bruised.  
Because she doesn't need you anymore.

You browse the drinks—you don't need to buy more,  
though it'd be nice to share some coffee brew.  
But no. You're all alone. In the grocery store

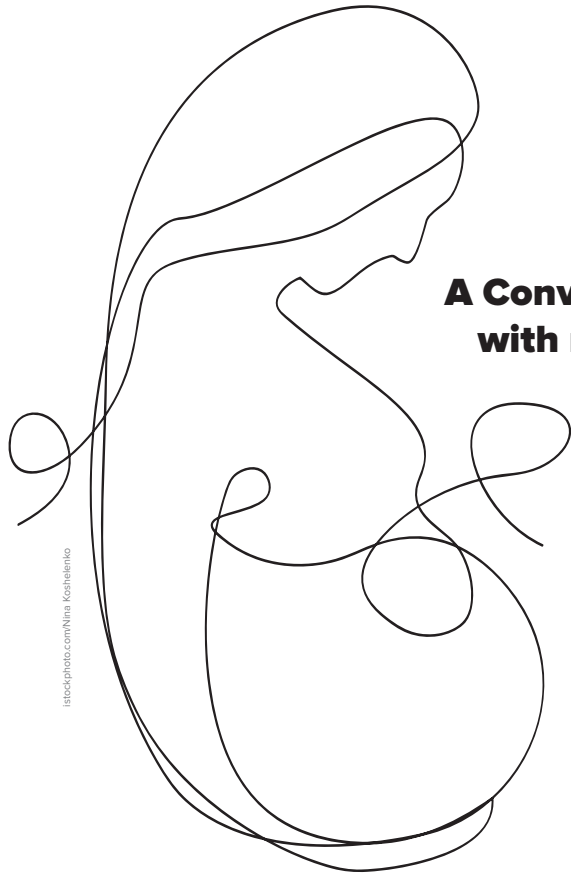
you throw nachos in the cart; you pour  
your heart into a selection of fondue,  
because she doesn't need you anymore

than soccer players need a rowing oar,  
than cookies need a glass of orange juice.  
And now, you're all alone in the grocery store.

Crying in the milk aisle is uncalled for.  
You should probably stock up on tissues.  
Because she doesn't need you anymore,  
and now, you're all alone in the grocery store.



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## A Conversation with my Birth Mother

istockphoto.com/Nina Konhelentio

Hi there. 我的名字是谢妍捷。  
No, 我叫谢妍捷. I'm sorry.  
I'm not really sure how to start this;  
my Mandarin skills are below average.

Sometimes I think about you and I wonder  
what you look like. I wonder if you're tall  
or short, though, judging from my height,  
you gotta be less than five foot three, right?

Sometimes I wonder what parts of my face  
came from yours. Did you give me your nose,  
your lips, your monolid eyes? And were you surprised  
when I popped out of you? Did you maybe think,  
*Wow, that is a beautiful baby*, or were you more like,  
*Woah. That is the ugliest baby I have ever laid eyes on.*

Really, I'm curious about a lot of things.  
For instance, did I have a baby brother?  
Was I born second or first? Did I cry a lot?  
Did you used to look at me and imagine  
what I'd be when I grew up?

Sometimes I wonder. What do you do for leisure?  
And do you have a sense of humor?  
And how do you do your hair in the mornings  
right when you wake up, and—

Would you like me?  
I mean, would we get along?  
Would we be similar in demeanor  
or have completely different dispositions?  
See, sometimes I make this pretend story  
where I'm walking down the streets  
of Hunan and I see a woman who looks suspiciously  
like an older version of myself (that's you)  
and we lock eyes. And I imagine it like this:  
a moment of recognition flashes through us  
like a bolt, like two fists  
punching us straight in our guts,  
like that scene in the rom-coms  
where they meet in the middle of the street  
and the cars have to drive around them  
because all they see is each other.  
That's you and me. And hey—  
do you like rom-coms, by the way?  
Do you like to write? (I like to write.)  
And what do you do for a job?  
What do you do in your down time,  
and did you used to sing to me?  
When I get angry, is that temper from you?  
I mean, this isn't an interview, but we got  
twenty-one years to catch up on, come on!

Or maybe, instead of everything spilling out like tea,  
we'd have nothing to say to each other at all.  
Maybe, we'd just be two stoic walls of culture shock  
and completely contrasting life experiences  
and irreconcilable differences.  
Two mouths gaping like fish, gasping for air.  
Two faces bound to separate continents, never to meet.

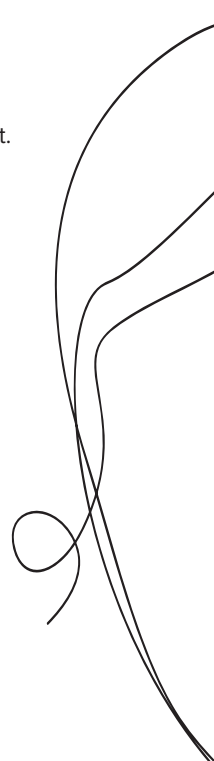
Sometimes I wonder. Do you ever think about me?  
And if you do, is it on the daily, or maybe once a year?  
Are you happy? And do you ever cry?  
And when my ear itches, have I crossed your mind?  
Do we ever think about each other at the same time?

I'd like to think that you'd be curious about me,  
but maybe you've moved past me, and that's okay.

I hope you're doing well. I hope you're happy.  
I hope. 我希望。我希望你想念我。  
Man, I need to work on the Mandarin, I'm sorry.

Anyway. I know I'm just talking to this  
imaginary version of you, but here goes:

Hi there. My name's Alannah.  
My Chinese name is 妍捷。  
And now that you know my name,  
one day,  
maybe I could get to know yours.



"You know," said the man next to me,  
"I bet I could do that."

Six-foot-square, canvas, dimly lit  
by the overhead glow of the exhibition light,  
gridded pencil lines rest atop soft  
bars of gray, barely distinguishable from  
the wall where it is hung. Its neighbors, a  
dizzying Jackson Pollock splattered with red,  
black, and yellow and a five-foot wire statue  
garnished delicately with severed human  
hair, make it look like a rogue printing error;  
binary coded gray and white that landed itself,  
somehow, in the MOMA. I remembered that Agnes Martin  
once said of her art "it is not what is seen—it is  
what is known forever in the mind," and I  
thought about when I was thirteen,  
laid flat on a squeaky, blow-up mattress,  
staring at the freshly-painted ceiling for my  
glow-in-the-dark stars and knowing they  
were gone. I said, "Well, she did it first, didn't she?"  
and turned away from the entrance of the gallery,  
where more people were beginning to walk in,  
leaving my footsteps on the concrete floor.

*Nora Martin is a psychology  
and English double major  
at Andrews University.  
She has been writing  
creatively since middle  
school, and writing poetry  
since entering college.*



istockphoto.com/nopow

## My Cat-Shaped Mug

The day I found out my mother wasn't perfect was the day she broke my cat-shaped mug. I loved that mug. I said it was fine (except

that wasn't true) and together we picked the shards up. She was tired. It was the end of the day. I found out my mother wasn't perfect

on a Sunday. I was six. It's hard to accept God isn't a woman, called *Mom*. Side hug. I loved that mug. I said it was fine, except

I've never been a good liar. There are side effects to lying, like you're on the floor—an old rug. The day I found out my mother wasn't perfect

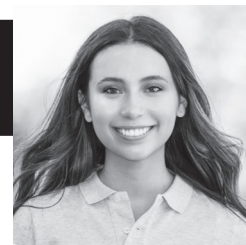
I saw her up late—super glue and ceramic. Cracks still apparent. She knew how much I loved that mug. I said it was fine (except



she knows me). I slept, while she tried to connect broken pieces back together until it was the day. I found out my mother wasn't perfect. I loved that mug. I said it was fine (except

this time it was).

*Kamila Oster is a senior at Andrews University studying English, pre-medicine, with a writing concentration and chemistry minor.*



## A Flight to San Juan



the boy on the plane  
sat in my assigned seat  
next to the window.  
he asked me my name  
before i could show him my ticket  
and point out his mistake.

and instead of saying *kah-mee-la*—  
which i would have,  
had i not been able to see his veins  
through his skin  
and bald eagle t-shirt,  
i said *kam-ee*  
and sat down in the middle seat next to him.

he talked a lot for a stranger,  
inserting his words into my mind  
like quarters in a candy machine.  
never waiting for a gumball response.

*his pet bunny ran away when he was nine.  
he's scared of planes.  
he'd never been to puerto rico before,  
and just downloaded a new crossword game,  
but was stuck on the last word.*

some four letter variation  
of I, P, S, and C.  
i watched as he strung them together,  
over and over.  
he decided *S-P-I-C*  
must be the order.  
and when the screen turned red  
he tried the same word over again.

i imagined my grandmother  
on this same flight, but in reverse.  
my age—sixty years ago.  
arriving to JFK  
only to be greeted by the same word  
the boy next to me  
believes to be the only possible  
ordering of these letters.

he sighed, turning towards me.  
“well, what do you think it is?”  
“P-I-C-S” i replied.  
“pics. like a picture.”  
i watched as he chewed my letters  
in his mind  
and decided to give it a try.

*the screen finally turned green.*



*Irina Gagiu recently graduated from Andrews University with a Bachelor of Science in psychology and minors in English and sociology. She is currently on the path to becoming a mental health counselor and loves to read, make music, and write creatively in her free time.*



## “Sure, Let’s Have Brunch Together One More Time”



Let’s sit for coffee crumble cake and slices of dough we’ll soak in eggs and milk—doused in sticky syrup and clotted cream. We’ll eat these recipes, drink sips of chai—spices distracting from audacity—the sin of this cliché of savory and sweet. This link between strawberry jam and meat feels like a weary bond more akin to the pair of old: salt and sugar—guises we hide behind. But you did choose to cheat and end this routine treat of stretched-marked skin and mornings mixed with noons—split by vices of your own making. But sure, I’ll get the juice if you’re still starved for one more tasty ruse.

## The Eternal Feminine

Paul Cézanne,  
Oil on canvas, 1877



Paul Cézanne, *The Eternal Feminine*, circa 1877, Public domain.

a spectacle of skin and rested limbs  
draped on an edifice of cloth—  
framed at the apex of a  
man-made mandorla—

alluring. opaline. bare. the femme

fatale stared upon by a  
menagerie of mingled limbs—  
angled strokes yield to  
a laddish troop of

lawyers. writers. painters. a bishop

braced with a crozier  
to magistrate over their  
weapons and methods  
of choice and approach—

easel. trumpets. pen. the eyes

of these men cannot be trusted  
yet it is Hers that are deep  
and red and missing

and somehow—She alone  
glows with the soul of one  
who will surpass them all.

eternal. feminine.  
perpetual. sin.  
immutable. immoral.

I don’t know these men  
but I know Her, well.

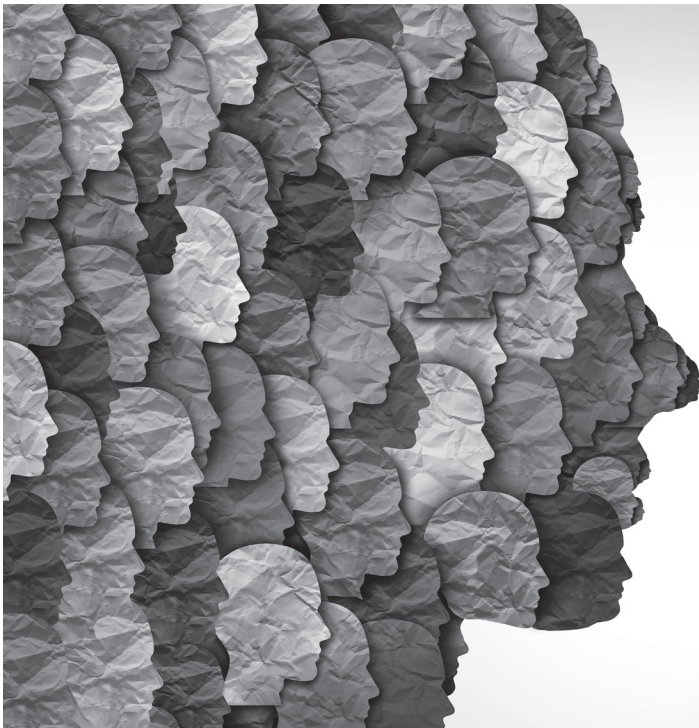
# Fireflies



Happiness was a high, ephemeral thing,  
a firefly, a small beast fanning ashes.  
Once when I was five, looking for flashes,  
swiping a jam jar, I pumped my legs on swings.  
Satisfied with my haul, like a coiled spring  
I leapt off, proud of my ample caches.  
How magically they would glow! The flashes  
would spin shining galaxies across wings,  
nature's wonderful show of elegance  
captured for my private celebration.  
Lamps switched off, creating a dark expanse,  
my eyes blink to adjust. Anticipation—  
No tip toe, no ballet magnificence.  
They died. I tipped them out in frustration.



*Shannon Huang is a senior double majoring in English writing and informatics at Andrews University. She loves talking to anyone who will sit still long enough to listen about her favorite books, the power of interdisciplinarity, and the grace of God.*



# Edgewalker Syndrome

The National Geographic cover says  
“We now know what America  
will look like in the year 2050.”

The featured article notes  
how we’re more accepting now,  
how we’re playful about it now:  
Blackanese, Chicanese, Filatina, and me?  
I’m the new A.B.C.  
American. Brazilian. Chinese.

When I was born,  
the doctor sat my mother down.  
As she cradled me in her arms,  
he sighed and shared:

Edgewalker Syndrome is a  
previously rare but increasingly  
prevalent, inherited condition.

It occurs in people who  
tightrope the line between  
black and yellow, red and white.

She’ll struggle, yes, but she will  
get the amazing chance to act as  
an ambassador for others like her.

An “ambassador” that will be...

Confident when code switching  
on the playground versus in an interview;  
calm when people stare and  
query about suntans and curly hair;  
and patient, oh so very patient  
when the waiter mistakes  
her mother as her nanny, again.

But, the doctor warns,  
fear Type II: Skinwalker Syndrome  
the progressive subvariety  
that nigh inevitably manifests  
into sneaking around at night  
stealing skin to try to fit in.  
To blend in. To infect.

I reject that doctor’s “advice.”  
Edgewalker Syndrome  
is no Jekyll and Hyde scenario  
that switches on and off on a dime.  
That “switch” is behind glass with red letter,  
“IN CASE OF EMERGENCY,  
BREAK.”

Break like that too tight tight rope  
under the feet of that A.B.C. girl.

I didn’t need a magazine cover  
to tell me what we’ll look like.  
I already knew.

*Yoel Kim is a third-year student at Andrews University, studying physics and math and minoring in English. Born in South Korea, he came to the United States in 2011 and has fallen in love with the English language and seeks to better understand and utilize the language.*



## Shoe Kicking Contest

never seen a country bird fly over sea shores  
before. it's got no place to hide—just salt &  
sand & ruthless gulls. no place for the meek.  
my poor father

stood exposed in the expensive resort plaza,  
no veil of labor & dirt & dried red peppers  
to hide his rural dialect and six dollar shirts  
from seaside natives.

7 pm, the old conference head invited attendees  
to an unfriendly competition; gathered the rich  
& important city folks to the whispering beach  
for a shoe kicking contest.

how quaint it must have been for those important  
city folks to play a rural children's game—squawking  
like gulls at the novelty. one by one they laughed &  
kicked their shoes.

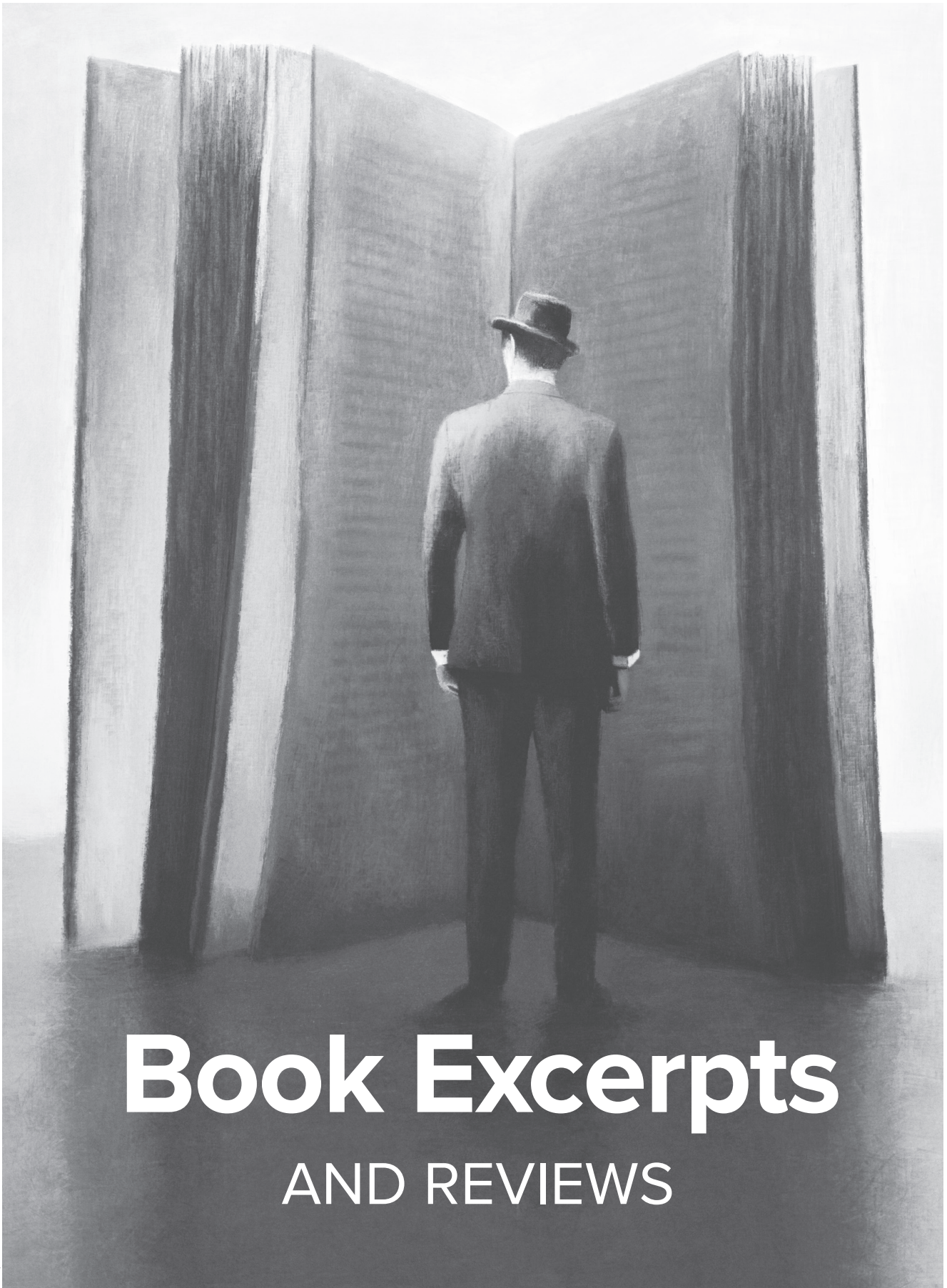
head pastor of the conference—3 paces.  
seoul university graduate—8 paces.  
venerable pastor in dress shirt—6 paces.  
some other dude—11 paces.

when my father's turn came around  
he dared  
to turn his shoe into a poor country bird  
and let it fly over the salt & sand & ruthless gulls  
far

far above the spray

until it tired and fell

18 paces away.



# Book Excerpts

## AND REVIEWS

istockphoto.com/francescoth



By Darcie Friesen Hossack

# Stillwater

## A Novel

New Westminster, BC: Tidewater Press, 2023.

### Nuteena

“Have you found yourself a recipe yet?” Lizzy, seated at a farm table on the eating side of Stillwater’s kitchen, looked up just as Mrs. Schlant bent to check inside one of two industrial-looking ovens. Having already decided not to like anything about this place, she thought how easy it would be to Gretel the woman inside and shut the door.

“I’ve been doing math,” Lizzy said, imagining a nice, crispy skin—something a Seventh-day Adventist should know nothing about.

Nevertheless, she picked up the cookbook the director’s wife had offered and flipped a few pages, looking for recipes for her home economics assignment. Recipes she was told she could cook for her future husband and his guests. All the traditional Adventist dishes were there—walnut patties in mushroom sauce, spaghetti and gluten balls—along with a few she didn’t recognize. On those pages, Lizzy stuck a series of Post-it flags, until she finally came to one she knew she had to have. She took out a recipe card from the front pocket of her backpack,

set it on the table, and printed NUTEENA at the top. Before she could get started on the ingredients though, her mother opened the mudroom door, just off the kitchen, and let herself in, along with a cold breeze.

“Still snowing out there,” Marie said, stomping her feet. “I’m afraid Daniel still has the summer tires on. And I don’t even have the right shoes.”

*Darcie Friesen Hossack is a graduate of the Humber School for Writers. Her short story collection, Mennonites Don’t Dance, was a runner-up for the Danuta Gleed Award and shortlisted for the Commonwealth Writers Prize. Having mentored with Giller finalists Sandra Birdsell (The Ruslander) and Gail Anderson Dargatz (Spawning Grounds, The Cure for Death by Lightning), Friesen Hossack is also a four-time judge of the Whistler Independent Book Awards, and a career food writer. She lives in Northern Alberta, Canada, with her husband, an international award-winning chef.*

Caught us all by surprise, I guess.”

“October’s early for snow in the Okanagan,” Mrs. Schlant agreed, already moving on to her next task.

Marie shed her jacket onto an iron hook. “Lizzy, you’d like the bakery and the homeschool, I think.”

When Marie said things like that, Lizzy felt as though her mother had never listened to a thing she said. But since Lizzy needed Marie on her side, she kept quiet as her mother stepped out of her shoes, arranged them neatly on a black rubber tray and stuffed her feet into a pair of crochet slippers from her jacket pockets. The slippers, a polyester checkerboard of yellow and brown yarn, looked like two over-ripe bananas, and Lizzy offered up a years-old prayer to keep Marie from slipping.

Crossing the expanse of green and white linoleum between them, Marie unlooped the hand-sewn mask from one of Lizzy’s ears. She pressed her cold cheek against Lizzy’s warm one, then brushed the bangs from her face. “Take that off,” Marie said. “It’s rude.”

Lizzy, who had leaned into the softness of her mother for just a moment, replaced her mask. Annoyed, she batted away the attention, picked up her pen and clicked the nib in and out a few times. At that, Mrs. Schlant made her way over to see which recipe Lizzy had chosen to copy into her scant collection.

“I thought you might choose that one,” she said, smoothing an invisible crease in her apron. “What others do you have already?”

Lizzy reached into her backpack and withdrew a Ziploc baggie containing the dozen or so recipes she had already gleaned from here and there: the potluck ladies at church, Mrs. Wroblewski down the street from them in Kelowna, her mother’s recipe box.

Mrs. Schlant unzipped the bag. “Sweet and Sour FriChik?” she said. “I don’t think I’ve tried that one.”

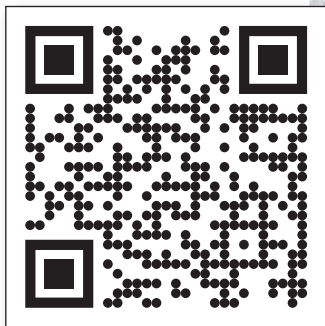
“Mom invented it for Sabbath lunches. It’s her specialty,” Lizzy said through layers of cotton that she had stitched together in sewing class, and for which she had received a C-minus. As she spoke, she lifted her feet off the floor and snugged her heels onto the front edge of her seat.

“Then it must be good,” said Mrs. Schlant. Lizzy saw her mother blush.

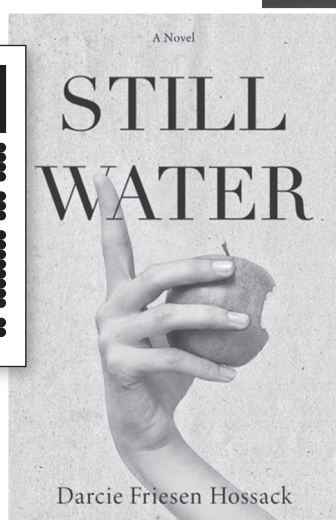
“Back when Mom was my age, she used to make it with actual chicken,” Lizzy said, which was nothing more than a matter of fact. “Oh,” said Mrs. Schlant, replacing the card in the bag and setting it on the table with a little push. “Well, I see.”

Lizzy tipped her head to one side for a better view of the director’s wife. She was a sturdy woman, more in her bones than her flesh; older than Lizzy’s mother, but not by much.

“And pork,” Lizzy added. “Sweet and sour pork was your favourite, wasn’t it, Mom? My grandpa—they lived on a farm, you see—used to let her choose which pig to kill.”



Scan the QR code to view the author talking about *Adventism and food*.



Lizzy, who'd never met her grandfather and never would, given that he had died when Marie was a girl, had no idea whether that last part was true. It had the hoped-for effect though. Mrs. Schlant's hands fluttered upwards to her chest, where she fiddled with the topmost button of her blouse. "Oh," she said again, clearly appalled by the thought of handling anything that "parted the hoof." After all, pork was at the top of the Leviticus list of forbidden foods.

Mrs. Schlant settled herself and pressed a hand onto Marie's shoulder. "My goodness. But I guess we all have a past, don't we?"

Lizzy could almost feel the hot glow of her mother's mortification. To keep from laughing out loud, she fake-sneezed into her mask, grateful it was there to conceal her smile. If only Lizzy could tell them both about her secret after-school job at a butcher shop. But then her father would find out, and that would be the end of that and a whole lot of other things, like ever leaving the house again. Worse, it could be the final push he needed to move their family here.

"I know what you mean about having a past," Lizzy said, recovering quickly. "Once, I ate almost an entire box of no-name Oreos. Double Stuff." That day, Lizzy's father had come home, found lard in the ingredients listed on the side of the package, and declared the cookies—and her—unclean. She'd been made to fast on nothing but vegetable broth for a week.

"Oba," Marie said. "We don't need to talk about that."

*Tomato juice, potato water, cornmeal,* Lizzy wrote, along with their measurements. *Peanut butter, oil, soy sauce . . .*

"Dad won't like seeing you sit like that." Marie whispered, "Or this," again snapping the elastic of Lizzy's mask.

Lizzy slipped her feet back to the floor, crossed her ankles as she had been taught at home and at her church school, but left her mask in place.

*Combine the first 14 ingredients in a blender until smooth . . .* With her recipe card complete, Lizzy set down her pen and pressed the heels of her hands against her forehead to uncrinkle tension brought on by the thought of having to cook.



Marie, who had been waiting patiently, picked up the card. "Nuteena?" There was a note of wonder in her voice. "You'll get an A for sure with that one."

Nuteena—once a beloved canned item by the same name—had been discontinued by Kellogg after they'd bought the Adventist-owned Worthington brand a number of years ago.

Marie turned to Mrs. Schlant. "Do you remember when they stopped making this? In Kelowna, we were afraid there'd be riots."

Lizzy had heard the stories. The couple who drove the mobile ABC—Adventist Book Centre—had parked their semi-trailer and truck at the SDA Academy. Word had gotten out, and a swarm of anxious wives had shown up clutching backyard wheelbarrows by their handles. Three cases were as many as anyone was allowed. Most of the families they knew were still saving their last cans, along with their best can openers, for the Great Tribulation—the time when faithful Sabbath-keepers would have to head for the mountains with their Ellen G. White libraries and vegemeats. Mrs. Wroblewski, their neighbour in Kelowna, had opened a can for Lizzy once, and she could still taste the finished product, as salty as it was beige.



Lizzy agreed it was a good start to her recipe box assignment, but even Nuteena would go only so far in the one class currently dragging down her GPA. GLUTEN STEAKS, she wrote on another card.

While Lizzy copied, Mrs. Schlant drifted to the other side of the kitchen, emptied a burlap sack of carrots into the sink and began to scrub at their skins with a brush.

“Do you know why we leave the peels on, Lizzy?” she called over her shoulder.

“Most of the vitamins are there,” Lizzy replied flatly, not surprised when her mother shoved up her sleeves to help.

Lizzy decided to take advantage of the opportunity to reward herself for her own culinary efforts. She dragged her backpack around from the back of her chair onto her lap, opened its main compartment wide and unsleeved her most prized possession: a used college microscope, lately purchased using sixteen ten-dollar bills, a lifetime of birthday money from an aunt and uncle in Saskatchewan who Lizzy had never met. She had noticed a dried smear, presumably of raw Nuteena batter, on the open page of Mrs. Schlant’s cookbook, and she wanted a closer look.

Lizzy expected her mother to tell her this wasn’t the time or the place. When she didn’t, she set her microscope on the table and snuck its power cord into a nearby outlet. Then, using the blade of a scalpel kept in her pencil case, she scraped a flake of the substance onto a glass slide and set it with a drop of water. She positioned the slide, flicked on the illuminator and adjusted the focus until the matter came into view. She had hoped to find some kind of exotic flour mite trapped in the mixture, like a specimen preserved in amber. But no. There was nothing more interesting than flecks of peanut in the smear. She switched off her microscope light and watched the two women push carrots end to end through a juicer until they had exsanguinated enough to fill three large pitchers.

As though the whirring of the machine had been a signal for the whole community to gather, the other members of Stillwater began to file in. Some came from elsewhere in the house. Others, including a troupe

of children with carrot-coloured eyes, appeared from outside. Lizzy’s father, along with her younger brother Zach, soon followed, having been on a men’s tour of the facilities. With them was an older teenage boy who balanced on one foot, ankle over knee, to unlace his boots.

“I told you it’s quite the setup they have here, isn’t it?” Lizzy’s father said, cheeks flushed or maybe a bit frostbitten. He shucked off his shoes and Marie, hurrying over, scooped them up to arrange next to her own. “The bakery, Marie. The bread. And did you see? There’s a pair of old washing machines they’ve refitted since I was here last, just to juice apples. Comes right out the drainage hose during the spin cycle.”

Lizzy made a covert gagging motion for the benefit of her brother. “Take a look at this, then.” Marie fetched the cookbook from under Lizzy’s elbow.

Daniel took the book, offhandedly at first, until he saw what it was. He then lightened his touch and held it like a relic. Uninterested, Lizzy zipped up her recipe cards, tucking them into the front pocket of her hoodie, and packed her pencil case and textbooks into her backpack.

“Where did this come from?” Daniel said.

“Loma Linda University. Department of Dietetics, 1999,” said Mrs. Schlant, with a carrot in her hand. “I was one of the students in that class.” She went over and tapped the book with the end of the vegetable. “There are hardly any copies out there.”

“Loma Linda,” Daniel said. “Now, Lizzy, there’s something for you to think about. Loma Linda’s one of the best medical schools in the world, you know. And it’s *ours*.”

“Not interested,” Lizzy muttered.

Daniel stared at her mask and flicked it with his fingers. “Now,” he said.

“There’s a pandemic, you know. And they’re all wearing masks at Loma Linda.” She tried not to think about how many people breathed and coughed in this kitchen every day.

Daniel ignored her and turned to Mrs. Schlant. “I keep telling her no one is going to need a zoologist when the



Eve talking in Garden of Eden with serpent and Adam about fruit from forbidden tree. Vintage antique drawing. Bible, Old Testament.

Tribulation starts. But nurses and dieticians . . .”

“Maybe *I* could become a dietician,” Zach ventured.  
“Do they get to cook?”

Daniel returned the book to Mrs. Schlant. “You’ll have to do very well in school if you want to go there. I’m sure it’s a difficult program.” As though on cue, the Stillwater women fell into a choreography that quickly had plates down from cupboards and mismatched casserole dishes pulled from hot ovens with scorched mitts. As they moved, the long, mid-calf bells of their dresses swished, and Lizzy realized she was the only girl or woman there

dressed in pants. Her father caught her eye, and she could tell from the look on his face that he was thinking the same thing.

“Put this away,” Daniel said, tugging the cord of Lizzy’s microscope from the wall. Marie was the one to take it, along with Lizzy’s backpack. As she did, one of the women stepped in to scrub the table and two others set down dishes and food. With the women still on their feet, the men took their seats. Lizzy realized, too late, that she had been expected to stand, and quickly scabbled to her feet.

“Don’t worry about it. Everyone takes time to learn,” said the boy from the door. “I’m Joel, and you have something on your face.”

Lizzy brushed her fingers over her cheeks. “Hilarious,” she said, and Joel shrugged.

As the men settled in, the children, including Zach, gathered around a smaller table to the side, next to a kumquat tree warming itself in the afternoon sun. Each of the children was poured a tall tumbler of carrot juice.

Before sitting, the women quickly peeled off skins of plastic wrap that had covered the dishes. Steam lifted, revealing stacks of whole-grain pancakes, alongside dishes of hashbrowns and Stripples—vegan

bacon from the ABC—that looked as though they’d started off crispy before losing their nerve. To spread over the pancakes, there was oily peanut butter in vintage gold-coloured Tupperware, along with glass jars of chunky applesauce, lightly pink from the retention of their peels.

Finally, the women, including Lizzy, took their seats. There was a hymn sung in poorly tuned unison. Director Schlant, Stillwater’s founder, was the first to speak. “Before we dig into this good food, I’d like to thank our guests for coming all the way out here from

Kelowna today," he said, to murmurs of agreement all around. "Of course, we'd already met Daniel here enough times to judge his character. But after having you with us, Marie, Lizzy, Zach, I think each one of us will agree that we'd like to see you join us here. So let me just say welcome, and we hope the feeling is mutual." The entire table turned and pressed upon them a collective, if somewhat uneven, smile.

Daniel's face split open into a Cheshire grin, while Marie, Lizzy noticed, inclined her face toward her lap. She'd missed a perfect cue.

"Um, thanks," Lizzy said in her mother's place. "But I don't think we've decided. Dad hasn't even decided yet whether he'll get the vaccine when it—"

"Well, we do certainly feel welcome," Marie interrupted, rearranging her fork and knife before putting them back exactly where they'd been.

From under the table, Lizzy felt her father's sock-covered toes dig into the bones of her foot. She removed her mask, shoved a forkful of pancake into her mouth, and swallowed it dry before realizing that everyone else was waiting for the director to pray.

After prayer, which petered off at the end so that Lizzy had to look up to find out whether it was over, conversation turned to business.

"We took a look at last year's sales from the greenhouse again," said a man at the other end of the table. "We could probably get away with planting double the edible flowers and herbs, just for the contracts we already have."

"One of the clothes dryers is acting up again, if one of the men can come and take a look," said a woman near Lizzy, who smelled strongly of fabric softener. While perfumes were frowned upon, even among less dedicated Adventists, Downy was considered a good, functional scent.

One forkful at a time, Lizzy and Marie ate, soon falling into a common pace.

"Is there any salt or pepper?" Lizzy asked, pushing her fork through a perfectly bland pile of hashbrowns.

"Pepper excites the animal passions, dear," said Mrs. Schlant, handing Lizzy a salt shaker. "Salt is fine, and cinnamon for baking, but Ellen G. White says our food

should be prepared free from strong spices."

The director cleared his throat and wiped his mouth on a starched napkin.

"That's right, Lizzy. Now, Daniel, we hear you might be willing to share some of your hospital skills," said Mrs. Schlant, tipping a second helping of Stripples onto his plate. Lizzy's father was a nurse, who would've been a doctor, he often said, if he'd been able to pay for more school. He would have gone to Loma Linda, in fact, which was responsible for churning out doctors for the Lord.

"I've worked in old folks' homes, mostly. I'd say it's the best place to practice because there's a little bit of everything." Daniel was rewarded with a round of enthusiastic murmurs and nods.

"We can certainly always use someone with medical knowledge," said the director. "Someone who isn't just quick with the medicines, forgetting that God gave us good fruits and vegetables and sense. And Lizzy, you have your father's interest in science, I hear. Perhaps you could assist with the younger children."

Lizzy lowered her fork and wrapped her fingers, overhand, around its handle, tamping down an impulse to stab. "I'm in Grade 11, but I'm already taking a bunch of Grade 12 classes this year."

"I see," the director said, forking up another mouthful of peanut butter and pancake. "Well, perhaps your education could take a new direction."

"That doesn't make any sense. Why would I do that?" Lizzy said and once again felt her father's foot.

"It does make sense, Lizzy," he said. "You just have to think about it a little longer. And you'll have plenty of time for that while you help your mother pack."

Lizzy tried to count to five. "What do you mean, pack?" she said, without even getting to two.

"It's okay, Lizzy," Marie said, reaching for her hand. "We can all talk about this once we're home."

Silence fell from one end of the table to the other. Only the children, off to the side, kept up a happy chatter. When someone finally spoke, it was the director again. "I think what your father means, Lizzy—" he said but was interrupted by Joel.

"You know, I wasn't sure about this place, either. The first time you see all these people out here with their sprouted wheat and carrot juice, living together under the same roof, it looks kind of crazy. But I came, and I can tell you I've learned a better way."

Joel sounded like a salesman. But after he had spoken, the director himself reached around a man seated between them and clapped Joel warmly on the back. "Our boy here is being modest," he said, beaming. "Do you know that the church in town found him living in their basement? Eating nothing but potluck leftovers when he could get them. And at night, when the building was locked up? He'd make his way to the upstairs library and read our dear Mrs. White. By the time someone noticed, he'd gotten through everything from *Messages to Young People* to *The Great Controversy*."

Joel patted the director's hand good-naturedly even as he peeled it away. "It's true," he said but didn't elaborate.

"Excuse me," Lizzy said, her chair scraping loudly against the floor as she stood. She was still clenching her fork and deposited it into a vase of silk flowers as soon as she reached the front foyer before continuing up a flight of shag-carpeted stairs. At the top was a U-turn: bedroom, bedroom, bedroom and a bathroom to the right.

Lizzy shut herself behind the last door and turned the lock. Inside, the smell of bleach stung the delicate membranes of her nose. There was a small window above the bathtub, providing light as Lizzy lowered the toilet lid and sat down on a rug-hooked cover the colour of yellow cough drops.

"I cannot live here," she said out loud, just to hear the sound of her own dissent.

"Lizzy?" came Marie's voice from the other side of the door.

Lizzy, startled at first, untwisted the lock and Marie let herself in to perch on the edge of the tub. She'd brought her purse with her, and from inside its opened mouth fetched a clump of cherry-flavoured hard candies. She broke one off from the cluster and offered it to Lizzy, taking another for herself. The same cherries had been present at every scraped knee and after every harsh word from her father since Lizzy was a little girl.

Lizzy picked away a ball of lint before putting the candy in her mouth, welcoming the painful pinch of saliva that followed, and the sour-sweetness on her tongue. "Do you have any aspirin in there?" Her head hurt, and she wasn't sure when it had started.

Marie drew back a little. "Are you sure you need one? You know how your father feels."

Lizzy nodded, and after digging again in her purse, Marie offered a single pink chewable from an envelope kept secret inside the purse's lining.

"Really, Mom? Children's?"

"You can have another in twenty minutes if it's not enough," Marie said, checking her watch. "We don't ever want to over-medicate. People get into trouble that way. Your father . . ."

Lizzy closed her eyes but only needed to count to three. "I don't think aspirin is what they mean," she said, pushing the candy into her cheek for safekeeping while she bit down on the tiny pink tablet. Her mother, purse settled in her lap like a cat, began to pick at the sides of her fingers, where she tended a perennial thicket of hangnails. "So what do you think, Lizzy?" Marie said, tearing off a square of toilet paper to stick to a drop of blood. "Couldn't you see us here, though?"

Lizzy sat up straight. "Can you?" she said, incredulous. "I thought you and I only agreed to come here so we could talk Dad out of it."

Marie's face fell. "I don't know. Don't you think it's nicer here than you expected? What about Mrs. Schlant giving you her recipes and what-not-all? Besides, Dad doesn't think the Cotton Glenn is going to give him much of a choice."

"Yeah, but maybe they're right, Mom. I mean, we have all of our other vaccines. Dad, too. And besides, they don't even have someone who can properly teach science and math. What would I do for school?"

Marie made a familiar sucking noise as she chewed away a stubborn snag of flesh. "Would it be so bad to spend a little more time with us before going off to university?" Marie said.

"If I go to UBC in Kelowna, I can live at home for four more years, maybe more," Lizzy said. "And what about

Zach, Mom? Did you see all those other kids with their carrot eyes? People don't live together like this, all in the same house. It's not normal."

Marie's hands dropped onto her bag and her shoulders slumped toward them. "It's not normal to you, Lizzy," she said after a full measure of silence that grew louder with every tick of Lizzy's mental clock. "But I grew up around lots of aunts and cousins, you know. And sometimes I might like to have other women around to talk to."

"Mom, you have friends back home. And me. I talk to you."

"I don't tell you about everything," Marie said. "But if you still want me to talk your father out of this, you just let me know." She snapped her purse shut, stood, and let herself out, leaving the door open to the landing.

Lizzy was left with a bitter taste in her mouth, along with the cherry candy still dissolving on her tongue. She tore off a square of toilet paper, spat out the candy and slipped it underneath her into the water below.

That's when she heard it. Someone clearing their throat.

"How long have you been spying on me?" Lizzy said, even before she saw him.

"I live here," Joel said simply, coming out from one of the bedrooms.

Lizzy crossed her arms, wishing she could puff herself up to appear larger and spikier than she was.

"I didn't mean to upset you earlier. And I'm not spying on you now." Joel leaned close to whisper. "Your mother is the one who's listening."

"Good. And you didn't upset me," Lizzy said, her voice wavering a little now at the sound of Marie's slippers shushing down the stairs.

Joel came into the bathroom and squinted at Lizzy, as though considering something, then crouched down and reached into the cabinet under the sink. He took out a glass bottle and a jar of cotton wool and set them on the counter.

"Look. I can tell you've already decided not to like me—"

"I don't have to—" Lizzy said. "I mean, I haven't decided anything."

"Just that you're too good to be here. But it doesn't matter." Joel tipped the open bottle over a wad of cotton. "Your mom will probably manage to talk your dad out of this for you, even though, from what I can tell, he'll probably make her pay for it. And you can keep on doing whatever it is you do. Biology, is it?" He squeezed out the excess of what Lizzy could now smell was rubbing alcohol into the sink. "I'm going to touch you now. If that's okay."

Lizzy drew back. "Excuse me?"

"Okay, look. I tried to tell you before at the table, but you have something blue, just there," he said, pointing at Lizzy's forehead. From a hook next to the sink, he passed Lizzy a pink-handled mirror. He swept back her bangs, and Lizzy saw what must have been apparent to half of the people at the table, even through her hedge of overgrown bangs. A smear of ink.

Lizzy checked her palm for the corresponding blob of blue and felt her cheeks prickle with heat. "I can get it," she said, quickly licking her finger when Joel moved toward her with the cotton.

"No, you'll just smear it." Joel bumped away Lizzy's hand and took the mirror. Before she could stop him, he tipped back her head and touched the cotton ball with alcohol to her face.

#### **NUTEENA**

- 2½ cups tomato juice
- 1½ cups potato water
- ½ cup cornmeal
- 1½ cups chunky organic peanut butter
- 2 tbsps vegetable oil
- 1 tbsp low-sodium soy sauce
- Pinch each of dried sage, thyme, marjoram and rosemary
- ¼ tsp garlic powder
- ¼ tsp onion powder
- 1 tsp table salt
- 1 tbsp Lawry's seasoned salt
- ¼ cup gluten flour
- ¼ cup whole wheat flour
- 2 cups rolled oats
- 1½ cups whole wheat breadcrumbs

Heat oven to 375°F. Combine the first 14 ingredients in a blender until smooth, then transfer to a large bowl. Fold in oats and breadcrumbs.

Grease five 2½ cup-sized tin cans and fill each with 1¾ cups of the batter. Place cans in a deep casserole pan and then into the oven. Fill casserole dish with boiling water to ¼ of the way up the sides of the cans. Cover the cans and dish with foil and allow to steam for 1 to 1½ hours or until the mixture is set. Remove cans from water and let cool completely. Keep covered and refrigerated, then let Nuteena come to room temperature when ready to remove from cans. Makes a total of 60 slices.

## Beet Roll

Marie adjusted the waistband of her skirt, a consequence of Mrs. Schlant's pancakes. Too much bran always made it tighten. So, for that matter, did Lizzy and Daniel whenever they disagreed. And since both of those things were true today—too much friction and too much fibre—it was difficult to know which to blame for the tightness that had begun to cinch her insides like the strings of a purse.

"How about we play a game while we drive?" Marie offered toward the backseat of the car, where Lizzy and Zach silently, if not patiently, passed the time. Both shook their heads and Marie turned back to face the road.

It had only been an hour or so since they had driven away from Stillwater. Already, though, daylight had become gritty and turned to dusk.

Without a word, Daniel switched on the headlights. They needed to be cleaned, Marie thought. Even on high beams, they barely spilled enough light for something to come into focus the moment it became too late to swerve. It could be a deer, Marie imagined. Or a rock the size of a chesterfield, slipped from an unstable bank. Or it could be one of those cheerless, soiled people who seemed, for no reason—thumbs in, they carried nothing—to drift between towns along the shoulder of the road.

"Anyone need to get out?" Marie asked a short while later when a glow on the horizon told her they were nearing the city of Vernon. If she were in charge, they'd pull over at the Dairy Queen on the highway. That's what

her own father used to do when she was a girl and he had taken her into Swift Current with him, whether it was to buy a used tractor or just to knock on watermelons together until they agreed on the perfect one.

"Zach? Lizzy?" she said over her shoulder as the Dairy Queen came into view. "Bathrooms?"

"I'm okay," Zach said.

Lizzy, reading by booklight, didn't reply, and before long they were swallowed back into an evening that seemed to have grown darker for every minute they had driven under streetlights.

Alongside an inky pool that was Kalamalka Lake, a bank of lights sped toward them. Marie sucked in a gasp of a breath, holding it until a logging truck carrying a jumble of stripped-down trees had passed. "That one was close," she said after they swept through its wake.

"It was fine, Marie. Or maybe you want to take over and drive us the rest of the way?"

No matter how long she lived in British Columbia—more than seventeen years, now—Marie had never been able to get used to its roads. She had learned to drive on the Prairies, with its stick-straight lines. BC was all ups and downs and hairpins that jumped out of the middle of nowhere and seemed to appear in a different place every time. And then, today, there was the weather. The snow from the morning had melted, but the temperature was dropping again. The water it left on the roads could freeze and turn into black ice.

"Mom, do we have anything to eat?" Zach said, and Marie relaxed a little at the sound of his voice.

"Why don't we see what Mrs. Schlant put in our bag?" Marie reached between her feet for a paper grocery sack the director's wife had handed to her on their way out of Stillwater.

"You'll find a beet roll on top," Mrs. Schlant had said. "It's a new recipe, so next time you're here, you'll let me know what you think."

Marie had promised she would. As she felt inside the bag, her head was nearly on her knees when the front passenger tire of the car thumped over something on the road.

"Cripes, anyway!" Marie said. "That could've been

a . . ." She settled herself back down. Reason told her it was just a clump of ice, shed from the mud flap of a semi that had come over Roger's Pass. But ever since she'd read a story about a mother out east who had placed her infant son in a brown paper bag and left him on a highway, Marie imagined an abandoned baby under every bump in the road. "Everyone okay back there?" she said, giving herself an excuse to count her own children.

"We're fine," Lizzy said and turned a page.

Marie found Mrs. Schlant's beet roll. Keeping a slice for herself, and one for Daniel, she passed the rest back to Zach.

Marie faced forward once again and touched her hand to her belly where her own seatbelt should have been fastened securely across her hips. For months now, the mechanism to pull the strap down had been stuck, but whenever she pressed Daniel to take a look, he told her that he'd get to it soon. "If the Lord decides it's your time, Marie, a seatbelt won't add an extra minute to your life," he said. To which Marie replied, "Maybe He gave us seatbelts so He can worry about other things." Which was as good as making sure it would never get fixed.

To keep her mind off the road, Marie bit into her beet slice, expecting, despite the name, to taste jam-filled sponge, and maybe a hint of something that resembled cream, reminiscent of the delicate cake and sweetened preserves her mother used to make. Instead, the beet roll lived up to its description. If they did end up at Stillwater, the food was something she would have to get used to. And she couldn't see how there would be many opportunities to go into town to get a little something sweet.

But when she passed Daniel a slice of what amounted to cooked beets rolled up and baked into dense bread, he ate his and reached for Marie's, too.

Marie wiped away a few crumbs from her skirt before digging into the bag of yarn she travelled with. With a few twists, she began to cast chunky knots off the end of an oversized crochet hook, and her breath, which had risen high and tight into her throat, began to deepen and slow.

"You haven't said much about the place," Daniel said after a while, reaching across the space between them to touch Marie's hand.

She flinched and dropped a stitch. Even in so little light, Marie was self-conscious about her hands. As she saw them, they were all rough and red from years of scrubbing pots and potatoes. Just flesh, skin and knuckles with circular wrinkles like elephant knees.

"Oh, well I . . ." she said.

"I know it's a big change," Daniel said, returning both hands to the wheel. "But once we all get settled in there, it won't take any time at all for it to feel like home. Don't you think so, kids?"

From the back seat, a glutinous silence stretched out until Zach, finally, gave it some slack. "They have a nice kitchen," he said, allowing Marie to dip her crochet hook back into the scarf she had begun to make. "And Mrs. Schlant knows a ton about food."

The yarn slid and looped its way through Marie's fingers, reminding her of the way they'd felt the first time Daniel had ever touched them. Slender and elegant. Piano hands. Even though her fingers had always been too short to span an entire octave.

From behind, Marie felt her daughter's feet push into her seat. A reminder. "Lizzy, do you want a scarf that's long enough to wrap a few times or just once?" she asked over her shoulder, casting for a reprieve.

"What colour is it?"

"You saw when I packed it this morning. It's that purple."

Lizzy was quiet for a moment. "Maybe just make it for yourself?" Kilometers passed without anyone saying another word. The dark shapes of mountains and trees continued to unspool along the sides of the road.

"So do we think we could get ourselves out there by the end of the month?" Daniel said, more sternly than before.

"Mom," Lizzy said.

"Well," Marie began. "You know, those kids there. The school isn't what we might have hoped. Less than we thought. And when I tried to give the children each a candy, they looked at me as though I'd offered them an onion. It's not right for kids to not at least want a little sweet."

"I see," Daniel began to grip and ungrasp the wheel.

Little strangling sounds of skin against plastic filled the silence. “So, because a few children don’t want your pocket lint, I should what?”

“We don’t even know what will happen at work. Everything could be fine. Some people say this is all still going to go away, so why don’t we just wait and see?”

For a moment, Daniel lifted both hands off the steering wheel, then slammed them back down.

“There is a lot to like out there.” Marie used her most placating tone. “But maybe we should wait a little while. Lizzy could finish up her schooling where she is, and we could see whether things get a little better for you at—”

Daniel’s fingers flexed open, his knuckles flashing white in the dark. Only the heels of his hands were touching the wheel, and Marie mistook it as a gesture of surrender.

“It’s not even all that long until she’s done,” she added, leaning against the passenger door. “I bet she could finish by the end of this school year, with all the extra classes she’s been taking. Isn’t that right, Lizzy?”

“That’s another eight months, Marie. I don’t have another eight months. Lizzy, this sounds a lot like you. Did you put your mother up to this?” He strangled the wheel a little tighter.

“Is this seriously a done deal? I don’t know if you saw, Dad, but all of those children’s eyes are orange from all that carrot juice. And, really, that many people all living in the same house? It’s weird.”

Marie lifted her hand to her mouth and tasted yarn as she bit away a shred of skin next to a nail. Lizzy had nicked the taut string of Daniel’s patience and she could almost hear her husband’s thoughts taking shape as she continued.

“Dad, I won’t learn anything out there,” Lizzy said, leaning into the space between the front seats. “I could teach every class in that place.”

Marie, hands ravelled up in purple yarn, gently pushed Lizzy back.

“I’ll tell you what, Lizzy,” Daniel said. “School isn’t everything, and it worries me that you think it is.”

“Fine, then. I’ll just become a housewife.” She switched off her booklight with a tiny click.

In the silence that followed, it began to rain, small, spattering drops that quickly became half-frozen splashes drumming wetly against the hood and roof.

“Kalamalka Lake,” Marie said, just under her breath. “Duck Lake. Wood Lake.” She counted the various waters between Stillwater and home. By feel rather than sight, she dipped her crochet hook back into the scarf. Okanagan, Kalamalka, Duck, Wood. One, two, three, four. *Over, dip, over, draw.* Marie knotted their names into the yarn of the scarf. Soon, however, she had to unravel several rows she couldn’t account for.

Around a particularly tight bend, Marie slid sideways and, unrestrained, grasped Daniel’s arm to steady herself. “I’m glad we’re almost there,” she said with a nervous laugh.

Silence.

“Dad, you’re speeding,” Lizzy said, and after a moment, Daniel slowed to just under the limit.

The car lurched over a frost heave and Marie was lifted slightly out of her seat. Her hands flew out in front of her as she landed, and the seat seemed to count every unnecessary ounce against her.

Mennonite thighs, Marie thought, trying to regret the varenyky and cream gravy of her childhood. She had already been soft by the time she met Daniel. Two children later, and even though she had agreed to a vegetarian lifestyle, her belly had taken on the consistency of punched-down bread dough.

Marie relooped her yarn and tucked back a tendril of hair that had escaped from the bun at the back of her head. No longer light brown or dark blond or even grey, now it had become a shade that, whenever she washed another clump of strands down the shower drain, reminded her of the dead mice she found every autumn in the kitchen glue traps Daniel set inside her cupboards.

“Marie, why don’t we try some of that bread next?” Daniel said. The rain had stopped, although the road remained splashy with puddles. “Lizzy, I’m sure a future biologist will appreciate this. At Stillwater, they make their bread from sprouted grains. We can use the rest for tomorrow morning’s toast.”

Marie could tell he was offering an olive branch and



said a little prayer that her daughter would accept it.

“That’s botany,” Lizzy said.

“Why do they sprout it?” Zach asked, accepting the loaf Marie passed back. “Does it have better flavour that way?”

“You guys tell us,” Daniel said.

From the back seat came a crinkle of paper, after which Marie felt the remaining loaf slide over her shoulder from behind. She took it and removed two slices, handing one to Daniel and keeping the other for herself. She was still working hard on her first bite when Zach offered an opinion.

“It’s like loofah!” he said with a note of horrified wonder. Marie’s stomach flopped.

“Think of it toasted with some margarine and honey,” she said, encouraging him to say something nice.

“Honey on loofah is still loofah.”

“Nutty. That’s the word. It’s nutty.” She reached back into the bread bag and was about to offer everyone a second slice when Daniel gently lowered the bag back into Marie’s lap.

“What about you, Lizzy?” Daniel said.

“It tastes healthy. But Mrs. Wroblewski’s bread is a thousand times better and it’s healthy, too. And we don’t have to move to a commune to get it.”

“Kids, you know if it were up to your mother, we’d eat nothing but white bread. Fried white dough. Boiled white dough. And white gravy over it all.”

He was laughing, but it felt like a trap. He and Marie had long ago agreed not to confuse the kids with ideas from a different time in her life. It was a promise Marie had occasionally broken, when she found a particularly good watermelon to share with the kids, by frying up small batches of *rollkuchen* to accompany it when Daniel was at work. Mennonites always ate *rollkuchen* with watermelon in the summer.

“Not everything about where I came from was so bad,” she said, having nearly managed to keep the thought tucked in. “The kids might want to know about where they came from someday.”

This time when the car went over a heave in the road, Marie’s body lifted and came back down with a painful thump.

“The only thing anyone needs to know is where they’re going,” Daniel said, the words falling like hot coals from his mouth. “And if you keep up with this, I can’t be responsible for where that might be.” Marie slipped her yarn-tangled hand behind her seat to find her daughter’s foot, surprised when Lizzy reciprocated with her own hand. She wanted to reach for Zach, as well, but knew she couldn’t do so without being noticed. “If the two of you could just agree,” she said softly, toward her lap.

“Mom, it’s okay. We don’t have to talk about it anymore,” Lizzy said and pinched her nails into Marie’s palm.

Marie felt Daniel’s foot twitch on the gas. “Well, let’s just get home, then,” he said.

“Fine with me,” said Lizzy.

Daniel picked up speed. Faster and then faster, round curves and through gullies while the road, it seemed to Marie, threatened to slide out from beneath them at every turn. Her hands had begun to tremble, and she slid them under her legs. She had a habit of reaching for the door handle when startled, and if something made her do that now, without a seatbelt, she would spill right out onto the road. It was uncomfortable, though, sitting on her hands. Her hangnails caught on the polyester of her skirt. She had no lotion in the car to soothe the dryness that caused them. She longed to be home, massaging Vaseline into her fingers while seeing the kids off to bed. Or home in her mother’s kitchen, where hands that handled lard never needed a pump of Jergens. Or simply back at Stillwater, where Mrs. Schlant kept a glass bottle of something that smelled of rosemary next to the homemade soap on every sink.

Wood Lake was finally alongside them, with its too-fast bend in the road up ahead. Marie reached for her seatbelt and gave it a tug. It clunked inside the housing and refused to be moved.

“For God’s sake, Marie,” Daniel said and his arm flew across her. He grabbed the seatbelt and yanked it hard three times. “There,” he said as a shard of plastic cracked away from the door and the belt suddenly unspooled.

There was too much slack in the shoulder, but Marie

clicked the latch in gratefully and snugged the belt tightly around her waist.

“Dad, let’s just get home safely,” Lizzy said as the rain returned as slush. “We’re already really close. It’ll just be a few minutes extra if we go slow.”

Marie began to hum. A squeak of a sound at first, and barely audible. But as the notes seeped from her, they grew louder until they finally flattened out into a hymn her mother had taught her to sing whenever she felt far from home. *Nearer my God, to Thee, nearer my God*; thin and thready, like a bow dragged across the strings of a dried-out violin.

“For crying out loud, Marie,” Daniel said. “You’d think I was trying to kill us.” And though it hadn’t seemed possible to Marie that they could go any faster, he coaxed yet another measure of speed from the car, whose frame began to rattle.

“I don’t know if God would want you up there if you sing like that,” Daniel said. It was an attempt at a joke, and Marie rewarded it with a little laugh.

“Well, I just think—” Marie said but didn’t get to finish.

Daniel accelerated into the bend and Marie was shoved against the inside of her door like a load of wet laundry as the road and mountains spun around them. For a few seconds, her chest felt tight, and her head clunked heavily from shoulder to shoulder.

Something struck Marie’s side of the car with a terrible noise. Glass from the passenger window shattered and was followed by the sudden shock of coming to a full stop. Marie’s body, only half restrained, was flung forward and her hands, raised to protect her face, smashed into the windshield before falling into her lap.

At first, Marie didn’t recognize the cold that began to climb toward her knees as water from the lake inched its way up her legs. Not even as it began to lift them, and she pushed them back down with hands that made crunching sounds like bags of loose marbles, the kind she used to take outside on warm summer days.

“*O, mein Gott*,” she said, lapsing into Low German

as the water reached her waist and recognition crept in.

“Daniel?” she said, with water at her neck, but when she turned to look for him, he was gone. “Zach? Lizzy?” she said and inhaled a breath that filled her nose and mouth with lake.

### **BEET ROLL**

- 1½ cups warm water
- ¼ ounce active dry yeast (1 packet)
- ¼ cup honey
- 3 tbsps baking margarine, softened
- 3½–4 cups whole wheat flour
- ½ cup wheat bran
- ½ tsp kosher salt
- 2 medium beets

Sprinkle the yeast over top of warm water and set aside in a warm place to proof for 5 minutes. Transfer to the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the dough hook attachment. Add honey and margarine. Mix in 2 cups of the flour and the salt until moistened. Beat on medium speed for 3 minutes. Add more flour, just until dough pulls away cleanly from the sides of the bowl.

Turn out and knead on floured surface, adding remaining flour, until dough is smooth and elastic, about 10 minutes. Place dough in large greased bowl and cover with a clean tea towel. Let rise in warm place until doubled in size, 30–45 minutes.

Meanwhile, cook two medium beets in salted water until tender to the tip of a knife. Rub away the skins using a paper towel. Chop into small dice, and mash those slightly with a fork.

Lightly grease a sheet pan. Punch down the dough and roll it out to the size of the sheet pan. Spread beet over the surface, leaving room along the edges. Roll up like a jelly roll and transfer to the greased baking sheet. Cover loosely with a tea towel and let rise in warm place until doubled in size, 30–45 minutes.

Preheat the oven to 350°F. Uncover roll and bake 40–45 minutes or until roll sounds hollow when lightly tapped.



# Coming of Age in an Adventist Commune

A Review of  
*Stillwater*

Darcie Friesen Hossack, *Stillwater* (New Westminster, BC: Tidewater Press, 2023), 296 pages.

Seventh-day Adventists are rarely represented in literary fiction. And when the Adventist Church does get a mention in serious literature, the depiction is often unflattering. Darcie Friesen Hossack's recent novel: *Stillwater*, offers a damning portrait of an Adventist community that is also thoughtful, nuanced, and insightful.

*Stillwater* tells the story of the Fischer family, who live in Kelowna, British Columbia. Sixteen-year-old Lizzy and her thirteen-year-old brother, Zach, are being raised by their father, Daniel, an ultra-conservative Seventh-day Adventist, and their mother, Marie, who grew up Mennonite but converted to Adventism when she married Daniel. Lizzy finds her father's religion narrow and stifling—but their mainstream Adventist church and school are practically worldly compared to what awaits her when Daniel moves the family to Stillwater, a self-supporting Adventist commune in rural BC.

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*Trudy J. Morgan-Cole is an author, mostly of historical fiction set in Newfoundland, including The Cupids Trilogy (A Roll of the Bones, Such Miracles & Mischiefs, and A Company of Rogues) as well as Most Anything You Please, A Sudden Sun, That Forgetful Shore, and By the Rivers of Brooklyn. She has also written several books of inspirational fiction, many of which are re-imaginings of Bible stories. These include Esther: A Story of Courage, James: The Brother of Jesus, and Lydia: A Story of Philippi. Morgan-Cole describes herself as "a Christian who loves Jesus but finds some of his followers scary and a Seventh-day Adventist who doubts, questions, and loves my church passionately."*

The catalyst for the move is the COVID-19 pandemic and Daniel's resistance to government anti-COVID precautions, including his employer's insistence that he get vaccinated for his work in a seniors' care home. While the local Adventist church has cancelled services to comply with government regulations, Daniel finds in Stillwater a community of like-minded Adventists who reject masks, vaccines, and social distancing and believe natural remedies and a vegan diet can cure even a global pandemic.

Hossack does a great job of sketching and satirizing the Stillwater community through the eyes of the skeptical Lizzy, a budding scientist whose most prized possession is her microscope. But the author never slips into parody: we see the characters as real people with sincerely held, though misguided, beliefs. Hossack also recognizes that these beliefs are more complex than a simple good/bad binary: Stillwater's natural remedies cannot heal Marie's chronic pain from a serious injury, but traditional Western medicine leaves her addicted to prescription painkillers. There are no easy answers here.

In Canada as in the United States, regulations to limit the spread of COVID-19 drove deep wedges within religious communities. This was true for both Adventist and Mennonite churches, with official leadership and the majority of churches complying with church closures and socially distanced services upon reopening, while a handful resisted, seeing these measures as restrictions on their religious freedom. Debates over COVID vaccines and vaccine mandates further deepened those divisions.

Hossack has mentioned in interviews that she had been working for many years on the novel that became *Stillwater*; COVID was not originally part of the story. But a pandemic that divides tight-knit church communities provides a vivid backdrop for Lizzy to critique the anti-science, anti-intellectual sentiment around her.

The juxtaposition of Adventist and Mennonite communities may be unexpected to some readers, though it's a natural one for Hossack who, like Lizzy, has one Adventist and one Mennonite parent. Readers in the United States, particularly, may miss some of the Western Canadian context of Hossack's work.

Mennonite subculture—apart from wildly popular Amish romances—may not have as significant an impact in the broader American culture as it has in Canada.

Canadian Mennonite life has been explored in twentieth-century literature by award-winning writers like Rudy Wiebe (*Peace Shall Destroy Many, Sweeter Than All the World*) and Sandra Birdsell (*Night Travellers, The Russländer*), and in the twenty-first century by the highly acclaimed work of Miriam Toews (*A Complicated Kindness, Women Talking*), among others. Adventists fly under the cultural radar in both countries, but Mennonites occupy a much larger role in the Canadian literary consciousness than they do in the US.

Both groups are small in number. Worldwide, and in the States, there are far more Adventists than Mennonites. In Canada, however, Mennonites outnumber Adventists three to one. Canada's Mennonite population is largely concentrated in the prairie provinces, giving Mennonite culture a significant impact in Western Canada.

Outsiders will see many similarities between these two conservative Christian groups, each with a tendency to mark themselves as separate from "the world." (Hossack's first book is called *Mennonites Don't Dance*, a title that will resonate with Adventist readers.) *Stillwater*, however, concentrates not on the similarities but on the differences between these two religious communities.

One of the most striking ways Hossack develops this contrast is through food. The novel lingers in loving—or, in some cases, horrifying—detail on the meals the characters cook and eat. Food in this novel is not just a detail of setting, but a metaphor for communities and relationships. To underline the point, Hossack, who has worked as a food writer for local newspapers, titles each chapter after a food item and includes that recipe at chapter's end.

The *Stillwater* commune, like many Adventist communities, is obsessed with healthy eating. Hossack has indicated in an interview that *Stillwater* is loosely inspired by Silver Hills, a self-supporting Adventist institution in British Columbia. On its website, Silver Hills currently bills itself as a spa and guest house with

a focus on holistic wellness, healthy eating, and natural remedies, similar to the LifeStart retreats at Weimar Institute in California and other places. Even the most enthusiastic proponents of such retreats recognize that no one benefits from the program unless they engage with it willingly, which is definitely not the case for a reluctant teenager dragged there by an overbearing parent.

Lizzie dislikes the vegan, whole-grain, all-natural diet at Stillwater; the food serves as a metaphor for the commune's rigidity, its lack of warmth, its isolated and isolating nature. Recipes for homemade Nuteena, sprouted wheat bread, and chickpea meringue portray "Adventist food" as ranging from the austere to the bizarre.

By contrast, when Lizzy visits her mother's Mennonite relatives in Saskatchewan, the meals are swimming in the rich dairy products and animal fats that are taboo at Stillwater. Though her mother tries to avoid eating the Mennonite dishes of her childhood, Lizzy luxuriates in them, just as she does in her aunt's and uncle's warmth and acceptance. Food is a kind of love; for Lizzy, the love of the Adventist community is limited and bound about by strict rules. The love of her Mennonite relatives is as rich, warm, and comforting as zwieback dough fried in pork fat drippings (yes, those recipes are included, too).

This is the point at which some Adventist readers might wonder if Hossack is engaging in a simplistic "Adventists bad; Mennonites good" dichotomy. While there are kind and open-minded Adventists in Lizzy's life—including a progressive academy biology teacher who slips her a copy of Charles Darwin—the majority of her Adventist experience comes through the rigid and legalistic Stillwater residents. Her Mennonite Aunt Toots and Uncle Henry, by contrast, accept her intelligence, curiosity, and ambition. In their home and at their table, she finds love as rich as full-fat cream.

It's not hard to find a different perspective on Mennonite communities in literature or in life. Miriam Toews's books, for example, depict Mennonites who are every bit as narrow, legalistic, and unsympathetic as the Stillwater Adventists. Hossack's own 2011 short-story collection, *Mennonites Don't Dance*, gives the author a broader canvas on which to paint a more nuanced and

varied picture of Mennonite life than this novel permits.

We don't see any narrow-minded, anti-science, judgmental Mennonites in *Stillwater*, not because they don't exist, but because *Stillwater* is not an exhaustive attempt to compare and contrast two conservative religious communities. It is fiction, and like all the best fiction, it is rooted in the individual experience of its characters—in this case, Lizzy's experience.

Lizzy's journey in *Stillwater* is a classic coming-of-age tale: a bright and ambitious teenager struggles to move beyond the limits of her home and community. It's also much more: an exploration of family dynamics, domestic violence, and addiction, as well as a strong contender for one of Canada's great "pandemic novels."

But like all good fiction, *Stillwater* deals not in abstractions but in specifics. The detailed evocation of the story's Adventist and Mennonite communities—right down to the recipes—is what makes this novel powerful and memorable. If those details make some Adventist readers feel as if they are under the unsparing gaze of Lizzy's microscope, that scrutiny may be well deserved.

Writing on her own blog about her dual heritage, Hossack concludes: "[A]s much as I've made light and sport my experiences of Adventism (and Menno-ism and, really, Conservative Evangelicalism in general) for the sake of this blog post, it's behind these closed doors, where many of the (metaphorical) lights are turned off, that darkness is encouraged to flourish."<sup>1</sup>

Hossack's main concern is to shine a light on the darkness of ignorance, abuse, and repression all too common in isolated, conservative religious communities—regardless of whether the dinner menu features haystacks or pigs' snouts.

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#### ENDNOTES:

1. <https://darciefriesenhossack.wordpress.com/2023/06/06/on-chicken-feet-and-gluten-steaks-behind-the-scenes-of-darcie-friesen-hossacks-stillwater/>



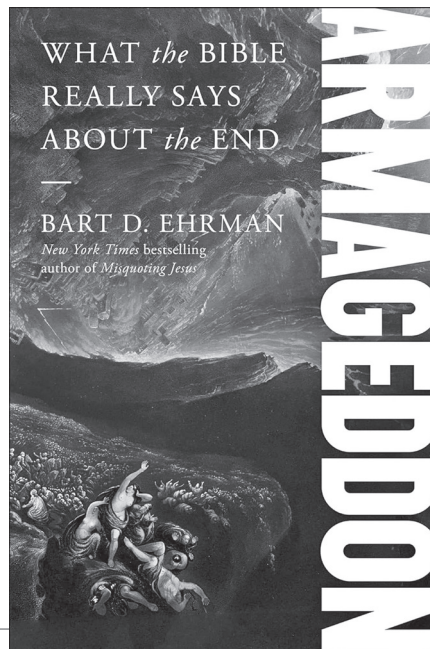


By John R. Jones

# Let the Reader Understand

*A Review of Armageddon: What the Bible Really Says About the End*

Bart D. Ehrman, *Armageddon: What the Bible Really Says About the End* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2023), 250 pages.



Among his thirty-plus authored and edited volumes, both academic and popular, Bart Ehrman (James A. Gray Distinguished Professor of Religious Studies, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill) is here most explicit in tying together his reading of a New Testament book and his own religious pilgrimage. Tracing the diverse ways in which John's Revelation has been read over the centuries and especially today, he provides benchmarks for the story of his successive wrestlings with the book's message. The result

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is a compelling summons to his readers to engage the Apocalypse, not in a quest for eschatological timing, but as an ethical challenge for our decisive times today.

In *Armageddon's* four-page preface, Ehrman sketches the two interpretive camps that he sees as the standard alternatives for interpreting Revelation today. Evangelical Christians view it as “a blueprint for events soon to come,” while liberal Christian scholars read the book as metaphorical (xvii). In this latter perspective, Revelation does not describe the eschaton, but uses symbolic pictures to affirm God as the ultimate source of hope for believers. “I have held both these views at different times in my life,” he writes, “and I now think they are both wrong” (xviii).

*Armageddon's* first four chapters sketch the standard interpretive approaches<sup>1</sup> to Revelation, with Ehrman's reflections. In his opening chapter he refutes the futurists' “proof-texting” approach that treats the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures as sources of puzzle pieces to be variously selected and re-assembled into mosaics reflecting each interpreter's understanding. “I believe this view of Revelation, and indeed of the entire Bible, is simply wrong” (15).

### **From Evangelical Futurist to Historical Preterist**

*Armageddon* is not just a scholarly commentary on the book of Revelation. It arises from and reflects his personal pilgrimage through the stages—pre-critical, critical, and post-critical—that many of his readers will recognize. That Ehrman can tell his story without much recourse to labels such as “conservative” or “liberal” attests his judicious stance.

Even so, it is ironic that the deciphering procedures he describes, in the hands of so-called conservative literalists, can introduce a notion as questionable as the rapture, which “has not been taken from the Bible; it has been *read into* the Bible” (9, emphasis original). Ehrman once counted himself among such readers. But then he got conservative in a different way: he came to recognize (a) the importance of reading scriptural books as books, rather than as collections of coded secrets, and (b) the equal importance of discerning what each

scriptural author was intending to say to his/her original addressees. Under such criteria, responsible interpreters in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have striven increasingly to hold themselves accountable to the Bible's messages. But by always starting with the question of what a scriptural author meant within his/her own setting, hermeneutically schooled students of Revelation were naturally prioritizing preterist readings. Accordingly, in his second chapter, Ehrman can affirm that

John explains that the revelation he received involved a vision (“that he saw”) about what “will take place soon” (1:2). He then names the intended recipients of his message: “the seven churches in Asia” (1:4). A few verses later he identifies these churches (1:11), and in chapters 2 and 3 he addresses a letter to each of them. These churches are in cities of the western part of Asia Minor (modern Turkey): Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. I need to press this point: John was writing to seven groups of Christians that he personally knew, not to people living two thousand years later in North America. When he says he has seen a vision about what “will take place soon,” he means “soon” for his actual readers. He does not mean “thousands of years from now.” (28)

To help his readers whose familiarity with the text of Revelation may need bolstering, Ehrman provides a few background notes and a brisk overview in his second chapter, section by biblical section. This consists of a running paraphrase, with some limited interpretive observations from his preterist standpoint. The third chapter, “A History of False Predictions,” traces the various ways Revelation has been understood over the centuries. Starting with bishops Papias (ca. 60-140) and Irenaeus (ca. 130-202), who held quite literalistic views of the saints' rewards, Ehrman continues with historian Eusebius (ca. 260-339), who urged a much

more spiritualizing picture of the hereafter. The oldest surviving commentary on Revelation, by Bishop Victorinus of Pettau (d. 303 or 304), is interesting as an early example of a historical (i.e., preterist) reading, which also extends out into a futurist interpretation of the final judgment.

Ehrman credits Augustine (354-430) with first locating the church of his day as already experiencing the millennium under Christ's reign, a view that "quickly became the dominant understanding of Revelation and remained so until relatively modern times" (58). It took the Reformation (with its identification of the papacy with the beast of the sea in Revelation 13) and the French Revolution (with its overthrow of the established order culminating in the replacement of Pope Pius VI with the Roman Republic) to finally supplant Augustine's historicist interpretation with a futurist one. Things have never been the same since. With the Kingdom's advent at the door, John Darby's seven "dispensations" could number down to their final era, the Laodicean period could conclude the seven churches' march through time, the ancient prophecies of Israel's restoration could be recycled, America could move itself into the eschatological center, and the rapture could be exploited to juice up sales of books and films.

In his fourth chapter, "Real-Life Consequences of the Imminent Apocalypse," Ehrman moves onto familiar turf for Seventh-day Adventists. The Great Disappointment and the Waco disaster, with a two-page interlude on Leon Festinger's "disconfirmation theory,"<sup>2</sup> occupy sixteen and a half pages of insightful reportage. William Miller's study is well presented as a classic example of day-for-year calculation under literalist assumptions, extending across millennia.<sup>3</sup> In contrast with Miller's modest character, Ehrman sees David Koresh as more egocentric in his insertion of himself in the key, messianic role of his interpretation of Revelation. Even so, Ehrman notes Koresh's expressed interest in discussing with outsiders who could understand his perspective, and relates with chagrin the refusal of the FBI agents to accept the help of scholars who were offering to defuse the confrontation by co-opting Koresh's viewpoint and language.

In sum, Ehrman is empathetic yet clear about the potential for damage when continuous-historicist or futurist readings are given uncritical sway in our current lives.

Those of us who watch such events [as Waco] unfold have no difficulty seeing the narcissism of messianic pretenders. But what about the millions of regular old folk—our friends, families, and neighbors—who also genuinely believe they are living the fulfillment of prophecy? Are they delusional, too, when they claim that God's eternal plan is now coming to fulfillment for them in particular, that they are the ones predicted by the ancient prophecies of God?

I try not to pass moral judgment on anyone who believes such things. All of us are almost certainly wrong about one thing or another when it comes to ultimate reality. But the belief that the divine plan of the entire human race has now climaxed with us (lucky us!) is, if not delusional, then at least a bit narcissistic. Narcissists, like their eponymous ancestor, do not see what is in the water when they gaze into it. Or for that matter what is in the Bible. They see themselves. This is not always disastrous, but it is nearly always sad. (91)

Such "real-life consequences" are often morally freighted. In the case of national or other corporate decisions, these can bear far-reaching implications indeed. Two such instances, for Ehrman, directly ride the crest of the current wave of popular convictions about the shortness of the time. With regard to international relations, American (and British) alignments with Israel can be seen to derive quite frankly from certain Judeo-Christian eschatological agendas. "Many evangelicals saw the Trump administration's decision to move the US Embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem as a fulfillment of the plan of God, all part of the end-times



scenario that would lead up to the return of Jesus” (95). That this scenario entails the replacement of the Muslim Dome of the Rock with a new Jewish Temple “is key to understanding evangelical support of Israel” (99).

Comparably, in the arena of ecological responsibility, a shortened eschatology has been demonstrated to correlate with apathy or even resistance to defraying climate change (107). Ehrman’s case in both of these instances is well developed. If the Palestinians (and Muslims generally) have to pay the price for Zionism in the first example, the entire planet has to pay in the second. Hence the irony: what feels moral because religiously framed can turn out to be immorally irresponsible.

### . . . and Beyond

It is this growing ethical, even moral, concern that pulls Ehrman onward, through his second and into his third, post-critical, phase. In his second phase, the task was governed by his ethical responsibility to arrive at the text’s meaning, conceived as the Revelator’s intended message. In his third, it becomes a matter of bringing our moral sense as readers to bear upon the text.

In both Daniel and Revelation, Ehrman shows how the triumphalist voice helps assure their respective readers that their present tribulations are transitory, soon to end in victory over their oppressive rulers. This helps him identify the way Revelation naturally wants to be read. “This is a message written for John’s day” (140). Accordingly, the whore of Babylon (Rev 17), the beast of the sea (Rev 13) and the second beast (Rev 17) represent the City of Rome, Emperor Nero, and the imperial cult, respectively (128-141). (Excluded, by this framing, is the identification of the scorpions of Revelation 9 with Hal Lindsey’s attack helicopters.) Viewed through the standard lenses of traditional scholarly practice, Ehrman’s interpretive task would be done with this conclusion; all that would remain would be to faithfully proclaim the established message.

But he refuses to allow this conventional critical treatment to push the ancient text back into irrelevance. Here is Ehrman’s greatest challenge. He must still insist

that Revelation “is hugely relevant,” but not in the straight-across way we would expect of most biblical books. “Not because it predicts what will happen in our own future, but because it conveys ideas that must be taken seriously by readers of all times—ideas about who God is, how he interacts with his world, what he expects of people, what he exacts from those who do not give him what he demands, and how he rewards those who do” (140). In his remaining three chapters, Ehrman’s moral sense prompts him to engage precisely the negative implications of this relevance—implications that raise the issue not only of how, but whether we shall indeed choose to read Revelation, not in “all times,” but precisely in our time.

*Armageddon’s* chapters six and seven confront us as readers—of Ehrman, of Revelation—with the two most serious hurdles posed by Revelation’s text. The first is the picture of utter fury that characterizes Revelation’s divine judgment. The second, similarly, is the picture of absolute dominance on the part of God and the redeemed, exerted over all others in terms of unbounded power and material wealth. Such a challenge calls for innovative approaches. How to deal with the tension between these scriptural motifs and our own values today?

This turns out to be hard. The difficulty arises with the unidirectional process, in traditional biblical interpretation, of always working from what the text meant to what it means—a process that effectively closes off the feedback loop.<sup>4</sup> It therefore fails to accommodate any shift in moral vision between Revelation’s time and ours.

Central to this hurdle is today’s growing conviction that meaning itself is coming to be newly defined. It is now to be sought not as latent in the text, but as an event, a potential or actual happening in any era, in the encounter between text and reader. With the rise of this more dynamic model, each side—text and reader—brings something to the party. The resultant question is whether the outcome is to be a dance or a tug-of-war. Not only does the reader have a mind of her own, so does the text. Over against each real flesh-and-blood reader,

the text posits its “implied reader,” to use Wolfgang Iser’s coinage. We may think of this figure as the person whom the author is mentally addressing, potentially susceptible to the author’s line of thought, and influencing, in turn, the author’s discursive strategies.<sup>5</sup>

Ehrman expresses his appreciation to the novelist D.H. Lawrence, who, perhaps precisely because he is no theologian, is able to pass some judgment on Revelation’s implied readers as people who could be characterized as small-minded and envious. Lawrence is not typifying all early Christian believers in this way; he sees Jesus and Paul as “strong personalities, confident and self-sufficient” (170). But in characterizing Revelation’s target audience as insecure and materially minded people, he helps Ehrman open up a gap of tension between himself and the Apocalypse’s implied readers, thereby legitimizing Ehrman’s inner move beyond the text.

That has its own value. Yet the problem remains for Ehrman: to what end? Here we begin to encounter the intractable nature of Ehrman’s quest as he seeks to salvage a reading for our time. Not only is the final reward attained through incomprehensible violence at the hand of a God whom the Revelator consistently sees only as “a God of wrath” (167), the saints’ reward itself is expressed in unworthily materialistic and vindictive terms.<sup>6</sup>

As an example, Ehrman cites the cry of the souls under the altar (Rev 6:9-11), calling out for justice and vengeance for their shed blood (160). This makes an important and typical statement about the Revelator’s mental image of the readers whom he is addressing. But then what elements in Revelation’s implied reader can we identify that could connect with less vindictively minded actual readers, today? Does morality only act along the axis of vengeance? As Ehrman observes, “this is not the proponent of nonviolent resistance who inspired Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr.” (162).

### Other Scholars Offer Perspectives

Beyond Ehrman’s quandary, scholar David Barr offers helpful insights with regard to Revelation’s

implied readers. In his 2003 essay, “Doing Violence: Moral Issues in Reading John’s Apocalypse,” he carefully nuances the implied “narratees” on three discursive levels. For present purposes, we especially note his focus on the third level, which he identifies as the people addressed in the various stories recounted within Revelation—“that is, the saints and martyrs who struggle to conquer the beast.” They are depicted as struggling and oppressed, in a way that corresponds to the innocent suffering of Jesus. “John consciously discourages the use of violence and calls rather for faith and consistent resistance. . . . John’s vision peers behind the violence of this world, offering a glimpse of the cosmic war between good and evil, a war only won through suffering.”<sup>7</sup>

With this perspective, Barr can define a higher morality at work beyond vindictiveness. As he concludes his essay, Barr affirms that in this material, “the prayers, the patience, the persistent resistance of the saints overthrow the powers of evil and bring God’s kingdom into reality.”<sup>8</sup> In this, Barr models his selection of a particular stratum, so to speak, of the material in Revelation, to elucidate a higher morality.

This selection is a deliberate choice and a valid option. A similar strategy is manifested in the work of theologian Kendra Haloviak Valentine, who makes a comparable selection in her book *Worlds at War, Nations in Song: Dialogic Imagination and Moral Vision in the Hymns of the Book of Revelation*—this time in favor of the hymnic stratum of the Apocalypse. By identifying and focusing on the rich and lyric materials in these sixteen hymns, she is able to trace the bridging of time and space in the corporate life of the worshiping community, as they sing the songs of heaven on earth and anticipate the glorious future in their present trying circumstances. These stanzas are also the wellspring from which the worshiping community’s moral convictions arise and strengthen. The moral vision, experienced as God’s presence, “invites readers who engage it to answer or respond with their lives. In this way the New Testament Apocalypse makes a critical contribution to the moral enterprise. The language of

the book is so deeply imaginative that scenes of worship and the call to witness cannot ultimately be separated. In this Apocalypse, liturgy cannot be separated from moral action.”<sup>9</sup>

### Ehrman's Journey

In moving into this third stage of his hermeneutical pilgrimage, Ehrman appears to have evolved beyond the potential that he can find in Revelation's pages. His solution is to turn to the ethical and moral principles of the four canonical Gospels, especially Matthew 25 and John. This is not an integrative move, for him. He is not using the Gospels to complement Revelation, but to supplant it. To be sure, he recognizes and accepts the apocalyptic passages in the synoptics. What distinguishes these from Revelation are their perspectives: good news of hope and salvation pervades in the former, extreme judgmentalism and torture in the latter.

What one misses, with Ehrman, is the sense of dialogic engagement. In a sense, he is exercising the same right of selectivity, within the canon at large, that we see Barr and Haloviak Valentine exercising within the Book of Revelation. But this stratagem does not help with regard to Ehrman's question of Revelation's value for us as readers today. On that level, we are left with the negative results that Ehrman hints at when he asks his key questions about who God is, how he interacts with his world, what he expects of people, what he exacts from those who do not give him what he demands, and how he rewards those who do. The Book of Revelation, at this point in his life, seems unable to tell him why he should continue to read it.

Ehrman's journey has, by his own admission, taken him through faith and beyond. It is too facile, however, to attribute his negative outcome with Revelation to his unbelief in the traditional sense. He can, after all, still write that “for those of us who choose to follow Jesus—whatever religious tradition we call our own—our understanding of Jesus will almost certainly affect how we model our lives” (207). For him, it is simply a question of where in the New Testament he finds the Jesus who still attracts his allegiance, in view of the unbridgeable gulf he

sees between the early Gospels and the Apocalypse.

Like any book, *Armageddon* is of course penned at a moment in time, and so reflects a particular juncture in its author's life. He is not waiting to produce one definitive and retrospective volume. One of Ehrman's strengths is his transparency; as his readers we sense his invitation to journey with him. And we recognize the implication: the path—a shared path—beckons us all onward. As he continues to offer his course on Revelation, on campus and in his online lectures, it would not be surprising if he, like other preterist interpreters, might yet find grounds in the process of teaching for more fruitful engagement with the ancient text.

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### ENDNOTES:

1. These are commonly termed “preterist” (regarding the entirety of the predictions as applying to the general near-term time frame of the author); “historicist” or “continuous-historical” (regarding the predictions as applying sequentially to eras stretching from the author's time to the reader's); or “futurist” (regarding the predictions as applying entirely to a future far beyond the author's time, albeit often in the reader's near future). Each of these models conceives of the fulfillments as literal, singular, definitive realizations of the text's predictions. A fourth model, termed “idealist” or “symbolic,” takes opportunity to identify events or themes in a reader's experience with any prophecy that may provide comparable terms. (My students in Hong Kong, during the late 60s and early 70s, instinctively identified the red dragon of Revelation 12 with Mao Zedong and his regime, without concern for interpretive systems.) Such matchups may sometimes be cited as secondary fulfillments in addition to definitive primary realizations in one of the other three schemes.
2. Leon Festinger, Henry W. Riecken, and Stanley Schachter, *When Prophecy Fails: A Social and Psychological Study of a Modern Group That Predicted the Destruction of the World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1956).
3. Even so, not all is absolute; human judgment plays its role. With most interpreters today, Ehrman takes the four beasts of Daniel 7 as symbolizing Babylon, the Medes, the Persians, and the Greeks, respectively. William Miller got the same sequence to Rome by combining the Medes and Persians in the second, lop-sided beast.
4. In his classic essay on “Biblical theology,” Krister Stendahl notes that liberal scholars' methods turned out to be “basically the same as those used by the conservatives. Both were convinced that the Bible contained revelation which could be grasped in the clean form of eternal truth unconditioned and uncontaminated by historical limitations.” “Thus,” he observes, “the tension between the past and the present meaning had been overcome before it could create any problems for interpretation.” Krister Stendahl, “Biblical theology, contemporary” in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 1, ed. George Arthur Buttrick, et al. (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), 418-432 (419).
5. “[The implied reader] embodies all those predispositions necessary for a literary work to exercise its effect—predispositions laid down, not by an empirical outside reality, but by the text itself. Consequently, the implied reader as a concept has his roots firmly planted in the structure of the text; he is a construct and in no way to be identified with any real reader.” Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 34.
6. “Revelation does not adopt a new Christian attitude toward wealth and domination. It instead affirms the attitude promoted by Roman culture, the same view held by most people who choose *not* to follow the teachings of Jesus: wealth and domination can be ultimate goods.” Bart D. Ehrman, *Armageddon: What the Bible Really Says About the End* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2023), 172 (emphasis original).
7. David L. Barr, “Doing Violence: Moral Issues in Reading John's Apocalypse,” in *Reading the Book of Revelation*, ed. David L. Barr (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 107.
8. Barr, “Doing Violence,” 108.
9. Kendra Haloviak Valentine, *Worlds at War, Nations in Song: Dialogic Imagination and Moral Vision in the Hymns of the Book of Revelation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2015), 182.



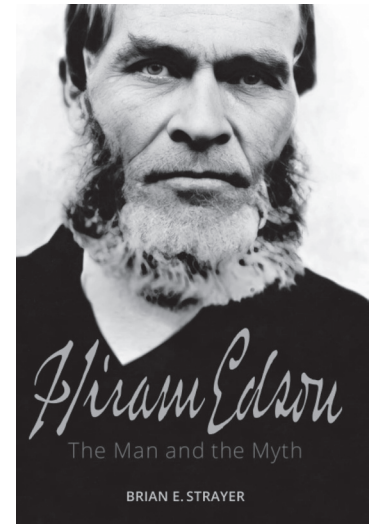
BY DONALD E. CASEBOLT

# The Phoenix Manuscript

A Review of *Hiram Edson: The Man and the Myth*

Brian E. Stayer, *Hiram Edson: The Man and the Myth* (Westlake Village, CA: Oak & Acorn Publishing, 2023), 279 pages.

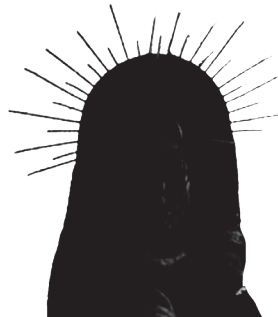
Could it be mere coincidence that Hiram Edson was so closely associated with the Burned-over District of New York? As Brian Stayer’s *Hiram Edson: The Man and the Myth* suggests, Edson was a prototypical example of the religious, social, and political effervescence which characterized this area of New York. He was immersed in an atmosphere containing Shakers, Quakers, Spiritualists, and Mormons. These groups “claimed to communicate with the supernatural realm either directly, by talking with extraterrestrial beings, or indirectly” (35). Thus, when prior to his cornfield experience, Edson hears “the voice” giving him commands, he concludes that this “unseen power” which he perceives as a “shadowy form in human shape” was the “Lord’s angel [who] was accompanying me.”<sup>1</sup>



Edson became a Promethean Seventh-day Adventist symbol. He advanced Ellen

White. F.M. Bartle asserted to General Conference President William A. Spicer that “Elder Hiram Edson had visions [two months] before Ellen G. White did” (60). LeRoy Froom said he’d had a “revelation,”

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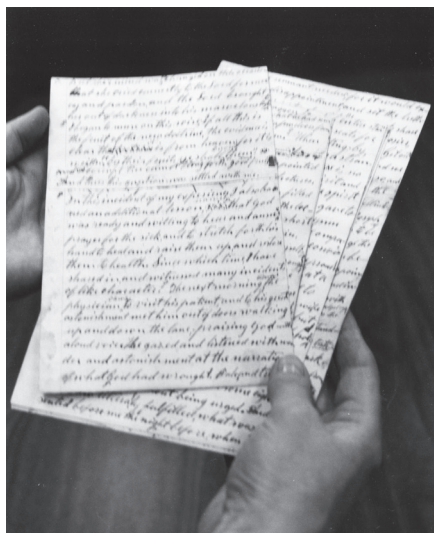


a “veritable vision from heaven” (60). Moreover, Hiram Edson stated that he saw “distinctly and clearly” facets of the sanctuary doctrine that would take years to develop. Thus, it was ironic that the man from the Burned-over District documented his “revelation” in a two-hundred-page manuscript that was twice burned (by himself and his wife) with the result that only a twelve-page remnant remains.

### The Mythic Significance of the Manuscript

The most fascinating tale in Strayer’s biography is his description of how Edson’s undated, mutilated, twice-burned manuscript morphed from a document that the Church refused to print into a hallowed, popular account. Edson’s “veritable vision” became an inspiring religious myth—a myth taught to “thousands of Adventist youth around the world” from the 1940s to the 1960s (60). It became indelibly tattooed into their (and my) Weltanschauung. Its revelatory imprimatur became as pivotal to Adventist apologists as the Shroud of Turin was to conservative Catholics. Edson’s “vision” was an account that vindicated the Great Disappointment.

Strayer chronicles how many Adventist thought leaders promoted the idea that Edson had a special revelation that guaranteed and authenticated the novel doctrine of the two-phased atonement. For example, he documents that Arthur Spalding “embellished” Edson’s cornfield experience, describing it as if he felt a “hand upon him, stopping him where he was,” and “as in a vision he saw that Jesus, our High Priest, had entered that day into the most holy place of the sanctuary in heaven.” Spalding “added several elements that Edson’s account omitted.” In a *Guide* magazine article for young readers, James Joiner wrote that Edson felt a [evidently supernatural] hand on his



shoulder, saw Jesus, our High Priest, and “as if struck by lightning,” understood the Adventist sanctuary doctrine (61). Glen Greenwalt wrote that “Edson’s experience was truly visionary” (62).

Considering that various thought leaders added details and dramatized the cornfield scene, their accounts may be considered as something midway between history and hagiography; perhaps biopic might be the best descriptor. Strayer compiles four main interpretations of Edson’s experience: first, the “veritable vision” just described; second, “an experience of enlightenment” (Merlin Burt); third, “an impression” or a “firm conviction; fourth, “retrospective elaborations” probably written “years after the fact” (63-69).

Edson’s daughter, Viah Ophelia Cross, insisted that her father’s manuscript was written “immediately after the disappointment of 1844” (180). But given that she was born on June 2, 1843, she was only one year old in 1844 and not a reliable witness. Furthermore, Strayer and Fernand Fisel<sup>2</sup> documented multiple anachronisms in Edson’s account. Additionally, between 1844 and 1892, not a single writer—believer or skeptic—ever mentioned Edson’s cornfield experience (69). Thus, the question arises: How many dramatizations, added details, or accretions does it take to transform a historical account into an apocryphal tale?

Historians work with dates. Even an isolated date can give clues as to place and circumstances. Undated manuscripts, particularly those purporting to recount

metaphysical encounters, make life quite difficult for historians. However, Strayer’s meticulous detective work provides a convincing account of Edson’s manuscript’s history and fate. His reconstruction indicates that it was initially written in the 1870s and submitted to the reading committee,

The Hiram Edson manuscript in the Andrews University Heritage Room, photography circa 1970s.

COURTESY OF THE CENTER FOR ADVENTIST RESEARCH IMAGE DATABASE.

consisting of James White, J.N. Loughborough, Uriah Smith, and J.N. Andrews about 1873-74 (55, 180). They rejected the manuscript, which the committee and Ellen White thought would be destructive to the Church. They offered to print the autobiographical portion, but Edson was offended and refused. He subsequently burned his own manuscript (182). However, he rewrote it and promoted his prophetic speculations—to the chagrin of Ellen White—for a period during which he did not attend church services. According to his daughter, he left the Church (183). He was so attached to his theological speculations, which he considered to be “light” from God, equal to his cornfield experience, that he dedicated half of his last will to directing his wife, Esther, to publish it posthumously. Its title was “The last great trumpet of alarm or voice of warning” (188). She resubmitted it to the committee, but they rejected it. Allegedly, she burned the part with prophetic speculations (190). Edson’s manuscript lay forgotten for decades until, like the mythical phoenix, it arose from its fiery pyre under the pen of Arthur Spalding.

### What Gave the Phoenix Life?

Hiram’s experience was archetypal of the experiences of his soulmates, who were convinced of their pre-Disappointment religious journeys, despite all empirical evidence to the contrary: “We wept, and wept, till the day dawn,” wrote Edson. Joseph Bates said that no one could comprehend their soul-destroying grief except those who experienced the disaster firsthand. Washington Morse said his grief was virtually “uncontrollable. I left the place of meeting and wept like a child.” James White echoed: “I left the place of meeting and wept like a child.” Henry Emmons said he “lay prostrate for two days without any pain—sick with disappointment” (49-50).

But even more significant are Edson’s words: “I mused in my own heart, saying My advent experience has been the richest and brightest of all my christian [sic] experience. If this had proved a failure, what was the rest of my christian [sic] experience worth? Has the Bible proved a failure? Is there no God—no heaven—no golden

home city—no paradise? Is all this but a cunningly devised fable?” (51).

Ellen White made the same appeal to the Millerites’ spiritual experience in *The Great Controversy*, chapter 22: “The conversion of sinners and the revival of spiritual life among Christians, had testified that the [date-setting] message was of Heaven.”

For White’s and Edson’s soulmates, to imagine that their Christian experience was a fable was equivalent to asserting that the Bible was a failure; there was no God, no heaven, no New Jerusalem. For Hiram, James and Ellen White, and the other shut-door believers, this was *impossible!* Edson’s and O.R.L. Crosier’s new sanctuary explanation was infinitely preferable. Even in early 1845, they still professed a certainty that Christ’s visible Advent would happen within a few days,<sup>3</sup> or by April 1845 (Edson’s and Crosier’s conviction) (81), or the autumn of 1845 (James White), or any of the other *imminent twenty dates* that were proposed (52).

Edson might have been burned over more than once, but he never lost the fire in his belly. This fire was evidenced in a number of ways: One, he was an active participant in conferences, one of which was held in his Port Gibson barn on August 27-28, 1848, which Merlin Burt asserted constituted “the theological birthplace of the Seventh-day Adventist Church” (101). Two, he was a major donor. In 1850, he financed the itinerant evangelism of Bates, J.N. Andrews, J.N. Loughborough, George Holt, and Samuel Rhodes. In 1852, he sold his farm for \$3,500 and gave \$650 to James White for publishing equipment (113). Three, as late as his fifties, he walked hundreds of miles, sometimes through three feet of snow, sometimes forty miles a day, as an itinerant evangelist. One wonders how he kept his farm operating during such long absences. His “ministerial partners” included George Holt, J.N. Andrews, Samuel Rhodes, H.S. Case, Joseph Bates, J.N. Loughborough, Horace W. Lawrence, Frederick Wheeler, and William S. Ingraham (111-135). Four, he was an enthusiastic contributor to Advent literature. In 1849 he published *The Time of the End: Its Final Termination*, which predicted that the world would terminate on May 19, 1850 (142-43). In 1856, he

published his long-winded, seven-installment, *magnum opus* on the *Times of the Gentiles* (147).

### Miller's First Prophetic Period

It is a little-known fact that the 2520-year, Seven Times of the Gentiles prophetic period was the first one that William Miller discovered, which formed the foundation for his synchronization of it with his 2300-year prophetic period. In George Knight's 1994 compilation of primary sources—a book titled *1844 and the Rise of Sabbatarian Adventism*—his first primary source from the *Advent Shield*, May 1844, quotes Miller explaining his method of interpreting the Bible and how he calculated the Advent for 1843:

I was determined to know what my Bible meant. I began at Genesis and read on slowly; and when I came to a text that I could not understand, I searched through the Bible to find out what it meant. After I had gone through the Bible in this way, O how bright and glorious the truth appeared. I found what I had been preaching to you. I was satisfied that the seven times [2520-years] terminated in 1843. Then I came to the 2300 days; they brought me to the same conclusion.<sup>4</sup>

Miller's 2520-year calculation preceded and generated his 2300-year calculation. He started his 2520-year calculation with 677 BC, ending in 1843. (Edson altered Miller's calculation; his parameters were 723 BC to 1798). Miller's 2520-year calculation appears in the 1843 chart endorsed by Ellen White. It also appears in the White/Otis Nichols 1851 chart. Ellen White said that God inspired her to make this chart, which was predicted in the Bible. She stated that it should only be altered by [her] inspiration. Nonetheless, James White eliminated it from his 1863 rendition of the chart.<sup>4</sup> In 1897 Uriah Smith denied that the "seven times" was a prophetic period and said its four-fold repetition, lasting 1080-years, would be absurd. Recently the Biblical Research Institute published an article citing multiple

**Edson might have been burned over more than once, but he never lost the fire in his belly. This fire was evidenced in a number of ways.**

reasons why the 2520-year period cannot be interpreted prophetically. Strayer postulates that Edson "had not left the church, the church had left him behind" (184), along with some of its "prophetic periods."

Uriah Smith barely tolerated humoring Edson by publishing his speculative 2520-year series. Loughborough wrote that Edson had been "out of the church" toward the end of his life, as his daughter said. D.N. Canright wrote that both Edson and S.W. Rhodes "died confirmed cranks, and a trial to the church." Ellen White stated that Edson's "light" contained "erroneous theories" that would result in "dissension and discord." That was a far cry from her 1859 evaluation when she asserted that "bro[ther] E[dson] has good judgment in matters of the church" (182-82, 33).

It is ironic that a man who had contributed so much to the Church in money, time, articles, and miles-walked died in disrepute. But like Joan of Arc, who was burned at the stake for heresy and witchcraft but now is venerated as a saint, Edson, the "confirmed crank," was transformed by Spalding into a veritable visionary who saw "distinctly and clearly" sanctuary truths two months before Ellen Harmon saw them only partially and indistinctly.

#### ENDNOTES:

1. George, Knight, *1844 and the Rise of Sabbatarian Adventism* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing, 1994), 123-34.
2. Fernand Fisel, "Edson's Cornfield 'Vision': Frisson or Figment?" *Adventist Currents* (July 1983):27.
3. Initially, some expositors of the new sanctuary explanation calculated that Christ's invisible atonement in the heavenly most holy place would last only a single day whereupon Christ would visibly return. For example, Samuel Snow and James White believed "in a one-day atonement (October 22, 1844)," according to Strayer (79). As days became years, it dawned on them that the investigative judgment must be taking more time. Article X of the *Fundamental Principles of SDA in 1872* asserted that Christ's investigations started in 1844 and would occupy only "a brief but indefinite space." See P.G. Damsteegt, *Foundations of the Seventh-day Adventist Message and Mission* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1977), 303.
4. Knight, *1844*, 4.
5. Damsteegt, *Foundations*, Appendix V.

# The Adventist **FUTURE**



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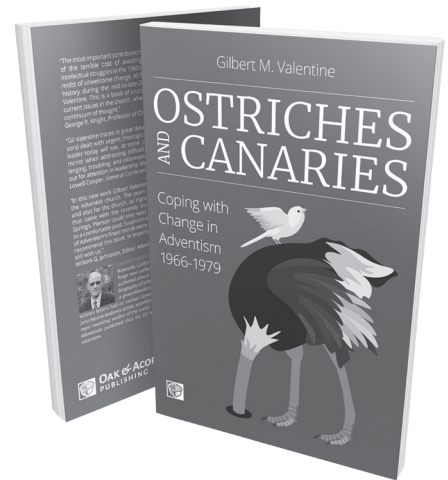
# God Created Canaries AND Ostriches



A Rebooted  
(2.0) Adventism  
Celebrates Both

Few Seventh-day Adventists would doubt the bona fides of Richard Hammill (former Andrews University president and Church education leader), Siegfried Horn (renowned twentieth-century Adventist

archeologist), or R.R. Figuhr (former General Conference president). However, the Adventism of these thought leaders couldn't be more different from the Adventism of widely respected past GC presidents such as W.H. Branson and R.H. Pierson and current GC President Ted Wilson. Using the taxonomy of Gilbert Valentine's monumental *Ostriches and Canaries: Coping with Change in Adventism 1966-1979*,<sup>1</sup> the first trio are "canaries," the latter "ostriches." Canaries constructively engage with unwelcome truths; ostriches cannot or will not. Canaries are our Church's progressives; Ostriches are the fundamentalists.



God created canaries *and* ostriches, and Adventism is sufficiently big, dynamic, and mature enough to not just abide, but celebrate both. There are powerful reasons to get beyond an either-or mentality<sup>2</sup> and applaud both-and. But deep in the denominational DNA is an opposing momentum that enshrines the exclusivity of either-or. Nevertheless, the genius of Adventism is best realized when we acknowledge our penchant for fundamentalist

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either-or thinking and appreciate our more progressive both-and sentiment.<sup>3</sup>

Herein I argue that the genius of Adventism is that historic conflicts between fundamentalism and progressivism have been deeply affected by and largely regulated by reason.

### James White, an Early Adventist Progressive

Striking differences in temperament among early Adventist believers are not surprising given the post-Millerite milieu in which the Church arose. William Miller, a rationalistic deist-turned-Baptist, attracted many other frontier believers—mostly Methodists and Baptists. Ellen Harmon came from a shouting Methodist congregation, where her father was an exhorter, until the family was expelled. If we follow Valentine’s typology, Miller leaned more canary than ostrich. This was best exemplified by his post-Disappointment Albany Conference at which he and key Millerite leaders regrouped, acknowledging their prophetic miscalculation, and opposed members in their movement they considered fanatics—a group that included Ellen Harmon. She was one of several such “fanatics” participating in a Millerite believers’ prayer meeting in February of 1845 at Israel Dammon’s home in Atkinson, Maine.<sup>4</sup> Within a year Ellen would be married to James White, and with Joseph Bates they founded what would become the Seventh-day Adventist denomination of more than twenty-two million members, while Miller’s Advent Christian denomination continues with at most, sixty thousand members.

During the Sabbath Conferences of 1848, Ellen White was not directly involved in doctrinal development; however, she was a prophetic consensus builder—divinely led in her spiritual gift of reconciliation. Thus, in *Present Truth* (July 1849–November 1850), organizer James White published accounts of his wife’s visions. But sensitive to criticism of fanaticism and of following “another rule of faith than the Scriptures,” James—the calculating canary—failed to publish many accounts of her visions in his newly founded *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* (August 1850–January 1856). “As many

are prejudiced against visions,” wrote James, “we think best at present not to insert anything of the kind in the regular paper.”<sup>5</sup> However, after James’s ouster as editor, Ellen’s visions became a staple of the *Review* under its new editor, Uriah Smith. The backstory of James’s removal from his own *Review* illustrates how a fundamentalist/progressive distinction has existed in our Church from its inception.<sup>6</sup>

### The Fundamentalist/Progressive Distinction

Sabbatarian Adventism was burgeoning in the 1850s, especially in frontier states such as Michigan, whose population had increased by 574 percent during the last census decade.<sup>7</sup> Evangelistic meetings were drawing up to fifteen hundred attendees, and the *Review* was read by at least two thousand.<sup>8</sup> James White, accused of downplaying his wife’s visions, was a focus of the November, 1855, Battle Creek conference, attended by some sixty Adventists.<sup>9</sup> A month earlier “a class of persons . . . determined [to] make the views of Mrs. White a Test [sic] of doctrine and Christian fellowship,” reported James in the *Review*. Editor James responded: “What has the *Review* to do with Mrs. W’s views? The sentiments published in its columns are all drawn from the Holy Scriptures. No writer of the *Review* has ever referred to them as authority. . . . The *Review* for five years has not published one of them.”<sup>10</sup>

However, James White’s fellow believers resoundingly disagreed with editor James’s perceived disregard: They contended that Ellen’s visions were God’s “adopted means . . . for the perfection of the saints . . . in these last days.” They vented their “fear that we have grieved the Spirit by neglecting the blessings already conferred upon the Church. We refer to the visions which God has promised to the remnant.”<sup>11</sup> Ellen, gratified at having her prophetic gift overwhelmingly affirmed at the three-day Battle Creek conference, received a seven-topic vision as the conference ended. She immediately wrote up the vision, had it published, and within a month had sent out one hundred and fifty copies.<sup>12</sup>

Two months after the Battle Creek conference, newly appointed *Review* editor Smith published a direct



criticism of James White, with James's candid response. A "Brother Bingham," speaking for Vermont Adventists, said James had "placed a less estimate" on Ellen's gift "than the Churches [sic] here have. . . ." Bingham called for "some apology through the *Review*; that shall be a relief to many minds."<sup>13</sup> But James stood by his five-year *Review* editorial leadership: "The Bible is my rule of faith and practice, and in saying this, I do not reject the Holy Spirit in its diversities of operations."<sup>14</sup> Manifesting his both/and approach to his wife's spiritual gift, James recalled that it was "well known that we [Adventists] have been charged with testing all men by the visions, and making them the rule of our faith." He concluded: "This I have denied, and deny it still."<sup>15</sup>

James White believed he could be both respectable in the eyes of the larger public and fully accepting of Ellen's gift of prophecy. He could, personally; he couldn't editorially. The powerful, religio-emotional forces of the Sabbatarian Adventists (mostly ex-Millerites) were too strong. Ellen willingly complied with her devotees' needs—and James stepped into place, as new editor Smith resumed visionary article publication (The position of *Review* editor would seesaw between Smith and James four times over the next twenty years). In 1855 (eight years before formal organization), fledgling Adventism dramatically demonstrated contrasting styles of dealing with common-faith issues. That contrast continues.<sup>16</sup>

### **Haskell, Washburn, and Holmes as Leading Fundamentalists**

There's ancient wisdom in the proverbial saying that the leopard cannot change its spots (Jer 13:23), and that applies to our Adventist tradition. Not coincidentally, our Church's roots are in upstate New York, not New Haven, Connecticut. The popular discontent that replaced James White with Smith as the *Review* editor continued to gain ascendancy in the Church through such leaders as S.N. Haskell, Claude Holmes, and J.S. Washburn.

Self-educated Stephen Haskell heard a second-coming sermon when he was eighteen, immediately began sharing, and within a year raised his first Adventist

congregation. Highly entrepreneurial, Haskell made an indelible, multifaceted contribution to his Church: in publishing, urban evangelism, college-founding, conference administration, and advocacy of Ellen White's inerrancy. He and Ellen were close (he once proposed to her), and she wrote him more testimonies than anyone outside of family.<sup>17</sup> But two years before Ellen's death, her son Willie warned Haskell: "that a few men of age and experience insist upon . . . the theory of verbal inspiration which Mother does not stand for, which the General Conference does not stand for, which my father never stood for."<sup>18</sup>

Judson Washburn, representing the next generation beyond Haskell, proudly continued what he saw as faithful old-line Adventism—seeing ultra-traditionalist Smith as his "idol" and following his uncle G.I. Butler in opposing the righteousness-by-faith emphasis at the 1888 GC session. Washburn, coming from solid Adventist pioneer stock (and brilliant; he reportedly memorized the New Testament), finally accepted righteousness by faith, but was increasingly adamant about Ellen White's verbal inspiration. Later, in a mass-circulated pamphlet, he criticized the 1919 Bible Conference's candid discussion of Ellen as "the most terrible thing that had ever happened" in Adventist history. A.G. Daniells called Washburn's claims "the worst tirade ever put in print by a Seventh-day Adventist minister."<sup>19</sup>

Claude Holmes, eighteen years Washburn's junior, and two generations younger than the still-vital Haskell, raised the decibel level even higher in beating the drum for Ellen White's inerrancy. This perfectionistic linotype operator accepted nothing less than a letter-perfect prophet, publishing his *Have We An Infallible 'Spirit of Prophecy'?*—two years before Daniells was denied the GC presidency. Therein, Holmes asserted: "One tells me her books are not in harmony with facts historically, another that she is wrong scientifically, still another disputes her claims theologically and another questions her authorship, and another discredits her writings grammatically and rhetorically."

"Is there anything left?" asked sarcastic Holmes. "Several have said to me: 'Oh, you are making a pope

out of Mrs. White,' I reply, 'Never!' I would not lower the dignity and authority of God's messenger by putting her on a par with a Pope. She is far above and superior to any Pope."<sup>20</sup>

### Lacey, Prescott, and Daniells as Minority Progressives

If Haskell, the veteran churchman who delivered the sermon at Ellen White's Battle Creek Tabernacle funeral, along with Holmes and Washburn, were the fundamentalists, the opposing progressive trio was made up of Bible teacher H. Camden Lacey, historian W.W. Prescott, and GC President A.G. Daniells.

Lacey was a Brit born to an Episcopalian family that converted to Adventism when he was seventeen. A bright student, Lacey took the ministerial course at Healdsburg College, studied classics at Battle Creek College, and later was a professor of biblical languages at Washington Missionary College. He helped Ellen White found Avondale College, and while in Australia saw firsthand the complex production of *The Desire of Ages*. He was Willie White's brother-in-law, living for some time in the White home. Lacey believed Ellen was divinely inspired for the "spiritual light [her writing] throws into our hearts and lives"—not in "intellectual accuracy in historical and theological matters."<sup>21</sup>

W.W. Prescott came from a Millerite family, and as a second-generation Church leader, he served on the GC Executive Committee for forty-two years, and overall served fifty-two years as a publishing and educational leader. Having earned his BA and MA from Dartmouth College, he was later president at Battle Creek College, while simultaneously co-founding Walla Walla College and Union College! Subsequently, along with Lacey and Daniells, he helped Ellen White found Avondale College, and he later aided her as she edited a new edition of *The Great Controversy*, suggesting one hundred and five changes, most of which were accepted.

Arthur Daniells, a valued colleague of Ellen White, was not only an able administrator, serving as GC president longer than any other (1901-1923), but he was a bold thinker who long sensed the need for the

denomination to view Ellen's divine inspiration more realistically—hence, the 1919 Bible Conference. However, this conference became a lightning rod, attracting the fiery criticism of Washburn and Holmes and factoring into his ouster from the GC presidency.

Daniells courageously convened the 1919 conference, despite awareness of a widespread inerrantist sentiment among both laity and pastors. Even many of the Washington Missionary College board members were "ultra-conservative," observes Valentine.<sup>22</sup> This sentiment was evidently widespread even among leading laypersons.

Historian Benjamin MacArthur, who has written the most definitive biography to date on Daniells,<sup>23</sup> faults him for failing to fight for an enlightened view of Ellen White's inspiration. However, this would have meant taking on the Washburn-Holmes majority. MacArthur sees Daniells's inaction here as his most significant failure:

For all of [Daniells's'] brave talk [about Ellen's inspiration] during the [1919 Bible Conference] sessions, he faltered. The transcripts were filed away, not to be rediscovered for decades. This was perhaps Daniells's greatest failure as leader. Rather than leading his church toward a much-needed re-examination of their prophet's writings, he allowed the church during the 1920s to turn down the path of fundamentalism.<sup>24</sup>

MacArthur's judgment is understandable, but it fails to consider the fundamentalist sentiment that's characterized most Adventist believers from our beginning.<sup>25</sup> In Daniells's decision to file the conference transcriptions, he likely sensed—at least intuitively—that denominational unity was at stake. At the 1919 conference he'd gathered top Church leadership—and as the GC president for the previous eighteen years, he had disproportionate say about who would lead a Church of less than 70,000 members<sup>26</sup> when he took charge. Given the composition of Daniells's top colleagues in 1919, his progressive views easily prevailed. But a showdown in the general

Church over Ellen White’s inspiration was a battle he’d surely lose—and he knew it.

Daniells’s crucial 1919 “filing” decision may have been less a leadership failure than a perceptive leader’s reading of his denomination’s zeitgeist, or undergirding nature. Regardless, hindsight suggests that despite popular Adventism’s inerrantist views, Daniells should have shared key insights from the 1919 transcripts, and thus deliberately kept alive the important deliberation over Ellen White’s prophetic role.

As important as the Daniells-Washburn standoff was, it is secondary to the deeper value of sustaining Adventism as a thriving American frontier Church that would grow to more than twenty-two million members. I’ve been a lifelong Adventist pastor/professor, and only more recent study has led to a deeper, more inclusive view of religion—and my Adventism. I’m now more interested in *accepting* than *changing* fellow-believers.

In a rebooted Adventism 2.0, which celebrates both fundamentalists and progressives, it’s important to understand two key points: first, the undergirding dynamic of religion, and second, the unique Adventist claim of present truth.

### **The Basic Nature of Religion (and Adventism)**

Religion in general, and Adventism in particular, is more a matter of the heart than head—to over-simplify the issue. It’s a question of essence, and here religion is too important to merely reside in the mind. A growing number of contemporary philosophers, psychologists, and historians who study the phenomenon of religion see it as essential to human experience. For example, philosopher Stephen Asma has moved from religion skeptic to advocate, seeing religion functioning primarily at the affective level of our being, where he says we really live and decide. In terms of our brains, religion is rooted in our limbic system. Religion, like art and music, has “direct access” to our emotions in a way that science doesn’t.<sup>27</sup> The most basic life/death decisions are rooted in one’s reptilian and mammalian brains, with the neocortex kicking in to supply enabling reasons for deeply held convictions. Of course, the

issue isn’t *either* deeper brain levels *or* neo-cortex; it’s their intrinsic interpenetration, with our “language, symbolic ability, executive control . . . energized by lower-level emotion.” Our highest brain level possesses “uniquely human emotions, like the elaborate feelings of introspective savants such as Marcel Proust and Fyodor Dostoyevsky.”<sup>28</sup>

Psychologist Jonathan Haidt, in *The Righteous Mind*, severely criticizes the New Atheists (Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, Sam Harris, and Christopher Hitchens) for their restricted view of religion. Yes, they make some good points about much of religion’s rationality. However, they fail to appreciate what sociologists such as Emile Durkheim underscore: the unique and superior way in which religion can bind people together and make them more generous. For example, in his chapter titled “Religion is a Team Sport,” Haidt cites a study of the United States population that shows that the least religious quintile gives one and a half percent of income to charity, while the most religious quintile gives seven percent!<sup>29</sup>

Renowned historian of religion Mircea Eliade weighs in, questioning the possibility of contemporary secularization “completely desacraliz[ing]” a normal person. Such a person “still dreams, falls in love, listens to music, goes to the theater, views films, reads books—in short, lives not only in a historical and natural world but also in an existential, private world and in an imaginary Universe.” Eliade sees “‘religious’ structures” behind our imaginary universes. “On the most archaic level of culture, *living as a human being is in itself a religious act.*”<sup>30</sup>

Seventh-day Adventism, like all religious groups, is rooted in human affect, but represents a balance between our emotional and rational selves. Early popular Sabbatarian Adventism favored the emotional side, given that Ellen White quickly rose to prominence—despite her more rationally oriented husband’s predilections. The affective and intellectual roles complement one another, but the issue of priority and dependence warrants further comment. In the final analysis, we must recognize that the rational is parasitic on the affective core of religion. We humans cognitively reason about a viscerally felt

experience—something James experienced, but may not have been able to fully explain to himself. It's not that James wasn't highly intelligent, but obviously he didn't have our benefit of specialized studies on the emotional-rational interplay. James accepted the chastening decision of the 1855 conference and ably served his Church another twenty-six years until his early death. Analytically speaking, reasoned discourse is always about something more substantive, more basic to our very existence than merely high-sounding religious concepts and moral principles. And that's a lesson James learned: his leadership of Sabbatarian Adventism, about which he was so concerned to make wise decisions, wouldn't even have been needed if the fledging group became disillusioned and left due to the neglect of a key, charismatic leader. Maybe James, given his temperament and abilities, could balance belief in his wife's gift and his rational perception of group needs. But the 1855 Battle Creek conferees rejected James's balance, going with their hearts.

Similarly, Daniells and his fellow top Church leaders in 1919 believed in Ellen White's prophetic gift, and were at peace, if not fully comfortable, with its human limitations. However, the popular Church, influenced by and reflected in the ultra-fundamentalism of Washburn and Holmes, was relatively free, after Daniells was denied the GC presidency, to follow its basic affective instincts. Adventist fundamentalism became mainstream, so much so that the discovery and publication of the 1919 transcripts was a conceptual jolt to people like me, a pastor who had recently completed his doctorate.

These transcripts held liberating news: some thoughtful Church leaders held informed, non-fundamentalist views of Ellen White's prophetic gift! But, again, in 1979 when I read those 1919 transcripts, there was something more basic behind Daniells's rational explanations of Ellen's gift: a whole Church of people who deeply felt—knew in their hearts—that God was powerfully using this gifted woman's counsels and unifying efforts. These Church people, en masse, demanded that her visions be published—despite the charges of fanaticism and extra-biblical authority that

might come. If popular Adventism had not prevailed, James might have witnessed the demise of his fledging Church, to say nothing of his prized *Review*. And there would have been no *Spectrum* to run analytical essays such as are in this special issue, as there would have been no thriving world Church to care about.

Fundamentalist Adventism—emotionally dominant, either-or, originating in the charismatic wing of Millerism—will endure. Adventism, in being true to itself, will never mimic the Congregationalists, the Episcopalians, or the Unitarians as their adherents are true to their historical selves. And for at least that reason, the ostriches will always out-number the canaries in Adventism. But there have always been upstanding, leading canaries. Without both species in the Church, the denomination cannot flourish.

Religion, in its grandest sense, deals with the most essential question of human existence—the meaning of our human lives. And ever since we humans were able to conceptualize, we employed art, told stories, and articulated beliefs. Religion is basically affective, but it is necessarily moderated by parasitic reason.

### **Present Truth**

Five years after the Great Disappointment, James White founded the publication *Present Truth*, likely to herald the newly adopted Sabbath truth, which replaced the *Midnight Cry* of Millerism. "Present truth" is historically tied to Sabbath, but there is a deeper meaning to the term than its originators imagined—and that meaning rings true in two senses: first, that truth matters to Adventists; and second, that truth relates to present circumstances. Given today's multi-million-member Church—which is diverse geographically, intellectually, culturally, socioeconomically, educationally—that Adventism be truly present is a challenge of unparalleled importance. Adapting Adventism to cultural and personal need is not only permissible but mandatory. From our earliest days, we Adventists have had our ear to the ground to sense what God is doing at present.

The concept of making Judeo-Christian truth

meaningful to present time isn't new. It's intuitive to see religious truth through one's contemporary lens. How else can one "be true" to herself? For ages believers have naturally used contemporary word-pictures to portray their "present truths":

- When times were particularly violent, it made sense for believers to see their God in terms of contemporary practices: "[destroy every] woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep" (1 Sam 15:3).
- Before greater attention was given to appropriate methods of scriptural interpretation, no less than Paul used allegory: "Now this is an allegory: these two women [Sarah and Hagar] are two covenants . . ." (Gal. 4:24).
- Without in-depth biblical word study, but based on her basic intuition, Ellen White asserted that it would be immoral for God to punish evildoers in eternal hellfire.<sup>31</sup>
- In his recent seven-week series on Revelation, "Heaven Cares: The Tender God of the Apocalypse," Randy Roberts, Loma Linda University Church senior pastor, preached on grand ideals/symbols that apply to all places and times—openly lamenting the fear-inducing, probation-closing interpretations of his childhood.

The practice of adopting various styles of worship and study, thus making truth authentically present to different Adventist groups, is catching on:

- Crosswalk Church features a casual, Christ-centered approach to worship and study, whose appeal to younger Adventists has now spread from its Redlands, California, base to include diverse satellite locations: Australia, Texas, Tennessee, Oregon, New England, Los Angeles, and more.
- A growing number of Adventist churches and institutions have abandoned the longstanding Adventist taboo on coffee use, and now serve the health-inducing brew as a conversation-promoting, community-building practice.
- Some Sabbath school classes have replaced the ubiquitous, worldwide Sabbath school quarterly, essentially making religious truth more present—

probing topics, sometimes in two-hour depth, that class members find more pertinent to felt spiritual need.

These are but a few illustrations of how believers have made religious truth applicable to personal circumstances. But let's dig a little deeper to see if there's conceptual justification for what's been done intuitively.

Take the very notion, "truth." There's no agreement among philosophers, whose stock-in-trade is truth. Some contend for a correspondence theory—that truth and facts correspond. OK, but what are "facts"? Astrophysicists' evidence-based speculation about our universe(s) only complicates the quest, as some leading physicists are questioning the bedrock of all we think, do, and believe—that we exist in a particular space and time. Spacetime may be "emergent," with quantum physics as more basic. "We have a lot of hints from physics that spacetime as we understand it isn't the fundamental thing," asserts Natalie Paquette, of the University of Washington.<sup>32</sup> The take-home? That truth itself is intrinsically dynamic. We need less finality in our truth-assertions about spacetime matters. As the apostle Paul cautioned in 1 Corinthians 13, we "see through a glass darkly." If that applied when we believed in a geocentric universe, how much more applicable is it now, given current views of the cosmos? The status of spacetime itself may well be theoretically indeterminate, but that's no threat to faith. Our faith is in nothing less than our infinite Creator God—not in what God has created, including even spacetime.

Then there's the adjective "present"—truth that's present or contemporary, as opposed to past truth and yet-to-be-discovered truth. The notion of being present indicates the importance of living "now," taking seriously what we and our God are doing at present—in these times, places, and cultures. In a sense, the essays in this special issue of *Spectrum* are grappling with issues of *present* truth.

## **From Traditional to Contemporary (2.0) Adventism**

Traditional Adventism sees itself one-dimensionally: the Church is uniform and to deviate

is wrong, perhaps sin. Contemporary, rebooted Adventism is multidimensional: our human natures lead to fundamentalism, progressivism, and sometimes a beautiful mix of ideologies.

Most Adventists are fundamentalist, and the Global South is disproportionately represented and rapidly growing. Brazil has more Adventists than the United States, 1.7 million (up seven percent some years) to 1.2 million (barely holding). Latin America has roughly thirty percent of Adventism, Asia fifteen percent. But numbers-wise, Adventism is an African denomination, with half the Church soon in Africa. Four African countries (Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda, Zambia) have more than one million members, and continental membership grows more than five percent some years. Anyone see the world-Church headquarters heading to São Paulo or Nairobi?<sup>33</sup>

Whereas Adventism began one hundred and sixty-five years ago in rural New England, now old England and sister developed lands have a shrinking six percent of world membership. But members in developed nations possess disproportionate wealth and influence. Another difference regards culture. Whereas the most developed nations emphasize equality, the overwhelming majority of Adventists live in world regions with hierarchical cultures: tribal Africa, Roman Catholic Latin America, and caste-influenced Asia.

All factors considered, how long can our exceedingly diverse denomination hold together? Will we split? Probably not, for at least three reasons:

- The progressives have the ideological bandwidth to embrace fundamentalists and see strength in diversity.
- Even our ultra-fundamentalist GC President Ted Wilson has limited power to enforce his agenda, as demonstrated in his drastic but inoperative compliance committees.
- The formerly powerful GC is likely to be increasingly irrelevant as divisions, unions, healthcare corporations, and universities chart their own Adventist courses.

A related question is whether individual members will continue to be Adventist. The answer is mixed. Loyal

fundamentalist Adventists are likely to remain tied to a Church many essentially see as their ticket to heaven, to oversimplify. But progressive Adventists have more options. Some leave Adventism, often for principled reasons. For example, in a recent interview, attorney Vicki Ballou—former Walla Walla University board member and North Pacific Union executive committee member who has seen Church operations from the inside—shared her overall impression: “A corrupt good-ole-boys system that’s a hierarchical patriarchy.”<sup>34</sup> Melodie Roschman, writing “Pastor’s Kid” in this issue of *Spectrum*, decided to leave the Church she loves and continues to serve. Roschman, who wanted to be a pastor but was never invited (unlike her less-fitted brother), says “patriarchy is not a quirk, [but] an atmosphere” in Adventism. Most educated Church members, thankfully, choose to remain Adventist.

Appropriately, three such writers in this special issue are African; they have a vision beyond the prevailing American-missionary Adventism. Chigemezi Wogu calls for a distinctive Nigerian Adventism that reflects his nation’s unique culture and thought patterns. Admiral Ncube, in wanting to get beyond traditional doctrinal correctness, calls for a new African expression of Adventism for altered “lived realities.” Jeanne Mogusu writes of a “pervasive ideology” in an African Adventism that idolizes “uniformity and conformity” on secondary issues cloaked as salvific divine mandates. Norwegian historian Edwin Torkelsen espouses a similar perspective in his penetrating critique of contemporary Adventism, writing of the “addictive power” of imperial Adventism. André Kanasiro, writing from the wealthiest Adventist powerhouse outside the US—Brazil—creatively grapples with the implications of communitarian Bible study, White-inspired country living, and transfer of wealth. Lars Gustavsson uplifts climate change as a present truth. Finally, Anthony Bosman and Richard Hart, respectively,





explore education and healthcare—increasingly leading brands of Adventism around the world.

One hundred seventy years ago, some fifteen hundred American frontier Sabbatarian Adventists disagreed over prophetess Ellen White's role in their fledging church group: a progressive minority vs. a fundamentalist majority. The Church of today has vastly changed in demographics and organization, but a progressive/fundamentalist split over the prophetess's role remains. Yes, wise denominational leadership can and should take deliberate steps to lessen the divide. However, deeper issues are at play: historical, educational, psychosocial. And there's the undergirding importance of our religious sensibility, which can be the basis for understanding and hopeful acceptance of the other. This is the hope for a rebooted Adventism.

#### ENDNOTES:

1. Gilbert M. Valentine, *Ostriches and Canaries: Coping with Change in Adventism 1966-1979* (Westlake Village, CA: Oak and Acorn Publishing, 2022).
2. The poet Czeslaw Milosz's "Either-Or" questions the mentality of believers who must choose between salvation in the sky and salvation on earth. *New and Collected Poems, 1931-2001* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 540-541.
3. This essay expands Valentine's helpful ornithological typology by contrasting traits in human nature, illustrating how some people demand simple solutions, while others entertain complex, both-and resolutions. In using this approach, I readily acknowledge that although no person neatly fits into either type, recognition of undergirding socio-psychological traits may give unique insights into how Adventist faith has developed. A rebooted view of Adventism will likely be resisted by fundamentalists because Adventism 1.0 (supposedly unchanging) is sufficient and must be protected at all costs.
4. Israel Dammon's court case was covered by a local newspaper, and a detailed account of the tumultuous religious behavior leading to his arrest was published in *Adventist Currents* 3, no. 1, (1988). One trial witness testified that Ellen Harmon: "told her vision to a cousin of mine, that she must be baptized that night or go to hell." Another witness gave similar testimony about Ellen Harmon's warnings of hell, adding, "we believed her," [http://www.1timothy4-13.com/files/bible/sda\\_dammon.html](http://www.1timothy4-13.com/files/bible/sda_dammon.html).
5. James White, *Review and Herald Extra*, July 21, 1851.
6. I employ the fundamentalist/progressive distinction more as a contrast in personality types than in personal theologies, although often there's a linkage. For example, James White was more able to entertain a complex handling of his wife's visions, in contrast to mainstream Adventists, hence the progressive/fundamentalist distinction. In basic theology, James, like all fellow Adventists at the time, read the Bible literally and was hence a theological fundamentalist. Gilbert Valentine thoroughly details the deep roots of theological fundamentalism from which Adventism emerged, <https://spectrummagazine.org/views/2022/adventist-identity-when-did-fundamentalism-begin>.
7. Adventists were aware of such developments because their Church paper reported on relevant secular developments. *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* 7, no. 4 (August 21, 1855), 31-33. I am indebted to Douglas Hackleman for sharing with me his unpublished writing on 1849-1856 Adventism, based on early issues of *Present Truth* and *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*.
8. James White, "Terms of the Review," *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* 7, no. 1 (July 10, 1855), 8.
9. Approximately sixty Sabbatarian Adventists (the Seventh-day Adventist denomination would not be organized until 1863) attended a weekend conference in November 1855. At least two leading matters of business were addressed: the location of the *Advent Review* publishing office and the publication of Ellen White's visions. The senior churchman was Joseph Bates, 62, who not only co-founded the Church, along with James White, 34, and Ellen White, 28, but had converted the four attendees who each ponied up \$300 for the establishment of the Adventist press at Battle Creek, moving it from Paris, Maine: John P. Kellogg, Daniel Palmer, Cyrenius Smith, and Henry Lyon (average age at the conference, 49). Roswell Cottrell—whose two hundred-year heritage was Seventh Day Baptist and who was attracted to Millerism but didn't join the Millerite-Adventist band until it became Sabbatarian—was 41. Cottrell was on the editorial committee, along with J.N. Andrews, 26, and Uriah Smith, 25. Another attendee was John Loughborough, 25, who along with Uriah Smith was but 12 at the Great Disappointment. Ages of some leading conference attendees are listed to show the relatively youthful nature of the early Adventists.
10. James White, "A Test," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* 7:8 (Oct. 16, 1855), 61-62.
11. "Address of the Conference Assembled at Battle Creek, Mich., Nov. 16th, 1855," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* 7:10 (Dec. 4, 1855), 78-79.
12. Ellen G. White, *Testimony for the Church, No. 1*, (Advent Review Office, 1851), 22; *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* 7:12 (December 18, 1855), 96.
13. Hiram Bingham, "From Bro. Bingham," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* 7:20 (Feb.14, 1856), 158.
14. James White, responding to Hiram Bingham, "From Bro. Bingham," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* 7:20 (February 14, 1856), 158.
15. James White, "From Bro. Bingham," 158.
16. The contrast today is significantly more pronounced, as originally it was mostly differing personality types. Today, largely due to Adventism's education emphasis, the contrast exists in sometimes vastly differing theologies. (See endnote 6.)
17. Gerald Wheeler and Douglas Morgan, "Haskell, Stephen Nelson (1834-1922)," *Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists*, <https://encyclopedia.adventist.org/article?id=69G2>.
18. W.C. White to S.N. Haskell, 1/15/1913, E.G. White Incoming Correspondence.
19. Matthew J. Lucio and Douglas Morgan, "Washburn, Judson Sylvanus (1863-1955)," *Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists*, <https://encyclopedia.adventist.org/article?id=DAD4>.
20. Michael W. Campbell and Douglas Morgan, "Holmes, Claude Ernest (1881-1953)," *Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists*, <https://encyclopedia.adventist.org/article?id=D9HS>.
21. See Valentine, 29; and Milton Hook and Paul Lockham, "Lacey, Herbert Camden (1871-1950) and Lillian (Yarnell) (1873-1965)," *Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists*, <https://encyclopedia.adventist.org/article?id=5CQ8>.
22. Valentine, 27.
23. Benjamin McArthur, A.G. Daniells: *Shaper of Twentieth Century Adventism* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2016).
24. Benjamin McArthur and Douglas Morgan, "Daniells, Arthur Grosvenor (1858-1936)," *Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists*, <https://encyclopedia.adventist.org/article?id=8972>.
25. Technically, American fundamentalism arose in the second decade of twentieth-century American evangelicalism, and it profoundly influenced Adventism, as Michael Campbell so helpfully documents in his 1919: *The Untold Story of Adventism's Struggle with Fundamentalism* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2019), and 1922: *The Rise of Adventist Fundamentalism* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2022). However, in Adventism's deeply literalist view of biblical inspiration, along with an overall either-or mentality, the religious sentiment that led to fundamentalism had long been in popular Adventism. (See endnote 6.)
26. The GC archives reports a world membership of 69,356 at the end of 1901, <https://documents.adventistarchives.org/Statistics/ASR/ASR1901.pdf>.
27. "In this book, I will argue that religion, like art, has direct access to our emotional lives in ways that science does not," asserts Stephen T. Asma, in his *Why We Need Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 3. In *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion* (New York: Vintage Books, 2013), Jonathan Haidt makes a related point with his now near-infamous contrast between the visceral Elephant and its rational Rider—with the latter assuming she's in control while the elephant is the true manager.
28. Asma, "Why We Need Religion," 69.
29. Haidt, "The Righteous Mind," 308.
30. Mircea Eliade, *The Quest: History and Meaning in Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), ii, iv, original italics.
31. Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1911), 535.
32. Adam Becker, "What is Spacetime Really Made Of?" *Scientific American* 326, no. 2 (Feb. 2022), <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/what-is-spacetime-really-made-of/>.
33. The South American Division has 2.1 million members and grows at sometimes 7 percent annually. The North American Division has 1.4 million members and barely shows annual growth, with three unions losing members during a recent year: North Pacific Union, Pacific Union, and Southwestern Union. Adventism is increasingly huge worldwide—three times the size of all the religious Jews in the world and more than six million members larger than Mormonism.
34. Jim Walters' interview of Vicki Ballou, 8/21/2023; quotation used by permission.



# AFRICANS on AFRICAN Adventism



# Decolonizing African Adventism

A Call to Critical Examination and Distinction of the Biblical, Cultural, and Preferential

Whenever the terms colonizing or decolonizing come up, the typical reaction is defensive. The idea of colonization, and all that goes with it, has the ability to bring up the most visceral reactions. Before I go any further in this discourse, it is important to state unequivocally that my intention is to provoke critical thought and dialogue regarding the deconstruction of a few of our widely held beliefs as African Adventists, so as to have a deeper, more authentic experience with God.

To ensure that there are no misunderstandings, it is important to define the term “decolonization.” As its name suggests, decolonization is the removal or undoing of colonization, the peeling away of the political, social, and cultural effects of Euro-American influences and attitudes on current life structures.<sup>1</sup> As such, a call to decolonization is a call to consciousness; it is a call to an intentional and methodical identification and examination of these influences on the practice of Adventism in the African context. The decolonization of African Adventism therefore calls for us to recognize and strip away from our Adventism things that are expressions of another culture. Such an exercise requires open-mindedness as we deconstruct very deeply entrenched ideology so as to better understand ourselves and God.

## What Is a Colonial Worldview?

Defining colonialism and its tenets is not a simple task. There are many definitions proffered, and the characteristics of colonialism tend to vary in extent and intent. However, regardless of the definition used or the differing characteristics described, there is a basic understanding of what colonialism espoused. This Euro-American worldview is one that places high value on competition, individualism, and male superiority. Given this general understanding, we can extract the central themes of colonization as competition, individualism, and hierarchy—the last of

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which is evidenced in the tenet of male superiority.<sup>2</sup>

An examination of these themes and how they are reflected upon our practice of religion—and particularly our practice of African Adventism—will show that there is a very strong and deeply rooted influence of colonialism in African Adventism. This reality has such a stronghold within the African Adventist faith that to highlight and challenge this influence is akin to challenging God. Questioning policies, practices, and interpretations is seen as an indication that you have fallen out with God and the Church. Critical thinking is rarely encouraged, if ever, and this mindset is further reinforced by the African tradition of respect and deference to those in authority and those who are older. As such, I dare say that African Adventists are in a perpetual state of subconscious turmoil made worse by the fact that we don't even realize that we still hold within ourselves vestiges of colonialism.

### **Influence of Colonization on the African Adventist Faith**

Although the African Adventist Church is not monolithic, the influence of colonization can be witnessed by examining practices that are common in most of the continent. As we look at some of these major areas of colonial influence, it is important to distinguish between the biblical, the traditional, and the preferential. When there is no consciousness of

these critical distinctions, then there is a great danger of fanaticism and legalism, both of which are not aligned to the Christian value system.

The Christian value system is best explained by Jesus himself when he was asked which was the greatest commandment. He responded by giving two commandments which, he said, anchor all of the law and the prophets: love God with all your heart, mind, and strength; and love your neighbor as yourself (in Matthew 22:36). By saying this, Christ gave the foundational principles that ought to govern and guide our values.

African Adventism with its vestiges of colonialism contravenes this Christian value system and, by extension, goes against Christ's charge in the things it chooses to emphasize and hold in high esteem.

### **The Theology of the "Other"**

A large part of the decolonization that must take place is the misplaced allegiance to the Church and denomination rather than to Christ, who is our Savior and Redeemer. In The Great Commission, Christ asked the disciples to teach what they had been taught by him, to make disciples, to share what he had shared with them. However, as admirably as we have taken evangelism to heart as African Adventists, we have interpreted the making of disciples as the making of Adventists. We have internalized allegiance to Adventism and to the institution of Adventism rather

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## **RATHER THAN TO CHRIST,**

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than to the Christ whose advent we eagerly await. I call this our theology of the “other.”

One of the most prevalent understandings of the Adventist Church is our interpretation of Revelation 14:12 and our belief that we are the remnant Church. I suggest that the first missionaries, in their enthusiasm for the Adventist message, conveyed it in a way that demonized all others to the point that we have coined a term for all those that are not us: non-Adventists. This understanding of superiority, grounded in a colonial understanding that Africans are primitive peoples that need liberation, has influenced many in the Adventist faith to believe that only Adventists will make it into heaven and, by extension, to believe that being Adventist in itself is the ticket to heaven.

Although this is not the correct interpretation of that text (and many other supporting texts), the unfortunate truth is that this is the most prevalent interpretation, and it is touted as a fundamental belief. This misinterpretation has led to the theology of the other, the ideology that distinguishes us: Adventists are the only ones going to heaven and, by extension, everyone else is going to hell. This idea has been the driving force of our evangelistic methodology, and it has led to the development of a superiority complex that is antithetical not only to our biblical faith but also to our African cultural beliefs.

When people believe that they are superior and, by extension, that all others are inferior, it breeds a sense of contempt—even if that contempt stems from perceived care for the perishing of souls. The biblical foundation of the Christian faith is strongly rooted in the understanding found in Romans 3:23, that we are all equally sinners, and as such we are all equally in need of the salvation of our Lord Jesus Christ. Additionally, John 3:16 makes it abundantly clear that the sacrifice of Christ on the cross was for all. We all alike need salvation, and we all alike have access to that salvation through Christ. Verse 17 goes further to let us know that Christ’s primary goal was not to condemn the world but that the world would be saved through him. Isn’t it sad that our flawed understanding and subsequent methodology of

evangelization seem to be driven solely by our belief that we are the only ones that are right and therefore must save all the others who are wrong?

Furthermore, our theology of otherization has led us to be so outward focused, so fixated on the wrongs of the “other,” that we rarely make an active examination of ourselves. It is not uncommon to hear evangelistic efforts that doom all other denominations to hell while touting Adventists as the only ones going to heaven. Unfortunately, this approach has alienated the very people we are trying to evangelize.

African cultural norms are centered around community and the belief that the success of one is the success of all. There is a joint responsibility for one another woven within the fabric of African society. None is better than another; when one fails, all fail; when one succeeds, all succeed. And everyone cares for the welfare of everyone, beginning in the home, in the extended family, in the village, and so on. This is seen in concepts such as Ubuntu, Harambee, and the like, which are more in line with our Christian value system of loving our neighbors as ourselves.

### **The Order of the Worship Service**

Liturgy is perhaps the most obvious element in which the greatest amount of influence from colonialism and its rigidity can be witnessed. Regardless of where you go in the world, the order of service is pretty standard in the majority of Adventist churches. From the way that the lesson study is conducted, to the general time when the divine service begins, to the order in which the divine service is conducted, and the components that comprise this service—one would be hard pressed to find much variation among the churches around the world. Again, it is important to reiterate that not all the colonial influences were necessarily bad, but rather the problem comes when these influences are taken as biblical foundations that are never to be challenged or changed.

In African Adventist churches, the order of service is followed to the letter, with military precision. For example, the invocation must be hymn number 479, “Be Silent,” and the doxology must be hymn number 695.<sup>3</sup>

These exact songs must be sung. Much effort is made to translate these particular songs rather than find other songs, even native songs, that serve the same purpose. This choice of songs is preferential and not biblical; there is an attachment to the familiar. God would not be displeased if the songs were to change or the order of service were to be arranged in a way that took into consideration the lived reality of the local members.

As the world population becomes increasingly urban, most African churches exist in environments that are highly demanding of time. For example, people in Lagos, Nigeria, spend an average of thirty hours per week in traffic.<sup>4</sup> This is the lived reality. In a city like Nairobi, Kenya, it is not uncommon to find people waking up as early as four in the morning in a bid to beat the rush-hour traffic. They then spend an average of four hours a day in traffic.<sup>5</sup> Even amidst these challenges of modern life—and even with our fundamental and foundational belief of resting on the Sabbath—little, if any, consideration is given to the need for a change in the timing of our Sabbath services.

As a child, I remember the constant rebukes from our elders, and even from the pulpit, that if we could get to work and school early, then we must do the same on the Sabbath. However, this is a false equivalency that actually works counter to the intention of Sabbath rest. If the purpose of the church service is to encourage the attendees to worship and grow in their faith, then perhaps the recognition must be made that the timing and order of the service are not themselves biblical, and as such they can be changed and rearranged to a time when the attendees can be most attentive, receptive, and engaged. When Sabbath programming is scheduled like a regular work week, with hardly any time for rest, should we not reexamine the effectiveness and sustainability of this model? Could this be what Jesus meant in Mark 2:27, when he said, “The Sabbath was made to meet the needs of people, and not people to meet the requirements of the Sabbath” (*NLT*)?

### **Biblical vs. Cultural and Preferential**

It is no secret that the peoples of Africa are an

expressive group. Some of the most conspicuous characteristics of Africans are their vibrant and rhythmic expressions. Almost every season of African traditional life has a song attached to it. Music has always been an integral part of the African way of life, incorporating traditional musical instruments and movement. However, for all the expressiveness that is characteristic of the African way of life, one would be hard pressed to find this same vibrancy in our Adventist worship services. This is because of the pervasive and, dare I say, erroneous understanding that the God we worship in Adventism is so holy that to use our traditional instruments in worship would be sinful. Further, there is an unwritten and yet widely enforced rule that our worship services must only incorporate Western hymns, regardless of how far from people’s lived reality those hymns may be. Even the incorporation of songs composed by local artists, regardless of how relevant those compositions are, is seen as mixing the holy with the unholy. The irony of this is that the majority of the songs in the Adventist hymnal were composed by people that were not Adventists.

And herein lies the need for distinguishing what is biblical, cultural, and preferential. It was the missionaries’ preference to introduce what was familiar to them. However, in their zeal to share Adventism with the African population, these missionaries instilled ideology that demonized the African cultural way, making it inherently evil, by associating it with the devil, witchcraft, etc., while elevating everything that they were sharing as being akin to godliness. No distinction was made—no clarification as to the elements that were preferential, the elements that were cultural to the missionaries, and the elements that were biblical. Everything that was African was thrown out wholesale, and the missionaries’ culture and preferential ideology were to be adopted en masse.

For example, decades after Adventism was introduced in Kenya, the belief that traditional musical instruments cannot be used in worship is still deeply rooted. Although these stringed instruments, drums, and percussion instruments are conspicuous in ceremonies

**THERE IS A JOINT RESPONSIBILITY FOR ONE ANOTHER WOVEN WITHIN THE FABRIC OF AFRICAN SOCIETY.**



such as weddings, funerals, and other societal events, there is an unwritten rule that such instruments have no place in our worship service regardless of how much they are a part of our everyday life. The use of instruments such as keyboards, pianos, and organs is widely accepted, even in rural communities, but the use of the local traditional instruments—which are more readily available and much more affordable—are deemed ungodly and unholy. This ideology is still being perpetuated and reinforced by sermons from prominent figures in the Church.

Another example is the way we dress for church. The words “decent” and “appropriate” have been so misconstrued that churches are run more like country clubs with specific dress codes that will get people ousted without blinking. One of the most prominent cultures of the continent is the Maasai people, and one of the more conspicuous things about them is their very colorful jewelry. On the outset, it may look just decorative, but it is meaningful to them, with different jewelry signifying a different stage of life, giving the people a sense of pride in their cultural identity. However, rather than celebrate their unique culture, quite often these people are told that their cultural artefacts—these items so integral to their culture and their identity—are to be taken off before baptism. People are basically asked to detach from their cultural identity in order to be a part of the Church. Biblical texts referring to jewelry are taken out of context as justification for the stripping away of culture and identity.

An incident recently occurred in Kenya—going viral and making the national news—when a local pastor reportedly chased away bridesmaids from a church because they were not decently dressed, and they were not Adventists.<sup>6</sup> It is important to clarify that while there

may have been unknown circumstances that led to this pastor’s reaction, what was discussed in the public square was the intolerant nature of perceived standards of dress held by African Adventists. It is important to declare that this is not an argument for or against whatever may be deemed indecent in whatever culture. This is simply to highlight the way we as African Adventists are so socialized toward treating the Church like an exclusive “club” to the point that the very foundations of Christian faith—like kindness, patience, and understanding—are demands to be made on others but not to be required of us.

As such, this is not a rebuke but rather a call to a consciousness. It is not about the types of dress, a subject that will always tether on the preferential and cultural spectrum. Rather this is about an honest self-evaluation of how we as an African culture have adopted a culture of sexualization and have ourselves become so sexualized that it is easier for us to lay blame on everything else rather than examine ourselves and our mindsets. Jesus said, “If your eye causes you to sin, cut it out” (in Matthew 18:9). As drastic as it sounds, perhaps what Jesus was trying to teach us as Christians, and especially as African Adventists, is that sometimes our self-examination will be as painful as plucking out our eyes, but that self-examination is critical to be a true reflection of Christ.

A final example is the unwritten and widely accepted rule that a man must wear a suit and tie at church—in the pulpit and in the pews—regardless of the hot African climate. And because of this, it is very common on any given Sabbath to see many succumb to sleep in hot buildings in their hot attire. Even though African print clothing and other types of clothing are cooler and much better suited for the climate, they are deemed not formal or decent enough for Sabbath worship.

At the root of this ideology is a belief that only what God created in the West is good, while that which was created by God on the continent is perverted. This may be strong language. However, such thinking needs to be confronted with the strongest possible words. There is a great need for the decolonization of this mindset, which is so deeply ingrained in the majority of the people of a whole continent to the extent that they cannot call into question that which has stripped them of their cultural identity and affected how they relate to God. There is a mostly unconscious belief held by African Adventists that they are not equal to the Adventists that are in the Euro-American parts of the world. This belief is demonstrated in the wholesale adoption of that which has been passed down the pipeline, along with the hesitation and resistance to question relevance in light of the African cultural and geographical context.<sup>7</sup>

### Conformity and Uniformity

A pervasive ideology among African Adventism—encouraged by those in the highest offices of the Church—suggests that godliness is only to be found in uniformity and conformity. However, when closely examined, what is really being pushed is uniformity and conformity on matters that are preferential and cultural to certain people. Unfortunately, because of the status of these individuals who always throw in a text or two, albeit taken out of context, their pleas are taken as the gospel.

The major problem with this ideology is that it doesn't take into consideration that God's primary concern (as outlined in John 3:16-17) is the salvation of people. People are very dynamic and unique. Therefore, what God needs to do in the life of one person will differ from what he does in the life of another—simply because different people have different things from which they need to be delivered. To push uniformity and conformity on a world Church containing people from various cultural, geographical, economical, and professional backgrounds is essentially to provide prescriptions for things that only God himself can provide. It is essentially saying that we know better than God what is needed. It is to presume the place of God when surrender to the God

who knows, sees, and understands is required.

Could this be why we do not get to see and experience the miraculous power of God in the magnitude that we need him? Could our prescriptive arrogance be making our churches impotent? Could this be why we are urged in 2 Chronicles 7:14 to humble ourselves and turn from our wicked ways in order for us to see the healing of our lands that we so desperately need in this time? Can we surrender to the One who has the prerogative to use whoever he wishes and whatever methodology he wants to serve his purpose?

In conclusion, this discourse was meant to spark dialogue and not to demonize. It is not meant to prescribe but rather to urge a consciousness in the way we practice our faith. It is meant to ignite a fire that will take us back to the heart of God and ask him and ourselves why it is that we do what we do, and why we do it the way we do it. It is meant to begin a reexamination into our God-given identity as Africans created in the image of God. Decolonizing African Adventism is tapping into the parts of us that have been so beaten down and hidden to the point that we have believed we cannot proudly present all of our African selves to God. This call to conscious faith is a call to rediscover who we truly are as the Africans that God created, and to slowly and consciously reintegrate the parts of our identity and culture that allow us to be authentically ourselves and worship the God who made us so.

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### ENDNOTES:

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3. *Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*, (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1985).
4. Daniel Obi, "Lagos Commuters Lose 75% of Weekly Working Hours to Traffic," *Business Day*, December 11, 2018, <https://businessday.ng/uncategorized/article/lagos-commuters-lose-75-of-weekly-working-hours-to-traffic/>.
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# Nigerian Adventism

## History and Promise

Seventh-day Adventism in Nigeria is a thriving faith, a fact that mirrors the denomination's global presence. Adventism's theology and practices have undergone dynamic development in Nigeria, shaped by the country's unique history and socioreligious context. This uniqueness and dynamism are a result of the approaches of Western Adventist missionaries as well as the distinctive history and development of the Nigerian socioreligious sphere.

In this article, I will explore the responses of Nigerians to Adventism and how the faith has evolved in the country, using the contrasting psychological categories of *extrovert* and *introvert*. I will discuss the acceptance of Adventism in the early days when Western evangelism dichotomized faith, the later tendency to Africanize the faith by adoption of Nigerian cultural elements, and the recent move toward adaptation of a Pentecostal worldview. These developments have led to questions of Adventist identity—if not a crisis of faith for many. Finally, I will argue for a unique Nigerian Adventism that may emerge in the future that will reflect the country's unique cultural and religious context.

### Jung: Extraversion and Introversion

The terms "extraversion" and "introversion" as proposed by Carl Jung were brought to my attention by David Lindenfeld.<sup>1</sup> While these terms have passed into general discourse, Lindenfeld has shown their usefulness in mission history. Jung defines the two different types of individual personality: "in the one case [extravert] an outward movement of interest toward the object, and in the other [introvert] a movement of interest away from the object towards the subject and his own psychological processes."<sup>2</sup> Jung was of the opinion that while individuals are either predominantly extraverted or introverted, no one can afford to

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be exclusively one or the other as a matter of survival.

In line with Lindenfeld, “extraverted” in this context means directing one’s energies to an external unseen, with the hope or expectation of influencing it in order to achieve a desired result. Examples of extraverted activity include supplicatory prayer, performing sacraments, and making sacrifices. In the Adventist context, it means actively praying and living for the parousia.

On the other hand, “introverted” means conceiving the unseen to operate in or through the subject. This may, in the words of American philosopher and psychologist William James, amount to “altered states of consciousness,” such as trances, dreams, hallucinations, and charismatic tendencies. Catholics encourage this. In China, for instance, you can see this, and in Catholic-dominated regions of Nigeria/Benin, you can see this kind of phenomenon where folk religions exist. Catholics were interested in the inward or introverted individual. But Adventists were appalled by it.

### **Adventist Missionaries and the Transfer of Ideology**

Because of Adventism’s late arrival to Nigeria, there was a smaller field for doing mission work because other denominational missionaries preceded the Adventists. For instance, the Catholics had already dominated the South and Southeast of Nigeria by 1914 when Adventists established their first mission.

The Adventist apocalyptic ideology of the soon return of Christ was the main preoccupation of the missionaries. The impending end of the world fostered a missionary zeal to warn non-Adventists and to win them as remnants. This meant converts needed to abide by a long list of rules: keep the sabbath day holy on Saturday; live a healthy lifestyle by eating properly according to the Levitical laws; abstain from alcohol and caffeine; prescribe to proper dress, which excludes jewelry, etc.

The missionaries came with their own way of transferring this ideology. They established schools, printed books and magazines, set up organizations, and established health care systems. Converts would have Bible study on Saturday, go to the Adventist school



L. to r.: G. A. Solademi, Sabbath school and lay activities director, Nigerian Union Mission; Helge Andersen, president, Nigerian Union Mission; Arne Friis, president, North Nigerian Mission. In the background is the Union headquarters in Lagos, Nigeria. Date: c. 1980.

system during the week, visit the Adventist clinic when they were ill, and work in the Adventist press when they needed jobs. Thus, converts were supposed to enter the Adventist world/ideology and bid farewell to their traditions, culture, friends, and—in most cases—their families who disagreed with them.

To be Adventist, one needed to be extraverted, move outside one’s comfort zone, and direct one’s energies toward the external unseen or other-worldly unseen with the hope or expectation of making it to heaven at the parousia when Christ comes.

### **How Did Nigerians Respond?**

In the early days, Adventism was moderately accepted in Nigeria. The messages of salvation and the imminent second coming of Jesus Christ resonated with many Nigerians, particularly those who had experienced the hardships of colonialism and the Second World War. Adventism’s emphasis on healthful living and education also appealed to many Nigerians, and the denomination established several schools and health care institutions in the country.

However, Adventism was also perceived as a foreign religion that was not fully compatible with African (Nigerian) culture and traditions. Thus, there were tendencies to dichotomize Adventism, separating it from Nigerian culture and traditions. Some Nigerians felt that Adventism was too Western and sought to adapt it to fit their own cultural and religious practices. This led to Africanization, the attempt to make Adventism culturally relevant, and “multiple-religious,” the combination of Adventism and traditional beliefs.

### Acceptance

The success of Seventh-day Adventism in Nigeria, especially in its founding days, was due to the acceptance of the religious ideology by some Yoruba, many Igbo, and some Hausa Nigerians. Three cases show why Adventism grew in Nigeria.

David C. Babcock, the first official missionary to Nigeria, first landed among the Yoruba people. His strategy was to introduce formal education, and this yielded many Yoruba conversions. In 1915-1916, Babcock and his group of missionaries established a school in Sao (Shao), Ilorin, which was a breakthrough for the Adventist mission. The school grew to become the first official Adventist educational institution in Nigeria. In addition to reading, writing, and math, students received extensive training in evangelism as well as in trades like bricklaying, furniture making, carpentry, etc. Since the locals wanted their children to have a formal education, they sent them to the Adventist school. These students later became mission employees who served as local evangelists and workers in bringing more Yorubas to Adventism.

In the Southeast, the Igbo people were generally open to Christianity. Nevertheless, Adventism’s early success in Igboland was attributed to the camp meetings that took place in 1928 and 1929. These turned out to be a successful strategy for operations in the area. The camp meeting booth style, made of palm fronds, was appropriate for the Ngwa Igbos, who did not live in towns or cities but rather in compounds with several thatched houses nearby. The camp meetings were a

novelty in that region, and as a result, Adventists drew lots of Igbos who attended the events just to see what was going on, but the preaching and Bible studies led to many conversions.

In the North, it was medical mission that brought a breakthrough. When John and Louise Hyde went to the North in the early 1930s, they met serious resistance. Muslims predominated in the Jengre region, which made the work challenging. Since Louise was a licensed nurse, the Hydes opened a dispensary, which subsequently evolved into Jengre Seventh-day Adventist Hospital, giving access to those who were in urgent need of medical care. One example was Louise’s therapy for the jigger flea in which she removed the parasite from the soles of the patients’ feet. The people in the area were so drawn to Adventism that a group of about fifty chiefs once came to the Hydes—during a visit by William McClements, superintendent of the mission in Nigeria—to learn more about the Adventist medical work. These traditionalists stated that Adventism was needed in their region.

### Dichotomization and “Multiple Religious” Belonging

Adventist missionaries made a mistake in thinking of conversion in a monolithic sense in Nigeria. Other Christian groups, such as the Catholics, had a more fluid understanding of conversion. It was no surprise that Igbo Catholics were ingrained in their traditional culture to such a large extent that their faith could be considered syncretic or hybrid. Thus, the idea of “multiple religious” belonging already was an issue before the coming of Adventists. For instance, Rosalind Hackett notes the ubiquity of people in Calabar belonging to several Christian and non-Christian religious groups simultaneously.<sup>3</sup>

Adventist missionaries were suspicious of these kind of multiple allegiances, so they almost always refused such groups of people who wanted to join their movement. For instance, when missionary Jesse Clifford encountered a group of indigenous Sabbatarians in the Niger Delta, he was faced with the dilemma of whether or not to adopt this group as foundational members of the local Adventist church. Since most of the

Sabbatarians were polygamists and engaged in other strange practices and customs, Clifford decided not to incorporate the group into the Adventist body because he believed that there would be no radical break with the past, and it would be difficult to police and enforce Adventist ideology.

Interestingly, many converts from traditional religion among Igbos and Yorubas joined Adventism. However, since Western Adventism did not speak to the psyche of Nigerians, converts would visit native doctors and juju priests when a problem arose that could not be handled medically or intellectually. This led to the emergence of a unique form of Adventism in Nigeria that combined elements of both Adventism and traditional African religion. For example, some Adventists incorporated elements of ancestor worship and divination into their religious practices, while others adapted Adventist teachings to fit their beliefs in reincarnation and spirit possession.

### **Africanization**

Africanization here means the process of giving Adventism an African identity and, in the case of our discussion, a Nigerian identity. In the contract between Christian missionaries and indigenous peoples, conversion, according to Lindenfeld, could suggest a change in sensibility that occurs within an individual; for others, it suggests a group process that can have dramatic social consequences. As the mission history shows, Adventists focused more on individual conversion than on group conversion. They reasoned that group conversion was problematic. Perhaps this was a Western problem, the tricky line between Christianization and colonization.

Perhaps, they were afraid of what Lamin Sanneh terms the contextualization of the Christian message. This is when the process of conversion “brings the translator into the quicksand of indigenous cultural nuances, and this helplessness may lead the translator to turn matters over to indigenous experts who, in any case, may feel called upon to challenge missionary leadership in a field where, by any yardstick, they have the advantage.”<sup>4</sup>

In Jungian thought, this would entail an inner movement toward the unseen before an outburst of extraversion. However, as Lindenfeld posits: “it does not take long for missionaries to lose control of the message once the Bible is in the hands of the indigenes.”<sup>5</sup> It seems this was the main fear of the missionaries.

For instance, in Aba in the 1930s, after a charismatic renewal among Adventist converts, Adventist missionaries branded the revival as spiritism. After studying the gifts of the Holy Spirit, several members claimed the power of the Spirit to see visions and dreams, heal the sick, raise the dead, make the lame walk, etc. While some prophesied and spoke in tongues, others openly confessed their sins and were flogged publicly to gain forgiveness.

This revival was a step in the conversion process, that of introversion where the convert undergoes a process of conceiving the unseen to operate in or through the subject. The result can be the outburst of charismatic tendencies, visions, hallucinations, etc. The missionaries considered the revival among Nigerian Adventists to be a sign of the end time, where false spirits and false christs will deceive many in order to veer them off the course of the parousia. Thus, this type of movement toward the parousia was highly discouraged and quelled by Adventist leaders.

However, what foreign Adventists failed to understand was that in the Igbo worldview, the cosmos is populated by benevolent and malevolent spirits. The malevolent spirits are capable of causing misfortune, wreaking havoc, and bringing a lack of progress to individual and communal lives. Being able to control the cosmos and knowing the cause of misfortune is a prime preoccupation of their metaphysics. Hence, their recourse is to magic and divination in order to gain power from the benevolent spirits to protect them from the unseen evil forces. It should not be a surprise that the movement in 1938 was only a deeper yearning for the power of God through the Holy Spirit to permeate the practicality of the new Adventist faith.

The converts who experienced the charismatic renewal understood the Adventist theory of spiritual



Bassey Effiong Okon Udoh (center), president, Eastern Nigeria Union Conference, West-Central Africa Division; Emmanuel Dike (right), lay representative, GC Executive Committee, West-Central Africa Division. The 61st General Conference Session of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, America's Center Convention Complex, St. Louis, Missouri, June 6-11, 2022

gifts in their own context by tapping into the power of the Holy Spirit. As a result, they were able to see visions (the unseen), had power to heal, and received power to overcome evil forces. Nonetheless, this vision was not shared by the mission leaders, who possibly did not fully understand the Nigerian metaphysics and the lived realities of indigenous life. For them this was not conversion, but deceit. But for the Igbo Adventists, this was full adaptation or Africanization of Adventism from below, an original process which needed to be seen in light of the metaphysics of Igbo Adventists.

### The Present State of Adventism in Nigeria<sup>6</sup>

If the Nigerian response to missionary Adventism saw lots of acceptance, a mild level of dichotomization, and then some attempts toward Africanization, what happened to the denominational culture after the missionaries left? What did the Nigerian Adventists do in the face of socioreligious change?

Nigeria was rocked by a different sociopolitical framework that saw the rise of corruption, such that the government became untrustworthy. In the wake of a highly galvanized corrupt system, the kind of Church that developed in response to the nation's abuses had to assure the populace of a better life, one that was infused with the very tones of the Nigerian

of missionary Adventism, and the full-blown "Pentecostalization" of Adventism.

### Adaptation

The adaptation of Pentecostal praxis into Adventist worship began in the 1970s and 1980s in the wake of the campus revivals that rocked the country. As a result, Nigeria experienced a significant growth in Pentecostal Christianity. Pentecostalism emphasized the power of the Holy Spirit and the need for personal spiritual experience, and it quickly gained popularity among Nigerians. The revivals saw the springing up of several charismatic student movements that metamorphosed into Pentecostal churches.<sup>7</sup> Adventist students—the second generation of Nigerian Adventists—were not left out.

When they saw the lively worship atmosphere as a result of the revivals on their campuses, they caught the born-again awakening. They argued that their student groups were overly formal in their worship. They wanted their worship to be authentic, lively, and relevant in the context they were in. This led to a historic revival among Adventist young people as charismatic revivals among Adventists students shook the country. Soon, the effect was seen in many congregations in the west of Nigeria. All-night prayers, vibrant worship styles, and music with percussion were adopted. Interestingly, for a while there

neo-Pentecostal movement. The Nigerian Adventist response to that kind of Christianity came in three ways: adaptation of Pentecostal praxis, preservation

was support for these changes by the Nigerian national leaders until the student leaders who spearheaded this movement went abroad for further studies.<sup>8</sup>

### **Preservation**

The reaction of many Adventists to the adaptation of Pentecostal praxis in Adventist ethos was to move toward preservation of missionary Adventism or Adventist heritage. The need to preserve Adventism's core beliefs was critical given that the Christian religious landscape in Nigeria was unidirectional or leaning toward Pentecostalism. The bulk of Adventists in the country were worried about preserving the denomination's identity and any remaining missionary-transferred traditions. This is not shocking at all. When confronted with change, congregations naturally assume a functional status in which they consider preserving their identity and organizational self-understanding. As a consequence, the Church starts to view itself in functional terms and feels that it has a duty to serve God in the world.<sup>9</sup>

For Adventists, the purpose of the Church is to warn and prepare the world for the parousia—the end of the world. This implies a break from other churches that do not observe the Sabbath and do not conduct their worship services in a way that shows awe toward God. Therefore, mixing with other religions and permitting their practices among Adventists would be considered a rejection of the Church's fundamental mission and functional identity. Because of this, most Nigerian Adventists embodied the idea that they were a remnant and thus branded the revival as false. Instead, they promoted hymn singing, orderly worship ethos, end-time apocalyptic teachings, and the distribution of media from American Adventists.

### **“Pentecostalization”**

While the preservation sector of Adventism kept attempting to restore Adventist ethos due to the “damage” done to Adventism, those who had gone abroad for further studies came back to Nigeria and took leadership positions. Dr. Israel Olaore, a leading member of the campus revival, became the university pastor at

Babcock University (BU). During his leadership, some Adventist leaders at BU started incorporating Pentecostal praxis in their worship spaces and student groups in reaction to complaints by majority non-Adventist students that Adventists were perceived as being too rigid and formal. This action could be interpreted as an effort to be competitive in the religious market.

However, since the majority of the students weren't actually Adventist, this move wasn't made as a consequence of losing members. As my interviews demonstrate, it was an effort to stay relevant (in terms of worship praxis) by including the same goods sold in the Nigerian religious market, which was mainly Pentecostal. Soon a full-blown innovation—the Pentecostalization of Nigerian Adventism—was in place.

This innovation was also spearheaded by other leaders who experienced the campus revival, like Bukky Ajide. When he returned from the United States, he became a pastor in Lagos, where he fostered the planting of a new congregation that has been branded a Pentecostal Adventist church. From then onwards, several other congregations have been planted in Lagos, Abuja, Port Harcourt, and Aba.

The Pentecostalization of Adventism developed from a dissatisfaction with the traditional ways of worship found in the denomination's missionary-founded status quo. Moreover, the collapse of the Nigerian state sparked the movement because some Adventists wanted to speak against the political despair. In an effort to present a different social and religious order, they looked for creative methods to address the needs of the society. Thus, some novel practices have helped Pentecostalize Adventism: the novelty of prayers, worship, liturgy, and prosperity preaching.

Pentecostal Adventists take elements of the Adventist tradition and fit them into an essentially neo-Pentecostal worldview. A major route used by this group is seeing the Sabbath as a key element to prosperity in the now and the future kingdom. These kinds of Adventist congregations claim that by keeping the seventh-day Sabbath, believers can unlock the unknown secrets of prosperity even as they prepare themselves for the coming kingdom. This is known among them as

“kingdom enterprise.”<sup>10</sup> This hermeneutic linking of the Sabbath to prosperity in the here-and-now and the here-after is evidence of how a significant number of Adventists are appropriating Adventist eschatology in a Pentecostal religious market. They do this by focusing on the blessings of Sabbath observance, which is lacking in Nigerian Pentecostalism.

### **The Future of Nigerian Adventism**

The responses of Nigerians to Adventist missionaries and the later responses of Nigerian Adventists to Pentecostalization demonstrate that Nigerian Adventism has become a local initiative of a global denomination. This initiative appears to be in an identity crisis. Where is Nigerian Adventism going? Are they going back to missionary Adventism, or are they concerned with relevancy in today’s Nigeria? Other factors such as dichotomization or multiple religious belonging, church politics and policy application, tribalism, and nepotism have not made the case any better.

As Gabriel Masfa notes in his just-published book on Adventism in Africa, some of the issues above threaten the identity of the larger African Adventist body. His lists correlate well with Nigerian Adventism: polygamy; the Church’s responses to its young people’s dealing with the postmodern-world interpretation and application of Ellen White’s writings; the interpretation of the Bible and its application to African culture; gender issues and their relation to Church missions; and Muslim-Adventist relations.<sup>11</sup> In view of this identity crises, the question is: What will the future of Nigerian Adventism look like? My way of responding follows thus:

### **Nigerian Adventism as a Beacon for the Rest of Africa**

In his futuristic projections for Global South Christianity, Philip Jenkins in *The Next Christendom*<sup>12</sup> argues that Christianity will become a religion of Africa. While this is already playing out for global Christianity, global Adventism is increasingly becoming an African denomination. I suggest Nigerian Adventism has a role to play in this process.

Nigerian Adventism has had a unique history. From its early inception to facing civil war, political turmoil, military junta, and Pentecostalization, Nigerian Adventism has seen a calamitous mix of socioreligious change, adaptations, and innovations. Therefore, Nigerian Adventism can serve as a beacon of an authentic faith that is in crisis as it is torn between its denominational tradition and finding its own innovative pathways for the rest of African Adventism. Thus, the crisis of identity which was pointed out earlier is a good thing as it shows that Nigerian Adventism is in a constant flow of engagement between missionary traditions, Nigerian Christianity, and Nigerian culture.

### **“Glocality”**

A portmanteau of “global” and “local,” the term “glocal” is an apt description of Nigerian Adventism, which has been able to blend a world religion with local particularity. The end of missionary dominance and the development of new Adventist generations are significant elements, causing the reinvention of worship rituals, even though a sifting through an inherited denominational culture is still in progress. Adventism is experiencing many forms of appropriation at the grassroots level, as is Christianity in general. This process should not be truncated but studied and encouraged so that the various “Adventisms” that will develop in the future will be as unique as Christianity itself, which transcends ethnic, national, and cultural barriers.

### **Diversity**

Closely related to the glocal nature of Nigerian Adventism is its diversity, which encourages heterogeneity rather than global homogeneity. This can play out in various ways if the trend is encouraged. One approach is for Nigerian Adventism to adapt and innovate General Conference calendars and programs rather than replicate ideas without taking cultural and local dynamics into consideration. At the same time, local initiatives and programs of Nigerian Adventism can be developed and suggested to other regions of Adventism for consideration if not adaptation. Thus,

diversity becomes the right arm of glocality.

## Theological Thinking

What follows diverse denominational praxis is theological thinking. Nigerian Adventists include many who hold Doctor of Ministry degrees and several who hold PhD degrees in biblical studies, history, and theology. However, until now, religious materials from the United States and Europe have been the main resources for theological thinking in Nigeria. As they consider local grassroots contextual practices, Nigerian Adventist theologians and pastors need to start thinking from the grassroots level and not just from the top-down. They must consider the issues mentioned above that cause identity crises as well as construct liturgical theologies for the local context.

One major area that needs constructive theological thinking is the Sabbath school. While the lesson study guide should not be thrown away, a theological commentary on the weekly lesson may assist local assimilation and help to deal with everyday issues of faith and praxis. Interestingly, I must confess that Nigeria has gone backward instead of forward in the matter of Sabbath school. In the past, there used to be contextual translations of the Sabbath school guide in various languages. Those translations are dwindling as English has become the preferred language of worship and God-talk.

## Contextual Missionizing

Because Nigerian Adventism is actively undergoing a process where the gospel is being proclaimed to and contextualized for every nation, tribe, language, and people (Revelation 14:6), or in Adventist vocabulary, engaging the *present truth*, contextual missionizing is vital. Rather than transplanting preachers and teachers from the United States or other countries, the Adventist Church should encourage translation (both in the linguistic and theological sense) and adaptation. Contextual missionizing needs to be faithful first to Scripture, and then to tradition and context. This way, theology becomes truly contextual. When Nigerian Adventists are encouraged to do this, they will be able to

develop a significant range of contextual approaches, not only in terms of actual thought, but also with regard to “method” and reasoning.

## Conclusion

Seventh-day Adventism in Nigeria has had a unique history and dynamic development in its theology and practices. The responses of Nigerians to Adventism have been influenced by the approaches of Adventist Western missionaries and the distinctive history and development of the Nigerian socioreligious sphere. The adaptation of Pentecostal practices into Adventism has led to opposing responses—preservation and Pentecostalization—creating what looks like an identity crisis. However, there is a need for the development of a Nigerian Adventism that reflects the country’s unique cultural and religious context. This Nigerian Adventism should be grounded in the original doctrines and practices of Adventism as it develops its authentic voice in Nigerian culture and thought.

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## ENDNOTES:

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7. Mattews A. Ojo, “Pentecostalism and Charismatic Movements in Nigeria: Factors of Growth and Inherent Challenges,” *Renewal* 3, no. 1 (2016): 80, (74-94). See also Ojo, “Deeper Life Christian Ministry: A Case Study of the Charismatic Movement in Western Nigeria,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 18 (1988): 141-162; Ojo, “Deeper Life Bible Church in Nigeria,” in *New Dimension in African Christianity*, ed. Paul Gifford, (Nairobi: All African Council of Churches, 1992), 135-156.
8. See my forthcoming article: “Independence, Civil War, and the Beginnings of Indigenization of Seventh-day Adventism in Nigeria from 1940s to 1990s,” *Spes Christiana*, 2023.
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10. See booklet by Bukola Ajide, *The Unknown Secrets of Prosperity* (Lekki, Nigeria: Victory Sanctuary Seventh-day Adventist Church, n.d.).
11. Gabriel Masfa, *Seventh Day Adventism in Africa: A Historical Survey of Interaction Between Religion, Tradition and Culture* (London: Taylor and Francis/Routledge, 2023), 167.
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# Can Adventism Be Authentically African?

**D**id you know that out of the 22.2 million reported members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, about 9.9 million are from the three divisions in Africa?<sup>1</sup> This represents about 45 percent of global membership! But, of course, the story of Adventism's growth on the African continent is not just about commitment to mission. It's also due to a high fertility rate of around 4.6 percent<sup>2</sup>—significantly higher than in many parts of the world—and a population that is notably religious or open to religion. This means membership growth is not unique to Adventism. Catholics, Pentecostals, and other religious groups have also recorded commendable growth in membership, which makes the growth of Adventism in Africa more nuanced than is often reported.<sup>3</sup>

While worldwide Christianity is no longer a White religion, it's still dominated by Western history, theology, and training. When we acknowledge this in regard to Adventism, the fundamental question becomes whether Africa can play a more significant role in Adventism than she currently has. What role can and should the weighty African Adventist numbers and growing African Adventist cultural self-awareness play in our expanding and maturing Church? The fundamental issue I address here is not about the future of Adventism in Africa but that of Africa's future in Adventism.

## A People Divided

As Adventism continues to grow on the continent, two opposing viewpoints are increasingly apparent. One is trying to pull back toward conservative values, faithfulness to tradition, and views inherited from Church pioneers, while the other is pushing toward being more progressive, relevant, and dynamic

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Blasious M. Ruguri (left), president, East-Central Africa Division; and Mark Finley, assistant to the president, General Conference. “Hope for Africa” in the East-Central Africa Division report. Morning business session, Tuesday, October 10, 2023. General Conference Annual Council 2023.

in a changing world. As a result, Adventism on the continent is becoming divided and deeply polarized over many issues, which boil down to how we interpret the Bible and how we use Ellen White’s writings. The questioning of traditional conservative values, instead of fueling dialogue, is further entrenching these divisions. But what I find more worrying is that conscientious members’ differences of opinion are seen as threats. Consequently, the reaction to various ideas is too often not based on their merits, but rather on the proponents behind the views. This is not really an African problem, but rather an Adventist one that has been observed across the global Church.

Unfortunately, this atmosphere of suspicion gives room to “church politicians” who play to our

conservative fears to get political mileage. They hijack African religiosity for political ends, which reduces Africans to a mere political constituency whose votes are misconstrued as faithfulness to conventional Adventist values. Notice how Africans have been vocal in theological wars over issues such as women’s ordination and inclusion of the LGBTQI community. This has caused African Adventism to be defined by resistance to these questions while glossing over more systemic and stubborn evils such as white supremacy, racism, tribalism, and sexism among us. Our often-celebrated unified wrath over homosexuality and women’s ordination exposes how much African religiosity is being weaponized to fight theological battles. While divergent views will always exist in any community, the danger

lies in seeing our position on certain issues as making us more “Adventist” than other church members. My greatest fear concerns those leaders who insist we hold fast to our Adventist heritage and fear certain theological threats, while they remain criminally silent about structural and systematic evils that keep them in power—thus oblivious to more foundational principles in our Christian tradition!

### **A Time for Africa**

The fact that about four out of every ten Adventists are Africans presents a huge voting bloc when it comes to General Conference sessions. Our Church governance process, which relies on the power of numbers rather than consensus, makes it is easy for issues to be politicized. Church governance becomes a numbers game when voting ignores the merits of an issue while focusing on the proponent of an idea. The applause that comes after a tightly contested vote is more worrying than the issue under debate. We are falling victim to the tyranny of numbers when our processes create arrogant winners on one hand and bitter losers on the other. Thus the fundamental question is: Can Africa go beyond being seen as a mere voting bloc and become a thought leader in Adventism?

Rather than playing a vanguard role in Church affairs, Adventists in Africa need to rethink their added value to the global Church by challenging the status quo and bringing new ideas. If we are the movement we claim to be, then the huge footprint of Adventism in Africa should be turned into a resource that propels the Church forward. Finding our validation in the extent to which we comply with General Conference directives is narrow-minded and self-limiting. Waiting for Adventists in

other parts of the world to raise issues and questions to which we respond does *not* make us more faithful or more Adventist than everyone else. As stakeholders in this global movement, we now have opportunity to set the agenda and proactively influence the course of the world Church. As a result, Adventism on the continent will move from mere growth to mature development. But of course this will not be easy, which means we need to interrogate obstacles that limit Africa’s contribution to Adventism.

### **The Young and the Restless**

At least 70 percent of the population of Africa’s continent is below the age of 35.<sup>4</sup> This is a significant demographic dividend that the Church is sitting on. But sadly, young people remain excluded from decision making, and they are often reduced to being consumers of products developed in a bygone era for a generation that no longer exists. For a Church whose pioneers were relatively young, it is surprising to see how young people are marginalized.

Why can’t Africa lead the way in putting talented young people into leadership positions, and in developing tools and models for how to better retain young people in the Church? Rather than perpetuating processes and attitudes that exclude young people, Africa can serve as a model for how young people can be creatively integrated into the life of the Church in meaningful ways. This includes adapting youth curricula and resources to be more practical and useful—instead of being abstract and indoctrinating. The Church can also direct funding to young people to develop and engage them in creative mission activities that target their peers. As long as we treat young people as suspects who aren’t ready, we miss out on tapping into their energy.

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Rather than reducing their participation to parading in colorful uniforms and performing recitations, our youth should have programs that move beyond information to cultivate innovation and generate ideas for mission.

In her book *Education*, Ellen White remarked: “With such an army of workers as our youth, rightly trained, might furnish, how soon the message of a crucified, risen, and soon-coming Saviour might be carried to the whole world! How soon might the end come—the end of suffering and sorrow and sin!”<sup>5</sup>

### **A Warped Apocalypticism**

Pan-Africanism is on the rise, with many questioning the Eurocentrism and colonialism that still shape the expression of Christianity. There’s admission that the Christian faith has operated as a tool of empires, and it has also directly oppressed peoples by building on knowledge forms and assumptions that privilege the languages, discourses, practices, and institutions originating in colonial cultures. Africans are increasingly seeing how traditional Christian expression has robbed them of their identity and demonized their cultures in the process.

Adventism is not spared, given its American heritage. Witness the America reading of apocalyptic texts, an Anglo-American liturgy, Eurocentric theological scholarship, and a Western governance structure. The Church finds herself a victim of anti-American hegemony sentiments. Even among Adventists on the continent, there is a dissatisfaction about the Americanness of Adventism. The critique here is not that Adventism has an American origin, but how its intrinsic American character makes it impossible for it to authentically accommodate other cultures. Sadly, the African feels like he or she is struggling to fit into another culture, rather than striving to be Christlike.

This is the time for Africa to challenge a warped apocalypticism that downplays tragedy in the Global South while presenting tragedy in the North as more ominous. This is buttressed by a reading of Ellen White detached from her context that reduces her to a tool for perpetuating a narrow reading of apocalyptic texts. It

is shocking to hear Africans downplaying tragedy in their neighborhoods while exerting energies to decipher American and European history and political affairs. A hermeneutical framework that speaks to the vivid realities of the African is Africa’s responsibility to herself and the Global South. This means that our theologians on the continent need to develop a framework that confronts this warped reading of apocalyptic texts and corrects it to be more inclusive and contextual.

### **African Present Truth**

Religion has great meaning for the African. Whenever there is a misfortune or calamity, the first response is not to do a physical analysis of the situation, but a spiritual diagnosis of the spirit powers that have been offended. Conversely, success in any endeavor is not attributed to a person’s acumen but the special favor of the ancestors or spirit powers.<sup>6</sup> For an African, religion is a potent force permeating every aspect of life as it contains rules about conduct that guide life within a social group, and it is often organized and practiced in a community, instead of being an individual or merely personal affair.<sup>7</sup> Thus, life for an African cannot be compartmentalized; religion cannot be divorced from daily life.

Another important aspect of African religion is called “dynamism or power-centeredness,”<sup>8</sup> wherein the effectiveness of a religion is determined by how much power it makes available to its adherents. This power is needed not only for success in life, but also for protection against hostile forces. When a religious system becomes ineffective in terms of its power, it is soon abandoned for a more powerful one.<sup>9</sup> Even in today’s Africa these factors still bear considerable weight in mission, in that they understandably find expression or equivalents in Christianity.

Because Africans look to religion for answers, most traditional Protestant churches—including the Adventist Church—have been criticized for failing to speak to the practical realities that people face. In the name of compliance, Adventism is robbing itself of the opportunity to adapt for relevance. No wonder there has been a proliferation of African independent churches

Julia Mambuene, director,  
Hope Channel Kinshasa,  
West Congo Union  
Mission, East-Central  
Africa Division, singing a  
song in a local language.  
Hope Channel Network  
Leadership Conference,  
Johannesburg,  
South Africa,  
April 19-24, 2023.



For Tomorrow / Adventist Media Exchange (CC BY 4.0)

(AICs) that are more charismatic and try to respond to issues such as poverty, witchcraft, ancestral spirits, curses, and other lived realities facing the African. Desperate for solutions to these supernatural problems, professing Adventists sometimes consider syncretism, dualism, and AICs for answers. The absence of a theological framework that incorporates African traditions means that the Church finds itself with no convincing response to help its members navigate through today's challenges.

From Western liturgy to theological constructs, the bias toward Western theologians entrenches a marginalization of non-Western scholarship and thought. Because religious materials used in the Church continue to originate in the West, the content is more friendly to Euro-Americans, leaving Africans to struggle with that which was "not meant for them." This reveals a space for Adventist scholarship in Africa to proactively articulate an Adventism that engages with African traditional religion, developing a framework that addresses ancestral worship, spirit forces, and other elements of traditional religion.

### Into the Cities

As Africa urbanizes, its cities are the most rapidly growing and the youngest in the world. This significant

development presents a challenge and opportunity for Adventist mission, which continues to rely on methods borrowed from nineteenth-century America, such as distribution of printed literature in public places and homes, and evangelistic campaigns running for a couple of weeks, culminating in a baptismal event. These methods have worked well in the past, but their efficacy is now questionable in contemporary urban Africa, where issues include congestion, high transportation costs, and balancing family budgets. A rising middle class finds it difficult to attend evangelistic meetings, and even Adventists struggle to find time to be present.

But our dilemma is not just about methods in a dramatically changed Africa. It's also our message and how we reframe it. Clearly the migration from rural to urban, increased literacy and income status, access to digital technology, and exposure that comes with residing in an urban area mean new anxieties and questions. We need to take time to understand these anxieties and respond appropriately. People don't hate doctrines, per se, but they are attracted by a church that invites them first to belong before they are bashed about the wrong things they believe. With religious exclusivity being increasingly repulsive, it becomes an existential

challenge for Adventism that finds the “remnant” self-definition as non-negotiable. How the traditional Adventist message fits is a question for all to reflect on.

### Not With Us but Not Against Us

On the African continent, Adventism finds itself having to exist in a congested religious space as other religious groups present a challenge to Adventist mission. No wonder growth in membership across the continent is not homogenous. For example in 2021, many unions in the three divisions in Africa—the Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division, the East-Central Africa Division, and West-Central Africa Division—experienced low to negative growth in membership, probably due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Interestingly, emerging middle-income countries such as South Africa, Kenya, Botswana are experiencing low growth. The Church is apparently struggling to make inroads in West Africa (Ghana, Nigeria) which are countries with large Christian populations as illustrated in the table.

### The Remnant Motif

The “remnant” motif defines Adventism as special and others as Babylon. As a result, we have inherited attitudes that view other religious groups with suspicion. We find it difficult to embrace or to be open to learn from those we consider inferior and in error. But at a time where religious exclusivism is repulsive, Adventism finds

itself in a dilemma. How do we maintain the remnant motif without sounding arrogant and abrasive? Unlike in regions where Christianity is on the decline, in Africa Adventism faces competing voices that increasingly ignore her claims of exclusive truth. The things we cherished are now challenged as inconsequential by many Christians. Is there a danger that we are primarily speaking to ourselves about ourselves? The challenge for Adventism on the continent is to develop approaches and ways to work with other religious groups in addressing the needs of the population. Fears of ecumenism are self-limiting because we detach ourselves from confronting certain issues due to outdated fears. We would rather watch other religious groups we call “non-Adventist” fight for our interests or things that benefit us rather than join them. Nothing is more hypocritical or opportunistic than that. The use of the non-Adventist label is both harmful and hurtful. It makes us impervious to learning from others as we see ourselves as the favorites of heaven.

The Church needs to rethink its approach in Africa and find ways in which it can work with others to address what is affecting its populace. Contextual models can be developed for ways Adventism can work with others in impacting communities. How can we use our unique identity and message to connect people to God, to demonstrate concern for the things that worry them? Africa is an ideal location for this to happen because Africans are generally communal. Often Adventist

Country	Population 2020 <small>(Source: World Bank)<sup>10</sup></small>	Membership 2020 <small>(Source: GC reports)<sup>11</sup></small>	Estimated Adventists per capita	GDP per Capita USD	Tithe per Capita USD
Zambia	18.38 m	1.360 m	1:14	1,050.92	6.88
Zimbabwe	14.86 m	0.989 m	1:15	1,128.21	6.55
South Africa	59.31 m	0.188 m	1:316	5,090.72	164.11
Kenya	53.77 m	1.070 m	1:50	1,838.21	23.35
Tanzania	59.73 m	0.800 m	1:75	1,076.47	24.30
Nigeria	206.11 m	0.288 m	1:716	2,097.09	22.90
Ghana	31.07 m	0.371 m	1:84	2,328.53	31.94



Lucas Chelimo / Adventist Media Exchange (CC BY 4.0)

Annie Sylvie Beya-Wakata, lay representative from the West-Central Africa Division, General Conference Executive Committee, commenting on proposed changes to policy and General Conference Bylaws regarding the authority of the Spring Meeting. Morning business session, Tuesday, October 10, 2023. General Conference Annual Council 2023.

families have relatives who belong to other religious groups. The ability to connect with Christians from other denominations will be helpful in mission in that it creates spaces to be heard. This can be one of Africa’s contributions to Adventism—demonstrating how to work for and with Christians of other persuasions.

### Where Do We Go?

Of course, Adventism on the continent will continue to grow. But the challenge is: How can contemporary Africa contribute to the development of Adventism, not just membership growth? Africa needs to rise above being celebrated for compliance to directives from higher offices and instead adapt, develop products, and find approaches that deepen its impact and relevance. Africa is changing, and its people are not immune to postmodern influences. As much as religion continues to permeate every aspect of life, the religion that wins the day is that which speaks to the present in honest ways. In a congested religious space, Adventism in Africa needs to emerge out of attitudes borrowed from a bygone era and develop a hermeneutical framework that candidly confronts its lived realities. If Adventism cannot accommodate authentic African expression, then

the Church will find it increasingly difficult to navigate a new Africa where new questions and anxieties are emerging. Unfortunately—or maybe fortunately, in the long term—narrow doctrinal correctness, which has been the hallmark of Adventism, is no longer seen as consequential. This means Adventism on the continent cannot continue acting like it is the brightest kid in class. Being more engaging, more embracing, more listening are the keys to being relevant and responsive.

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# ENVIRONMENTS

Naturally Intelligent

# AND

Artificially  
Intelligent







# The Land of Theology Against the Theology of the Land

## How the US Adventist Culture Shaped the South American Church

It's been exactly one hundred and sixty years since the Seventh-day Adventist Church was formalized as an institution in the United States. Just a few years before, Adventists had been mostly known as an erratic, eccentric group of Millerites, followers of William Miller who prepared for Christ's return in 1844. After the Great Disappointment, this small, radicalized faction of the movement took almost two decades to be reorganized as a new Protestant religious movement under the leadership of prophetess Ellen White and her husband James. Since then, the Adventists have grown to be one of the most successful American denominations in the world, with more than ninety-thousand churches, 21.8 million members, and \$3 billion annually in tithes and offerings.<sup>1</sup> Such growth was possible partly because Adventism consolidated as "an alternative form of American civil religion that provided a divergent route to salvation,"<sup>2</sup> making a parallel society where its members could live and affording them a sort of temporal and cultural separation from broader society.

But what happens when this alternative form of American civil religion, with its parallel institutions and way of life, crosses oceans and hemispheres to arrive in a New World? Such a question is not trivial because the Church in these so-called peripheral countries is now already much bigger and more numerous than it is in the homeland, and the new forms adopted by Adventism abroad can and will decide the future of the world Church. We are especially interested in South American Adventism—for the South American Division (SAD) is already the second-highest collector of tithes and offerings in the world Church—and, more specifically, in Brazilian Adventism, home to SAD's headquarters and most of the continent's leaders. What particular forms were adopted by Adventism when it landed with German immigrants in the Brazilian South in the 1890s? How was Adventist theology transposed and transformed in Brazilian lands, and

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how does it reflect the great transformations undergone by Adventism in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries? Answering such questions will afford a glimpse of the possible futures promised by Brazilian Adventism to itself and the world, and will represent a new starting point for a critical understanding of Adventism in other South American and peripheral countries.

### The Land of Theology

It is not possible to understand the development of Adventism in Brazil and South America without understanding its American homeland's relationship to land and labor. Millerism and Adventism arose in a young nation that favored the expansion of its settlers into small rural properties over its whole territory, especially in the northern areas. At the same time, the southern states followed more closely the trend of international colonialism: the exportation of commodities intensively produced through African slave labor on plantations. In the mid-nineteenth century, the country underwent a vigorous, disordered, and violent process of capitalist modernization, especially in the North, since the South, with its system of plantations and slave labor, was already integrated into the global market.<sup>3</sup>

The importance of this process for the formation of the Adventist ethos cannot be understated. Both Millerism and early Adventism were composed mostly of White farmers and farm operators from the North.<sup>4</sup> They were part of a countryside middle class<sup>5</sup> who—although their material survival was not immediately threatened as it was for other, poorer peasants—experienced, through growing industrialization and urbanization, the gradual dissolution of their way of life.<sup>6</sup>

Here it is worth noting the similarities of this background to the Second Great Awakening. The movements of the first half of the nineteenth century ignited peasant spirituality in the face of growing urbanization, triggering diverse antinomian and ecstatic manifestations. Rather than a possible radicalization, the movement settled on Arminian foundations, pointing to a kind of salvation through works by Bible reading, prayer, and individual temperance. This temperance

translated to a self-repression of the worker, who, little by little, torn from his communitarian roots, was ever more vulnerable to the risks of the “pleasures of the flesh”—drinking and prostitution, for instance—and needed new anchors that justified his dedication to a society from which he saw himself alienated. The breath of revival, then, stabilized the flames of the worker's individual and familial life, ensuring his performance and the social reproduction of the next generations of workers.<sup>7</sup>

The transformation of a fraction of Millerism to Adventism followed a similar path, something already acknowledged in other terms by Jonathan Butler's anthropological reading.<sup>8</sup> A movement undergoes a period of total rupture with the ideological and ecclesial established orders, just to make its own ideological and ecclesial order—from “no rules” to “new rules,” according to Butler—becoming more and more functional for the capitalist order where it is inserted.

Adventist ideology, originated from Ellen White's writings, emphatically demonstrates this transformation: Adventist heaven is a rigidly bureaucratic and hierarchized monarchy, and Lucifer's rebellion is portrayed as republican in its content; the quest for happiness and salvation requires the restriction of emotions and appetites for a perfect performance of heavenly Victorian etiquette in order to fill the vacancies left in heavenly bureaucracy by the fallen angels;<sup>9</sup> labor and trade unions are seen as diabolical and prophesied as instrumental for the chaos of Armageddon, etc.<sup>10</sup> In summary, Adventist ideology seems to require a rigorous self-repression from its members, which, combined with an effectively monarchist and submissive ethos, could generate the perfect worker for America's ascending capitalism: obedient and disciplined. In this sense, Adventism in its origins is not very far from some characterizations of fundamentalism,<sup>11</sup> a definition that, although anachronistic at first, was already used to describe nineteenth-century Adventism.<sup>12</sup>

All this potential, however, is impeded in its full actualization by the ambiguous pessimism with which Adventism sees the United States. The Church's expectation that the homeland, as a decaying pinnacle

of Christianity's eternal principles, will persecute the faithful remnant before Christ's return results in an exhortation to escape the new American society and avoid it in its different forms—from the urban labor market to the consumption of entertainment—becoming one of the Adventist steps towards perfection. Members are instilled with values such as respect for hierarchy and submission to authority, but are encouraged (with some urgency, for the end is nigh) not to actively engage with the capitalist market and the general society.

When Jesus did not come, this potentially radical stance settled on more agreeable foundations through the gradual making of a parallel society: an imitation of the United States. Adventists, while waiting for Jesus from inside a nation that was alien to them, had another nation to which they belonged. The making of hospitals, schools, food factories, and publishing houses; the attempt to create a representative democracy and a self-owned social security system; and even the institution of a Sabbath are opaque, deliberately transformed reflections of American society's counterparts from the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>13</sup> As it grows, the Church expands the breadth of its institutions so its members depend less and less on the outside world and ever more on institutions administered by fellow believers, ruled by a centralized, planned, and highly hierarchized economy.<sup>14</sup> This is a transformed reflection, surely, of the American republic, which had its capitalist modernization increasingly centralized and planned after the Civil War.

What is done, then, to the submissive, legitimist impulses that unavoidably result from the Adventist view of heaven? One must only look to the peripheries of the world, eternal test fields for the most innovative and retrograde forms of exploration of man by man—in this case, Brazil.

### **In the House of the Father**

The Brazil in which Adventism arrived in the 1890s was a “an ideological comedy” that was “*simply different from its European counterpart*” and the one found in the

American North. In there, “economic freedom, equality under the law, and, generally, universalism, were an ideology . . . but there they corresponded to appearances, obfuscating what it was essential to obfuscate, namely the exploitation of labour.”<sup>15</sup> In Brazil, such jargons of liberalism were twice a farce. The assertion of freedom of labor and equality before the law lived together with the “impolitic and repugnant” practice of slavery,<sup>16</sup> and the “professed universality of principles . . . transformed the general practice of ‘favour’ into a scandal.”<sup>17</sup>

In addition to slavery—at first indispensable for a society founded on the monopoly of the land for intensive farming and exportation of raw material to the international capitalist market—there was the universal mediation of favor. A certain formless class of free men, graced with the luck of not being enslaved, but lacking a capitalist labor market to join, depended on the favor of powerful families—more precisely, patriarchs—who supported them. Among such free men, dependent on the favor of the powerful, were the small farmers, a minority in a country of large estates. It is worth noting, then, the first contrast that interests us. While the first Adventists in the United States were small farmers who saw the plantation, slave-owning culture of the South as a threat, the first Adventists in Brazil were small farmers in the heartland of a culture that valued the arbitrary judgment of powerful patriarchs over the fate of free, dispossessed men.

The implications of this combination are explosive, for they encourage the peasant to view and appreciate the large-estate owner as a benevolent patriarch in the face of capital's expansion. Such an ambiguity was present in the United States, one should note, where the White, poorer peasants believed that the slave owners “loved money less” than the Federalist bankers and traders.<sup>18</sup> But while this occasional political promiscuity between small farmers and plantation owners ended in the US due to the Civil War,<sup>19</sup> it yielded fruits in Brazil, and the arbitrary paternalist care of the powerful remained as a false ideological counterpoint to the cold universalism of capitalist principles. The unjustified partiality of the patriarch is an exploitative shelter against the impersonal



As the Brazilian Adventist parallel society was established, the tendency for the first Church members to have an **economic advantage** was even higher for those working at Adventist institutions,

thanks to the **Church wage parity policy** which, at least in theory, offered better wages to its employees than its “worldly” counterparts.<sup>24</sup>

mediation of commodity between humans.

Let us return to the Adventist Church. The dynamics observed in the US recurred in Brazil: the denomination expanded amidst White small farmers<sup>20</sup> who sought to create parallel institutions to separate themselves from society. Brazilian Adventists, however, were immigrants in colonies already culturally and linguistically segregated from the rest of the country, contributing even more to their alienation from broader society, joining Adventism and German culture in a single way of life, and making it difficult for the early Church to reach native Brazilians.<sup>21</sup> Equally crucial was their separation in socioeconomic status from the rest of the country. While the great majority of the Brazilian population was composed of formerly enslaved Black people (slavery was formally abolished in 1888) and “free men” without means of subsistence and dependent on the favor of the powerful for insertion in the labor market, most German small farmers had the chance to grow economically more safely than their fellow countrymen.<sup>22</sup> It is thus

unsurprising that until the 1960s, the expansion of the Church, even after crossing the borders of German colonies, was mainly in the South and Southeast, regions with a concentration of immigrants from other European countries and their descendants.<sup>23</sup>

As the Brazilian Adventist parallel society was established, the tendency for the first Church members to have an economic advantage was even higher for those working at Adventist institutions, thanks to the Church wage parity policy which, at least in theory, offered better wages to its employees than its “worldly” counterparts.<sup>24</sup> As a result, the major institutions of the continent—food factory, publishing house, media center, first seminary, etc.—were established in those regions. Thus the first generations of Brazilian Adventists, mostly immigrants or descendants of European immigrants, could establish themselves as economic and political elites as the Church expanded toward the poorer portions of the population.

Today, after more than one hundred years of Adventist expansion across the country, we have a Brazilian Church

that is mostly feminine (54.9 percent of the members),<sup>25</sup> of low income<sup>26</sup> and incomplete basic education (55.7 percent),<sup>27</sup> with a significant percentage of unemployed (8.4 percent),<sup>28</sup> illiterate (8.2 percent),<sup>29</sup> and poor (16.2 percent).<sup>30</sup> Most Adventists who are illiterate, poor, or did not complete basic education are in the North and Northeast regions, which have the highest number of Church members in Brazil and the highest proportion of Adventists.<sup>31</sup> Both regions also have the highest proportion of Black and Brown people: 69.2 percent in the Northeast and 73.7 percent in the North, compared to 50.9 percent in the whole country.<sup>32</sup>

Political power in the South American Church, however, remains where it has always been. “From 1916 to 1975, the South American Division was led by nine North Americans of British and Scandinavian descent, and for the last three administrations, it has continued under the presidency of descendants of German immigrants”<sup>33</sup> from the South of the country. While SAD remains ruled by White men descended from early Adventists, the only territories not under their direct interference are the South and Southeast of Brazil, as well as Argentina.

The first territories conquered by Adventism, ruled by European descendants who barely represent the national Church, form the cadres that rule over the continent. They are the only ones enjoying some autonomy in the face of the central government, and they shelter the most central institutions for the ideological life of the Adventist nation. In a Church that gives political power to institutions instead of lay members and effectively operates a transference of income from lay members to its institutions through tithes and offerings,<sup>34</sup> that means our lay members—mostly Black, of low income and incomplete formal education—are supporting the ascending social mobility of a White absolute minority in the institutions who rule over them. In return, these lay members are not receiving voting power or much opportunity to ascend the Adventist social ladder. It thus seems that the Brazilian Church, inside its institutions, might maintain for a minority<sup>35</sup> the pattern partially found by Graybill<sup>36</sup> and by Bull:<sup>37</sup> qualified labor, higher

income, and wage parity policies—but at the expense of its broader membership.<sup>38</sup>

These are the political consequences of Adventist ideology, already known for instilling in its members “the virtues of passivity and mistrust for the world” and making them “fairly easy to control.”<sup>39</sup> But why is the congregationalist potential, which makes the local church the most unstable administrative unit of the Church in the United States,<sup>40</sup> not as apparent in Brazil and other countries of the global South? In countries that did not settle historic scores with their dependent capitalism, the culture of favor seems to settle with much more strength and permanence. This culture is not an archaism of pre-capitalist traditions, but a domination mechanism perfectly incorporated to national capitalism due to its functionality—and the institutions developed in the country acclimatize accordingly. In a country like Brazil, it was possible to nourish in the Church the equivalence—subjacent, barely explicit—between heavenly and terrestrial bureaucracy, and submission to the arbitrary will of the patriarchs in control of the Adventist nation as a requirement for migration to the kingdom of God.

Worse: the false hostility of paternalist affection to capitalist modernization is added to Adventist ideology, with its ambiguous aversion to the US and the free market, in order to create the impression that, inside of the Adventist nation, the members are at least partially free from the mediation of commodities in their social relations. Such an impression is obviously false, since the leaders to whose absolute judgement the members are submitted attend to their (White) race and (middle) class interests, without realizing and with the best intentions, and describe such interests as the will of God.<sup>41</sup>

The consolidation of this Adventist ethos, submissive from one side and paternalist from the other, obviously did not occur in a day. Crucial for this configuration of the Church in Brazil was the unique confluence of national and international events. From the 1960s to the 1980s, academic and ecclesial debates in the United States compromised the foundations of Adventist fundamentalism. However during this time, Brazil lived

under a brutal military dictatorship, ruled by generals from the country's South, at the same time that Southern Adventists were consolidated as the hegemonic Church leadership in the continent.<sup>42</sup> The political climate in the country allowed Adventist leaders, confronted with the ideological crisis of the institution in the homeland, to implant an authoritarian and repressive regimen inside the Church in order to stop discussions going on in the US from crossing the equator. The minutes of the 1919 Bible Conference; works by Ronald Numbers and Walter Rea, and the response by Veltman and the General Conference; the questions posed by Desmond Ford against the doctrine of the investigative judgement—none of these had a significant impact in South America.

On the contrary: the Brazilian Church increased the translation and publication of Ellen White's "compilations" of writings,<sup>43</sup> consolidating—amidst a membership mostly egressed from Catholicism and already used to the canonical authority of ecclesial tradition<sup>44</sup>—her authority as the only authorized interpreter of Scripture, able to teach about virtually any subject of daily life. At the same time, a spirit analogous to that of a military dictatorship was raised in the Adventist parallel society. The danger of internal "subversion" was greater than external threat, and the institutions—embodied in the leaders and pastors—represented the will of God on earth.<sup>45</sup>

The consequences of this international contrast are immediately evident. While the conservative wing of the US Church resorted to authoritarianism to silence questioning and crush dissidence, even more authoritarian leaders ensured those questions never made it to the global South, where the growth of the world Church has concentrated ever since. Even in its homeland, the Church's composition is increasingly similar to what is found in peripheral countries, with a growing proportion of ethnic minorities, such as Blacks, Latinos, and low socioeconomic classes, still ruled by a White minority from higher socioeconomic classes.<sup>46</sup> International Adventism in its fundamentalist mold, filled with false certainties and thorough daily prescriptions, seems to appeal more to the vulnerable

layers of society. Those layers join Adventism and support the middle class ruling over them.

At the same time, it is now impossible to expand the influence of Ellen White as an extrabiblical authority or maintain the perfectionist spirit of the investigative judgement with the certainty held by early Adventism, since the critiques from the 1960-80s to those positions were never overcome. The result is an international amnesia. An Adventism of ambiguous identity, incapable of proclaiming its certainties or admitting its falseness, tries to forget the investigative judgement without refuting it, emphasizing justification by faith, and tries to reinforce the authority of White while not denying the history of her writings' composition or openly debating it with its members.<sup>47</sup>

The reasons for this amnesia seem clear. It is impossible to refute the massive amount of evidence raised against our fundamentalist positions in the last fifty years. At the same time, overcoming Adventist fundamentalism would bring about fundamental changes in relations with the lay membership, which politically and financially sustains our current leaders in power. As a result, it is unavoidable that some resentment grows amidst the most conservative layers of the Church, who see in this amnesia as an apostasy and denial of our principles, especially amidst the leadership in the global South.

All that was needed, then, was an American leader capable of mobilizing the fundamentalist resentment of peripheral countries in his favor to ensure a new reactionary turn in the world Church, which indeed happened with Ted Wilson. In his third term, his hegemony is maintained by African and South American conservative leaders, whose territories already represent most of global Adventism, and who increasingly occupy positions of power in the General Conference. Wilson's executive secretary is currently Erton Köhler, former president of the South American Division. He is from the South of Brazil, known for a highly conservative, authoritarian, and paternalist rule. The Biblical Research Institute is directed by a Brazilian conservative, Elias Brasil de Souza, and has in its committees important

South American fundamentalists, such as Adolfo S. Suárez and Alberto R. Timm—the latter also an associate director for the White Estate.<sup>48</sup>

One must not, however, lose sight of the fact that peripheral fundamentalism came from its North American parents, and that its paternalist and authoritarian ethos was already latent in the texts of our founding prophethood. The lack of transparency, the authoritarianism, and the paternalism so present in the General Conference of the last decade are simply prodigal children returning to the house of the father.

### **The Theology of the Land**

Overcoming so many contradictions is not an easy task, which will take decades—best case scenario. An indispensable step would be the complete reformulation of our denominational institutions based on more democratic foundations. Would there be a greater testimony to the world than the existence of a parallel Adventist society that is more just, egalitarian, and democratic? In the global South, it is worth noting that any initiative in this regard must be accompanied by a critical, balanced, and transparent reevaluation of the nature of Ellen White's writings, as well as our doctrinarian tendencies toward perfectionism and Romanism in the relation between lay members and clergy. The works responsible for debates about these issues, however, were hardly ever translated from English to other languages.

Another complicating factor is the fact that, despite its rural origin and anti-urban spirit, Brazilian Adventism recruited the overwhelming majority of its members from the outlying ghettos of big cities. These areas grew disorderly during the twentieth century due to the immigration of masses of peasants from the countryside in a process that came to be known as rural exodus. The peasantry, who were socioeconomically vulnerable because they did not have the autonomy held by small farmers from the South, massively migrated to the big cities in search of work and respectable living conditions.<sup>49</sup> While Peruvian Adventism occupied the countryside and empowered the peasants, building them

schools and openly defying oppression by rural dominant classes,<sup>50</sup> Brazilian Adventism did little for the peasants until they entered big cities.

Even the exception seems to confirm the rule. The rural Brazilian community of freed Black slaves in the Valongo Hinterland converted to Adventism ninety years ago in the heart of the territory occupied by German immigrants. To this day, they live in wooden houses, and the only brick building in the whole community is their Adventist church.<sup>51</sup> Abandoned by the Brazilian state, their long life in the Adventist parallel society does not seem to have afforded them social ascension or political conscience to face the causes of their socioeconomic vulnerability.<sup>52</sup>

The only collective return to the countryside seems to be practiced by Adventist institutions, such as boarding schools, seminaries, Novo Tempo Channel, and the Brazilian Publishing House,<sup>53</sup> which means that, in Brazil, the transference of income from lay members to institutions also implies a transference of income from the cities to the countryside. But what if there was another collective return to the countryside, organized by the Church and offered to lay members, in which land was made available to low-income Adventist families for the practice of family farming and polyculture? This sort of agrarian reform in the Adventist parallel society would be a powerful testimony in a country with the largest movement of rural landless workers in the world, and in a world where 80 percent of the consumed food is produced through family farming. There is no lack of qualified Adventist personnel willing to organize such initiatives. For instance, in the Northeast of Brazil, ADRA already has experience in the practice of polyculture and family farming with rural workers, with very positive results.<sup>54</sup> There is a need for this kind of initiative amidst the Brazilian membership, and the negligence of this subject by the Church administration has allowed conservative and perfectionist “dissident movements” to appropriate this discussion.<sup>55</sup> However, transformation that is not accompanied by a democratization will inevitably result in new forms of exploitation of the poorer members by the administrative leaders of the Adventist nation.

Thus we return to the previous problem: How do we overcome the perfectionist and Romanist tendencies of South American Adventist fundamentalism? Now is a good time to bring back what was perhaps the greatest theological innovation ever made by Latin America. The Bible popular reading, or communitarian reading, is a method of Bible reading through which socioeconomically vulnerable groups interpret and appropriate the Bible from their disfavored position in concrete reality.<sup>56</sup> Although strengthened in Catholic groups, since it was developed by popular movements associated with liberation theology, this reading method has the potential to develop even more vigorously in Protestant and Evangelical denominations, which are theoretically anti-clerical and advocates of universal access to the biblical text.<sup>57</sup>

This apparently simple proposal for a critical, creative reading of the Bible—without fundamentalist restrictions imposed by loyalty to the orthodoxy of the moment—is not new and has already been made in other forms by Adventist scholars.<sup>58</sup> Bible communitarian reading has potential that is unexplored by other approaches, starting with its collective approach. The interpretation of a biblical text depends on the diversity of critical and creative perspectives inside a community, and the meanings of the passages are extracted from agreements and disagreements between the members. Especially powerful, and challenging to Adventist fundamentalism, is its radical antinomian approach: there is no absolute law that can overrule the need for abundant life in humans and living beings in general. This perspective, drawn from a deep reading of Paul’s letter to the Romans,<sup>59</sup> finds in the empires and beasts of Revelation (imposers of absolute laws despite the life of their subjects) the theological target for critique, and consequently finds in the principalities and powers of our time the political target for critique. In this sense, there is immense potential for its combination with Adventist apocalypticism, which is contemporaneous as it sees in Rome and the United States—great representatives of religious empire and capitalist imperialism—the beasts who raise themselves against God.

What will flourish, then, if the bases of South American Adventism receive the seeds of Bible communitarian reading groups, watered by critical debates over the legacy of Ellen White? What will arise if White’s ode to country living is finally turned into public policies for the Adventist nation? We do not know. But the theological and practical synthesis sprouting from this fertile soil will be, maybe for the first time, a popular Adventism that is authentically South American.

#### ENDNOTES:

1. 2022 *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*, Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2022, <https://documents.adventistarchives.org/Yearbooks/YB2022.pdf>.
2. Malcolm Bull and Keith Lockhart, *Seeking a Sanctuary: Seventh-day Adventism and the American Dream* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 247.
3. For more details on antebellum capitalist modernization in the US, see Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).
4. For the social composition of Millerism, see David L. Rowe, “Millerites: A Shadow Portrait,” in *The Disappointed: Millerism and Millenarianism in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Ronald L. Numbers and Jonathan M. Butler (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1993), 1-16. In the case of early Adventism, see Ronald Graybill, “Millenarians and Money: Adventist Wealth and Adventist Beliefs,” *Spectrum* 10, no. 2 (1979): 31-41.
5. Some leaders, however, were connected to the elite of the country, such as J.N. Andrews, G.I. Butler, Uriah Smith, and W.W. Prescott. See Bull and Lockhart, *Seeking a Sanctuary*, 104.
6. It is worth noting that such a way of life, that is, of small and family farmers, had already been facing crises since the end of the eighteenth century. At the turn of the century, “agrarian crisis disrupted customary human relationships to produce a rising age of marriage, a declining birthrate, an increasing incidence of premarital pregnancy (reaching 41 percent of first births in some towns), and an erosion of patriarchal authority,” Sellers, *The Market Revolution*, 18. The further expansion of the capitalist market intensified already existing crises, transforming small farmers into wage laborers.
7. This process is described in its contradictions by Sellers, *The Market Revolution*, 202-236. For the moment when this process culminated in Millerism, briefly mentioned, see 364-395.
8. Jonathan M. Butler, “The Making of a New Order: Millerism and the Origins of Seventh-day Adventism,” *The Disappointed: Millerism and Millenarianism in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Ronald L. Numbers and Jonathan M. Butler, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1993), 189-208. On the Adventist expression of an ecstatic antinomianism, see Frederick Hoyt, ed. “Trial of Elder I. Dammon: Reported for the Piscataquis Farmer”; Jon Butler, Ron Graybill, Frederick Hoyt, and Rennie Schoepflin, “Scandal or Rite of Passage? Historians on the Dammon Trial” in *Spectrum* 17, no. 5 (1987): 29-36, 37-50.
9. For an extensive description and discussion of such traits in Adventist ideology, as well as specific quotations of Ellen White’s work, see Malcom Bull, “Eschatology and Manners in Seventh-day Adventism,” *Archives de sciences sociales des religions* 33e Année, No. 65.1 (January-March 1988): 145-159; Bull and Lockhart, *Seeking a Sanctuary*, 69-82, 162-171, 244-258.
10. Ellen G. White, Letter 5, 1904, quoted in *Selected Messages*, II, 141; White, Letter 200, 1903, quoted in *Selected Messages*, II, 142; and White, Letter 93, 1904, quoted in *Counsels*, 10.
11. Jorge Pixley, for instance, defines fundamentalism as a Protestant orthodoxy which is socio-politically conservative and militantly anti-modernist. Jorge Pixley, “¿Qué es el fundamentalismo?” in *Revista Pasos* 103 (2002): 6-11.
12. See Gilbert M. Valentine, “On Adventist Identity: When did the Fundamentalism Begin?” *Spectrum*, published Oct. 14, 2022, <https://spectrummagazine.org/views/2022/adventist-identity-when-did-fundamentalism-begin>, accessed June 14, 2023.
13. As argued by Bull and Lockhart, *Seeking a Sanctuary*, 244-258.
14. Bull and Lockhart, 114.
15. Roberto Schwarz, *To the Victor, the Potatoes! Literary Form and Social Process in the Beginnings of the Brazilian Novel* (Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill, 2019), 2.
16. A.R. de Torres Bandeira, “A liberdade do trabalho e a concorrência, seu efeito, são



- prejudiciais à classe operária?" in *O Futuro*, no. 9, 15/01/1863.
17. Schwarz, *To the Victor*, 2.
  18. Sellers, *The Market Revolution*, 34.
  19. The conflagration of the American Civil War can be understood as a war of conquest from the slave-owning South, whose impulses for monopolizing land and maintaining slave labor posed a threat even to small farmers in the North. For an extensive discussion on the subject, as well as a refutation to the claim that the South only defended its own autonomy, see Karl Marx, "The American Question in England," *New-York Daily Tribune*, October 11, 1861; "The North American Civil War." *Die Presse* 293, October 25, 1861; "The Civil War in the United States," *Die Presse* 306, November 7, 1861; August H. Nimitz, "Marx and Engels on the US Civil War: The 'materialist conception of history' in action," *Historical Materialism* 19.4 (Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill, 2011), 169-192.
  20. See Renato Gross and Samuel Wesley Pereira de Oliveira, "South Brazil Union Conference," *Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists* (herein termed ESDA), published on July 30, 2021, <https://encyclopedia.adventist.org/article?id=CGQW>, accessed on June 19, 2023. A similar process occurred in Argentina. See Angel Jesús Torrel Shapiama, Eugenio Di Dionisio, and Sílvia C. Scholtus, "Argentina Union Conference," ESDA, published on November 12, 2021, <https://encyclopedia.adventist.org/article?id=EIDV>, accessed on July 02, 2023.
  21. See Haller E.S. Schünemann, "*O Tempo do Fim*": uma história social da Igreja Adventista do Sétimo Dia no Brasil (Universidade Metodista de São Paulo: PhD dissertation, 2002), 154-200.
  22. In 1893, for instance, about 80 percent of artisanal and commercial activities in Brazil were already practiced by immigrants, even though a big part of those markets was occupied by slaves before the abolition in 1888. For a detailed discussion about the exclusion of the Black population from the Brazilian capitalist market, see Clóvis Moura, *Sociologia do Negro Brasileiro* (São Paulo: Perspectiva, 2019), 89-138.
  23. Schünemann, "*O Tempo do Fim*," 281-282. Schünemann attributes the expansion of Adventism to other regions from the 1950s onwards to the growing urbanization and the strategies of evangelism popularized by Walter Schubert. These were more attuned to the sensitivities of the Catholic popular classes in the country, and prioritized the preacher's charisma and the public's daily life instead of the didactic exposition of prophecies, 264-265.
  24. See Bull and Lockhart, *Seeking a Sanctuary*, 129-130. It is important to note that the data here refer to the Church's institution in the US, and that the ideal would be to analyze the wage scale directly from South American institutions. Unfortunately, this information is not available to the general public.
  25. Rodrigo Follis, Allan Novaes, and Marcelo Dias, *Sociologia e Adventismo: Desafios brasileiros para a missão* (Engenheiro Coelho: Unaspres, 2015), 110-111. The data from this book correspond to the Brazilian Census of 2010.
  26. Follis, Novaes, and Dias, *Sociologia e Adventismo*, 122.
  27. Follis, Novaes, and Dias, 129.
  28. Follis, Novaes, and Dias, 123.
  29. Follis, Novaes, and Dias, 128.
  30. Follis, Novaes, and Dias, 125.
  31. Follis, Novaes, and Dias, 109.
  32. Sistema IBGE de Recuperação Automática—SIDRA. *Tabela 2094 - População residente por cor ou raça e religião*. Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (IBGE). 2010. Accessed on July 03, 2023.
  33. Ruben Dargã Holdorf, "South American Division," ESDA, published on November 23, 2021, <https://encyclopedia.adventist.org/article?id=IIFC>, accessed on July 03, 2023.
  34. Bull and Lockhart, *Seeking a Sanctuary*, 129. Twenty years ago, the projection was that, from \$100 collected by the world Church, \$75 went to the Church's administrative system. See Malcolm Bull, "The Economic Structure of Seventh-day Adventism," *Social Compass* 39, no. 1 (1992): 103-110.
  35. While in 1910 the proportion in the world Church was of one Church employee for fourteen lay members, in 2000 it already was of one employee for sixth-eight lay members. Bull and Lockhart, 119.
  36. Graybill, "Millenarians and Money."
  37. Bull and Lockhart, 129-130.
  38. Bull and Lockhart, 148-154. The pattern found for the western US was that Adventists only composed significant portions of the local upper middle class around the Church's institutions.
  39. Bull and Lockhart, 251.
  40. Bull and Lockhart, 123-126.
  41. As argued by José Comblin, the clergy is also composed of subjects who are concretely inserted in the labor and consumption market, and they "[...] suffer the effect of propaganda. They are informed and learn what are all the products of the new technologies in their disposal. But one cannot consume without money. Does the pastoral office need too much technology to act? What will be the message contained in this consumption? Will the Church remain being seen as wealthy? Will the clergy be seen as member of the integrated class, of the class that entered the full technological civilization? Who will pay for pastoral consumption? It will have to be the middle class. Isn't this creating a dependence? How can the clergy criticize the new wealthy and technological civilization in this situation of dependence? Will they not be assimilated to this class? . . . A dependent word will never be a prophetic word. Clergy can become a prisoner of the owners of wealth—as in the times of yore, in the times of Christendom," José Comblin, *A profecia na Igreja* (São Paulo: Paulus, 2008), 259.
  42. For an extensive analysis of the history of the Adventist Church in this period, whose conclusions are partly shared here, see Schünemann, "*O Tempo do Fim*," 301-354.
  43. Schünemann, 324-326. Between 1964 (the beginning of the military dictatorship) and 1977, fifteen different compilations of Ellen White texts were published, and only one "original" work: *Early Writings*.
  44. In an evangelistic series held in São Paulo in the 1960s, for instance, 66.1 percent of those converted to Adventism were Catholics. Schünemann, 337.
  45. Schünemann, 339-341.
  46. Bull and Lockhart, 147-154.
  47. Bull and Lockhart, 21-37. For an analogous process in South American Adventism, see the case of Pastor Alejandro Bullón as narrated by Schünemann, 372-375. The meteoric ascension of Bullón consolidated for a few decades the justification by faith as the predominant approach in Adventist evangelism in South America, but without explicitly debating or overcoming the Church's perfectionist-leaning doctrines. This ambiguity in the South American Church was reversed in 2006 with the election of Erton Köhler, representative of the Southern conservative dynasties, to the presidency of SAD, in opposition to the candidate supported by Bullón.
  48. *2022 Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*, Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2022, <https://documents.adventistarchives.org/Yearbooks/YB2022.pdf>.
  49. For a summary of this process of urbanization in Brazil, as well as the Adventist response, see Wendel T. Lima, *A tensão campo-cidade no adventismo brasileiro: mudança no discurso institucional e reinterpretção de uma tradição religiosa* (Universidade Metodista de São Paulo: Master's thesis, 2020), 17-26, 30-52.
  50. Charles Teel, "The Radical Roots of Peruvian Adventism," *Spectrum* 21, no 1, (1990): 5-18. When entering cities, however, Peruvian Adventism does not seem too different from Brazil. See Graybill, "Millenarians and Money," 38-39.
  51. Antônio B. de Moura Filho, *Sertão do Valongo: Articulação de liberdade, religião e identidade em uma comunidade quilombola adventista* (Universidade Metodista de São Paulo: Master's thesis, 2015), 39, 50-62, 66-68.
  52. It is said that "they are conformed, because they do not fight for their rights; they live in a place not reached by public services and do not complain." Ana C. R. Guimarães and Maria J. Reis, "Práticas de cura e referências culturais: uma análise das representações sobre saúde e doença de um grupo negro, rural e adventista," 173. In Alicia N. Gonzalez de Castells, org. *Ecos e Imagens do Patrimônio Imaterial: Inventário Nacional de Referências Culturais do Sertão de Valongo* (Florianópolis: Insular, 2008), 171-186.
  53. On this, see Wendel T. Lima, *A tensão campo-cidade no adventismo brasileiro*, 84-91.
  54. For an extensive discussion of landless militancy in Brazil and the Adventist experience in the struggle, as well as ADRA's project of polyculture and family farming in Uauá, Bahia, see Elias Batista Jr., "In Search of the Promised Land," *Spectrum*, published on January 29, 2022, <https://spectrummagazine.org/views/2022/search-promised-land>, accessed on July 12, 2023.
  55. For instance, "Missionários Voluntários" and "Terceiro Anjo". See Wendel T. Lima, *A tensão campo-cidade no adventismo brasileiro*, 86, n. 138.
  56. For an introduction to Bible communitarian reading and its "hermeneutics of the poor," see Pablo Richard, "Lectura Popular de la Biblia en América Latina: Hermenéutica de la liberación," *RIBLA* 1 (San José: Rehue, 1988), 28-44. For a Brazilian experience reading the biblical book of Judges, see Neftali Vélaz, "La lectura bíblica em las CEB's," *Ibid.*, 9-27. For the account of an experience in the Dominican Republic, see Luis Quesada, "Devolvendo la Biblia al pueblo: Hacia una practica popular de la Biblia," *RIBLA* 16 (San José: Rehue, 1993), 93-98.
  57. For a similar argument, as well as an overview of the Bible communitarian reading in Latin-American Protestant environments, see Jorge Pixley, "Un llamado a lanzar las redes: El nuevo protestantismo y la lectura popular de la Biblia," *RIBLA* 10 (San José: Rehue, 1991), 99-118.
  58. See, p. ex., Laurence A. Turner, "The Costly Lack of Literary Imagination in Seventh-day Adventist Biblical Interpretation," in *Exploring the Frontiers of Faith: Festschrift in Honour of Dr. Jan Paulsen*, ed. Borge Schantz and Reinder Bruinsma (Lueneburg, Germany: Advent-Verlag, 2009), 261-276. Turner proposes a more literary approach to the biblical text, in opposition to a reading concerned with demonstrations of the denomination's doctrines.
  59. For an initial outline of this approach, see Franz J. Hinkelammert, "La teología de la liberación en el contexto económico-social de América Latina: economía y teología o la irracionalidad de lo racionalizado," in *Revista Pasos* 57 (1995): 1-15. For a more extensive proposal and argumentation, see Franz J. Hinkelammert, *A maldição que pesa sobre a lei: as raízes do pensamento crítico em Paulo de Tarso* (São Paulo: Paulus, 2012).



BY LARS G. GUSTAVSSON

# Climate Action or Climate Apathy?

I love my Church. I love its origins. And I love what it has achieved over the past one hundred years and more. I have seen this firsthand as I have traveled and worked in one hundred and twenty-nine countries. I have spent my professional career in development and humanitarian assistance programs.

But I do not love our current apathy toward many of the world's most distressing issues.

## From Messy Beginnings to Getting Sorted

In our early beginnings as an Advent movement, we were messy, chaotic, disorganized, and sometimes confused. However, we were a people who loved to explore, discover, challenge, question, and debate. We longed to be more organized, structured, and united in our beliefs and practices. We took bold action and we took risks. We spent lots of time and resources and eventually got sorted. So, here we are today with so much to celebrate.

I get it. Most of this was essential and necessary. We are now the world's second largest centrally organized Christian church, the Catholic Church being number one.

In all of this "sortedness," however, we seemed to have lost some of our best

characteristics from our early days. We have pivoted toward being a global entity, well-organized, well-structured and—for the most part—well-respected. But our focus has shifted to assuring that

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we are held accountable to the Adventist “brand” everywhere. We as a Church seem to place a higher value on the Church as an institution than on the Church as a people. And we place a higher value on core fundamental beliefs, doctrines, policies, and common practices than we do on core issues impacting our neighbors, our society, and our planet.

### Climate Crisis

By far, the most consequential issue of our time is climate change.

Humanity’s impact, particularly in the last two hundred years, has been driven by three things: 1) a global population surge; 2) use of a significant part of the earth’s accessible land to grow food; and 3) a dramatic increase in heat-trapping carbon from human activity that has changed the earth’s atmosphere.<sup>1</sup>

Humans now directly or indirectly affect more than 80 percent of the earth’s ice-free land. Biodiversity loss is now estimated to be up to one thousand times the natural background rate. Since 1970, there has been a 68 percent decrease in the planet’s population of wild mammals, fish, reptiles, amphibians, and birds.<sup>2</sup>

One-third of the world’s forests are gone; one-half of the world’s coral reefs are destroyed. The concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere

is at its highest level. The earth’s oceans, which absorb some of this carbon dioxide, are more acidic now than they have ever been. The full implications of humanity’s dramatic impact on the earth’s ecosystems are unknowable.<sup>3</sup>

Nearly one billion children across the globe are now living in countries at extremely high risk of climate change and environmental hazards. This is nearly one out of every eight people on the planet.<sup>4</sup>

Without action on climate change, droughts will continue to intensify, land degradation and desertification will continue to accelerate, and the hunger crisis will be further exacerbated. More frequent and severe natural hazards are amplifying already high levels of humanitarian need globally.

### Uncharacteristic Silence

Sadly, in spite of this, Adventism is silent on most of the difficult issues. Why are we quiet on many of the most critical societal issues? In particular, why are we so silent on the world’s most existential threat to humanity—climate change? We have known about this crisis for several decades, and we are reminded daily. I believe the answer probably stems back to our early beginnings when our expectation was that the second coming was imminent. We still believe that Christ’s return is imminent. But so did the apostles of two thousand years ago and so did our Adventist



pioneers of one hundred and fifty years ago. We seem to be more comfortable living in the past and the future, but not the present.

Now more than ever before, Adventists need to demonstrate to the world—and to ourselves—that we in fact do care deeply about humanity’s and the very planet’s well-being. We must care about the now and we must care about the future—however long or short that may be.

We simply cannot afford to be apathetic about the core responsibility God gave to mankind in the Garden of Eden: to be stewards of His creation. It is not our choice to ignore the plight of our planet when God specifically tasked us with taking care of it. It was relevant then, and it certainly remains relevant today.

### **The World Is Responding**

The good news is that much of the world is moving from apathy to action. Most governments have signed on to the United Nations-led Climate Response.<sup>5</sup> Global financing mechanisms are being developed to reward nations that are making significant investments in climate change initiatives. Through the Giving Pledge community of the world’s richest entrepreneurs, two hundred and forty-one philanthropists from twenty-nine countries have signed up to give away at least 51 percent of their wealth.<sup>6</sup> The Climate Charter<sup>7</sup> that is led by the International Committee of the Red Cross and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies is another important climate change alliance empowering partnerships and action.

### **The Faith Community Is Responding**

Christians around the globe are stepping up to the challenge. Just to share a few examples, the Lausanne Movement through the “Biblical Creation Care Model”<sup>8</sup> represents evangelical leaders from around the world who have affirmed that this is a “Gospel Issue” within the Lordship of Christ. The Vatican has a Global Climate Action declaration—the “Laudato Si’ Movement: Catholics for our Common Home” that lays out

clear goals for its 1.3 billion Catholics.<sup>9</sup> And there are many other initiatives led by the Baptists, Lutherans, Anglicans, Pentecostals, and individual churches.

### **Adventist Climate Action Needed**

There is a lot that we can do as an Adventist Church to set goals that support a Net-Zero<sup>10</sup> world, and there are many faith-based organizations we can learn from. At a minimum, the Adventist Church should urge its networks and institutions to actively advocate for and make a positive contribution to climate policy change by “translating” and applying what others are already doing effectively into our own organizations and contexts. The Adventist Church through its General Conference should lead and also mandate its institutions to participate in real, practical ways for the protection and restoration of God’s planet and creation.

Spiritual values propel individual behaviors for more than 80 percent of the people on earth. In many countries, spiritual beliefs and religions are the main drivers for cultural values, social inclusion, political engagement, and economic prosperity.<sup>11</sup> So, in principle, protecting and restoring our planet is possible as most people on our planet are in spiritual and moral alignment.

**We Adventists are complicit if we do nothing!**

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#### **ENDNOTES:**

1. Learn more: <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/science/key-findings>.
2. “Living Planet Report 2020,” World Wildlife Fund, Sept. 10, 2020, <https://www.worldwildlife.org/publications/living-planet-report-2020>.
3. Learn more: [www.un.org/en/climatechange/cop26](http://www.un.org/en/climatechange/cop26).
4. “Climate Change and Environmental Stewardship,” World Vision International, <https://www.wvi.org/our-work/climate-change>.
5. Learn more: <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/cop26>.
6. As of June 2023; learn more: <https://givingpledge.org/>.
7. Learn more: <https://www.climate-charter.org/>.
8. “Creation Care and the Gospel: Jamaica Call to Action,” Lausanne Movement, Nov. 2012, <https://lausanne.org/content/statement/creation-care-call-to-action>.
9. Aryn Baker, “How 10 Years of Pope Francis Has Changed Climate Action,” *Time*, March 15, 2023, <https://time.com/6263212/pope-francis-climate-change-action/>.
10. Learn more about Net Zero: <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/net-zero-coalition>.
11. “Why Faith and Environment Matters,” United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), <https://www.unep.org/about-un-environment-programme/faith-earth-initiative/why-faith-and-environment-matters#:~:text=Spiritual%20values%20drive%20individual%20behaviours,political%20engagement%20and%20economic%20prosperity>.



# Rethinking Adventist Education for the Age of AI

When the first Adventist institution of higher education, Battle Creek College, was founded in 1873, America was in the early years of the second wave of the industrial revolution, also known as the technology revolution. In the following decades, the world was connected by expanding railroads and telegraph lines and transformed by electrical power. It was a period of rapid scientific discovery, with American universities transitioning from a model of training ministers to centers of research activity. As such, Adventist pioneers faced a choice: Should our colleges focus entirely on training members for ministry, or should we also educate our young adults in the sciences so they can participate fully in the new economy?

While Church leaders were divided on the question, Ellen White addressed the General Conference in 1881 and argued for the latter: “God’s purpose has been made known, that our people should have an opportunity to study the sciences and at the same time to learn the requirements of His word.”<sup>1</sup> This ultimately led to the model of a faith-based liberal arts education that came to characterize many of our colleges and universities around the world. Thus, for a century and a half of Adventist higher education, we have educated not only pastors, teachers, and medical workers but also engineers, artists, historians, scientists, and business leaders.

Now, society is being transformed again in a period of disruptive technological innovation

commonly referred to as the fourth industrial revolution. Zoom connects people around the world; Slack allows global teams to collaborate on projects; and AI-powered automation has the potential to redefine the very nature of work. Generative AI tools such as OpenAI’s ChatGPT and Google’s Bard can already write computer code, do many forms of routine legal work, and diagnose patients with increasing accuracy. Self-driving cars are becoming more common on our streets, and AI-generated images and videos are populating our social media feeds. These technological innovations promise greater economic prosperity but also raise questions about their social and political impact. While tech companies invest billions to develop AI, experts also warn against its catastrophic potential. What kind of education will prepare students for this brave new world? I believe Adventist education has much to offer. But for us to realize the full potential of our educational system, we must rethink it—re-examining what and how we teach, how we structure our institutions, and how we address the serious challenges facing them.

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## Disruption Comes to the Classroom

When classes went remote during the pandemic, teachers redesigned their courses, recording lectures, facilitating Zoom breakout discussions, and finding alternative forms of assessment to replace traditional tests. Now AI is disrupting education again. In seconds, a student can have ChatGPT generate an original essay on the topic of their choice. Or a student with no familiarity with computer programming can work with it to generate the JavaScript code to a game such as Tetris. While the results are often not error-free, the technology is impressive and constantly improving, powered by machine learning. In particular, large language models (LLMs) such as ChatGPT and Bard work by writing one word at a time, and then predicting the next, using a neural network trained on the massive corpus of human text across the internet. This simple principle results in a technology capable of mimicking human-produced text. Other AI applications take a similar approach to generate images, audio, or video. Thus while the outputs of artificial intelligence may appear to be the result of great thoughtfulness or creativity, they are mere imitations of human intelligence.

The ease with which AI can do students' work for them has raised alarm bells for educators. Some are relying on plagiarism-detection technology to determine if an essay was produced by an LLM, but since the text produced by the LLM is original, it can be hard to definitively know how much of a student's work is their own. At best, an essay can be assigned a probability of how likely it is the result of an LLM. Thus teachers relying on such detection technology risk falsely accusing students.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, generative AI is becoming ubiquitous, being integrated into search engines, email services, and word processors. Thus rather than try to ban students from using AI, educators need to recognize that AI will be a part of students' lives and teach them how to effectively and ethically use it. This includes teaching students the serious limitations of the technology. For instance, LLMs are prone to "hallucinate," generating factually incorrect information or false citations. Also, machine-learning-trained models

reflect the bias of the data that they were trained on.

Yet, they can serve a valuable role in teaching. Rather than just teach students the mechanics of a five paragraph essay, writing instructors might teach students to critique and improve AI-generated essays, checking if they are factually accurate and logically sound while examining them for bias. In this way instructors can leverage AI to foster students' higher order thinking skills, teaching them to be thinkers and not mere reflectors of other people's thought. And with the proliferation of AI-generated deep fake images and videos that are already appearing in students' social media feeds, they will need to master information literacy, preparing them to assess the credibility of sources and claims.

Just as calculators did not replace the need for students to learn arithmetic, which is essential for developing numeracy, LLMs will not replace the need for students to learn how to write, as writing is one of the best ways to foster precise thinking. Yet even in teaching such foundational literacies, AI may play a supportive role. The popular educational website Khan Academy is incorporating an AI-powered chatbot tutor that can aid students stuck on homework via a Socratic exchange that helps students think through a problem rather than simply tell them the solution. Imagine the value of having an expert one-on-one tutor to help students whenever they need it! Such technology could be utilized in our multigrade classrooms, where teachers are often stretched thin trying to support a wide range of learners. Moreover, AI can help teachers create lesson plans, learning activities, and assessments. No technology will replace the work of a teacher, but it can free teachers to focus more on the human side of education, such as fostering a learning community that supports students' holistic growth and character development.<sup>3</sup> Thus the rollout of AI to the classroom may lead to a greater premium on teachers who practice whole-person education, giving us an opportunity to prove the value proposition of Adventist education.

Beyond benefitting from emerging technology, some Adventist schools are positioning themselves as

leaders in the fourth industrial revolution. The Florida Conference has invested in an innovation lab at Forest Lake Academy, where students learn design thinking, robotics, and entrepreneurial skills in a project-based curriculum. Loma Linda Academy runs a maker faire. Southern Adventist University's Center for Innovation and Research in Computing (CIRC) is working on several AI-related research problems to address pressing social problems. Andrews University's recently established Office of Innovation and Entrepreneurship brings together students and faculty from across the university to tinker, prototype, develop a business plan, and compete for real-world funding in a pitch competition to facilitate technological innovation and social change. Such efforts preview the future of education which will be characterized less by students learning within strict disciplinary boundaries and characterized more by students learning through projects and experiences that promote the application and transfer of knowledge across disciplines.

### **Educating Humans to be More Human**

A recent Goldman Sachs report indicates that AI will significantly disrupt the labor force, impacting up to 300 million jobs globally, including a quarter of jobs in the United States and Europe.<sup>4</sup> Those professions especially exposed include white-collar jobs, such as programming and legal analysis, which were once considered safe from automation.

What kind of education will prepare students to compete against a technology that can outsmart them? First, students need to learn how to leverage emerging technology, for it will be humans working with AI who will be able to outperform either alone. Schools need to re-examine their curriculums to ensure students are getting exposure on how to harness the power of machine learning and to work with big data. Second, since people will need to continue to upskill throughout their lives as the economy undergoes rapid transformation, rather than merely teach students an established body of knowledge, education must train students to be lifelong learners. To do this we must resist the trend toward narrow training

and invest in a broad education that furnishes the architecture of the mind. And third, we need to focus on educating those distinctly human skills that will not soon be automated away, including creativity, leadership, judgment, ethical reasoning, and theological reflection.

Adventist education is founded on the premise that the ultimate purpose of education is to restore the *imago Dei* in humanity. The cultivation of uniquely human skills, then, not only equips graduates to compete in the new economy but also fulfills this greater redemptive goal of education. Ellen White averred that love is the basis of true education, and James K. A. Smith has argued that Christian education needs to treat students as not only "thinkers" but also "lovers."<sup>5</sup> That is, rather than merely focus on content or even worldview formation, a Christian education should cultivate a student's love for God, humanity, justice, beauty, and truth. Adventist campuses offer an unparalleled place and community to foster such formation, where through course lectures, group projects, soccer games, worship programs, service projects, and late-night dorm conversations, students are drawn into a way of living that is poignant with meaning. By belonging to a community that practices sabbath, students learn to resist the techno-capitalistic pressure to reduce their value to that of their outputs, and by learning to recognize the *imago Dei* in everyone, they discover the deficiency of AI-powered algorithms that define users by their metrics. Ultimately, we have a vision of the future that extends past this world. Thus Adventist education should teach students to see themselves as eternal learners, continuously developing their capacities to better serve in this world and the one to come.

### **Networked Campuses for an Interconnected World**

Increasingly, graduates will need to function in a highly interconnected, global economy, regularly interacting with colleagues and clients across national and cultural lines. While tools such as Google Translate can facilitate a conversation between speakers of different languages in real time, we must still educate students to effectively work across cultural divides.

Adventist schools reflect the world Church in that they are some of the most diverse places to learn and grow. Andrews University is routinely recognized as one of the most ethnically and internationally diverse universities in the nation, and many of our other campuses stand out as some of the most diverse in their region, teaching highly valued intercultural skills and novel problem solving.

Online classes serve an essential role in our digital age, but the pandemic taught us that many learners still desire the authentic human connection of an in-person campus. Hybrid courses and degrees, which include a combination of convenient online modules and focused in-person experiences, bring together the best of both modes of learning.<sup>6</sup> Ultimately, all of our degrees and programs will need to become more flexible to serve a range of learners with a variety of learning needs and preferences. In *Robot Proof: Higher Education in the Age of AI*, Joseph Auon, president of Northeastern University, offers a model for how university networks can better serve the next generation of learners:

The multi-university network is a multi-location entity existing across states and even multiple countries. Each node of the network is connected to the other, such that learners can circulate through it to take advantage of academic programs, learning resources, and experiential learning opportunities. In many ways it is the next logical iteration of the university, taking into account the forthcoming need to serve a growing population of lifelong learners.<sup>7</sup>

If we synergize our dozen campuses in the United States and Canada, and deepen connections with the many more Adventist institutions of higher education throughout the world, we would be able to offer an unparalleled global education. Already, through Adventist Colleges Abroad, many students spend a semester at one of our campuses in Europe, South America, or the Middle East to master another language or learn about a region's history and culture. And many more students attending Adventist universities spend up

to a year serving as student missionaries, volunteering across the world from Egypt to Micronesia. Such experiential learning teaches students intercultural, interpersonal, and other valuable skills that help them stand out in the new economy and instills in them a deep sense of mission. For instance, this last year, one of my math majors spent a mission semester in Kenya, doing financial work at an Adventist hospital and volunteering at the local orphanage, before returning to the States to start his career as an actuary.

There is still much we can do to leverage the strengths of the Adventist multi-university network and position it to serve learners for life. What if we made available to every student at every Adventist university the strength of the entire network? For instance, it could become the norm for political science students studying on any of our campuses to spend a semester of intensive study at Washington Adventist University, taking advantage of its proximity to the nation's capital, and for computer science students to spend a summer doing tech internships on the West Coast arranged through Pacific Union College or Walla Walla University. And health science students at any of our campuses would benefit from greater access to the resources and opportunities of Loma Linda University, AdventHealth University, and Kettering College. We must transition from a mindset of competition to one of collaboration, spending less energy marketing our institutions against each other and more on building a system-wide experience that will benefit all students. By aligning curriculum across our universities, we can allow students to tap into the resources of the wider system, enabling them to freely travel between campuses for semester intensives or research experiences.

Moreover, by investing in a joint Adventist alumni network, students can be connected with internships and career mentors so that a student from Burman or Union interested in pursuing a software engineering job at Google could connect with Andrews and Oakwood graduates already working there. Alumni would benefit from staying connected to the network, taking relevant online or hybrid courses and certificates to advance their careers, deepening their spiritual lives, and becoming more effective in service.

The first steps of greater collaboration between



our campuses are already taking place. For instance, Southern, Southwestern, and Union have piloted a course-sharing agreement that supports the mathematics program at all three. And the CAREonline program between our universities allows students to take additional online and hybrid courses from peer institutions, helping to guarantee them the courses they need to graduate on time.<sup>8</sup> Expanding such initiatives can strengthen the programs on all of our campuses, providing more course options to students. They can also help support essential liberal arts disciplines, from history and literature to the arts, during periods of low enrollment. The next step of collaboration is to develop joint certificates and graduate degrees, bringing together the faculty expertise and staff support of several campuses to offer flexible, in-demand programs such as biostatistics, cybersecurity, and data science. Already, faculty from multiple Adventist campuses contribute to a recently developed PhD in business hosted by Andrews University. To compete in a rapidly changing higher education landscape, we must continue to pool our resources and work together.

Having an independent college in each union made sense when our institutions were established and cross-country travel was difficult, but in an increasingly connected world, where even those on the same campus regularly hold meetings over Zoom, it is time to re-examine this model. Some have advocated for a single administrative structure overseeing our campuses, though others fear that would undermine local leadership and support. Certainly, we should respect the distinctive character of each campus and the various expressions of Adventism from the West Coast to the Midwest to the South. A regional model would achieve this, where we move toward three or four comprehensive universities, each offering a broad range of undergraduate and graduate programs, along with several smaller partner campuses that are more specialized in the programs they offer. For instance, Pacific Union College could become a partner campus to La Sierra University, merging institutional structures to reduce overhead costs and achieving greater economies

of scale, freeing PUC to focus on offering an affordable education in areas of distinctive strength. This would provide a model for others to follow such as Southwestern Adventist University partnering with Southern Adventist University and Union College (soon to be Union Adventist University) or Washington Adventist University partnering with Andrews University. Some universities with a well-defined educational focus or legacy, such as our health care institutions and Oakwood University, could maintain organizational independence while still participating in the larger network. Whatever form it ultimately takes, the future vitality of Adventist higher education is dependent upon our willingness to rethink our institutional structures. Transitioning from our largely autonomous way of operating to the strength of a truly collaborative Adventist network offers incredible promise, but it will require a generation of visionary university leaders and board members, courageous Church leaders, and engaged church members.

### **Insurmountable Challenges?**

Enrollment at our higher education institutions has dropped nearly 20 percent over the last decade while many grade schools and academies have closed, leading some to worry that Adventist education is a system in decline. Yet such fatalistic analysis misses that 2010 saw an all-time high in enrollment—the culmination of several decades of national growth in higher education. Since then, the overall enrollment decline at Adventist schools and universities has largely tracked with national enrollment trends, explained chiefly by changing national demographics, macroeconomic conditions, and the impact of the pandemic.

As our institutions are tuition dependent for the majority of their revenue, decreased enrollment translates into reductions in faculty size, cuts in academic programs, delays for building projects, and other morale-killing measures, as many of our campuses have experienced in recent years. Yet it can also spur innovation, with many university campuses pivoting to better serve the growing population of adult learners who are looking to upskill and retool to keep up as technology

transforms the economy. Many campuses are also revitalizing industries and other non-tuition sources of revenue, such as grant writing and industry partnerships.

Moreover, we are not fated to follow the national trends. Since 2012, several Christian colleges have experienced an enrollment increase. While we might dismiss these as lucky outliers, P. Jesse Rine, professor of education, offers an explanation for their success: “In a highly competitive environment characterized by fewer incoming students, institutions with the clearest sense of mission and identity are best positioned to stand out from the crowd.”<sup>9</sup> A clearly articulated, compelling vision for the future of Adventist education is the best way to ensure that future!

Another challenge is rising tuition costs. Although many students benefit from scholarships that significantly offset the sticker price of college, it is no secret that over the last half-century the cost of higher education has skyrocketed, outpacing wage growth. Addressing this is a priority on all of our campuses; for example, Union College has introduced a scholarship to cover the cost of tuition for families making less than \$65,000.<sup>10</sup> All of our campuses need to focus their development efforts on growing endowments that can help support promising students who demonstrate financial need to avoid crippling debt. While Adventists are sometimes reluctant to donate to grow endowments, preferring to spend money on immediate mission efforts, we need to educate members that endowments are a primary means of ensuring the long-term stability of mission-critical functions during turbulent financial times. A related challenge is low faculty wages, which on many campuses have remained largely stagnant during the recent high inflationary period, making it difficult to recruit and retain excellent teachers and professors. Rectifying this will require a significant financial commitment from the Church, recognizing the essential role that educators play in advancing Church mission.<sup>11</sup>

Given the cost of higher education, it is no surprise that many question if it is a worthwhile investment. Certainly, there are alternatives to college that work well for many people, but a recent analysis by Georgetown

University demonstrates that a university degree continues to be the best way to promote social mobility and lifelong financial security. Using data from the United States Department of Education, the study calculated the lifetime increase of earnings of college graduates and determined its net present value (NPV). The NPV measures how much forty years of increased pay across one’s career would be worth as a lump sum in today’s dollars. The study found that the average NPV for US college graduates is \$723,000, while that of graduates from Adventist colleges is over \$900,000. That is, on average, an undergraduate degree from an Adventist college or university is a million-dollar lifetime investment. Undoubtedly, our strength in the health sciences and many STEM disciplines contributes to this value. Yet the Georgetown analysis also revealed that while business, science, and technology graduates tend to take the highest-paying jobs upon graduation, those earning liberal arts degrees close the gap in later years as their training prepares them well to advance throughout their careers.<sup>12</sup>

Of course, we believe Adventist education is more than just a financial investment. Graduates of Adventist schools and universities are more likely to be engaged in their faith and be leaders in the Church; they also benefit from an education that intentionally engages faith in every discipline and profession. Thus they have occasion to wrestle with questions in their field under the support of committed, expert faculty while learning how to live out their faith. Such an education prepares graduates to confront the ethical challenges that accompany technological development and social change and to live meaningfully in an increasingly artificial world. While many of our campuses serve a primarily Adventist student population, and thus explicitly promote a distinctly Adventist way of life, other campuses, such as our health care institutions, serve a more religiously diverse student population and are integrating their faith-informed mission and values in a way that students from all backgrounds can appreciate. With a shrinking pool of college-aged Adventist students, each of our institutions will have to wrestle with whether it

will emphasize traditional faith integration across the disciplines or if it will seek alternative ways to serve a more pluralistic student body. Taking a variety of approaches to mission, contextualized for the various student populations we serve, strengthens our network.

### Mission Critical

Since its inception, Adventist education has been critical to the mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, providing the Church with specialized workers in ministry, health care, education, and administration required to operate the various institutions of the world Church, while also preparing graduates for distinguished legal, scientific, creative, and business careers beyond the Church, extending our witness to every social sphere. Moreover, our Adventist colleges and universities provide the Church with a place to do its thinking, enabling it to thoughtfully engage issues related to technological progress, scientific discovery, and social change. It is essential for us to have spaces where theologians, scientists, and historians talk together, and students training to be pastors study alongside those pursuing a variety of other careers, fostering a theologically grounded, scientifically informed, historically minded Church. In this period of rapid technological advancement, spurring economic, social, and political disruption, we need strong educational institutions to help guard the Church against both fundamentalist reactionism and uncritical embrace.

Preparing students to serve and lead in the new economy will involve integrating technology into our classrooms and teaching students to effectively leverage it, but the strength of Adventist education will remain in it being a thoroughly human education, committed to restoring the *imago Dei* in humanity. As that is a goal that

cannot be automated away, we need to properly support educators doing this essential work. To deliver on the full promise of Adventist education, we must synergize our efforts across campuses and reexamine our institutional structures, working together as a network to educate eternal learners. While Silicon Valley techno-visions have captured the popular imagination, rather than depend upon AI to deliver utopia—or dystopia—we are guided by another vision. As it has for the last century and a half, our forward-looking vision compels us to educate for a Better World.

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### ENDNOTES:

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10. See Bridge to Union Scholarship: <https://ucollege.edu/bridge-to-union>.
11. Here Ellen White's counsel on wages is especially pertinent: "To connect the right class of laborers with the work may require a greater outlay of means, but it will be economy in the end; for while it is essential that economy be exercised in everything possible, it will be found that the efforts to save means by employing those who will work for low wages, and whose labor corresponds in character with their wages, will result in loss." *Testimonies for the Church, Vol. 5*, 551.
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# Institutions

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**vs.**

**INDIVIDUALS?**

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# From Eight Simple Remedies to Complex Medical Therapies

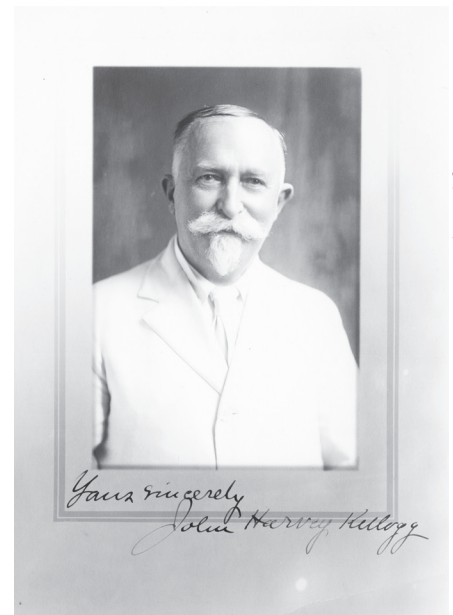
## The Evolution of Adventist Health Services

Several social movements claimed widespread attention during the mid-1800s, including abolition, women's rights, and health reform—the last of which usually included a vegetarian diet and abstinence from alcohol, tobacco, and spices. The leaders of the Adventist Church were active in each of these. Ellen White's seminal 1863 message to the Church on health reform gradually embedded certain practices into our theology at a time when the Church was searching for its identity. While several reformers in this country promoted similar practices, including Sylvester Graham, the integration of health reform into Adventist Church doctrine assured it would have a lasting impact even now, one hundred and sixty years later.

### The Young Church Incorporates a Health Message

Growing out of this commitment to health reform, the Church established its first health care institution, the Western Health Reform Institute, at Battle Creek, Michigan, in 1866. Initially located in the former residence of Benjamin Graves, a judge of the Michigan Superior Court, it became the harbinger of a worldwide network of over two hundred Adventist hospitals today.

Soon after John Harvey Kellogg was recruited to lead this health



Autographed print of John Harvey Kellogg, 1852-1943, founder of Battle Creek Sanitarium, Battle Creek, Michigan.

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movement, he had bigger dreams and built the Battle Creek Sanitarium, modifying the name from sanatorium, a place for injured soldiers. His health reform strategy of wellness quickly gained national and international fame, attracting prominent politicians and businessmen. When his magnificent wooden structure burned down in 1902, he built an even larger edifice. By then his theology had drifted away from Adventist beliefs as he followed his own journey to fame.<sup>1</sup>

After her disappointment in Kellogg and the Battle Creek venture, Ellen White continued to pursue her dream of a major medical and educational center committed to healthy living and simple remedies. She commissioned a young pastor, John Burden, to find a suitable place in the rapidly developing Southern California area. This new venture captured the Church's imagination, believers quickly paid off the property's \$38,000 discounted price, and Loma Linda began its own one-hundred-and-eighteen year journey.

Originally called the College of Evangelists in 1905, it was quickly renamed the College of Medical Evangelists a year later as the founders set their hearts on starting a medical school. A little known fact is that the Adventist Church had two medical schools for one year, 1909, as Kellogg tried to keep his American Medical Missionary College alive even while the Church started a new medical school at Loma Linda.<sup>2</sup> AMMC lasted just fifteen years—from 1895 to 1910—but produced a number of graduates who migrated to Loma Linda to help establish the new institution.

With very limited faculty and even more meager resources, the Loma Linda Sanitarium established two training programs: a School of Nursing and a School of Cooks and Bakers. When the School of Medicine began in 1909, the commitment to health reform, evangelism, compassionate patient care, and global mission service was quickly accepted as the *modus operandi* for this fledgling institution.

Other Adventist sanitariums were also starting across the US and around the world. Over the next fifty years, from 1900-1950, the Adventist Church established over one hundred hospitals, an average of two per year.

About half were in the United States, with the other half primarily in developing countries as Adventist medical missionaries followed their calling to spread the gospel through caring for the sick.

As more and more physicians and other health professionals graduated from Loma Linda and other Adventist educational programs, many also started working at other institutions, both private and public. They contributed their unique understanding of what is now called “whole person care,” integrating spiritual encouragement into their physical and emotional care of patients.

Following Ellen White's bidding that all Church members have something to offer to improve the health of their neighbors, various health education programs were launched by conferences as well as individual churches and members. Vegetarian cooking classes and perhaps most famously “The 5 Day Plan to Stop Smoking,” developed by Wayne McFarland and Elmer Folkenberg, became the norm in many Adventist churches. Only eternity will tell how many lives were saved through these simple educational efforts.

### **Adventist Health Care Begins Its Evolution**

The rapid advances of medical science during the latter part of the twentieth century led to monumental challenges for the Adventist Church. In the 1960s, the introduction of Medicare, a federal program of health care for the elderly, followed soon by Medicaid for the poor, added growing governmental funding and control into health care. Stronger medicines, new laboratory tests, powerful imaging, and creative surgical techniques became the expected norm for hospitals in the United States. Chronic illnesses gradually replaced infectious diseases. Many of our hospitals and Adventist physicians accepted these changes while also recognizing the financial challenges they presented. The great battle to keep up to date began. Our eight simple remedies were not forgotten, but they had to take a back seat to these new modalities.

By the latter part of the last century, the Adventist Church owned and operated around one hundred and

seventy-five hospitals worldwide—depending a bit on the definition of “hospital.” About half of these were in the U.S., with the balance scattered around the world: twenty-five in Africa, twenty or so in Central and South America, eleven in the Philippines, eleven in India, and around fifteen in the cities of Asia. Many of these were started by entrepreneurial physicians from Loma Linda and elsewhere who set standards that soon distinguished these institutions. During these years, the US State Department often referred to our hospitals as the best in the country for foreign travelers and their own embassy staff.

Our traditional business model of a community hospital, usually with Church officials dominating the board, became increasingly problematic in this new environment. Hospitals had to start considering investments in new facilities and equipment, with associated borrowing and risks that raised fears among many Church leaders. Malpractice suits also grew exponentially, with large settlements becoming more common. The fear of ascending liabilities threatening Church coffers became a real concern.

As the financial and organizational challenges facing our hospitals across the United States increasingly became evident, insightful hospital leaders started searching for new strategies that could help them weather the coming storms. Mardian Blair and Erwin Reiboldt in the West and Don Welch in the Southeast were some of the first—with both the credibility and foresight to begin conversations about new ways of operating. They quickly recognized the strength that numbers and size were bringing to other health systems. Common purchasing, shared overhead, branding, and the search for qualified personnel were put forward as arguments of why we could do better together.

Gradually, regional clusters of Adventist hospitals began sharing ideas and resources. Leaders started searching for common branding ideas, what strengths could be shared, and what organizational structures would work best. By the early 1980s, the idea of uniting all the regional structures into a national system was being discussed and championed by many. Don Welch

was empowered to create Adventist Health System/US, and resources were put forward to enable this to occur. The recognition of what a national network of Adventist hospitals could do and the impact it could make for the Church was enticing. Unfortunately, after only a few years, it was recognized that health care politics were regional, and the forces pulling this fledgling system apart became greater than the glue trying to hold it together.

Without trying to document all the ensuing forces, Adventist hospitals in the U.S. gradually coalesced into five systems, currently known as AdventHealth in the Southeast and Mid-America; Adventist Healthcare Inc. in the Maryland area; Kettering Health around Dayton, Ohio; Adventist Health in the West; and Loma Linda University Health in inland Southern California. These systems now include around ninety hospitals in the United States, sharing a common heritage from the Church with branding as faith-based institutions and a commitment to spiritual care. The boards of all these systems are still chaired by Church officers from either the involved unions or the General Conference.

Meanwhile, local church-based health education programs have diminished significantly, with many



AdventHealth Orlando, formerly known as Florida Hospital Orlando.

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conferences and unions using volunteers to fill these once-prominent positions. The commercial markets for weight management, tobacco and drug cessation, exercise, and other modern trends have taken over this space, though the strategies are often more profit oriented than personally useful. Our Church continues to possess major credibility in matters of lifestyle due to the increased health and longevity of our members documented by the Adventist Health Studies.

Thanks to our many educational programs, there are thousands of Adventist health professionals working in various institutions and private practices who share these Adventist health principles in their personal lives and activities. Loma Linda alone has fifty thousand alumni, two thirds of whom are still living. They give talks, encourage patients, and influence policies and people toward healthy living in many communities. When we speak of Adventist health systems, let's not forget this great army of individuals who represent our Church to the public as much as our hospitals do.

### **Where Are We Headed Now?**

Without question, modern health care—with its many technological advances, leveraged balance sheets, competitive environments, and deep governmental involvement—is a far cry from our quiet sanitariums and long-term patients of the past. Most hospitals are now big Intensive Care Units with seriously ill patients, who need to be discharged as quickly as possible to meet insurance requirements. Opportunities for establishing relationships and sharing the good news of salvation during these very stressful and brief moments are increasingly limited. Within these constraints, our Adventist hospitals seek to gently present an invitation to patients and their families to consider their faith journeys as they confront life's challenges. Baptismal and Bible study numbers, which used to be tracked, are harder to quantify in today's world, but there can be no question that people are nudged toward considering their own mortality and the spiritual issues this raises in their lives.

In this context, a common concern is how effective spiritual witness can be when the majority of hospital

employees are not members of the Adventist Church. While the proportion varies widely by geography and length of time the institution has been part of an Adventist system, Adventists are a fairly small minority in most hospitals. While our hospitals try to recruit Adventists, there simply are not enough qualified professionals to fill the necessary positions. As a result, most of our institutions recruit for "mission fit," a euphemism for those who understand and support our beliefs even though they are not members of the Church. Without question, many of these individuals become an integral part of our service commitment, often making efforts equal to our own members in sharing our values.

Another notable characteristic of today's world is how much other institutions, including secular ones, are echoing the principles of Adventist health care: recognition of the "whole" person and the value of a healthy lifestyle to avoid disease. Even the State of California called for its health services to promote "Whole Person Care" in its programs. While their definition may not include the full spectrum of spiritual health that we value, they are getting closer. Their understanding of health increasingly mimics what Adventists have taught for one hundred and sixty years. Some may feel cheated that others have "stolen our thunder." I say, praise the Lord that many have grasped this basic understanding of a balanced life.

As market forces have impacted our hospital systems in the US, various compromises have crept in. The level of debt hospitals have assumed for their required growth would stun most Adventists of yesteryear. Executive salaries, affiliations with other systems, Sabbath accommodations, and just the sheer size itself are raised as concerns. The collective annual budget of our health care systems in the US is now over \$30 billion, with nearly one hundred and fifty thousand employees, making us one of the largest health networks in the country. This gives us considerable political influence, which our systems are starting to utilize to protect our core principles. And the social and legal pressures of caring for all who enter our doors, regardless of their lifestyle or cause of illness, bring ethical concerns unimagined in the past.





Andrew McCreary / Adventist Media Exchange (CC BY 4.0)

Manado Adventist Hospital, which opened with fifty beds in December 2007, expanded to one hundred and fifty beds and new facilities with the help of a 2012 Thirteenth Sabbath Offering. Today, the hospital employs 384 staff members, 90 percent of whom are Adventist, and cares for about 700,000 patients a year.

### Global Service Gives Credibility

While speaking of the Adventist health systems in the United States, I must not forget the other half of our Church’s hospitals scattered around the globe, mainly in what should be called the “majority world,” where most of the planet’s seven and a half billion people actually live. We have a significant footprint there as well, though they are struggling to keep up with modern medicine. We have only two hospitals left in all of Europe: Waldfriede in Berlin and La Ligniere near Geneva.

Many of our “mission” hospitals in developing countries are struggling to maintain their unique witness due to financial threats. Even the term “mission” needs to be rethought as local integration and staffing make them far more indigenous than foreign. Recent Church decisions to pivot traditional General Conference-supported budgets away from established institutions to “unentered” cities and countries will require even more local self-sufficiency. And there are still vast areas of the world with no institutional Adventist health care presence at all, including North Africa, China, Russia, and most of the 10/40 window. What does the future

hold for Adventist health care in these other countries?

We can thank those who have gone before us for developing such a solid reputation for the Church. Together with our educational system, health care is what gives our Church credibility in most countries. Can we further differentiate ourselves and our institutions, both in the US and elsewhere, with a common brand? We have carefully documented that two words—Adventist and health—have market value. Are we willing to help lift those institutions that are struggling in developing countries so we can proudly call them sister hospitals? It is disconcerting to see some of the best hospitals in the world listed alongside some of our struggling institutions on the same Church roster. Adventist Health International, based at Loma Linda, is now affiliated with over half of these hospitals, trying to strengthen their services and reputations. Other Adventist health systems in this country are also involved in these ongoing international efforts.

### Our Core Values Will Continue

As many countries increasingly recognize health care as an essential service for their citizens, government funding and involvement in all aspects of health care are inevitable. Can we maintain our unique perspectives in this controlled environment? My experience has been that no government or commercial health care service can compete with genuine spiritual care for others. Valuing every person as a child of God brings a compassionate connection to each relationship that cannot be matched. While we have shared much of our “magic” with the secular world today, the essential core of our understanding on how to make men whole will always remain ours. Let us recognize what we still have, be proud of what we have shared with the world, and move humbly, yet confidently, into the future.

#### ENDNOTES:

1. The Great Depression caused the institution to go into bankruptcy, and it was sold to the federal government to become the Percy Jones Hospital, housing soldiers from World War II and the Korean War. Finally, in 1954 it was converted into a federal office building, named after three United States senators who had been patients there—the Hart-Dole-Inouye Federal Center—which it continues as today.
2. That same year, the federally commissioned Abraham Flexner Report came out, shutting down half of America’s medical schools due to poor educational quality.



BY EDWIN TORKELSEN

# The Imperial Church

## From Movement to Corporation—and Back?

*“Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.”*

George Santayana, *The Life of Reason*

### What Is the Church?

The English word “church” has three meanings: a) a community of people, b) a worship building, c) a religious denomination.

Among the early Christians, the Greek term *ecclesia* simply meant an assembly of people.<sup>1</sup> The distinction is important because people are more important than organizations and buildings. The vibrant life of a religion resides in the people who worship. A church organization has value only if it serves the needs of the people. That is its only *raison d’être*.

In the New Testament, “church” was local. We find

no trace of a top-down, centralized, bureaucratic, and hierarchical church organization. Jesus and Peter both warn against that (Matt 20:25-28; 1 Pet 5:3).

### The Constantinian Church

Three centuries later much changed. Jacques Ellul, French philosopher and professor of the sociology of institutions, wrote a book titled *The Subversion of Christianity*.<sup>2</sup> The book defends “primitive Christianity” against an organized Church that subverted Christianity. Institution and politics enthralled the leaders of the new Church organization. Where politics enters institutions, conflicts are inevitable. The story of this change is long and complicated.<sup>3</sup>

### The Roman Empire and Church

As the Roman Empire crumbled in the West, the Emperor moved to the “New Rome” in the East, Constantinople.<sup>4</sup> A vacuum in civil structures in the West was filled by the Roman Church. Where Empire officials moved out, Church officials moved in. An

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ecclesiastical-administrative network covered the Western part of Europe.<sup>5</sup>

### **Kingly Power**

Power is addictive. The popes aspired also to secular authority. The idea of papal supremacy over secular princes is called the hierocratic doctrine.<sup>6</sup> It may have been expressed as early as Pope Gelasius I (492-496), but it became prominent during the conflicts between the popes and emperors in the high Middle Ages.

In 756, the Frankish King Pepin the Short in the *Donatio Pepini*,<sup>7</sup> “restored” to Pope Stephen II the sovereign authority over a swath of lands in Italy, called *Patrimonium Beati Petri* (the inheritance of St. Peter). It was the legal foundation of the Papal States. The historical background for this “restoration” was “documented” by the “discovery” of the famous pious forgery called *Donatio Constantini*.<sup>8</sup> Its narrative was how Emperor Constantine transferred his imperial authority in the West to the Bishop of Rome. On Christmas Day in 800, Pope Leo III surprised the Frankish King Charlemagne by crowning him Roman Emperor. This action demonstrated that the popes had the authority to appoint and depose emperors.<sup>9</sup>

Christianity in the West became an imperial church, a successor of the Roman Empire, together with a new *Imperium Christianum*. Over time it acquired many of the characteristics of a secular state.<sup>10</sup>

### **The Church as an Ideological-Economic Empire**

The influence in society of the Roman Church created a cultural unity which Wallace K. Ferguson ascribes to three commonly held assumptions: a) There is only one form of truth manifested by divine revelation; b) The Church is the sole custodian and interpreter of that truth; c) The Church is an international institution necessary to salvation and endowed with powers to enforce obedience to its tenets. This made the Church “the matrix in which the civilization of Western Christendom was cast.”<sup>11</sup> All shared the same worldview of heaven and hell, and all tried to avoid one and win the other. Controlling people’s minds was the foundation of Church power.

The Church had powerful tools of coercion and punishment in penance, excommunication, and interdict. The Church possessed the power to close the gates of heaven.

Purgatory and the *thesaurus ecclesiae* were used to build an economic empire. The spiritual treasury contained the surplus merits of Jesus and saints, administered by the Church. Sinners with a deficit of salvific merits could benefit from this surplus in exchange for penance. Inconvenient penances could be converted to indulgences, which might be obtained through “gifts” of properties and money.

### **The Waning of Church as a Political Empire**

Empire and Church were seen as two sides to the same “unified” born-again *Sacrum Imperium Romanum*, in theory ruled by two equal powers. However, emperors wanted to control the Church, and popes wanted to control emperors and princes. Conflict was inevitable.

At the time of the Reformation, emerging nation states claimed full sovereignty, challenging the imperial idea in both the religious and secular realms. Charles V was the last emperor who still believed in it, and Martin Luther exploded the idea of the single Church empire. Ending the wars of religion in Germany, the Peace of Augsburg in 1555 declared the principle of *cuius regio, eius religio*. The prince decided the religion of his principality. In the Scandinavian countries, Lutheranism became the state religion with the kings as its head.<sup>12</sup>

### **Colonial Imperialism**

The idea of empire was reborn in colonial imperialism. The colonial empires grabbed land where they could. After the loss of its thirteen American colonies, Great Britain learned a lesson or two. The British Empire transitioned mostly peacefully to a new union called the Commonwealth, which today has fifty-four member countries.

The principle of diversity within a union was incorporated in modern nations like the United States

of America and the Federal Republic of Germany. This solution has kept the ideal of “government of the people, by the people, for the people” closer to being a reality.<sup>13</sup>

## Modern Religious Empires

Wikipedia provides a long list of Christian denominations, illustrating a huge diversity of Christian churches.<sup>14</sup> Christianity embraces approximately 2.6 billion people, 50.1 percent in the Catholic group and 36.7 percent in the Protestant group. The rest is made up of smaller Christian churches.

The Roman Catholic Church has always claimed to be a global church. Its organization is hierarchic and imperial with a literal “monarch” at the top. Three smaller churches also aspire or claim to be global—the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and the Jehovah’s Witnesses. They are all attracted to centralized global uniformity in organization, doctrine, and governance. All of these claim to be “the only true church.” The three smaller ones share a dominant eschatological focus placing themselves at the center.

Is this diversity in organization and theology a religious scandal? Maybe it is a sign of dynamic vitality that exhibits flexibility and ability to adapt to various human conditions? God has not restricted himself to having children in only one denomination, though some churches think so.

## The Adventist Church: From Movement to Corporation

The Seventh-day Adventist Church is rooted in the Millerite movement<sup>15</sup> that swept the New England states and collapsed in 1844 when Jesus failed to appear as predicted. Most followers disappeared, disappointed or relieved.

One small group was held together by three leaders, the visionary girl Ellen Gould White; her husband, former Christian Connexion preacher, James White; and the former sea captain Joseph Bates. To begin with, Sabbatical Adventists were skeptical of organized religion and creeds. However, as the group

grew, some kind of organization was needed for order and business purposes.

In 1861, the Michigan Conference was formed, followed by other similar conferences. In 1863, they united in a General Conference (GC) led by John Byington. This event is considered the formal beginning of the organized Adventist Church. The estimated total membership at the time was about three thousand five hundred.

## The Path Toward Centralism

Rapid growth in membership and expansion in activities followed. The movement established institutions, like publishing houses, church primary schools, a college, and a sanitarium. Foreign mission work started, enabled by financial assistance from the Battle Creek, Michigan, office. The Church was on the path to be a global corporation.

James White, second president of the GC, carried a heavy workload, threatening his health. He suffered a stroke, was disabled for a period, and his wife was concerned, not only for his health, but also for the way he worked. Like the bishops in Rome more than a thousand years before, he had been accustomed to, and now expected, that all business should be placed on his desk for decision. After his death in 1881, his successors continued this tradition.

Communications with missionaries in faraway places was time consuming and inefficient. Asking for permissions and waiting for decisions and funds from Battle Creek proved to be a tiresome process. The global centralized Church had a serious problem.

In Ellen White’s parlance, centralized authority and power became synonymous with “kingly power.” She repeatedly warned against it. It was spiritually damaging, both for the individuals that exercised it and for local leaders that became dependent on the “kings.”

## Dismantling the “Kingly” Organization

While in Australia from 1891 to 1900, Ellen White became convinced that a reorganization was needed. In letters to the leaders of the GC, she chastised and

admonished them to abandon and correct their thirst for power and control.<sup>16</sup>

At the GC session in 1901, a new structure with regional unions of conferences was implemented. A.G. Daniells, who had worked closely with Ellen White in Australia where a union had been formed, was elected the new leader of the GC—with the significant change of title to chairman. However, in the 1903 session of the GC, the title was changed back to president.

Ellen White's son, William C. White, was excited about the reorganization. He said: "[We]should bear in mind that the remedy . . . for our confusion is to strengthen the union in every locality, strengthen it in my individual heart, strengthen it in my church, strengthen it in my conference, strengthen it in my Union Conference. . . . The General Conference, by this system of organization, is forced to become a mission board; and our General Conference must leave institutional work alone."

He added a quotation from a letter from his mother, written in 1902: "The division of the General Conference into District Union Conferences was God's arrangement. In the work of the Lord in these last days there should be no Jerusalem centers, no kingly power. And the work in the different countries is not to be tied up by contracts to the work centering in Battle Creek, for this is not God's plan. Brethren are to counsel together; for we are just as much under the control of God in one part of His vineyard as in another."<sup>17</sup>

George Knight points out, "The key word in seeking to understand the 1901 session is 'decentralization.'"<sup>18</sup> That meant curbing the centralized powers of the GC and transferring authority to the regional and local levels.

A reaction appeared. Knight writes that at the GC session in 1903, "the old denominational demon of 'kingly power' had reasserted its ugly head."<sup>19</sup> The centralizing powers came back into the ring. The Review and Herald Publishing Association wanted to control all other publishing houses, and John H. Kellogg and his "medical empire" wanted to control all health institutions. GC President Daniells resisted, and some of these "independent" organizations were

incorporated as departments of the GC.

The conflict was mostly about who should exercise control. Daniells wanted more authority in his hands to meet the competing challenge from Kellogg. Knight writes, "But, unfortunately, Daniells in his drive to bring Kellogg and his associates into line had by 1903 resurrected tendencies to 'kingly power' in the presidential office. . . . After all, power generally has to be met by power."<sup>20</sup>

## Resurrecting Centralized Church Authority

In his book *Adventist Authority Wars, Ordination, and the Roman Catholic Temptations*, Knight reviews the steps back to centralizing the organization. He sums it up in this statement: "An ongoing temptation of the General Conference throughout its history has been to overstep the bounds of its authority."<sup>21</sup>

## God's Voice?

In recent years, when GC authority has been challenged, the current officers have selectively referred to Ellen White's statements about the authority of the GC in session as being God's voice. A false impression has been created that no matter what is decided, everyone is obliged to submit.

In 1877 the GC in session voted this statement: "Resolved. That the highest authority under God among Seventh-day Adventists is found in the will of the body of that people, as expressed in the decisions of the General Conference when acting within its proper jurisdiction; and that such decisions should be submitted to by all without exception, unless they can be shown to conflict with the word of God and the rights of individual conscience."<sup>22</sup>

Three important conditions are mentioned: acting within its proper jurisdiction, not conflicting with the word of God, and respecting the rights of individual conscience.

In 1901 Ellen White wrote this sobering statement: "The people have lost confidence in those who have the management of the work. Yet we hear that the voice of the Conference is the voice of God. Every time I have

heard this, I thought it was almost blasphemy. The voice of the Conference ought to be the voice of God, but it is not, because some in connection with it are not men of faith and prayer, they are not men of elevated principle.”<sup>23</sup>

Clearly, Ellen White’s understanding of Church authority was not that the voice of the GC “is the voice of God” unconditionally. All Church authority is conditional, never absolute.<sup>24</sup>

In 1895 Ellen White had a few words about policies: “Laws and rules are being made at the centers of the work that will soon be broken into atoms. . . . If the cords are drawn much tighter, if the rules are made much finer, if men continue to bind their fellow-laborers closer and closer to the commandments of men, many will be stirred by the Spirit of God to break every shackle, and assert their liberty in Christ Jesus.”<sup>25</sup>

In October 2016, former GC legal counsel Mitchel Tyner pointed out that the GC leaders’ attempt to bring unions into compliance with policies on the issue of women’s ordination was itself conducted in noncompliance with these policies.<sup>26</sup>

The process over the issue of women’s ordination from 2015 until today has revealed a mindset among GC leadership that takes for granted that spiritual unity (a) can be achieved through bureaucratic global uniformity (policies); (b) can be enforced from the top of the organization; (c) can take place without regard for current procedural policies; (d) can go forward without listening to the pleas from the fields.

This raises the issue of democracy in the Church.

## A Democratic Church?

Leaders have claimed that the Seventh-day Adventist Church is a representative democracy.<sup>27</sup> Members elect local church officers and representatives to conference constituency meetings directly. But above that level, representatives are appointed by boards. Layer by layer, members have been distanced from participation in the governance process, diluting democracy.

GC policy regulates appointments of delegates to a GC session. A large group is appointed by the GC itself;

many Church employees are *ex officio* delegates; some are invited delegates at large. Lay delegates not employed by the Church are also appointed, but they constitute a small fraction of the total number of delegates, which was 2713 at the St. Louis session in 2022.<sup>28</sup>

## Essence and Spirit of Democracy

Democracy is about the source of authority (the people), elections, and how authority is distributed and exercised. The hierarchical-bureaucratic nature of the Church shifts focus to lines of command and obedience.

Some of the world’s most repressive regimes have the words “democratic” or “people” in their names, like the defunct Deutsche Demokratische Republik (DDR), the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK), and the People’s Republic of China (PRC). These states were/are highly centralized, totalitarian, one-party states, where “the people” had/have very little, if any, real choice as to the nation’s laws, politicians, and politics.

The democratic deficit arises when delegation of authority is cumulative, from bottom level through several levels above, before reaching the top level.

## The Democratic Mindset

A democracy depends not only on an organization’s structure, but even more on the democratic mindset of both the people and leaders involved.

The French philosopher Alexis de Tocqueville (1805-1859) had thoughts on what democracy means. Roy Teofanovic argues that the core point in Tocqueville’s ideas was “democracy’s impact on *democratic man’s political mindset* and his *preferences, outlook and values*, and the consequences that the *principle of equality as a guiding moral principle* exerts on modern society” (my emphasis).<sup>29</sup> In short, if that mindset and principle are lacking on the individual and collective levels, speaking of democracy is of little value. “The principle of equality” as “a guiding moral principle” may not be welcome to a person who is hooked on authoritarian hierarchy structures.

## The Majority Vote Fallacy

A common reductionist idea is that democracy is all

about majority votes, where the minority is obliged to submit to the majority. That reduces democracy to a power struggle between competing wills. It is blind to the “Jerusalem” conciliatory principle of both-and instead of either-or (Acts 15).

This reductionist idea disregards the freedoms and rights of the minority, like freedom of speech, religion, conscience, worldview, and unhindered participation in communal activities and debates. A liberal democracy will also allow for expression of different opinions after the vote and seek to accommodate different consciences.<sup>30</sup> In a religious setting there ought to be a deep understanding of and respect for the value of freedom of expression because that is the sine qua non for increased maturity of faith. Faith cannot be legislated.

### Democratic Centralism

One fake democracy is called “democratic centralism.” The idea was invented by Vladimir Lenin early in the twentieth century, accepted by the Soviet Communist Party in 1917, and became the leading form of governance in all Communist countries.<sup>31</sup>

Democratic centralism has four key points:

- All directing bodies of the Party, from top to bottom, shall be elected.
- Party bodies shall give periodical accounts of their activities to their respective Party organization.
- There shall be strict Party discipline and the subordination of the minority to the majority.
- All decisions of higher bodies shall be absolutely binding on lower bodies and on all Party members.<sup>32</sup>

In the debates that followed the vote on women’s ordination in San Antonio in 2015, the issue of Church authority received much attention from the GC. In September 2016 the GC secretariat released a fifty-four page thesis titled *A Study of Church Governance and Unity*. The anonymous authors argued for a democracy, authority, and relationship between levels that reflect the core principles of Lenin’s democratic centralism. The core points of this document are:

- The lower levels are free to have an opinion.
- Opinions are not acceptable unless they are approved and allowed by the top level.
- Authority in the Church flows from the bottom up.
- The authority on the top then flows from the top down.
- The minority must submit to the majority.
- Decisions made at the upper levels are binding for all lower levels.
- There must be strict discipline exercised to assure the submission of the minority to the majority.<sup>33</sup>

*General Conference Working Policy* states that recognition of local authority “is not self-generated,” it is “granted” to them from above.<sup>34</sup> That idea nullifies all democracy. Hierarchy wins.

This reasoning has a serious defect in addition to its subversive understanding of democracy. It dilutes and confuses the lines of accountability. The constituency meeting and constitution of any organization are the “self-generated,” final, and undisputed authority of that organization. They carry all legal responsibility. All Adventist levels are obliged to comply with the laws and requirements of the country in non-faith issues. In a lawsuit, the court will not accept an argument that some church authority in another country has imposed on them rules that violate the state rules. Passing the buck to Silver Spring will not help.

The principle of divided authority blurs the lines of accountability. It undermines the legal independence of the local entity. It makes a sham of the local entity’s constitution and constituency. It expresses heavy-handed, top-down, hierarchical thinking that violates the ideals of the democratic mindset. Or, repeating Knight’s words, “An ongoing temptation of the General Conference throughout its history has been to overstep the bounds of its authority.”<sup>35</sup>

*Nota Bene!* This has nothing to do with “religious freedom,” only organizational clarity and accountability.<sup>36</sup>

### The Imperial Adventist Church

The Roman Catholic Church still has an imperial

profile. The Adventist Church has some similarities with the Roman Catholic Church, not only in its hierarchical organization, but also in imperial ambitions, ideology, and praxis.

- The GC building in Silver Spring displays a large sign at the top: The Seventh-day Adventist Church World Headquarters.
- The Church publishes a magazine titled *Adventist World*.
- The top bureaucrat has often been presented as the president of the Adventist World Church (wrong title).
- When traveling abroad, the president of the GC (correct title) meets heads of states, like the presidents of Uganda and the Philippines.
- He has been received as an important potentate, riding on an elephant in India and, in Uganda, arriving at a stadium in a military helicopter and riding in a large armored black SUV with military security guards running beside the car.
- *General Conference Working Policy* requires compliance by all levels of the organization.
- The *Church Manual* defines *orthodox praxis* universally.
- The 28 Fundamental Beliefs have near-creedal status.
- Appealing to religious freedom, the Church has tried to avoid national laws in matters of gender equality, discrimination, and worker protection.
- There is both a status and functional distinction between lay members and clergy.
- The rite of pastoral ordination is reserved for males only.<sup>37</sup>

### The Imperial Mindset

Imperialism is to exercise control over dependent regions. In the Adventist Church, control is exercised through the *Working Policy*, *Church Manual*, and “model constitutions.” The moment something is mandatory, its acceptance is no longer voluntary. It is bureaucratic law. Unilateral demands for compliance evaporate everything “voluntary.” The principle of equal collegiality and *consensus ecclesiae* has been replaced by imperial fiat.

Imperial mindset is contagious. It has infected some private Adventist websites opposed to women’s

ordination. Using militant “culture war” rhetoric and demanding effective disciplining of the “rebels,” they promote imperial coercive power to obtain obedience and control.<sup>38</sup>

Past and present history reveals that imperial thinking has been and still is attractive to bureaucratic-minded people, reflected in the hierarchic organization structure. How can this imperial-minded challenge to the spiritual collegial *consensus ecclesiae* be met?

### The Church of Tomorrow

The arguments for dismantling a centralized organization in 1901 seem to be equally valid for the Adventist Church in 2023. Changes in organization and, most importantly, bureaucratic thinking, are often defeated by change resistance and denial of reality. Insisting on formal authority and status quo will at best create calcified stagnation and irrelevance, and at worst end in schism or collapse. But we may be warned when cracks appear in our imperial walls.

### Cracks in the Catholic Walls

The Roman Catholic Church is reputed for being solidly *semper eadem*. But since the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), the Roman Catholic Church has introduced some changes. The Mass is now said in the vernacular; the long-held animosity between Catholicism and Protestant churches is no longer so intense; the militant rhetoric has changed from “heretics” to “separated brethren”; the ideal of governance collegiality has been recognized (with one reservation—the authority of the pope remains the same).

Traditionalist Catholics criticize Vatican II and strive to turn the clock back; they insist that the Mass should be conducted in Latin only; they are against ecumenism; some promote dress codes and complementary gender roles. Some have claimed that the current Jesuit Pope Francis I is a liberal heretic that must be deposed.<sup>39</sup> The French Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre<sup>40</sup> is probably the best known opponent of Vatican II and Catholic leaders. In 1988 he was excommunicated by Pope John Paul II.

Other groups think the reforms did not go far enough.



Some advocate for abolishing celibacy; many refuse to follow and simply ignore the Church's teaching on contraceptives; some want to open the priesthood for married laymen; some advocate for women to be included in the priesthood. Even the Jesuits, long the staunch conservative defenders of the papacy, have become "liberal" and were in conflict with Pope John Paul II.<sup>41</sup> Conservative popes have tried to bridle Marxist-inspired liberation theology clerics in Latin America.

The Roman Catholic Church is no longer so monolithic, uniform, and forceful as it has been. There are cracks in its walls. Obedience to pope and council is no longer a given among members.

### **Cracks in the Adventist Walls**

The idea that our pioneers worked together harmoniously and in complete unity is a saintly myth.<sup>42</sup> But they proved that disagreements and flexibility could be strength, not weakness. This helped them avoid some traditional ideas of obscure origin. But some cracks are serious.

### **The Kellogg Crack**

As mentioned above, in the early 1900s, power and control rivalry erupted between Dr. John Harvey Kellogg, and the GC President A.G. Daniells. Kellogg wanted his medical empire to be independent of pastors, while Daniells feared its independence. In addition there were theological differences. The conflict caused a schism that led to Kellogg being disfellowshipped in 1907.

### **The Ellen White Crack**

Ellen White's claim to prophetic status was not unique. There were other women prophets in modern times.<sup>43</sup> She was met with skepticism; some accepted her claims, others did not.<sup>44</sup> These divergent views have remained until now.<sup>45</sup>

At the 1919 Bible Conference, a serious crack appeared in a conflict between myth and reality, focused on the nature of inspiration in the Bible and the writings of Ellen White and her magisterial role in the Church.<sup>46</sup> Those who defended the myth claimed verbal

inspiration, seeing the Bible and White as inerrant and infallible. Daniells and W.W. Prescott, a well-educated senior administrator and experienced educator, had both worked closely with White and had observed close up how her writings had been made. They informed the conference that the myth was a myth and not reality.

A slander crusade against the two leaders had already started. At the GC session in 1922, new leaders came in, some of whom wanted to strengthen the myth by putting White on a pedestal of inerrant infallibility. The Church adopted ideas from the evangelical fundamentalist movement that created a militant confrontation between myth and reality in the Church, a crack that has remained open to this day.

### **The Education Crack**

Education became a hallmark of maturing Adventism. In 1873 Ellen White wrote: "Ignorance will not increase the humility or spirituality of any professed follower of Christ. The truths of the divine word can be best appreciated by an intellectual Christian."<sup>47</sup>

Battle Creek College was founded in 1874, and other colleges followed. Some have become universities. Today there are 9,419 Adventist schools, from kindergartens to universities, with a total enrollment of 2,023,884 students.<sup>48</sup> More than anything else, education has broadened the minds of young people, lifted them up on the socioeconomic ladder, and provided skilled personnel to serve the needs of society. The United Nations states that education is an important key to end poverty.<sup>49</sup>

One would expect that education would be an arena where scholarship is respected and pastoral efforts are informed. Unfortunately, anti-intellectualism, theological fundamentalist conservatism, and bigoted distrust have created a serious crack between academia and administrators.

In the 1960s, Church leaders, listening to rumors and assumptions from conservative lay members, viewed the theology taught in the Seminary and colleges with growing suspicion. Robert Pierson, president of the GC from 1966 to 1979, grasped for more control over what professors were teaching. He instructed Richard

Hammill, president of Andrews University from 1963 to 1976, to check on the theological orthodoxy of the professors, and he gave instructions that new professors should not be hired unless they could prove that their theology was sufficiently “conservative.” Mind control had replaced the open mind in the Church.

Obsession with administrative control created an unhealthy work environment. Some professors resigned; others were not reappointed. “Witch hunting”<sup>50</sup> took place at several colleges. Much harm was done to the academic community. This sad story has recently been well documented by professors Gilbert Valentine and Edwin Zackrison.<sup>51</sup>

Unfortunately, an anti-academic mentality has appeared among leaders of the GC today. The president has dedicated whole sermons to warn against perceived threats to orthodoxy, as happened in 2018 and 2022.<sup>52</sup> This antagonistic-polemical approach will only erode mutual trust, create confusion, and encourage suppressed acrimony—not exactly the fruits of the Spirit.

### **The Women’s Ordination Crack**

The most recent—and totally unnecessary—crack has been caused by the issue of women’s ordination. This has been one big paradox. The most influential spiritual leader in all of Adventist history, by far surpassing all male pastors combined, was a woman. From the age of 17 to her death in 1915, Ellen White was considered the highest human authority in the Church. From the 1920s, women gradually disappeared from the roster of Church employees in leadership positions and were pointed to the kitchen or secretarial work. Pastoral leadership was the sole domain of males.<sup>53</sup>

In the 1970s, women’s emancipation finally helped challenge hoary secular society and Church traditions. A male headship theology was constructed to defend male dominance—a power grab discrimination in religious garb, built on fanciful arguments claimed to be “biblical truth.”<sup>54</sup> Pastor Josephine Benton became a trailblazer for women in pastoral ministry and was finally ordained in 2013 at age 87.<sup>55</sup>

The issue of women’s ordination cracked open a

polarized gulf between supporters and opponents. In the end the “fight” focused on a bureaucratic issue: Which label should be put on a prayer ceremony for pastors? A somewhat ludicrous “solution” was adopted—for men “ordained” and for women “credentialed.”

*Working Policy* created more confusion with a self-contradictory policy, stating that no discrimination of any sort, including gender, should be tolerated—and then added a discriminatory exception for positions that required “ordination.”<sup>56</sup> With a stroke of the bureaucratic quill, all women were excluded from pastoral leadership positions because they had the wrong tag!

Three GC sessions, in 1990, 1995 and 2015, voted down the ordination of women. The rationale given was not theological, but an assumed political consideration, claiming that the “unity” of the Church for the time being might be threatened, since in some parts of the world women in spiritual leadership positions were unacceptable. Based on this assumption, social traditions in one part of the world were imposed on the Church in all other parts of the world.

Ted Wilson, GC president since 2010, initiated a worldwide study of the issue, the Theology of Ordination Study Committee (TOSC). It morphed into a discussion of women’s ordination. The study found no theological support in the Bible or the writings of Ellen White that could bar women from ordination. The division reports were divided. Ten were in favor of ordaining women or not opposed to other divisions doing so. Only three were against and demanded to impose their view on all divisions.

A “Consensus Statement on a Seventh-day Adventist Theology of Ordination” clarified that within the Adventist context the rite of “ordination” has no sacramental value, nor does it convey “special qualities to the persons ordained nor introduces a kingly hierarchy within the faith community.” It is simply a matter of bureaucratic church order.<sup>57</sup> Gender roles are not mentioned. The statement was theoretically correct, but did not reflect actual praxis.

None of the three TOSC positions were presented and explained to the delegates at the 2015 GC session. That was

a serious failure. and it was a manipulative move by Wilson, before the vote, to say, “You know where I stand.”<sup>58</sup>

To quell the opposition to the 2015 vote, the GC office mustered the defense of the empire. Under the banner of unity, the bureaucratic tools of policies, pressure, coercion, naming and shaming, etc., were mobilized. The campaign against “rebel unions” that still ordained women was waged with fervor, but the “rebellion” continued and spread as more unions and conferences sided with the pro women’s ordination stance. The crack has become a bleeding wound. Never has a GC president talked so much about unity and—by his actions to secure uniformity and compliance—increased the division in the Church and weakened the authority and relevance of the GC office. Many members did not care at all what came from that office.

However, it became clear that the issue of women’s ordination is not the central problem. The idea of the uniform imperial Church is. The first is a symptom; the last is the disease.

### Theological Cracks

The pioneers discarded teachings they found were false, like Jesus’s second coming in 1844, the 1845 theory (James White), the seven-years speculation that Christ would return in 1851 (Joseph Bates), the “soon” meaning their lifetime, the Shut Door. They disagreed about organization, creeds or pseudo-creeds, the “daily” in Daniel, the law in Galatians; the Ottoman Empire’s role in prophecy, Armageddon, when to begin the Sabbath, tithing, justification by faith vs. sanctification, the Trinity, prophetic beasts and horns, and the role of Ellen White. *They learned to live with differences of human opinions.*

Some deeply held divisive theological opinions are still present in the Adventist Church, like the confusing mix of justification and sanctification, Last Generation Theology, male headship theology, remnant theology, the sanctuary/investigative judgment doctrine, organizational structure, and the general militant conservative-liberal divide (sometimes mixed with corresponding political views).

### The Present Truth Crack

Should we just play the ostrich and claim that there are no such cracks? If so, that would be in opposition to the concept of “present truth.” Today some claim that the term is static, meaning the Adventist theology of the nineteenth century. (Which part of it?) Originally, the term was dynamic and progressive, a mandate to be open-minded in our continual search to learn more and unlearn even more. Ellen White wrote: “We have many lessons to learn, and many, many to unlearn. God and heaven alone are infallible. Those who think that they will never have to give up a cherished view, never have occasion to change an opinion, will be disappointed. As long as we hold to our own ideas and opinions with determined persistency, we cannot have the unity for which Christ prayed.”<sup>59</sup>

Some may concede that we have more to learn, but are opposed to unlearn. They may not have noticed that in Ellen White’s parlance, “conservative” was a negative term.<sup>60</sup>

To retain our original openness to progressive change, we may need an (if possible) unbiased committee tasked with continually reviewing our old, cherished views. Theological studies may have revealed that some ideas we have held as truths for a long time are more anchored in our traditions than in the Bible. Some “fundamental beliefs” may even be redundant and irrelevant. The primary task of the Church is to focus on salvation, not overrule science or put a stamp of approval or disapproval on items of non-salvific importance.

The alternative is the Roman Catholic view, where tradition is a source of truth equal to the Bible. The *Wesleyan Quadrilateral*<sup>61</sup> also includes tradition as a source of truth, along with Scripture, reason, and experience. Adventists should at least consider the possibility that some points in our faith are eisegetically rooted in our tradition, even if we think they are *sola scriptura exegesis*.<sup>62</sup>

### The Colonial Empire Lesson

King George III insisted on empire uniformity. American colonists declared independence and fought

for it. They opted for a federation of states, the United States of America—*e pluribus unum*. The Civil War threatened that unity. Abraham Lincoln is remembered as the president that saved the union.<sup>63</sup> It was the principle of unity in diversity that was secured.

Great Britain got the point. The colonial British Empire decided to adapt to reality. Beginning with granting colonies self-governing dominion status, they ended up with the Commonwealth model, an association of independent former colonies still united by sharing the same sovereign.

The 1901 GC session expressed opposition to religious colonialism within the Adventist Church, tried to fix it, and apparently succeeded in theory, but not in praxis. To succeed, mentality must be changed, not only organization.

### What Is the Cure?

Several solutions may be considered. These are my personal ideas; others may have better ones.

First, diagnose reality. All empires have one defect in common: their inherent weakness causes all to crack, crumble, and collapse (cfr Dan 2). Strong centralism is never a cure because most people are freedom-loving humans, not dead robots. The “rebellion”<sup>64</sup> in the Adventist Church is a symptomatic cry against the hierarchically enforced uniformity mentality of the Middle Ages, and a call for freedom from imperial religious power. Although our present situation is vastly different from 1901, the central principle is the same.

Second, abandon empire mentality, and replace it with the unity in diversity principle. Equality authority should replace hierarchical authority. The different units should on equal level counsel together, respecting and allowing each other’s differences in needs and circumstances.

Third, mentality and organizational charts may change. Here is my twelve-point think-about list:

1. In all things, lift up and turn your eyes upon Jesus.
2. Allow the Holy Spirit to work everywhere as he sees fit.
3. Praise freedom in Christ and flee human coercion.
4. Don’t let mind control subvert Adventism.

5. Focus on principle, not form.
6. Learn from history; don’t worship it or repeat it.
7. Don’t elevate traditions to doctrines, and make no irrelevant doctrines and policies.
8. Avoid all superfluous religious code language.
9. Encourage voluntary cooperation, not enforced by law.
10. Replace democratic centralism with liberal democracy.
11. Reassess and reduce the number of bureaucratic levels.
12. Don’t exalt one authority above other levels.

We need to take to heart Ellen White’s statement: “The work in the different countries is not to be tied up by contracts to the work centering in Battle Creek, for this is not God’s plan. Brethren are to counsel together; for we are just as much under the control of God in one part of His vineyard as in another.”<sup>65</sup>

May it be so!

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### ENDNOTES:

1. <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/ecclesia>.
2. Jacques Ellul, *The Subversion of Christianity*, English trans. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986).
3. The rise of the papacy was a long process. See Walter Ullmann’s book, *The Growth of Papal Government in the Middle Ages* (London: Methuen Publishing, 1955) and later editions.
4. While the institution we call the papacy flourished in the West, in the East the emperor retained authority over the Church. That arrangement is called *Caesaropapism*.
5. Belgian historian Henri Pirenne, in his small book *Medieval Cities*, states that “The Church had of course closely patterned the religious districts after the administrative districts of the Empire. . . . In fact, from the beginning of the sixth century the word *civitas* took the meaning of ‘episcopal city,’ the center of the diocese” (New York: Anchor Books, 1956), 8. “[I]n the course of the fourth century, the Eternal City [Rome] had ceased to be the capital of the world. In leaving it for Ravenna and then for Constantinople, the emperors abandoned it to the Pope. What it no longer was for the government of the State, it continued to be in the government of the Church. The imperial city became the pontifical city,” 45. See also Wallace K. Furguson, *Europe in Transition 1300-1520* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1962), 25.
6. Walter Ullmann, *A History of Political Thought: The Middle Ages* (London: Penguin Books, 1970), chap. 4.
7. English translation of parts of the document in Brian Tierney, *The Crisis of Church & State 1050-1300* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), 20-21.
8. English translation in Henry Bettenson, *Documents of the Christian Church*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 98-101. This is probably the only document where the title *Vicarius Filii Dei* (The Vicar of God’s Son) appears, 99. The most common title used in papal letters is *Vicarius Christi*.
9. Charlemagne was, according to Einhard in his *Vita Karoli Magni*, not happy about what happened, and he never returned to Rome. People close to Charlemagne entertained the idea of making him emperor because of his military successes in enlarging his kingdom. What the pope did left the impression that Charlemagne now had replaced the emperor in Constantinople and had taken over the old Roman empire. Charlemagne had no intention of doing that. His idea was built on his admiration of the biblical King David, and his aspiration was to found a new Christian Carolingian empire, not to replace the old secular Byzantine-Roman empire of pre-Christian lineage.
10. This development took place especially during the Avignon Papacy (1309-1376). See Yves Renouard, *The Avignon Papacy* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1994); Geoffrey

- Barraclough, *The Medieval Papacy* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1968) chapter IV; Walter Ullmann, *A Short History of the Papacy in the Middle Ages*, (London: Methuen Publishing, 1972), chaps. 10 and 12.
11. Wallace K. Ferguson, *Europe in Transition 1300-1520* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962), 51.
  12. Owen Chadwick, *The Reformation*, vol. 3, *The Penguin History of the Church* (London: Penguin Books, 1988), 143.
  13. The USSR was a union of one party Soviet Republics. Post-Cold War Russia attempted to be democratic as a Federal Republic. But because of the democratic centralism view of democracy, and a deficit of democratic mentality, both editions became more or less dictatorships.
  14. [https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_Christian\\_denominations\\_by\\_number\\_of\\_members](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Christian_denominations_by_number_of_members)
  15. For an in-depth study of the Millerite movement and its relation to the origin of the Adventist Church, two books by Adventist historian George Knight are recommended: *Millennial Fever and the End of the World* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1993); and *William Miller and the Rise of Adventism* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2010).
  16. Much of this counsel has been published in the book *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*. <https://m.egwwritings.org/en/book/123.2>. NB! This is a compilation book. For an extensive treatment of this period, see Gilbert M. Valentine, *The Prophet and the Presidents* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2011), chaps. 3-6.
  17. *GC Bulletin*, Apr. 10, 1903, 158.
  18. George Knight, *Adventist Authority Wars, Ordination, and the Roman Catholic Temptation* (Westlake Village, CA: Oak and Acorn Publishing, 2017), 48.
  19. Knight, *Adventist Authority Wars*, 51.
  20. Knight, 52.
  21. Knight, 89. My emphasis.
  22. *The Review and Herald*, Oct. 4, 1877
  23. *Ms. 37*, April 1, 1901.
  24. See my article, "Defending the Church: The Limits of Church Authority, Conscience, and Compliance," *Adventist Today* 27, no. 1 (Winter 2019), [https://atoday.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/AT\\_Winter\\_19.pdf](https://atoday.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/AT_Winter_19.pdf).
  25. Ellen White, "The Great Need of the Holy Spirit," *The Review and Herald*, July 23, 1895.
  26. Mitchel Tyner, "Analysis: The Use of GC Working Policy in the Case of Unions that Ordain Women," *Spectrum* (Oct. 10, 2016), <https://spectrummagazine.org/article/2016/10/10/analysis-use-general-conference-working-policy-case-unions-ordain-women>.
  27. I wrote an article for *Spectrum*, titled "Church Democracy and Orthodox Faith" (Aug. 28, 2018), where I discussed these issues. <https://spectrummagazine.org/article/2018/08/28/church-democracy-and-orthodox-faith>.
  28. <https://www.gcsession.org/delegates/>.
  29. Roy Teofanovic, *Democratic man and democratic mentality: a Tocquevillian perspective*, Master thesis, University of Oslo, 2004. English résumé here: <https://www.duo.uio.no/handle/10852/13602>.
  30. [https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liberal\\_democracy](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liberal_democracy). All freedoms operate within certain limits, also religious freedom.
  31. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Democratic\\_centralism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Democratic_centralism).
  32. You may substitute the word "party" for "church."
  33. These ideas are presented in several places in the document, but especially in section III: "Diversity, Unity and Authority," subsection 3: "Diversity and Authority in the Seventh-day Adventist Church."
  34. "Organizational status is granted to a constituency as a trust. Official recognition . . . is not self-generated, automatic, or perpetual. It is the result of a formal decision by an executive committee or a constituency session at higher levels of denominational organization" (GC Working Policy, B 05, emphasis added).
  35. George Knight, *Adventist Authority Wars*, 48.
  36. In the Merikay Silver lawsuit (1973-1983) for equal pay, the Church countered, among other arguments, that it was a religious liberty case, implying that a religious organization is free to discriminate as it sees fit.
  37. Cf my article, "An Image of the Roman Hierarchy: Are We Repeating History?" *Adventist Today* 26, no. 4 (Autumn 2018), <https://atoday.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/2018-Fall.pdf>.
  38. This situation and rhetoric are sad and deplorable among Christian brothers and sisters because serious, open, and respectful conversation regarding challenging topics is replaced by militant vitriol. (I will not identify any of these websites.)
  39. <https://wherepeteris.com/critics-letter-fails-to-make-case-that-pope-francis-is-a-heretic/>.
  40. [https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marcel\\_Lefebvre](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marcel_Lefebvre).
  41. An interesting glimpse into the inner workings of the Jesuits is described by Malachi Martin in his book, *The Jesuits: The Society of Jesus and the Betrayal of the Roman Catholic Church* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1988).
  42. The GC session in Minneapolis in 1888 was marred by strong internal antagonism. The GC session in 1922 was highly politicized with strong accusations directed at A.G. Daniells and W.W. Prescott.
  43. <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/display/document/obo-9780199730414-0bo-9780199730414-0190.xml>.
  44. In 1919, D.M. Canright, a former Adventist pastor, published a book titled *Life of Mrs. E.G. White: Her Claims Refuted* (Kindle).
  45. The most recent attack on Ellen White's personality and morals comes from Steve Daily, *Ellen G. White: A Psychobiography* (Kindle, 2020). The book is marred by being very polemical.
  46. Two books by Michael Campbell deal with the 1919 Bible Conference and the 1922 GC session: 1919: *The Untold Story of Adventism's Struggle with Fundamentalism* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2019); 1922: *The Rise of Adventist Fundamentalism* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2022).
  47. Testimony #22, published 1873. Ellen G. White, *Christian Education* (Battle Creek, MI: International Tract Society, 1894), 23, <https://m.egwwritings.org/en/book/10.91>.
  48. According to the latest available statistic, <https://www.adventist.org/statistics/>.
  49. <https://www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/ending-poverty-through-education-challenge-education-all>.
  50. Term used by William Johnson, former Seminary professor and *Adventist Review* editor, on the back cover of Gilbert Valentine's book *Ostriches and Canaries*.
  51. Gilbert Valentine, *Ostriches and Canaries. Coping with Change in Adventism 1966-1979* (Westlake Village, CA: Oak & Acorn Publishing, 2022). Edwin Zackrisson, a former religion professor at Southern Missionary College in the 1970s, describes in his autobiography what and how it happened to him and others, but was unable to understand why it happened. *Profile of a Religious Man. Confessions of a Religious Addict* (California: Resource Publications, 2020).
  52. See my article in *Spectrum*, "Comments on Ted Wilson's 2018 Annual Council Sermon" (Oct. 13, 2018), <https://spectrummagazine.org/news/2018/comments-ted-wilsons-2018-annual-council-sermon>. In 2022, Michael Ryan, former GC vice president, advisor to Ted Wilson, and chair of the Faith and Science Council, was interviewed for a conservative Adventist podcast. He stated that this forum's purpose was to promote the 28 Fundamental Beliefs, especially the literal six-day creation doctrine (14 min. point), and to educate Adventist science students to do so. He encouraged members to investigate schools at all levels to see if their science teaching is in harmony with the six-day creation story (17 min. point), <https://youtu.be/ikxhNQC5dDk>. On this point Ryan's advice is in harmony with what happens in the secular political scene in the United States. See Robert Crux, "When Schools Are Political Battle Fields," *Adventist Today* (March 2, 2023), <https://atoday.org/why-schools-are-becoming-political-battlefields/>.
  53. See list of women ministers in the Adventist Church 1884-1975 in Josephine Benton's book, *Called by God*, Appendix B, (Lincoln, NE: AdventSource, 2002), <https://www.ecogidasparaservir.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Josephine-Benton-Called-by-God.pdf>.
  54. See Gerry Chudleigh, *A Short History of the Headship Doctrine in the Seventh-day Adventist Church* (published by Gerry Chudleigh at Smashword, 2014).
  55. Josephine Benton was the first woman to be an ordained elder. She served as a pastor and was ordained by the Potomac Conference and Columbia Union Conference in 2013, <https://atoday.org/history-making-woman-to-be-ordained-as-an-adventist-minister-on-february-16/>.
  56. GC Working Policy states, "The world Church supports nondiscrimination in employment practices and policies and upholds the principle that both men and women, without regard to race and color, shall be given full and equal opportunity within the Church to develop the knowledge and skills needed for the building up of the Church. Positions of service and responsibility (except those requiring ordination to the gospel ministry) on all levels of church activity shall be open to all on the basis of the individual's qualifications" (BA 60 10, emphasis added).
  57. <https://www.adventistarchives.org/final-tosc>.
  58. Vote results were 1381-977, a surprisingly close vote compared to previous votes, <https://adventist.news/news/delegates-vote-no-on-issue-of-womens-ordination>.
  59. Ellen G. White, *Counsels to Writers and Editors* (Nashville: Southern Publishing Association, 1946), 37.
  60. "And at that time the superficial conservative class, whose influence has constantly retarded the progress of the work, will renounce the faith and take their stand with its avowed enemies, toward whom their sympathies have long been tending." *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1882), 463.
  61. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wesleyan\\_Quadrilateral](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wesleyan_Quadrilateral)
  62. The term *sola scriptura* does not exclude other sources, but indicates that Scripture is the final source. Some Adventist teachings are rooted in the need to explain the historic Disappointment in 1844. We must distinguish between *exegesis* and *eisegesis*.
  63. Cf the inscription above the statue in the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, DC.
  64. At Autumn Council in 2017, GC Vice President Thomas Lemon, who chaired the Compliance Committee, declared that in his conversations with "rebel" unions, he had not met any person that could be called a "rebel" in any sense of the word. A few hours later he was no longer chair of that committee.
  65. *GC Bulletin*, Apr. 10, 1903, 158.



By Melodie Roschman

## Pastor's Kid

*"Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." Proverbs 22:6 (KJV)*

In the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, leaders frequently invoke the concept of "the shelf." If someone asks a question they don't have an answer to, or expresses a particular doubt or frustration, that person is encouraged to take their issue and put it away on a metaphorical shelf, to bring up with Jesus someday once they're in heaven.

When ex-Mormons talk about why they left the church of their youth, they will often return to this metaphor. "That moment," they will say, "is when my shelf broke."

Today, I will tell you one story from my shelf.

I am the daughter of an Adventist pastor. My mother's father was a pastor. Several of my great-uncles were pastors as well. I attended Adventist schools from first grade through university, worked at an Adventist summer camp, and spent hours at church every Sabbath.

Growing up as a pastor's kid, I frequently joked that people expected me to follow one of two paths: either I would remain perfect, devout, and dutiful, or I would run away from home, get a bunch of tattoos, and start dating a man named Snake.

For a very long time, I worked as hard as I could to be that perfect kid. I never drank or swore or watched R-rated movies. I got straight As. I tried to witness

about my faith, which was difficult, because I didn't know many non-Adventists.

From the age of three or four, I was comfortable doing Scripture readings up front. I made my cousins

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and friends play missionary and teacher. I quickly picked up my father's affinity for striking up conversations with strangers. I loved reading and writing and doing research. I had a knack for languages. I spent hours thinking about theology, writing in a prayer journal, and memorizing Bible verses. I was always the first one to find the text during Sword's Up, the first one ready with an answer to the Sabbath school lesson.

But despite all of this, no one has ever, in my whole life, told me or my parents that I should be a pastor.

This stands out to me as especially funny because I have a younger brother. Paul is brilliant and talented, but he was a shy, dreamy kid, rarely volunteering to be up front or lead a group.

And yet, I have heard people exclaim dozens of times throughout my life that Paul should be a pastor, often within minutes of meeting him, seemingly for no other reason than he was standing within ten feet of my father and wearing a miniature suit and tie.

In the end, as it turns out, neither of us became pastors. Paul, delightfully, became an archaeologist, and I went on to get a PhD in English literature.

As a child, though, I tried on a new career every week: scientist, librarian, ballerina, secretary. (I found office work very glamorous). But I never, not once, considered being a pastor. It never even occurred to me as an option.

My parents both supported women's ordination, I

heard children's stories about our female founder who had visions from God, and I still thought that being an international spy seemed more plausible than me preaching behind a pulpit.

• • •

At my Adventist boarding academy, there was a man who taught Grade 12 Religion. He was given the title pastor, though he was not ordained, had never been to seminary. But he went by pastor—I will call him Pastor Smith. The pseudonym does not matter. You have met this man. He is a deacon at your church, or he teaches Sabbath school. He serves on your board or hands out homemade fliers in the parking lot during services. We all know a Pastor Smith.

Pastor Smith was blessed with an unshakable belief in his own rightness, a certainty so deep and pure the very stones must have envied him.

Pastor Smith did not like me.

Of course, I did not realize this at first. Up to this point, I had only had teachers who loved my enthusiasm, encouraged my big, open-ended questions, were excited about my extracurricular research and desire to go deeper. That same year, in World History, I got permission to write a seventeen-page final paper instead of the assigned six because I had done so much research about the

For a very **L O N G** time,

I worked as hard as  
I could to be that *perfect* kid.

Titanic disaster. Why would a teacher be threatened by a student like that?

I remember looking forward to Grade 12 Religion. My dad already had a connection to Pastor Smith: he had supervised him as a youth leader when I was a toddler and Pastor Smith himself was just 17. Plus, Pastor Smith's religion class had a reputation for being one of the hardest senior classes, and I loved a challenge.

The class featured four units: Worldviews, John, Hebrews, and Human Relationships—a collection of topics I was sure would inspire thought-provoking discussions and spirited debates. This curriculum, set by the North American Division, was designed to help us “develop critical and creative thinking skills” (according to the division's 2017 “Secondary Religion Standards”).

Our class was at 7:30 a.m.—a time that boggles my mind now. Back then, though, I was just happy to not be in Chemistry at the crack of dawn, like my best friend was. Pastor Smith had a policy that if you were ten minutes late, you were counted as absent, and if you were absent, you could not take a quiz or test, even if it was still ongoing when you got to class.



istockphoto.com/wildpixel

I was late exactly once that semester. I slept through my alarm, woke up at 7:36, and made it to class by 7:42.

That day, there was a quiz on the Gospel of John, and I sat there silently, still shaking with adrenaline, for an additional eight minutes while my classmates wrote. It was the first—and only—zero I ever received on a quiz or test, and it dropped my grade in the class overnight from an A+ to a C. After class, I apologized profusely and asked if there was anything I could do to make up for the zero. Pastor Smith told me that on the test for the unit, he would give students a point for every fact or concept they mentioned in the essay question. I studied for that test for two weeks, and in the fifty minutes allotted for it, I answered all the other questions and then wrote a five-page essay regurgitating dozens of concepts from the lesson almost word-for-word. I got 80 out of 30 on the essay question, and my grade in the class shot from the low 70s to 103 percent.

As someone who has since designed and taught several classes, I am tempted to dwell on the wildly imbalanced grading system for that course. There is another whole essay to be written about pedagogy and expectations, consequences, and grace. But for now, I will say only this: I do not remember a single phrase or concept that I memorized for that test.

At the end of the semester, I went to each of my teachers' offices to give them a thank you card and a jar of my mom's homemade cookie mix. “Would you like to see your final exam?” Pastor Smith asked when I got to his office. Of course I would. He carefully pointed out each error I had made, and then leaned back against his desk and crossed his arms. “If you had gotten one more point, you would have gotten a 98 percent on the exam,” he said. “Then you would have finished the class with a 99, instead of a 97, and I would have rounded your grade up to 100.” He smirked at me. “But you didn't.”

Looking back now, it is so plain to me that he wanted to smear my nose in my failure, put me in my place. Back then, though, I just saw it as friendly competition, an encouragement to do my best. I would work harder. I would show what I was capable of.

Around the same time, our Grade 12 class pastor got



caught smoking weed, and our class sponsor asked me to step in as a replacement. As a result, I found myself unexpectedly working closely with Pastor Smith for the rest of the year as part of campus ministries. Mostly, this meant that I helped organize a café night and find musicians for vespers. It also meant, however, that I was a natural choice to be one of the ten seniors chosen to give a sermon during Student Week of Prayer.

My assigned sermon topic was the crucifixion. I spent hours and hours on that sermon: cross-referencing Gospel accounts, borrowing commentaries and history books from my dad, doing medical research. I practiced it with my friends and alone in the mirror. The evening of my sermon, one of my friends borrowed a video camera and sat up in the front row to film me so I could show it to my parents.

As he did for each of my classmates that week, Pastor Smith said a few words to introduce me before I stood up. So far, these had been general compliments: Jeremy is very focused. Leah clearly loves Jesus. But tonight, his introduction was different. “I knew Melodie when she was just a toddler,” he said. “I used to carry her around on my shoulders in nothing but a diaper! And now she’s preaching a sermon! I guess I must be old!”

My classmates giggled as I, struggling not to flush with embarrassment, took the podium. I hadn’t prepared for everyone to picture me in a diaper moments before I launched into a wildly detailed and gory account of how crucifixion affects the body, but I soldiered on. The rest of the sermon went as smoothly as rehearsed, my friends were waiting with hugs and praise, and I moved on with the remainder of senior year.

As graduation approached, I decided to apply to work at the local Adventist summer camp. Our applications had to include two references, who would rate everything from our work ethic to our spiritual seriousness. I asked my beloved English teacher, naturally—and I asked Pastor Smith. Who better to recommend me as a camp counselor than someone who had seen my work as both a student and as a spiritual leader?

I got the job, working part time in the craft building and part time in the office. One muggy July day,

while cleaning up some paperwork, I came across my application packet. Despite my seventeen years of trying, I was still no saint. I peeked.

First, my English teacher’s recommendation form: five out of five across the board, glowing praises in the optional notes section. Balm for my exhausted, insecure teenage heart. Then Pastor Smith’s. Work ethic? Five out of five. Spirituality? Five out of five. Personality? Two out of five.

I jerked back from the folder of papers like I had been stung, then looked again. There it was, unmistakable. Two out of five. No note, no explanation. Just a calm, quantitative assessment of my bad personality.

As an adult, I am incredulous at the absurdity of asking anyone to rate a teenager’s personality on a numerical scale. At the time, however, I mostly felt betrayed.

I knew we had our disagreements and debates, but I thought they came from a place of intellectual rigor and respect. I thought he was one of my mentors.

If he felt that way, why had he agreed to recommend me? What did he think was wrong with my personality? Did I have a 2/5 personality? What did that even mean?

I will be the first to admit that I have many flaws. Some of those flaws, in fact, are ones I likely share with Pastor Smith. I talk too much. I am stubborn, proud, fiercely competitive. I am too sure of my own opinions, and I seldom back down from an argument.

I don’t know if those things are what he saw in me when he filled out that form. But I do know this: All the things that made him so certain of his calling, so confidently a messenger of God, made me a threat. I was the wrong kind of woman.

Back then, I didn’t have the language to articulate that. I was raised in a world that excused blatant misogyny as God’s plan, or as a quirk, or at worst as a difference of opinion among believers. And I was busy. Busy being seventeen. Busy trying to be good. Busy memorizing enough concepts from the book of John to get 80/30 on an essay question.

Like I said, I don’t remember any of those concepts anymore.

But I do remember some things from that class.

What I remember is the unit on Human Relationships, where we memorized a list of physical acts of intimacy, from holding hands to French kissing to “fondling, clothed” to “fondling, unclothed” to actual sexual intercourse, along with what stage of the relationship they belonged to. That was a far easier test to study for. Everything except for holding hands and hugging was reserved for marriage.

I remember that Pastor Smith used Bria and Arnold, my classmates who were dating, as examples for that discussion of physical intimacy, and speculated aloud what they had done on that list.

I remember when Pastor Smith explained free will by describing how, if he created a robot that looked exactly like my friend Katie and programmed it to say that it loved him, it would not be meaningful.

What I do remember is Pastor Smith bragging about making his wife and daughter cry. He told us how his wife foolishly let their five-year-old daughter check out a book about Tinker Bell from the library, and he made her return it, because his wife thought it was okay, but he knew better. He knew that “Tinker Bell leads to Harry Potter, and Harry Potter leads to witchcraft, and witchcraft leads straight to Satan worship.”

I remember that day how he proclaimed so confidently that children under the age of twelve could not tell fantasy from reality.

“That’s news to me,” I shot back. “My dad read me *The Hobbit* when I was five, and I could tell just fine.”

In retrospect, I don’t know what irked Pastor Smith more: that I was a woman who pushed back, or that I had

the preparation to do so because my dad was a pastor, too. My dad explained Greek words to me and showed me maps of Egypt when I went to his office to kiss him goodnight. He taught me how to use a concordance and answered my hundred questions about household purity laws and suffering in Job. My dad also, inadvertently, taught me that pastors were just people, that they got tired, made mistakes, and disagreed with each other.

I was a threat.

Because I knew that a pastor did not always speak with the voice of God. Sometimes, he was just a man.

• • •

This is the part of the story where, if you were already looking for a reason to blame me or discredit me, you have no doubt found one. I clearly have a chip on my shoulder. I am out for petty revenge. Poor little teacher’s pet, still cranky twelve years later over one teacher who wouldn’t give her an A.

And I would take that critique if I was the only woman in my class whom Pastor Smith made feel small.

I would move on, if the way he treated me was unique. If he was unique.

He was not unique.

He was as common as dirt.

Because it wasn’t just Pastor Smith who claimed to speak in the voice of God.

It was the old men at my church who would walk up to me when I was ten or eleven and tug at the hem of my skirt without warning to make it more “modest,” who



would write letters to the president of the conference complaining about female members being “allowed” to change into jeans during potlucks.

It was the seminary student I met at a party who told me, two hours after he met me, that I would change my mind about being a feminist once I found a husband.

It was the male speaker, invited for my dorm’s Womanhood Week at Andrews, who told a room full of doctors-, engineers-, and professors-in-training that men were thinkers and women were feelers, and that he just needed to teach us this because this week we were his daughters and he was our daddy.

And I was lucky.

I know women who did want to become pastors, who faced parental rejection and misogynistic classmates and institutional denial of their calling from God. I know women who were beaten by their husbands and then told to prayerfully submit, as wives are commanded to do. I know women who were called liars for testifying that they were raped by the very men appointed to care for them as a shepherd protects his sheep.

I did not leave this Church because of a failure to value the world I was raised in. I loved it dearly; in many ways, I still do.

I left this Church because it did not value me.

• • •

But for many years, before I left, I stayed.

I stayed because I had hope. I stayed, because for every teacher like Pastor Smith, I had two like my English teacher Mr. Carton, who loved me and nurtured me and really did want me to succeed. At Andrews I encountered the same rigidity and patriarchy I had known my whole life, but I also found community and resistance and a voice.

My senior year at Andrews, I took another capstone religion class. It was taught by another straight white man, one who could have gone by “Pastor,” but went by “Dr.” instead. It had a reputation for being challenging. It was.

In that class, our teacher, Dr. Jerončić, encouraged us

to debate with him and each other. We read Nietzsche and Kierkegaard and talked about ethics and suffering. We wrestled with difficult questions and wrote philosophical reflections on our exams. At the end of the class, we composed capstone papers summarizing our theological conclusions.

My paper was about systemic inequality, the banality of evil, and the pernicious ways in which the Church sanctifies violence against women, people of color, and LGBTQ+ people. I wrote about my belief in the God who declares in Amos 5:21-24: “I hate, I despise your religious festivals; your assemblies are a stench to me. Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Though you bring choice fellowship offerings, I will have no regard for them. Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps. But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream” (NIV).

That November, I was asked to give a chapel talk, and I based my sermon around the ideas I was exploring for my paper. This time, I requested that my religion teacher introduce me. His introduction surprised me, too, not because it was embarrassing, but because of the strength of his belief in me.

Dr. Jerončić praised my “audacity and brashness,” my “sanctified sarcasm.” He spoke of my “deep love for Jesus,” “passion for justice,” and “openness to the opinions of others.” “She embodies, in many ways,” he said, “what I would like to see in the future generation of Adventists.”

It is an incredible thing to be called the future of the Church.

Incredible, but also a terrible weight.

That same year, because of an editorial I wrote in the campus newspaper, *The Student Movement*, I ended up on a panel about Church politics alongside six men. I used my place on that panel to call attention to the Church’s enduring treatment of women as second-class citizens. Pioneer Memorial Church Pastor Dwight Nelson sat on my right, and Lake Region Conference Executive Secretary Timothy Nixon sat on my left, and at one point I had to lean back in my chair to avoid being crushed as they argued with each other.

After the panel was over, Nixon came up to me with a Bible in his hand and read me the beginning of Deuteronomy 2:16. “When the last of these fighting men among the people had died . . .” he quoted. “When the last of these fighting men died,” he repeated, “then the Lord led the young people into the Promised Land.”

He meant it as encouragement, and at the time I took it as such. But what a message: Just wait, and eventually you will save us from ourselves. Be patient, and perhaps one day you can shape the future of this Church.

That summer, I watched the live stream of the 2015 General Conference Session as—against the example of its founding prophet and the advisement of its own theologians—1,381 of the Church’s fighting men voted yet again to forbid even the possibility of women’s ordination.

Patriarchy is not a quirk or a difference of opinion within the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It is the

atmosphere. I was suffocating, and the promise of future oxygen was not enough for me to breathe forever.

I do not remember what I learned for that test on the Gospel of John all those years ago. But I do remember a parable Jesus told in the Gospel of Matthew, of a master who entrusted his servants with his gold talents while he was away. To one he gave five pieces of gold, and that servant used them in business and doubled his money. To another, he gave two pieces of gold, and that servant prospered also. But the third servant took the one piece of gold he was given, and he buried it in the ground and hid it away to await the master’s return.

The Church is squandering its talents.

But we are not objects. We are not resources to be deployed strategically or saved for some future day when we will finally be wanted.

We are people. And we can walk away.

Do not ask me what it would take for me to come back. It is too late for me.

Ask what you will do to save your daughters.

**Continued from page 2**

Branson’s former critic has produced a presidential heir. As I watch Church meetings and read earlier transcripts, I wonder: In what ways might longevity indicate fragility?

In those same 1984 minutes is a report on an institutional change issue by Charles E. Bradford, the first president of the North American Division. A world traveler, he draws on his global perspective and ends with this:

When I visited the spiritual and tribal leader of the Ashanti people in Kumasi, Ghana, I learned much from the philosophy shared by this great statesman. As I left the palace, he gave me a very interesting memento to take with me. It was a carving made from the heart of a tree that grows in the Ashanti forests. His Highness the Asanthe, Nana Opoku Ware II, told me the significance of this carving. It depicts the five

fingers of a human hand securely holding an egg. The moral of this is that one who is in authority must hold the egg securely enough so that it does not fall to the ground and be destroyed, but at the same time not hold it so tightly or carelessly that the egg might be crushed within the hand of the holder. This, I think, represents the type of protective authority which the General Conference needs to exercise, and it also cautions against being over authoritarian.

What is a good protective grip when holding the power that comes with leading a historically large community?

Directed, acted, and written by cinema greats, the 1964 political thriller *The Seven Days of May* explores how reactionary righteousness converts authoritarianism and ennui into institutional self-destruction. In the film, a wise

seer warns: “All you’ve got to know is this: right now the government of the United States is sitting on top of the Washington Monument, right on the very point, tilting . . . and ready to fall off and break up on the pavement.” He adds that only a few can save it.

Instead of thinking in terms of ideology, great leaders often employ a soft touch—it’s how things stay balanced and unbroken.

The metaphor of The Shaking continues to be misunderstood; it has to do with carelessness, indifference, trust, victory, and salvation. The fantasy held by some that it involves 28 doctrinal matters, drums in church, identity, or women’s ordination shows that they do not know their Ellen White.

*Ted Wilson has not listed women’s ordination on his recent homiletical lists of threats. The president certainly doesn’t think the biblical texts have changed. But the politics have. Opposition to that issue doesn’t excite his base like it used to. They have new phobias these days.*

The big Wilsonian fantasy is that if “the remnant” can just shake out everyone else, everything will be pure and heavenly. What they don’t realize from their current perch in the GC is that global Adventism has not yet been retrofitted for the future.

But there is hope. In 2016, retired GC Vice President Lowell Cooper contributed a chapter to a book published by the Biblical Research Institute. Titled “Trends and Factors Affecting the Future of the Adventist Ecclesiastical Organization,” his chapter stacks up the biblical and Adventist historical evidence for why adaptability leads to organizational growth and mission effectiveness. In bold type and titular capitalization, a subsection begins: **Diversity of Contexts Requires Organizational Flexibility.** In it Cooper states, “The range of environments (e.g., geographical, cultural, economic, religious) to which the Adventist Church must relate will require elements of flexibility in the ecclesiastical structure. A rigid organizational template may not always be the best way to facilitate mission and unity.” Noting that what is considered “essential” by some may not apply globally, Cooper concludes, “In fact, denominational structure must be seen as the servant of

unity rather than its master.”

As we close out 2023 and consider newness as the Gregorian calendar refreshes, this special double issue of the journal offers support for reflection on diversity and flexibility. The year behind us marked one hundred and sixty years since the founding of this denomination. In light of that, this issue begins with a reassessment of important moments in Adventist history, then adds Scripture and later poetic, narrative, even gastronomical moments of self-reflection. Then it moves into a special section, called “The Adventist Future.” Conceived, collected, and developmentally edited by Jim Walters, it is a joint publishing project with *Adventist Today*. Each publication printed different articles, but we share a focus on what’s really essential as we independently consider challenges and opportunities as the present reality of Adventism moves farther from the century and continent of its birth.

I prize independence. I also value the deep connections to Adventist institutions that our contributors represent. As Cooper continues in his chapter: “There is a strong, but inappropriate, tendency to be categorical when considering questions about the Church and independent ministries or initiatives.” I couldn’t agree more. Adding words that seem appropriate for these pages, Cooper adds, “The spectrum of independent activities is very broad and cannot be evaluated as if they were all the same.” This double issue represents a tradition of Adventist independent thought that spans almost a third of the denomination’s existence. The community it represents has always stood with the servants against those masters who react to fragility with verbosity and ostracization.

Now, looking around the world and reflecting on the notion of The Shaking, I see too many fellow believers oddly excited about factions and fracture. All too often this merely marginalizes a mainstream of balance and adaption. I see hope in Adventism’s global, numerical success and the growing impact of its institutions. But its promise tips on its ability to increase unity *through* diversity. To feel this promise in Adventism, we must grasp that its future *is* flexible.

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MEET SOME OF THE TEAM MEMBERS AT

*community through conversation*  
**SPECTRUM** SINCE 1969

# SPECTRUM

Creating community through conversation since 1969  
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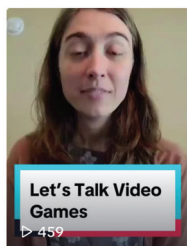
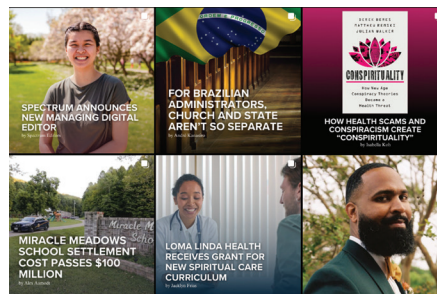
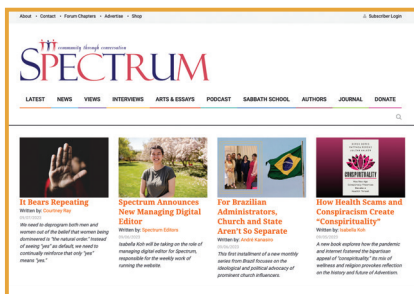
An independent nonprofit media organization, Spectrum was started by Seventh-day Adventists in top graduate programs who were serious about academic freedom, professional excellence, and the pursuit of truth beyond the borders of the status quo.



Since 1969, the Spectrum community has published 51 volumes to date of a premiere Adventist **journal** which features top scholars exploring religion, science, artistic creativity, and social justice. This year Spectrum was a multiple category winner at the Best of the Associated Church Press Awards: Scholarly Article, Social Media Presence, and Science Writing for the World of Faith.

<< Alexander Carpenter, executive editor of the journal.

>> We post new articles on our **website** every day. Spectrum regularly breaks news and provides thoughtful analysis of current events. It is visited by tens of thousands of Adventists each month and hosts an open comment section where intellectual freedom and questions are welcome.

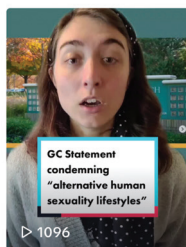


Follow us on TikTok!



Follow us on Instagram!

^ We're active on **social media**. Our Instagram account (@adventistforum) is an easy way to keep up on our daily articles as well as special content like day-in-the-life-of-a-student Insta story takeovers that provide a window into campus life around Adventism.



<< On **TikTok**, Jacklyn spills the tea for our Adventist Tea account, covering Adventist news. She plays around with memes and explores the good, not-so-good, and "special" parts of Adventist culture. Check it out for conversations about video games, canvassing life, LGBTQ Adventist news, and other hot topics.

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