

God's Original Plan
for the Priesthood

Our Taboo on Tattoos:
Is It Biblical?

The Problem With Proving
a Very Young Earth

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Adventist *Today*



**FAITH &
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COVER STORY

8 Reflections on the 2014 International Conference on the Bible and Science in St. George, Utah

by Roberta Angst (a pseudonym)

features

5 Women's Ordination & God's Original Plan

by Nelson Fernandez, Jr.

14 The Greater Controversy: How Ellen White's Insights May Help Coordinate Geologic and Biblical History

by Jack Hoehn

22 Tattoos and Biblical Lifestyle

by Loren Seibold

25 A Simple Solution for Our Present Crisis

by Desmond Ford

DEPARTMENTS

3 Editorial

Change and Integrity: Openness vs. Manipulation

by Monte Sahlin

4 Letters

28 Alden Thompson

Inching Toward a Big-Tent Adventism?

31 Adventist Man

Famous Brushes With Adventism

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Change and Integrity: Openness vs. Manipulation

By Monte Sahlin

The Adventist denomination is looking toward what may be a historic General Conference (GC) session this coming summer in San Antonio, Texas. This issue of *Adventist Today* provides information and viewpoints that can help the average believer, as well as the delegates, make informed decisions about several important items that are on the agenda. A special double issue of this magazine, to be published in April, will seek to explain the various decision-making processes involved in the global meeting, which occurs once every five years. Our goal is to give additional background on key decisions, as well as to take stock of where we are in the development of the Adventist movement as it nears 35 million adherents.

Two articles in this issue provide analysis on the proposal to revise the denomination's doctrinal statement on the topic of creation. The changes that the GC Executive Committee, during its 2014 Annual Meeting, voted to recommend to the delegates at next summer's session have been presented as "strengthening" paragraph six in the Fundamental Beliefs document. The concern of some loyal Adventists is that these changes introduce words not found in the Bible, and the guideline for the Fundamental Beliefs document has always been to use only terms found in Scripture.

Another concern expressed by loyal Adventist members is the trend toward defining our doctrines more narrowly than they have been defined in the past. As more and more Adventists are educated in technology, math, and science, will our doctrine of creation encourage unity or become a divisive factor between those educated in theology and those who are trained in the growing technological fields?

Some denominational leaders have expressed the hope that debate about ordination and the role of women in the Adventist clergy will be brought to a close after decades of discussion. In fact, how much have Adventists engaged in real discussion? How much of the tension has built because the actual discussion has been largely suppressed? If we cannot listen to one another in love as brothers and sisters in Christ, seeking to understand the views of the other and to meet the needs of each one for whom Jesus

gave his life, how can we expect the Holy Spirit to resolve any difference of opinion?

The mission of *Adventist Today* is to provide an independent, professional journalism ministry serving the broader Adventist community, including the millions who were once baptized or raised in Adventist homes but no longer participate in a local church anywhere. We seek to honestly report the facts and to provide a place where a full range of opinions can be expressed. We seek to respect and learn from the many, many different ways in which people relate to the Adventist faith in the hundreds of languages and cultures that exist around the world. We believe that they are all God's creation, women and men for whom our Savior died, looking to the hope that is in Jesus and his return. We believe that if God's people are fully informed, they can make good decisions.

We distribute at least one story each day through our website (www.atoday.org) and our page on Facebook, as well as a weekly summary via email and a quarterly magazine in print. We seek to serve only our readers and subscribers—no organizational self-interest or particular ideology or segment of the full Adventist "family" around the world. We gladly receive suggestions, especially for news stories, and the help of trained journalists. We readily extend anonymity and confidentiality to those who need it. We are planning to cover fully the GC Session this summer and developments leading up to it.

Our editor, retired pastor J. David Newman, experienced some severe health problems as we prepared this magazine. We solicit your support for him, both through prayer and messages of healing that we will share with him and through your contributions to the specific ministry of journalism that Christ has called us to perform. Our team will continue to implement Newman's planning as he recovers.

Monte Sahlin is executive director of the Adventist Today Foundation and executive editor of publications. He retired in 2014 after 44 years in full time ministry, during which he served at all levels of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. He is the author of 22 books, 117 research monographs, and hundreds of journal articles.

Some denominational leaders have expressed the wish that debate about ordination and the role of women in the Adventist clergy will be brought to a close after decades of discussion.



GC President Owes It to the People

Pastor Ted N.C. Wilson, in his lecture titled “God’s Authoritative Voice” (as reported in *Adventist World*, October 2014), says that “the Spirit of Prophecy ... [is] a defining element in historical accuracy” and, in the same sentence, implies that Ellen White is reliable also in science and theology. He probably means that her biblical exegesis and pronouncements on matters scientific are impeccable.

I think that the General Conference president owes it to the people to demonstrate the credibility of his assertions about Ellen White’s expertise in each of these three areas: theology, science, and history. When he does, may he do so with academic rigor.

ANGUS MCPHEE
Rathmines, New South Wales

Thought-Provoking Historical Quotes

I do thank God for the wisdom of having an independent church paper apart from the waffle: [British slang for “blather”] that comes from the pen of [General Conference President] Ted Wilson. We can ill afford to not have a forum like this. It gives me great courage and a little hope. I have done 45 years in ministry in

Adventism and see such a decline under Ted’s leadership. As a matter of fact, I called for his relocation to a small country church, where he could quietly consider servanthood for a change and where his influence would be zero.

I just want to share a few quotes with you.

“‘True conformity’ is possible only in the cemetery.”

—Joseph Stalin (1878-1953),
dictator of the Soviet Union

“When historians look back, I believe the fading of religious faith in this era will be seen as the chief explanatory factor of its madness. Men haven’t got used yet to the emptiness of the sky, and so they worship gods of clay again—what crude and bloody ones!—and believe in myths and promises of heaven on earth. Soviet Russia was far enough away, and sufficiently insulated by the language barrier, to function wonderfully in the place of Kingdom Come. All you had to do was dismiss the plain facts as atrocity stories—they are horrible enough to sound like it—and believe the whole state-owned propaganda, and you could be as tranquil amid the falling ruins of civilization as an infant in the arms of Jesus.”

—Quoted from *Enjoyment of Living* (1948), p. 423
by Max Eastman (1883-1969),
American writer and political activist

“Generally, nobody behaves decently when they have power.”

—Sir Kingsley Amis (1922-1995),
English novelist and poet

“You can always tell the pioneers because they are the ones face down in the mud with arrows in their backs.”

—Anonymous

“How fortunate for the leaders that men do not think.”

—Adolf Hitler (1889-1945),
dictator of Nazi Germany

“There is nothing quite as frightening as someone who knows they are right.”

—Michael Faraday (1791-1867),
English scientist and electrical pioneer

Sent with blessings. I do enjoy every magazine you print.

KEN L. LAWSON
Brisbane, Australia



Do Not Avoid Difficult Questions

Among the many topics discussed in the Summer 2014 issue of *Adventist Today*, I found the trend among many Adventist historians toward “naturalistic history,” under the rubric of scholarship, of special interest. When I study science, I fully understand why this approach, which excludes the metaphysical, is attractive. Like many, I feel more secure in the simple realm of materialistic facts. However, a naturalistic approach has turned out to be

Continued on page 30

WOMEN'S ORDINATION & GOD'S ORIGINAL PLAN

BY NELSON FERNANDEZ, JR.

EVER SINCE I WAS A KID, THERE HAVE BEEN POLARIZING ISSUES within the church. If you want to get a group of Adventists riled up on a Sabbath afternoon, just talk about the nature of Christ, Last Generation Theology, worship style, or conference segregation. In this article, I'm going to finally stick my neck out regarding another polarizing issue in the church: women's ordination.

With an important vote to be taken at the next General Conference session in 2015, it has become especially crucial to speak about this now. Sadly, the rhetoric on both extremes rivals any recent political campaign. It feels like the *Marvel Civil War* arc, where Tony Stark (Iron Man) goes up against Captain America, and every superhero is forced to take sides in the conflict; even to not act is to take a stand on one side or another.

Since I started researching this issue a few years ago, I've become more and more convicted of one side. But before announcing my position, I want to take you briefly through my thought process. As you read, please keep in mind that when discussing contentious issues such as this, we need to:

- Learn how to discuss such issues without anger/excessive emotion.
- Accept the fact that we all approach the Scripture with *a priori* presuppositions.
- Recognize that none of us has all of the answers.

I apply each of these important points to myself first and foremost. Personally, I think that the entire conversation about ordination has been taken way too deep. I try to look at things in the most simple way possible (or, at least, simple for me). Here is what I think about this issue.

1. God has always had a priesthood.

A priest by definition is a person whose office it is to perform religious rites, and especially to make sacrificial offerings. In Christian use, it can be taken in one of two ways: (1) a person ordained to the sacerdotal or pastoral office; a member of the clergy; minister; (2) In hierarchical churches, a member of the clergy of the order next below that of bishop, authorized to lead out in the rituals of Christian ministry.

The earliest mentions for priests that I found in Scripture were in reference to two people: (1) Melchizedek (Gen. 14:17-19) and

(2) Jethro (Ex. 2:16; 18:1). The first was a mysterious king who served Abram as a priest. The other was a farmer who also served as a priest and eventually became Moses' father-in-law.

I'd like to note a few important characteristics about these first two priests:

- They were both using their gifts of ministry in addition to having a separate career.¹
- They were at opposite ends of the socioeconomic spectrum.
- Both served God's leaders as priests before those leaders (i.e., Abram and Moses) fully realized their own calling into ministry.
- They were priests *before* the establishment of the covenant at Sinai.

Because the first two priests were functioning in the priestly office before Sinai, and because they came from both ends of the socioeconomic spectrum and also had side jobs, I believe that anyone—king or peasant—can be a priest.

2. God's original plan to reach the world was through a nation of priests.

Oftentimes, the Levitical priesthood (God's first established lineage of priests in Israel) has been referenced as the pattern for how pastoral ministry began and should operate today. But many people overlook the fact that the Levites were, in fact, *not* God's Plan A. His original idea was as follows: "Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. *Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.*" These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites" (Ex. 19:5-6, NIV, emphasis mine).

Again, God's Plan A was for *everyone to be a priest*. Man, woman, and child. Everyone was to know the Lord and minister for him. The only problem with this plan, as with every plan God tries to make, is people. People (and this whole concept of free will) make things complicated.

Because of the Israelites' rebellion, instead of a nation of priests, God had to settle for Plan B: priests in a nation.

Even though the congregation promised to do as God required (Ex. 19:7-8), and even though God gave the people instruction in what was going to happen when he showed up on the mountain

and how to prepare for the crazy sights they would see (latter part of Exodus 19), we find the following account of what the people did when everything went down:

“When the people saw the thunder and lightning and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke, they trembled with fear. They stayed at a distance and said to Moses, ‘Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die.’ Moses said to the people, ‘Do not be afraid. God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning.’ The people remained at a distance, while Moses approached the thick darkness where God was” (Ex. 20:18-21, NIV).

The people *insisted* on a mediator (or a buffer person) between themselves and God. Because they couldn’t handle the presence of God, they asked for someone *else* to convey God’s messages to them so that they wouldn’t have to deal with the Deity. The same problem manifested itself later, when the people wanted to make an idol to go before them (Ex. 32:1, 23) into unfamiliar territory.

God’s Plan A was for *everyone to be a priest.* Man, woman, and child.

Perhaps they thought a manmade god they could see would be better than an awe-inspiring God they could not see.

When Moses came down from the mountain and called the people to arms, only the sons of the tribe of Levi came to aid in cleansing the camp (verses 25-29). So again, instead of a nation of priests, God had to settle for priests in a nation (and not even all of the Levites—the priesthood was primarily relegated to one family: Aaron’s lineage). The very model used today as a basis for not ordaining women to ministry is a faulty model, created due to the human rejection of God’s plan. It was the byproduct of a rebellion, not a mandate from God. So the Old Testament priesthood is not the ideal model for ministry in today’s world (especially because we believe in the priesthood of *all* believers).

Now, which plan do you think the Apostle Peter was referring to in 1 Peter 2:9? God’s Plan A or God’s Plan B? He said, “But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (NKJV).

The pontifical titles and perks that come after ordination—such as having members call me “Elder Fernandez” instead of

“Pastor Nelson,” as I’m currently called; a salary increase; or the perception that I am somehow closer to God because of ordination—are not rooted in Scripture. They are manmade perks to make people feel better about having a select group of people doing “the work of ministry,” instead of having *everyone* directly engaged in ministry and letting the Holy Spirit decide who gets what gift. Spiritual gifts include the gift of pastoring—and no, neither the gifts nor the fruits of the Spirit are gender-specific.

Furthermore, I don’t buy the idea that since none of Jesus’ twelve disciples was female, only men can be prominent leaders in his church. If we were to follow that logic, we would also need to keep from leadership all slaves, freed slaves, Gentiles, and people of color. So basically 95 percent (and that is a conservative estimate) of all Adventist males—those who do not have predominantly Jewish heritage—would be kicked out of leadership positions.

Perceptions of Women Throughout History

Now on to what we as a church are facing today. The recent action at the Annual Council authorizing the world church to decide whether or not each geographical section of the church can be allowed to ordain women in its own field has made some people start campaigning hard against this idea. This campaigning has led to some spectacular facepalm comments, such as this unedited quote:

“Our Church is waisting God’s money with women ordination. Comman sence alone will tell you that God did not ordain women. You don’t have to be a rocket scientist or a professor of theology to know that God have a standard. Think . What will happen when someone have to be baptize and the woman pastor is seeking her period. Think . Next they will have to accept gay as ministers...”

Yes, you read that correctly. This quote speaks for itself. *Where* do people come up with these things? I’m not sure, but I *can* tell you that it’s not from Scripture. The above comment is actually closer to Catholicism than Adventism. And unfortunately, church leaders throughout the centuries have used this type of put-down against women.

Check out the following quote:

Synod of Paris (AD 829): *“In some provinces it happens that women press around the altar, touch the holy vessels, hand the clerics the priestly vestments, indeed even dispense the body and blood of the Lord to the people. This is shameful and must not take place ... No doubt such customs have arisen because of the carelessness and negligence of the bishops.”*

Unfortunately, that’s not all. Here is a sprinkling of some of the best of the worst comments about women from church leaders throughout history:

Tertullian (3rd century): “And do you not know that you are each an Eve? The sentence of God on this sex of yours lives in this age: the guilt must of necessity live too. You are the devil’s gateway; you are the unsealer of that forbidden tree; you are the first deserter of the divine law; you are she who persuaded him whom the devil was not valiant enough to attack. You destroyed so easily God’s image, man. On account of your desert—that is, death—even the Son of God had to die. And do you think about adorning yourself over and above your tunics of skins?”

Aphrahat (4th century): “From the beginning it was through woman that the adversary had access unto males ... for she is the weapon of Satan ... For because of her the curse of the Law was established.”

Basil of Caesarea (4th century): “However hard, however fierce a husband may be, the wife ought to bear with him. ... He strikes you, but he is your husband. ... He is brutal and cross, but he is henceforth one of your members, and the most precious of all.”

Augustine (4th century): Male—the mind. Female—the sexual nature.

Papal decretum (AD 1140): “The image of God is in man in such a way that there is only one Lord, the origin of all others, having the power of God as God’s vicar, for everything is in God’s image; and thus woman is not made in God’s image.”

Compare all of these statements with a great quote from page 46 of *Patriarchs and Prophets* (a book written by a prominent founder of Seventh-day Adventism, unashamedly a woman):

Ellen G. White (AD 1890): *Eve was created from a rib taken from the side of Adam, signifying that she was not to control him as the head, nor to be trampled under his feet as an inferior, but to stand by his side as an equal, to be loved and protected by him.*

Remember What It’s All About

Clearly, I believe that all people—men *and* women—may receive ordination as an affirmation of the call of God.²


There are intelligent people on both sides of the debate, and I don’t doubt the sincerity of most. What troubles me is that I’ve seen fear-mongering, conspiracy theories, and incredible leaps in logic used against the ordination of women to pastoral ministry. Since *everyone* is called to be a priest (as opposed to only a select few who have the gift of pastoring), then the importance we give to ordination today is really a moot point.

As a side note, many of the divisions around the world that are most against the idea of women clergy also view and/or treat women less favorably within their culture. I’m Hispanic, so I’ll pick on my own cultural heritage for this example. A recent Gallup poll found that Latin Americans (who make up a large chunk of the world-church population) were “the least likely in the world in 2012 and 2013 to say women in their countries are

treated with respect and dignity.”³ I wonder how many votes will be cast based on what some prominent preachers say, backed up by the cultural “machista” perception.

If a certain part of the world isn’t yet ready for women as pastors, I can understand. But I also don’t believe it’s right for members of another culture to impose their expectations or norms on us, any more than we would expect Adventists in other parts of the world to start wearing wedding bands just because we do in North America.

Contextualized ministry for the sake of the gospel is what it’s all about.

I don’t know what the future holds between now and the official General Conference Session vote in 2015. But I do believe that God is still in control of his church. Every day I am convicted even more that we need to go back to God’s Plan A, in which we will be a *nation of priests* and base the decision of who should or shouldn’t be in pastoral ministry on the gifts of the Holy Spirit, not on gender. The decision of whom to call into ministry is after all, as my friend Kessia says, “not our right, but his.”⁴ 

Nelson Fernandez, Jr., is an Adventist pastor in the bilingual and multicultural Greenville-Clemson church district in South Carolina.

¹ This idea taps into the “priesthood of all believers” concept Martin Luther taught during the Protestant Reformation. Here is a summary from page 1 of “The Priesthood of All Believers” by Art Lindsley (http://ifwe.s3.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Priesthood-of-All-Believers_Final.pdf): “[The priesthood of all believers] is an important biblical idea that has great implications for our personal spirituality and public life in the Church and in the world: the idea that every believer is a priest, regardless of his or her full-time occupation. This notion was one of the top three ideas of the Protestant Reformation. The first two, *Sola Scriptura*—which asserts the sole authority of Scripture—and *Sola Fide*—which teaches justification by faith alone—have been widely taught, but the notion of the ‘priesthood of all believers’ has been by far the most neglected. Martin Luther thought that ‘this word *priest* should become as common as the word *Christian*’ because all Christians are priests. Yet for whatever reason, the priesthood of all believers has been much less understood, taught, and expounded upon in writing.

“When Luther referred to the priesthood of all believers, he was maintaining that the plowboy and the milkmaid could do priestly work. In fact, their plowing and milking was priestly work. So there was no hierarchy where the priesthood was a ‘vocation’ and milking the cow was not. Both were tasks that God called his followers to do, each according to their gifts.

“This has enormous implications for how Christians live their daily lives. If the Church teaches that working in business, communications, politics, or any other profession is just as impactful as working directly in the ministry, it allows Christians to connect their beliefs to their everyday actions, giving them purpose in their jobs and equipping them to serve others and improve society through their daily work. On the other hand, if the Church implies that the ministry is a higher calling than other professions, it will lose the impact that it has on individuals and society through ‘secular’ vocations.”

² <http://nadordination.com/>

³ <http://www.gallup.com/poll/178427/respect-dignity-women-lacking-latin-america.aspx>

⁴ Kessia Reyne Bennett, “Women in Ministry: Not Our Rights, But His,” blog post on Oct. 15, 2014 (<http://www.moves-removes.com/home/2014/10/15/women-in-ministry-not-our-rights-but-his>).

C O V E R S T O R Y



DANGERS FOR THE CHURCH

Reflections on the 2014 International
Conference on the Bible and Science
in St. George, Utah

By Roberta Angst (a pseudonym)



Editor's Note:

The following article describes some of the joys and the challenges of the International Conference on the Bible and Science held August 2014. Before publication, I thought it only fair to send it to Ed Zinke and Tim Standish (two of the principal organizers of the conference) for their review and comments. Neither liked the fact that it was written under a pseudonym; in fact, they both expressed extremely strong feelings about that.

"I think it is a huge mistake to publish something like this that no one will take ownership of."

"I'm not interested in responding to anonymous ruminations on any subject. I guess it is up to you as editor to decide if publishing anonymous stuff by someone under the cover of paranoia about vindictive and dictatorial church leaders falls within the ethical framework of Adventist Today journalism."

They also said that the article contained "clear and serious misrepresentations," but they would not give any details.

Both Zinke and Standish felt that Adventist Today would lose a lot of credibility by publishing this piece. I invite you, the reader, to be the judge. Does this article seem to come from "paranoia"? I can say that the author is someone I know quite well who is a very respected leader in our denomination.

—J. David Newman

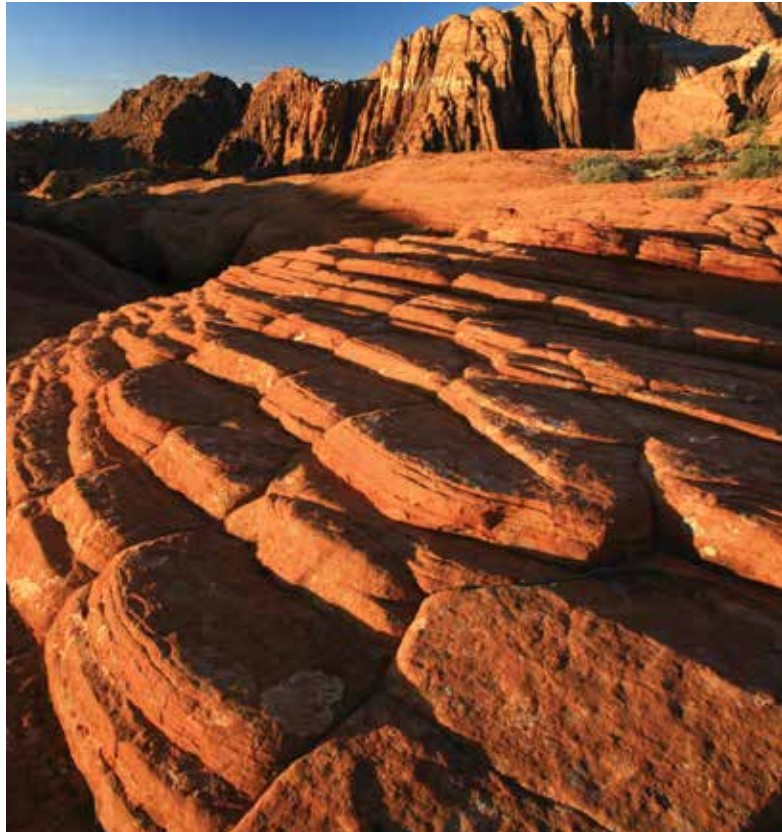


I was one of the participants in the International Conference on the Bible and Science held Aug. 15-24, 2014, in the lovely little city of St. George, Utah. Like most others who have written about this event, I write anonymously, because the general atmosphere today for Adventist denominational employees seems to be one of suspicion. Many fear that some leaders might want to use administrative power to punish those who dissent from their preferred ideas.

Positives

A major residual opinion of my experience at St. George is that someone was thinking big and worked really hard to pull off a logistical triumph. I can only imagine the kind of work involved in bringing more than 400 people together from around the world; transporting them all to and from two national parks, both of which are filled to capacity with tourists in the summer; arranging food and accommodations in two different venues; and coordinating a very rigorous schedule of presentations. The team of persons who pulled that off is to be congratulated. This logistical excellence was largely responsible for making a rigorous schedule bearable and the conference a pleasant experience. Some aspects even brought moments of considerable humor, such as when attendees heard that the caterers, who had never before fed a group of vegetarians, revealed they had Googled “Seventh-day Adventist” and discovered that we eat “haystacks.” One can only imagine the puzzlement of the executive chef, who likely had no idea how to create a haystack!

Another remarkable aspect of this conference is that while Adventist conventions tend to be significantly more rigorous than others I have attended, this one “took the cake.” The daily activities began at 8 a.m. and—with the exception of a 15-minute break in the morning, a one and a half hour break for lunch, and another 15-minute break in the afternoon—continued unabated until supper. Then, on most evenings, something else was on the schedule after supper. Speakers followed one right after another, with only a minute or two in between to allow for changing computer hookups. On some days there were as many as 11 presentations! I must admit that the rigor of the schedule surprised me, because educators are counseled that lecturing is not the best way to teach, that interaction between learners is vital, and that listeners need time to absorb and process what has been learned. But not so in St. George. One had the distinct sense that an entire body of truth had been collected and was being disseminated as efficiently as possible. Those in attendance were to take it all in and store it for later use all around the world. It seemed a bit incongruous for the leaders of Adventist education to use this strategy.



Challenges Avoided

Another lingering opinion I have from the conference is that those who organized it were afraid. I base this on the fact that, even though there were a host of well-educated and informed people in attendance, the list of presenters was noticeably short. In order to occupy the time well, the presenters did multiple presentations, some as many as 10! Are we at a point in Seventh-day Adventism where only a few people can articulate the issues of our time? Another fact contributing to my opinion is that the conference allowed no time for open dialogue. At the end of every morning and evening, the presenters were assembled into a panel and those in attendance could write down questions, which were then reviewed and handed to the presenter deemed best able to answer. But there was no opportunity to freely discuss the pressing issues of science and religion. Was this due to a lack of time, or was it a matter of not wanting open discussion on difficult issues? I sensed a great reluctance for anyone to challenge what was presented. And that was unfortunate, because we are all created to need to see something for ourselves before we will believe it, and candid discussion is the best way to allow that process to unfold. As a result of this lack of openness, I suspect that a lot of people went

away with their opinions on difficult things largely unchanged.

I thought the presentations, for the most part, were quite good. I was particularly intrigued by one on bioturbation, which is the natural mixing of soils or sediments by animals or plants. It pointed out that a lack of bioturbation at the intersections between the various geological layers—something one would expect if the layers had been laid open for millions of years—suggests that the sediments were laid down quickly. Also, a presentation that provided a mathematical model for a global flood was fascinating. I thought that a presentation on the whales buried in the Patagonia region of South America was also very well done, with modest conclusions drawn. There are certainly some credible scientists in the Adventist community! But there were also some pretty poor lectures, especially those

Bible true. Surely some other foundation for Bible credibility could be articulated.

Surprise No. 1

Three outcomes of the conference surprised me then and trouble me now. The first of these is the content of the General Conference (GC) president's opening speech. Though he spoke in measured tones and said he was speaking kindly, he basically drew a line in the sand and said that those who do not see the creation issue in the most literal and conservative terms, as he does, are not "Seventh" "day" Adventists and should do the honorable thing and resign their positions. His sentiments received some resounding "amens." I am still processing this and what it might mean. I guess my greatest surprise is the thought that we may have come to

There was no opportunity to freely discuss the pressing issues of science and religion. Was this due to a lack of time, or was it a matter of not wanting open discussion on difficult issues?

given by presenters who read material prepared for them by others. Even if spoken with conviction, the subject matter was difficult to figure out.

Cognitive Dissonance

While in St. George, I experienced cognitive dissonance as a result of the way "human reason" and "science" were often adversely discussed while, at the same time, used to support the credibility of the Bible. A number of speakers spoke in warning tones against using "human reason" to interpret the Bible. And science was in some cases described as dangerous and ungodly. At the same time, those who explained the Bible created carefully organized arguments to make their cases (what kind of reason were they using when doing this, if not human reason?), and many lectures were given by scientists who used their findings to shore up the Bible (how did *their* science become suddenly godly?). Further, what does it mean to use science to "prove" the Bible? Somewhere in Adventism, conversation on this issue is desperately needed, because it does not make sense to vilify human reason and science on one hand and then, on the other hand, use them to prove the

the point where a GC president now has the power to determine what defines Adventism. I have been a lifelong Adventist and have never encountered anything like this. To me it smacks way too much of the way the Bishop of Rome gained power in the early centuries of Christianity. I hope this trend does not develop further, for it will radically change the nature of Adventism away from a representative association to a hierarchical one. I cannot but think of all the pejoratives Adventists have hurled over the years at Catholics, at least in part because of their hierarchicalism. I am left to wonder if we are now going to follow suit? I certainly hope not.

Surprise No. 2

A second big surprise was the presence of non-Adventist presenters. I believe there were three or four of them. They were even given significant time to promote the academic institutions at which they work. I must profess shock, not because I am opposed to hearing them, but because the current president of the General Conference not long ago explicitly stated that Adventists are not to invite non-Adventists into our midst to speak on religious matters! Yet here were non-Adventist presenters in the presence

of the president, speaking on a foundational doctrine, and he said and did nothing! How does this fit together, especially the matter of advertising their colleges so openly? No Adventist institutions were given that privilege. This surprise was exacerbated further by the scuttlebutt that La Sierra University, which was adversely mentioned by name in some written questions, was expressly denied the chance to speak to the issues raised. I remain quite surprised by this. I am still not sure what to make of it.

Surprise No. 3

The third big surprise—and I remain quite shocked and somewhat disillusioned by it—had to do with the development and voting of a resolution document that was to represent the consensus of

session, the General Conference vice president, who was presiding, became quite assertive, saying that we had all discussed this before, that discussions can go on interminably, and that this was the time to vote the document without further discussion. He stated that the section under the heading Recommendations constituted the substance of the document and that the rest of it was “wallpaper”—his words, not mine.

Having pushed the group toward a vote, he then relented and said that if there were individuals who simply could not live with themselves if they did not speak, he would take a few comments. At this point things got real interesting, because it became apparent that the Spanish version of the document was not the same as the English one.

In this awkward moment, it became apparent that whoever had custody of the English document overnight had taken the liberty of changing it without the involvement of the writing committee.

those gathered at the conference. I am not privy to the origins of the document, so I can only speak of what happened publicly. Basically, a writing committee was established that, we presumed, was given the task of producing this document. Whether the basic document was provided to them initially or whether they wrote the whole thing from scratch, I do not know. What I do know is that the document came up for public discussion three times. The first time quite a few participants raised their voices, saying the document was too strident and needed to be toned down. The writing committee then worked on it and brought it back for review. It was my sense that this second draft was far more acceptable to the assembled group, although some individuals I would describe as “fundamentalist” were not happy. So the document went off to the writing committee again, with the understanding that it would come back once more on the last day of the conference for a final vote. When that actually took place, attendees discovered the document to be significantly different from what they had last seen. Included were additions and changes that gave it what I would deem a decided fundamentalist tilt. Also introduced was a new piece that had to do with marriage, something that was never part of previous discussions. At this final

It finally came out, by way of a speech from the man who had translated the document, that he had translated the English version given to him the night before and that there was now a different English version in existence. In this awkward moment, it became apparent that whoever had custody of the English document overnight had taken the liberty of changing it without the involvement of the writing committee. A quick assurance was given that the two documents would be aligned, and then the vote was called for. The vote was overwhelmingly in favor of the document. I thought it unfortunate that those who voted against it were treated to some adverse humor for their efforts.

Benevolent Dictatorship


My sense of shock remains, for this is the first time in my very long association with Adventism that I have seen political process so openly manipulated by leaders. What does it mean when those who lead, who have custody of documents, can rewrite them as they please and then pressure a constituency to vote their designs without discussion? That is not the kind of Adventism I have known, and it is very disconcerting! I suppose that in parts of the world where a strongman type of government is in control,



this type of method is not surprising. But to those in the West, for whom process is as important as outcome, these tactics can only be regarded as inappropriate, to say the least. What level of integrity is left to voting and to discussion if such manipulative strategies continue? Surely there is little reason to remain involved in church process, if this is how leaders are now going to do business.

My own belief is that church leaders see members who are from the West, where process is very important, as being of little consequence—perhaps because they have become politically weak. I got the sense that process did not matter, and that those for whom process is important are insignificant and are more of an annoyance and a nuisance than anything else. This last impression is the overriding one I took home from the conference. I am left to wonder about the integrity of those who lead our denomination today. In St. George they were openly expedient, allowing an end they wanted to see accomplished to justify whatever means might be necessary to achieve it.

I am glad I went to the conference, but I do not know what its effect will be. I suspect the most immediate result will be that people who are not well-informed in the sciences will take the

documents provided and dash out into the world to speak as voices of authority on things they know little about. That would not be good. Further, I do not think that any individuals with evolutionist tendencies will be persuaded to change their minds as a result of the conference, primarily because their concerns were not engaged, at least not in terms of dialogue. Dumping piles of data on people does not usually change their minds, for data must be evaluated and processed, and objections must be engaged to the point that people see for themselves a reason for changing their minds. In addition, I know that some people left St. George with increased cynicism about the way the organized church is going, largely because of the incident where open process was disrespected. I think that scientists in particular were discouraged by the proceedings and will likely go underground with their opinions in the future. Those I talked to felt unsafe. Some participants wondered if the Adventist denomination is one in which those who do science are welcome. If these observations are valid, then the International Conference on the Bible and Science will have done little to accomplish the noble goals the organizers hoped for. With a few changes, the outcomes could have been much better. 



Editor's Note:

Dr. Jack Hoehn wrote this article not to solve scientific questions or to offer a new chronology of Earth's history, but rather to suggest to the thoughtful Adventist that there may be some very Adventist ways of thinking about the Creation story that differ from our traditional way—especially if we apply some of the unique Adventist insights into pre-history.

—J. David Newman

Ellen G. White had definite opinions on when and how the creation of life on this planet took place. Her opinions were very much in concert with most Christians of her day, who accepted Archbishop James Ussher's 1650 chronology proposing that life on

is necessary for life to exist and flourish engenders deep respect for the mathematical genius of the Lawgiver behind those natural laws.

Even non-Christian scientists are coming to the conviction that neither classic Darwinian nor neo-Darwinian evolution remains viable as an explanation of the origin, complexity, or development of life.⁷ At the same time, today there is little or no convincing evidence that it all could have happened only 6,000 years ago!

Things We Can See Make Us Wonder

The purpose of this article is not to debate the evidence for the age of the Earth and life on it. And it certainly is not to

The Greater Controversy

How Ellen White's Insights May Help Coordinate Geologic and Biblical History

BY JACK HOEHN

Earth was created in 144 literal hours around 4004 B.C., roughly 6,000 years ago.

Sister White does admit: "Just how God accomplished the work of creation, he has never revealed to men..."¹ She wrote in 1880 of personally viewing the fossils of extinct animals and plants found in different strata² and commented that "Relics found in the earth do give evidence of conditions differing in many respects from the present"³ but, as far as we know, to her death in 1915 she never accepted that evidence from geology might require much longer periods of time for life on Earth than "6,000 years."⁴

Since her death, large numbers of Christian geologists, biologists, paleontologists, and archaeologists favor a much longer chronology of life on our planet.⁵ Many Seventh-day Adventist scientists in those disciplines quietly or openly tend to agree.⁶

Science Confirms Faith But Questions Chronology

As a Bible believer who accepts Ellen White as a messenger of the Lord, I have struggled to accept both the book of revelation (the Bible and Ellen White's writings) and the book of nature (science).

My faith in God as the Creator has been greatly strengthened by the many discoveries about the irreducible complexity of even the simplest forms of life on Earth. DNA is all code—amazingly complex, elegant, and found even in the simplest life forms. All code requires a mind, a coder, an intelligent designer. The precise fine-tuning of chemistry and physics that

cede to atheists their unsupportable contention that no God is necessary in the story of life.

I believe in God as the Creator and in the historicity of Adam and Eve. But our Bible does not come with dates. Biblical chronology is deduced by computations and assumptions, not by biblical revelation. For non-scientists, several easy-to-understand facts are available on a nontechnical level that, at the very least, severely challenge a very short (6,000-year) chronology of life on our planet:

- A total of 70,000 years or more of annual ice layers exist in Greenland, each layer with a different springtime pollen content. This doesn't fit either a very short chronology of plant life on Earth or the dating of a universal flood 4,000 years ago.⁸
- Living Bristlecone pines high up in the mountains of California have rings much older than the traditional dating of Noah's flood.
- By visiting several of the Hawaiian islands and comparing the older islands (Kauai and Oahu) to the newer ones (Maui and Hawaii), you can observe changes that could not easily occur within a short 6,000-year age of life on Earth, or an even shorter span of 4,000 years since a universal flood! Each island, created as Earth's crust moved over the Hawaiian volcanic vent in the ocean floor, shows evidence of its formation and subsequent weathering and flattening during the passage of time; the entire process seems impossible to fit into a short 4,000-year post-Flood chronology.

The things that we see in nature and study with science confirm faith in God as the Creator, but they also cause us to

question theories of a very recent (plus or minus 6,000 years ago) creation.

Fear of Change

Resistance to changing the simple short-term chronology of life on Earth and rethinking our interpretation of Genesis is still present among many older church members, some church leaders (such as the current General Conference president), and some Adventist theologians.

The expressed fear of some is that changing the chronology of creation endangers Adventist theology. But which is more dangerous: to believe science or to ignore it?

Austrian theologian Gerhard Pfandel ends his useful discussion of the movement among Adventist scientists toward

Doesn't an Adventism that refuses to accept facts found by science run the risk of becoming irrelevant to society at large?

long-term creationism with the following warning: "Should theistic evolution [not identical with "long-term creationism," but you'll get his point] become more and more accepted, we will be in danger of losing the biblical foundation for the Sabbath and our understanding of salvation. Without the creation week the Sabbath becomes a Jewish institution, and if death existed long before the appearance of man, there was no fall in Eden and therefore there is no need for salvation."⁹

How realistic is this threat? Is there no equal threat to faith by detaching belief from reality? Doesn't an Adventism that refuses to accept facts found by science run the risk of becoming irrelevant to society at large?

Is Ellen White the Problem or the Solution?

I respect and value the ministry of Ellen White too much to simply jettison her defense of the traditional chronology of life on Earth. It is hard to disagree with your spiritual mother, who clearly believed in a short chronology! But Sister White's voice is now silent while we are alive; things like the genetic code, DNA, radiochronometry, and Greenland ice cores were not issues 100 years ago, but they are now.

I experienced what felt to me like an epiphany.¹⁰ A key to harmonization of the findings of science with Biblical revelation

may be found in Ellen White's "great controversy" concept. A text I have long known—Revelation 13:8: "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world"—opened a new door in my mind. The sudden insight was that God's plan of salvation, including death of the Lamb, started not with the creation or fall of man, but from the foundation of the world—from day 1 of creation. The realization grew that this might mean that the great cosmic conflict was going on during the whole history of creation.

Since then, instead of fearing that the witness of science might destroy my Adventism, I have begun to explore how Adventism may hold the key to harmonization of the witness of nature in God's world with the witness of revelation in God's Word.

The Unique Adventist View

If you are an Adventist, this story is well known to you. I am not trying to document the following points, but rather to summarize the "great controversy" concept.

Sometime in the long ago, there was a war in heaven.¹¹ Lucifer was God's first created intelligence to sin. Rebellion was found in his great mind, made possible by the "freedom of will" God designed in all of his intelligent creation.¹²

According to Ellen White, the issue that brought Lucifer's rebellion to the fore was the planning for the creation of this Earth. Why, Lucifer asked, is the Father consulting with his Son instead of with me?¹³

The great controversy over the wisdom and justice of God's character became a war between Christ (then known as Michael) and Lucifer (now known as Satan).¹⁴

After the angelic fall, Lucifer and his angels were banished to Earth (Rev. 12:7-9) while it was yet formless and void in its pre-organized *taba bohu* form, when darkness lay on the face of the deep.¹⁵

In that pre-creation darkness lurked Satan and fallen angels, ready to renew battle with the Son of God¹⁶—this time not over the planning, but over the implementation of life on Earth.

These revealed insights can change how we view the creation events outlined in Genesis.

Creation Week: A Series of Perfections—or of Battles?

Instead of thinking of creation as a series of six wonderful events in a void, the new thought is that the creation of Earth was *not* actually happening in a sinless, pristine environment!

Remember, the great controversy pre-existed the creation events. There were "sinners" on Earth—Satan and his angelic host, cast to the Earth from heaven—long before Adam and Eve were created. This implies that the creation events themselves

may have been happening on a battlefield.

If each of creation's days were accomplished in disputed territory, where God's ways and God's laws were being actively opposed by Satan's ways and Satan's philosophy, might this explain why the geologic record of life on Earth appears to be one of repeated conflict? Even the face of our unfallen moon bears scars of an intense cosmic bombardment!¹⁷

Is This Biblical?

Perhaps you have noticed that each Genesis creation day starts in darkness ("and there was setting," or *darkness*) and ends in light ("and there was dawning," or *light*). This order is reversed from the way we typically consider days. In most of the rest of the Bible, each day begins at dawning (or *daybreak*, when light first appears) and concludes after sundown (when darkness and night begins). So creation days are unique days.

Also in Genesis 1, after darkness ends and the light comes, God says, "It was good" (verses 4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25) or even "very good" (verse 31). Is there a deeper meaning to each creation day beginning in darkness and finishing in light? And if the day that ends in the light is "good," does that imply that starting the day in darkness was not good or, at very least, not yet good?

The New Testament has an "In the beginning" creation story, too. John 1 starts with the same words as Genesis 1, and John is explicit about the controversy existing between darkness and light. "In the beginning was the Word," Christ, who was with God and was himself God (John 1:1). In him was life and light (verse 4). And the light shone into the darkness, and the darkness was not able to overcome his light (verse 5). Is this not the great controversy between light and darkness, starting from the beginning?

Creation Days Start in Darkness and End in Light

What happens if we combine the insights of John 1 with the story of Genesis 1?

Day 1: The Trinity enters into the darkness and does battle with it. Earth is formless and void, with an untamed and dangerous sea (biblical texts do speak of God battling creatures in the primordial sea).¹⁸ God speaks in the darkness, and light comes. Darkness is not able to extinguish God's light. It may not have been good in the darkness at first, but after his Word, light comes and it is good. God separates light from pre-existing darkness. Day 1 in the great controversy of Christ with Satan is over. Light wins.

But darkness and chaos are still not finished. There is another day to come; more darkness will be met by more light.

Day 2: The second creation day once more starts with darkness. Again God's Word comes into the darkness of an oxygen/nitrogen-free atmosphere, and he speaks light and life as the atmosphere is created. And it is again good. Light has triumphed over the darkness. Air has triumphed over emptiness. The firmament is now firm. It too is good.

Day 3: Evening/darkness starts the third day in an unformed, watery Earth that has light and atmosphere but no land and no plants. Again God the Word speaks, bringing order: form, substance, flowers, and fruits on Earth with land and plants. The darkness and formlessness is pushed further back; light wins again. Another event in the controversy over that which was "not good" has now become—by the power of the Creator—"good." Light has won another battle with darkness.

Day 4: As on previous days, evening/darkness with its chaos, emptiness, and purposelessness is fought by order, law, purpose, beauty, love, and light. God's light ordains the sun and the moon and stars their jobs, and the dark of each day now has night lights, and that too is good. God wins again. He extends his rule not only over the day, but now over the night as well.

Days 5 and 6: The "not yet good" empty sky and "not yet good enough" empty sea become populated, and the "not yet good" empty earth becomes populated, and then man is created and then, finally, the crown of creation: woman.

By now, so much light had banished so much darkness that at the end of day 6, it is not only "good," but it is "very good!" In fact, it is finished!

Day 7: A finished creation ushers in the first Sabbath. But there is no more darkness on this special seventh day! Unlike the six creation days, there is no mention of "evening and morning" (darkness followed by light) for the Sabbath. Creation is finished, and God has won the great controversy of creation. Darkness has been opposed with light. In Eden for the first humans on the first Friday night, it is not dark; the sky has stars and a moon.

God and light have ruled over Satan, darkness, chaos, and the emptiness of the pre-human demon-inhabited but otherwise empty Earth. His moon and his stars rule the night, his sun rules the day. The walls of Eden guard against any dangers without. If the humans will but obey, darkness need never rule Earth again.

Intelligent Destroyer?

To summarize, if the battle between Christ and Satan started over God's plan for the creation of man, and if Satan was cast to Earth before the creation of life on this planet, isn't it possible that the conflict would continue during Earth's creation week, with the intelligent Designer being opposed by an intelligent destroyer?

We have at least one biblical example of satanic power over God's creation *before* the fall of man. Genesis 2 shows that the devil could make a beautiful, wise, created flying reptile do something it had never done before. Satan made the flying serpent able not only to talk, but to speak lies.

How could an unfallen animal, such as the divinely created serpent, be manipulated by Satan before Eve sinned, if animals were first subjected to satanic power only after the fall of man? How many other animals and plants were mutated, transformed, or amalgamated into something more pleasing to Satan's plans during the creation events?

According to the abundant records preserved in the geologic sediments of Earth, there was indeed a controversy going on during pre-human history. Might not our Adventist theology of the great controversy expand to help explain where death before mankind's sin originated?

Jesus Accuses the Devil of Murder "From the Beginning"

In John 8:44, Jesus indicts the devil for his evil designs—specifically in killing and lying. "He was a murderer *from the beginning*, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he

How could an unfallen animal, such as the divinely created serpent, be manipulated by Satan before Eve sinned, if animals were first subjected to satanic power only after the fall of man?

speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies" (NIV, emphasis mine).

Did Jesus mean that Satan began lying and murdering beginning at the point of Adam's fall, or even earlier? We know that Lucifer was lying to Eve before the fall. When did his murdering begin? Jesus indicted the devil for killing and murdering "from the beginning." This suggests to me that both death and lying could have been present on Earth before Adam's fall.

What Was the Garden of Eden Guarding?

Genesis 2 suggests that life on Earth as it came from the Creator's hand, while good, was not yet what we could call perfect. Eden was different and better than the rest of Earth. It was an idyllic place, a distinct location, within the larger Earth. Eden was not all there was of Earth; east of Eden was Nod, and the rivers from Eden flowed to Havilah, to Cush, and to Ashur, or Assyria (Gen. 2:10-14).

Eden was a protected, guarded, or even walled place (the root form of the word "Paradise" means "a walled garden") within an outside, unwalled, less planted, unguarded, different kind of world than inside Paradise.¹⁹

In Genesis 2, after the special creation of Adam outside of Eden and the planting of the garden in Eden, God takes Adam into Eden and informs him of at least one thing the garden could guard man against. The Garden of Eden with its tree of life could guard the man against *death*! The need in unfallen Eden for a *tree of life* suggests that there was such a thing as *death* in the world outside of the garden before mankind's fall. Our first parents were protected from death by the life tree. After the fall of Adam, death came to mankind by moving humans outside of the Garden of Eden into the rest of the Earth, where death apparently reigned unopposed by the tree of life.

Was there death on this planet before the fall of man?²⁰ Not human death, but apparently only in Eden was a life tree available. Mankind was created mortal—Adventism is very clear on this—and, separated from the tree of life, humans would die. Conditional immortality was based on obedience to God's law and continued access to the tree of life, found in the center of the Garden of Eden.

Outside the garden were no life trees. If man was created mortal, were plants and animals living outside the Garden of Eden created immortal? Not likely. This suggests that animal and plant death was possible or even probable outside the garden.

Before the moral fall of mankind, any plants or animals outside of Eden may have been living on a battlefield of good and evil. Animals such as the serpent, and plants such as the tree of knowledge of good and evil, may have been subjected to Satanic lying and murder (perhaps even genetic manipulations) from fallen intelligent destroyers. At least, it is possible to understand a literal reading of Genesis in this way.

Doesn't the Bible Teach That "Death" Was the Result of Adam's Fall?

A major theological problem for creationists has been the abundant evidence of death, sometimes on a catastrophic scale,

found in the fossil-bearing strata. Death's presence on Earth today is understood as the "wages of sin," or the results of the moral fall of mankind. Short-term creationists time all fossil evidence of death as post-Adam's fall. They attempt to use Noah's flood as the major engine of the record of death and destruction found in the geologic history of Earth. But it is possible that the "wages of sin"—*angelic* sin—may also have afflicted life on Earth before Adam's fall?²¹

Does the Bible permit this idea?

What About Paul's Arguments?

"So death passed upon all [humans]" (Rom. 5:12, KJV) can be understood exclusively as *human* death caused by Adam's sin (see verses 12-21).

The groaning of "the whole creation" (Rom. 8:22) is real (see verses 18-24), but it may in fact have started with Satan's exile to this uncreated planet and worsened with Adam's submission to Satan. Earth later suffered still more violence due to group human sin, which the Bible identifies as the root problem necessitating Noah's flood (Gen. 6:5-7, 11-13, 17). Today creation continues to groan—perhaps even more loudly—due to accumulated pollution, exploitation, and degradation.

Great Controversy an Adventist Key ^{22,23}

The geologic record of creation shows not only an intelligent Designer, but also evidence of an intelligent destroyer. The devil and his substantial crew of angelic beings could work with God's tools but pervert them to selfish, harsh, cruel ways and means. Genesis' creation record can be understood as a record of God's interventions into chaos, of divine light shining into the darkness at each successive stage of creation.

Geology then can be not only a record of the great controversy *after* the fall of man, but it could also be a record of the great controversy *before* the creation of man, though after the fall of Satan and his angels.

Increased Appreciation for Christ

If you believe that this better explains what you see in the world of God (nature), does it destroy your faith in God and in the Bible? On the contrary, this view doesn't diminish but, in fact, greatly enhances an appreciation for what the Logos did during creation, as well as during his incarnation.

As presented in John 1, Christ has always been our mighty warrior, fighting the darkness during creation as well as fighting the darkness during redemption. Jesus creates all things good, upright and perfect, but always the Liar has taken the good

creation and—through mutation, genetic manipulation, and deformation—has transformed things to show Satanic ideals and goals.

Understanding creation week as part of the great controversy enhances our understanding of the plan of redemption. Our Savior is the "Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Rev. 13:8, KJV). Our Creator is our defender. Creation itself is the fight of good against evil, of light against darkness. Eden becomes more precious when its context is understood, and the desire to return Eden to Earth, with its life tree, becomes all the more urgent in our hearts.

Sabbath Escapes Unscathed

The Adventist long-term creationist doesn't need a short, 144-hour creation week in order to validate the Sabbath. Clearly God created the Sabbath at the end of his creation work. The seven great creation days are the foundation of the week and its Sabbath, even if our week is a memorial of creation, not a clone of creation.²⁴

A long-term creationist is under equal obligation and equal blessing from the weekly Sabbath, as is a short-term creationist. Exodus 20:11 loses no force or blessing if the motivation for Sabbath observance is six amazing creation days or six amazing creation stages. In the same way, the Sabbath loses no force or blessing if it is based on a memorial of redemption (Deut. 5:15) instead of creation. Creation itself can be seen as a seven-stage redemption from darkness and chaos, uniting both foundations of the fourth-commandment Sabbath.

We Are Rightly Humbled

Seeing creation as a much larger and more complex event than a few short days requires some humility on our part. It is not always easy to "follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth" (Rev. 14:4, KJV).

As a short-term creationist, I now see that I was trying to make the Lamb go where I wanted him to go. I tried to reduce God's mighty creative actions into my simple and simplistic understanding of the Genesis story. I long resisted letting the evidence God has left in the Earth speak to me of how much bigger, longer, more complex, and awesome creation was than a simple story best understood in Cradle Roll.

Adult Christians must be willing to follow the evidence beyond childhood understandings. We need to be willing to go where the truth leads, regardless of where we want it to lead. Mature Christians value truth, inside and outside of the Bible, more than they treasure and cling to their previous understanding of truth.

If Adventists admit that we may have been wrong in our chronology because of a commitment to a sweet error, our pride

in our own opinions will be decreased as our admiration for Christ as Creator and Redeemer increases. Can't we be humble enough to join John the Baptist in admitting, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30, KJV)?

Ellen White Rescued From Irrelevance

Was Ellen White wrong? If she erred on the chronology of creation, is she proven a false prophetess and do we throw out everything she wrote? Perhaps we would, if inerrancy were our standard for God's spokespersons. But then we would discard the psalms of David on grounds of moral turpitude, and like Peter we would have to take up short swords to swing at enemies' ears, or

If man was created mortal, were plants and animals living outside the Garden of Eden created immortal? Not likely. This suggests that animal and plant death was possible or even probable outside the garden.

we'd whine and wheedle our way into high church offices as James and John tried with their mother. We would reject Ezekiel because his temple never saw the light of day, and we'd cast aside Hosea for his unwise marriage, James for his racial prejudice against Gentiles, and Paul for his murder of Christians.

Ellen White's voice is silent now, and her world is long gone. Some Adventists will leave her buried safely away. But not those of us who are drawn to Jesus every time we read her works. She led me to Christ and preserved me from many spiritual dangers in my youth, as well as in my older age. She remains God's messenger to me, even though I realize that volcanoes aren't caused by coal fires underground, that some fiction reading is redemptive, that riding bicycles is not wrong, and that eating between meals is often a bad idea but not a mortal sin.

Ellen White was a Christian realist, and I suspect that if she were alive today, in the face of the scientific evidence she would tell the church that in order for the Lord's work to advance, "His people must draw together."²⁵ She could advise that truth is "progressive"²⁶ and that God has not chosen to reveal science to us by revelation.²⁷

Perhaps she would even admit that although the creation days were presented as a regular week to her, that week may have been a regular week in heaven's eyes but have been quite a bit longer in human terms.²⁸

She might remind us that the issue is that creation is God's good work against Satan's diseases, malformations, and deceptions. It is not a question of hours or days or weeks or months or years, but of character.²⁹

A Bigger Creation, a Bigger God, a Bigger Tent for Adventism

Darwinians with limited science in the 19th century bragged that God had been made unnecessary. I see divine wisdom at that time in supporting a simplified version of biblical creation as a practical barrier against those godless presumptions. But in the 21st century, the truth about DNA and the fantastic fine-tuning of the environment necessary to support life has put the truth to inadequate Darwinian theories. No longer is simple faith the only bulwark we have against the big lie.

Now, from a position of scientific strength, may be the time to admit that creation is bigger, longer, more complex, and more amazing than even believers knew. That the great controversy between Christ and Satan has been fought on battlefields previously inaccessible to us.

If the truth is out, Adventists are followers of truth! To believe an error in ignorance was a mistake, but to hold to an error now that the truth is out would be a sin. Let the church confess our errors and repent, lest we promote sin.

In a broad-tent Adventist church, from month to month and from Sabbath to Sabbath the cautious and conservative will learn to be more relaxed and tolerant. Likewise, the liberal and careless will learn to be more measured and restrained, as we begin to like and love each other.

We will try out and polish our opinions on each other by frank, fair, and open conversation. We will appeal to reason and to revelation—not power politics, financial manipulations, or personal attacks to enforce our will on those who disagree with us.

Faithful Adventist scientists will become our heroes when they try to teach our children how the facts of evolution differ from the fictions of evolution, and how the intelligent Designer has throughout the ages coped with the first liar and murderer, both before and after the fall of humanity.

God Moving Upon the Face of the Deep

Let me close with a Bible story³⁰ from Matthew 14: When his entire General Conference was in the boat headed from point A to point B

on Galilee, why was Jesus outside the boat walking on the waters?

The answer: Because Satan in the darkness was using nature to try to destroy the infant church with the chaos of untamed waves. Darkness was once again trying to overcome the Light. As on the first day of creation, Christ the Creator moved upon the face of the deep. The frightened disciples held onto their boat for dear life, looked through the darkness, saw Jesus, and thought he was a spirit.

What Peter (soon-to-be-president of the General Conference) learned was that the safest place to be was not in the good old boat. Instead, the safest place to be was out of the boat, standing on the troubled waters of origins, right next to Jesus. We too need to have the courage to “follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth,” even if it sometimes means we have to get out of the old boat.

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¹ Ellen G. White, *Christian Education* (Battle Creek, MI: International Tract Society, 1894), p. 193.

² White, *Manuscript Releases, Volume 8* (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 1990), p. 246.

³ White, *Christian Education*, p. 192.

⁴ See White, *Lift Him Up* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1988), p. 64; Arthur L. White, *Ellen White: Woman of Vision* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2001), p. 264.

⁵ For example, see Davis A. Young and Ralph F. Stearley, *The Bible, Rocks, and Time* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008) for scholarly support of a long-age chronology of life on Earth from two conservative Christian geologists.

⁶ For example, see Lawrence T. Geraty, “Siegfried Horn on the Age of the Earth: Looking Over the Shoulder of a Former Seminary Dean,” *Spectrum*, Summer 2010, Vol. 38, No. 3, pp. 45–47.

⁷ Jerry Fodor and Massimo Piattelli-Palmarini, *What Darwin Got Wrong* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010) openly challenges the central Darwinian theory of natural selection from an entirely secular background. And there are many others.

⁸ See September 2012 articles by Brian Bull: <http://spectrummagazine.org/blog/2012/09/21/bringing-real-world-genesis-ice-cores-and-scripture-part-i%E2%80%94how-many-years-has-snow-f> and <http://spectrummagazine.org/blog/2012/09/27/bringing-real-world-genesis-ice-cores-and-science-part-ii%E2%80%94greco-roman-lead-mining-confir>

⁹ See article by Gerhard Pfandl, Ph.D., associate director of the Biblical Research Institute, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, online at: <http://creationsabbath.net/resources/articles/a-historical-review-of-the-creation-debate>

¹⁰ It was 8:55 on Sabbath morning, May 9, 2009.

¹¹ See Revelation 12:7–9 and Ellen G. White, *The Story of Redemption* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1947), p. 19: “Then there was war in heaven. The Son of God, the Prince of heaven, and His loyal angels engaged in conflict with the archrebel and those who united with him. The Son of God and true, loyal angels prevailed; and Satan and his sympathizers were expelled from heaven.”

¹² White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1911), p. 493.

¹³ White, *The Story of Redemption*, pp. 13–14: “Especially was His Son to work in union with Himself in the anticipated creation of the earth and every living thing that should exist upon the earth. ... Lucifer was envious and jealous of Jesus Christ. ... Christ had been taken into the special counsel of God in regard to His plans, while Lucifer was unacquainted with them.”

¹⁴ White, *The Story of Redemption*, p. 19.

¹⁵ Although Ellen White does not time these events, she uses phrases suggesting

deep time. See *The Great Controversy*, p. 495: “God in His great mercy bore long with Lucifer. ... Long was he retained in heaven” (emphasis mine). See also p. 498: “Evil must be permitted to come to maturity. For the good of the entire universe through ceaseless ages Satan must more fully develop his principles” (emphasis mine).

¹⁶ White, “Purpose of Man’s Creation,” *Review and Herald*, Feb. 11, 1902, Article A: “Thrust out of Heaven, Satan determined to set up his kingdom on the earth. Through him sin entered the world, and death by sin.” (Here Ellen White applies the words of Romans 5:12 not to Adam, but to Satan, who brought sin and death to this world before Adam brought sin and death to humans.)

¹⁷ See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Late_Heavy_Bombardment

¹⁸ Psalm 74:12–17 and other texts (Isa. 27:1; 51:9) allude to God fighting and overcoming monsters in the untamed seas. The cultures of Bible times knew about the evil forces (“gods”) lurking in the untamed seas, which a Creator had to vanquish. Perhaps this supports the possibility that fallen angels were here from creation Day 1? See <https://www.knowingthebible.net/yahweh-the-leviathan-and-sea-for-a-nice-summary>.

¹⁹ White, *Education* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1903), p. 23: “The Garden of Eden was a representation of what God desired the whole earth to become, and it was His purpose that, as the human family increased in numbers, they should establish other homes and schools like the one He had given. Thus in course of time the whole earth might be occupied...”

²⁰ For a recent book by another Seventh-day Adventist author on this question, see Ronald E. Osborn, *Death Before the Fall: Biblical Literalism and the Problem of Animal Suffering* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014).

²¹ In 1940 C.S. Lewis presented the idea that a Satanic fall caused suffering and death on Earth before Adam’s fall in his classic *The Problem of Pain* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1940), p. 137.

²² Others outside of Adventism have come to the same great-controversy conclusions based on the Bible, without benefit of Ellen White’s insights. See Gregory A. Boyd, *Satan and the Problem of Evil: Constructing a Trinitarian Warfare Theodicy* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001).

²³ Even agnostics have seen, from scientific evidence alone, a demonic principle in the creation. See Howard Bloom, *The Lucifer Principle: A Scientific Expedition into the Forces of History* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1997).

²⁴ For a comparison between this concept and the heavenly and earthly sanctuaries, see my blog at <http://www.atoday.org/article/1488/blogs/hoehn-jack/2012/god-s-days-and-our-days>.

²⁵ White, *Testimonies for the Church, Volume 9* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1909), p. 258.

²⁶ White, “The Stone of Witness,” *The Signs of the Times*, May 26, 1881, and “Candid Investigation Necessary to an Understanding of Truth,” *The Signs of the Times*, May 26, 1890. (According to retired Adventist scholar Arthur Patrick: “Thirty-eight times Ellen White indicates that truth is “progressive.” On 101 occasions her writings employ the word “unfolding” with reference to “truth.”)

²⁷ White, *Medical Ministry* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1932), p. 116: “Christ could have opened door after door of science. He could have revealed to men treasures of science on which they might have feasted to the present time. But knowing that this knowledge would have been appropriated to unholy uses, He did not open the door.”

²⁸ See Gerald L. Schroeder, *Genesis and the Big Bang* (New York: Bantam, 1991) for a spirited attempt to show that the events of the billions of years that cosmologists say followed the Big Bang and those of the first six days described in Genesis are, in fact, one in the same—identical realities described in vastly different terms.

²⁹ I further expanded on disagreeing respectfully with Sister White at <http://www.atoday.org/article/1518/blogs/hoehn-jack/2012/disagreeing-with-our-mother>.

Additional statements by Ellen White on the necessity of moving beyond 19th-century Adventist theology are also quoted at <http://www.atoday.org/article/2556/opinion/hoehn-jack/precious-gems-from-the-pen-of-inspiration>.

³⁰ This story was illuminated by a sermon of Alex Bryan, Walla Walla University Church, Oct. 16, 2010.



TATTOOS AND BIBLICAL LIFESTYLE

BY LOREN SEIBOLD

HAD SOMEONE 40 YEARS AGO ASSIGNED to me the part of futurist, near the top of the list of things I wouldn't have predicted would be the widespread popularity of tattoos. In my youth, skin art was associated with roustabouts in dockside bars, not educated professionals in offices. At best, tattoos were for servicemen who recorded upon themselves (often to their regret when sober) their travels and amours. Serious tattooing—anything beyond an anchor or a loved one's name—was practiced by a tiny subculture, and no one called it art.

Leviticus 19:28 (“Do not cut your bodies for the dead or put tattoo marks on yourselves. I am the LORD,” NIV) has long been used in some communities of the Jewish faith to discourage body art. As it has in recent years occasioned some discussion among Christians, too, we might look at it as a case study of how we use Scripture to address contemporary culture.

Exegetical Considerations

While some Levitical law is classified thematically, this passage is embedded in a grab bag of advice about husbandry, agriculture, occultism, the Sabbath, social justice, sex, and idolatry. Verse 28 is

preceded by prohibition of certain styles of cutting the hair and beard (as still practiced by Hasidic Jews) and followed by prohibition of prostituting one's daughters. The obscurity of verses 27-28 (and possibly the obviousness of verse 29) suggest customs about which we have little knowledge, most likely those of the pagan peoples with whom the Israelites mingled. The appended “I am the LORD” says that this is about fidelity to Yahweh in an environment of competing deities. If a certain style of the hair, for example, marked one as a worshiper of a pagan deity, the followers of an exclusive (“jealous” in Ex. 20:5) God should shun that appearance.

Cutting one's body for the dead could mean ritual self-laceration in grief, or some kind of body scarification in memory or propitiation. The Hebrew for “marks” (qa`aqa`) is less than definitive; it appears only here in Scripture, so its meaning is derived largely from this context. Jewish exegetes assigned it the meaning of “tattoo,” but we don't know what the ancient process was. Although the two prohibitions are in proximity, “for the dead” follows cutting, not marking, leaving unclear whether body cutting and body marking are part of the same ritual or separate prohibitions.

God Said It; That Settles It

One can easily read Leviticus 19:28 as a condemnation of any kind of tattooing or body modification. This has simplicity in its favor: it is minimally interpretive of God's desires, ignoring time and culture. We might speculate what God was addressing in this passage, but we don't need to know for sure; it is enough that God said it. This approach at its best proceeds from a high view of God's sovereignty: even if we don't know why, even if the rule seems to our limited reason nonsensical or inapplicable, we should obey it.

Scripture, particularly the Old Testament, has many examples of God's expectation that humanity obey “because I said so,” beginning with Adam and Eve at the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:17). Circumcision, sacrifices, the Sabbath—none of these is immediately deducible from reason and experience, as murder or stealing might be. Such testing truths ask, “Are you dedicated enough to follow my commands even if you can't explain the reason for them?”

Perhaps it is too simple. Note that in the immediate context of Leviticus 19:28 are rules that most Christians would admit cannot be taken at face value without

doing violence to Christian principles. We would all agree that one ought not to prostitute one's daughters (verse 29), but offering an animal sacrifice in propitiation for having sex with a slave girl (verses 20-22) isn't as thorough a morality as that taught by Jesus, and so calls into question the applicability of the rest.

We must concede that much of the Torah falls at the cross, not because it was wrong for its time and place but because it is superseded by something less specific but considerably more complete. Whole blocks of Levitical law move from prescriptive to illustrative when ritual sacrifices are replaced by Christ's perfect sacrifice. The end of theocratic government erases chapters more. The complex set of laws governing the relationships of spiritually immature, newly emancipated people on a desert journey is replaced with a principled Christian social order built around marriage, family, and church. There may still be good advice for Christians in the Torah (the prohibited meats of Leviticus 11, say some, are unclean because they are unhealthy), but I doubt one could argue—especially since Jesus said nothing about it—that getting a tattoo falls into the same category as Christian testing truths such as believing that Jesus came in the flesh (1 John 4:2) or that the way to salvation is to repent and have faith in Jesus (Acts 20:21).

Culturally Conditioned Interpretation

Another way to interpret the passage is to understand it in light of the culture to which it was addressed. Tattoos were prohibited when they were associated with pagan deities or done for the dead. These cultic practices, already barely understood, are millennia in the past. Tattoos, this interpretation would say, are now no more a spiritual matter than shaving one's beard. The only question would be the *subject* of the tattoo. If a tattoo is a mark of ownership (as it was for slaves in some ancient cultures), then a tattoo proclaiming your loyalty to Jesus Christ might be not only

appropriate, but desirable (cf. Isa. 44:5).¹

Adapting Scripture to culture is both necessary and dangerous. Necessary, because without it we would have to live in mimicry of the culture of the Bible in order to apply all of its rules and proscriptions. There are hundreds of commands in Scripture that can be made relevant to modern times only with difficulty. A kiss in greeting between men (1 Thess. 5:26), for example, was expected in some ancient cultures but might be quite inappropriate in ours.

Yet many Bible-following Christians are terrified of cultural relativism. "Where do you draw the line?" they ask. Presumably, one could explain away the entire Bible by saying that it was relevant only to a cluster of Mediterranean cultures thousands of years ago, and so reduce the gospel to a few insipid principles about love and justice.

Most of the arguments don't take place at the extremes, but somewhere in a muddy middle. Was Paul's description of family relationships (Col. 3:18-25) intended to be a model for all Christians for all time, or was he illustrating principles of love and mutual respect by describing the way families behaved in his world? A related debate raged in the 1700-1800s around the absence of a clear Biblical prohibition of slavery.

On which side does an Old Testament prohibition of tattoos fall?

Principled Analysis

There's yet another way to wrestle with an issue like this: take central Biblical principles and apply them to lifestyle choices about which the Bible says nothing, says little, or is unclear.

In the 19th and early 20th centuries, some Christians marked tobacco as dangerous, expensive, habit-forming, and unhealthy. No scripture explicitly prohibits inhaling the smoke of burning leaves through a tissue-paper tube, but Biblical principles of health, sobriety, economy, association, and cleanliness led them to add tobacco

use to the list of activities (drinking alcohol, playing cards, going to theaters, wearing jewelry and makeup, even bowling and billiards) they regarded as vices. In the long view, they were proven right about tobacco; it is now known to be a public health hazard, disparaged by nearly everyone.

In the same way, we might argue that whatever their function among the ancient pagans, because tattoos are attention-seeking, tend toward dark themes, and are (despite wider acceptance) still associated with gangs, drug culture, and people of low ambition, they are inimical to the wholesome, responsible Christian life as described in Scripture. It could also be added that tattoos might interfere with being hired by respectable employers² and are expensive and time-consuming to remove if later regretted.³

If the first position is criticized for being woodenly literal and the second for subjectivity, the weakness of the third is the authority it places in the church and removes from the individual Christian. For it is generally the church that processes, establishes as rule, and passes judgment—that, in short, sets the fusion of horizons⁴ necessary to apply an ancient text to modern times. Roman Catholic ecclesiology accepts a broad role for the church in interpreting Scripture, creating doctrine, and making rules for behavior. Although we Protestants see ourselves as relying upon Scripture alone rather than a church magisterium, a surprisingly large proportion of us have been quite authoritarian on a range of behavioral issues that aren't biblically central.

What's Important?

I could easily be lured into a philippic on why I still think it is foolish to ink permanent designs upon your body. But I am, admittedly, the squarest of squares; I don't even like my hand stamped to get back into a concert. My larger interest is the way we work with questions such as this one, for the reasoning I've outlined above

takes place constantly within the church, and you can often track the argument as it is shaped by these three hermeneutical processes.

Consider, for example, the ordination of women to ministry. For centuries, a literal interpretation prevailed: women, says Paul, ought not to speak in church or teach men (1 Cor. 14:34-35; 1 Tim. 2:12). Modernism opened the way for a culturally adjusted view: Paul was only addressing a specific unruly church

Given the popularity of tattoos, can you really claim to be winning the world for Christ if you would exclude those (about one in five in the United States) who have permanent body art?

situation in a male-dominated culture, but from the larger scriptural context we know he intended for us all to be equal in Christ. Working from Scriptural principles, the church has processed and hardened around several views. Some employ male headship arguments reinforced by the patriarchy of the local culture to say that women must never be ordained. From passages like Galatians 3:28, and influenced by Western egalitarianism, others argue that women may be ordained. Still others take a pragmatic approach, going as far as the church community will tolerate to admit women to ministry, short of ordination.

I would find it hard to argue that getting a tattoo is as significant a spiritual issue as, say, war, family breakdown, poverty, or even women's ordination. Neither the literalist nor the modernist has an


indisputable answer to Leviticus 19:28, nor does the Christian community. I was recently told of a church in Ohio that made a convert get a skin graft over a tattoo before he could be baptized. By contrast, a church in Texas asked members to get permanent tattoos symbolizing the crucifixion and death of Jesus!⁵ Some churches have made a ministry of helping individuals get rid of tattoos so they can find employment—an illustration of why they might have been discouraged in the first place. Yet given the popularity of tattoos, can you really claim to be winning the world for Christ if you would exclude those (about one in five in the United States⁶) who have permanent body art?

Church rules and standards are a two-edged sword. The saving power of Christ, combined with a community expectation of clean living, high moral standards, education, and spiritual discipline has transformed lives. But ask anyone who has left a conservative church why they left, and the usual answer will have to do with fussy rules overshadowing the joy of the gospel, and criticism straining relationships between church members. Churches, with the best of intentions, can fall into the trap of micromanaging their own small choices rather than transforming culture.

Indeed, one of the central struggles in conservative churches is sorting what is vital and important from the less important. When church standards are first discussed, it is to support Christians in making moral and lifestyle decisions. But as years pass, the group loses plasticity. It dislikes rethinking past decisions, even if circumstances have altered. The contrasts between important and less important flatten. Standards of a wide range of gravities dominate church culture, obscuring the good news that brought people together in the first place: “that Christ Jesus came into the world to

save sinners; of whom I am chief” (1 Tim. 1:15, KJV). Some may begin to feel as though keeping the standards is in itself a saving activity. When change does happen, it is by revolution or abandonment rather than reasoned decision.

When everything is equally important (eschewing tattoos the same weight as, say, cultivating the fruit of the Spirit), then nothing is *particularly* important, and the gospel collapses into a heap of rules that excludes as many from receiving saving grace as it gives false confidence to those who slavishly follow them.

Questions like this one will come to the church. And when they do, they require not just initial scrutiny but continual study, humility, and an attitude of grace. 

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¹ I have heard the argument from tattooed Christians that if body mods weren't to be done for the dead, that's all the more reason we should get Christian-themed body art in honor of Jesus Christ, who has overcome death!

² According to a 2001 survey by vault.com, 60 percent of employers said they were less likely to hire a candidate with tattoos and piercings (<https://ulife.vpul.upenn.edu/careerservices/blog/2011/12/08/tattoos-think-before-you-ink/>).

³ A poll conducted in January 2012 by Harris Interactive reported that one in five U.S. adults has a tattoo (<http://www.harrisinteractive.com/NewsRoom/HarrisPolls/tabid/447/mid/1508/articleId/970/ctl/ReadCustom%20Default/Default.aspx>). Of the 21% of all American adults (approximately 62 million people) who now have a tattoo, 14 percent of them regret getting one.

⁴ The phrase comes from Hans-Georg Gadamer's *Wahrheit und Methode* (1960), to describe the complex way one's own background and culture intersect with the text.

⁵ “The tendency we have as Christians is to skip past Jesus' suffering,” said Ecclesia pastor Chris Seay of Houston, Texas. “Not only do tattoos come with a bit of suffering, they are also an art form that has not fully been embraced” (<http://religion.blogs.cnn.com/2012/03/03/inking-for-jesus-dozens-of-church-members-take-lenten-tattoo-challenge/>).

⁶ Harris Interactive Poll, 2012.

A SIMPLE SOLUTION FOR OUR PRESENT CRISIS

By Desmond Ford

THE ADVENTIST CHURCH IS IN DANGER OF BEING TORN APART. And the first to leave will be the best educated. The cause is well known: the controversy over the first chapter of the Bible. Does the chapter suggest a young Earth or an old one? Must we believe in a globe between six and ten thousand years old, or can we in good conscience understand these opening words of Scripture as applying to a very old creation?

Most of our science teachers in Adventist colleges and universities believe in a very old Earth—and for excellent reasons that are readily available to anyone who reads.

Many modern exegetes tell us that an appropriate translation for Genesis 1:1 states, “In the beginning God created the universe.” See, for example, the commentaries by Victor P. Hamilton and Gordon Wenham—scholars acknowledged around the world as first-class.

I quote the *Word Biblical Commentary* on Genesis 1-15, published in 1987: “‘The heaven and the earth.’ It is characteristic of many languages to describe ‘the totality of something in terms of its extremes, e.g., ‘good and bad,’ ‘big and little,’ etc. Here we have an example of this usage to define the universe (cf. J. Krasovec, *Der Merismus im Biblisch-Hebräischen und Nordwestsemitischen*, BibOr 33 [Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1977], 16-25).

“On its own *shamayim*¹ means ‘sky’ or ‘heaven,’ i.e., the abode of God, while *erets* denotes the ‘earth, world,’ which is man’s house. But in the OT, as well as in Egyptian, Akkadian, and Ugaritic, ‘heaven and earth’ may also be used to denote the universe. (M. Ottosson, *TDOT* 1:389-91; Stadelmann, *Hebrew*

Conception of the World, 1-2; *Gen.* 14:19,22; 24:3; *Isa.* 66:1; *Ps.* 89:12).

“Genesis 1:1 could therefore be translated, ‘In the beginning God created everything.’ Commentators often insist that the phrase ‘heaven and earth’ denotes the completely ordered cosmos.”²

A more popular work says the same thing essentially: “Old Testament Hebrew had no word for ‘universe’ so it used ‘the heavens and the earth’ instead. That phrase is one of the biblical ways of saying ‘all things’ (*Eccles.* 11:5; *Is.* 44:24; *Jer.* 10:16; *John* 1:3) since everything that exists is either on earth or in the heavens (broadly conceived).”³

But no Adventist is dependent upon the literary skills of scholarship to prove this point. The Bible does it for us and in just the right place. See Genesis 2:1: “Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them” (KJV). Or, in the NIV: “Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array.”

The word translated “host” or “vast array” is used elsewhere in Scripture for an army (*Gen.* 21:22); the stars (*Deut.* 4:19); or angels (*1 Kings* 22:19). Practically all commentators understand the term here to signify the stars of heaven. This summary verse at the close of the creation story is looking back on all that God has done, including the making of the sun, moon, and stars referred to on the fourth day.

The clincher, of course, is Genesis 1:16: “God made two great lights—the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night. He also made the stars” (NIV).

The Hebrew is quite clear; the making of the stars was part of the same process that led to the sun and moon. The common theory that “make” here means “reveal” will not stand. The Hebrew for “appear” occurs in verse 9, and it is not the same as the Hebrew of verse 16. There is no escaping the fact that Genesis says God created the heavenly bodies on the fourth day. This implies that the Earth was made before the rest of the universe—only understandable if history and science were the last things on the mind of the inspiring Spirit.

There is nothing new in the present contentions. Note the following discussion of Genesis 1:1 from *The Pulpit Commentary*, which was first published over a century ago: “*The heavens and the earth (i.e. mundus universus—Gesenius, Kalisch, etc.) Cf. ch*

It is difficult to imagine that some people still think that the universe is 6,000 years old, and any denomination that teaches so will never win educated people.

2:1; 14:19,22; Ps. 115:15; Jer. 23:24. The earth and the heavens always mean the terrestrial globe with its aerial firmament. Cf. 2:4; Ps. 148:13; Zech. 5:9). The earth here alluded to is manifestly not the dry land (ver. 10), which was not separated from the waters till the third day, but the entire mass of which our planet is composed, including the superincumbent atmosphere, which was not uplifted from the chaotic deep till the second day. The heavens are the rest of the universe.”⁴

Taking the Bible Too Literally

Therefore, the teaching of Genesis 1 is crystal clear; it is referring to the making of the entire universe. This fact guarantees that the week under review is a parabolic one and that primeval creation dates back long, long eras ago. It is difficult to imagine that some people still think that the universe is 6,000 years old, and any denomination that teaches so will never win educated people.

I venture to quote my recent book *Genesis Versus Darwinism: The Demise of Darwin's Theory of Evolution*:

“Young people who frequently have had little acquaintance with literature tend to take everything they read literally. But the Bible contains many types of literature—poetry, law, history, apocalyptic, prophecy, doctrinal statements, and so on. Also the Bible is full of figures of speech and symbols. For example, the

serpent in Genesis chapter 3 is interpreted in Revelation 12 as Satan, and the four Gospels set forth the Cross as the true Tree of life and Tree of knowledge. The forecast of the end of the world (Revelation) is full of symbols. What about the account of the beginning of the world? When time and eternity meet, pictures are inevitable.

“No one takes literally all the sayings of Christ. ‘If your eye offend you pluck it out, and if your hand offend you cut it off,’ is but one instance. Christ’s speech is full of metaphors. He speaks of moving mountains, of people who swallow camels. He tells us that we must eat his flesh and drink his blood. John 10:6 states that Christ spoke in allegories (original). Most people in churches still have both eyes and both hands! When Christ declares himself to be the Door, the Vine, the Bread of Life, for example, we recognize that he is using symbols. The whole book of Revelation is a series of pictures, for one picture is better than 10,000 words. In real life there are no beasts with seven heads and ten horns, nor will Christ literally appear on an Arabian steed with a sword protruding from his mouth, despite the portrayal in Revelation chapters 13, 17, and 19.

“One-third of Christ’s teachings are in the form of parables, and there are inspired parables in the Old Testament as well. Parables teach the truth by pictures and stories, not by literal arguments (the kingdom of God is LIKE ...). Luke 16:19-31 is not taken literally by those comprehending the text. The Bible nowhere teaches a present fiery hell (especially not in *Hades*, verse 23, which means the grave), or that heaven and such a hell are in conversational distance.”⁵

The early chapters of Genesis contain many symbols or metaphors. God himself is anthropomorphically pictured as breathing (2:7), speaking (1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 22, 24, 26, 28-29), doing surgical work (2:21-22), gardening (2:8ff), and tailoring (3:21). He declares that the serpent henceforth will eat dust. Nobody literalizes that.

Consider how Exodus 31:17 tell us that God was “refreshed” by his Sabbath rest. But elsewhere Scripture assures us that the Lord God “faints not, neither is weary”, so the NIV translates the Hebrew into a more acceptable term. Christ in John 5 assures us that God has never stopped working. See verse 17, which assures us that God is *always* toiling.

Those who wish to take everything in the Bible literally will have an untold number of difficulties. Take 1 Corinthians 7:1, which says a man should not touch a woman. Yet the same Paul believes in marriage as honorable. If you take “all things are yours” literally, you will end up in jail. As Ellen White has told us, God as a writer is not represented in Scripture. His chosen words gifted to us are human words, and everything human is imperfect. And yet the Bible is perfect—perfect for its purpose.

Problems With Proving a Young Earth

Siegfried Horn, the scholar who had most to do with the chronology of the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* and *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary*, always refused to offer any certain dates prior to the call of Abraham. Dr. Horn's diary makes it clear that he rejected all efforts to prove a young Earth. We would do well to follow his example.

Many of our problems arise from inadequate exegesis of Genesis. We have never made it clear to our people that the word for "Adam" in Genesis chapters 1-3 is customarily prefaced by the Hebrew article "ha," making it clear that in these chapters there is no personal name, only a reference to generic man.

The words of Derek Kidner are helpful: "If Genesis is abbreviating a long history, the sheer vastness of the ages it spans is not so sharp a problem as the fact that almost the whole of the immensity lies, for the paleontologist, between the first man and the first farmer—that is, between Adam and Cain, *or even between Adam inside and outside Eden*" (emphasis mine).⁶

Kidner's problem is solved when we understand that a personal Adam with that name appears only in Genesis 4, many ages after the pristine beauties of Genesis 2. Thus, Genesis 1 and 2 describe a time eons before the development of cities, musicians, and tradespeople as featured in Genesis 4. Genesis 4 belongs to approximately 10,000 B.C., but the preceding chapters belong to the ages (deep time). Adam in Genesis 1 is not the same Adam as in Genesis 4.

Here now is Charles Foster's conclusion: "The formulation used to denote Adam throughout the first three chapters of Genesis is Ha Adam. But that, in Hebrew, is not a personal name at all. It simply means 'the human.' Adam is not used as a given name, to denote a particular individual, until chapter 4."⁷

There is no need to invoke theistic evolution. Genesis 2:7 is *not* saying that God took an advanced hominid and breathed a human personality into him. Theistic evolution always has the early things getting better and better, but the Genesis story is the reverse. The New Testament knows nothing of theistic evolution and always uses Adam as a real person, the father of humanity.

Seventh-day Adventists are evangelicals but not fundamentalists. The difference chiefly consists in this: that like the fathers of the Reformation and the originators of Methodism, we take scholarship seriously.

Similarly, we acknowledge true science as one of God's good gifts. How thankful we are for it when requiring surgery, for example. Think of the agonizing surgeries before the days of chloroform!


On the other hand, there is no basis for worshiping science. It is carried out by imperfect humans, and its erroneous theories over the decades have been innumerable. For example, see the

recent book by Edward O. Wilson, *The Meaning of Human Existence*, which documents how in our times hundreds of scientists have taken the wrong path and erred in their own field (see pages 66-75).

It is almost humorous to read of the world-famous evolutionary biologist Wilson endorsing a new theory, then recanting, and then enduring rebuke from 137 fellow scientists (including Richard Dawkins), who were themselves in error. It would make a great movie.

God has two books—Scripture and nature—and we would do well to constantly study both books. But if we so interpret them as to make them conflict, we will have erred regarding one or the other. Then is the time to humbly re-examine until disagreement ceases.

Let us, as Adventists, be cautious not only about science, but also about our own traditions. Ellen White was right: "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."⁸

"There is no excuse for anyone in taking the position that there is no more truth to be revealed, and that all our expositions of Scripture are without an error. The fact that certain doctrines have been held as truth for many years by our people, is not a proof that our ideas are infallible. Age will not make error into truth, and truth can afford to be fair. No true doctrine will lose anything by close investigation."⁹ 

Desmond Ford, retired Adventist theologian with doctorates from Michigan State University and the University of Manchester (UK), writes from Shelly Beach, Caloundra, in Queensland, Australia.

¹ The English equivalent has been used to replace the Hebrew for *shamayim* and *erets* here.

² Gordon J. Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary*, Vol. 1: *Genesis 1-15* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1987), p. 15.

³ Ronald Youngblood, *The Book of Genesis: An Introductory Commentary* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1999, 2nd ed., 2000), p. 23.

⁴ *The Pulpit Commentary*, Vol. 1, Joseph S. Exell and H.D.M. Spence, Eds. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978), p. 3.

⁵ Desmond Ford, *Genesis Versus Darwinism: The Demise of Darwin's Theory of Evolution* (self-published via CreateSpace, 2014), p. xii.

⁶ Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1967), p. 27.

⁷ Charles Foster, *The Selfless Gene: Living with God and Darwin* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2010), p. 129.

⁸ Ellen G. White, *Counsels to Writers and Editors* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing, 1946), p. 37.

⁹ *ibid.*, p. 35.



Inching Toward a Big-Tent Adventism?

By Alden Thompson

“Big-tent Adventism” is a phrase currently rumbling through the outskirts of the church. The issue is not public evangelism, but whether the church can be inclusive rather than exclusive. I think it’s a wonderful idea and want to join the modest chorus of voices urging Adventism to move in that direction. This column is about that.

Most church members would likely see the idea of “big tent” Adventism as liberal or progressive. That’s probably correct and, given recent developments in the church, one would think that “liberals” in Adventism would be thoroughly discouraged.

Frightened conservatives, for example, have become very shrill in their defense of top-down, male-dominated leadership. The continuing strength of the so-called “complementarian” movement in the church witnesses to that fear, all the more astonishing in the light of Ellen White’s 70-year ministry in Adventism. Complementarians argue that women are to serve in supportive rather than leadership roles in family and church. Many Baptist communities have moved strongly in that direction. The Southern Baptist Convention officially endorses it. Albert Mohler, the current president of its largest seminary, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, quickly implemented the male-headship philosophy when he became president in 1993. He is now a leading voice in American Evangelicalism. In recent years, several of his articles have been reprinted in *Adventist Review*.

This last August, in spite of Ted Wilson’s warning about the use of non-Adventist speakers at Adventist institutions, the General Conference invited a faculty member from Cedarville University in Ohio to address the International Conference on the Bible and Science. An Independent Baptist institution with more than 3,000 students, Cedarville’s recent move toward complementarianism is remarkable. In December 2013, for example, 20-year Cedarville professor Joy Fagan resigned in protest of the new prohibition against male students in classes taught by female professors. At the Adventist science

conference, the Cedarville professor vigorously promoted his campus during his presentation, even though he was a guest and speaking on science.

Admittedly, I am concerned about the potential damage that frightened conservatives could do in Adventism. But I must also admit that their fears are not entirely unfounded. If you are interested in the topic, read the 1985 book by James C. Turner, titled *Without God, Without Creed: The Origins of Unbelief in America*. Like others in the free-will tradition, Adventists are vulnerable to rational threats to belief. The United Methodist Church, our liberal cousin in the free-will tradition, provides a vivid example. Several years ago, when I invited a Methodist pastor to address my Modern Denominations class, he declared, “God is not a person, and heaven is not a place.” My students hardly knew where to start with their questions. Finally, after one asked, “Then where is God?” the Methodist pastor responded, “We swim in God.”

Is Adventism at risk from that kind of liberal threat? Potentially. I still remember the suppressed gasp that rippled through the crowd at the 2006 Adventist Forum retreat in Coeur d’Alene, Idaho, when the invited guest, Nancy Murphy, author of *Bodies and Souls: or Spirited Bodies?* (Cambridge, 2006) and a faculty member at Fuller Theological Seminary, admitted without embarrassment that she believed God answers prayers, even prayers for lost keys.

But for my fellow Adventists who struggle with the idea of a God who intervenes in our private lives to answer our smallish prayers, let me heartily recommend the biblical book of Ecclesiastes. There’s more to the book than 9:5: “The living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing” (KJV). Read the whole thing. You’ll not find a praise, a prayer, or a hallelujah in the entire book. Indeed, the author warns us: “Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few” (Eccl. 5:2, NIV).

Small wonder that Walter Martin, the well-known evangelical cult expert who finally begrudgingly admitted that Adventists could be called Christian, didn't much like Ecclesiastes. In *The Truth About Seventh-day Adventism*, his 1960 response to *Questions on Doctrine* (1957), he wrote: "It is almost universally agreed among Biblical scholars that Ecclesiastes portrays Solomon's apostasy and is therefore virtually worthless for determining doctrine. It sketches man's 'life under the sun' and reveals the hopelessness of the soul apart from God. The conclusion of the Book alone mirrors the true revelation of God (chap. 12)."¹

Adventism needs a larger tent than that. We must make room for the believing skeptic; otherwise, we

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curse many of our children to a lonely life apart from a community of faith. The author of Ecclesiastes believed in God. But he wasn't a leader of the praise team. Our tent needs to be big enough to hold God's children who think like that.

Yes, Adventism is potentially at risk from both the liberal and the conservative impulses. But as long as we cherish the Bible and the writings of Ellen White, as long as we still believe in evangelism and take our children to Sabbath School, there is reason for hope that a "big-tent Adventism" can keep both impulses alive in the church, preserving us from the dangers of both extremes.

And at the practical level, let us remember what has actually happened in our church in connection with the "complementarian" issue. Our General Conference president, Ted Wilson, has taken a

strong stance against the ordination of women—so strong, in fact, that he went personally to the constituency meeting of the Columbia Union Conference to argue against ordination. In the face of Wilson's presentation and with the General Conference president still in their midst, on July 29, 2012, 80 percent of the constituents voted for ordination. Three weeks later, on August 19, Wilson did the same thing at the Pacific Union Conference constituency meeting with a nearly identical result: 79 percent voted in favor of ordination.

And what happens if the 2015 General Conference does not grant each division the right to make its own decision in the matter? Then ecclesiology, the doctrine of the church, will become the next major discussion issue and the church will be forced to confront the practical application of Ellen White's ringing call for reorganization at the 1901 General Conference. That church leaders "should stand in a sacred place," she said, "to be as the voice of God to the people, as we once believed the General Conference to be—that is past. What we want now is a reorganization. We want to begin at the foundation, and to build upon a different principle."²

The challenges facing the church are daunting. But by God's grace, we will be able to follow where he leads. And for those who want to keep the church small and pure—a pup-tent remnant—rather than make a tent big enough for Revelation's "great multitude" that no one can count (Rev. 7:9), let us remember Jesus' parable of the tares (Matt. 13:24-29), in which the Master declares that the wheat and tares should grow together until the harvest. Then the decision about who belongs in the kingdom will be his, not ours. In the meantime, we will carry God's message to "all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues" (Rev. 7:9, KJV).

¹ Walter R. Martin, *The Truth About Seventh-day Adventism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1960), p. 127, note #11.

² Ellen G. White, "The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials: Letters, Manuscripts, Articles, and Sermons Relating to the 1888 Minneapolis General Conference," Vol. 4 (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 1987), p. 1745.

Letters *continued from page 4*

too simplistic to explain reality. Especially problematic is the rather overwhelming evidence for design in nature, the failure of naturalism to explain attributes like consciousness or free will, and especially the failure to explain how life, which even in its simplest forms has turned out to be overwhelmingly complex, could just appear by itself. Our laws of physics, chemistry, and mathematics are rather simply indicating that a very perceptive God is necessary to perform this incredible feat.

It seems to me that if Adventist historians are searching for reality (truth), they should not avoid the “God question” and whether or not God inspired Ellen White. Many wonder about these crucial questions. Why limit the horizon of inquiry to simple “naturalistic history”? If God was active in inspiring Ellen White, you will not find that out by avoiding the question. In our search for truth, we are more likely to find it if we do not eliminate difficult areas of inquiry. History evaluates all kinds of topics; why exclude inspiration? From a scholarly perspective, it would seem unwise to remove God from the equation unless you are sure He does not exist. He can be very important.

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Response to Debate Over “Six-Day Creation”

In 1994 *Adventist Today* published the results of my survey of the science teachers in Adventist higher education on their beliefs about creation. The enthusiastic discourse within the Seventh-day Adventist Church on the interpretation of the geological record has, since then, provided considerable entertainment.

Growing up in theologically conservative Northern Wisconsin in the 1950s, I was taught that the Bible was God’s first book and that nature was His second book. On that premise, let me pose a question: If I had only the second book and not the first, what conclusions would I arrive at concerning the age of the Earth? Such consideration initiates a second question: Does God play tricks?

I along with you have been fascinated with the pictures coming back from the Hubble Space Telescope. The stunning vastness of the universe is incomprehensible. What was/is the Creator up to?? There simply is no human language available to explain what we see. And I expect that what we see is only a miniscule portion of what exists. Suppose my great-great-grandfather was blind his whole life and should suddenly appear before me tomorrow. If I were given three minutes to describe to him the Saturn 5 moon rocket; what would I say? The best I could do would be to tell him that it is a fancy chariot with a volcano at the back. Now, most would agree that [my attempt] is not a very complete description of the Saturn 5. The problem is that he would not possess a language that would [allow me to] do much better than that. Our feeble attempts to describe the mysteries of creation are, to use the words of humorist Dave Barry, equivalent to “a tree frog contemplating the space shuttle.”

On my bookshelf is an 800-page volume that attempts to describe what we know about the single living cell. And often it appears that we attempt to read into the first three short chapters of Genesis a more definitive explanation of Earth’s geological record than my 800-page book gives on the living cell.

For the past 27 years, I have enjoyed the privilege of being a teaching faculty in the schools of Public Health,

Nursing, and Medicine at Loma Linda University. During much of that time, I led a consulting group that assisted in study design and data analysis of more than 700 human health-related research projects. The more I see of the human body, the more convinced I am that we are “fearfully and wonderfully made.” And the more I learn, the more I discover what I don’t know.

Let me suggest that our attempts to dogmatically explain the how and when of creation is a childish display of extreme arrogance and disrespect to the Creator. Human language does not exist that could come close. The best Moses could do was to use some familiar metaphors. Please don’t misunderstand. I am not suggesting that we shouldn’t study and propose models—feeble as they will be—of what appears to have happened. But in the process, we would do well to review God’s challenge to his friend Job: Where were you when I laid the Earth’s foundation? Tell me, if you think you are so smart (Job 38:4, my paraphrase). And Job’s reply: “I put my hand over my mouth. I spoke once, but I have no answer—twice, but I will say no more” (40:4-5, NIV).

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Adventist Man

A SATIRICAL LOOK AT ADVENTIST LIFE

Famous Brushes With Adventism

Last Tuesday my Uncle Feldspar Ffarrowmere, MFA, complete with side whiskers and leather briefcase, hustled into my drafty garret. Prying apart the briefcase's jaws, he reached in and extracted a packet of scribbled notepaper.

"Here," he wheezed. "Publish this. You'll have to recast it into printable form, but it's a bombshell. Gotta go." And off he went.

You may remember Uncle Feldspar's bitter yet plaintive ballad "Tell Me What to Think" in the Winter 2013 issue of *Adventist Today*. His Master of Fine Arts in poetry hasn't confined him to that genre alone. He takes all literature, and *littérateurs*, within his scope.

Using a desk lamp with a strong light, a powerful magnifying glass, and an encyclopedia article on codes and ciphers, I was finally able to discover what was on my uncle's mind. Uncle Feldspar grew up in an era when Adventist urban legends claimed that quite a number of famous people had either once been, or were secretly and currently, Seventh-day Adventist.

Those were the days when the Monkees' lead singer was said to have gone to an Adventist academy, and Billy Graham was said to have kept *The Desire of Ages* on his bedside-reading table. And the absolutely true story of Little Richard's Seventh-day Adventist conversion, as well as Paul Harvey's occasional laudatory broadcasts about Ellen G. White, gave credence to the more questionable tales.

Anyway, here's what Uncle Feldspar thinks he

has discovered. He won't read this column—he rarely reads anything later than the 1950s—so I'll just say *caveat emptor*, or maybe it's *cave canem*. Or *cave nutcasem*?

According to my uncle, a surprising number of major literary figures had close brushes with Adventism. And this makes sterling good sense. Adventists, like well-known poets and novelists and essayists, are willing to turn their back on accepted conventions in their search for truth and, when wrestling with life's major issues, seek primal source material rather than predigested commentaries.

Taking these literary pioneers in roughly chronological order, we first come to Stephen Crane. Uncle Feldspar asserts that Crane, a struggling New York writer barely into his 20s, was invited to a Sabbath service hosted by a group of recent immigrants from India. These former Hindus had enthusiastically accepted the health message and strove to unite it with their cultural cuisine.

At the potluck following the service, Crane gingerly tasted the various dishes and was so affected that he immediately began work on *The Red Batch of Curry*. Puzzled editors urged him to change his subject to something less inflammatory, so he tweaked the title and shifted the topic to the Civil War. *The Red Badge of Courage* became a classic.

Uncle Feldspar assures me that potlucks figured largely in Adventism's attraction to hungry ink-slingers. In 1921 T.S. Eliot, during a trip to the Continent from England, was fortunate to have brought an empty stomach to an Adventist potluck peopled with sturdy Germans, and he used the back of his church bulletin to rough out initial notes for what he at first titled *The Waistland*.

Around the same time, small, fiery Dorothy Parker—renowned for her quick wit and cynical

outlook—visited a Seventh-day Adventist church. She couldn't stay for potluck, but an earnest gentleman pressed a casserole upon her, urging her to take it home. As it happened, there was a gathering of the Algonquin Round Table that afternoon, and she brought the casserole, which she hadn't yet tasted. The other writers present stated their reactions so strongly that she memorialized the event in a rapier-sharp poem, in which she expressed her passionate desire to

... eviscerate the witless oaf
Who suckered me with lentil loaf.

But—again, according to Uncle Feldspar's research—the prizewinner when it came to being inspired to works of greatness by a single brush with the Remnant was none other than Ernest Hemingway. He received two memorable ideas, not just one.

At the service he attended, he sat listening to the pastor preach and kept glancing at his watch. Noon passed, and nearby chimes sounded from church steeples, and the unremarkable sermon went on and on. Hemingway grabbed his writer's notebook, drew a caricature of the pastor, and scrawled beneath it the admonition, "For Whom the Bell Tolls." In the foyer after the service, all of the incessant talk about "What time is sundown?" and "What are you doing after sundown?" goaded him to later write *The Sun Also Rises*.

So there you have it, for what it's worth. Don't thank me; thank Uncle Feldspar.

Do you have a tough question? Adventist Man has "the answer." As a former member of "the remnant of the remnant," Adventist Man was ranked 8,391 of the 144,000—and working his way up. Now he relies solely on grace and friendship with Jesus. You can email him at atoday@atoday.org.

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