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Listening for a talking God: Beyond Protestantism

JOHN MCLARTY

We Adventists claim to be Protestants because of our allegiance to the Bible instead of the pope. But our critics point out that we are not very good Protestants because of our belief that God spoke through the prophetic ministry of Ellen White.

Adventists have vigorously claimed our place in the Protestant family of churches. We have published books demonstrating our continuity with the Reformation. Adventism "completed" the Reformation. We were the final development of a trajectory set by Calvin and Luther in their embrace of the Bible as ultimate authority and their belief in the priesthood of all believers.

Most critics of Adventism accept the validity of the Reformation as the touchstone of theology, then argue that Adventism contradicts or subverts the verities of the Reformers. We are wrong, they say, because we do not agree with John Calvin and Martin Luther. (The Anabaptists, who emphasized the life and teachings of Jesus and the church as a community of transformed people, are ignored.)

Even within Adventism, the same criteria has been used. In the 1970s many Adventist polemicists used the epithet "Catholic" to assail any questionable theology or practice. "Catholic" was synonymous with legalism and heresy. "Protestant" meant gracious and true.

The fact is, the Christian world cannot be neatly divided into Catholic and Protestant hemispheres. Protestantism is not the touchstone of truth. There are genuinely Christian communities, churches, and movements outside both the Protestant and Catholic camps. Among them are the Orthodox churches, the Friends (Quakers), and (some would argue) Pentecostals.

One of the key elements of Quaker self-understanding in the 1600s was its sense of standing against the Protestant ideal of sola Scriptura and the Catholic doctrine of ecclesiastical authority. In contrast to the infallible book or the infallible church, the Quakers gave priority to

the present Word of God.

The Puritans ridiculed the Quakers for their belief in extrabiblical revelation. The Quaker response was, "How can you say that God has completed his revelation in the Bible? The Bible doesn't tell you whether God has called to you to minister in a particular place or not. In fact, the Bible can give no personal guidance at all. But that is precisely part of what it means to be a Christian. The Bible cannot convict of sin. That is the work of the Holy Spirit."

The Quakers had high regard for the Bible. They quoted it liberally and used it with intimidating effectiveness in debate. The Bible itself spoke of a teaching work of the Holy Spirit that was future. Why, they argued, could not that future be now?

Because the Quakers were so attentive to what God was saying in their time, they led in the transformation of the treatment of the insane, criminals, debtors and the working poor. A hundred years later they emancipated their slaves in America. While Protestants and Catholics were still strait-jacketed by arguments about ancient dogma, the Quakers were helping people hear the new word from God.

If Adventists are going to offer anything of value to the world, we must give up trying to "prove" we are Protestants. Where we have been legalistic, arrogant, or inappropriately sectarian, let's change. Let's learn from our Protestant friends, but let's not make "becoming Protestant" our goal. That would be a retreat, a pursuit of lowest-common-denominator religion which is seldom vital or transforming.

Let's affirm the centrality of Jesus, our confidence in the Bible, our devotion to the Trinity. And let's cultivate openness to the ongoing teaching of the Holy Spirit. With the Quakers and Charismatics, we believe that the God who spoke still speaks. His communication can be understood. He expects us to obey.

Neither the Bible nor Ellen White (in most cases) gives detailed guidance regarding many



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Gospel Writers

Enjoyed the March/April 2001 edition of AT. One question did, however, arise. In the feature "Why Have Ethnic Churches?" by Dennis Hokama, I find this statement: "It was Paul, the Outside Apostle (because unlike the others, he had never known the historical Jesus) who first tried..." My question is, who were the "other" apostles or Gospel writers who were contemporary with the historical Jesus and eyewitnesses to events in his life?

John Hughes | Fresno, Calif.

EDITOR'S REPLY: Three of Jesus' twelve disciples are thought to be authors of Gospels: Mark, Matthew, and John. Matthew seems to have relied on Mark's first Gospel to record his own convictions that Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies of a coming Messiah, and John wrote from a very different perspective. The Gospel of Luke was written by someone close to the movement, though not one of the 12. Luke apparently also wrote the Book of Acts.

Upbeat Music

I really appreciated your article "Beating Up on Upbeat Music." I wanted to read more background on the footnotes. Footnote number 11 refers to manuscript releases, volume 2 page 37. Is this a misprint? I could not find this quote on that page.... I would appreciate any help you can offer on this as I am anxious to use your article at an upcoming church meeting. A group of us are trying to institute an outreach service with contemporary music. This quote was used in opposition, but I fear it was taken out of context. I would like to be able to read it in its full context. My wife and I always look forward to each issue of Adventist Today.

J. Bursey | Via the Internet

EDITOR'S NOTE: The reference (Footnote number 11) was inaccurate; it should have been *Selected Messages*, Book 2, page 37.

The Gospel Without Strings Attached

This is an interesting concept (AT Mar/April 2001). Kukolja takes to task writers who in his opinion may not have been exact in their usage of words, but in his use of the words "gospel," "completed atonement," "grace," "redemption," "justification," etc. implies incorrectly that these words are interchangeable. It may safely be assumed that the Adventist Today writer and the individuals referenced in his article all agree that Paul taught that the sacrifice of Christ completed "once and for all" man's "atonement." This is correct theology but needs some defining. "Atonement" is a comprehensive word that appears but once in the King James Version of the NT. More recent versions translate the Greek word "katallagee" by "reconciliation," which adds clarification. Certainly at the cross, reconciliation between man and God was completed and was total. On this we can be sure that the several writers listed above agree. They also agree that the careful reading of the NT, particularly Paul, indicates that the final aspect of the "at-one-ment" (atonement) between God and man is still future. God and man cannot be completely "at one" until the curse that separated man from God is finally removed.

Paul's teaching on this is clear when writing of Christ: "Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death," 1 Cor 15:24-26. Only when the last enemy, death, is vanquished [and] the disharmony that now exists between the creature and the creator is removed, can the atonement in its wider meaning be considered universal and complete. The NT indicates that

following a believer's justification (which is the "once and for all time" act of God), a process comes into action which is sometimes defined as "sanctification." It must be understood that while justification and sanctification are sometimes studied separately, neither can exist without the other. In the first Christian Church, the experience of conversion to Christ was described as, "the Lord added unto the Church those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47) (note the present continuous). The process is therefore past, present, and future. Soteriology, as explained by Paul, is clear; "The gospel came not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction"—

Soteriology, as explained by Paul, is clear, "The gospel came not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction"—which resulted in "work produced by faith" (see 1 Thess 1:3-4 NIV). It therefore appears to me that Kukolja and the individuals with whom he takes issue are in fact on the same wavelength.

which resulted in "work produced by faith" (see 1 Thess 1:3-4 NIV). It therefore appears to me that Kukolja and the individuals with whom he takes issue are in fact on the same wavelength. His is a problem of semantics. The meanings of words change. We need to tune in to each other more often.

Charles Watson | Daytona, Fla.

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An invitation to our readers from the publisher

ELWIN DUNN

For the past nine years Adventist Today has tried to supply thoughtful Adventists with news and analysis about topics and issues important to them—church institutions, leadership, theological thinking, denominational history, and expressions of the spirit of Adventism. Many readers have told us they get the first word on changes and controversies from this journal.

We were able to launch the journal and provide financial strength for it through the aid of the Advisory Council, whose names are listed on page 2. They have supported the journal with ideas, promotion among friends, and financial commitments.

There is more we want to do, however, and we would like the journal to have a more secure financial base. Therefore we have created four categories of supporting members—patrons, councilors, advisors, and ambassadors. We invite you to consider these and join us on the council.

Patrons give \$5,000 or more in a single year. This kind of generosity dramatically extends the impact of Adventist Today.

Councilors support a specific expense or activity of Adventist Today in the

sum of \$1,800 or more per year. This consistent support brings us peace of mind as we manage the challenge of funding the month-to-month operation of the journal. The money and the ideas contributed by these councilors make a significant difference.

Advisors give \$500 or more per year. These regular gifts are indispensable for the ongoing work of reporting, inspiring, questioning, and networking that is so vital to Adventist Today. We cannot survive without this kind of faithful giving.

Ambassadors give time and leadership. They host annual fund-raising and promotional gatherings for friends of Adventist Today in various cities. Their work is crucial in extending the awareness of and support for the journal by Adventists across North America and beyond.

Edward R. Murrow once said, "Our major obligation is not to mistake slogans for solutions." While many Adventists

respond to catchy slogans about the church's progress, Adventist Today seeks workable solutions for the real issues confronting us. We cannot do this work alone. We need your money, your

“Edward R. Murrow once said, ‘Our major obligation is not to mistake slogans for solutions.’ While many Adventists respond to catchy slogans about the church’s progress, Adventist Today seeks workable solutions for the real issues confronting us.”

ideas, your friendship.

As board chair of the Adventist Today Foundation, I'd like to extend a special invitation to you to become part of our Advisory Council by penciling in one of the categories on the enclosed envelope in this magazine and sending it back to us.

I look forward to hearing from you. ■

WWW.ATODAY.COM gets updated and readers are invited to participate

Adventist Today is preparing to focus more of the discussion on the site on the articles posted in the magazine archives, news items, and aToday extra material. As part of this, the current discussion forums are going to be discontinued. There will still be opportunity to engage in dialogue on atoday.com. The already ongoing discussions around Adventist Today articles and news items will continue and be augmented by other material. This other material may be articles or book reviews submitted by

aToday readers or links to other material on the internet. For now, essays, book reviews, or links can be submitted to webmaster@atoday.com. There will shortly be a function on the front page to submit new articles there. We hope that this focus will serve to enhance discussion on atoday.com.

Those who wish to express their opinions on topics not currently being considered may wish to submit a letter-to-the-editor for consideration for publication in Adventist Today. ■

The surreal picture of the doctor's kind but now sober face remains vivid in my mind's eye. The smile that had been so warm a few minutes ago had taken on a determined objectivity that instills dread in observant patients. Jill and I had been sitting in his office just a few minutes before, relating with almost giddied glee the fact that at Jill's last appointment (made primarily to

three-year-old son when we wished we weren't having a second child. Had our wishes been granted?

Two days later, the procedure went without complications. The finality and reality of our loss was now very real. When we understood that growing life had become stagnant death, we were anxious to move on. My concern shifted from the baby lost to Jill's well-being, and her rapid recovery came as a relief.

baby" and talked often of what they would do. Of course he had wanted to know how it got into Mommy's tummy. We explained that Moms and Dads had a special way of getting a baby inside Mommy's tummy. We also credited God, by whom we are "fearfully and wonderfully made." The night we told him, he wept and wept.

Brennan's next reaction to our news showed astounding comprehension as he blurted out, "I'm gonna hit Jesus," followed later by "I'm gonna get a sword and fight God." Of course! If God is responsible for giving us life and directing the miracle of conceived life growing within, then God must be responsible for the end of that life as well.

A death in the family:

REFLECTIONS ON THE EXPERIENCE OF MISCARRIAGE

GREGORY L. HOENES, M.A.

begin the processes of a fertility work-up) she was already pregnant. We couldn't have been more pleased!

A short while later, a sonogram revealed the hidden truth. The embryo we expected to see moving about, the reassuring flicker of its beating heart on screen, was still. The doctor paused, looking, weighing how to tell us the bad news. A computerized measurement was taken, showing the embryo to be seven weeks old. Not usually a problem, but Jill was ten weeks along, and there was no heartbeat.

My own heart beat faster, as if to make up for the silence on the monitor. "I'm sorry," our doctor said with a devastating assurance. "I can do further tests, but I am 100 percent sure. I assume you will want to schedule a D&C as soon as possible." My mind went numb, struggling to comprehend. "It's dead?" I asked. "Yes, there is no heartbeat, and it appears that there has been no growth for three weeks," he said. Jill's eyes were moistening and red. She, too, knew the truth.

We said "Thank you" as we left his office, minds racing and hearts breaking. Jill reflected on her intuitive feelings that something had been wrong. I was in denial, still looking for an alternative explanation. Of course it was impossible not to guiltily remember those moments of sheer frustration with our very busy

I write a week later, and I think we are handling this well. Jill still gets teary thinking about it, and I fall into a sad silence. We will always know there should have been another. But we both know it could have been so much worse. We understand that our loss was something over which we had no control. We never had to make a decision about the future of this life, as some parents must do. We lost our baby early, while still adjusting to the prospective joys and trepidations of having it. Ours was not stillborn or a prolonged pregnancy with negative results. And, thank God, we already have at least one healthy child.

It had all been too easy. Our firstborn had been conceived shortly after we moved to our new assignment in the valley late in 1992. We were both done with school, employed, enjoying our careers, and happy in our church. Then, as now, Jill had gone to her doctor for her annual exam and to plan a pregnancy. We rejoiced since she was already with child and unaware of it. And it had happened again ... only something went wrong.

Perhaps the most difficult part of our experience was trying to help our son, Brennan, understand. He had been so excited that we were having a baby—a little brother or sister for him to teach and play with. He referred to it as "my

Could a three-year-old be so logical?

We told him that it was okay to be angry with God, all the while assuring him that God and Jesus were sad about what had happened, just like we were. He wanted to know where the baby was. "Just gone," we said. It never dawned on us that he would take it so hard.

As we communicated our loss with the people who knew about the pregnancy, we were surprised how many told us that they had been through similar or worse. Almost everyone was sympathetic, a few urging us to get on with the business of making another. The doctor had said that spontaneous abortion occurs in roughly one in three pregnancies; yet we had never expected that it would happen to us. As common as this event seems to be, there is so little said of it, even in literature on pastoral care.

And it is a gray, problematic area to address. It is difficult for us to see this as a loss of "person"; for we are a people who affirm that unborn life has value, while maintaining that we become "living souls" as the breath of life (spirit) and body (soma) come together. A face had not been seen, nor a definitive name been given. And the baby's gender wouldn't have been known for some time yet.

The definitions are blurry. When a child is stillborn, there is a fully developed

body to bury or cremate. But not for those who have natural miscarriages, or must undergo a D&C to remove an unviable embryo or fetus. In these circumstances, there is no norm for expressing grief. A funeral would be awkward at very best, and inappropriate, excessive, and unnecessarily traumatizing at worst.

So How Should Pastors Respond to Parishioners Who Suffer Miscarriages?

1 Be aware that it is a pervasive experience for your membership. It is not some kind of bizarre happening, nor is it rare. It is not the judgment of God, or retribution for moral or other shortcomings. All of you have parishioners who have had this happen; and if the statistics are correct, many of you have gone through some version of what we did ourselves.

2 Recognize that the loss is real, however unquantifiable it seems to be. The sense of emptiness and pain experienced reflects the reality I am suggesting. Don't inadvertently trivialize the loss by suggesting replacement be "made," or that the answer is to just "get back in the saddle again." Nothing can replace the timing, spontaneity, hope, and positive circumstance of Jill's second pregnancy—even if there should be a successful third. We will always know that something precious was lost, that we had a death in the family.

3 Don't try to explain it. Doctors can't, and pastors shouldn't either. Something went wrong—yes. But there is no way, short of extensive and expensive tests, of knowing whether there was some major genetic error or some sort of intrauterine accident. God is in control of our universe—yes, and "all things work together for good"—yes. But things happen. God's will, inscrutable as it may be, should never be portrayed as whimsical or malicious. I would suggest that we do God no favor by offering this sort of "encouragement." Think about it. To suggest that a miscarriage is the will of God is actually rather abusive, especially to a woman desperate to understand why she cannot keep a pregnancy! This may be particularly true

if she has waited until marriage to have a baby, has the means to take care of it, and has enough love to go around. Given the fact that so many unwed teenagers manage to carry a baby to term with no maturity with which to raise it, no means with which to care for it, and no moral backing for giving it a name, the "It is God's will" explanation fails both pastorally and morally.

4 Do express sympathy. Here, less is more. A discrete word at church, a personal note expressing sympathy and your caring concern, or prayer at a particularly appropriate moment could be very helpful. Of course, if your parishioner is hospitalized or requests you to visit, you will want to do so.

5 The silent nature of this kind of loss suggests that most people see it as highly personal. Treat it that way. With feelings ranging from guilt to despair involved, you will probably not know the majority of times that it happens in your congregation. When you do know, your confidentiality and discretion will be appreciated.

6 Be aware that there may be counseling issues arising from the event, and be available to deal with them as you can. Pregnancy involves tremendous hormonal changes, which can take six weeks or more to resolve once the miscarriage has taken place. Depression may be an issue, as may guilt, anger, or a deep sense of betrayal. Rational or not, one partner may blame the other. Sexual patterns may be disrupted, and the potential for a negative effect on relationships from these issues is all too real. Have counseling referrals available if the problems are beyond your capabilities.

7 Do share the reality of God's love for all of us. We look forward to the consummation of that love in an eternal experience in which this kind of loss is forever banished. We can marvel together at the tenacity and delicacy of

life. The fact that there are so many pregnancies that don't go to term does not diminish the greater miracle of the majority that do. Truly we are "fearfully and wonderfully made."

Theological and Ethical Reflections

I cannot help reflecting on the theological and ethical implications of my own experience. Miscarriage raises some interesting issues. You may come to different conclusions, but these are thoughts that occupy my mind.

First, it seems odd that in the whole debate on abortion, spontaneous abortion does not come up very often. I find it inconsistent to argue that abortion is a morally unacceptable alternative under any circumstance (a position that the Adventist church has wisely not taken), and then declare the inscrutability of God when it comes to spontaneous abortion. In other words, why should God have an abortion option if it is truly a universal moral wrong?

Second, it seems odd that the very text used by "pro-life/anti-abortion" advocates as proof of our personhood in utero—that the hand of God directs conception and the formation of human

“As we communicated our loss with the people who knew about the pregnancy, we were surprised how many told us that they had been through similar or worse.”

life—is rarely challenged with the facts and realities of spontaneous abortion. Argue that miscarriage was never meant to be, or that our polluted earth has increased this difficult problem, or even that our diets, stress, lifestyles, and other choices have contributed to the rate, and you may have a point. But that still doesn't address the perils of pregnancy! If God is busily knitting us together in

CONTINUED ON PAGE 9

In debating the ethics of abortion, people opposing it have looked for a Bible statement to support their views. They find very little mention of it there.

Although abortion was widely practiced in the Roman Empire, somehow the New Testament contains no specific reference to the practice. As

equally on her assailant. But the fetus is property of the husband to whom the fine is paid. The fetus does not hold the legal status of a person with a life equal to that of the assailant or the woman.

In rabbinic tradition, this one text is cited for the majority position that therapeutic abortion is acceptable, and even salutary. Nontherapeutic abortion was

“there is no form” in the Greek. No one has adequately explained how *‘ason* was translated as *exeikonismenon*. It is at least possible that the translator did not understand the term *‘ason* and derived its meaning from context. Verse 22 reads, “and her offspring comes out and there is no *‘ason*,” and the translator could have concluded that *‘ason* referred to the offspring rather than the woman. From this assumption the translator then guessed at a meaning that would fit the miscarriage. The Septuagint reading works in verse 22 but not verse 23. A miscarriage almost never results in a live birth. Though “a life for a life” would make sense in the Greek—“an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a hand for a hand, a foot for a foot,” it makes no sense in reference to a miscarried fetus. Not only does a fetus lack teeth, but the other body parts are not lost individually in a miscarriage.

Throughout the Roman Empire many Greek-speaking Jews had little or no knowledge of Hebrew and were completely dependent on the Septuagint. One major Greek-speaking Jewish author was the philosopher Philo of Alexandria, who thought the Greek translation of the Torah was inspired. Basing his reasoning on the Greek ver-

Abortion and the Bible: A CAUTION

JIM MILLER

early as the fourth century B.C., Plato and Aristotle endorsed abortion in certain cases. A safe and effective abortion drug was made from silphion fennel, and there was a high demand for it. In fact, the demand was so great that the plant was harvested to extinction.

Though the New Testament does not speak on abortion, one legal text from the Old Testament speaks almost directly on the subject; and it has an interesting history.

In the law of Moses, is a fetus a legally protected person with a recognized life of its own? One biblical law seems to define the fetus as property rather than a legal person. The text is Exodus 21:22-25: “When people who are fighting injure a pregnant woman so that there is a miscarriage, and yet no further harm follows, the one responsible shall be fined what the woman’s husband demands, paying as much as the judges determine. If any harm follows, then you shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe” (New Revised Standard Version). According to this text, punishment for the miscarriage is handled by imposing a fine. However, any damage to the woman herself results in the *lex talionis*, a life for a life, etc. In this law, the woman is a full person with status equal to the man who struck her. Any damage to her can be inflicted

almost ignored—for since the rabbis placed a high value on reproduction, abortion as birth control was almost beyond their conceptual world. They did not recognize a fetus as a legal person. Though most rabbinic texts are somewhat later than the first century, the rabbis’ position may be found as early as the first century writer Josephus, in his *Antiquities of the Jews* 4.277-278. However, Josephus supports the opposite position in *Contra Apion* 2.202, where he holds that abortion and infanticide are murder. This position was also held by Greek-speaking Jews who depended on the Septuagint translation. Josephus associated with both Greek-speaking and Aramaic-speaking Jews, and at times he took the position of one, then the other.

The One Text in the LXX. In the Septuagint (Greek translation), the text of Exodus 21:22-25 is significantly different from the Hebrew. Where the Hebrew text of verse 23 states, “If there is harm” (to the woman), the Greek translation reads, “If there is form” (to the fetus). Likewise verse 22 has “there is no harm” in the Hebrew, but

“By the time Jerome restored the Hebrew reading of Exodus 21:22-25 through his Latin translation, the church position against abortion had gained a life of its own and was in no way dependent on biblical texts.”

sion of Exodus 21:22-25, Philo found most abortions to be utterly abhorrent and unacceptable. He even extended the law to cover domestic animals and women awaiting execution. Should sacrificial animals or a condemned woman

be found to be pregnant, Philo stated that they should be spared until after the birth. The unborn, he said, are not necessarily to share the same fate of their mothers but rather have their own lives.

With very few exceptions, Christian theologians could not read the Hebrew Scriptures from the second century through the fifteenth. The church depended on the Greek translations and used them for translations into other languages. The exceptions were Origen, Jerome, and occasional Jewish converts. Not only did the church depend on the Septuagint, but it also depended on Jewish authors who wrote in Greek, Philo being a favorite. As a result, the church fathers followed Philo's position on abortion. By the time Jerome restored the Hebrew reading of Exodus 21:22-25 through his Latin translation, the church position against abortion had gained a life of its own and was in no way dependent on biblical texts.

Today modern Evangelicals have attempted another reading of the Hebrew text which could remove it from the topic of abortion. The terminology used

in Exodus 21 is odd for miscarriage. Literally, "her children go forth." But the terminology is not common for live birth as well, unless twins are presupposed. For, "her (singular) children (plural) go forth (plural)." The plural indicates a figure of speech rather than a direct description of birth. Evangelicals wish to understand this text as describing a live, premature birth rather than a miscarriage; and "harm" would refer to the newborn child. Though such a reading might give the fetus full value as a human, it removes the mother from the equation of *lex talionis*, which means this text cannot be used to prove that the woman has equal value to men under Mosaic law. On multiple layers, the abortion question pits the value of the fetus against the value of the woman.

It is notable that no rabbinic commentator has seen the possibility of a live-birth reading in Exodus 21, including such careful readers of the text as Rashi, Rashbam, and Ibn Ezra. All assume a miscarriage here and find no difficulty in this reading. Likewise, the Evangelical reading of this text has not convinced any major commentator on

the text. Contextual uses of the terms in this chapter have led most translators and commentators on the Hebrew text to understand a miscarriage in Exodus 21:22-25. Also, similar laws may be found in Akkadian law codes, laws which speak of miscarriage, not premature birth. This is how ancient writers would write a law about causing a miscarriage.

Yet the Evangelical reading, though weak, is not impossible. Niels-Erik Andreasen took this position in the Loma Linda University book, *Abortion: Ethical Issues and Options* (1992), though he included the mother with the newborn under the *lex talionis*. But the law of Exodus 21:22-25 cannot possibly carry the weight of an entire ethical issue, however it is understood. One biblical text is far too easily misunderstood and misapplied. ■

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REFLECTIONS ON THE EXPERIENCE OF MISCARRIAGE

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our mother's wombs, one might think there could be a few more malpractice suits filed against the Great Physician.

Rather, I have come to see this text as a poetic rendering for the intimacy we have with God. God knows us from day zero, as it were. Outcomes are not guaranteed. But in the end, the mystery doesn't lie in miscarriage but in the perfect baby that is born more often than not. Perhaps an appropriate analogy is salvation. We understand that salvation is offered to all, and that God's salvific will is universal. We also understand that "many are called, but few chosen." To summarize, the fact that God is good, desires that all should be saved, and has the power to save all will not necessarily produce that result. I would suggest that despite the fabulous mystery of life, and

God's universal love for all creatures born or unborn, not every life that is conceived will succeed.

Third, we are told that "all things work together for good to them that love God." Yet, to suggest that this was part of God's plan for some good begs two questions. One, if the embryo lost was not part of God's plan, why was it allowed, and what about it would morally justify the terminating of its existence? Two, what good that God can bring about might justify miscarriage? I can see the positive ramifications of this experience, and yet I am not sure that compensates for the loss! I can also surmise situational, financial, or other unknown benefits; yet that still doesn't justify the cost.

All I can do is turn to my Arminian spiritual roots and declare two hard realities. First, that we have choices and

must bear the responsibility for them. We were responsible for this conception. We chose to risk pregnancy, even with all attending risks, including miscarriage. Second, things happen. While we cannot control them, we still have choices to make! We can blame God, endlessly stew about the "why," consider ourselves victims, and otherwise decompensate. We can also praise God that despite the risks, good things can come from our choices. We can choose to go on, and take the risk again. We can give it to God—knowing that few things in this world have clear or easy answers—and engage the life we all share. ■

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Supporting young-earth creationism: Religious faith or scientific evidence?

ERVIN TAYLOR

A rapid survey of the contents of these two books would perhaps initially strike an informed reader as showing why young-earth, fundamentalist creationism has so little credibility in most scientific disciplines. If a reader is also familiar with the scholarly literature in Old Testament or ancient Near Eastern studies, these two books might also be viewed as providing an excellent case

seven literal days less than 10,000 years ago. He declares, "All fifty of these scientists, through faith and scientific fact, have come to the conclusion that God's Word is true and everything had its origin not so very long ago, in the beginning, *In Six Days*." Let us see if this assertion is accurate.

These individuals hold their degrees in a number of fields, several from distinguished academic institutions. However, no explanation is offered in either book for the immediate relevance of those having research experience in, for example, solar energy engineering, canola oil lipids, mineral processing technology, kiwi fruit preservation, combustion theory, optical fibers, and battery-cell design, as listed in the books. Very few had degrees in molecular and evolutionary biology, geochronology, archaeology, or human paleontology. One of the authors lists a PhD in human biology from Columbia Pacific University (CPU)—a private, nonaccredited correspondence school located in Novato, Calif. Unfortunately for him, in December 1999 CPU was ordered by a Marin County Superior Court judge to permanently stop operating. A report issued by a California State agency specifically stated that CPU failed to meet various requirements for issuing PhD degrees.

There is no reason to question the main point of the book—that there are individuals holding PhDs in the sciences and engineering who believe in young-earth creationism. There is also reason to assume that many of them are capable scientists in their own fields of study. It appears that many of the contributors to these two volumes have read widely in some of the areas of research directly relevant to the topic. What many of the authors do state is that they have come to the views they hold, not primarily from examining the scientific evidence but because of their

personal theological or religious convictions as Protestant Christians.

One example is Kurt Wise—who holds an honors undergraduate degree in geological sciences from the University of Chicago, and MS and PhD degrees in geology from Harvard, working with Stephen Jay Gould. Dr. Wise is currently director of origins research at Bryan College in Dayton, Tennessee, an evangelical Christian, interdenominational, liberal arts college named for William Jennings Bryan (1860-1925) of Scopes "Monkey Trial" fame. Surprisingly, in responding to the mandate from the editor as to why he believes that everything had its origin in six days not so very long ago, Wise does not present any scientific evidence or data to support his point of view. Rather he relates his personal journey to reconcile what he views as a conflict between the "claims of the Bible" in Genesis and the conclusions of contemporary historical geology and evolutionary biology.

Wise's way of reconciling what he sees as a conflict is to state: "[I am] a young-age creationist because that is my understanding of the Scripture . . . if all the evidence in the universe turned against [young-earth] creationism, . . . I would still be a [young-earth] creationist because that is what the Word of God seems to indicate. Here I must stand." There is no appeal to scientific evidence; no talk of changes in the decay rates of radioactive isotopes, the laws of thermodynamics, intelligent design, or irreducible complexity. There is no attempt at apologetics. Rather, there is a personal confession of a religious conviction. What is disappointing is that Wise could apparently not bring himself to apply the same analytical skills and critical insights needed to understand scientific questions to the study of the Genesis creation narratives.

Very few of the other 49 contributors

Works reviewed:

■ John Ashton, editor, *In Six Days: Why Fifty Scientists Choose to Believe in Creation*, Green Forest [Ark.], Master Books, 2001.

■ Albert A.C. Waite, editor, *Let The Earth Speak Of God's Creation*, Riseley [England], Mandra Publishing, 2001.

study of how little almost all "scientific creationists" appreciate and understand the literary and theological nature of the creation narratives in Genesis.

However, a closer reading of several chapters in these books might reveal that there is a little more to consider than the editors may have intended. This might be especially true for those interested in the current consultations on the nature and meaning of the Genesis creation narratives now under way in the Seventh-day Adventist denomination, since both volumes contain a number of chapters written by current and former members of the Geoscience Research Institute (GRI). This is the arm of the church's General Conference that is devoted to providing apologetic support for the traditional understanding of the earlier chapters of Genesis.

In Six Days is a compilation of the views of 50 individuals, all holding the PhD degree. The editor of this volume states that the writers are explaining why they believe creation took place in

to *In Six Days* have adopted some version of Wise's position—an approach that has the advantage of at least being intellectually honest. All but two of the nine authors in this volume who are associated with Adventist institutions—of which four are or were on the scientific staff of the Geoscience Research Institute at Loma Linda University—present a conventional apologetic line of argumentation in their sections. GRI biologists Timothy Standish and Ariel Roth repeat many of the standard objections to evolution voiced by other fundamentalist apologists over the past 50 years. However, Elaine Kennedy is at least honest when she states that as a geologist she does not find much evidence for a recent fiat creation. She emphasizes that it is from her “platform of faith” that she looks at the geological data. She admits that “those of us who believe in a short chronology and a six-day creation do not have an adequate explanation for radiometric dates,” but that she considers “God’s revelation more valid than human reason, because I experience his recreative power in my life daily.”

I find it encouraging for the future maturity of Adventist views on creationism that among all the authors in both books, the most reasoned statement comes from GRI nuclear physicist Ben Clausen. For someone working for a young-earth creationist institution, Clausen is refreshingly candid and direct. He states unambiguously that he does not find the evidence for a recent creation compelling; rather he finds that “more of the scientific data is currently explained by a long-age than a short-age model”; and he states that “no comprehensive, short-age model is even available to rival the long-age model.” He clearly understands that “any biblical short-age model would be expected to include some supernatural activity, immediately making it unacceptable as a scientific model at all.” Finally, he states that his own primary reason for accepting the biblical account is “the part it plays in the Bible’s characterization of the Creator.” As a previous reviewer of this book, Dr. Colin Groves stated that Clausen’s views “read like a

breath of fresh air.” Incidentally, Groves’s excellent review of *In Six Days* at <http://home.austarnet.com> provides a detailed summary of the entire volume.

In the second volume, *Let the Earth Speak*, the editor states that “the book is not primarily about science. Rather it is an interaction between God’s two book, the Bible (his words) and the world (his works),” and is primarily addressed to “teenage young people.” Of the ten short chapters, six were written by current or former members of the GRI

“Wise’s way of reconciling what he sees as a conflict is to state: “[I am] a young-age creationist because that is my understanding of the Scripture . . . if all the evidence in the universe turned against [young-earth] creationism, . . . I would still be a [young-earth] creationist because that is

scientific staff. Unfortunately, Dr. Clausen was not one of these; for he could have provided some needed relief from the apologetic tone that pervades many chapters in this book in the authors’ attempt to support the reality of a recent worldwide flood. Two chapters were written by the editor, who holds a PhD degree in chemistry and views himself currently as a “freelance researcher/writer.” The last chapter was written by an Adventist theologian.

To obtain some flavor of the level of argumentation advanced in *Let the Earth Speak*, consider the following extracts. The first chapter suggests that the renewed focus on the study of the relationship between science and religion as exemplified in the studies being supported by the C. S. Lewis and John Templeton foundations means that “scholars are finding that the harmonizing of science with the revelations of Scripture gives a more meaningful estimation of the origin of the universe.” This is a gross oversimplification and even misrepresentation of the efforts of these foundations. Chapter 2 was written by the former director of the GRI, Ariel Roth; and his concluding statement that the “geologic column gives credibility to the Genesis account of beginnings” can be entertained only if 95 percent of the data concerning the geologic column is ignored. The third chapter presents the idea that plate tectonics moved the continents from their original location at the time of a recent (<10,000 year) creation to their present location at the time of a postulated worldwide Genesis Flood a few thousand years later. It is admitted that there is a “problem” in the tremendous heat that would be generated if this occurred rapidly. What is the answer to this “problem”? It is that “God could surely move the continents about Earth’s surface with very little trouble.”

There are a few exceptions to the generally simplistic, apologetic tone of most of this book. For example, recently retired GRI chemist Clyde Webster candidly but cryptically notes that “if there is an Achilles heel to the Scriptural interpretation of the geologic column, it has to be the progressive radiometric ages found within the column. Right up front, I must say that I am not aware of a direct linear relationship between the radiometric time sequences for life found within the geologic column, and the Scriptural account of Creation and destruction [in the Flood].”

The crowning example of not only the tone but also the overall agenda of *Let the Earth Speak* is contained in the final chapter. It carries the intriguing title, “The Rainbow Connection: Fossils, The

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doctrines are teachings, and anything taught is a doctrine. But the word is most familiar in a religious context, referring to the teachings of a religious leader or community.

Not all doctrines are of the same kind. They differ from one another in what they refer to, in whether or not they can be empirically verified, in their status, and in many other ways. Since awareness of these differences may help us construct or examine doctrines, this pa-

That may be an exaggeration. The Shema (Deut 6:4 ff) appears to deal with a fundamental metaphysical belief: God is one. But it is possible to argue that it has immediate halakic implications in worship. Another place, however, in which Judaism has made haggadic correctness a condition of salvation is in Mishnah Sanhedrin 10:1: "These are they that have no share in the World to Come: he that says there is no resurrection of the dead prescribed in the Law, and that says that the Law is not from Heaven,

other such issues are concerned with past or present realities on earth, and as such they are at least in principle verifiable or falsifiable empirically. The evidence, in so far as it is still extant, is earthly and potentially accessible. If the evidence is no longer extant, it once was; and there remains the possibility that it may yet be recovered. Such doctrines can be subjected to historical or other scientific study.

On the other hand, the doctrine of the Trinity, the deity of Christ, and most

eschatological doctrines related to future events are not subject to any sort of empirical

An essay on the **TAXONOMY** of Doctrines

ROBERT M. JOHNSTON

per presents a preliminary taxonomy of the doctrines of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. I will refer also to other religious communities for illustration and comparison.

Every set of doctrines can be classified in several ways—some binary, others with multiple categories. I have suggested nine such ways.

1. Halakah/Haggadah. This binary classification is one of the oldest, and it is the primary classification used in Judaism. Halakah is law-torah, while haggadah is story-torah. Halakah refers to the legal material in Scripture and tradition; and haggadah is everything else, all nonlegal material. Corresponding to these categories are two pairs of English words that similarly alliterate: behavior and belief, and law and lore.

In Judaism, halakah is considered far more important than haggadah. Orthopraxy (right practice) rates above orthodoxy (right beliefs) in the sense of correct opinion. Persons can be good Jews and believe almost anything, provided they live according to the Torah. S/he may think as they like about the World to Come, for example, but they must obey the Commandments. In the words of Moses Mendelssohn (a totally observant Jew, but philosophically a Deist of the Enlightenment), "Judaism has no dogmas, only commandments."

and an Epicurean."

It remains true, however, that the main emphasis in Judaism is upon halakah. The contrast with Christianity was dramatically visible in the fourth century C.E. While the Christian bishops were arguing about one iota in the creed—should it be homoousios or homoiouosios?—the rabbis were arguing about whether an egg laid on the Sabbath might be eaten. A modern rabbi has remarked a bit acidly that "Christianity is the religion of creeds, and Judaism is the religion of deeds."

In Adventism there have been plenty of disputes about something like the haggadah—the human nature of Christ, the investigative judgment, the identity of the king of the north, for example; but the average Adventist is more concerned about halakah—diet, entertainment, proper Sabbathkeeping, and the like. Among the twenty-seven fundamental beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists (hereafter referred to simply as "the 27"), the following doctrines are examples of those that are primarily haggadic: 2, 3, 5, 6, 8, etc. These are primarily halakic: 14, 15, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22.

2. Metaphysical/Terrestrial (or Vertical/Horizontal). The age of the Earth, the historicity of the Flood, the date of the Exodus, the evolution-creation debate, the healthfulness of vegetarianism, and

observation or proof because they are heavenly realities existing where human observers cannot go (cf. John 1:18 3:13).

Biblical religion has an inescapable historical dimension. The framework of the Scriptures is basically a narrative of events on earth; and they are replete with recitals of salvation history, such as Psalm 78. The Apostles' Creed includes such historical references as "born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried." To be sure, these events had metaphysical implications, but the events themselves were accessible to human ocular vision and made the subject of potentially verifiable or falsifiable historical record.

Adventist doctrine, because of interest in chronology and in healthful living, has a higher terrestrial content than that of most Christian denominations, which tend to emphasize metaphysical beliefs that are out of the reach of cold-eyed science. Much Adventist theology has an interest in science because it is not immune from science.

3. Salvific/Adiaphoric. If belief or obedience on some point is essential for salvation, we may call it a salvific doctrine. Any doctrine that does not pass through that screen belongs in the category of adiaphora (meaning "indifferent"). Among halakic matters, we can distinguish between command-

ments and counsels.

Paul in Romans 14 relegated certain practices to *adiaphora*. The medieval church taught “the counsels of perfection,” such as celibacy and the vow of poverty, which were not required for salvation but were marks of piety or works of supererogation (“beyond the call of duty”). Classical Protestantism rested its case on justification by faith alone in Christ as one’s personal Savior.

Early Adventism tended to multiply “testing truths.” Adventist popular piety of the older sort still tends toward a perfectionism that denies heaven to those who are insufficiently scrupulous—though the younger generation has reacted sharply against that, calling it legalism. Nowadays the question of “What must I do to be saved?”—if addressed at all—receives a vaguer answer. But if the question, “Is belief in this, or obedience to that, necessary for salvation?” were addressed to every doctrine, it would probably result in a much shorter list.

Such minimalism may be excessive. Is correct understanding of the state of the dead necessary for salvation? We would probably say not, but a wrong understanding makes one vulnerable to delusions that would have salvific implications.

4. Christian/Protestant/Adventist. Many of the 27 are doctrines that Adventists share with all or most Christians, others with all or most Protestants. Such generic doctrines are the first five fundamental beliefs, for example. The five “Landmark” doctrines, on the other hand, are distinctively Adventist—but perhaps not completely. For example, we share the Sabbath doctrine with the Seventh Day Baptists, from whom Adventists received it, as well as with some smaller Sabbatarian bodies. We share our doctrine of the state of the dead with the Advent Christians and other Millerite remnants, as well as with the Jehovah’s Witnesses and numerous Protestant biblical scholars (e.g., H. Wheeler Robinson, Oscar Cullmann, and Clark Pinnock).

It is sometimes said in behalf of Adventist doctrines related to the year 1844 that they must be true because

they are our only truly distinctive doctrines, the only ones completely unique to us; and that therefore without them we lose our reason for existence. Without passing judgment on these doctrines themselves, one must say that such an argument would appear to be a peculiar criterion of truth. If such reasoning be persuasive, we would do well to add more unique beliefs. If to the 27 we added the proposition that the moon is made of green cheese, it would indisputably enhance our uniqueness, if not our credibility.

5. Biblical/Traditional/Ecclesiastical.¹ Many Adventists still retain some attachment to the slogan, “No creed but the Bible,”² and all of the 27 have supporting proof texts of varying appropriateness. But for the average Adventist it is probably true that most of our doctrines would now remain standing even if all the biblical supports were removed. This would be the case either because of the power of tradition or because of the authority of Ellen White or both.³

Other doctrines have authority simply because the church has voted them. If they remain in place unchanged for a sufficient length of time, they will become unchangeable. There is not an absolute distinction between doctrine and policy. A policy is a doctrine that the church is willing to change, and a doctrine is a policy that the church is unwilling to change. Time-honored policies become doctrines. An interesting example is the list of the 27 itself.

6. Creed/Confession/Theologoumena. For our purposes let us say that a creed is what believers must agree to in order to be members of the church. It is usually relatively short. A confession is what the ministers of the church must teach. Its content includes much more than the creed. Theologoumena are the frontiers of theological thought, matters that are

still debated and undefined by the church. One can think of these categories as three concentric circles, with the creed being the small common core, the confession covering a larger area, and the theologoumena moving out beyond that. If you deny the creed, you lose your membership. If you deny the confession, you lose your credentials. If you deny some point of theologoumena, you lose only friends.

The tendency is for each circle to grow larger by absorbing doctrines from the larger circle outside it. Theologoumena move into confession when an authoritative body of the church, such as a general church council, adjudicating between opposing views, makes a decision that declares one view to be orthodox and the other view heresy.

What corresponds to a creed in Adventism is the baptismal vow⁴ consisting of thirteen questions that the candidate for baptism is to answer in the affirmative. (The Apostles’ Creed be-

“Adventist doctrine, because of interest in chronology and in healthful living, has a higher terrestrial content than that of most Christian denominations, which tend to emphasize metaphysical beliefs that are out of the reach of cold-eyed science.”

gan in the second century as a similar list of questions.) The 27 are the Adventist confession. Still in the realm of theologoumena are issues such as the nature of Christ’s humanity and some questions of prophetic interpretation. Apparently the doctrine of the Atonement—its howness, not its thatness—also remains in this area.

Curiously, the short baptismal vow sometimes goes beyond the more de-

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tailed 27 Fundamental Beliefs. For example, the last question in the Vow asks: "Do you accept and believe that the Seventh-day Adventist Church is the remnant church of Bible prophecy...?" Fundamental Belief No. 12 mentions the Remnant without ever making a denominational identification.

The natural tendency officially to define doctrines more and more closely ought probably to be resisted. When the circles become too large, fission occurs—schism. When the rope is drawn too tightly, people cut the rope. Every time a doctrinal point is added to the required list, it is like adding a new station to a railroad—it is one more place for people to get off the train. Minimalism is cowardly, but maximalism is tyrannical. If anything, however, Adventism suffers from doctrinal inflation.

7. Classification by Loci of Systematic Theology. Traditional theological science groups the doctrines under such rubrics as Christology, Pneumatology (study of spiritual beings or phenomena), Soteriology (dealing with salvation), Ecclesiology, and Eschatology. Adventist doctrine is particularly rich in Eschatology.

Eschatology involves a special blend of metaphysical and terrestrial. Much of our eschatological teaching has to do with signs of the end, as well as with the end itself. That which is still in the future is beyond human vision and verification, but we like to extrapolate it from current trends. Some of our traditional eschatology has to do with past events—things that happened in 1755, 1780, 1798, and 1833. Such doctrines tend to lose their persuasiveness with the passing of time. Though we distinguish between the End and the Time of the End, when the Time of the End extends to more than two centuries, the quality of urgency is inevitably diminished. In the early nineteenth century, the astronomical phenomena of 1780 and 1833 ("dark day" and "falling of the stars") were impressive not only because they were recent, but because they were wonders. At the beginning of the 21st century

they are less impressive, not only because they are old but also because their causes are well understood.⁵

To some degree, then, eschatology is subject to the scrutiny of history and science.

8. Official/Unofficial. Technically, only the 27 should have standing as a test of orthodoxy in the Adventist church, but teachings and opinions not on that list have at times been used as tests, at least

“An embarrassing doctrine need not be violently killed, however. It can die gently of itself through benign neglect, or it can fade away incrementally by successive redefinitions, reformulations, qualifications, and general whittling down.”

for church workers: the Mark of the beast, Ussher's chronology, the United States in prophecy, the authorship of Hebrews, and others. If a worker were to depart from the common understanding of any of these things, would it be an adequate defense to argue that they are not mentioned in the 27?

9. Living and Dead. Just as there are dead languages and extinct animals, there are dead doctrines. Doctrines die or are killed when the cognitive dissonance that they produce becomes too great to be borne sanely, or when they no longer have any usefulness for spiritual health or as a desirable boundary marker.

Doctrines can be killed by official ecclesiastical decision, which is often traumatic and may meet with resistance. In Mormonism, an example was the manifesto of President Wilfred Woodruff

forbidding the practice (but apparently not the theology) of polygamy; but there is still significant noncompliance by dissident groups. A more recent Mormon example was the admission of black men to the priesthood (which is normally an offer to all postpubescent Mormon males), in spite of the fact that the church had earlier supported exclusion by both (pseudo-)historical and metaphysical rationales.⁶ But apparently the revisionist declaration by church president Spencer Kimball and the First Presidency, based on a new "revelation," has not met significant resistance, probably because the old doctrine had become an embarrassment, and because of the increased authority of the First Presidency and a doctrine of "continuing revelation."

An embarrassing doctrine need not be violently killed, however. It can die gently of itself through benign neglect, or it can fade away incrementally by successive redefinitions, reformulations, qualifications, and general whittling down. On the other hand, redefinition, reformulation, and qualification can serve to keep a doctrine alive by preserving or restoring a relevance or acceptability that had been lost, or by relieving cognitive dissonance. In Mormonism the pattern for the Temple Underwear (which good Mormons wear at all times) had been divinely revealed, or so it was claimed; but when fashions changed, and sleeves and skirts and pants became shorter, the First Presidency conveniently received another revelation permitting an underwear pattern with short legs and sleeves.⁷

Examples of doctrines in Adventism that are dead or dying are the old teaching of the Shut Door, the keeping of Sabbath from six to six, the identification of the king of the north with Turkey, and the old (pre-tithing) system of systematic benevolence. Examples of doctrines that have been revived by redefinition, reformulation, or reconceptualization are the understandings of the Third Angel's Message⁸ and of the Investigative Judgment. Such reformulations are customarily defended as deeper understandings that are really in continuity

with the old understanding.

NOTES

¹The adjective “biblical” is often used by Adventists and Evangelicals generally in the way the early Christian Church used the word “apostolic.” It means simply what we vaguely believe to be correct and pious, as in such phrases as “biblical marriage,” “biblical entertainment,” or “biblical roller-skating.” It is vague because it is unclear whether something has to be prescribed (commanded or recommended) in Scripture, described in Scripture, or merely not forbidden in Scripture, in order to merit the designation of “biblical.” The ordination of women is neither prescribed nor forbidden in the Bible; it is simply not dealt with at all. The same is true of Sabbath School and church school. Are these things biblical?

²This is the language of our nineteenth century pioneers—which they shared with Baptists, Campbellites, and other anticredal Protestants. But the Bible is, in fact, not a creed; and a better expression is the classical Reformation slogan, *sola Scriptura*.

³As an example of the authoritative-ness divorced from scriptural support, one union administrator has remarked with great conviction that the Seventh-day Adventist system of church governance is of heavenly origin and must remain inviolable.

⁴*Church Manual* of 1990, pp. 44, 45.

⁵The dark day of May 19, 1780 was caused by a massive forest fire in Canada and the northwest, then virtually uninhabited and almost unknown; the phenomenon was limited to the eastern region of North America. The falling stars of November 13, 1833, resulted from the passage of the earth through the Leonids, a periodic occurrence. Adventist literature has, at least for the past half century, left the door open for a natural explanation of these signs, emphasizing rather the significance of their timing: “These signs occurred exactly as predicted, and at the time indicated so long before their occurrence. It is this fact, and not the cause of the darkness, that is significant in this connection, . . . In like manner, even though it were possible for science to ac-

count for the remarkable darkness of May 19, 1780, instead of merely speculating concerning it, the event would not be discredited thereby as a merciful sign of the approaching end of probationary time” (*Bible Readings for the Home: A Study of 200 Vital Scripture Topics in Question-and-Answer Form Contributed by a Large Number of Bible Scholars*, rev. ed. [Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1949], 311). The predicted time to which this source refers was after the Great Tribulation of Matthew 24:21. “Within the 1260 years, but after the persecution (about the middle of the 18th century), the signs of His coming began to appear” (*ibid.*, 310). The timing could thus be any time between about 1750 and 1844, a period of nearly a century. Expressions such as “exactly as predicted, and at the time indicated” seem somewhat extravagant as a description of such a span of time.

⁶*The Book of Mormon* clearly teaches that black skin is the result of God’s curse (2 Nephi 5:21; Alma 3:6). Mormonism before 1978 taught that Cain was cursed with dark skin; and he became “the father of the Negroes,” for Ham married one of Cain’s descendants, named Egypta—thus transmitting and perpetuating the curse in the postdiluvian world. The metaphysical explanation ran as follows. In order to progress toward godhood, spirits must pass through a stage of being born on earth and receiving bodies. There was war in heaven, and a third of the spirits rebelled against the heavenly Father, a third was loyal to Him, and another third attempted to remain neutral. The loyal ones are born into white bodies. The rebel spirits are denied the privilege of getting bodies, but they sometimes attempt to circumvent that handicap by seeking to possess the bodies that belong to the good spirits, hence spirit possession. The spirits who attempted neutrality are allowed to receive bodies, but only black bodies, the sign of the curse that is upon them. Fulsome

documentation is provided by Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *Major Problems of Mormonism* (Salt Lake City, UT: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1987), 39-49.

⁷For details, see Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *Mormonism—Shadow or Reality?*, 5th ed. (Salt Lake City, UT: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1987), 459-61a, 463-66.

⁸The classic Adventist understanding of the third angel’s message of Revelation 14 ended the message at verse 11 and emphasized the warning about the mark of the beast. Later Adventism, taking its cue from a dictum of Ellen G. White in 1890, ends the message with verse 12 and understands “the faith of Jesus” to contain an objective genitive; whereas earlier Adventism understood it as a subjective genitive. Ellen White wrote: “Several have written to me, inquiring if the message of justification by faith is the third angel’s message, and I have answered, ‘It is the third angel’s message in verity.’” *The Review and Herald*, April 1, 1890, excerpted in *Evangelism as Set Forth in the Writings of Ellen G. White*

“The ordination of women is neither prescribed nor forbidden in the Bible; it is simply not dealt with at all. The same is true of Sabbath School and church school. Are these things biblical?”

(Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1946 and 1974), 190; *Selected Messages from the Writings of Ellen G. White*, Book 1 (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1958), 372. ■

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In 200 A.D., an early church father named Tertullian taught that wearing colored clothes was an expression of sinful vanity. Yet the Apostle Paul organized a church in the home of Lydia, a seller of purple cloth. So is wearing purple right or wrong?

I've spent almost 50 years listening to Adventists argue about

rearing of children. These rules were maintained into the mid 1800s.

Quaker writers of the 1900s lament the impoverishment of spirit caused by this puritanicalism. Children with artistic gifts were shut away from their talent; people of all ages were disfellowshipped for silly trifles.

But this criticism must be tempered by one vital fact:

PLAIN and Fancy CHRISTIANS

JOHN MCLARTY

"church standards." And I've long thought we could learn something from other Christians who have wrestled with similar questions. In the fall of 1996, a grant from the Louisville Institute¹ gave me time to begin exploring the history of church standards. In my study I focused on three communities: The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), the Brethren Church, and the Amish. In addition, I read a number of the ante-Nicene fathers (Christian writers from before the Council of Nicea in 325 A.D.). This article is an abbreviated version of my report to the institute.

The Quakers

Quakers in pre-Revolution America won large reputations for competence and fairness in colonial government. But after the Revolution, they were excluded from government even in Pennsylvania. Since they could no longer devote their energies to the regulation and reformation of society at large, they focused their energy on becoming the Holy Community. They became obsessed with the minutiae of a narrow, personal goodness. Rules multiplied and were vigorously enforced: no music, no drawing or painting, a strict dress code. There were community norms regarding the treatment of servants, the decoration (or nondecoration) of one's house, and the

On the greatest moral issue of their day, Quakers alone, of all the nationally distributed churches, came down on the right side. They emancipated their slaves.

If the Friends had been a less structured community without all those petty rules, would they have been able to eliminate slavery from their community?

The Brethren Church

Modern Brethren writers, like Quakers, lament the legalism of their earlier period when the church had rules about bonnets, birthday parties, and jewelry. (Neckties were prohibited as needless adornment. Amen!)

The Brethren Church began relaxing its rules in the first decades of the 1900s. The modern Brethren Church rejects all lifestyle rules, and gladly so. But along with the elimination of petty rules has also come the loss of any effective peace testimony.

At the time of the Civil War, Brethren members who served in the army were disfellowshipped.² During WWII most Brethren young men served in the armed forces. By the 1970s, a member who opted for alternative service instead of the military was likely to be scorned in his local congregation.

My question regarding the Brethren Church is: What is the connection be-

tween discarding church standards of dress and entertainment and the de facto annulment of the church standard regarding pacifism? Is it mere coincidence that all the historic peace churches (Brethren, Mennonites, Quakers) are also churches that in their formative period, and for long afterwards, maintained corporate rules regarding dress and entertainment?

The Amish

In light of the debates among Adventists, the most fascinating factoid that I encountered in reading about the Amish was the negative correlation between relaxing the rules and retention of the children of members.

Among the most liberal groups, about 50 percent of the young people stay within the tradition of their parents. Among the most conservative groups of the Amish, 95 percent of the young people stay within their parents' tradition.

I hear many Adventist voices arguing that to retain our youth, we should get rid of our petty rules. The Amish experience suggests otherwise. On the other hand, the Amish care nothing for evangelism and appear to know very little of personal spiritual life.

Ante-Nicene Fathers

Reading Tertullian (c. A.D. 200), I was struck by several things in his writing:

1. I had heard all his arguments when I was a teenager, or at least most of them. He was as vehement as the most fanatical Adventist I had ever encountered. Certainly in the area of church rules regarding dress and entertainment, the debates are as old as Christian history.
2. He used some goofy arguments, like, if God had meant for us to wear purple clothes, he would have made purple sheep.
3. While many would disagree with his conclusions, the ideals and values from which he started were thoroughly biblical and Christian—values like modesty, self-denial, and service.

TOWARD A CONCLUSION:

Plain and Fancy

When I look at the witness of Quakers, Brethren, Mennonites (and yes,

Adventists) I think it irresponsible to casually dismiss their early commitment to communal standards of dress and recreation/entertainment as mere legalism or juvenile zeal. It may, indeed, have been adolescent zeal; but the intensity of that zeal spurred these groups to heroic Christian service. These groups not only preached noncombatancy; but also practiced it, giving birth to generations of young men who refused to kill in the name of patriotism. Each of these groups opposed slavery. Each, early on, became involved in education. All distinguished themselves in foreign missions, with the Quakers and Adventists pursuing a wholistic form of mission that

“The Plain churches appear to produce a disproportionate number of people committed to altruistic service in medicine, education, and traditional evangelistic ministry (especially foreign mission service). Community standards that require the rejection of conspicuous consumption provide tangible support for the ideal of service.”

emphasized medical care and education as well as preaching.

The Plain churches appear to produce a disproportionate number of people committed to altruistic service in medicine, education, and traditional evangelistic ministry (especially foreign mission service). Community standards that require the rejection of conspicuous consumption provide tangible support for the ideal of service. The “Mother Teresas” of the world are best prepared for their service by the disciplines of self-denial. Jewelry, movies, luxurious cars and homes—these are distractions for the heroic Christian soldier.

On the other hand, a church that over-

emphasizes the Plain lifestyle (i.e., teaching that this is the only way to be a “real” Christian) will make itself inhospitable for its own children who are called to other forms of ministry—such as government, the arts or design.

Even within the church, it is usually Fancy People who excel in social functions and hospitality. I used to call them worldly; now I call them Fancy. Often the members who do the best job as wedding coordinators, interior decorators, or church social organizers are people who are relatively more concerned with creature comforts and physical appearance. Because these Fancy Christians are accustomed to providing nice things for

themselves, they can easily imagine how to minister to the creature needs of others. They know how to pamper others and take pleasure in doing so. Their ministry makes the church welcoming.

None of the Plain churches have advanced art, literature, or urban planning. With the exception of the major reforms sparked by the early Quakers, none of these churches has been effective in shaping the landscape and culture of cities (which is where most people live). If Chris-

tians get involved in designing parks, building political coalitions and supporting the symphony, it is usually Fancy Christians who do it.

Historically, the spiritual culture of the Plain churches has prepared their members for certain kinds of ministries but not for others. The same is true for Fancy churches; they offer little support for the habits essential to certain kinds of ministry.

A Model: The Church as a Bridge

The church is a bridge between the Kingdom of God and the world. The people of the church are the pillars that support the roadway.

The church needs people planted near

the “God-end” of the bridge. These folks are so in tune with other-worldly realities that earthly concerns mean very little; self-denying service is second nature to them.

The church also needs people planted very close to the world. People who are so earthly minded that they instinctively understand the uses and value of beauty, elegance, style, and hospitality.

The Plain Folks keep the church from forgetting it is an embassy of heaven and not merely an earthly, social organization. The Fancy Folks keep the church from forgetting that it exists for the world, not merely for God and the saints.

The normal historical pattern is that once the church honors Fancy Living, the habits of self-denial simply atrophy into nonexistence. On the other hand, if a church rejects assimilation and Fancy Living, it usually fossilizes a particular application of Christian thinking and becomes spiritually dead and culturally irrelevant (e.g., the Amish).

The challenge facing the church today is how to foster the strenuous habits of self-denial that support mission activity while honoring the gentle habits of person-care that are indispensable for healthy community life.

The conflict ultimately is not between Plain and Fancy habits, both of which can be avenues of service or tools of unrighteousness. The important struggle is the contest between a dominant concern with my “holiness” or my pleasure on the one hand, and on the other hand a wholehearted commitment to Christ and his call to serve the world he loves. ■

NOTES

¹The Louisville Institute awards a number of research grants each year to religious professionals (e.g., pastors) who are not involved in academia. Requests for information can be sent to James Lewis, Director, The Louisville Institute, 1044 Alta Vista Road, Louisville, KY 40205-1798. E-mail: jwlewi01@ulkyvm.louisville.edu. Phone: 502-895-3411 x.487.

²The Brethren Church did not have any significant membership in the South, so slavery was not a divisive issue for them.

after the Barna Research Group in 1997 surveyed 601 Protestant clergy, the researchers reported that 38 percent cited burnout as the greatest danger to them and their families, 80 percent cited isolation, and 37 percent cited marital infidelity.

While adultery might be committed

White's writings about a defrocked pastor not returning to his vocation? Does God forgive and restore us when we commit adultery? Does the church really understand the meaning of forgiveness? Does the church have a ministry of reconciliation for the people in which it has invested thousands of dollars year after year? Can

mirror they see a forgiven adulterer. Like the psalmist David, they will agonize that "my sin is ever before me" (Ps 51:3). It appears that the hardest thing they face is the ability to forgive themselves.

The Christian community is generally very intolerant of ministers who are involved in sexual sins. Women are

particularly intolerant, because it seems to send a negative message to their husbands. The church is distraught because the pastor was their leader and role model.

If a marriage manages to survive this crisis, it will never be the same again. The sin of adultery is not only against the man's

A SECOND CHANCE: Can fallen pastors be restored?

ERROL A. LAWRENCE

in private, it is a public sin. Every Christian is responsible to be pure and holy, but the onus on the minister is especially demanding. When a minister falls, his/her family, church congregation, and colleagues are all affected. The church does not take adultery lightly, and rightly so.

Congregations may forget that ministers of the gospel are in many respects like everybody else; so when a minister resigns because of burnout or is fired because of a moral fall, members become shocked beyond forgiveness. He or she may be shunned by fellow ministers.

One of the most gut-wrenching experiences I have had recently was listening to a fellow pastor express regret that he had "messed up" and had to leave the ministry. I have known three other pastors who have been defrocked because of infidelity. In the past week I agonized with a pastor who had been out of ministry for more than a decade and had not been permitted to return to the pastorate, even though his case was not one of infidelity. None of these men had had any sustained period of counseling; nor did they have hope of being restored to ministry.

These former colleagues ask me many questions: Are there solid biblical reasons or statements in Ellen

God use a repentant, restored sinner to win souls? Is "restoration" a dirty word to some church leaders? What help is being given to local congregations or denominations whose pastors experience a moral fall? Does the church have a theology of restoration?

We may not have firm answers to these questions; but I am hoping we will at least think about some solutions, because the problem seems to be on the increase.

There are several books that deal with clergy abuse, the perils of pornography, and clergy misconduct and compulsive sexual behavior; but there is very little on how to restore fallen clergy. Thomas L. Pedigo, a recovering clergy, has started the Winning Edge Ministries in Colorado Springs, Colo. I have found his writings to be very helpful.

When ministers fall into the sin of adultery or sexual indiscretion and it becomes common knowledge, they may be subjected to excruciating pain. In one moment of despair they recognize that their ministry is gone. Their spouse and their children will never be the same. Their church family is now estranged. Their circle of friends disappears. They might ask God for forgiveness and accept that forgiveness, but every time they look in the

body but also against his wife's (1 Cor 6:18, 7:4). Many women declare to their husbands that one thing they will never forgive is adultery. However, some godly wives manage to forgive their repentant husbands. In the book *Adultery and Grace*, C. Welton Gaddy says: "Adultery invariably results in conflict, hurt, and guilt. Understanding, acceptance, and assistance beneficially address the first two of these consequences. Only forgiveness can eradicate guilt and thus lay the foundation for honest relationships and a healthy future. Forgiveness means 'letting what was, be gone; what will be, come; what is now, be'" (p. 194).

This forgiveness is instant in God's dealings with humans but often prolonged or stretched out ad infinitum in the case of the believers and the church. Such forgiveness must begin with our placing value on the people being forgiven. God places inestimable value on people. That is why Jesus died for us "while we were still sinning" (Rom 5:8).

Forgiveness in no way minimizes someone's sin, Gaddy says. Adultery must be treated as the serious wrong that it is, an unchangeable fact. However, forgiveness will happen only if the people involved in the process come to grips with the reality of it all and move

on, not minimizing it but moving beyond it. By moving on, they refuse to let it dominate the present and control the future (p. 195).

GOD'S HALL OF FAME

In God's hall of fame, Hebrews 11, there are restored people like Moses the murderer, Jacob the liar and cheat, Rahab the prostitute, David the cold-blooded murderer and hot-blooded adulterer, and Samson the hotheaded philanderer. God gave them all a second chance. Look what a difference they made! However, according to the General Conference Working Policy:

"It is recognized that a minister who has experienced a moral fall or has apostatized has access to the mercy and pardoning grace of God and may desire to return to the church. Such an individual must be assured of the love and goodwill of his fellow believers. However, for the sake of the good name of the church and the maintaining of moral standards, he/she may plan to devote his/her life to employment other than that of the gospel ministry, the teaching ministry, or denominational leadership" (p. 379).

It would appear that while God was willing to risk his own name by allowing repentant sinners to work for him, the church is more concerned to protect its "good name." If God gives men and women a second chance, why can't the church? There is no doubt that the moral fall of ministers does damage the church. However, the church can take steps to manage the damage. Once it is evident beyond any reasonable doubt that the minister is guilty, he should be asked to resign. It would be better to spare the church from hearing an emotional public confession, but it might be appropriately done before the church board or the board of elders. The pastor could write out his confession and that could be read to the church. The minister's confession should include an acknowledgment of moral guilt so that no member of the congregation will be in any doubt about the truth of the matter.

A financial settlement may be necessary for the minister to be able to take care of his/her family and their immediate needs.

In his book *If Ministers Fall Can They Be Restored?* Tim LaHaye suggests that after authorities make sure of the facts about the impropriety, ask for the minister's resignation, and make financial settlements, there are other things to be done in trying to bring about restoration. The minister should be asked to leave town. An interim minister should be hired. The church should establish guidelines for leadership in the local congregation so that power-hungry people in the congregation will not move in to fill any leadership vacuum. Above all, a restoration committee should be established, unless the denomination has a procedure for dealing with a fallen pastor (pp. 97, 98).

The restoration committee should be made up of spiritually minded people who have the interest of the pastor and the church at heart and who have the confidence of the church or the organization. According to LaHaye: "The goal of this committee should be to help rebuild the pastor's life—his spiritual life, his marriage, his family, his relationship with the church body, and his ministry. The end result of this process may be the pastor's restoration to public ministry. But restoration to ministry is by no means the place to start. The first step is helping the pastor rebuild his spiritual life" (p. 98).

If the pastor chose to leave town after the initial stages of discipline, the restoration committee should locate and visit him/her and family. If the pastor returns to town, s/he should be encouraged to attend another church but at the same time maintain an accountability relationship with the

restoration committee. Some leaders feel it is not advisable for the family to leave town, since that might be too traumatic for the spouse who would have to leave children and/or grandchildren behind.

THE BIBLE AND RESTORATION

There is no specific biblical mandate for or against restoring a fallen minister to public ministry. Some people feel that since God did not allow David to build the temple because he had shed much blood (1 Chron 22:8), no person guilty of a moral sin should be allowed to continue his/her duties. There are others who see no reason why there should be any prohibitions, since Scripture is not specific. While another group believes that every "fall" is serious, each one needs individual

“It would appear that while God was willing to risk his own name by allowing repentant sinners to work for him, the church is more concerned to protect its “good name.” If God gives men and women a second chance, why can’t the church?”

consideration to determine whether the minister should be restored to a similar ministry. This means that several factors should be considered: the duration of the affair, the frequency of the sin, whether the pastor repented before being found out, and the number of people involved in the transgression.

The pastor should be encouraged to seek help. The first step of the restoration committee is to help the pastor rebuild his/her spiritual life. The Bible says: "Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently." (Gal 6:1). If, according

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to Romans 11:29, God's gifts and his call are irrevocable, does moral fall always permanently disqualify a minister?

The former prostitute Mary Magdalene was given the unique opportunity of anointing Jesus before his crucifixion. When Simon and Judas sought to condemn Jesus because he allowed this woman of ill repute to use such an expensive perfume, and that such a woman should be so intimate with him, Jesus said, "She loves much because she has been forgiven much." Could there be a lesson in that statement for the church and for those who experience restoration? Does the story of the prodigal son in Luke 15:11-32 say something to the church about restoration and grace?

RESTORATION AND GRACE

Restoration and grace are inseparable Siamese twins. The church cannot talk about grace without considering restoration. The goal of grace is restoration. Restoration can take several forms. There is restoration of the one who has fallen but come back to a spiritual connection with God. There is restoration to his/her spouse and family and to the church, colleagues, the congregation, and the community. There is also restoration to a former position. Churches have a bad track record when it comes to forgiveness and restoration. Leaders talk about forgiveness, but they abstain from—sometimes even fight against or oppose—efforts at restoration. It is not uncommon to hear leaders say: "We love him and we forgive him, but we cannot have a person with such a sin on his record working for us. What would the world think of us?" Indeed, what if we do not do what God requires of us? James 4:17 says: "Anyone who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins."

Secular employers often feel the same way as church employers and paint the worst-case scenario when giving a reference for a former employee who has had

an adulterous affair. Grace requires that the truth be spoken, but it also begs for mercy. Grace should encourage the adulterers to remain in therapy as long as required, in order to get their emotions better balanced and their lives moving in the right direction. In cases

“Forgiveness in no way minimizes someone’s sin, Gaddy says. Adultery must be treated as the serious wrong that it is, an unchangeable fact. However, forgiveness will happen only if the people involved in the process come to grips with the reality of it all.”

where the persons have lost their jobs, it would only be grace in action if the restoration process includes helping them to find employment. There should be no limit to grace.

RESTORATION PROGRAM NEEDED

In my search for a program of restoration of clergy, I have found very little in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. I have received some information about a program that is being put together in the Southern California Conference. The Southeastern California Conference is developing a five-year restoration plan. During that period the minister agrees to undergo professional marriage and family counseling and therapy. S/he is also assigned to mentors, who conduct evaluations from time to time. They make reports quarterly and annually. By this means they seek to restore the min-

ister and prepare him/her for future employment.

I have read several books dealing with clergy misconduct and clergy sexual abuse, and there are numerous suggestions from authors about the need for restoration. However, I have been able to find only one restoration manual that outlines steps to be taken to heal wounded clergy, their families, their colleagues, their congregations, and their communities. This is the *Restoration Manual: A Workbook for Restoring Fallen Ministers and Religious Leaders*, by Thomas L. Pedigo, Winning Edge Ministries, Colorado Springs, Colo., 2000.

MODEL RESTORATION PLAN

The mission statement of Winning Edge Ministries declares that it is "dedicated to helping take back what sin and satan has (sic) taken from the church!" Pedigo, himself a pastor in recovery, has outlined 27 "check points" for the restoration team working with fallen clergy. His manual is written from the perspective of a clergyperson who knows that the laity are not prepared to deal with ministerial indiscretion. For each of these checkpoints he has six sections, dealing with the nature and reason for each procedure, the biblical bases, questions to be explored, and helpful quotations from knowledgeable people.

Pedigo's 27 checkpoints are intended to keep the repentant minister and the restoration team focused on significant aspects of the process of recovery. They deal with such things as proper procedures; scriptural guidance; professionalism in conduct; recognition of tendencies for people to deny unpleasant realities; spiritual regeneration; restoration of integrity and credibility; mental, emotional, and volitional qualities; rebuilding of marriage ties; restoration of self-esteem; new patterns for social interaction; restoration of the family unit; vocational assistance; financial needs; decision-making skills; stress and possible medical and legal interventions; and time needed for deep thought before planning to reenter the ministry. Other checkpoints deal with the restoration of the repentant

Supporting young-earth creationism: Religious faith or scientific evidence?

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Geologic Column and Calvary"; and was written by theologian Dr. John Templeton Baldwin, a member of the faculty of the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University. The chapter is a restatement of the position Baldwin expounded in a book he edited entitled *Creation, Catastrophe and Calvary*, published in 2000. The thesis of his article in *Let the Earth Speak* is summarized by the subtitle of his book: "Why a Global Flood Is Vital to the Doctrine of the Atonement."

According to Baldwin, how one interprets the origin of the geologic column—i.e., whether it was deposited over millions of years or very rapidly in a worldwide deluge—"can either support or demolish the gospel." Why is this? A recent, worldwide flood "geologically establishes the needed causal connection between human sin and all

death by burying animals into the geologic column subsequent to Adam's sin, thus confirming the [literal] truth of the biblical claim that all death is the wage of sin." Clearly here scientific conclusions must conform to a theological assumption—exactly the problem that Galileo encountered.

When the editor of *In Six Days* stated that "all fifty of these scientists, through faith and scientific fact, have come to the conclusion that God's Word is true," he misspoke. What he should have said was that all fifty through faith in their interpretation of Genesis, with some scientific "facts" later added, have come to the conclusion that their interpretation of the Bible is true. ■

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Listening for a talking God: Beyond Protestantism

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contemporary moral issues: drug addiction, abortion, slavery, tobacco, obesity, income inequity, pornography, reproductive technology, environmental degradation, immigration policy. If the church is silent on these matters, we will become increasingly irrelevant. The church cannot fulfill its call to make disciples, if it addresses only issues that are "decisive for salvation." We must challenge our members to live as Jesus would. We must challenge the rest of society to live in ways that promote personal and social health.

Given the crying need of the world and our responsibility as the body of Christ, we dare not retreat to the ancient certainties and dogmas of classic Protestantism. God has something more to say. ■

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minister's credibility; and the search for a church that will be loving, forgiving, and nurturing. And an especially strong checkpoint has to do with deliverance from the devil's grasp by developing spiritual strongholds and the honesty required for avoidance of sexual sins. The author gives a checkpoint rating scale to be filled out at regular intervals.

CHURCH GUIDELINES FOR RESTORATION

There are few guidelines for fallen religious leaders within the Adventist church. With regard to counseling and career guidance, the North American Division /General Conference Working Policy simply states: "Where practical, the organization shall provide a professional program for counseling and

career guidance for the minister and family to assist them in transition." (*NAD Working Policy*, 1999-2000, p. 462)

The policy clearly states that while the church forgives a minister who has had a moral fall, "for the sake of the good name of the church and the maintaining of moral standards, he/she must plan to devote his/her life to employment other than that of the gospel ministry, the teaching ministry, or denominational leadership." (*NAD Working Policy* 1999-2000, p. 462). This clearly says that there is no restoration to one's leadership position after a moral fall. Where then is the grace?

The Southeastern California Conference's ministerial restoration program sounds hopeful for salvaging men and women who have potential for the church.

Does restoration mean reemploy-

ment? Is five years too long to wait? Pedigo quotes Gordon McDonald, who states: "The restorative team can ensure that, to the best of their ability, no soldier is ever lost to the fight; no gifts ever wasted; no call, if possible, ever terminated" (*Rebuilding Your Broken World*, in Pedigo, p. 69).

I believe it is time for the church to stop being "religious" and start being practical. ■

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the title on *Christianity Today's* web site, caught my attention. It posed the very dilemma I have been puzzling over for some time. Why are so many Christians violently opposed to

J.K. Rowling's wildly popular stories about Harry Potter, when many of these same Christians love J.R.R. Tolkien, and his tales of Frodo the Hobbit and the other mythical characters of middle earth?

Rowling's story, for those who have not read the books or seen the movie, follows a well-established format of children's stories. Harry Potter is a quite ordinary little boy, with thick glasses, and average abilities. His parents are killed in an apparent car accident; and he is sent to live with his aunt and uncle Petunia and Vernon Dursley, and their spoiled brat of a son, Dudley. Life is horrid for Harry. As the male counterpart of Cinderella, he is singled out for ridicule and abuse, and made to live in the cupboard under the stairs. Then, at the age of 11 everything changes. In a magical redemption Harry is freed from his oppressors and granted admission to the prestigious Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Harry is a wizard. So off he goes to school, leaving from platform nine and three-quarters, on a magical train that whisks him away to a world that coexists with the everyday world but is invisible to ordinary people, or muggles, as they are named at Hogwarts.

All of this is pretty standard fare for children's books: vulnerable child (often orphaned, usually misunderstood), dim-witted if not thuggish adults, clash between good and evil in which the outcome of the good teeters on the brink of defeat, eventual triumph of the child protagonist. Dickens and

Disney both made a name for themselves making this kind of story. Why then the fuss? Isn't this the Christian story in outline form—tinkering a bit with words like "magic," "wizards," "spells," and the like.

The trouble is that many conserva-

FRODO GOOD HARRY BAD

GLEN GREENWALT

tives cannot get beyond the idea that the Potter series is chock-full of alchemy, astrology, witches, wizards, spells, and other such stuff. For them the Potter books are a clever deception of the Devil to entice children into the occult. At the very least the books promote a kind of neo-paganism from which spirituality is eclectically chosen out of a smorgasbord of religions. A recurring criticism is that the books make no explicit reference to God or any other higher power. The powers of magic appear to be inherited, like blue eyes or gender

—even though in ordinary biology, progeny can seem to appear from out of nowhere. Muggles can give birth to wizards and vice versa! Other complaints include the occasional "darn" and the fact that Harry and his friends at times break school rules without consequence.

But none of these criticisms fully explains the conservative Christian hostility to the Harry Potter series. After all, wizards, magic, and even spells are found in the writings of J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis, both of whom are loved by most conservative Chris-

tians. A case is made by some that both Tolkien and Lewis were explicit about their faith; whereas J.K. Rowling, while a member of the Church of Scotland, is not. But on that charge a great number of books, including the book of Ruth in the Bible, should not be read—since the book of Ruth makes no explicit mention of prayer, faith, or God. So what is the real complaint?

The most likely answer is that the Potter series blurs the distinction between reality and fiction. Tolkien's middle earth exists in the distant past of myth. And while the land of Narnia is entered through a coat closet of the real world,

Lewis' tales are read as an allegory of the Christian life, not unlike that of Bunyan. Read as an allegory, the characters and events of a story are decoded back into a literal story. Aslan the lion is Christ. His death is the death of Christ, etc. Rowling, on the other hand, invites her readers to believe that the everyday world around them might be enchanted. One might, if they were really awake, see that our everyday world is invaded with magic. Perhaps even more troubling to her critics, Rowling is explicitly critical of the literal-minded muggles who cannot sense the enchantment that resides right under their noses. Muggles, like wizards, can be good or bad. What muggles cannot do is recognize the magic that is all about them.

The level of conservative outrage to her books suggests that Rowlings' description of muggles may have hit

home. As one observer has noted, "muggles are unfailingly literal, deaf to metaphor, blind to the central reality of what Chesterton calls 'the poetical side of man'—that behind the ordinary façade of atoms and death lurks an enchanted world indeed. The literal-minded critic has no choice but to defend muggles, since to do otherwise would be to raise the possibility of a world beyond the reliable borders of a strictly literal interpretation of human existence."

Fundamentalists of whatever stripe may be intelligent, highly educated, engaging, socially conscious, the life of a party. What they seem to lack is a metaphorical bone in their bodies. Or if they possess metaphorical sensibilities, they fear them in the way that raging sexual urges drive some into celibacy. In their own defense, literal-minded fund-

amentalists may counter that what they oppose is relativistic, soft-headed religion, and not metaphor itself. Poetry is fine, but God's Word is not great literature forged in the crucible of human experience, but the infallible will and testament of God. Furthermore, if we stir up our imaginations instead of use our minds, we are easily led down paths of deception.

In my next column I want to talk about one of my favorite subjects, God's battle with dragons in Scripture. I want to show that without attending to the long-established myths of dragons in the ancient world, one can miss the literal truth of dragons in the Bible. But that story must wait.

My interest in this column is to follow the irony that literal mindedness of Christian fundamentalism is largely a product of the very modernism fundamentalists scorn. Fundamentalism arose as a stated agenda in the 1920s at Princeton University. Its founders, inspired by the writings of Scottish pragmatic philosophy, sought to place Scripture on the same secure founda-

tion as science. Their central claim was that the only difference between Christian theology and the other sciences was the data it observed. Whereas the other sciences studied aspects of the natural world, the theologian studied the inerrant Word of God. The irony of this move is, of course, that in the 1920s philosophy itself was seeking scientific credibility. Anything that could not be demonstrated to be logically or factually true was meaningless or at best merely subjective. Religious fundamentalism and the attempt to remove all soft-headed thinking from philosophy are two sides of a single phenomenon. The fear of metaphor, story, myth, fable, and the like are products of modernism.

The problem I wish to note is not that fundamentalists are a product of their own age. What else can we be?

Tolkien and Lewis both rejected literal interpretations of their work. The danger of such interpretation is that it reduces the surplus meanings of a text into established formulas. Once one understands what the symbols of the Book of Revelation mean, for example, the symbolism of the book is exhausted.

My concern is rather that literalists are blind not only to the intention of the Potter series, but to the truths of the Bible itself. If they mistake the Potter books as literal, the fanciful world of wizards and spells becomes indeed an entre into the world of the occult—thus entirely obscuring the point of the Potter books. Rowling does not write as a recruiter for Satanism. She

has no intention of turning young people into gothic zombies. Her goal is to keep alive the magic that comes naturally to children. On the other hand, by reducing the richness of Scripture into doctrinal formulas, the Christian right dangerously overlook many truly demonic events of everyday life when those events fail to match their formulated interpretations.

Tolkien and Lewis both rejected literal interpretations of their work. The danger of such interpretation is that it reduces the surplus meanings of a text into established formulas. Once one understands what the symbols of the book of Revelation mean, for example, the symbolism of the book is exhausted. One no longer needs the Book itself. In a similar fashion, literal-minded readers of Tolkien saw his

book as an allegory of the rise of Hitler and the Axis Powers. Tolkien insisted that he was not writing about contemporary historical events, but rather about the underlying struggle between good and evil in all ages. Tolkien, and subsequently Lewis, spoke of this deeper writing as being mythicopoeic. While what they wrote was not literally true, it spoke about what is most true in life. In biblical language, they wished to make the point that we struggle not against flesh and

blood but against principalities and powers.

Our world really is enchanted—for good and evil. Things are not always what they seem on the literal face of things. On this, Rowling and the Bible agree. ■

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Why my empty arms?

God, how I wish you could come and sit here on this stool beside me and chat with me face to face. I have a lot of questions I'd like to ask you. Top on today's list is, How do I know your will? I long to live my life abandoned to your will—tough to do, sometimes, when I don't know what that will is.

Let's talk about Miracle, my little girl. I never thought I would want a child. In fact, I was pretty sure I didn't. Loving Loyd changed that. You changed that. You created us to long to create—to create in our likeness—like you. Your first instructions to humanity included “be fruitful and multiply.”

Did we miss a clue? All those months—months that turned into years, living with the cycle of hope and longing, disappointment and despair. The endless tests, surgical procedures, and always the tyrannical thermometer. It's amazing how a little piece of glass and a tiny dab of mercury can control your life.

Yet when modern medicine seemed to say, short of in-vitro fertilization, ‘it ain't happenin,’ we got pregnant. You enabled the miracle of life. We knew our baby was a little girl. We named her Miracle. And began to plan for her future in our lives. Thankful that your will for us included a child.

Twelve weeks later, Miracle died.

What's up with that, God?

Just when we had run out of options, you stepped in; we got pregnant. Miracle was a gift from you. There was no other plausible explanation. We'd been doing everything “right” for months, no, years. When our resources ran out—infertility was not covered under government insurance—we got pregnant; she had to be a gift from you. Her conception was obviously your will; what about birth?

How could she die? How can it be your will for a wanted and loved child to die? We believed it was your will that we got pregnant. Where were you when Miracle died? Was her death your will as well? How can it be your will to enable but not sustain life?

Is it possible to push beyond your will? Did I wear you out with my tears?

God, for twelve weeks, we rejoiced in your gift. But Miracle died. And I am left with empty arms and the haunting question—How do I know your will in the loss of our child? What do I do with these empty arms? ■