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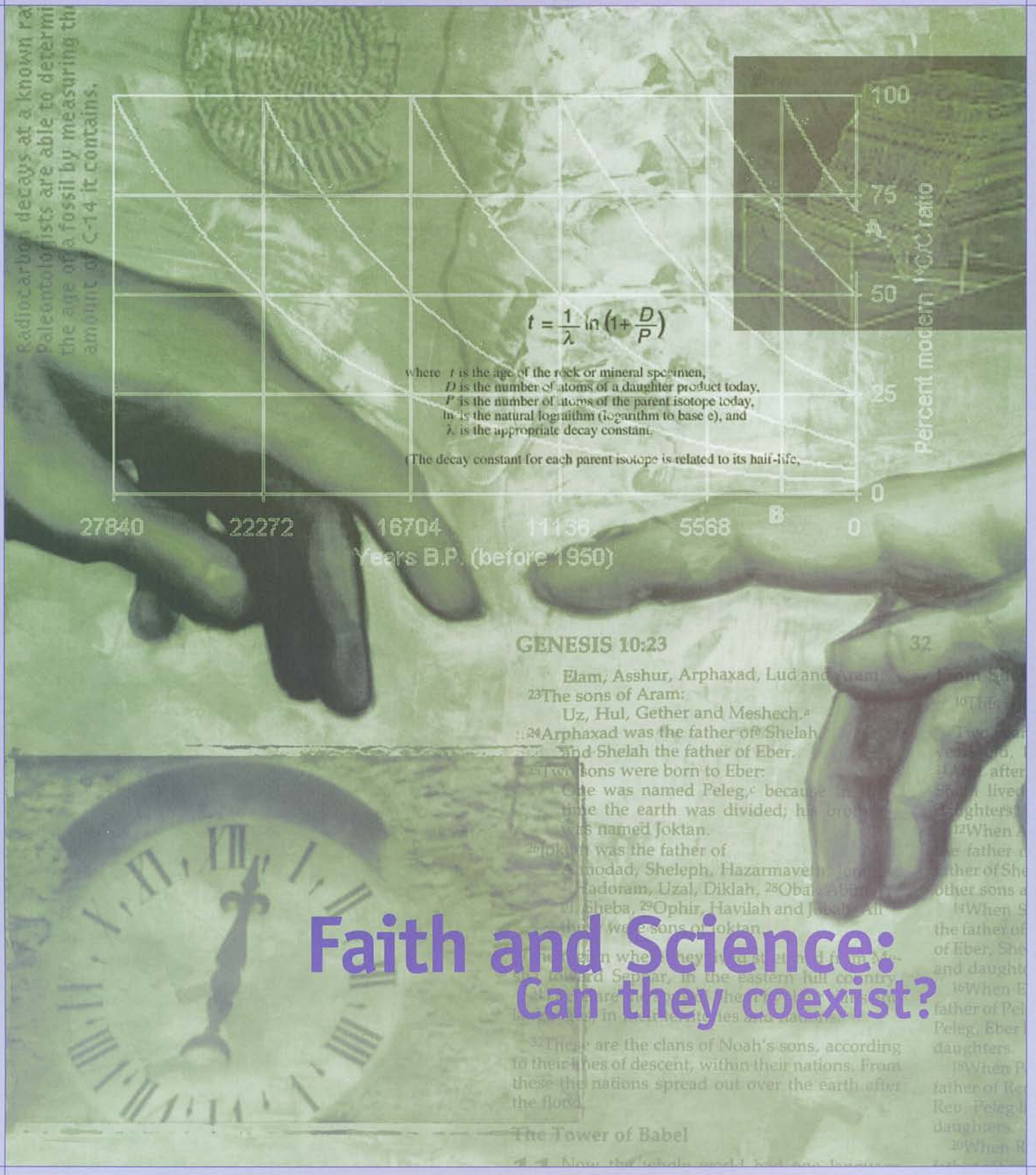
NEWS
ANALYSIS
OPINION

volume eleven | number four | july. august 2003



Faith and Science:
Can they coexist?

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Wrong Every Time

JOHN MCLARTY

In 1795, based on his geological research, James Hutton wrote: we find no vestige of a beginning—no prospective of an end. But he was wrong. Science eventually replaced his smooth, everlasting uniformitarianism. As a 12-year-old Adventist in 1962, even I knew better. There had been a beginning about 6,000 years ago, and there was an end two years in the future. I was wrong, too. I thought the beginning was the ex nihilo creation of the entire globe, a view rejected by all the theologians at the Andrews seminary. And my date for the end was based on the (now) dubious parallel between Adventist preaching about the judgment and Noah's 120 years of preaching about impending judgment. (As it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be…).

I learned in church school about uniformitarianism. Scientists blindly embraced the notion of peat bogs in Michigan and Scotland slowly, inevitably turning into coal seams. The sea floor would gradually accumulate enough limey deposits to create another Red Wall in a future Grand Canyon.

Even as a 12-year-old I knew this was nonsense. I knew that the coal seams were produced by the flood's burying the pre-flood tropical rain forests and that limestone was formed from the rapid burial of marine layers in the flood. Ten years later I read William Agee's *The Nature of the Stratigraphic Record*. This prominent secular geologist pointed out that the geologic record is full of compelling evidence of nonuniformity. Coal is not being formed in our world; massive limestone is not being created.

Science had been wrong. Which would have been a very gratifying thought except that I lived on Long Island, a terminal moraine created by continental glaciation. In church school I had been taught, a la George McCready Price, that so-called Ice Age deposits were actually flood residue. Living on a moraine and studying geology, I was inexorably moved to the conclusion of all post-Price Adventist scientists: G. M. Price and the church had been wrong. There had indeed been continental glaciation. And I realized the church had been wrong about the coal, too, because we "knew" there had been no rain before the flood, but you needed rain to create the tropical rain forests for the flood to bury.

The church and science are always getting it wrong. But now we have it right. The scientists know that the universe is about 14 billion years old and the theologians know that life is about 6,000 years old. There will be no further corrections. There is no new data for science to discover; there are no new accommodations that theology will need to make. We finally have it right…and I have a bridge to sell you.

If the church builds its doctrine (officially required belief) on the assured results of scholarship, it is building on sand. If it makes a doctrine of historical or chronological conclusions drawn from the Bible by devout Adventists, it is building on quicksand. Because we are always getting it wrong.

The church and science are always getting it wrong. But now we have it right. The scientists know that the universe is about 14 billion years old and the theologians know that life is about 6,000 years old. There will be no further corrections. There is no new data for science to discover; there are no new accommodations that theology will need to make.

Whether it is George McCready Price arguing that the geologic column is a godless fiction, Robert Gentry arguing that the universe was created 6000 years ago or a union president pontificating to his constituents that the sun is younger than the earth, when public figures in the Church make strong chronological assertions and insist they are based on the Bible, they diminish the Bible's credibility in the eyes our educated children, because they always get it wrong.

I have seen Bible reading transform drug addicts and watched its words soothe the terminally ill. I've seen obedience to its principles heal troubled marriages. The Bible is a good book. It is too good, too precious, to be discredited by our clumsy history writing.

Twelve-year-olds will always be wrong about something. My prayer is that they will not be wrong because they have been listening to their church. ■

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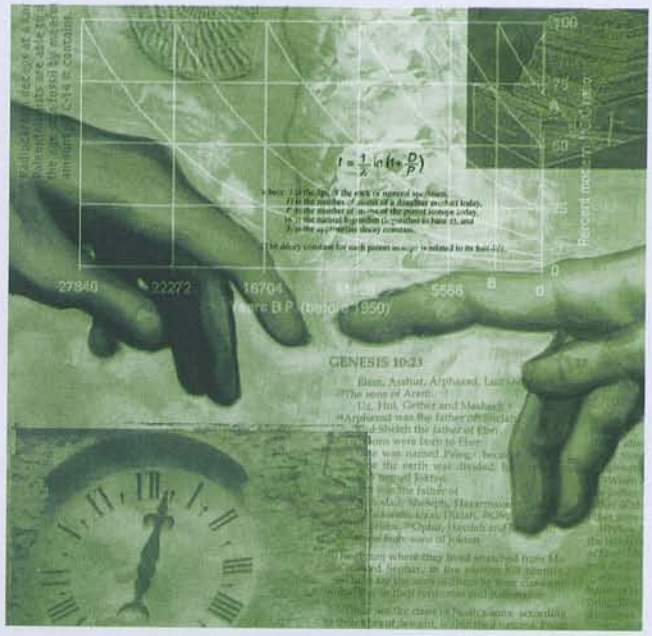

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adventist today

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adventist today (ISSN 1079-5499) is published bimonthly for $29.50 per year ($18 for students, $40 for institutions) by **adventist today** Foundation, P.O. Box 8026 Riverside, CA 92515-8026. Periodical postage paid at Riverside, California, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Adventist Today, Box 8026, Riverside, CA 92515-8026.

LETTERS

Scholars and Gospel

I enjoy reading your journal and find it very informative and thought provoking. A few writers give the impression that unless you are formally educated you will not be able to understand the Gospel of Jesus, the plan of Salvation, the End Times, or other important teachings of the Scriptures.... I found many members of the church who were "attendees" in church and supported our schools by sending their children to them. I refrained from making them feel uncomfortable because I had formal education and they did not. Most of your writers do very well in not giving one the impression that if you are not a scholar you're going to miss the Savior's promises. That is why I continue my subscription.

Roy F. Battle, Via the Internet

Implications of the Conference

I'll be very interested in reading the reports from Glacier View in August. I suspect this Faith and Science conference will be even more controversial than the previous Investigative Judgment and Sanctuary conference because the outcome could have such an impact on our outreach to educated and secular 21st-century minds. I hope that exploring this topic will not cost our GC president his job.

Margarita Merriman, Via the Internet

Reports to Share With White Estate

On behalf of the Ellen G. White Estate, a subscriber to *Adventist Today*, I'm requesting to be put on the mailing list to receive your reporter's "Glacier View Reports." ...Our director, Dr. Jim Nix, who is attending and presenting, asked me to make the arrangements...to share with our staff.

Larry J. Crews, Silver Spring, Md.

Catastrophic Ramifications

I am very much interested and concerned with the meetings and the dialog that is taking place at [Glacier View]. While I do not know all the data on the findings, or what a polemic actually is, the bottom line issue to me is: Where Is Our Ultimate Authority? Is it in whatever new data the scientific community can bring us about the age of the earth or how this world was created, or is it in the Bible? Ultimately this is just another test of our faith and commitment to our acceptance of the Divine inspiration of the Bible and that it is indeed trustworthy. Never mind all the arguments about how we should love one another and be tolerant of different and diverse views; this is an issue of inspiration, and the ramifications of this discussion and outcome are catastrophic! I believe the most loving thing to do is to meet this in an uncompromising way, and allow those who can no longer subscribe to this very fundamental belief of His church, to move on to other academic pastures and opportunities outside of this church.... Let us be earnestly praying for our church (His church) our leaders and the outcome of this meeting.

Pastor Lonny G. Liebelt, Via the Internet

While I do not know all the data on the findings, or what a polemic actually is, the bottom line issue to me is: Where Is Our Ultimate Authority?

A Different Viewpoint

Please send the Glacier View conference reports to my father.... He is a current subscriber to AT. He asked me to contact you for him as he is 86.... He enjoys your periodical very much and looks forward to each issue. Your viewpoint is not commonly held by our local church congregation in many cases and is appreciated.

Judy Cutts, Via the Internet

Lifetime Listing

Yes indeed, please do—add me to the list for the reports from the Glacier View Conference. And since I plan to subscribe for the rest of my days, why not start a lifetime list?

Delmer W. Holbrook, Via the Internet

A Broader View

We would like to receive reports from the conference.... We intend to keep subscribing to AT. We enjoy and appreciate the broader view of things than is given in the *Review*.

Roy and Jinny Olson, Via the Internet

Read Upon Receiving

I appreciate *Adventist Today* and read all issues almost immediately on receiving them. Yes I would like to receive the postings from the Glacier View II conference.

Berryl Longway, Via the Internet

Great job, thank you

Thank you so much for the daily synopsis of the Glacier View meetings. I have read some of the reports to my husband, Ed Hare. He used the story of Joseph Bates and Ellen White's vision of the planets often when talking about Inspiration. Only it is Jupiter and not Uranus that she saw with four moons. Ed always used Jupiter for the example. She mentions Uranus with six moons. Arthur White stops his quote a little too soon in his biography. You may want to check out pages 258, 259 of Loughborough's *The Great Second Advent Movement* to get it firsthand. Here are a significant couple of sentences:

"From that evening Elder Bates became fully satisfied that

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We recently learned that problems with our Internet service have kept hundreds of e-mails from reaching us over the past four months. We believe the difficulty has been fixed. If you tried to contact us electronically and we have not responded, please re-send your e-mail. Or you may call our office at 1-800-236-3641. You letters and comments matter to us. We apologize for any inconvenience this has caused our subscribers.

the visions of Mrs. White were outside of her knowledge and control. This and the character of the reproof and instruction given, satisfied him that they were from God."

It is so obvious and such a wonderful illustration of how God uses Inspiration for specific purposes and how important it is to take into account time and place. I'm glad someone presented it.

Did anyone mention the wonderful quotation in *Education*, page 128? "Since the book of nature and the book of revelation bear the impress of the same master mind, they cannot but speak in harmony. By different methods, and in different languages, they witness to the same great truths. Science is ever discovering new wonders; but she brings from her research nothing that, rightly understood, conflicts with divine revelation. The book of nature and the written word shed light upon each other. They make us acquainted with God by teaching us something of the laws through which He works." This was Ed's inspiration to keep pursuing and trying to understand. He gave a marvelous series a number of years ago at CUC in which he emphasized that the observations and evidence aren't controversial, just the interpretation we give either from science or the Bible. He showed many slides to show the evidence.

Thanks again for making these daily reports available. You are doing a great job with AT.

Patti Hare, Via the Internet

Paulsen on Obedience

As I understand it, AT's position is that of a watchdog on the Adventist church, seeking to ensure that it does not lose hold of its spiritual roots.... So I take note of Ervin Taylor's review and commentary on Jan Paulsen's recent policy address (AT Nov/Dec 2002). In it Paulsen is quoted as saying, "Obedience is always obedience where one is." Paulsen continues, "Salvation is contingent on that obedience." Taylor leaves unchallenged this assertion....

In marked contrast to Paulsen's statement, Protestants believe Paul's assertion, "For by grace are ye saved through faith, not by works.... It is by not believing that salvation is "that simple," dependent only on God's grace empowering my faith, that the church has apparently lost sight of basic Protestantism. Adventists lament loss of their identity.... Jesus never used a word starting with those letters (obe*). If He did not, why are we so obsessive on the subject, to the point of destroying our joy by getting it backwards? Those in a love relationship with truth and God never give obedience a thought. I believe Paulsen's position is unchristian, is instead base heathen idolatry, and that the most important statement made by the Church President in his speech was left unchallenged by the Church's watchdog deserves notice by those who love truth.

Ken Cox, Angwin, Calif.

Greig on Logical Doctrine

Congratulations on a timely and brave article by Dr. Joe Greig (AT March/April 2003) entitled "Should Adventist Doctrine Be Logical?" Also, thanks to John McLarty's editorial echoing a similar theme of blind acceptance of information and dogma without serious open-minded inquiry.

Inquiry enhances faith. Too many believe that remaining ignorant (of doctrines and their origins) protects that faith. On the contrary, faith is made stronger by informing it. Whether in religion, science, medicine or any intellectual pursuit, untested beliefs return us to the Flat Earth concept. I believe Dr. Grieg would return us to a world and society in which members will pursue a spirituality of quest and inquiry, not of answers and dogmas. That is the world I want to live in. An ancient holy man once said: "A seeker after truth must shun no science, scorn no book, nor cling fanatically to a single creed."

John Hughes, Fresno, Calif.

War Can Be Moral

Kudos to Janine Goffar for pointing out that "War Is Sometimes Moral" (AT Mar/Apr 2003). By helping free the Iraqi people and protect other nations, the United States and the rest of the "coalition of the willing" played, on an international level, the role of the Good Samaritan who helped someone in need. France and Germany were the men who ignored the victim and passed on the other side. We owe all our rights to armed conflicts. Was the American War of Independence immoral? Was the war to defeat Nazi Germany, Italy, and Japan immoral? We Adventists are not of this world, but we are in this world for the duration and should have the sense of responsibility to fight for what is right, whether domestically or internationally.

Hector Hammerly, Maple Ridge, British Columbia

The Sanctuary and the Sacrifices

I just read the article on "The Sanctuary Doctrine—Asset or Liability?" (AT May/June 2002). I have been concerned about who wanted/needed the Sanctuary/sacrificial system. Jeremiah 7:21, 22 says, "I spake not unto your fathers nor commanded them on the day I brought them out of Egypt concerning burnt offerings or sacrifice." And in the new Peterson *The Message*: "When I brought your ancestors out of Egypt, I never said anything to them about wanting burnt offerings and sacrifices as such." Is this one of those "very hard to be understood verses"? I have come to believe that it was not God who needed or wanted the "systems" but the people, and as in the case of their wanting a king, God allowed them to have this and tried to use it to shed some light on sin and the concept of salvation.

Jay Rasco, Via the Internet

Editor's note: The Exodus record states that God told Moses to build the sanctuary and begin the sacrifices. Of course, the slaughtered animals were later used by the priests for food. But the prophets such as Jeremiah were often at odds with the establishment, especially where the welfare of the people was concerned. JHS

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Our denial allows us to attempt to restore the person who is considered to have made a mistake in judgment.

REPORT

Faith and Science Conference

JOHN MCLARTY & ERVIN TAYLOR

What follows are edited extracts from reports filed from the conference by these AT editors. The abrupt changes in perspective from section to section reflect the reality of the conference. The reports in their entirety were e-mailed to all AT subscribers who had given us their e-mail addresses. If you are a subscriber and did not get the full reports but wish to see them, we invite you to send us your e-mail address at atoday@atoday.com with "e-mail reports" in the subject line.

The 2003 Faith and Science Conference was the second in a series of three annual Seventh-day Adventist conferences called to address questions surrounding our understanding of creation. The first conference, which brought together representatives from around the world, was held in Ogden, Utah, in 2002. The second series of conference(s) were organized by many of the world divisions in their own territory and have occurred or will occur in 2003 and early 2004. The final conference will again bring together representatives from the world church and will be held in Denver, Colo., in August 2004.

Historically Seventh-day Adventists have been the leading champions of a short chronology for life on this planet. Citing the Bible, Ellen White and science, we have taught that terrestrial life first appeared in a singular creation week a few thousand years ago and that there has been no special creation since that week. The fossil and geological record has been believed to be created largely by global disturbances during Noah's flood. The vast majority of Adventist members still have unquestioning confidence in the continuing validity of our traditional view on earth history. They believe the Bible supports it and that science offers credible corroborative support.

However, two polls of faculty in Adventist colleges and universities in North America have indicated that less than 50 percent of the science teachers believe the traditional view of origins. Among theology faculty, a growing minority question the validity of traditional Adventist interpretations of Genesis 1-11. Faculty in Adventist institutions cannot openly espouse these views and remain employed, but there is a growing underground network of Adventists who believe that the church's historic position is scientifically, rationally and even biblically untenable.

To put the issue very bluntly: On one hand, the vast majority of Adventist church members see nothing wrong with our traditional views. On the other hand, a growing number of Adventist scientists and theologians are convinced that tradition must yield to the best evidence from science. The social divide is reminiscent of other arguments: vaccination, fluoridation, the use of anesthesia, earth's place in the solar system. But the questions at hand—remote prehistory and origins—are much less tractable than the disputes over cycles of cause and effect that are completed in less than a human life span. And the spiritual, scientific, philosophical, epistemological and theological connections in this case are labyrinthine beyond imagination.

■ ■ ■

We arrived at the Glacier View Camp outside Boulder late in the afternoon, Wednesday, Aug. 13, in time for the first event of the conference: supper. It was like a family reunion. Many of these people have known each other for decades. They went to school together. They were students and teachers of each other. They've attended professional conventions together and even participated in church-sponsored discussions of this nature for years. The debates at this conference are truly "within the family." About 130 people gathered for the conference.

The first formal presentation, Wednesday following supper, was by Angel Rodriguez, director of the Biblical Research Institute (BRI). BRI serves as the theological counsel and watchdog for the General Conference. In his paper, Dr. Rodriguez set an anchor point for the tradi-

tional view. He emphatically declared that in any area where it speaks, the Bible holds absolute priority as an authority. Biblical statements regarding history or science as well as theology are infallible and cannot be corrected or meaningfully challenged by science. "Adventists find certainty only in the message of the Scripture, and that determines the way they read and interpret all other experiences."

■ ■ ■

Several teachers talked about the challenges of teaching origins to academy and college students. All of them talked about the importance of exposing their students to the best of evolutionary thought so that they would not be overwhelmed when they first encountered these ideas in a secular setting where there would be no support for their faith. The need for this kind of preparation, especially in academy, was highlighted by a report that indicated that two-thirds of Adventist college students are in non-Adventist schools.

■ ■ ■

A geologist told his personal story. He grew up Adventist, attended Adventist academy and college and remained a committed "young creationist" through his graduate work and for a decade or so of his career as a working geologist. But the more he looked at the rocks, the more he found himself compelled to acknowledge their age. He finally reached the point where he simply accepted what he saw. The rocks were old. He could not fit the geological features he studied into a 6,000-year chronology. But he treasured the Bible, the Adventist church and God. He remains an active church member even though he accepts conventional geologic ages for fossils and rocks.

■ ■ ■

Adventists have always viewed the Bible as a blend of human and divine. But there is increasing debate over just how those elements interact. On the second full day of the conference, the formal work began with a paper that vigorously reiterated an essentially fundamentalist position. The most arresting statement in this presentation was the assertion that Adventist believers in the 21st century should adopt the world view of the Old Testament writers in their understanding of how and when God created the world. However, a second paper observed that conservative Adventists scholars have long understood Genesis 1 to be a polemic against various aspects of ancient Near Eastern mythology. In light of its highly complex literary structure and polemical intent, we were advised to be "more cautious...about assuming that a narrative is meant to be seen as a straightforward chronological history of events."

This paper was surprising because its author is widely known as a conservative. We learn that labels, while useful, are slippery.

A third paper argued strongly against reading any of the putatively historical parts of the Bible as anything other than literal history. This presenter devoted most of his time to a critique of a paper by another presenter. (Many of the papers were circulated to the participants before the conference began.) The paper being critiqued stated that we should begin our approach to the Bible by asking, "What is the purpose of Scripture?" or more specifically, "To what extent does Scripture give us scientifically useful information as well as theological meaning?" Although the author made it clear that he believes the Genesis creation narratives represent the results of divine initiative and revelation, he proposed that

1. "the purpose and function of Scripture are theological, not scientific,"
2. "the portrayals of creation in Genesis 1 and 2 show that they are theological rather than scientific explanations,"
3. "the assumption that Scripture provides scientific information about creation is a result of a theological tradition and the empirical bias of modern Western thought," and
4. "we should focus our attention on identifying, understanding, applying, and communicating the profound theological truths of Genesis 1 and 2."

A paper titled, "Back to the Bible: Trying to Hear All the Voices," began with the assumption that all human knowledge is partial and limited, especially our knowledge of God. The presenter quoted the words of Ellen White: "God and heaven alone are infallible." He then commented, "We humans are easily tempted to obscure the diverse perspectives in Scripture by privileging the elements congenial to our particular preferences and biases. Thus we risk putting God on trial by our preferred words, logic and rhetoric. And by being selective rather than comprehensive, the diverse perspectives in Scripture can easily appear contradictory, rather than complementary." His thesis is: "The recognition of the diversity within Scripture should move us to seek a) the common ground shared by all the biblical perspectives and b) ways of seeing these perspectives as complementary." In attempting

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Faith and Science Conference

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to deal with the diversity he sees in Scripture and in the views being expressed in the Adventist church, he pointed to insights that can be gained by reflecting on the Myers-Briggs temperament profile, which "offers very helpful possibilities for understanding our differences." Interestingly, one of the conference attendees, a prominent member of the medical profession, held a Saturday evening workshop on Myers-Briggs.

In considering what some view as the "problem" of the great diversity of Adventist views on origins, one theologian reminded us that the Adventist divisions are reflected in the wider contemporary Christian community. His paper offered several suggestions for how the Adventist church might address the challenge of interfacing science and faith. The first is to consider the role of doctrine in the life of the church community. On one hand, he suggested, there is the view that a believing member is one who comprehends and assents to a list of propositions. The "community of faith comprises those who have come to similar doctrinal conclusions through personal investigation." On the other hand, he writes, "While a concern for propositional expressions of the faith will always be important, it is a mistake to make it the one essential quality of the Christian community. Other expressions of truth are even more important and other qualities account for the corporate life of the community." He points out that "according to one of the most famous passages in Paul's writings, the Christian community lives by faith, hope, and love, rather than by knowledge—one of the things that 'pass away.' Moreover, the life of faith is a life of community, a life in which learning from, caring for, and growing with one another are essential.... The most important question before us as members of a community we care about is not who's right about origins and why, but how can we affirm our collective confidence in God's sovereign love in ways that include and encourage all of us? In other words, whatever we say about creation should ultimately strengthen our faith, hope and love."

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■ ■ ■

Friday evening the group assembled for worship, then Sabbath morning there was a worship service in a beautiful outdoor setting. A few of the participants (including McLarty) climbed Long's Peak. The hike was richly symbolic. It included five young adults who were at the camp only because they were related to conference participants. It also included vocal proponents of the divergent interpretive positions present at the conference. Praying together, hiking, taking care of group members who suffered from altitude sickness or were nearly stymied by the thinness of the air at 14,000 feet, and finally sitting on a mountaintop gazing in rapt wonder at the surrounding glory superseded our propositional differences. It gave us a special sample of the family connections God gives us in his church.

■ ■ ■

One presentation featured an account of one of Ellen White's visions. Joseph Bates, among others, was present when she had the vision, and while she was in vision, she spoke of seeing several planets. When questioned on how many moons she saw around these planets, she said she saw four moons around one of them and eight moons around another. Bates was an avid amateur astronomer and knew that recent discoveries had found four moons orbiting Jupiter and eight circling Uranus. When Bates asked White if she had been reading about astronomy, she indicated she knew nothing about it. This gave Bates great confidence in White's status as a prophetess. The question posed to us was: what do we do with the fact that astronomers have found 39 moons orbiting Jupiter and 21 around Uranus? (A fuller account of the vision can be read in *Ellen G. White: The Early Years* by Arthur White, pages 113-114.)

One of the deans of Adventist creation science and a forceful expositor of traditional Adventist short-age and worldwide flood views is Ariel Roth, now retired, formerly director of the Geoscience Research Institute. The title of his presentations was "Some Persistent Scientific Evidence that Affirms a Recent Creation." Roth devoted most of his presentation to paraconformities. If one looks at the walls of the Grand Canyon, you will see very flat layers of rock piled up. The various layers have been carefully dated. The fossils in the rocks fit the ordinary pattern of progression as you move from the bottom to the top. But between a number of layers that lie smoothly on top of each other there are gaps (paraconformities) of millions of years. According to Roth, paraconformities are very difficult to account for in conventional geologic time, and they are found all over the world. Roth believes such paraconformities are best explained by a worldwide flood. Another problem that he addressed was rates of erosion in the geologic record: According to present rates of erosion, the continents should have been eroded flat a hundred times over in geologic time. This would mean there would be no geologic column. All of the fossils would have been eroded away. Roth also mentioned some of the very widespread formations in the American West. The Morrison formation, for example, stretches from Canada to Arizona. It is very difficult to account for these

formations with conventional geologic processes, Roth said. They are best explained by a catastrophic event like the flood.

Interestingly, in conventional geology, researchers are turning more and more to catastrophic explanations of various features in the geologic record. However, these catastrophic explanations apply to very restricted localized contexts scattered throughout the geologic column and do not work as an explanation for the thousands of feet of sedimentary record characteristic of most sections of the geologic record.

For many years Adventists have explained the geologic column by the ecological zonation theory (EZT) first propounded by Harold Clark. This theory was examined in a paper titled: "Biome Succession: A Theory in Crisis." Biome succession is a new name for EZT. The paper noted that Adventists have done very little research on it, and what research has been done yielded more questions than answers. He outlined some research that Adventist scientists could engage in to strengthen or overturn the theory.

A well-known leader in Adventist creation science presented a tentative theory for a new flood model called the "extended flood." This theory assumes a literal creation week that resulted in a balanced ecosystem. But in a departure from tradition, it also assumes that fossil-bearing strata began forming shortly after the fall. At the time of the flood, there would have been very dramatic sedimentation and fossilization, processes that would have continued at an accelerated rate for a while after the flood as well. This model was proposed to help explain some aspects of the fossil record that do not fit with the idea of the flood creating nearly all the geologic record.

■ ■ ■

One topic that received a lot of attention was the extent of the flood, according to the Bible. The lead-off paper forcefully argued for a literal interpretation of the Bible's words about the universality of the flood. We should interpret the words of Genesis 6-9 in the light of their connection with the same words in the creation story. The whole world was created in Genesis 1-2; the whole world was inundated in Genesis 6-9. The paper included several additional textual arguments in favor of a global flood.

A later paper stated that, according to the Hebrew language, there were categories of animals that did not enter the ark. The flood could not have literally covered the entire earth because reptiles and carnivorous animals were not transported on the ark, yet they appear on the earth after the flood.

Another paper by an archaeologist argued that the author's use of "worldwide" language had to be understood within the context of the author's world view and not in the context of our understanding of similar language.

He pointed out that there is no archaeological evidence anywhere (in wells, caves or tells) for a Noachian flood in the Middle East. Outside of Genesis, the Bible uses global language to describe less-than-global realities. For example, Nebuchadnezzar is said to have ruled over the whole earth, but he actually ruled only Mesopotamia. Paul said the gospel had been preached to the whole world, but we don't believe early Christian preachers reached the Solomon Islands or Australia. In this view, the Bible itself does not teach a flood that actually covered the entire globe in Noah's time. One participant wondered if the linkage of language between the flood and creation stories might not mean that we should localize the creation story instead of globalizing the flood.

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The author of a paper on the role of Ellen White in shaping Adventist thinking about earth history affirmed that she could and did make errors in small details. The author even acknowledged that her many statements attributing 6,000 years to earth history might be an accommodation to the popular chronology of Bishop Ussher. Conservative Bible believers in her day believed in Ussher, and she would not have been credible to them if she had written about a different time scale. But, the author insisted, the six-day creation and the global flood are not small details. These cannot be surrendered without fatally undermining her entire theological structure.

■ ■ ■

An Adventist geologist presented his well-known work on paleocurrents in a presentation titled, "Paleocurrents as Tools: What They Can Tell Us About the History of the Earth." Paleocurrents are flow structures in sedimentary rocks which reveal the direction of the wind or water which worked the material before they hardened. In North America, in Paleozoic and Mesozoic rocks, the paleocurrents are highly directive on a continental scale. These trends are inconsistent with standard geological models. The presenter sees them as best explained by a

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Faith and Science Conference

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flood. In the upper Cenozoic periods, the paleocurrents no longer exhibit the patterns. The author believes this indicates the end of the flood.

There was a report by a scientist on his research on fossil whales in Peru. These whales are found in sediments which, at conventional rates of deposition, would take from 500 to 4,000 years to bury a whale. However, the whales are beautifully preserved, with even their baleen intact. They had to be buried in a matter of days or a few weeks at the very most. The difference between the time indicated by the state of preservation of the whales and the time given for the formation by radiometric dating raises interesting questions about the reliability of conventional dating.

There was an unscheduled presentation on ice cores from Greenland and Antarctica. Ice cores reveal the record of annual deposits of snow. Several lines of evidence indicate that the individual layers do, in fact, reflect annual events. Contained in these layers are many types of organic products, such as pollen and spores, and inorganic particulates, such as lead and volcanic ash. Correlations between these annual layers and various historical events and processes can be documented. For example, the ice cores give a precise date for the eruption of Mt. Mazama, which created Crater Lake at about 7,686 B.P. (before present). The ice cores also map the beginning of copper smelting about 500 years ago and the beginning of the use of lead in gasoline and the subsequent elimination of leaded gasoline. The total length of time recorded in the Greenland ice cores is about 110,000 years. In Antarctica, cores have been drilled to 12,000 feet deep, and standard calculations give a maximum age of 420,000 years.

One theologian began his discourse with the question "Isn't it about time? Well, yes and no...and maybe only time will tell." He concluded that the modern Western quest to quantify time was not within the purview of the Biblical writers. A "holistic, practical, communal, dynamic of time began with God and creation, whenever that happened...."

An entire day of the conference was devoted to the problem of "Time" (11 papers) and another day to "The Flood" (10 papers). One historical reason for Adventist attention to these topics is the influence of George McCready Price (1870-1963). Price accepted at face value Ellen G. White's descriptions of an Edenic, antediluvian Earth created about 6,000 years ago and its destruction by a global flood 1,500 years later.

One paper titled "George McCready Price: Grandfather of Modern Creationist Geology," was based on a recent M.A. thesis completed at California State University, Fullerton. Price was self-taught in geology. He insisted that the geologic column was a fiction invented by geologists to support evolution. He believed the only alternative to evolution was Biblical creationism and a recent, worldwide, catastrophic flood that created the geologic column. When a young protege of Price, Harold Clark, insisted that there was indeed order in the geologic column, Price wrote "Theories of Satanic Origin," in which he claimed that Clark's views were of the devil. Price tried to have Clark fired for heresy.

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A scientist reviewed the standard interpretation of the geological history of southern California and some of his original research on that history. His review and research led him to conclude, "A one-year flood a few thousand years ago does not provide the best logical and useful scientific explanatory model for southern California geology." On the other hand, he stated he is "willing to accept the biblical record even if I don't understand it."

A University of California anthropologist and archaeologist outlined the scientific evidence for the view that modern humans have been on this planet for at least 100,000 years. He noted that the scientific basis on which both recent geological and prehistoric archaeological chronology is based has little, if anything, to do with the "biological evolutionary time scale." The overwhelming weight of prehistoric archaeological evidence argues for a human chronology in excess of 100,000 years and for a geologic column of tens of millions of years. He also stated that the prehistoric archaeological record lacks any evidence of a recent, worldwide flood.

A physicist presented a paper on "The Clocks in the Rocks" in which he explained why "as an Adventist and a

believer in a Creator God" he believes that "God is actually telling us that the earth has a long history." He argues that the current view in some parts of the Adventist church that "if we do not support a young-earth-deluge model we cannot be Christians" borders on "pathological theology."

Another paper attempted to demonstrate how the major radioactive isotope dating methods other than radiocarbon could be made compatible with a short-age view. "Creationists should not quit believing in a short time for life on earth.... Now is not the time for us to throw in the towel."

■ ■ ■

The Human Face of the Conference

A non-North American visitor began his presentation by remarking that the audience did not fit his expectations. He had read that 40 percent of Americans were obese, but he didn't see many fat people. The group was mostly middle-aged, white males, but they were uncharacteristically thin for an American group. There were others—women, including a young woman still in grad school. Dr. and Mrs. Richard Ritland attended. He was an early director of the Geoscience Research Institute. There were scientists and theologians from South America, two or three African Americans, a geologist from Germany.

The scientists included a fair number of people not employed by the church. Among the theologians, I believe only one was not church employed. Several of the clergy were practicing pastors; two or three scientists were physicians. Most of the theologians were faculty in Adventist schools. The editors of five Adventist journals (denominational and independent) attended at least part of the conference, and several denominational executives attended the entire conference.

What did the participants think about the age of the earth and life upon it? The range of views included:

1. The entire universe is 6,000 years old.
2. The sun and moon are 6,000 years old, but the inorganic substance of the earth is billions of years old.
3. The universe and the solar system (including the inorganic earth matter) is billions of years old, but terrestrial life is 6,000 to 10,000 years old.
4. The universe, solar system, inorganic earth material and terrestrial life all have the ages assigned to them by conventional science, that is, millions and billions of years.

There were scientists who believed in a young earth (and universe) and scientists who accepted conventional geochronology. There were clergy who believed the sun is younger than the earth and clergy who accepted conventional geochronology. Some of the theologians had been trained in science. Some of the scientists had trained as clergy. We heard personal testimonies from scientists who began their higher education as "long-agers" and felt compelled by the scientific and biblical evidence to embrace a short chronology. Other geologists told of studying in Adventist schools and accepting a short chronology only to be gradually forced by continued study of the rocks during their post-Ph.D. careers to accept a long chronology.

We heard vigorous speeches insisting that a belief in a recent creation is absolutely essential and central to Adventism. If you don't believe it, you don't belong. There were counter speeches arguing that the fact of creation (all that is ultimately comes from God) was the bedrock and we can safely allow scientists and others to follow their own research on the time and method of God's activity and to reach their own conclusions.

A daunting difficulty surrounding questions of origins is that everyone is working outside their areas of expertise because the subject crosses several discipline boundaries. We heard highly competent scientists make rather naive statements about exegesis. We talked with theologians who had not even heard of some of the physical phenomena being discussed by scientists. Systematic theologians had to deal with exegetical questions far removed from their theological competence and biblical scholars were forced to relate ancient words (which was their specialty) to scientific and postmodern philosophical constructs. Within the sciences you have very divergent areas of expertise: chemistry, nuclear physics, paleontology, sedimentology, genetics, geomorphology and archaeology.

The welter of voices and disciplines means that no matter what you believe you can find persons and evidence to support it. And the natural human tendency is to stick with what we already "know." In a classic exchange between two scientists, one challenged the other: "Is there any conceivable evidence that would compel you to change your mind?" The second scientist retorted, "Is there any evidence that would lead you to change yours?"

We have received a couple of e-mails asking why we do not identify conference participants by name. The answer is twofold. First, it would hardly be fair for us, as participants in the debate, to describe the positions of others and attach their names to those views. We aim at accuracy in reporting, but we would be superhuman if we were able to escape all bias.

Second, the purpose of this conference was the fullest possible airing of Adventist views on the topic of origins. Participants were encouraged to explore the edges, extremes and problems. The views expressed at this conference were not polished devotional gems. Instead many of the papers focused on problems—problems with conventional geology, problems with conventional Adventist hermeneutics. The specialists could not have been nearly as free if they had to worry about having to answer to a global gallery for every infelicitous statement.

At the conference people on both the right and the left

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The Faith and Science Conference of 2003

In Celebration of Certainty and Curiosity

DOUGLAS CLARK

It has been several days since we held the 2003 Glacier View Faith and Science Conference, and I continue to marvel at what happened in the rarefied alpine air of the Colorado Rockies. No one with whom I spoke at the conference could remember the church's sponsoring or structuring a set of important papers on issues of such significance in a format which intentionally incorporated a variety of viewpoints...ever.

While this format represented a major risk and did in fact generate moments of tension and angst, participants were for the most part gracious and understanding. Even in an ideal world, people will maintain varied perspectives, and bringing them out into the open not only keeps everyone honest, it tends as well to enhance the quality of scholarship presented, because the audience includes more than the choir with which we normally discuss such things.

Besides, the fact that we are engaged in responsible dialogue among theologians and scientists suggests that we have taken our task as informed Christians seriously. Those who have written off scientists as the devil's agents whose only task is to undo faith in the Bible have no debate about these matters; all is settled. Neither do those who have written off "true believers" as somehow irrelevant and out of touch with the modern world. Perhaps the fact that we debate such issues with purpose and intensity is the best indication of our commitment to absolute honesty with what we see or think we see in the world around us as well as complete faithfulness to what we know or think we know about God through Scripture.

We thus find ourselves, happily I would suggest, celebrating certainties in faith and science surrounding issues we all can affirm, as well as curiosity about what we don't know or that on which we don't at present agree. My sincere thanks to Lowell Cooper of the General Conference and Ben Clausen of the Geoscience Research Institute at Loma Linda University for making possible and fostering a remarkable conference. ■

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Faith and Science Conference

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told of being blacklisted and shut out of areas of ministry because of their views. Some of the stories were comical, some were heartbreaking, but they all highlighted the need for a protected arena in which devout Adventists with divergent views could process with all possible vigor the issues surrounding origins. If Adventist employees are going to have their employment questioned because of their ideas, that questioning should arise from their public writing and speaking, not from the thirdhand report of a dinner conversation which has been circulated over the Web.

A final remark about the human face of the conference. A couple of conservative theologians talked to us personally, strongly protesting against incorrect interpretations of their papers which they had heard from other conference participants. They wanted to make sure that we did not misrepresent their positions. None of us likes to be misquoted or misinterpreted, especially when our words can sink our careers or block us from ministry. We personally thought the "incorrect interpretations" these theologians protested were simply logical implications of their plain statements. But every author should be granted the privilege of explaining him/herself.

One of the most valuable questions raised at this conference was "What did you mean?" The issues raised in this conference remain intense and significant, but repeatedly, asking that question face-to-face led to clarification that reduced our distance from each other. As we continue to wrestle with theological and scientific questions, perhaps the greatest gift we can give each other is to surrender our penchant for telling and learn to ask, "What did you mean?" and "Why do you think that?" ■

"Answers in Genesis" Conference Report

JOHN KURLINSKI

"Answers in Genesis" [AiG] held its biennial Creation Conference in West Harrison, Indiana, May 23-26, 2003. As a pastor, I attended the conference at no charge, though I was responsible for my own transportation, food and lodging. AiG is a nonprofit, independent, nondenominational ministry that seeks to develop and disseminate Christian creation materials. A summary of their mission guidelines, found in *TJ: The In-depth Journal of Creation*, is:

1. The Bible is the inspired, inerrant, written Word of God.
2. Scripture is the final guide for the interpretation of Scripture.
3. The book of Genesis presents a factual history of the origin of life, mankind, the earth and the universe.
4. The Flood was an actual historical event, global in its extent and effect.
5. Scientific aspects of creation are secondary to the proclamation of the gospel.

AiG was founded and is led by former Institute for Creation Research (ICR) speaker Ken Ham. He is the driving vision behind their mission to promote salvation through "creation evangelism." The defense and promulgation of the Genesis story of creation and the flood in a seminar evangelism format is the method of ministry. They produce audio and video tapes as well as two journals, *Creation Ex Nihilo* and *TJ*. The first is a colorful magazine promoting their values for the average person, with a section for children as well. *TJ* is their quarterly technical journal with scientific articles and research papers supportive of the biblical account of a short-age creation of life and the universe.

The conference has a campmeeting flair. Many smaller creationist ministries gather from all over the country to learn, share ideas and methodologies, and be inspired by the speaking and most recent research done by the AiG scientific team and other scientists who share their vision. Presentations covered the gamut of issues—geology, physics, biology, cosmology, theology, paleontology, Darwin, etc.

Two presentations were worth the long trip from Idaho to Indiana. The first was by a geologist, Steve Austin. He presented his recent (2002-2003) findings on nautaloids, a squid-like spiral shellfish. They range in length from several inches to two feet in length. These fossils are found in the Mississippian and Madison formations in the Grand Canyon. The characteristics of the nautiloids' orientation, the vast number of specimens, and other aspects of the depositional environment point to a catastrophic event involving huge quantities of water over a short period of time. There are probably millions in these layers that cover thousands of square miles.

What made his report so fascinating is the cooperation of the National Park Service at the Grand Canyon. After he reported findings to the proper administrators, they contracted with him to catalogue and map this feature for the protection of the fossils from poachers. They are also working on an educational film explaining this feature from a catastrophic perspective—which creationists see as supporting evidence for the flood. A leading geological paper will be submitted for peer review. The support of the local park administration has given creationist geology a possible "foot in the door" in a trade journal.

The second presentation was made by an anatomist, David Menton, who received his Ph.D. from Brown University. Menton is a research technician for the Mayo Clinic as well as an associate professor of anatomy at Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis. His presentation on the "seeing eye and the hearing ear" was exceptional in its scholarship while being understandable in its presentation. I would say that an eighth grader would have had little trouble following the main points of his presentation. He masterfully explained the anatomical and physiological complexity and the awesome abilities of the eye and the ear. They scream "design," or as he would say, "Designer!" There is no possible way these organs could ever have evolved on their own. There are not

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The 'Tradition' of Church-State Separation

RICHARD WORLEY

Last year Clifford Goldstein wrote cryptically, "After 18 years, in which I read myself out of almost everything I ever believed about religious liberty, I left my position as *Liberty* editor." Allowing for characteristic hyperbole, one can find at least part of Goldstein's answer in his 1996 book, *One Nation Under God?*, which contained several concepts that vary with Adventist popular understandings.

For example, alluding to the adage "You can't legislate morality," *One Nation* states: "The idea that you can't legislate morality is ludicrous. Morality is always legislated. It is one of the few things that ever is legislated. Legislation doesn't change character, only behavior, but that's all it's meant to do...in every society, religion shapes morals, and morals shape laws."

BOOK: One Nation Under God, by Clifford Goldstein

After growing up with my own set of views on religious liberties, my own epiphany came in 1970 when I began taking graduate classes in constitutional law at Portland State University. This came at a time when the federal courts had been breaking new ground under the leadership of Chief Justice Earl Warren. Professors and students were enjoying studying court cases that indicated a willingness by the justices to strike out in new directions and make decisions that affected many different segments of society. Some read *Liberty* magazine and appreciated the magazine. In the liberal climate there was wide support for expanding interpretations of the Bill of Rights.

However, I was in for a surprise. Basic to understanding the Bill of Rights, its history and enforcement, was a fact that surprised many PSU students and that others still don't know about. This misunderstanding accounts for much of the confusion that seems to crop up in Adventist publications and in conversations and in the pulpit. Simply put, the Bill of Rights was not written to apply to states, and did not apply to the states, until many decades of national history had passed. In fact, some provisions of the Bill of Rights still have never been enforced upon the states.

Although my liberal PSU friends were pleased that the federal courts were issuing decisions that changed the way government dealt with religion, they recognized that this was new ground the Supreme Court was plowing. It was readily apparent to me that my concepts of traditions of "separation of church and state" were mostly that—traditional understandings.

How did these confusions begin? As noted, the Bill of Rights originally applied only to the national government. However, the basis for change came after the American Civil War, in 1868. The 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution states, "No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities [italics supplied] of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law, nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws."

This amendment was designed to protect freed slaves from a wide variety of abuses that sprang up following the demise of slavery.* What were "privileges and immunities"? In 1925, the court began the process of nationalizing the Bill of Rights by using them as tests of constitutionality. This process has not been completed even today.

I soon realized that most states had "blue laws" upholding Sunday observance; public schools had very commonly provided or allowed prayer in schools, at graduations, and, dare we say it, football games.

In Cantwell v. Connecticut (1940), the court applied the "free exercise of religion" clause of the first amendment by striking down a state law that required a license to solicit funds for a religious cause. In the 1947 case Everson v. The Board of Education the court upheld the "establishment clause"** of the first amendment as enforceable upon the states. This case also quoted Thomas Jefferson, noting his referral to the separation of church and state. The following 56 years have brought a welter of decisions—allowing Sunday laws (if they were nonreligious in intent); banning religious symbols such as Christmas crèches, crosses, and the Ten Commandments on government property; and splitting hairs on whether aid to parochial schools was "establishing" religion or merely aiding education in general.

I soon realized that most states had "blue laws" upholding Sunday observance; public schools had very commonly provided or allowed prayer in schools, at graduations, and, dare we say it, football games. In fact, as a lifelong reader of Ellen White, I cannot remember a

single warning about danger to religious freedom to be seen in school prayers, religious symbols on government property, or common levels of promotion of Christian morality by public officials, including teachers. In her day, of course, many if not most school districts required teachers to be Christian. Her promotion of prohibition (the outlawing the sale of alcohol) was in large part based upon moral grounds.

Some may immediately say, "Times have changed." Of course. But that is irrelevant to the point we are making here. The separation of church and state policies that have emerged in the past 56 years are recent creations and should not be seen as part of "an established tradition of separation of church and state." Further, perhaps we should stay calm and speak more wisely as the Supreme Court appears to do some backtracking on church-state questions.

"A page of history, a measure of common sense, is worth a book of logic." Logically, banning of God from the school pledge when recited in school fits with the absolutist reasoning of some establishment clause interpretations. Similarly, allowing kittens to be "sacrificed" in a religious ritual is no worse than killing chickens for KFC. Most Americans, and probably most Adventists, find absolute logic more dangerous than a weighing and balancing that permits some intellectual inconsistencies.

Whatever the outcome, however, Adventists should avoid arguing that our interpretation can be vindicated by an "American tradition" of separation of church and state. ■

*Unfortunately, the Supreme Court in a variety of cases failed to uphold "civil rights" for African Americans, leading to "Jim Crow" laws and second-class citizenship for many decades. Most notoriously, in Plessy v. Furgeson the Supreme Court upheld "separate, but equal" segregation laws, a ruling that went unchanged for some 60 years.

**"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof...."

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"Answers in Genesis" Conference Report

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enough billions of years for random development of even some of the simpler parts of these magnificent structures. His presentation was the only one that received a standing ovation from all present (about 500 to 600 people). It prompted worship from my heart. It becomes very easy to bow down and give homage to a Being of such wisdom and power, not to mention that he is a God of love.

AiG and ICR, though not strangers to many Adventist scientists, may not be as well known by the average pastor or layperson. Steve Austin worked closely with Harold Coffin on study of the Mount St. Helens catastrophe. Ken Ham and others are well acquainted with Robert Gentry's work on pleochroic halos.

When Stan Hudson, pastor of the Spokane Valley, Wash., Adventist church, and I visited with Ken Ham between sessions, Ham acknowledged his acquaintance with Adventist perspectives; however, there was a negative edge to his perception of the church. The rub seems to be over the origin of the universe. AiG holds to a very strict 6,000 years for the age of everything, including the universe. They label Adventists as "long-agers" because our Great Controversy paradigm of Scripture allows for the pre-existence of matter—stars as well as other potential worlds.

One thing I found disappointing about AiG is their lack of acknowledgment of other creationists or divine-design scientists and writers who are making great contributions to the debate and the interface of theology and science. They do not speak of Michael Behe (a theistic evolutionist with a Roman Catholic faith), Phillip Johnson or many others who through their work have made more inroads into the scientific evolutionary community than the more parochial ministries like AiG.

This lack of acknowledgment arises from their Scriptural apologetics approach to the issue. AiG members see all who do not think exactly as they do as compromising biblical truth. They also do not tie together eschatology or ultimate destiny to their thinking on origins, for they have vast theological differences within their camp. Menton is a Lutheran, and others come from various fundamentalist and Pentecostal persuasions. Genesis has united many strange bedfellows in the creationist movement. ■

John Kurlinski, D. Min., is pastor of the Kuna Seventh-day Adventist Church in Kuna, Idaho, and co-hosts with Stan Hudson a lighthearted radio talk show on creation issues called "Sink the Beagle."

Conference on Religious and Theological Education

JOHN R. JONES

In a historic convergence, about 70 leaders in the denomination's educational programs in religion gathered from around the world at General Conference headquarters July 7 through 10. The purposes of the International Conference on Ministerial and Theological Education, as stated by its organizers in the GC Department of Education, were:

1. To foster theological unity among Bible/religion/theology teachers worldwide.
2. To strengthen the quality of Bible/religion/theology teaching.
3. To review and update the curricula of Bible/religion/theology programs to respond to the needs of the three groups of students attending Adventist colleges, seminaries, and universities: (a) future ministers, religion teachers and chaplains; (b) undergraduate and graduate Adventist students who take Bible/religion classes as part of general education or institutional requirements; and (c) a growing number of students from other faiths who are also required to take these courses.
4. To recommend, if appropriate, the development of textbooks.
5. To exchange successful ideas, methods and approaches in Bible/religion/theology teaching and learning.

Morning sessions, following worship with General Conference (GC) personnel, were tightly scheduled around invited papers. From a variety of cultural perspectives, participants addressed such topics as transmitting the Adventist worldview, beliefs, values and mission; finding/developing faculty who will do this; spiritual master-planning; integrating religion into general-education curricula; advances in pastoral education; and the preparation of chaplains for hospitals, military and educational settings.

Afternoons were devoted to breakout groups with assigned discussion topics. Centering their discussion around a reading of Carnegie Calian's *The Ideal Seminary* (Westminster: 2001), the five groups each day considered a set of assigned questions stressing the educational institutions' roles and function as servants of the church.

Not until the final day did presenters address aspects of the denomination's recently adopted strategies for centralized screening and control of programs and personnel (see accompanying box). GC President Jan Paulsen opened the morning by summoning the denomination's educators to theological unity. Careful to recognize that the church's educators have a legitimate role in helping the church reflect creatively upon its doctrines, Paulsen underscored the distinction between that more formative work and the purposes of the classroom. In the lecture hall, he stressed, the purpose is to attractively reaffirm the established Seventh-day Adventist teachings and values, and to foster the sense of mission. Paulsen emphasized that no ministry in our church has greater potential for communicating the Adventist values than does the ministry of teaching—especially teaching religion. But this same ministry, "which you represent," also has great capacity, when misused, to confuse and destabilize our young people and undo these values. While he did not refer to the denomination's plans for monitoring academic programs and personnel, Paulsen's presentation was clearly designed to justify the policies.

In response to a question concerning appropriate occasions and venues for the more searching tasks of the scholar in religion, Paulsen cited the Biblical Research Institute as a primary example.

The sole note of reservation was sounded by Jon Paulien, Professor and Chair of New Testament Studies

at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University. In his immediately following paper on "The Role of the Adventist Theologian," Paulien sketched the inevitable tensions between the religion scholar's calling to do thoughtful and creative work, and his or her loyalty to the church—a demanding path made more difficult in an atmosphere of mistrust. "Where a reasonable amount of academic freedom does not exist, scholars of integrity are tempted to re-evaluate their loyalty to the church or withhold from the church the fruits of solid and careful study."[1]

In light of this, Paulien turned to the certification procedures of the International Board for Ministerial and Theological Education (IBMTE). In addition to the instability this mechanism injects into the life and work of the religion scholar, Paulien cited its hierarchical construction of oversight, review and certification as problematic. "An accountability from the top down will result in much trauma, the loss of many talents and, in the end, imbalanced thinking in the wider church."

Citing trends in the secular world toward less centralized management, Paulien appealed to the Christian virtues of humility, openness, honesty and authenticity as especially pertinent today. By contrast, he stated that the IBMTE process appears to work "in the opposite direction. It seems to imply that one group is more qualified than another to define what is right. Our pursuit of such truth is more likely to succeed when we listen to each other and work closely together, as I believe we are seeking to do here today." Accordingly, Paulien called for the church to adhere to those processes that have been established as best practice: processes that are both peer-based and institutionally grounded.

In response, Jan Paulsen rose to assure the group of both the church's need for, and confidence in, its theological educators. The Iguazu action, he stressed, had been intended to affirm a core set of "five or six Adventist values," around which the structure of Adventist thought could continue to develop. "There was no intent of making you feel yourselves to be judged from above," he stated. Nor, on the other hand, was there any intent that each institution should propose on its own, how to deal with local problems in light of the denomination-wide call for unity. Paulsen urged that if some found difficulties with the proposed protocols for implementing the new policies, they should submit alternative proposals through the authorized channels. "We better get this together," he concluded, "and get it right."

No votes were taken regarding the establishing of the IBMTE and its division-level counterparts; these are already a matter of voted policy. Nor were any actions taken concerning procedures for implementation—though the group did recommend that the GC Office of Strategic Planning should "continue to seek creative means of fostering and promoting theological unity."

Among the 28 recommendations adopted at the close of the conference was one calling for similar gatherings on a regular basis. Regarding the procedural issues in implementing the denomination's plan for monitoring educational programs and personnel, delegates and GC officers recognize that work remains. The conference, it is hoped, has increased the prospect that this work will honor the best Adventist traditions of professional and institutional integrity, mutual trust, and provision for continued openness toward truth. ■

[1] *Paulien, Jon. "The Role of the Adventist Theologian," unpublished paper presented to the International Conference on Religion and Theological Education, Silver Spring, Md., July 10, 2003.*

Dr. John R. Jones is dean of the School of Religion at La Sierra University, Riverside, Calif.

Brief Historical Sketch

Annual Council: October 1998: New provisions voted for the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist church, establishing an "International Board of Ministerial and Theological Education" at the level of the General Conference, and in each division a similar "Board of Ministerial and Theological Education," charged with responsibility for screening and certifying academic programs and personnel in all Adventist institutions of higher education. (FE 20 15 and FE 20 20: *General Conference Working Policy*, 2002 edition, pages 233-240.)

November 1998: Statement of concern voted by Adventist Society for Religious Studies. Submitted to GC, but it received no acknowledgment.

September 2001: Subcommittee of GC IBMTE completed its 112-page *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Ministerial and Theological Education*, stipulating protocols for implementation and associated documents. The handbook, drafted in strict confidentiality, was voted by the full IBMTE in September. It was scheduled for ratification by the world church in annual council October 2001. It was withdrawn from the agenda shortly before the council met.

November 2001: Second statement of concern voted by Adventist Society for Religious Studies. ASRS officers sought to present the statement and accompanying signatures personally to a vice president of the GC, and to discuss the society's concerns, but were not granted an appointment.

At the same ASRS session, at the request of the North American Division, representatives were appointed by NAD religion chairs and deans to a task force to develop alternative procedures for the NAD. This working group produced a four-page proposal, on which they voted their approval in February 2002. It was subsequently modified into a second version, which the group has not yet met to consider.

Late 2002: Representatives of the GC institutions of higher education submitted their 16-page proposal to the IBMTE, containing a philosophical statement and alternative protocols for implementation.

July 2003: Four-day International Conference on Religious and Theological Education, under the aegis of the GC Department of Education, attended primarily by deans/chairs of religion schools/departments.

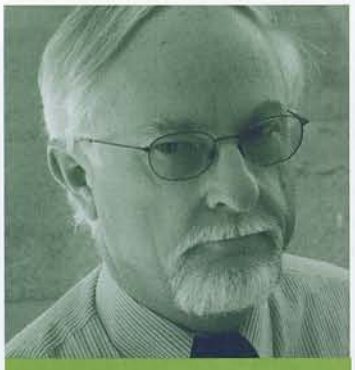
Adventist Creationism in the 21st Century: Fundamentalist or Constructive?

ERVIN TAYLOR

It is now widely and publicly acknowledged that there are substantive differences of opinion among Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) scholars, both scientists and theologians, about how the Genesis creation narratives should be interpreted.

The diversity of views can, in large part, be traced to whether scholars hold fundamentalist or nonfundamentalist-based assumptions concerning the nature of biblical inspiration.

Their views of inspiration influence the degree to which such scholars acknowledge that biblical narratives like these may contain factual errors. These views also may influence their acceptance or rejection of scientific data—geological paleontological and archaeological—which they consider to be incompatible with traditional SDA views on origins.



Dr. R. E. Taylor is a faculty member of the department of anthropology at the University of California, Riverside.

How can we reconcile these conflicting perspectives? I think that the current dialogues on this topic might serve as a model and case study of how other conflicting theological issues in the church can be resolved in a constructive manner. We can use these discussions to explore how important doctrines such as the Sabbath might be revalued in light of nonfundamentalist ways of approaching the biblical narratives. Though some people declare that we must retain the traditional views on the creation narratives, those who disagree should still honor their understandings and spiritual integrity. Those who hold a different perspective also have a right to the respect of any who disagree. Some may even disagree with both positions. But our church community as a whole should give them all equal respect; none should feel compelled to give up their views. The current president of the General Conference has proposed a constructive approach to reconcile the diversity of views on how God accomplished his creation. His approach, with several caveats, is for the church, firstly, to simply "to live with" the differences; and secondly, to "create a good home for the future in which people can communicate, understand each other, [and] respect each other's space."

Traditional SDA Creationism

Traditionally Adventists have believed in what is sometimes called "young life creationism"—that all forms of life were created in six contiguous, literal, 24-hour days in the recent past. The words "in six days, the Lord made ...all living things upon the earth" were added to the sixth of the 27 Fundamental Beliefs of the church at the 1980 General Conference session, without mention of how long ago that happened. This was the first time an official statement of doctrine made any reference to the details of either the creation or the flood narratives in Genesis.

Those holding to "young life creationism" typically define and state the "recent past" to be in the range from about 6,000 to 10,000 years, and a few people suggest even slightly higher numbers. At the most recent (2002) meeting of the General Conference Biblical Research Institute Science Council (BRISCO), held at Loma Linda University, a much higher number—on the order of several hundred thousand years—was mentioned as a possibility by one BRISCO member with a reputation for supporting the church's traditional positions on these matters. In addition, the conventional Adventist "young life creationism" posits that there has also occurred an even more recent catastrophic, worldwide flood—the so-called Noachian Flood described in Genesis 7-8, occurring somewhere between 4,000 and 6,000 years ago. Traditional understandings hold this event responsible for much or all of the fossil-bearing layers of the geologic column. They thus reflect an essentially fundamentalist view of Biblical inspiration and are currently championed by the Adventist Theological Society.

Young Life Creationism and SDA Fundamentalism

The use of the word "fundamentalist" in this discussion is not intended as pejorative. In historical, sociological or anthropological discussions of this topic, the term is

used in a descriptive and comparative sense, as defined by scholars who have studied varieties of religious commitments and expressions—particularly by those who have examined the history of American religious movements. This is how George Knight, professor of church history at the SDA Theological Seminary, used the term in a recent survey of the history of the SDA movement, A Search for Identity: The Development of Seventh-day Adventist Beliefs. He entitled the chapter in which he reviewed developments of SDA beliefs between 1919 and 1950: "What Is Fundamentalist in Adventism?"

A succinct scholarly definition of "fundamentalism" would be that it describes a militant, conservative movement in American Protestantism that, around the beginning of the 20th century, arose in opposition to what were termed "modernist" elements and tendencies in several Protestant churches of the time. Among other doctrinal statements, fundamentalist Protestants emphasized their belief in the absolute inerrancy of the Scriptures in the original autographs, that is, that there are no major errors of fact in any biblical text. The origin of the word "fundamentalism" itself derives from a series of booklets titled *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth*, written between 1910 and 1915 by a group of conservative evangelical Protestant scholars in the United States.

In popular and journalistic discussions fundamentalists are pictured as intellectually naive, culturally unsophisticated, and lacking in advanced formal education. They are represented as strident, anti-intellectual, reactionary bigots. However, many of the authors writing chapters in *The Fundamentals* held earned doctorates from major universities of the time and had academic appointments in some respectable academic institutions. Likewise, many SDA theologians currently supporting the young life creationism position, as exemplified by members of the Adventist Theological Society, are well-trained in various fields of theology or biblical studies, and some have earned doctoral degrees from major European or American universities. It should be forcefully emphasized that differences of opinion on this topic within the SDA community today are not a reflection of superior or inferior education or intellectual ability on either side of any disputed point of view. Rather, at issue are assumptions people hold about which biblical interpretative framework is to be considered normative within the SDA tradition, and how it is to be applied to this topic.

Many Adventists who hold to biblical inerrancy are influenced by the church's all-encompassing worldview, a means of completely understanding the past, present and future. The "Great Controversy" theme provides a master narrative and explanatory worldview that begins in the book of Genesis and ends in the book of Revelation. Many of its public evangelists present this as a comprehensive religious package. To many of its members this master narrative is thought of as an undifferentiated whole composed of a tightly interconnected set of beliefs which, taken together in their totality, are simply, "The Truth." It is thus understandable that they would tend to view a change in any one element as having important and far-reaching consequences for many other parts of their religious identity.

SDA Creationism and Flood Geology

University of Wisconsin historian Ronald Numbers, a former Loma Linda University faculty member, in his *The Creationists: The Evolution of Scientific Creationism*, documents how Adventists helped develop one facet of fundamentalist creationism in America. In this widely quoted book, he traces the SDA influence on the shaping of the modern fundamentalist "creation science" movement, and especially one of its characteristic hallmarks—the advocacy of a recent worldwide flood.

Numbers details how in the early 1900s one Adventist, George McCready Price, wrote books on what he called "flood geology," which were picked up by fundamentalists as their best way to confront evolutionary geology. Price's convictions on this matter stemmed from his reading of the Adventist prophetess, Ellen G. White. Like essentially all 19th-century conservative Protestants, she believed in a recent creation of all living things about 6,000 years ago and a worldwide flood not long after. Price, who received no formal education in geology but who read widely in the geological literature of his time, was a firm believer in the total and complete validity—we might even say inerrancy—of Ellen White's views on all important theological questions, including her interpretation of the opening chapters of Genesis.

Since for some conservative Adventists this essentially fundamentalist interpretation of the Genesis creation and flood narratives have been thus linked to what they regard as central elements of SDA doctrine, the details assume great importance. In fact, for some church members, to deny the literal truthfulness of a recent, worldwide flood, undermines what they view as the basis of their eternal salvation. This is clearly a very serious matter. SDAs who do not share these views should be sensitive to those for whom this is an issue of ultimate significance. Any who attempt to approach these differences in the church must affirm the sincerity and commitment of all members, even when not in agreement with their conclusions.

> Traditional understandings...reflect an essentially fundamentalist view of Biblical inspiration and are currently championed by the Adventist Theological Society.

A New SDA Creationism: Constructive Approaches

A number of Adventist scholars have advanced alternative, nonfundamentalist understandings and

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Adventist Creationism in the 21st Century: Fundamentalist or Constructive?

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interpretations of the Genesis narratives. Several have pointed out that there are approaches to honoring and celebrating the Sabbath within a solid Christian context that do not require the use of a fundamentalist view of the Genesis narratives. Some note that the reason given for the Sabbath as presented in Deuteronomy does not mention the creation narrative, but rather places it in the context of the Exodus experience. It is also commonly accepted that Jesus worshipped on the Sabbath. One might accept considerations like these as fully sufficient for observing the Sabbath as an appropriate day of worship for Christians, without reference to the creation week.

On the scientific side, conventional SDA creationism is confronted with a massive scientific corpus assembled over the past century by students from many academic disciplines, indicating that the fossil record was deposited under many types of environmental conditions over many hundreds of millions of years. Modern human populations, they report, have been on earth at least 100,000 years. There is little physical evidence in the geological record that indicates a recent, worldwide flood. In this discussion, it is important to reiterate that the evidence for or against Neo-Darwinian evolution as a scientific explanation for the observed fossil record has very little to do with the empirical evidence supporting contemporary scientific understandings of the deep time reflected in the fossil record.

Current dialogues on origins might serve as a model...of how other conflicting theological issues in the church in a constructive manner.

The current dialogue on creationism between the fundamentalist and nonfundamentalist elements of the church provides not so much a problem as an opportunity. The discussion focused on the issues surrounding this topic may provide a framework and model of how such a church with so many fundamentalist roots might foster—or at least not hinder—constructive pluralism. Can we as SDA Christians engage in the process of adjusting to a more diverse theological environment, while avoiding unproductive, negative organizational tensions? In the earliest years of the formation of the church, its leaders and scholars wrestled with many diverse opinions until their doctrinal positions were refined and clarified. Can we show the same spirit today?

In the context of this topic, I would like to suggest that one of these constructive refinements now might be to acknowledge as a new normative view of creationism that the God of the biblical narratives is the Creator of the universe and all that is good in it—and leave the details of what, when, and how it was done to the individual conscience and convictions.

Another constructive refinement would be to implement a suggestion of the current president of the General Conference, Jan Paulsen. His proposal was included in a recent essay entitled "The Theological Landscape," presented at a conference of church leaders in May 2002 on the "Theological Unity in a Growing World Church." In his view, "the church works best when unity and diversity coexist in a nonhostile tension, learning to defer creatively to each other, but loving that which they share more than they love themselves." Recognizing that "some theological polarity" exists in the church of the "right or the left, reactionary or liberal," he asked how the church might deal with this reality. His essentially pragmatic answer was to "learn to live with it."

Some in the church may feel it is vital that they retain the traditional understandings of the creation narratives in Genesis; their understandings and spiritual integrity should be honored by those who disagree. Others may wish to approach the creation narratives in Genesis from a nonfundamentalist theological perspective; and their views should be likewise honored. I am suggesting that as a 21st-century faith community, we have the opportunity to create a positive environment for all members—including those employed by the organized church—to affirm either fundamentalist or nonfundamentalist perspectives on this and other conflicted theological understandings.

In conclusion, a question that now seems to be squarely before the community of SDA biblical scholars and scientists is, How best can they assist their faith community to reconcile conflicting theological perspectives, including diverse views on creationism, in a constructive manner that will celebrate the church's historic commitment to "present truth"? All of us can play a constructive and healing role in assisting our faith tradition to create a place where, in the words of Paulsen, "unity and diversity coexist in nonhostile tension," where "people can communicate, understand each other, [and] respect each other's space." I would suggest that the current creationism dialogues have the potential to serve both as a case study and a model of how other conflicted theological issues in the church can be resolved in a constructive manner and how historically important doctrines, such as the Sabbath, can be revalued in light of new information and insights about how God has, and is, creating the universe and conscious beings within it. ■

In part, this article was the basis of a presentation made at the San Diego Chapter of the Association of Adventist Forums in May 2003. A much more detailed paper with footnotes and references is available from the author who may be contacted at retaylor.ca@att.net.

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Restoring Fallen Pastors

Errol Lawrence raised an interesting question when he asked if fallen SDA pastors either can or should be restored (AT Jan/Feb 2002). In my response I will write in the male gender, as most fallen SDA pastors are men.

In a sense, our church already attempts to restore such pastors. It does it by an accomplished practice of denial, which results in statements such as: penetration was incomplete, so intercourse did not take place; rubbing her breasts is not immorality; vaginal ejaculation did not take place, so there was no violation of the seventh commandment. The outside world knows better than this. The Uniform Code of Military Justice, as just about every military person knows, states that in rape cases penetration is not required. Penile contact with labia is all that is needed.

Our denial allows us to attempt to restore the person who is considered to have made a mistake in judgment. All too often this restoration has included such measures as: advice not to do it again, redemptive transfers, and attendance at a field school of evangelism. Advice not to do it again will most likely communicate that he should not get caught. Redemptive transfers are usually done without the knowledge of the gaining congregation. No one can hold the pastor accountable. Participation in evangelistic efforts neither deals with the root cause in the individual, nor really gives him time to devote to his spiritual life.

On a personal basis, I agree that sexual impropriety should not be an automatic, permanent disbarment from spiritual leadership functions. But, I believe that while there should be exceptions, in the majority of cases there should be a permanent withdrawing from pastoral care.

One example of an exception would be a single pastor who has stepped outside of bounds in a dating relationship. Another would be a pastor who patronizes a prostitute. These can both result from a "falling into sin" and not a commitment to sin. In addition, they may involve the individual's sexual maturation. It is common in the Adventist church to repress our sexuality. Some of the most vulnerable people are those who do so. It is very unhealthy for a pastor to be unable to acknowledge that he finds a certain female sexually attractive. It is a normal part of life to be sexually attracted to a person not your wife. The pastor, in establishing boundaries and standards for appropriate relationships, should acknowledge his sexual attraction to another and thus make decisions as to his future relationship with that person. One who can not acknowledge this places the relationship on an unconstrained basis where whatever happens, just happens. This is a failure to accept responsibility, and a foundation for real problems. These two exceptions, for me, represent cases where there can be a high likelihood of restoration, both spiritually and behaviorally.

The majority of situations of pastoral sexual misconduct will typically not allow for restoration to pastoral care. These will generally involve sexual misconduct with either a parishioner or with a minor....

Secular ethics in the helping professions deal with the establishment of boundaries, transference and counter transference. All of these come into consideration when the sexual misconduct involves a parishioner. The violation of professional ethics is so great that serious consideration should be given to whether or not the pastor should ever again provide pastoral care. In the secular world there are standards that may provide for permanent loss of license or credentials. A certified public accountant who embezzles from a client my be permanently barred from accounting. A police officer who uses excessive force once, may never again work in law enforcement. The standards are tough. But, they are reasonable, and we need to hold pastors to tough standards. Sexual involvement with a congregational member is much more than an individual sin. It is a sin against the congregation, the denomination, and the profession of ministry. A reasonable consequence of such may be that the person never again is involved in pastoral care.

This also is true for one who has become sexually involved with a child. Pastoral care always has the potential for care to children. One who has been so involved can never be deemed to be safe to provide care to children. This involvement is not about sex. It may be about power, control, and violence. The sexual and emotional feelings that participated in the sexual assault on the child often remain in the criminal for years and even decades.

The criminal may talk a good story about repentance, and make behavioral changes. But, he may still see the 12-year-old as a small woman. He may refer to her as a Lolita, which indicates he still sexually fantasizes about her in his mind. Often he will have no idea of the emotional impact on the family and on the victim. Such children may develop significant behavioral problems and become spiritually estranged from God and church. Yet the criminal will see the victim as getting on with her life, and have no sense of the destructiveness of the sexual assault. Some will attempt to sublimate their unresolved sexual issues in a socially acceptable manner. Pastoral care provides a good means to do this. But, all the time the basic underlying issues remain in the criminal. Such people have justly earned a permanent disbarment from pastoral care. Grace is required of Christians. But, grace does not require restoration to a pastoral position. While there are exceptions, the majority of cases of pastoral sexual misconduct should not have a restoration to a pastoral position.

Gregory Matthews, Brighton, Colo.

Gregory Matthews is an ordained Adventist minister and a retired U.S. Army chaplain, and currently is a chaplain in a Veterans Affairs hospital in Denver, Colo. He also participates in an Internet ministry to sexually abused women at www.s-n-t.org.

On the Edges of the BIG TENT

GLEN GREENWALT

My first memory of camp meeting is like awakening from sleep. I seem to be looking out from inside a dark cave, not unlike Plato's famous cave. I must have been almost 3 years old.

Images, sounds, and even smells appear and then disappear. I remember walking up these creaking stairs, and then down a long corridor with many doors. I had never been in a building like this before. From old black-and-white photos I now know the place was the girls' dormitory at Mount Ellis Academy.

GLEN GREENWALT is a theologian and an artist.

Next, I remember my mother unpacking our blankets and the grocery sacks of food and the sounds of footsteps passing in the hallway, with doors opening and closing, adults greeting each other outside our door, and children laughing and running down the hall.

For the first time in my life I remember thinking about my world, rather than simply experiencing it, or imagining myself in some fantasy world. Other families, I sensed, were in rooms just like ours, and were doing essentially the same things we were, but they inhabited a different world than mine.

Some were more worldly than our family (they didn't go to many meetings) and some far stricter (they wore long dresses and the men wore beards). I sensed, although I do not remember it, that I could set the course of my life as well, for my mother tells me that when it came time for Sabbath School I told her that she didn't have to go with me. I could go on my own. Camp meeting provided the opportunity to enter a world with wider horizons than I had known before.

Camp meeting continued to provide an opening to a wider world of ideas, friendships, and personal freedom as I grew through my teens. Growing up on a farm, I found that camp meeting provided release from the work. We were never able to take a whole week off, but we would begin shopping for food and packing up our sleeping bags on Thursday afternoon so that we could leave early Friday morning.

For every mile as we drove in our open-windowed car, the air became cooler and the surrounding hills greener. Just outside of Laurel we passed a sandstone citadel where Jim Bridger and Wild Bill Hickock were said to have held off a band of Indians. At Columbus we could see the Rosebud, where General Reno first had a skirmish with a band of Sioux Indians before his fateful meeting with Custer at the Little Bighorn. Finally, we would come over the Bozeman pass and into the Gallatin valley, first shown to white men by Sacagawea. In our going to camp meeting, the yearly feasts and sojourns of Israelites, the stories of the Old West, and our family history became one.

As we turned off the highway and drove up the gravel road toward the campground my heart would race with the excitement of seeing friends and meeting new people—especially girls. Inevitably, on the drive home after camp meeting was over I would hardly pay attention to that same landscape. My thoughts were always back with my friends, sometimes on a sermon, and at times on a girl I was too shy to meet.

Camp meetings have always been conceived as convocations centered on fiery preaching and souls finding the Lord. But there has always been a lot more to them. A description of a "field meeting" in the back country of England from the year 1759 suggests why Ellen White in her own day made repeated appeals for Adventist camp meetings to be governed by order and decorum, with greater attention placed upon one's spiritual condition than upon dress and food. Here is the English "field meeting":

[A]t first you find a great number of men and

> women lying upon the grass; here they are sleeping and snoring, some with their faces toward heaven, others with their faces turned downwards, or covered with bonnets; there you find a knot of young fellows and girls making assignations to go home together in the evening, or to meet in some ale-house; in another place you see a circle around some ale-barrel, many of which stand ready upon carts for the refreshment of the saints.... In this sacred assembly there is an odd mixture of religion, sleep, drinking, courtship, and a confusion of sexes, ages and characters.

Remove the reference to alcohol, and this critical description of an early camp meeting is colorfully descriptive of most camp meetings I have attended. As a young pastor at the Gladstone campground in Oregon, I often felt that I had been transported back into the 19th century. The same huge crowd of the faithful listened spellbound to a preacher in a grove of trees, as around the edges of the meeting I could see people sitting or lying in tents, walking about, or talking with friends.

Camp meetings have always attracted not only the faithful but also the simply curious, the social, and even the unruly. Both the intensity of emotion and the crowds of the curious led most Presbyterians and Baptists to abandon camp meetings by the time of the Civil War. Methodists and their descendents continued camp meetings, but sought to domesticate them. Ironically, the very need to bring decorum to these gatherings and weed out the excesses of the 19th century has sapped most of the life out of modern-day camp meetings.

The focus of such a meeting ought to be upon the spiritual, but when the value of these gatherings is limited to their effectiveness in converting souls and inspiring revival in the church, the very thing that is sought may be lost. Early camp meetings had three things in common outside of preaching: 1) they were located in places of recognized beauty—often in groves of trees that came to be viewed as sacred groves; 2) people left their everyday drudgery to celebrate with friends, leading to one early observation that camp meetings were one giant potluck; and 3) people found physical as well as spiritual refreshment in their lives.

I have wondered at times what evangelists will do in heaven. I am certainly in favor of revival and evangelism. But for me the work of the church is just that—work. It is like being back on the farm. There is a great deal of satisfaction that comes from planting, cultivating, watering, and harvesting. Outside of camp meetings, my fondest memories of childhood are harvesttime, when a crew of men would sit around our table telling stories and complimenting my mother on her good cooking. But even harvesttime is work.

Heaven I envision as camp meeting. I imagine great storytelling (I really can't imagine preaching in heaven). But most of all I imagine traveling to someplace at least as beautiful as the Gallatin. While I cannot share the poet John Greenleaf Whittier's difficulty in comprehending "how it is that this goodly, green sunlit home of ours is under a curse," I have to agree with him that in "September sunsets, changing forests, moonrise and cloud, sun and rain" I more often see "the perfect work of infinite love as well as wisdom," than in a good deal of preaching.

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In part, the decline of camp meetings is due to the fact that campgrounds once selected for their natural beauty are today surrounded by shopping malls and fast-food restaurants, and are within easy driving distance of home or motels. Preaching alone is not enough to get people to camp meeting. On this Ellen White agreed.

Few people are eager to go to heaven just to have some text of Scripture explained. We have eternity during which to learn the truth. Like camp meeting, what people anticipate most about heaven is finding friends and loved ones and meeting the Jesus who made it all possible. In other words, heaven sounds a lot like camp meeting around the edges of the big tent—people talking to friends, laughing, hugging each other, and making plans to eat together.

Now when I think of heaven in these terms, I feel all the same excitement and anticipation I used to have as we left the work of the farm behind and headed to Bozeman for camp meeting. The air becomes cooler. The grass greener. I feel refreshed. ■

The Eyes of God

DEE MYERS

His eyes, calm and deep as the water in the well beside me, hold mine. My eyes dam a torrent of turbulent thoughts.

Who is this man? This Jew? What is he doing here, alone, in the middle of the day? He's thirsty. He wants a drink of water. That's original! Probably belongs to that ragtag bunch I passed on my way here to draw water. Jewish men, who averted their eyes, my presence an offence. In different circumstances, I could have held their eyes.

But this man's eyes hold mine. I'm used to being looked over, around, through, but not at. How do I look into eyes that hold no leer or judgment? He asked me—me—a woman—a Samaritan woman—for a drink of water. Jewish men won't speak to their wives in public, let alone a total stranger. Our races have been enemies for over 400 years. Why would he ask me for water?

Living water? I'm familiar with the dispute over the difference between running water and well water. Frankly, I fail to taste any difference. But he carries no container? Where is his spring of water? Where am I to draw? I am weary of this isolated trek—the well in town is closer, but this well offers respite from the insinuations and isolating glances of the other women. I pretend not to notice but I yearn to be part of the camaraderie of those women on their daily pilgrimage for water.

What did he say? Never thirst again? How wonderful to draw water and never thirst. I have been thirsty all my life—I have yet to find water to sate my thirst. How is his living water different from this well? Or any other water? I glance into his eyes. Eyes brimming with invitation. Invitation to what?

He wants me to invite my husband? Where did that come from? How does he know of my five failed marriages—that I've abandoned marriage all together and am living with my current lover? How does he have such intimate knowledge of my heart? There is no way I'm going there. Shame prevents.

Yet he willingly follows my diversion. Where do I, as a sinner, go to worship God? Where do I find God? The cry of my parched heart. Excuse me? Worship is not about where? Worship is about who? Worship is knowing God heart and soul? How I long to know God.

I look into his eyes. He said he was thirsty. I feel like he is thirsty for me. Could I—can I be looking into the eyes of God? ■