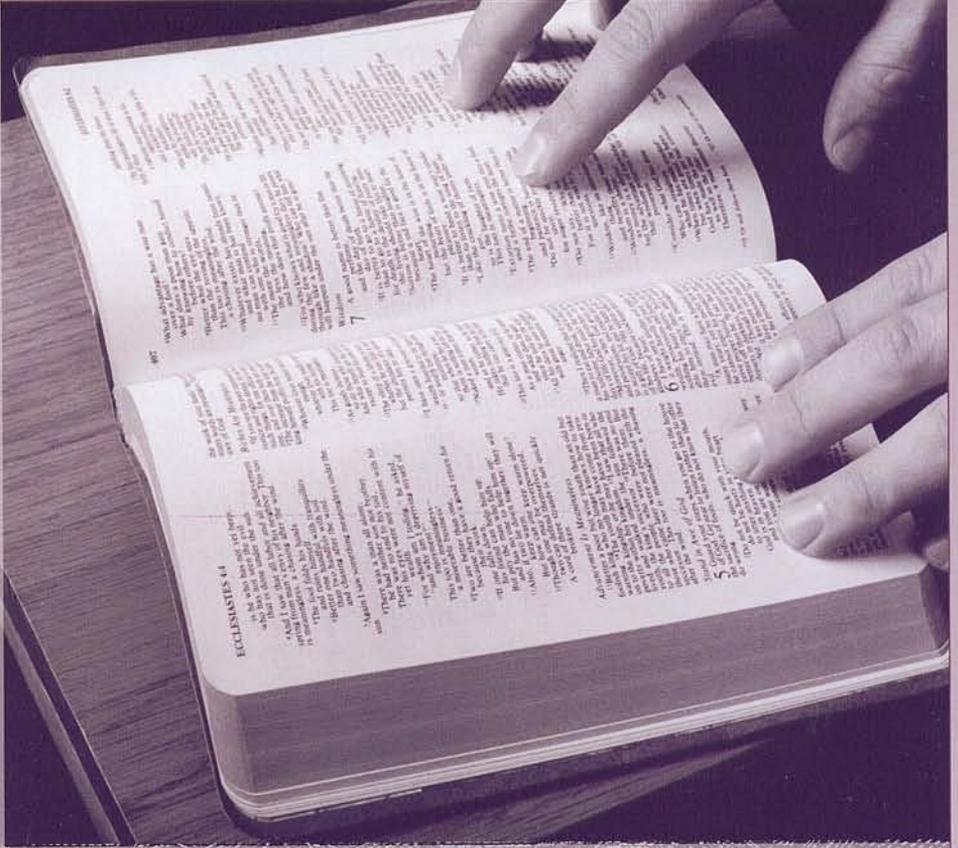


# adventist today

NEWS  
ANALYSIS  
OPINION

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# Lovers of Truth

JOHN MCLARTY

“L

iberal Adventists are undermining the truth. They question the historicity of our traditional understanding of Ellen White’s prophetic ministry. They point out scientific and theological problems in our traditional understanding of earth history. The trouble with these liberals is that they are unwilling to submit to authority, to humbly accept the teaching of competent ecclesiastical authorities. They do not trust the conclusions of our spiritual ancestors. They don’t bow to the truth.”

In this issue of *Adventist Today*, we do the typical “liberal” thing: We pointedly question several traditional “verities” of Adventism. These verities have been broadly affirmed in our church for over a hundred years and are seen by many as integral to Adventist identity and mission. But we also publish a classically “conservative” piece arguing for objective, nonpersonal truth and warning against the subjectivity of “the Left.” Why?

First, we often publish articles “to the right” of our editorial group. We value the contributions conservatives make to the life and thought of the church. Second, even though we are far more hesitant to claim that we “have the truth” than are our conservative critics, our very reason for existence is our commitment to the truth. This devotion to truth is part of our Adventist heritage. According to Ellen White, nothing is true simply because it has always been believed or because the church says so or because she says so. We would add, nothing is true simply because the Bible says so. A statement is true if it corresponds with reality, and false if it doesn’t.

The Adventist veneration of law is linked with this understanding of truth. We believe that even God is in some sense bound by law. He is trustworthy because he is consistent, rational and predictable, not capricious and arbitrary. (I am not denying God’s capacity to make personal choices, but those choices are within boundaries suggested by love, justice, rationality, fidelity.)

We believe that nature, like its creator, is also consistent. We reject materialistic explanations for the origin of life because they appear to us to require a saltation or miracle that is utterly incompatible with everything we observe in the universe.

Just as we reject naturalistic explanations that involve the invocation of godless miracles, so we reject spiritual explanations that ignore or contradict concrete evidence in the natural realm. In short, when we challenge traditional understandings of reality, we do so in pursuit of truth, not because we are relativists or postmoderns.

I personally value much of postmodern thought. The postmodern emphasis on relationships finds a very strong echo in the Bible, where the Jews receive extraordinary favors and punishment because of their special relationship with

**Just as we reject naturalistic explanations that involve the invocation of godless miracles, so we reject spiritual explanations that ignore or contradict concrete evidence of natural processes.**

God and where salvation is declared to come from knowing Jesus Christ. The postmodern recognition that all dogmatic religious statements are conditioned by time and place is a healthy corrective to the arrogance of Adventist traditionalism. We don’t have everything just right. We don’t have all the truth. But as a journal of progressive Adventism, AT is committed to the pursuit and publication of truth. Of course, we don’t always get it right. But we believe we provide a valuable service to the Seventh-day Adventist community by our exploration of credible challenges to “what we have always known” and our attention to the voices of those who have been driven by their studies to see reality in ways that sometimes contradict our historic certainties.

These novel perspectives are not always right. Tradition is not always wrong. But tradition is strengthened and purified when it is respectfully tested and questioned. We think that is part of our job. We believe it is required of those who love the truth. ■

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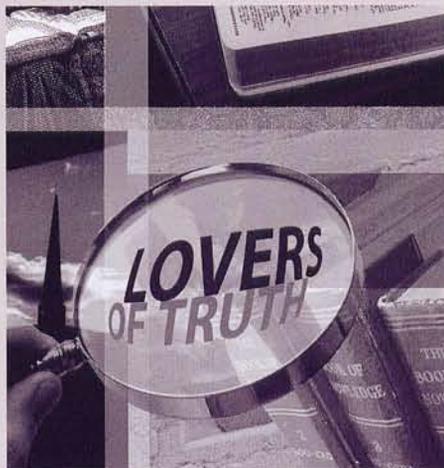
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## Gay Marriage and Discernment

I sincerely appreciate David Person's articulate argument entitled "Banning Gay Marriage Is Discriminatory and Wrong" (AT March/April 2004); his clarity challenged my own thinking on the matter. Nonetheless, while I agree with his spirit of conviction, I am left with some heavy questions concerning discrimination and government's role in the matter. Is all "discrimination" categorically wrong? Or, has this word become emotionally loaded and would it remove the power of government or an individual to be able to discern, and voice that discernment?

**We do not have an injunction from God to discriminate racially; however, we do have God's explicit word concerning sexual moral behavior. Because homosexuality is a religious moral issue, does that automatically gag government from being able to protect what is also a civil institution that dates thousands of years?**

To say that racial discrimination is wrong I wholeheartedly support, but to allege that discrimination is not Christian is overstating. The Ten Commandments teach us to discriminate between what is good and what is evil, and yet, according to Jesus, such discrimination is based on love. To hate is never Christian. Jesus left us many examples of how to discriminate in love: the woman at the well, the woman caught in the act of adultery, Zacchaeus the tax collector, Levi Matthew with his partying cohorts, and his (i.e., Jesus') own dying words while hanging on an unjust cross—just to mention a few.

We do not have an injunction from God to discriminate racially; however, we do have God's explicit word concerning sexual moral behavior. Because homosexuality is a religious moral issue, does that automatically gag government from being able to protect what is also a civil institution that dates thousands of years?

**Jay C. Baker | Via the Internet**

## Defense of Marriage Legislation

In the *Pacific Union Recorder* editorial you reprinted (AT Jan/Feb 2004), the editorial invokes the Ten Commandments to defend church intervention in same-sex marriage legislation. But the Ten Commandments focus on one basic marriage issue, adultery. If we look at the teaching of Jesus on this issue we find that He denied the reality of divorce, making remarriage a form of adultery (Matt 5:31-32; 19:3-9; Mark 10:2-12; Luke 16:18).

Where then, is the real Defense of Marriage legisla-

tion—making remarriage off-limits to most divorced heterosexuals? When remarried couples seek to join our church, why don't we tell them they are living in sin and must separate in order to join us? Do heterosexuals get a special dispensation from Jesus' teaching on divorce and remarriage?

**Jim Miller | Madison, Wis.**

## Curious Logic on Gay Marriage

Some curious logic is employed in the recent *Adventist Today* (March/April 2004) on the subject of homosexuality.

John McLarty, a thought-provoking writer and effective editor, makes the assertion that since we Christians have such an abysmal track record with heterosexual marriage (i.e., high rate of divorce) perhaps our "right to speak" on the issue of gay marriage has been diminished. We have thus not "earned the right to speak." But is the truthfulness of the message that man/woman marriage, as it was in God's created plan, is the best way, any less true just because we are defective? Our failure to live up to a high standard does not necessarily diminish the validity of that standard. (It does however speak volumes to our fallenness and need for redemption.)

Skeptics love to trash Christians for failings like Swaggart's and the Bakers' public falls from their own high standards. But does that make their standards any less well-grounded? Why should the person with no discernible standards automatically become "right" when Christians fail to meet their own standards?

Next, it seems to me that David Person commits a classic blunder when he assumes his point to prove his point. Discrimination is wrong. We all agree with that. Any action that does not treat gays as "equal" in every respect is discrimination and is therefore wrong. But the question of whether "gay marriage" should be treated differently from heterosexual marriage is the very point under debate! I'd guess he wouldn't dream of calling legal prohibitions against slavery, polygamy and unequal treatment of women in employment "discrimination" (though one finds more support for these in the Bible than for "gay marriage"). If every personal choice is given blanket exemption from being restricted because such restriction would be "discrimination," on what basis could there be any legal intervention in anyone's behavior no matter how bizarre or harmful? At what point does "discrimination" become the proper rejection of harmful, disruptive, antifamily or antisocial behavior?

Lastly, Ronald Lawson maintains that speaking against gay marriage somehow is an attempt to impose morality. This is tantamount to saying that the church has nothing whatsoever to contribute to the public discourse. By this reasoning, no person with any position molded in any way by religious influence has a right to

speak. Laws which uphold moral values are enacted all the time. Whether or not lawmakers label their motives as “moral,” the fact remains that laws protecting children and women, prohibitions on murder, theft and trafficking in humans are all grounded in a moral sensibility. The assumption that the “evolution” of marriage necessarily must lead to the acceptance of gay marriage as the moral equivalent to heterosexual marriage is unsubstantiated, contrary to Romans 1 and dubious.

To act as if acceptance of gay marriage as a civil right will not have any “spillover” effect in implying a moral equivalence to heterosexual marriage is naive at best, devious and catastrophic at worst. (His inability to discern the danger to traditional families that such an implied moral equivalence brings is, in itself, troubling.) To what other biblically rejected activities has Mr. Lawson applied such thinking? If biblical values are rejected as having no place in society simply because they are biblical, where, pray tell, does one get his values from? Should not these “alternative sources” also be subjected to the same scrutiny and suspicion Lawson focuses on the Bible? Our founding fathers rightly recognized the dangers of a state run by the church. This does not, however, mean that the values that molded their convictions were completely separated from their beliefs in God.

There may well be some good arguments in favor of gay marriage. The ones set forth in this issue of *Adventist Today* however, are not among them.

**Bob Rigsby | Orlando, Fla.**

## Not All Adventists Oppose Gay Marriage

Adventists should reject Alan Reinach’s plea to “speak up” on gay marriage.

■ He seems to assume that church members are uniformly against gay marriage. They are not. I, for one, am in favor of allowing gay marriage on constitutional and equality grounds. Others in the church have a similar approach.

■ Gay marriage is constitutional under the constitutions of most states. Opponents of gay marriage tacitly admit as much by calling for amendments that would expressly prohibit gay marriage.

■ Reinach overlooks the fact that marriage has two aspects: civil and religious. Nothing would prevent the church from continuing to fulminate against homosexuality and to prohibit gay unions within the church. Yet there is no nonreligious reason to deny gay couples the civil benefits that come from marriage (e.g., the right to inherit, to sue for injuries to the other spouse, to take pensions and Social Security, and the like). Law should reflect general communal norms, not the religious preferences of certain subgroups.

■ Finally, and most controversially for readers of this

journal, I disagree that homosexuality is “absolutely” immoral. Adventists traditionally cite the Bible as grounds for the immorality of homosexuality. Yet within almost the same breath the Bible commands men not to have sex with women on their periods, states that men are unclean after nocturnal emissions, claims that God directly or indirectly killed the innocent firstborn of Egypt and 185,000 of Sennacherib’s troops while they slept—and a host of other idiocies and atrocities that I would recoil at claiming are literally true of God.

For decades Adventists have applied historical methodologies to the Bible, frequently to derive the conclusions they desire for reasons external to the text. Paul’s advice to women to remain quiet in church and his assertion that women are ontologically subordinate to men; Jesus’ statements to the thief on the cross about post-death existence and the parable of Lazarus in hell; the New Testament’s repeated diminishment of the importance of Sabbath-keeping (Gal 4:10, Rom 14:5, Col 2:16-17); Jesus’ consumption of alcoholic beverages

**It is time that Adventists apply historical criticism consistently to the entire biblical text, in the context of modern science, and recognize the antihomosexuality teachings for what they are: outmoded and unethical.**

(Matt 11:18-19)—Adventists have performed hermeneutical somersaults to insure that these literal words don’t say what they say.

Why then are Adventists enslaved to the Bible’s backwards thinking on homosexuality, which should be assigned the same status as the idea that the sun stood still relative to the earth for Joshua? Science is demonstrating that homosexuality arises from a combination of genes, hormones and early life experiences, over which gays have no control or “responsibility.” It is time that Adventists apply historical criticism consistently to the entire biblical text, in the context of modern science, and recognize the antihomosexuality teachings for what they are: outmoded and unethical. The Bible does reflect an “absolute” morality, but it is contained in its ethic of love and valuation of humans in their relationship to God (Deut 6:4,5). The task of Christian morality is the difficult one of deriving principles of right action through a constant dialectic between the essential meaning of the Bible and the often ambiguous factual setting of our lives. The abject hoax of fundamentalism, typified by Reinach’s simplistic call to action, is that this task can be met through an easy reading of literal words without historical or social context.

**Karl Kime, attorney | Los Angeles, Calif.**

## Investigative Judgment

I found Ervin Taylor's book review (AT Jan/Feb 2004) of Clifford Goldstein's *Graffiti in the Holy of Holies* fascinating. But it was this statement that really knocked my socks off. "Even if we were to accept the questionable proposition that there is only one 'correct' interpretation of Daniel 8:14, what possible relevance might that have on how a Christian is to live now? Only those who closely identify with classical Adventism would try to find a reasonable explanation of how it would."

The Sanctuary doctrine and the Investigative Judgment as based on Daniel 8:14 are the "central pillar of the advent faith" (*The Great Controversy*, p. 409). If this "central pillar" is true, to paraphrase Des Ford, the

**If every person who has ever professed faith in God has their life come into review during an "Investigative Judgment" where every word spoken, every deed done, every motive considered {forgotten or otherwise} either condemns or justifies them, then how can any of these ever hope to experience the peace with God spoken of in Romans 5:1?**

"Good News" of the Gospel turns into really bad news. If every person who has ever professed faith in God has their life come into review during an "Investigative Judgment" where every word spoken, every deed done, every motive considered {forgotten or otherwise} either condemns or justifies them (*Spirit of Prophecy*, Vol. 4, p. 311), then how can any of these ever hope to experience the peace with God spoken of in Romans 5:1? And if this weren't enough, once the "Investigative Judgment" is over, two groups, those making the cut and those who don't, must live in the sight of the Lord until His second coming without a High Priest, the former group reflecting the image of Jesus completely; the latter group lost forever and without hope (*Early Writings*, p. 41). What possible relevance might this have on how a Christian is to live now? It means trading fear and uncertainty for the Savior's promise of salvation. "He who hears My Word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment but has passed out of death into life." (John 5:24.25).

**David H. Simon | Boise, Idaho**

## Timely Issue

Thank you for this issue (March/April 2004). It is timely, and much needed. Those of us who have to deal with the results of divorce will benefit from the advice given. The article re: the Catholic sisters should be well-heeded by SDAs.

**Karl Hafner, M.D., M.P.H. | Via the Internet**

## Healing Faith?

Thank you so much for Morris Venden's article, "Faith Enough NOT to Be Healed," (AT Sept/Oct 2000), which touched me deeply. I've been suffering with several debilitating chronic health problems for many years, and I've encountered those who believe that it is only due to my lack of faith that I haven't been healed. Though they sometimes made me doubt my faith relationship with God, I never really accepted their point of view, particularly because of the record of what happened to the Apostle Paul in response to his request for healing. This article brought me great comfort and encouragement and I'm very grateful for that.

**Deborah J. Uffindell | Via the Internet**

## 3ABN Conversation Misquoted

This letter is in response to your January/February article on 3ABN, which I saw only [in late May]. The article incorrectly attributed information to me. The last paragraph on page 11 says Kermit Netteburg noted that 3ABN's use of a corporate jet seems to coincide with 3ABN's loss of a million dollars in annual donations.

I recall the conversation between Ed Schwisow and myself quite differently. Ed asked me about a drop of \$1 million dollars in 3ABN contributions, and I said I didn't know about 3ABN finances. I didn't add that I'm not part of the board, nor do I have any relationship with 3ABN that would give me access to their donation records or their finances. The crucial point is that I did not confirm that 3ABN had lost \$1 million in contributions—nor could I have done so.

**Kermit L. Netteburg, assistant to the president, North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists | Silver Spring, Md.**

## The Health Hazards of CCM

One of my concerns in Contemporary Christian Music (CCM) (AT Nov/Dec 2003) is that as we move towards Rock, will we turn up the volume so that performers and audience close to the speakers could damage their hearing? I would like to see someone with the equipment to measure decibel levels help all of us understand what decibel level, in what pitch range, can damage hearing. This is an objective measure of music that could be taught to seminary students and youth leaders. God is not glorified by any health-destroying practice.

Another concern in CCM is a vocal style that can produce vocal nodes and permanent fibrous thickening of the vocal cords. Ellen White has much to say on this subject and warns that the improper use of the voice can shorten life (2T 672). Many popular rock singers can only sing for about 10 years, yet a well-trained voice can be used till a singer is old. God is not glorified by unhealthful singing.

Praise music that glorifies God should be based on melodic tones and harmony, not noise and dissonance. Screaming Christian words to distorted, overly dissonant music does not sanctify it.

**Elizabeth Iskander, M.D. | Los Angeles, Calif.**

## Belief System Purely Humanistic

In his "Readers Respond" called "Getting It Right" (AT Jan/Feb 2004), Bob Wonderly proposes a belief system that is constructed exclusively from human reasoning. His belief system is based on three questions and their answers: Does God exist? Yes; is this God relevant to me as a human? Yes; does God intend for me to be free? Yes.

Of course I have no problem with either Wonderly's questions or answers. My problem is 1) the fact that he abandons the Bible as a source for answering the questions (he speaks of our "unrealistic notion of inspiration") and 2) his questions don't address the problem of human evil and its solution (he includes humanity's fall into sin and God's plan to save us from it among the problems with our historic "bottom up" approach).

Adventists have maintained for more than 150 years that our theology is grounded in Scripture. But if we were to adopt Wonderly's approach to developing our belief system we would have to abandon Scripture as its basis. And we would have to abandon the great controversy theme with its diagnosis of the problem of evil and God's solution in Christ's death, resurrection, mediatorial ministry, and second coming. In abandoning these we would cease to be Adventist, Protestant or even Christian. Thus there wouldn't even be a magazine called *Adventist Today* in which Wonderly could express his humanistic views!

**Marvin Moore, editor, Signs of the Times  
Caldwell, Idaho**

## How Free Is Free?

Wonderly has made a significant contribution to the issue of "Getting it Right," (AT Jan/Feb 2004) and I commend his approach. That is, through the first two questions that he raises and answers. When he comes to the third question ("Does God intend for me to be free?") he ventures onto ground that detracts significantly from his former thoughts. I especially object to the following: "Free as in so free that I can surprise

God, that I can do something, create something, some idea, that God has neither thought of nor done? For it to be otherwise would mean that I am a mere computer doomed to follow a prearranged and previously imposed program over which I have neither say nor control."

**Adventists have maintained for more than 150 years that our theology is grounded in Scripture. But if we were to adopt Wonderly's approach to developing our belief system we would have to abandon Scripture as its basis.**

If I can surprise God, then I am a god that supersedes God. If I can develop some idea that God has never thought of nor done, then I am a superior god, and God is subordinate to me.

**D. Ordell Calkins | Orangevale, Calif.**

## Letters Policy

Adventist Today welcomes letters to the editor. Short, timely letters that relate to articles appearing in the journal have the best chance at being published. We reserve the right to edit for length and clarity. In publishing letters, AT does not necessarily endorse the views represented, but believes in giving voice to differing viewpoints. We prefer messages sent on the Internet, addressed to [atoday@atoday.com](mailto:atoday@atoday.com). Please include your complete address and telephone number—even with e-mail messages. Send postal correspondence to Letters to the Editor, Adventist Today, P.O. Box 8026, Riverside, CA 92515-8026.

# Troubled 3ABN Fires Linda Shelton

EDWIN A. SCHWISOW

**I**n a move that consolidates Danny Shelton, president, ever more firmly at the helm of the troubled Three Angels Broadcasting (3ABN) satellite network, the 3ABN board in June voted to dismiss Shelton's now-ex-wife, Linda, from her position as vice president and on-air hostess.

The dismissal came just days before the couple's divorce became final in late June—an uncontested divorce filed in Guam by Danny Shelton, naming Linda as respondent, according to divorce papers obtained by *Adventist Today*. Linda's dismissal in June was followed immediately by an official release by 3ABN's board chairman, Walter Thompson, to the effect that Linda Shelton had chosen to go a "different direction" from her husband and 3ABN. The release also said that the decision to terminate had come after considerable study and with the assistance of counselors and face-to-face dialog among the parties.

Concurrent with the announcement, staff removed all photographs and references to Linda Shelton from 3ABN's Web site and struck all programs on which she appears from the station's play lists.

Meanwhile, sources close to Linda Shelton characterize her removal as a coup-in-the-works for several months leading up to the June announcement. They acknowledge that in months leading up to her dismissal, she had been heavily involved in the rehabilitation of her adult son, Nathan (by a previous marriage), who reportedly had developed serious drug- and alcohol-dependency problems.

The therapy routine, administered by a Norwegian Seventh-day Adventist physician and financial supporter of 3ABN, reportedly achieved outstanding early results. According to Linda Shelton, in a release posted July 11 on her Web site, rumors that she had engaged in inappropriately intimate activities with her son's therapist began to circulate at 3ABN, leading in large part to her ouster. She vigorously and consistently denies any improper behavior or relationship with the doctor.

At approximately the same time, Johann Thorvaldson, director of 3ABN development in Europe, was removed from his post and has become an advocate for Linda Shelton. Citing provisions of her agreement with 3ABN, Shelton herself so far has refused to speak with reporters regarding her dismissal or future plans. However, at least two releases written in her name (one on e-mail, the other on her Web site) specifically deny that she committed adultery and attribute her fall to the proliferation of false information about her.

Sources close to Linda Shelton cite the 3ABN allegation of "spiritual adultery" as a factor in her dismissal—a phrase invoked among conservative Christians but not readily definable elsewhere. It appears to mean that the person so accused became overly friendly with, or bonded to, a person other than a spouse.

Meanwhile, Danny Shelton's daughter by a previous

marriage, Melody, has begun to appear regularly on the air as a co-host with her father.

Linda Shelton's dismissal took viewers across the nation by complete surprise, though careful observers had begun to pick up on-the-air cues more than a year ago that all was not well between Danny and Linda. Danny Shelton has acknowledged to viewers that the couple was undergoing marriage counseling in months leading up to their sudden divorce.

The Linda-and-Danny team had appeared together for nearly 20 years on 3ABN programs, portraying the kind of down-home, simple, Bible-based, devout Christian living they urged their viewers to adopt. That such an apparently devoted Christian couple could divorce so precipitously, amid such allegations of scandal, shocked the 3ABN world.

At least one affiliate manager interviewed by *Adventist Today* off the record believes that Linda Shelton's removal could benefit 3ABN ministry long-term. This source indicates that 3ABN has been undergoing troubled times, including a historic loss of revenue income in 2003, and that a shake-up at this time could be a new beginning for the maturing ministry. In a mass mailing to all financial supporters, 3ABN has also reflected the view that Linda Shelton's termination represents a time of opportunity.

Meanwhile, the emergence of a brand new "Hope" satellite network, sponsored by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, is attracting a great deal of interest across the nation, leading at least one influential Northwestern broadcaster, Blue Mountain Television, to sever ties with 3ABN as of Sept. 30. Other non-3ABN-owned stations may follow that lead in months to come—with unwelcome implications for 3ABN's bottom line.

All told, it appears likely that the internal disruption caused by the couple's breakup and the loss of 3ABN's monopoly as the sole source of satellite-driven programming for Adventist-oriented stations will combine to produce a less-than-banner year for 3ABN in 2004.

Oddly enough, Shelton herself sees a beneficial outcome, personally, from her termination. Noting on her new Web site that she had become institutionally sheltered by her many years of work at 3ABN, she says she welcomes the opportunity to get out on her own once again, mixing it up in the real world. She continues to portray herself as supportive of 3ABN's grand vision but conveys a sense of relief at severing ties.

Sources close to Linda Shelton indicate that she is now living near 3ABN headquarters in Illinois, in a modest dwelling, and that income sources include royalties from the sale of music she has written and performed and monthly termination payments. They also say that she has agreed not to comment publicly in ways that could be construed as attacks on her former husband and ministry.

She has also reportedly asked her friends to forswear any such attacks or attempts to vindicate her—though some are now speaking out. ■

# The Spiritual Renaissance Retreat

REP. DAVID A. PENDLETON

**E**ver since former President Bill Clinton popularized attendance at a year-end Renaissance Retreat in the Carolinas, Renaissance Retreats have been popping up all over the United States. Advertised as the intellectual's New Year's getaway, they feature prominent speakers, authors, business leaders and philosophers along with a cadre of celebrities. Activities such as golf and tennis are interspersed between lectures, panel discussions, and networking and mixer opportunities. The Spiritual Renaissance Retreat in Monterey, Calif., is an Adventist version of this kind of getaway.

**The retreat reminded me that we are called to love God with all our hearts and souls and minds. Wrestling with modernity, being responsive to science, and maintaining our fidelity to the Bible must all be taken on without flinching or fear.**

Founded by Pastor John Hughson and a handful of other enthusiasts over a decade ago, this New Year's retreat draws families from several Western states, including California and Hawaii, for a long weekend of lectures and worship, entertainment and recreation. Last year, I took my family to welcome in 2004.

Presenters at the Renaissance Retreat included exceptional speakers and scholarly experts. There were presentations on the rise of Islam in this post-9/11 world, on the future of Adventist young people, and on the convergence of liturgy, monastic prayer practices and Adventist piety. Speakers explored politics inside and outside the Adventist church. Where will our church be and what will it look like in years to come? Bill Loveless delivered a stimulating, if not controversial, look into the future and took questions which led to a conversation I wouldn't have been willing to miss even if you had paid me to leave the room.

Some wonder if there is "intellectual life" after college, especially in the church. This Spiritual Renaissance Retreat was a testament to the fact that there are people who love our church dearly and are intellectually honest and authentic. They demonstrated you need not leave thinking behind when you go to church. The retreat reminded me that we are called to love God with all our hearts and souls and minds. Wrestling with modernity, being responsive to science, and maintaining our fidelity to the Bible must all be taken on without flinching or fear. We are not called to avoid controversy but to think it through. A faith that cannot stand up to tough questioning isn't worth having. The life of the mind is not

only for philosophers in their Ivory Towers but for Everyman and Everywoman. The meaning of life is too important to leave to paid professionals.

My wife enjoyed the talk of books, worldviews and paradigm shifts and the like, but she also enjoyed the fellowship, food and fun. The retreat offered a wonderful balance of play and scholarship, worship and recreation. My kids thoroughly enjoyed the children's programming, which included not just play but learning and creativity. (Keep that a secret. So long as they don't know that it's "good for them," they'll have more fun. My young nephew and even younger daughter could not wait to get up in the morning and head on over to their group to do crafts.)

Participants included young and young at heart, single, married, with kids and no kids. Doctors, lawyers, politicians and pastors were there—but please don't hold this against the retreat. (I can say this as one who is a pastor, plaintiff's lawyer and politician.) We came from all sorts of

places and professions, but we all came with the hope of being refreshed, rejuvenated and renewed. I left with rich memories of memorable conversations and new friends. I left with my spiritual gas tank filled to the top and my spirit energized for a new year. My love of and faith in God was affirmed and my commitment to my church, the Seventh-day Adventist Church, was strengthened.

This year's Spiritual Renaissance Retreat will be held at the Hyatt Regency Monterey Resort, Dec. 30 through Jan. 2. Presenters currently scheduled include John McLarty, editor of *Adventist Today*; Ivan Blazen, Loma Linda University division of religion; Hawaii state Rep. David Pendleton; Richard Osborne, president of Pacific Union College; Doug Ammon, head of the counseling center at PUC; and Bailey Gillespie from La Sierra University school of religion. Worship services will feature Bill Loveless, Lonnie Melashenko of the Voice of Prophecy and the For Heaven's Sake quintet. ■

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# Wrestling With Venerable Manuscripts

FREDERICK G. HOYT

Arthur White once said that Christ had personally appeared more than a hundred times to his Grandmother Ellen, citing a document labeled Ms 43a (1901) as his source. That stirred my curiosity, so I looked up the document. The following is what I found.

The “hundred times” statement was an aside, a parenthetical remark by Ellen White to a group of invited “representative brethren” in the library at Battle Creek College who met at 2:30 p.m. on April 1, 1901, behind shut doors.

This select group of “representative brethren,” which apparently had no other woman besides “Sister White,” included A. G. Daniells, S. N. Haskell, M. C. Wilcox (who gave the opening prayer), Dr. J. H. Kellogg, and Willie White (his mother’s principal aide), since they were mentioned in the official minutes of this important meeting. Probably two other men, elders Irwin and Olsen, would have been there, as they were in the small group that had met with Ellen White the day before when they had decided to ask her to address this meeting.

Who else may have attended cannot be certainly determined, because no official list of attendees was compiled for this ad hoc meeting. It is reasonable to assume that it constituted what now would be termed the General Conference Committee. Daniells, who presided, simply remarked that at a “small meeting” the previous evening it had been decided to invite “Sister White” to speak to the group, “and place before us any light that she might have for us.” They had also decided to enlarge the group by inviting “others who are bearing responsibilities.”

Arthur White has nicely described the group that met that day: “Quite a wide, representative group met in the college library that Monday afternoon. It included the General Conference Committee, the Foreign Mission Board, conference presidents, and institutional leaders. The room was packed. Elder Daniells took along a secretary, Clarence C. Crisler; and Dr. Kellogg took his private secretary to report the meeting. The records of the meeting include the reports as transcribed by both men [sic], with some understandable slight variations in wording” (*Early Elmshaven Years*, 75).

“I would prefer not to speak today,” Mrs. White began deferentially, “but still not because I have not anything to say, because I have.” Then following her typical double negative, she launched into a lengthy, convoluted, complex and discursive speech that must have lasted well over an hour, with no questions or interruptions except for three

brief comments meant to be helpful.

Apparently she did not have a prepared script (at least none has survived and no one has ever referred to such a document). And the rambling nature of her talk indicates that she probably did not have even a simple topical outline. Sufficient for our purposes will be a listing of her principal topics. Essentially, she stated and reiterated that the structure of the church was seriously flawed with excessive power dangerously concentrated at the top in a few persons. Frequently she used the image of an autocratic monarchy: “a kingly, ruling power” (page 2); “there is [sic] to be no kings here ruling at all” (11); and God “does not want two or three minds to sit as kings” (19). Unfortunately, she gave no specific recommendations on how to achieve a more democratic and efficient structure for the small, struggling, infant church.

Although no names were used, Ellen White was also very seriously concerned about the character of some of the leaders. Among these concerns were selfishness (8), “sharpness...exercised toward outsiders” (8), a lack of “Christlike principles”—specifically, nobility, generosity, tenderness and compassion (6), and “narrowness...conceited ideas, and...planning and grasping and thinking...to gain something” (8).

She also counseled that other positive changes should be made in addition to fundamental structural reforms. Prime among these, and clearly related to structure, was the critical need for unification: “Let us, for Christ’s sake, unify” (18). But this essential move had to be preceded by a personal reformation among the leaders: “God says we must love one another. God says we must deal gently and justly and righteously with one another” (18).

About midway in her address, she seemingly digressed from her subject quite abruptly and with evident passion. “I do not ask you to take my word,” she forcefully declared, “I do not ask you to do it; lay Sister White right to one side; you lay her right to one side.” The subject that so gravely concerned her is not at all evident; but the weightiness of her burden is unmistakable. “Do you not—never quote my words again as long as you live, until you can obey the Bible...then you will know better how to receive some counsel from God.” (This counsel was obviously a reference to a “testimony” from her.) Then she returned to her severe command mode: “Do not go and repeat any more what Sister White said—‘Sister White said this,’ and ‘Sister White said that’; and ‘Sister White said the other

thing'; [but] you say, 'What saith the Lord God of Israel?' and then you do just what the Lord God of Israel does and what He says" (10).

The background for this stern diatribe is lacking—yet it may well have been entirely clear to her select audience. Perhaps her spoken words had been twisted and distorted to serve some now unknown nefarious purpose. At any rate, an indignant Messenger of the Lord returned to this subject at the end of her remarks. "But don't you never quote Sister White"—once again that double negative that came so easily to her lips. "I do not want you to ever quote Sister White until you get upon vantage ground where you can know what you are about. Go quote the Bible" (21). Again, the correct and full explication of this text is maddeningly elusive.

A related issue that pained her even more—"O, my soul, how it has hurt me to have the blocks thrown in the way in regard to myself"—related to what she termed health reform. "They will tell," she explained, "'Sister White said this,' 'Sister White ate cheese and therefore we are all at liberty to eat cheese'" (12-13). (Was cheese-eating actually a test of fellowship for the early church?) Then, "Another says: 'Sister White drinks tea, and you can drink tea'" (13). But she quickly took the ball away from her traducers: "Sister White has not had meat in her house or any dead flesh for years and years." Again, any reasonable explication would be clouded by time. (13)

These words were spoken with strong conviction and a commanding sense of urgency. "Why, I feel intensely," she declared. "I did not want to talk so, but I dare not hold my peace" (6). "God calls for a change" (4) she declared early in the speech. Then this theme was varied to "God wants a change," and to "God is going to have a change" (6).

Ellen White also wanted it clearly understood that what she spoke and wrote were not her own words or ideas, but that she was simply the mouthpiece for God. In just her fourth sentence, she plainly declared that her counsel came from "the light that I have had for some time" (2). Then she quickly qualified this statement by explaining that this "light" was "presented to me in figures," that is, her enlightenment came in symbols or figures rather than in words. Thus it was not "verbal inspiration" such as Harriet Beecher Stowe claimed when God dictated *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to her in Brunswick, Maine.

The phrase "the light that God has given me" was soon repeated by her (4), with the added explanation that these "messages" had been coming from God "for quite a number of years" (5). Yet the dramatic climax to Ellen White's claims that her words had a divine source came near the end of the long session when she revealed that Christ himself had been appearing to her personally and privately like he had to Moses at the Burning Bush and to Paul on the Damascus Road. She described the impressive scene: "Well, while I was praying and was sending up my petition, there was, as has been a hundred times or more, a soft light circling around in the room, and a fragrance like the fragrance of flowers, of a beautiful scent of flowers; and then the voice seemed to speak gently."

The impressive climax to this most dramatic scene came when she uttered those quite startling few words, almost as an aside: "as has been a hundred times or more" (17). Surely we would not have been surprised if Crisler had made this notation within parentheses: "gasps" or "cries." But he didn't.

This informal, spontaneous presentation behind closed doors provides an invaluable insight into the character and personality of Ellen White through the medium of a carefully preserved record of her words as recorded by Elder Clarence C. Crisler, Elder Daniells' secretary. It is obvious that he was meticulous in noting every word she uttered. When he was uncertain of a specific word he indicated so within brackets, as a college student would have been taught to do (he had attended Battle Creek College two years).

A few examples will suffice to illustrate this careful work by Crisler. "Nowhere is the way the matter [is] represented," appears on page 10. Apparently he was uncertain that he heard "is" so it is given this way. On the next page this appears: "Did they [you] create the means?" And on the following page there is this: "...and this world is to be converted and educated just as far [fast] as they will yield to the truth, but the seed of the truth must be sown." These instances actually occur very infrequently, and they almost certainly are a careful attempt by Crisler to provide an absolutely accurate and complete record of Ellen White's words rather than an attempt to correct her English.

If she rambled on without a pause indicating the end of a paragraph, then he preserved that structure in the record. Thus the paragraph which begins on page 10 runs on without a break to the bottom of page 13—a horrendous total of some 100 typed lines in one staggering paragraph of more than a thousand words.

If her grammar was faulty, it was not corrected. Thus, "there is to be no kings here ruling at all" (11). Or, as we have seen, her frequent use of double negatives was not corrected. And if her diction was poor, Crisler let it stand. "Now God wants every soul here should sharpen up," she declared. "He wants every soul here shall have his converting power. You need not refer not once to what Sister White has seen" (14).

Fortunately for us, Crisler preserved unchanged some fascinating elements of her down-east Yankee heritage that speak to her provincial upbringing and her limited formal education. She used that colorful old Anglo-Saxon phrase "dilly-dallying" to good effect: "we are just about [sic] as much dilly-dallying, and it is time that we arise and shine." (4) Also from the same linguistic roots she utilized an old English small coin to symbolize the utter worthlessness of faulty logic: "I would not care a farthing for anything like that" (13). And Crisler allowed to stand her graphic references to physical problems that plagued her life. In traveling to Battle Creek from California she suffered from "that terrible disorder, the bloody flux [diarrhea]—could not sit up at all hardly—had to lie all the time." And while in Texas she said the cold weather "nearly melted my kidneys..." (16).

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# Wrestling With Venerable Manuscripts

Certainly she could paint a dramatic scene with words that Crisler wisely recorded verbatim. “I was—the whole family was melted and broken down,” she recalled concerning a recent experience at Elmshaven. “There they were all weeping, all broken, and the blessing of God was flowing right through our room like a tidal wave” (18). Her figures of speech could also be strikingly graphic. “Do not pick flaws any more,” she warned. And then this warning was dramatically depicted: “O, I see enough buzzards, and I see enough vultures that are trying and watching for dead bodies; but we do not want nothing of that” (21).

Since she had grown up in Portland, Maine, a major seaport, it is not surprising that she had absorbed maritime imagery such as the essential compass for navigating through dangerous seas. “We must have responsible men, and we want men that shall stand just as true as the compass to the pole” (6), she warned in words that would be refined into perhaps one of her best-loved statements by using the more apt term “needle.”

Yet the most startling figure of speech that Ellen White used twice in this address was a colloquial expression that sounds so modern, so contemporary, that we can hardly accept the fact that it is really quite old. “We want no picking and picking and picking of flaws in others,” she cautioned. “Attend to Number One, and you have got all that you have got to do.” Then she immediately used it again, this time without the harsh “gots”: “If you attend to Number One, and if you will purify your souls by obeying the truth, you will have something to impart, you will have a power to give to others” (21). If she had only made this more concise it would have served admirably as a striking motto for framing in early Adventist homes.

Crisler’s meticulous transcript indicates that Ellen White’s very long monologue was interrupted briefly by three different people, all with the best of intentions of helping a woman in distress. The first break came early when she mistakenly attributed the famous “You have lost your first love” text to Daniel. S. N. Haskell simply said, “It was John.” She gave no recognition of this prompting, but in continuing she quickly cited John (7).

Later, when she questioned whether or not Dr. John Harvey Kellogg was actually present in the meeting, Elder Arthur G. Daniells responded simply, “Yes, he is here.” Ellen explained that she could not see faces without her “congregational glasses” (14). Yet near the end of the meeting she again mentioned Kellogg with the aside, “if he is here” (20). No one commented then.

The third assist came from her son Willie, who helped her get back on track after her thoughts had wandered astray. “You started to tell about your prayer Saturday night,” he prompted. “O, yes,” she exclaimed and immediately picked up the dramatic story about Christ’s return to earth recently at Elmshaven (17).

A comparison of Crisler’s official transcript of this

important meeting with another document labeled “copy made by Mrs White’s secretary MH” (Maggie Hare), an 18½-page double-spaced document designated as “Ms—43b—1901,” is both instructive and disturbing. A comparison of the two documents reveals that Maggie made extensive revisions to the official, carefully compiled record produced by Crisler for the General Conference. Maggie’s copy for Ellen White, her boss, is considerably shorter (only about 65 percent as long), there is extensive rearrangement, rewriting and revising, and many sections have simply been deleted. It is assumed that in this Maggie was following instructions from either Ellen White or her son Willie, her principal assistant and adviser. Yet whatever reasons there were, she was at least guilty of complicity in corrupting an official document, always a serious matter. In this instance her actions went well beyond the usual manipulations of public relations people to put a better “spin” on important events or materials.

Some changes may have seemed dictated by propriety to that proper young lady from New Zealand. For example, Ellen White’s striking sentence, “Sister White has not had meat in her house or any dead flesh for years and years,” was reduced by Maggie to this “dead” prose: “I have not had meat in my house for years.” (Note here that Maggie changed Mrs. White’s usual form of referring to herself in the third person—as Queen Victoria always did—to the first person, the proper style for commoners.)

Then there are those vulgar double negatives which the New Zealand maid from the most properly English of all Britain’s colonies obviously found repellent. Ellen White had forcefully commanded, “But don’t you never quote Sister White” (21). Maggie transformed this into the lifeless, “But do not quote Sister White...” (19). And Ellen White’s opening sentence (“I would prefer not to speak to-day, but still not because I have not anything to say, because I have”) Maggie compulsively revised to a proper but debilitated opening for this key address: “I would prefer not to speak to-day, not because I have nothing to say. I have something to say” (1). (In defense of Mrs. White it should be stated that other languages, such as Spanish, effectively use double negatives to add impressive force to important statements. Perhaps this was also in her Maine Yankee tradition.)

Again Ellen White’s forceful statements, “You need not refer not once to what Sister White has seen. I do not want you to do it” (14), were reduced to very weak tea by her misguided assistant: “Do not refer to what Sister White has said. I do not ask you to do this” (14). (Note again that she always referred to herself in the third person. Did anyone ever call her “Ellen” as we hear so commonly now?) And at the conclusion of her discourse, she strongly commanded, in reference to picking out flaws in others, “...we do not want nothing of that” (21). Maggie quickly jumped on that crude construction, turning it into, “Do not any longer pick flaws in your brethren” (18).

For some problem areas Maggie was apparently unable to find a proper solution, so excision was mandated. Thus that common, so very colloquial, expression “dilly-dallying” simply had to be cut out (4). Mrs. White’s extensive medical-psychological report to the brethren was clearly more than Maggie could stomach. So her long and detailed account of continual sickness, apparently a reoccurrence of malaria acquired in Australia, with its attendant “bloody flux” (diarrhea) and “melted” kidneys (no appropriate alternative phrase is evident) was simply deleted entirely.

Ellen White’s striking attack against faultfinding among church members (“O, I see enough buzzards, and I see enough vultures that are trying and watching for dead bodies; but we do not want nothing of that”) (21) was emasculated by fastidious Maggie into a colorless, devitalized few words: “I see enough vultures watching for dead bodies” (18).

In consideration of public delicacy, Maggie may have had an occasional reasonable point with some of her changes. But her attack on that beautiful Yankee figure of speech, “Number One” (21), is simply unacceptable. If that is a proscribed vulgar American colloquialism, so be it. We will not have our forceful language debilitated by effete immigrants!

But the major scholarly crime committed by Maggie Hare was what she did to Ellen White’s account of Christ’s visitation to her at Elmhaven. “As I was praying a soft light filled the room, bringing with it a fragrance as of beautiful flowers,” Maggie wrote. “Then a voice seemed to say, ‘Accept the invitation of my servant John Kellogg...’” (15). Why did she leave out the fact, clearly stated by Crisler, that the light was “circling around in the room”? But, most seriously, why did she omit these words recorded precisely by Crisler: “as has been a hundred times or more” (17)?

Every evaluation should be balanced, so what positive acts can be credited to Hare? For the treatment of that monstrous paragraph that seized pages 10 to 13, Maggie mercifully performed radical surgery, cutting it into several much shorter paragraphs (however, the content often bears little resemblance to the original).

Then there is that delightful compass metaphor. Maggie apparently finished up the metaphor as we have come to know it in *Education*: “We need men who will stand as true to principle as the needle to the pole” (5). (Was she actually the author of the finished and expanded statement? When a writing enterprise employs literary assistants—“ghost writers”—to the extent that Ellen White did, it is difficult, if not impossible, to determine the real author of any particular article or book, or any part of them. So a business enterprise can quickly become charged with ethical problems.)

All three intrusions while Ellen White had the floor (by Daniells, Haskell and Willie) were omitted by Maggie. Since this could not have been an accident, or a simple oversight, her reasoning (or counsel) must have been that she should leave these out in the best interest of her boss, improving the presentation and her image.

The transcript made by Dr. Kellogg’s unnamed secretary (marked “II” and “Part of Ms 43b 1901”) covers 20 double-

spaced, typed pages. In general it covers the same ground as Crisler’s transcript but in a much less careful and meticulous manner. This secretary also had great difficulty in determining when Sister White’s flow of words should have been logically broken off into paragraphs. Thus a massive single paragraph extends from pages 1 to 5, and even more forbiddingly, from pages 6 to 12.

There are minor differences, but grammatical and stylistic matters are generally ignored, as well as most of the double negatives. But Kellogg’s assistant, or the doctor himself, simply could not tolerate the low-level locution “dilly-dally,” so it was euthanized. However, they did find two “Amens” that others had missed and which were placed within parentheses (3). But the beautiful old colloquialism “Number One” was retained with slight variations: “Attend to No. 1, and you have got all that you can do. If you attend to Number One, and if you purify your souls by obeying the truth, you will have something to impart” (20).

This medical team did add one significant sentence that Ellen White uttered in reference to leaders acting like kings: “Now the Lord wants his spirit to come in. He wants the Holy Ghost king.” (7)

This document also added another old Yankee colloquialism that Crisler had missed. In warning her hearers to cease quoting “Sister White,” she cried out, “And don’t you give a rap any more what ‘Sister White said.’” That is, gossip concerning her spoken words was to be ignored because such apocryphal sayings were as worthless as a “rap,” an old counterfeit Irish halfpenny (9).

Relative to Ellen White’s claims of many special visitations from Christ, this manuscript simply says: “Well, while I was praying and was sending up my petition there was, as on other times,—I saw a light circling right around in the room, and a fragrance like the fragrance of flowers, and the beautiful scent of flowers, and then the voice seemed to speak gently...” (16).

Finally, the long, emotionally charged pre-General Conference meeting ended without a suitably formal conclusion. It seemingly just stopped by unspoken mutual agreement without even a short benediction. At least the record is silent. And, tragically, there was no time for comments or questions. If this special meeting had been planned by church leaders to resolve troublesome problems, it is difficult from our century-long perspective to give even a tentative evaluation of its success. Perhaps some walked away harboring even more troubling, unanswered questions than they had possessed before. No votes were taken and no resolutions were proposed, discussed or adopted. And there were no postsession interviews or debriefings that are extant.

Perhaps everything was entirely clear to that distinguished and select group, including the many allusions and intimations about personal defects harbored by their colleagues nervously seated among them. Unfortunately our insight today into such matters is sadly clouded and obscured by more than a hundred years of psychic smog.

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# Getting At What Genesis 1 is Getting At

IVAN T. BLAZEN

## Faith Statement

The opening chapter of Scripture has been easy prey for those who have wished either to debunk it or to support it as science. A strange unity exists between the deniers and affirmers of the scientific, factual accuracy of Genesis 1.

On the one hand, some evolutionary scientists disparagingly refer to the ostensible teachings of Genesis 1 as unscientific, that is, as contrary to what we have learned to be true by science. Charles Darwin exemplifies this in his description of his journey from belief in Christianity to disbelief. Tacitly assuming that his observations on natural history and the Bible's presentation of primeval history (Gen 1-11) are in the same "scientific" ballpark, he asserts that what we have in the Bible is a "manifestly false history of the world."<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand, some creationists, claiming the primacy, sufficiency and absolute authority of Scripture, seek rather ingeniously to stretch what Genesis 1 says to accommodate it to the contemporary, scientific picture of the world.

Both groups, in their own way, measure Genesis 1 in terms of science and interpret its language in a literalistic fashion, rather than getting at what it literally intended. Both have given away the store of the chapter's real meaning either through cynical rejection or strained accommodation.

I do not believe that Genesis 1 should be part of what has been commonly described as "the battle between science and religion." It is wide of the mark to question whether this chapter is good or bad science or to believe that since its composition long ages ago Genesis 1 has awaited the advent of modern science to discern its meaning and determine its veracity. As a matter of fact, the teaching about creation represented in Genesis 1 has had fundamental significance for science in that its desacralizing of nature has contributed to the objective study of the natural world rather than the idolatrous worship of it. This needs amplification, but here it is sufficient to say that biblical creation faith not only rejects past idolatry but represents a warning against the modern idolatry of allocating to any area of human study an autonomous role and making it the hermeneutical key for unlocking all knowledge. If it is true, as Genesis 1 affirms, that "in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth," and as Genesis 2:1 declares, "Thus the heavens and the earth and everything in them were completed," then there is no aspect of human existence and study, the horizontal dimension, which should be conducted independently of the vertical dimension, that which concerns us ultimately.

I contend that Genesis 1 is not unscientific, that is,

contrary to science, but nonscientific, that is, having other, more transcendent interests. It is primarily a religious statement which, with its doxological feel, rhythmic cadences and repetitions, has its home in worship (see Pss 29, 33 and 104) rather than in any scientific arena. As a conveyance for its primary teaching, Genesis 1 assumes a geocentric cosmology, according to which the earth—originally submerged in the waters of the deep, the great *tehom* (Gen 1:2)—rests upon the waters below (see Ps 24:2), which have been separated from the waters above by means of an intervening firmament or expanse (*raqia* in Hebrew). In this expanse, created on the second day and identified with the heavens in Genesis 1:8, 14, 15 and 17, the heavenly bodies—sun, moon and stars—move back and forth, shedding light upon earth and marking out the boundaries of time.

This geocentric understanding, based upon common observation and now succeeded by scientific observation, is not the point of Genesis 1, but is the vessel Israel used to express its faith in God as Creator of all things in contrast to paganism with its many gods and creators. It would be unjustified to consider Genesis 1 wrong because a geocentric perspective underlies it. Its message completely transcends the limited vehicle transmitting it. Paul was right (beyond his own immediate reference), "We have this treasure in earthen vessels" (2 Cor 4:7). Utilizing an ancient, prescientific cosmology, Genesis 1 teaches a perpetually valid theology. This theology is not subject to the ever-developing views of science, and hence does not need to be readjusted to any current version of scientific cosmology.

The big problem for Genesis 1 and its original audience was not science but the religious issue of monotheism versus idolatrous polytheism. Monotheism had to win its way against great odds ever since the forced stay of Israel in Egypt. The battle between the one God of Israel and the many gods of the pagan world was Israel's concern. All one has to do is study the mythical systems of thought, worship and ritual which surrounded Israel to see what really was at stake. They would have been puzzled by our scientific debates about creation. Science and the study of natural history, as carried on today, did not exist for biblical people. These people were intellectually and spiritually gifted to be sure (as Thomas Cahill's book, *The Gift of the Jews*, evidences), but they did not establish their understanding of the universe and its laws on the critical, analytical use of empirical data derived from sophisticated techniques of observation. The thinking and expression of biblical people was pictorial and

poetic, concrete rather than abstract. This kind of speech surely has other (valid) purposes than does the language of science. Scientific and literalistic approaches to Genesis 1 tend to miss the forest for the trees and to underplay the major thrust of the chapter—the confessional, which is meaningful, inspiring and enduring. In this way the biblical message of the chapter and its relevance for contemporary thought and life are mitigated or negated.

Much of our approach as creationists is apologetic. We seem more afraid of what we are going to lose than excited over what we are going to gain when the biblical account is interpreted in its own historical and literary context. What we have in Genesis 1 is a religious or faith statement containing theological affirmation rather than scientific delineation. This affirmation has the capacity to transform lives because it places the creature in relation to the Creator and his purpose for the world.

### Polemical Implications

Genesis 1 is a very positive, majestic, and serene expression of faith. Its polemical elements are indirect and subtle, implicit rather than explicit, and subservient to faith in the one God of creation. But precisely in giving positive expression to Israel's faith in God, Genesis 1 necessarily stands over against the alien views of its neighbors. Israel has heard other stories and says in effect: "Here is what we believe rather than that." Genesis 1, in affirming God as sole Creator, represents the challenge of biblical/Hebraic faith to the cosmogonies existing in the various regions of the ancient world, from Egypt to Babylon. It is a positive expansion of "Thou shalt have no other gods before me."

### Creation and Redemption

Recognizing the literary connection of Genesis 1 with the rest of Genesis and Exodus is an important preliminary to discerning the meaning of the chapter. Within this larger perspective Genesis 1 does not appear as an independent contemplation on origins, but as an introduction to the primeval history (Gen 2-11) and salvation history (Gen 12 forward).

As we read the whole story in Genesis and then Exodus, it seems clear that the movement of the primeval history in Genesis 1-11, which describes not only God's good creation, but mankind's rebellion, is toward the decisive moment described in Genesis 12, which pictures the call of Abraham and the covenant promise to him that all families of the earth would be blessed in (through) him. This determinative moment is succeeded by another, recounted in Exodus, when Israel becomes God's consecrated covenant community and receives the reiteration of the covenant and the revelation of the Torah at Sinai. Thus the narrative sequence found in Genesis through Exodus indicates that its interest lies in the redemptive meaning of Israel's

history. What Scripture is after in this history, particularly in Genesis 1, is the foundation for understanding who Israel is, who stands behind her, and what her relation to the world is. Through being Creator of the world, Israel's God is the guarantor of her existence and the world's blessing. Thus the creation story in Genesis 1 is foundational to understanding the creation of Israel and its salvific function for the whole world.

This means that the redemption of Israel is really the context for talking about the creation of the world. In a way, Genesis 12 and the following chapters through the book of Exodus could be read before Genesis 1-11. In Israel, creation faith is seen through the prism of exodus or redemptive faith. Israel, as God's people, was literally

## The big problem for Genesis 1 and its original audience was not science but the religious issue of monotheism versus idolatrous polytheism.

created by redemption, as is directly stated in Isaiah 43:1-2 and Exodus 15:16. Israel's own creation was the presupposition for its faith affirmation that God created the world. It should be kept in mind that redemption is the key theme of the entire Bible.

It is in harmony with this that the early Israelite confession of faith described in Deuteronomy 16:5-10 and amplified in Joshua 24 begins not with creation but with the mighty acts of God in the Exodus. Israel as a group of slaves—a nonentity—was, so to speak, created out of nothing by the word of God through Moses. Since the entire world was to be blessed by God through Israel, this means that the reality of creation undergirding Israel is that which supports all people. This universal perspective is found in Genesis 1-11, which does not single out Israel but is concerned with all of humanity. It is these people God wishes to redeem. Thus creation and redemption are forever linked. Only in connection with redemption is the intent of Genesis 1 clearly seen. The power of redemption lies in the hand of him who created all.

When one comes to this point, he or she is ready to study the theology of Genesis 1 and, above all, to be challenged by its existential relevance. The opening chapter of Scripture calls to faith in the God who, because he brought order out of chaos in creation, can do the same in our concrete lives as we face the powers and problems of human existence. ■

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### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>The Autobiography of Charles Darwin: 1809-1882, ed. Nora Barlow (W. W. Norton and Co, 1958), 85.

# The Church Must Pastor All Its Children

A PROPOSED RESOLUTION FOR THE 2004 INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON FAITH AND SCIENCE

JOHN MCLARTY

**T**he church must pastor all its children, whatever their education or intellectual culture. The Seventh-day Adventist Church is the mother of creation science. George McCready Price developed a theory of Earth history that sought to integrate statements of the Bible and Ellen White about creation and Noah's flood with statements found in geological literature. His work laid the foundation for the Geoscience Research Institute (a General Conference institution) and a variety of non-denominational, conservative Christian organizations which defend the scientific validity of a brief geochronology based on biblical genealogies. ("Brief geochronology" means variously that the universe or the solar system or major forms of life on Earth originated in a single week of divine creative action less than 12,000 years ago.) The views of Price have been modified over the years, but his basic notion that science agrees with the Bible in testifying that life first appeared on Earth a few thousand years ago has been unofficial Adventist doctrine for at least a hundred years. It has been a dominant motif in Adventist schools.

Adventists have given special emphasis to the study of science because of our commitment to health care and because of our conviction that the study of nature is a study of the work of God. Because of our long involvement in creation science, and because of our active promotion of science education for our young people, the Adventist church bears a special responsibility to provide pastoral care to those whose life work is the study of science. Whatever a person's views on Earth science, the church is obliged to provide moral guidance, instruction regarding salvation, hope for the future and encouragement in wholesome patterns of life.

The Adventist church now faces a profound challenge: Most of our members and clergy continue to believe correct Bible interpretation requires, and valid science supports, the view that life first appeared on Earth a few thousand years ago. However, a growing number of our members who have devoted their lives to the study of creation have concluded science requires, and the Bible allows, the view that the fossil record is millions of years old. These scientists and theologians remain convinced life is an expression of God's creative power, but they feel compelled by the preponderance of scientific evidence to believe a complete history of life on Earth includes a long time of life and change before the creation of humans.

The delegates to the 2004 International Conference on Faith and Science have invested the past three years in

the study of the theology and science of creation. For many of us, this study has been the focus of our work for decades. Our process has required us to listen to a multitude of voices within the church. We know what scholars and members believe. Whatever our individual convictions, we are aware of the evidence and the arguments cited to support differing conclusions. As we reach the end of this three years of study, prayer and conversation, we offer to the Church this testimony:

## **The Bible and Nature Are Trustworthy Revelations of God**

We embrace without reservation the twin declarations of the Old and New Testaments, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the Earth." "All things were made by him, and without him nothing was made that has been made." (Gen 1:1; John 1:3). Adventists are creationists. That means we trust the biblical statements that God is the originator and sustainer of everything. While nature does not offer explicit, unambiguous testimony about God, the careful, reverent investigation will not lead us astray. Nature points beyond itself to an origin of information and design. The Bible identifies and describes God, who is that Origin.

As people of the book (the Bible) we trust the picture of God's character found in the Bible. We trust the Bible's guidance in the great questions of morality and justice. We gladly accept Jesus as the fulfillment of the symbols, prophecies and communal hope of the Old Testament and look forward to his conclusive triumph when sin and sinners will be no more and one pulse of harmony and gladness will beat throughout the vast creation. As creationists (people of God's second book), we trust the record of Earth history God has written into the rocks. We believe that God does not change his moral or natural laws. We can probe the secrets of nature confident there is order and consistency across space and through time.

The historic Adventist belief in a short chronology has much to recommend it: apparently greater congruence with the biblical testimony about Earth history and our doctrines of salvation, the Sabbath and the Second Coming. However, old-Earth creationism also has much to recommend it: apparently greater congruence with a straightforward reading of nature, radiometric dating, ice core studies, fossil progression, and coherence between the world of nature and the human experience of suffering. The Bible testifies the Earth is God's handiwork. Nature points beyond itself to a source of information

and personhood. Because we are biblical creationists we dare not ignore the testimony from either the Bible or nature. We know our comprehension of the Bible and nature is partial, defective and subject to change. But we can see clearly enough to worship and to obey.

### **Sabbath-Keeping Is Central in Our Worship and Witness**

Seventh-day Adventists remember God's role as Creator in our observance of the Sabbath. Further, in our Sabbath-keeping we remember that through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God has secured our future. He offers us pardon, transformation and eternal life. Ultimately, human history will move beyond the cycle of life and death, birth and decay through the intervention of Jesus at his second coming. As leaders of the church we are responsible to provide for the spiritual well-being of all our members within the context of these convictions.

We have discovered that Sabbath-keeping unites Adventists across cultural and intellectual divides. Adventists who believe in a long chronology are no less committed to Sabbath-keeping and its theological lessons than are those who believe in a short chronology. It is crucial to our mission as a church that we continue to call all people—scientists and non-scientists—to keep the Sabbath and through their Sabbath-keeping to cultivate their confidence in God's promises and their obedience to God's law.

### **Pastoring All the Flock**

Many wish the church would issue a definitive declaration about Earth history and invite everyone who disagrees to leave our fellowship. Such an action would betray our obligation to act as shepherds for the entire flock of God. The church cannot safely make a particular view of science, even creation science, a requirement for inclusion in the fellowship of the church. Science, even creation science, is always changing. For example, the geological theories of George McCready Price are no longer endorsed by any of the church's scientists. Even those who agree with his conclusions about the age of life disagree with nearly all of his scientific arguments. While many scientific theories have apparent theological implications, if the church declares a particular view of science to be the only acceptable view for believers, we run the risk of repeating the folly of the church in earlier generations, which declared the Earth to be the physical center of the universe. If the church makes authoritative pronouncements about geochronology, it risks involving itself in scientific folly no matter what view it adopts—short or long chronology—because science changes. The church is called to build on a more secure foundation. Our theology and ministry as a church transcend any particular theory of Earth history.

We cannot endorse the idea of "ancient life" on Earth. The church does not teach this. But we must acknowledge that many of our loyal members have been led by

honest and diligent study to believe the evident age of the fossils is real. Their views on Earth history are not driven by rebellion against God or a disregard for Scripture, but by their commitment to pursue truth. By acknowledging that among our scientists and theologians are persons whose honest study has led them to conclude that Earth history is much longer than the church officially teaches, we are deliberately refusing to suppress the debate over the age of the Earth occurring in some places in the church. We believe truth will be better served by ongoing theological and scientific argument than by attempting to resolve the issue through fiat.

As pastors and teachers in the church of God, we are obligated to provide pastoral care and theological guidance for all of the children of the church—including those who believe the universe was created a few thousand years ago and the amateur and professional scientists who are compelled by their studies of creation to accept a long chronology.

**Many wish the church would issue a definitive declaration about Earth history and invite everyone who disagrees to leave our fellowship. Such an action would betray our obligation to act as shepherds for the entire flock of God. The church cannot safely make a particular view of science, even creation science, a requirement for inclusion in the fellowship of the church.**

We recognize that different educational institutions will develop different models for integrating the Bible and science. What we insist on is that every Adventist school, at every level of instruction, help their students to find intellectually and spiritually satisfying ways of integrating Adventist theology and practice with the content and processes of science.

Together, through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, we can build a community that is open to the knowledge that comes through the Bible and through science, is obedient to the commandments of God and confident in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. ■

*Editors note: In August 2004, the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists will bring together theologians, church leaders and scientists from around the world for the concluding conference in a three-year exploration of the relationship of biblical interpretation and science. A major issue under consideration is geochronology—more specifically, the age of life on Earth. How will the church respond to the growing number of its members who treasure the church and its doctrine but dissent from its traditional teachings about the age of the fossil record? We offer this statement as one path the church might take.*

# 2004 International Faith And Science Conference:

COMPLETING A THREE-YEAR EXPERIMENT IN THEOLOGICAL CONFLICT RESOLUTION

## EDITORS OF ADVENTIST TODAY

The Seventh-day Adventist General Conference-sponsored International Faith and Science conference will be held at the Hyatt Regency Hotel Tech Center in Denver, Colo., Aug. 20-26, 2004. This is the second international conference convened by the GC to deal with this topic. The first was held in Ogden, Utah, in August 2002. Between the Ogden and upcoming Denver conferences, six divisions of the General Conference (GC) held their own separate faith and science conferences (see accompanying table).

According to Lowell Cooper, the GC vice president responsible for the organization of both international conferences, 135 invitees have indicated their intention to attend the Denver conference. Five other individuals will attend as observers, including representatives of *Adventist Today*. According to informed sources, 90 attendees will come from the United States and Canada, while 45 will come from outside the North American Division. The expected attendees include 46 administrators,

particularly over the last three decades in centers of Adventist higher education.

It is expected that the conference will draft some type of concluding summary or statement of what has and what has not been accomplished as a result of this very expensive three-year experiment in theological conflict resolution in a highly conservative faith community. To many with scientific and theological credentials, how our church leadership pursues resolution of the conflict over the interpretation of the Genesis narratives will demonstrate their maturity and their resourcefulness for managing the wide diversity of views prevalent among its most-educated members.

From several individuals with views tending toward the optimistic has come the suggestion that, by organizing this series of unprecedented conferences, moderates currently in positions of leadership at the GC may be seeking to move the church toward a new approach to resolving contentious and divisive theological issues. According to this perspective, the goal is to address a substantive theological problem without creating increased hostility and acrimony such as characterized the disputes over 1844 and the investigative judgment.

These individuals point out that in other matters where there are contrasting points of view, the current GC president, Jan Paulsen, indicates we might as a church family have to "live with" various differences of opinion and not attempt to impose one set of views on every member of the community. On the other hand, Dr. Paulsen has publicly stated he will not support any change in the church's traditional authoritative statements on creation. One assumes that he knows it was not until 1980 that a specific reference to a creation doctrine was added as one of the current list of 27 Seventh-day Adventist "fundamental beliefs." He must also know that the controversial statement that creation took place "in six days" was added to the text more as a political "code phrase" indicating support for traditional Adventism than as the result of any deep theological reflection on Genesis.

The current most senior General Conference leadership is, if nothing else, pragmatic. It certainly understands that outside the first-world Adventist church, the subject of the Denver conference is not yet a pressing issue. However, within one or two generations, it may well become a matter of concern, even in the third-world Adventist church, as the level of formal education among its members is raised. Here in North America, the simple fact of openly considering the wide spectrum of views on this topic has raised fears. Conservative pastors are already warning their congregations about the erosion of

**Some among the senior leadership of the GC, especially from Latin America, wish to press for statements that would express unequivocal support for the traditional Adventist fundamentalist stance concerning Earth history, including support for a recent, literal six-day creation and literal worldwide flood.**

36 theologians, and 50 scientists (though some individuals could be assigned to more than one such category). Fifteen to 17 commissioned papers are to be presented at Denver. The papers apparently will not be made available to attendees prior to the opening of the conference. According to a recent announcement, an evening poster session will provide a means by which attendees "can share ideas and/or pertinent research with colleagues in an informal manner."

### Optimists, Pessimists and Pragmatists

In discussions over the last six months with a number of Seventh-day Adventist scientists and theologians, we have sensed a guarded and restrained optimism about the outcome of this conference. To this mildly optimistic group, the Denver meeting offers the potential to bring some reasonable, positive resolution to the long-festering discord and conflict that this topic has generated, par-

our faith caused by these kinds of open dialogs. Some progressives fear that conservative activists, such as those belonging to the Adventist Theological Society, will exploit the Denver conference as a means of enhancing their reputation as defenders of the purity of the church and advancing their agenda among traditional and reactionary segments of the general laity. One sitting GC vice president is reported to have already made comments and delivered sermons that give credence to this fear. There are also some among the senior leadership of the GC, especially from Latin America, who wish to press for statements that would express unequivocal support for the traditional Adventist fundamentalist stance concerning Earth history including support for a recent, literal six-day creation and literal worldwide flood.

These last points are emphasized by some who are more pessimistic about a potential for a positive outcome for the Denver conference. They report that a meeting entitled "Modeling a Universal Flood: A Working Conference" held at Southern Adventist University (SAU) in late April included informal discussions of strategies to influence the outcome of the Denver meeting in a reactionary direction. Interestingly, the only Geoscience Research Institute (GRI) staff member who attended the SAU meeting refused to comment on the substance of what was discussed at that conference. This reaction to questions is in marked contrast to the openness of the current GRI director, Dr. James Gibson, and several other current members of the GRI.

Clearly, the efforts of the GRI over the last 40 years to increase support among the majority of Seventh-day Adventist scientists and theologians in the first world for the traditional Adventist view of a recent creation and worldwide flood appears to have been largely a failure. Two surveys undertaken by *Adventist Today* in 1994 and 2001 have revealed that less than half of the science faculties in North American Adventist institutions of higher education support the traditional church teachings concerning Earth history, and support for that position is waning over time. One observer remarked that the GRI

appears to have largely given up on attempts to change the opinions of most scientists in North America and is currently focusing its attention largely on third-world Adventism.

### Division Faith and Science Conferences

Although all of the 13 current divisions of the Seventh-day Adventist Church were invited to organize their own faith and science conferences during the two years between the first and second international conferences sponsored by the GC, only six did so. Neither of the divisions of Latin America nor any of those in Asia elected to hold their own sessions. One knowledgeable observer of Adventist church affairs in Latin America commented that the topics being considered by the faith and science conference are of concern primarily to the church's scholars, scientists and other interested professionals. Currently, the majority of these individuals are located almost entirely in North America, England, Europe, Australia and New Zealand. According to this observer, since the overwhelming majority of Adventist laity and national leaders in the third world are converts, they simply do not understand what the fuss is all about. "We say we have the truth. All we have to do is believe it and disfellowship anyone who does not." Only a small fraction of these individuals currently possess the background and perspective to appreciate the scientific and theological problems confronting traditional Adventist interpretations of Genesis 1-11. There are clearly exceptions to this generalization at various Adventist educational centers outside of the first world, but much of third-world Adventism is at a relatively early stage in the development of an educated, professional class of theologians.

In the conferences held in the sub-Saharan African Divisions, the discussions lasted, at most, two days and most of the formal presentations were made by members of the GRI staff or GC officers. It appears that many of

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## 2003 and 2004 Division Faith and Science Conferences

Division	Date	Place
South Pacific	July 11-14, 2003	Avondale, Australia
North American	August 13-21, 2003	Glacier View, Colorado
Southern Africa-Indian Ocean	August 25-27, 2003	Johannesburg, South Africa
Euro-Africa	March 26-30, 2004	Friedensau, Germany
East-Central Africa	May 5-6, 2004	Nairobi, Kenya
West-Central Africa	May 27-29, 2004	Abidjan, Côte d' Ivoire

## 2004 International Faith And Science Conference:

COMPLETING A THREE YEAR EXPERIMENT IN THEOLOGICAL CONFLICT RESOLUTION

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these papers had already been presented in one form or another in other venues, including the 2003 North American Division session.

One interesting exception was a paper by Brempong Owusu-Antwi of Valley View University in Accra, Ghana, entitled "Faith, Black Magic and Science." After reviewing a wide range of theological (Thomas Aquinas, for example), philosophical (Kant) and anthropological (Frazer and Malinowski) literature, the author notes that "magic seems to thrive where there is lack of empirical

knowledge...there is an inverse relationship between magic and science—as science gets better the need for magic diminishes." The relationship between faith and science, he insists, is "a bit more complex...the world view of science is materialistic and physical, a closed natural system without the supernatural [while] faith looks beyond what is seen and reaches out to the supernatural."

The Euro-Africa Division session held in Germany and the South Pacific session held in Australia were on a smaller scale but roughly comparable to the North American Division conference in terms of the scope and extent of the discussion (see *Adventist Today*, Sept/Oct 2003). Both the Euro-Africa and South Pacific Division conferences included a significant number of papers from North American attendees. In the case of the Euro-Africa meetings, of the 16 papers presented on science or theology, more than half (nine) were contributed from individuals from the United States, with four of these papers presented by GRI staff members. Of the 17 papers presented in the South Pacific session,

seven were presented by United States visitors—four by a North American scientist with close ties to the GRI and two by the GRI director.

A disinterested observer would probably conclude that, with few exceptions, the presentations from U.S. attendees could be characterized as supporting the traditional Adventist understanding of Earth history which assumes a relatively recent creation of living forms in six

literal days and the reality of an even more recent world-wide flood.

However, this does not mean that these individuals do not understand and appreciate the monumental amount of scientific data that directly contradicts their views. Some are intellectually honest enough to state that they have no compelling explanation for the glaring discrepancy between what they think Genesis is saying and the scientific evidence for great age for life on this planet. For example, in a paper titled "The Challenge of Chronology: Radioisotope Dating," Dr. James Gibson, the GRI director, notes that all radioisotope dating methods yield dates far in excess of the "expected 6,000 years." He admits that proposals by creationists to try to find an explanation for why the dates are so much older than the expected age "have not been compelling." His conclusion is that he does not currently "know a good creationist explanation of the pattern of radioisotope dates."

The traditional Adventist understanding of Earth history was challenged in minor and major ways by a number of English, European, Australian or New Zealand scientists and scholars. We can comment on only a few. For example, Laurence Turner of Newbold College, in a paper titled "A Theological Reading of Genesis 1-2," noted that most Adventist scholarship dealing with Genesis has been apologetic in nature. (Several other presentations also made this point.) Our church, he insists, "should be doing more than merely utilizing [a particular interpretation of the opening chapters of Genesis] to inform established SDA beliefs."

Lynden Rogers of Avondale College reviewed events associated with Galileo's "17th century brush with ecclesiastical authority" and noted that this incident "fires shots across the bow of those embroiled in current conflicts involving scripture and science." Dr. Rogers notes that contemporaries recognized that the heliocentric theory raised important theological challenges to both Catholic and Protestant orthodoxy of the time, and this included questioning "the nature of inspiration and the authority of scripture." The Galileo incident illustrated an aspect of modern science in that "when faced with two competing theories scientists will choose the one which offers the most comprehensive, coherent, cohesive and consistent explanation with the least special pleading. This is not well understood by some creation scientists, who seek to challenge evolutionary origins by presenting apparent exceptions to the accepted paradigm...while ignoring the enormously persuasive mass of concordant data on which the [evolutionary] paradigm is based." He concludes by noting that the

### Daily E-mail Reports on the Denver Conference

Current *Adventist Today* subscribers can receive by e-mail free daily reports on the Denver Conference while it is in session by registering your e-mail address with us. Send your request to receive these reports and other news via e-mail to [hanan@atoday.com](mailto:hanan@atoday.com). If you are not a current subscriber, you may call Hanan Sadek, our office manager, at 1-800-236-3641 to subscribe and to request the inclusion of your e-mail address in our list.

"Copernican revolution demonstrated that there is much about the universe which is not explicitly spelled out in scripture."

In a paper titled "What Have Volcanoes and Soils Told Me?" Graham Will, a retired soil chemist from New Zealand, offered his view that, based on his studies of soil formation and chemical processes in New Zealand, he cannot "reconcile what I see, and what careful scientific studies have shown, with a "Short Chronology" for the history of the Earth...." His study of the sequence of climate changes in New Zealand and the multiple soils that developed as part of those changes "is not compatible with a recent worldwide flood." Dr. Will concludes by suggesting that "it is absolutely essential for there to be an ongoing and regular dialogue" within the church family on Earth history issues.

### Conclusion

Moderates and progressives attending the Denver conference who are mildly optimistic about the outcome hope the openness to the expression of a diversity of views and respect for minority positions that has characterized several previous conferences will prove to be a harbinger of how the final report on the three years of consultations will be constructed. There is widespread agreement that most progressives would probably welcome an outcome where diversity is recognized and the emphasis is on how we treat each other when there are serious and substantive disagreements about fundamental theological issues.

It is essentially universally agreed that progressives should particularly respect the concerns voiced by those representing the traditional Adventist views. For example, in the view of Dr. Gibson, the "long-chronology models introduce hermeneutical and theological problems that would undermine the integrity of the

Seventh-day Adventist message and mission. We would lose much and gain little if we were to abandon our faith in the biblical record of origins," by which he apparently means abandonment of the "biblical six-day creation." Dialog on this point provides a critical issue that many hope will be taken up squarely at the Denver conference.

**"Most progressives in the church would probably welcome an outcome where diversity is recognized and the emphasis is on how we treat each other when there are serious and substantive disagreements about fundamental theological issues."**

Progressives would most certainly cooperate with church leadership in implementing reasonable proposals for how the pluralism that is now a reality on this topic in the first-world church might be handled responsibly in Adventist institutions of higher education. What is not clear is whether traditionalists and conservatives will be able to accept a new model that includes some open recognition and acceptance of the legitimacy of the wide diversity of views on origins currently present in the Adventist church. ■

*In preparing this preview, Adventist Today wishes to acknowledge and express its sincere appreciation to Dr. L. James Gibson, director, Geoscience Research Institute, for the programs and other information concerning the faith and science conferences held outside North America, including providing copies of a selection of papers presented at these conferences.*

## Wrestling With Venerable Manuscripts

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So perhaps we should emulate those who patiently sat in silent respect during the entire lengthy session and then quietly stole away. But reading the documents they generated simply precludes such an easy solution to our puzzlements.

Among the lingering problems this historical exercise has generated is a puzzling question: Why did the church neglect to capitalize on Ellen White's stature as the greatest prophet since St. Paul, by reason of the unparalleled visitations she enjoyed from Christ? And why, in light of all the varied compilations produced from the vast body of her writings, have not those more than a hundred visitations been compiled by date, place and the specific words spoken to her by Jesus? What a golden treasure that would make!

It is startling and disquieting to discover the imperious

manner with which important documents have been handled and freely modified in the past. That people did not show respect for the integrity of every little jot and tittle in such documents is simply incredible. This hard question inevitably follows: What modifications and distortions have been committed against other key documents in the archives?

Enough! The challenges are there. The potential rewards—and further challenges—await the courageous and self-disciplined. This is the inescapable, slogging process by which our perception of truth is furthered incrementally. ■

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# TRUTH DECAY: The Collapse of Conviction

REGIS NICOLL

“What is truth?” Pilate asked Jesus during the last hours of the passion week.

I can almost hear the sarcasm in Pilate’s voice when he responded to Jesus’ claim to “bear witness to the truth.” Who could claim to have such knowledge? Surely, only a neuropath or simpleton; neither was a threat to the Roman empire. With a condescending shake of his head, he turned and threw his hands up to the crowd saying, “I can find nothing wrong with this man.”

The reality of truth, and how one could know it, had long been an object of controversy among the ancient philosophers. Heraclitus and Parmenides in the sixth century B.C. held opposing views that helped shape two major worldviews: naturalism and transcendentalism.

Heraclitus insisted that what is real is what changes, things which come into being, decay and ultimately disappear. We can only know what comes to us by physical sense perception. In other words, truth and knowledge are found solely in nature, because nature is all there is.

In contrast, Parmenides claimed that only those things that are eternal are real, like Plato’s “forms” or “ideas.” It is in the intangible, unseen realms that reality exists and truth is to be found. Plato elaborated on this theme in his allegory of the cave, where the material world is depicted as an illusionary shadow pointing to the “real” world of ideas. And only in this numinous world can truth and ultimate reality be found.

Plato’s skepticism about the tangible world came to dominate not only philosophy, but Christian theology as well. However, with the advent of the Renaissance, came a growing optimism about human knowledge. This optimism began with the invention of the telescope, which helped replace the Ptolemaic Earth-centered view with a more accurate model of the universe. When Isaac Newton published his elegant mathematical descriptions of planetary motion, he added the element of predictability to nature, and it was, “Good-bye, mystery and superstition; hello, determinacy and empiricism!” These advances prompted some philosophers and scientists to think that all the mysteries of the universe would eventually be unveiled and harnessed, leading to unlimited progress.

But by the 19th century a growing disillusionment set in. Soren Kierkegaard declared, “I must find a truth that is true

for me.” Friedrich Nietzsche wrote, “The assumption of an orderly universe is illusion.” These sentiments were undergirded by the metaphysics of Immanuel Kant, who said that mind is the creator of reality, and later, by the physics of Werner Heisenberg, who said that reality is created in the act of observing. These ideas led to the notion of the autonomous self and moral relativity. These, in turn, became the distinctive features of postmodern thought.

Shaped by these concepts, people began to reject the constraints of objective moral authority and individual moral responsibility and accountability. They began to regard antisocial behavior as an issue of ignorance, poverty, environment and bad genes. And the perpetrators of antisocial acts became society’s new “victims,” who needed understanding and not punishment.

This relativistic ethos also set the stage for a more sinister ethic—pragmatism, where the truth is “whatever works.” The highest values are defined by those in power—communist tyranny and ethnic cleansing, and closer to home, negative political campaigning, corporate America’s “fight for market share,” and insider trading scandals.

The collapse of a social moral sensibility has created a vacuum that is being decried by some unlikely voices. Tammy Bruce is an openly gay, gun-owning, pro-death-penalty, voted-for-Reagan feminist and former regional NOW officer. In her 2003 book, *The Death of Right and Wrong*, Bruce lists the following examples of what many people view as the “new” morality:

- Murdering your child isn’t murder if you’re a woman—it’s postpartum depression.
- Sex addiction, compulsion, and promiscuity aren’t problems if you’re gay—they’re part of an “alternative lifestyle.”
- Vandalizing, degrading, or mocking the symbols of a religion is a hate crime only if the object is Islam or Judaism. If the target is Christianity, it’s “art.”
- Murdering a police officer isn’t murder if you’re black—it’s self-defense or a heroic act.
- Murdering 3,000 people isn’t terrorism if the murderers are Muslim—it’s the Freedom Fighters’ last heroic act against an oppressor.
- Cheating on or lying to your wife isn’t a sin, it’s a sport—after all, it happened in the Oval Office.

Bruce rightly attributes this multicultural morality to the "left's" self-obsession and rejection of rules, noting that, "without rules, there was no perspective, no right and wrong—only relativism where everyone loses, especially the generation that must inherit their folly." Although a non-Christian, Bruce echoes C.S. Lewis' *Mere Christianity* in declaring that there are immutable virtues that "apply to everyone and already play a natural role in our lives." Christian ethicist J. Budziszewski would say that these are part of the things "we can't not know."

Still, most Americans reject the idea of any absolutes that are universally applicable and knowable. This is true even in the Christian church. Consider the controversial ordination of the Episcopal bishop, Gene Robinson. When asked why he left his wife and family for a homosexual lover, he responded that God had convicted him of living a lie. He was "created" homosexual, and living as a heterosexual was not being "true to his authentic self." When a reporter asked another bishop how he could vote in support of Robinson's ordination, given the explicit statements of the church's sacred scriptures, the bishop replied, "We do not consider Scripture as authoritative. Our authority is the Spirit as it moves through community." In other words, the litmus for truth is not found in the historical text, but in the collective experience and feelings of a group or community.

How widespread is this attitude today?" The data from a February 2002 study by George Barna (see chart 1) paints a disquieting portrait. The most surprising data is for the "born-again." Only 32 percent believed in absolute moral truth, with 54 percent believing that truth is situationally dependent. This is incredible, given their putative status as "followers of the way." It flies in the face of the biblical statements: "All your righteous laws are eternal." "You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free."

Even more alarming is the data for teens (see chart 2). For teens, only 9 percent of "born-again" believe in absolute moral truth, with 76 percent believing that truth is situationally dependent. Barna believes that these troubling results are due to relativism that was firmly entrenched in their parents' generation.

These beliefs have consequences. Christians in America do not embody a nobler, more honest, generous, disciplined way life than society at large. In his

2001 book, *Growing True Disciples*, Barna writes, "After studying 131 different indicators...we concluded that...to the naked eye, the thoughts and deeds (and even many of the religious beliefs) of Christians are virtually indistinguishable from those of nonbelievers."

This observation should serve as a wake-up call to any church, because it strongly suggests that we have been assimilated into the morality of a culture we are commissioned to change. Could it be that the fragrant aroma of the Christian life—designed to attract the world to the Bread of Life—has acquired too much of the scent of its tainted surroundings to be perceived as the remedy to the human condition? Could it be that we have capitulated to the philosophy of "tolerance," privatizing our faith so that we will never be accused of making others feel uncomfortable? If so, could this be the reason growth has been stifled in some churches?

These questions are as uncomfortable as they are challenging, because they remind us that if we wish to bring about changes in our culture we must begin with ourselves. There are no shortcuts or "end-arounds," for it is through us that God has chosen to reveal himself to the world. In bearing witness to the truth, the church must first allow itself to be ordered and shaped by the truth. The experiential nature of postmodernism has produced a culture that seeks authenticity. People will insist on seeing the truth in life before they will believe it in words. The challenge for the church is to offer a genuine display of truth so that when the world asks "What is truth?" they will be compelled by our lives to hear our answer. ■

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### CHART 2: For Teens

Moral truth...	All	born again	non born-again
is unchanging	6%	9%	4%
depends on the situation	83	76	87
don't know	11	15	9

### CHART 1: For Adults

Truth...	All	ages 18-35	ages 36-55	ages 56+	born again	non born-again
is unchanging	22%	14%	33%	24%	32%	15%
depends on the situation	64	75	55	61	54	71
don't know	14	11	12	15	14	14

## Still

DEE MYERS

Still  
Lord,  
Still  
I walk in darkness  
Muddled chaos in my mind  
Still  
Caught in the battles  
I thought I'd left behind  
Still  
Teach me to see  
Still  
The cloud pillar  
Your course for me  
Still  
Teach me to stand  
Still  
In the tumult  
Kept by your hand  
Still  
I would know your wisdom  
Speak clear your will to me  
Still  
I would bear your likeness  
Create your heart in me.  
Still  
Teach me to hear  
Still  
In the silence  
Your words appear  
Still  
Teach me to know  
Still  
Your life holy  
My fear overthrow  
Still  
Let me be  
Still  
In your presence.  
Still.

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