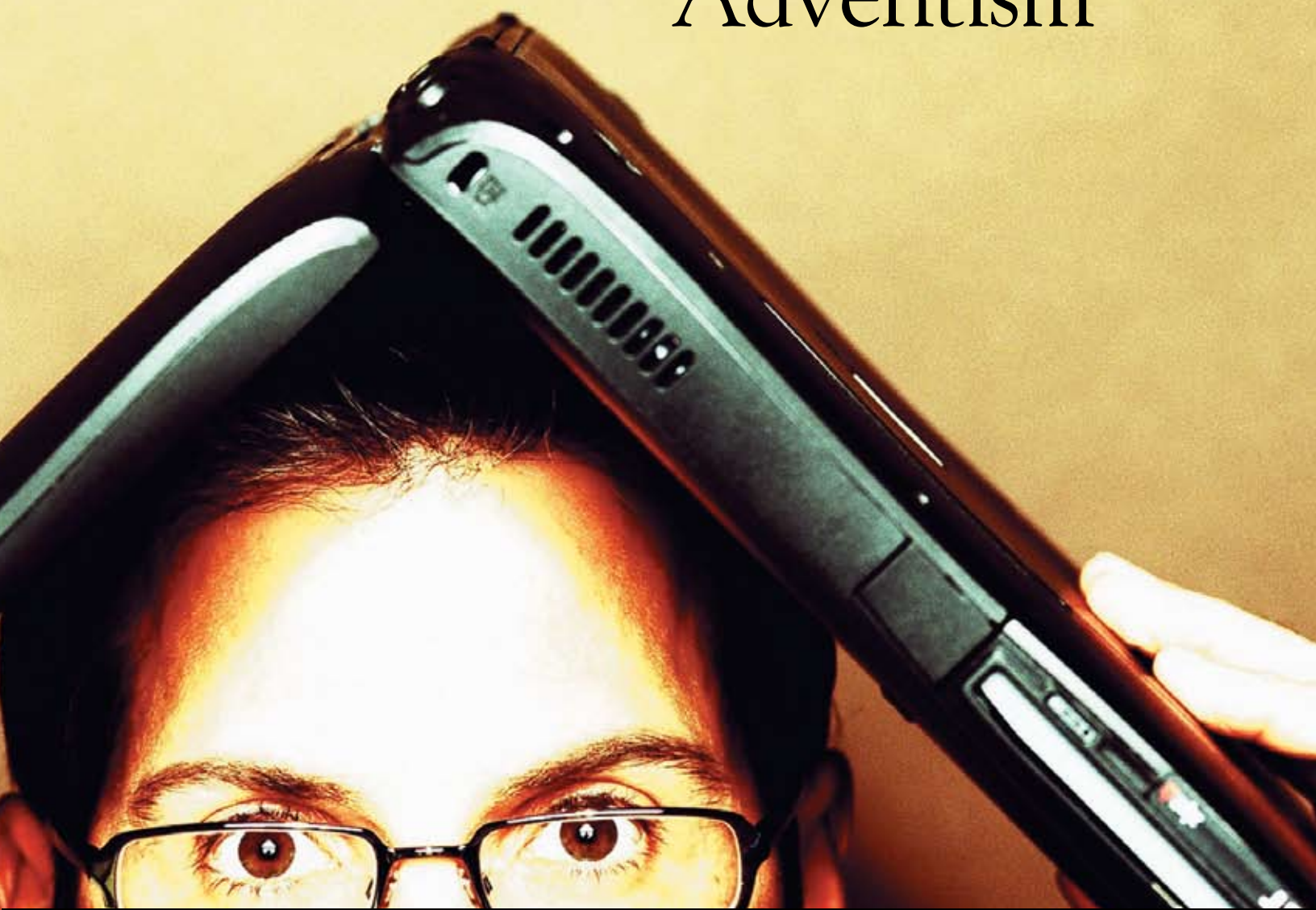


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## Intellectual Adventism



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Editorial | John McLarty

# Union of Church and Reality

When I ask Adventists their views on abortion, many dodge the moral question and immediately address the political questions. Then, almost as quickly, they duck behind the Adventist doctrine of separation of church and state. *We should not impose our moral values on others.* End of discussion.

Something similar happens when I ask about war, earth stewardship, health care, pornography or public education. We are afraid to get our religion dirty by taking it into the real world. But by keeping our religion “pure and undefiled,” I fear we are not just separating church and state; we are separating church from reality.

The Adventist obsession with the separation of church and state has led to utter silence in the face of human rights abuses. Adventist leaders have congratulated themselves on their amicable relationships with dictators in Latin America and elsewhere. Back in the bad old days of the USSR, Adventist leaders at the General Conference and in Russia repudiated any connection with the anti-communist, independent Adventist believers in Russia. Our silence gave us a limited measure of freedom to operate as a church, but at a frightful moral cost.

If we keep our church safe and pure, we will also keep it irrelevant and insignificant in the eyes of many of our children and neighbors. A radical separation of our religious and political thinking will impoverish both. We do our religion and the world a disservice if we isolate our religion from the messy reality of politics, culture, economics, science, urban planning and environmental policy.

Of course, no political party is an exemplary incarnation of Christian values. We cannot be faithful to our Master and pledge unquestioning allegiance to any political ideology, party or personage. But neither are we faithful to our Master, if we do our political thinking without any reference to the moral vision and spiritual insights of Scripture.

Bringing religious views into the discussion is dangerous. For too many people it does not help with thinking but merely fuels emotion. Once these folk have linked their opinion regarding a social custom or government policy with a religious principle,

they quit thinking . . . and listening. But the proper way to bring religious perspectives into the political or civic realm is to voice our deepest convictions as “our testimony” rather than as “the verdict.” Our religious views no less than our political views are *our* convictions (not *the truth*). “Bearing witness” to our convictions is not the same as making a wise decision. But if done with respect for others, it can aid in making decisions that bear the test of time.

*Adventist Today* is committed to bringing Adventist convictions to bear on every area of life, including politics, civics and science. We publish a wide range of Adventist opinion. Adventism is highly heterogenous—politically and religiously. *Adventist Today* reflects that diversity. It is impossible for any individual to agree with everything we publish, because we publish diametrically opposed views. If you are looking for safe, agreeable writing, you may find other Adventist journals more to your liking. However, if you are looking for provocative, stimulating, relevant conversation that takes both church and society seriously, *Adventist Today* welcomes you as a reader and as a writer. (Send us your letters and articles.)

We aren’t safe. We may not *always* be good. But we strive for honesty and fairness. We are committed to keeping our church and reality connected. We encourage those who are taking their deepest moral convictions out into the complicated reality of the world.

» If we keep our church safe and pure, we will also keep it irrelevant and insignificant for most of our children and neighbors. A radical divorce between our religious thinking and our political thinking will impoverish both. We do our religion and the world a disservice if we keep our religion separate from the messy reality of politics, culture, economics, science, urban planning and environmental policy.





Alden Thompson

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# letters

## READERS RESPOND

*I believe our president has done that in a reasonable fashion, and his treatment of enemies appears more humanitarian and just than the genocide practiced by the Hebrews. I agree with McLarty, however, that we should practice the highest standards of justice that can be practically implemented in a non-ideal situation (which war is), and be on guard against compromising our personal and national values.*

### GOLDSTEIN AND THE LIBERALS

“Closed-minded. . . dogmatists. . . utterly intolerant of any other views” is a better description of ATS than of the Adventist left. I graduated from the SDA seminary in 1952 and fondly remember many disagreements between, for example, Dr. W and Dr. Y, both of whom were excellent theologians. If we had labeled them, W was surely “liberal,” and Y was “conservative.” One of the students once asked me, “Which of them most nearly reflects Jesus?”

I can’t join ATS for doctrinal reasons (they demand that I believe in a literal seven-day creation—a position I see as questionable), but I subscribe to and read their publications. I am a member of AAF (the Adventist left?). Goldstein (AT Nov/Dec 2005) obviously does not know who welcomes another group seeking to express its interpretation of our faith in the “marketplace of ideas.” (AT published his article!)

My wife and I think Goldstein needs to go to his roots and ask a Jewish scholar to tell him what Genesis teaches about creation.

I am one of the “lifers, born, raised (reared) and educated in the insular SDA *weltanschauung*” with its strong we-have-the-truth mentality. I even taught that mindset in academy Bible classes and at Madison College for a long time. It was only after I became a *liberal* that I could “allow for the full flourishing of contrary ideas.”

**Felix A. Lorenz**  
Northville, Michigan

### MCLARTY ON THE PRESIDENT

I just received and devoured the Nov/Dec 2005 issue of AT—an enjoyable read, as usual! It is a rare occasion when John McLarty misses the mark in his editorials. The piece, entitled “Mr. President, That’s Wrong,” was one of those instances. I’m not speaking to the correctness of the conclusions; in fact, I have no firm opinion either way on the rightness of Guantanamo, CIA prisons, etc. Where I think McLarty missed the mark was in his attempt at biblical justification for his views.

Several references were made to the importance of law in Hebrew society/government. Justice was said to be meted out fairly to natives and foreigners alike: “Cursed be the man who withholds justice from the alien” (Deuteronomy 27:19). But McLarty failed to distinguish between alien guests protected



and offered hospitality then even as they are today in many Middle Eastern cultures—and enemy.

I taught the Junior Sabbath School class at church this morning. The lesson, on the battle of Jericho, emphasized God’s miraculous destruction of the city. One of my students pointed out, however, that the Hebrews did the dirty work, destroying “by the edge of the sword all in the city, both men and women, young and old, oxen, sheep, and donkeys” (Joshua 6:21). We could cite many such examples of destruction of enemy combatants and innocent civilians alike during Joshua’s conquest of Canaan, then later during the time of the judges, and still later by kings like David, “a man after God’s own heart.”

In summary, ancient Hebrews distinguished between alien guests and enemies. I believe our president has done that in a reasonable fashion, and his treatment of enemies appears more humanitarian and just than the genocide practiced by the Hebrews. I agree with McLarty, however, that we should practice the highest standards of justice that can be practically implemented in a non-ideal situation (which war is), and be on guard against compromising our personal and national values.

**Robert T. Johnston**  
Lake Jackson, Texas

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## Responses to Rejection of Desmond Ford as Speaker at SRR

### DESMOND FORD'S RECORDINGS

We are happy to say that we already subscribe to *AToday* and have for quite some time. We appreciate what we feel is an unbiased and fair reporting of issues pertinent to the Adventist people. Thank you for your good work! We await information about the Des Ford recordings. Dr. Ford is a personal family friend. My husband was part of the “collateral” damage when Des was defrocked in 1981. After 10 years outside the church he returned “older and wiser” and we have been members of a more gospel-oriented congregation in Florida every since.

Jodie Howell Via the Internet

### DESMOND FORD CONTROVERSY

Why do we have to resurrect and rehash the old Desmond Ford controversy? Don't we have enough current topics to talk about without opening up old wounds, pains that were put to rest a generation ago?

Let us not forget that the issue with Desmond Ford was more than whether or not there was an investigative judgment. It was that the “mother” of our church was being dishonored, and breaking one of the Ten Commandments is a matter involving our eternal salvation.

I'm a third-generation Adventist, one who was born in the church and treasures my heritage—one who doesn't dig into complicated concepts that have nothing to do with my salvation, and knowing that there are things that I will not know or understand until I reach the kingdom.

I lost my nephew in that controversy, a young minister who worshiped his teacher so much that he led his congregation to break with the mainline church as a result of his loyalty to Desmond Ford, and when his congregation could not survive after losing their connection with the church, my nephew committed suicide.

I'm sure that my nephew was not the only young person who was lost to the church as a result. As far as I am concerned, when young ministers are lost to the church because one influential teacher chooses to promote his doctrine in public opposition to the consensus and authority of the main body of the church, this is carrying the satisfaction of proving that you are “right” too far. The reason could be nothing other than intellectual pride. Was saving that one teacher more important than all the young ministers under his influence?

Carol Mayes  
Chatsworth, California

### FORD NOT A THREAT

I really thought our leaders were bigger than that. What is this, revenge? What can Ford possibly do or say that we are so afraid of? If his point of view still conflicts with that of the established church's we should still have the choice to hear him in any forum. I am not attending for other reasons, but hoped others could express free thought and listen to whatever Ford has to say.

He did not change my thinking 25 years ago, and I doubt he has higher and newer light now. However, our intellectual growth is stimulated by exposure to thoughts other than the regular cookie-cutter fare offered by the powers that be. Prohibiting him reeks of the petty fear that he might contaminate the purity of the elect or worst yet, expose.

S. Peter Campbell, Sr. Pastor,  
Allegheny East Conference

### NEEDED CHANGES

The event that you just describe is just the sort of thing that must change in the church that we all love. You must not be afraid to speak the truth about what the organization does that prevents it (the Adventist church) from completing its assigned task!

Clinton S. Cummings Via the Internet

### DARK AGES

We must be in the Dark Ages and it escaped my attention. I find it difficult to believe that the pastor involved “caved in,” but I, upon second thought, know why. If he wishes to continue his pastoring, he does as he is ordered to do without question. Dr. Ford has something to say and it is threatening to the authorities, so much so that they forbid his speaking. Absolute nonsense! Please keep me informed as to the time and place where you will host Dr. Ford in his presentation. I intend to be there!

Bradford Evans, Director,  
Pharmacy Services (Retired)  
Glendale Adventist Medical Center

*Why do we have to resurrect and rehash the old Desmond Ford controversy? Don't we have enough current topics to talk about without opening up old wounds, pains that were put to rest a generation ago?*

*Continued on page 6*

*“What has happened in twenty-five years in the SDA church since Glacier View?” you asked. The fact that Desmond Ford could not speak at the convention answers the question. The church still fears open discussion of issues it cannot biblically defend.*

### WHO'S WHO?

I've read your last two posts regarding the “Adventist church authorities forbid Dr. Desmond Ford's participation in Spiritual Renaissance Retreat.” Originally you said AT and Adventist Forums were sponsoring this, so who did the forbidding? Was this Spiritual Renaissance Retreat an officially sanctioned SDA meeting at any time?

Jim Gaull

Lead Pastor, Creekside Community SDA Church  
Langley, British Columbia  
[www.creeksideonline.org](http://www.creeksideonline.org)

*Editor's Note: An Adventist pastor, John Hughson, served as coordinator for the event. The event was advertised in Adventist publications.*

### LISTEN TO HIS VIEWS

I was a theology student at CUC in 1980 when Dr. Ford was at the GC during the time of his discussions related to the Sanctuary Doctrine. My professor was Robert Zamora, and due to the fact that I was a theology student I was privileged to attend a number of “off” campus discussions with and by Dr. Ford. He also taught a couple of our student Sabbath School classes. Although I did not and do not agree with his views concerning that subject and some other concerns, Dr. Ford presented the gospel message in a way that still affects me today. He is a sincere man, and it is a good thing for anyone with spiritual guidance to listen to his views and decide for themselves—this is exactly what we propose to anyone who questions any of our doctrines. I applaud you for respecting our leadership in the decision that they made, however restrictive. I am also glad that Dr. Ford will have a chance to once again voice his views—right or wrong. I truly hope to see him in heaven and walk with him along the River. I cannot be there personally, but I sure would like an overview or transcript of his talks—his journey will surely be an example to all of us.

Rob Hanson Via the Internet

### ONLINE REPORT

I saw your announcement that Dr. Ford would be speaking in Monterey and then just saw that he's been forbidden. Oh, well, you know what would be really cool? It would be great if you could pod-cast or broadcast through the Internet, the meeting with Dr. Ford in Monterey. I, for one, would love to be there, but since I can't be, it would be good to hear it online.

Jean Via the Internet

### RESTRICTORS OF SPEECH CANNOT WIN

I am astonished that conference leaders forbid Dr. Ford to speak at your retreat. I am not planning to be there, but I would like to be. If the brethren feel that they must protect the church, it seems to me that their action will damage the church more. They should know that those who restrict speech cannot win.

Ralph Neall Collegedale, Tennessee

### TWENTY-FIVE YEARS SINCE GLACIER VIEW

“What has happened in twenty-five years in the SDA church since Glacier View?” you asked. The fact that Desmond Ford could not speak at the convention answers the question. The church still fears open discussion of issues it cannot biblically defend. Desmond Ford remains in my mind perhaps the theologian who is the best, most dedicated to biblical truth the church has produced, and with the most integrity and courage despite consequences, I might add. If we differ in tactics of debate from the 16th century Roman Catholic Church, I am not sure how! Tradition at all cost! I am a disappointed and “ashamed” fourth-generation Adventist.

Pat Travis, M.Div. Oviedo, Florida

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## FORD'S THEOLOGY

Regarding the decision to forbid Dr. Desmond Ford from participating in the spiritual retreat, our church leaders did the right thing. Who knows how many members are insufficiently anchored by their personal study to see the deception of Desmond Ford without being carried away with his charismatic address and subtle miscomprehensions of the Scriptures which are well suited for those who are borderline willing to sacrifice the flesh, the world, and pleasures in exchange for their commitment to Christ. This is the heart of Dr. Ford's apostasy, license to remain captive to sin while claiming assurance of salvation. If this seems too harsh, then what explains the loss of scores of members in the late 70s and early 80s because of the last time Ford was permitted to speak before Adventists?

Ken Davis    Via the Internet

accompanied the team and presented an investment plan and opportunity to my church members.

Before the seminar, I publicly emphasized to my members, please don't invest any money in this or any program you cannot afford to lose. I have no money to give you should you lose your investment . . . please don't do anything that will jeopardize your financial position.

I am writing to you to give you the kind of response I would have been glad to give James Stirling for his AT report had his voice mails reached me. Unfortunately, they did not. We continue to grieve with all our members and those in the community who have suffered as a result of the financial losses, and pray that both their spiritual and earthly well-being remain in God's hands.

Pastor Reginald O. Robinson  
Pacoima, Calif.

## LOOK AT THE NUMBERS

I read with interest the latest online newsletter about the Des Ford forum. I'm a convert from Catholicism and have been in the church for over 20 years and have been a Bible worker and now pastor. Since Des Ford was rightly fired the SDA church has had tremendous growth. The SDA church is doing a better job than the Mormons and mostly every other church in gaining and retaining new members. I believe God started working when Des and his errors were rooted out. Take a look at the numbers and the projections for the coming years. With the coming of Jesus being near, the SDA church is more relevant than ever before.

Steven Caza    Via the Internet

## RESPONSE TO "SCAM ARTIST"

"Scam Artist Targeting Adventists Arrested" reported that a church member talked to the pastor, who assured her he was convinced of its value and planned to invest himself . . .

It is true that after attending a motivational seminar in which Winston Ross was a presenter, I invited the presenters to do a similar presentation to my church. Ross (whom I did not know)

» I really thought our leaders were bigger than that. What is this, revenge? What can Ford possibly do or say that we are so afraid of? If his point of view still conflicts with that of the established church's we should still have the choice to hear him in any forum. I am not attending for other reasons, but hoped others could express free thought and listen to whatever Ford has to say.

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## Letters

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Responses to the Editorial, “That’s Wrong, Mr. President” Vol. 13 No. 6

### “THAT’S WRONG, MR. PRESIDENT” VOL. 13 NO. 6

It is a disappointing irony that, in the same *AToday* issue where SDA liberals are wood-shedded for hypocrisy by Clifford Goldstein, the editorial page offers a rich cornucopia of evidence to validate Goldstein’s criticisms. With evangelical fervor, the editorial employs decontextualized proof-texting, false dichotomies, dogmatism, and demonization to oversimplify ill-defined and complex issues en route to concocting a divine imperative for the church to raise its collective voice in furtherance of a Leftist geopolitical agenda.

» While the political assumptions and conclusions of the editorial may be nothing worse than naive and misguided, its conscription of Scripture to warrant a *fatwah* by the church against President Bush is dangerous and disturbing.

The editorial deceptively begins with the false premise that terrorist detainees have pre-existing rights grounded in US law which the Bush administration is trying to take away. The assertion that the Senate is debating whether to revoke the habeas corpus rights of Guantanamo captives is like saying that, in *Roe v Wade*, the Supreme Court was debating whether to revoke womens’ constitutional right to an abortion, when the reality is that no such right existed before *Roe v Wade*. The real debate is not about revoking civil rights of the detainees (they have none), but whether to expand the power of the Federal Courts and Legislature over the executive branch of government by extending rights presently reserved for US citizens to captured prisoners of war.

The veto power of the president, which the

editorial views as a dastardly exercise in lawlessness, is but one of many powers granted to the president under the Constitution, which conceives the executive (even when a Republican is president) as a separate branch of government having certain authority and powers independent of judicial approval or legislative empowerment.

During the Civil War, President Lincoln suspended, without judicial authorization, rights of habeas corpus for even American citizens. The editorial argues, without any rationale, that unelected, life-tenured federal judges should define and circumscribe conditions of detainment and treatment for enemy combatants held during time of war. After all, the courts did such a fine job in WWII when they upheld the confinement of non-combatant US citizens simply because they were of Japanese ancestry. Yes, that’s a great idea. Who better to do justice for our poor, hapless terrorist “guests” than the Federal judiciary which, over the past 30 plus years, has invented and expanded an inviolable right for mothers to kill their own inconveniently conceived, unborn babies, leading to the state-subsidized killing of tens of millions of innocent human lives?

The argument that courts can be trusted to exercise wise discretion in dictating confinement terms because, after all, they haven’t yet released any prisoners, is specious to say the least. No courts have even considered the merits of the issue because their jurisdiction to rule on the issue is still being litigated. The editorial conveniently overlooks the fact that our government has already released many of the detainees without any court order, a number of whom have been found fighting against US and Iraqi troops in Iraq.

While the political assumptions and conclusions of the editorial may be nothing worse than naive and misguided, its conscription of Scripture to warrant a *fatwah* by the church against President Bush is dangerous and disturbing. Arrantly false dichotomies are offered to lay the foundation for demonizing those who disagree with the editor, turning what should be mere political differences of opinion into a battle between good and evil. Example: “On the one side is the rule of law and the authority of the

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courts. On the other side is the exercise of power by individuals unfettered by law or court review.” In context, the statement that, “it is evil to ignore our enemies’ humanity or to trample their human rights,” seems to mean that it is evil to oppose habeas corpus for Gitmo detainees.

This bold assertion is, it appears, founded on nothing less than the authority of Old Testament injunctions prescribing the treatment that the Israelites should give to foreigners living among them. How the cited texts have any relevancy to the issue of how terrorists who want to destroy our civilization by any means necessary should be treated is indeed a mystery. Perhaps the editor is aware of ancient manuscripts proving that the Marquess of Queensberry Rules were actually originated by the Israelites as rules of engagement for their conquest of Canaan. The Leviticus 24 command to apply the same law to foreigners resulted in the stoning of a “foreigner” for cursing God. When self-appointed guardians of Scriptural honesty and integrity hypocritically indulge in proof-texting that would make a fundamentalist blush, they create a credibility problem for themselves.

Finally, the editorial makes the astonishing assertion that we lose our moral standing if we use torture and lawless detentions (what those terms mean is never defined), and it would be better to lose the war on terror than to use such methods. First of all, having read the anti-war screed of multiple *Atoday* editorials since 9/11, it is a bit of a surprise to learn that we as a nation still have any moral standing left to lose. But even assuming, arguendo, that NSA wiretapping, detention of detainees, and torture of al Qaeda prisoners to obtain information are clearly illegal, surely that does not put us in the same moral category as those who teach that ultimate self-fulfillment and service to God consists of becoming a human bomb to destroy innocent life.

Unless one subscribes to the nihilistic world views of the radical Left, there is a vast moral difference between those who categorically repudiate the values and morals of Western Civilization and those who affirm them, but fail to live up to them or have differences of opinion as to their meaning.

Underlying the editorial is uncritical acceptance of the assumption that political convictions should be an extension of one’s religious faith. Noble as it sounds, this assumption needs to be examined. First, this nation is ostensibly guided and constrained by a Constitution, not Scripture. The President takes an oath to faithfully execute the office of the presidency as defined by the Constitution, and to protect the country against all enemies. Exhortations for him to execute his office in conformity with Christian principles are inconsistent with our form of government. Furthermore, the Gospel call to personal righteousness and holy living, achieved by surrender and servanthood, cannot be applied to nations. Eternal obliteration—not a starry crown—awaits any nation suicidal enough to choose the way of the cross. Third, our commitment to separation of church and state should make us very chary about overtly using Scripture as a guide to the social and foreign policy of our nation. And finally, neither history nor contemporary geopolitics offers any reason to believe that national policies based on religious faith will enhance security or liberty.

Politics certainly has its place, but it does not have the last word. Hopefully there is room in the “progressive” tent for even sharply divergent political views. Faith-based politics threatens to separate us from each other and from the love of Christ. This would be truly tragic. I hope that *AToday* will exercise care before divisively advocating political positions which detract from our primary mission.

Nate Schilt  
Loma Linda, CA

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## Letters policy

WE WANT  
TO HEAR  
FROM YOU

*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 by e-mail, 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.

## Letters

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### A LITTLE MORE COMPASSION, CLIFF

First a little background: Clifford Goldstein is a good friend of mine. Back in the early 1980s he and I worked together at the General Conference. We spent many an hour debating theology. Cliff has a great mind, great commitment to the Adventist Church, great writing skills, a great sense of humor, and he's great fun to be around. I can't think of a person with whom I'd rather spar. But I also feel, as I've told him repeatedly, that he demonstrates little pastoral sensitivity in many of his written diatribes—his Adventist Today analysis of Adventist liberals providing a prime example (AT Nov/Dec 2005).

I agree with much of what Cliff said in his article. Often what gets labeled “liberal” in the Adventist Church is in reality conservatism two or three blocks to the left but going in a parallel direction and following the same rules of the road. Adventists have a tradition of dogmatism. We call ourselves the “remnant church.” We have “the truth.” Such claims make it difficult to have an open-ended approach to theology.

In his essay, Cliff laments the absence of the kind of liberalism demonstrated by his father. Cliff's father is tolerant, hands-off, live-and-let-live—unless someone is going to be hurt. Only then will he respond dogmatically. I would suggest, however, that many of the “liberal” Adventists Cliff castigates

for their dogmatism are, in fact, speaking up dogmatically precisely because they don't want to see others get hurt, especially the young.

Because Cliff came into the church through a dramatic conversion experience, and because he found in Adventism answers to his life's questions, he has little understanding of those in the church who have a different experience. For him, the church has been an unqualified beacon of spiritual light and liberation. For others, however, it has been the source of both spiritual blessing and considerable pain. Let me cite one personal example.

My Adventist heritage goes back several generations. I attended only Adventist schools until I graduated from college. In school, we did a lot of memory work. I learned many Bible verses and many quotes from Ellen G. White. In fact, I preferred the quotes from “Sister White” because they were easier to understand than the King James Version texts we memorized. Many of those quotes had a power that, to this day, gives me goose bumps when I hear them. “The greatest want of the world is the want of men . . . who will stand for right though the heavens fall.”

When I was about ten, Elder D.A. Delafield from the Ellen G. White Estate came to camp meeting with the big Bible that Ellen White reportedly held in her outstretched hand for some thirty minutes during a vision. I watched as the strongest student from the local academy tried to match the feat—failing after scarcely a minute. It left a deep impression.

I remember one of my schoolteachers telling of a man who was planning to do his doctorate on Ellen White's use of prose. Here was a woman who wrote perfectly despite having but three years of formal education. It was miraculous that someone so under-equipped could achieve so much. In fact, the miraculous was my prime reason for believing. We heard story after story of how God oversaw, directed and protected the life and ministry of Ellen White. It was impressive indeed.

My father wanted his children to become versed in the writings of our church's prophet, so he offered to buy for our personal library a copy of each of her books that we read. Thus I immersed myself in her writings at an early age. Plus we read the entire Conflict of the Ages series for family worship. I came across nothing in my reading to suggest any reason

» Often what gets labeled “liberal” in the Adventist Church is in reality conservatism two or three blocks to the left but going in a parallel direction and following the same rules of the road. Adventists have a tradition of dogmatism. We call ourselves the “remnant church.” We have “the truth.” Such claims make it difficult to have an open-ended approach to theology.

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to question anything I was being told by my church school teachers or my parents.

In fact, Ellen White said: “Although I am as dependent upon the Spirit of the Lord in writing my views as I am in receiving them, yet the words I employ in describing what I have seen are my own, unless they be those spoken to me by an angel, which I always enclose in remarks of quotation.”—*Review and Herald*, Oct. 8, 1867. She also said: “When writing these precious books, if I hesitated, the very word I wanted to express the idea was given me.”—Letter 265, 1907.

Thus I was stunned when information about Ellen White’s literary borrowing began to surface in the late 1970s. I discovered that her writings weren’t quite the beautiful prose that I had assumed: They were edited and polished by others. I discovered that she wasn’t the uneducated person I had assumed: She was self-educated, a voracious reader and the possessor of a substantial library of books addressing the topics about which she wrote. I discovered that many of the miracles that had so cemented my faith in her hadn’t been rigorously verified. And I watched as leaders in high places merely shrugged and said, “So? We’ve always known that.” Yet somehow what they’d always known hadn’t filtered down to those who were teaching impressionable young people like me.

I was an idealistic young pastor at the time these questions were first raised, and it came as a devastating blow—far more pain than my words here can convey. What I had assumed were unassailable reasons for believing in the ministry of Ellen White had crumbled. My faulty premises for faith weren’t the result of wild irresponsibility on my part. I hadn’t misunderstood what I was taught. I had understood perfectly, but I had been taught wrongly. Thus I had to go back and rebuild my faith in Ellen White’s ministry—this time on a foundation that, I believe, can stand the test of time. But it was a painful journey.

Some people would call me liberal because I no longer use the writings of Ellen White as the final word. I now use them “as the lesser light to lead to the greater light,” as she herself advocated. I no longer base my belief in her writings on a string of alleged miracles. I cherish her writings because of the spiritual benefit they bring. I no longer have to prove to everyone that her writings are inspired. I simply invite people to read for themselves. And if the words so speak to their souls that readers say, “Wow, this is inspired!” then I praise God that they’ve been so blessed.

But I don’t want others to face the pain of unlearning and reformulating that I faced. So when I discover that my children are still being taught as

» Some people would call me liberal because I no longer use the writings of Ellen White as the final word. I now use them “as the lesser light to lead to the greater light,” as she herself advocated. I no longer base my belief in her writings on a string of alleged miracles. I cherish her writings because of the spiritual benefit they bring.

fact things that I’ve had to unlearn through a highly painful process, it upsets me. I can’t sit back with detached indifference. I can’t be a true “liberal.” I speak up. I don’t want to see people—especially young people—hurt. And I know how deep such hurt can be.

With all due respect to Cliff, he hasn’t gone through that kind of experience. Nor do I see any real evidence that he has gone out of his way to walk in the shoes of those who have. If he had, I don’t think he could speak so stridently.

I think Cliff has something to say that could benefit those not on his wavelength. But his flamboyant language all but guarantees that the ones who most need to hear it will be pushed away. Words such as “closed-minded hypocritical dogmatists,” “utterly intolerant,” “going postal,” “amusing,” “let’s try and be honest here,” “sheer intellectual dishonesty,” “the only folks they’re fooling are themselves,” “laughable,” “left-wing crusaders” and similar terminology aren’t helpful. He’s a great polemicist, but a more pastoral approach would do more to build up the church.

Cliff recognizes that liberalism, rightly done, could be a great blessing to the church. I agree. Likewise, Cliff’s concerns, rightly expressed and tempered with deep pastoral concern and understanding, could make an equally beneficial contribution. I maintain that compassionate conservatism has much to commend it—if you’ll excuse me for expressing such a liberal sentiment!

**James Coffin is senior pastor of the Markham Woods Church in Longwood, Florida, and director of Global Mission’s Center for Secular/Postmodern Mission.**



# Dr. Desmond Ford and the Twelfth Spiritual Renaissance Retreat

*Some time afterward, opposition surfaced from long-time critics of Ford. These critical voices were successful in pressuring key church leaders who as a result mandated to us to cancel the invitation to Ford.*

*Background: Dr. Ford was initially invited to be a speaker at the 2005-2006 Twelfth Spiritual Renaissance Retreat (SRR). When pressure was applied to the SRR organizers to disinvite him, Adventist Today reinvited him, became his host, and arranged for him to make the presentations originally scheduled to be given under SRR auspices.*

## Reflections by the SRR Organizers: Opposition Turned Into A Great Blessing

For twelve years now, Monterey, California has been the gathering location for people celebrating the New Year in a uniquely inspirational way at the Spiritual Renaissance Retreat (SRR). Every element of the weekend is meant to enhance our perception of God. The spectacular coastal beauty describes him as Creator. Fellowship among families and new friends describe him as relational. The presentations describe God's mission to be relevant to the world through us. And the Sabbath hours describe him as our Redeemer from works. Everything planned is done with the mission statement in mind: Inspiration for a Life that Matters.

Evaluations from participants of this past SRR were again overwhelmingly positive. More people attended than ever before, and the offering to support the next retreat was the largest ever. The success was particularly meaningful for us. As always, we had carefully chosen a group of presenters that would challenge us with creative thought for personal growth and ways to support our church. Much of the focus was on Adventism's future, the significant role of Ellen White and the spiritual legacy that we are passing on to our children. This year the presenters were Roy Branson, Jim Londis, Paul McGraw, John McClarty, Becky Wang-Cheng Scriven, Chuck Scriven, Arlene Taylor and Alden Thompson.

We also had a dream to have Desmond Ford to come as a presenter. We wanted him to share the primary focus of his life—the Good News of Jesus Christ and his righteousness. Ford's lifelong

study of these truths has given him the ability to articulate them in profoundly moving themes. Having him come would be a way by which we could acknowledge his positive contributions to Adventism in its journey to understand and proclaim the gospel. We also saw this as an opportunity to invite others who were blessed by his ministry but who have not been in contact with the Adventist church for years.

The idea to invite Dr. Ford led to much prayer and our growing conviction that God was leading in the plans. We also contacted church leaders early on for their opinion about his presenting at the SRR. Our discussion with them included several facts: SRR was a private retreat, was not held in a church facility, did not use church funds, nor was advertised as a church program. They gave their permission, so we invited Des and his wife, and they accepted. Some time afterward, opposition surfaced from long-time critics of Ford. These critical voices were successful in pressuring key church leaders who, as a result, mandated to us to cancel the invitation to Ford. For several months, we pleaded the positive benefits of Ford's contribution, reminding leaders that it was the gospel that would be Ford's sole focus during the retreat. Our efforts got no results, so we gave our huge disappointment to God. We still believed in the dream, but issues of *timing* are always of a divine nature.

After several months *Adventist Today* learned of the situation. SRR and *Adventist Today* had formed a partnership in 2004, which now took on new significance. On its own initiative, AT invited Ford to come and speak at a separate venue on the

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weekend. It established its own contract with the facility where his presentations would take place and notified its readership of the event. Ford was able to give powerful presentations of the gospel. His ability to speak about the grand patterns of grace woven throughout the Scriptures was truly inspirational and enlightening. His words provided a significant backdrop for concluding the past year and beginning a new one, and for reminding us that past failures are absorbed into mercies new for each day.

We left SRR rejoicing in the blessings of the entire weekend. We truly believe that God provided for every need. When our efforts could not accomplish what was hoped for, He provided the means. It's just that way with grace. Plans are well under way for the next SRR. And again we expect that God will have his own way to bless beyond our asking or thinking. To be placed on the mailing list for the 2006-2007 SRR, please e-mail John Hughson at [jhughson@puc.edu](mailto:jhughson@puc.edu).



# Reflections by Adventist Today: Political Power Versus the Gospel

*By Editors of Adventist Today*

For eleven consecutive years, the Spiritual Renaissance Retreat (SRR) had been held without controversy. The SRR had been designed by its organizers, John and Joan Hughson, as “a time committed to the transforming power of God through the sharing of ideas and relationships. Its primary objective is for growth, renewal, and visioning.” These objectives were met and exceeded year after year and the reputation of the SRR grew as a place of openness where a wide range of ideas could be safely shared and discussion could take place in a positive Adventist Christian atmosphere.

Then came SRR’s twelfth year. As related by the organizers in their reflections on the events, they wished to invite Desmond Ford to come as one of the presenters to make presentations on the gospel—the Good News of Jesus Christ. Since John Hughson is on the pastoral staff at the Pacific Union College Church and, knowing the nature of the past twenty-five-year-old history of Ford’s relationship with the Adventist Church, he contacted the local conference president and the president of Pacific Union College to inform them of his intention to invite Ford. Presumably because of the independent nature of the SRR, they expressed no opposition to the invitation—they would not approve, but neither did they disapprove. On this basis, the invitation was extended to Dr. Ford, and he accepted.

Then the problems began. There is good evidence that a former General Conference employee living in retirement near Pacific Union College, a well-known and long-time critic of Desmond

Ford, contacted certain union, North American Division, and General Conference officers to complain about the invitation. Partly in response to these objections, a union conference president contacted the local conference president and “urged” him to “reconsider” his lack of opposition to the invitation. This local conference president duly “reconsidered” his decision and communicated his new understanding to John Hughson, who, because he was a conference employee, was expected to obey the dictates of his ecclesiastical superiors.

This episode vividly illustrates the inevitable outgrowth of what happens when a religious institution becomes centralized, bureaucratized, and hierarchical. No matter how noble the original goals and intents of the founders of any given organization might have been, for the group to survive and expand, a small group of leaders emerges that controls resources and exercises power in the name of the group. Such leaders create administrative bureaucracies, forge policies that impose order on the group, and create an ideology that justifies the power of the controlling leadership cadre. They consider these actions to be absolutely necessary to ensure the long-term survival of the group. Such bureaucracies are effective in maintaining control over a specific corporate body of members. However, in exercising that authority by issuing orders, they expose for all to see that political power, and not the principles of the gospel that Jesus preached, controls the organization of which they view themselves as “leaders.”

# From Tragedy to Hope: ADRA International Responds to South Asia Earthquake

*The residents of this area desperately needed the emergency supplies. ADRA's first phase of relief operations also provided 300 tents, 300 food packages, 300 blankets and 300 jerry cans (water carriers) for 300 families in Mohala Khajgan and Mohala Saddat in Bagh District. Just one of these food packages would feed a family of six for a month.*

**T**he people of Kashmir have been innocent bystanders in a decades-old struggle for control of the territory that sits atop Pakistan and India. Their life has been difficult. After October 8, 2005, the South Asia earthquake left most of the impoverished region in ruins, changing lives forever in a few moments of terror. The massive earthquake, according to the United Nation's conservative estimates, left more than 73,000 dead, 128,000 injured and several millions without homes in one of poorest parts of the world.

Measuring about 7.6 on the Richter scale, the earthquake struck parts of Pakistan, India and Afghanistan. Although all three countries were greatly affected, the brunt of the damage occurred in Pakistan-administered Kashmir, where the epicenter was located. As many as 15,000 villages were affected by the mighty earthquake, and many cities were completely destroyed.

The Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) International responded immediately to bring hope to the survivors. Approaching the end of a year that began with the agency's largest response ever to a natural disaster after the Indian Ocean tsunami, once again it responded to a catastrophe of biblical proportions. As of December 14, 2005, ADRA International and its offices around the world have provided emergency aid valued at more than \$1.3 million, assisting nearly 72,000 people.

Immediately after the earthquake, ADRA International airlifted 20 boxes of medicine from Malaysia to the Islamabad airport in its first international shipment to help survivors. Each box was equipped to treat 1,000 patients for 90 days. ADRA dispatched small medical teams to the Kashmir region to assist with the distribution of medical supplies and attend to the health concerns of those who had been injured. These medical teams fanned out across hard-to-reach rural areas to treat



*Transportation is particularly challenging in devastated areas*

the earthquake victims and people who succumbed to illness and infection in the days that followed.

It became clear in the early days of the response that access to many of the affected areas would be difficult. In order to respond effectively and manage aid distribution, ADRA Pakistan would need to establish a base close to the areas in need. To coordinate relief efforts efficiently on the ground, ADRA set up an office in Rawalpindi, a city close to Islamabad, Pakistan, and a field office in District Bagh, where authorities gave ADRA permission to begin relief activities.

The mountainous district of Bagh was one of many areas that were severely affected by the earthquake. By some estimates more than 12,000 people died in this area and at least 60,000 families were left without a home or adequate shelter in a region that experiences severe winters. ADRA's response team on the ground in Bagh estimated that as many as 95 percent of the structures in these two towns alone had been completely leveled.

The residents of this area desperately needed the emergency supplies. ADRA's first phase of relief operations also provided 300 tents, 300 food packages, 300 blankets and 300 jerry cans (water carriers) for 300 families in Mohala Khajgan and

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Mohala Saddat in Bagh District. Just one of these food packages would feed a family of six for a month.

With a relatively mild winter thus far, ADRA has had an opportunity to continue delivering life-saving supplies to the survivors. Emergency winter supplies and aid has flowed into these earthquake-stricken areas from ADRA's offices around the world. As of December 15, assistance provided as part of ADRA's Pakistan/Kashmir Relief operations included: 55,800 blankets, 20,385 heavy local quilts, 552 temporary shelters, 2,680 winterized tents, 8,500 hygiene kits, 300 food packages, 300 jerry cans, 5,500 kerosene lamps, 2,245 wood stoves and the 20 large boxes of medicine. This precious aid has been provided by: ADRA International and ADRA offices in Austria, Belgium, Slovakia, Portugal, Germany, Switzerland, Czech Republic, Canada, Australia, Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Korea, and Japan as well as public donors Aktion Deutschland Hilft (ADA) through ADRA's office in Germany, and Slovak Aid through ADRA's office in Slovakia.

The emergency aid that ADRA has provided to the survivors of the Pakistan/Kashmir earthquake has been invaluable, but just as important has been the contribution of ADRA workers who labored tirelessly to assure that the supplies reached those who needed it most.

One example is ADRA's office staff in Turkey, who refused to give up on finding transportation for urgently needed heavy-duty tents that could house 30 to 40 people. After running into many dead ends, they were able to arrange for 60 tents to be flown into Islamabad—free of charge—on November 24 by three Hercules C130 planes provided by National Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Each tent measures 18 by 30 feet and weighs approximately 1,000 pounds. The tents are equipped with two stoves to fight the winter weather. They will now be used as classrooms for children during the day and shelter for displaced persons during the night.

ADRA's workers on the ground in Pakistan-administered Kashmir have been working long hours since the earthquake occurred. There are people like Radek Spinka, ADRA Pakistan's logistics officer on special assignment from the ADRA office in the Czech Republic, whose responsibilities include shepherding the many trucks that carry precious cargo through the mountainous roads to assist earthquake survivors in the Bagh District. To accomplish this he must juggle between phone calls to trucking companies and his ADRA colleague in Kashmir, 22-year-old Ismah. On her end, she helps coordinate the trucks' arrivals and organizes the 50



*ADRA's logo is fast becoming identifiable in any language*

ADRA workers who unload the trucks, set up the tents and help people construct shelters.

Working together, this team of two has successfully guided all 118 trucks that have been dispatched to deliver 812 tons of critical aid to the earthquake survivors. They are just two of the many ADRA workers around the world who have worked long hours since October 8 to ensure that all the aid provided by ADRA's generous supporters reaches those who need it most.

ADRA is on the front lines of this disaster and has continued assisting the survivors of this earthquake, but there is still great need. Thanks to the relatively mild winter, ADRA has been able to reach many survivors still in need of emergency winter supplies.

As the winter got harsher ADRA continued its work to bring supplies, food, and hope to people who have lost so much. ADRA will be in the Kashmir region, as well as many other places where people are suffering, as long as it takes to help them rebuild their homes and their lives.

For more information or to contribute to ADRA's Pakistan/Kashmir Relief, please contact ADRA International. Visit ADRA's Web site, [www.adra.org](http://www.adra.org), for updates and to donate online to ADRA's Pakistan/Kashmir Relief. Those interested can also call the ADRA toll-free number: 1-800-424-2372, or write to ADRA International, 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904-6600. Mark gifts: Pakistan-Kashmir Relief.

*Tereza Byrne is bureau chief for marketing and development, ADRA International.*



Feature | Elaine Nelson

# A Tale of Three Churches

**T**his is the story of three Adventist churches in Fresno, Calif.—the Valley Community Church, the Sunnyside Adventist Church, and their development by members of the large 1,200-member Central Adventist Church, which had a long history in this, the largest city in California’s Central Valley.

The Valley Community Church had its beginning in the early 1980s as a proposed pilot undertaking for missionary-minded members of the Central church. They had a goal of attracting “unchurched” people from the secular world and especially the growing immigrant and refugee population, as well as reclaiming former Adventists. The community had many Adventist church members who had become disillusioned with the treatment given the gospel-oriented views of Dr. Desmond Ford at Glacier View, Colorado, and had quit the church. Proponents of the new concept of community outreach had in mind a broad spectrum of programs:

smoking cessation, healthful living, survival skills for newcomers, English language tutoring, and elements of the Christian faith. They hoped that these practical subjects, combined with an atmosphere of love, acceptance, and forgiveness, would give them an entrance into the community. They planned to hold services in the multipurpose room and youth chapel of the Central church. They were ready to go.

As it turned out, however, dissident elements in the main congregation began to pick fault with the program. They were unhappy with the “basic elements of Christian faith”; they wanted the whole range of distinctive doctrines to be presented early on, including the role and ministry of Ellen G. White. Some were troubled by the prospect of bringing smokers onto the church property, who would leave tobacco smells and burn holes in the carpet. They succeeded in getting the attention of the conference officials, who then sensed divisiveness and became uneasy themselves. So the conference president tried to resolve the situation by



terminating the plans and giving the pastor a “call” to another church.

Undeterred by this action, however, supporters of the new concept persuaded the pastor to stay with the program but make it happen in another location—something rented from another church of Sunday keepers in town. So, starting on its own, the new group immediately began attracting a sizable congregation as a nondenominational Sabbatarian church. The new congregation had a strong gospel orientation, accepting all who wanted to worship with them in a spirit of fellowship. But they did so without having a formal connection with the local conference. This alarmed the people in the Central church, who by now had a new pastor. Agitators in the church began to call for the disfellowshipping of the leaders in the new congregation.

Thus the new Valley Community Church, though Adventist at heart, has continued without the support of the conference; but it has become prominent in the community for its many services and especially for its free classes in marriage, family and personal counseling.

The Sunnyside church had a somewhat similar beginning when church members, still wishing for a more gospel-oriented program but under the conference umbrella, started meeting quietly in their homes for prayer and planning, then proposed a “branch Sabbath School.” By January of 1987 there were so many who had been attracted to this group that they qualified as a “company,” with conference blessing, and a few months later they found a church willing to rent out their building on Sabbath mornings for Adventist regular services. This congregation continued to grow, until within a year it had 118 charter members and had taken the name “Sunnyside Adventist Church,” with full conference recognition and a full-time pastor.

The Sunnyside congregation decided to pursue three main goals: 1) to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, 2) to love one another—unconditionally, 3) to go and make disciples. These were almost identical to the goals of the VCC group which had been earlier rejected.

The Sunnyside church logo, “The Spirit of Sunnyside,” is readily demonstrated to all who attend, whether regular members, nonmembers or visitors. Anyone who desires to attend becomes part of the Sunnyside family. The church has continued to grow, with membership now close to 400 and with more who are not official members in weekly attendance. Especially encouraging is the rapid

growth of the children’s division. This includes children of parents who do not attend church but who appreciate the Christian education their children receive. Those who lead in the children’s departments say they want all the children who attend to have a happy experience. Many people on their first visit experience such warm acceptance that they decide to become regular attendees. And now the church has a new husband-and-wife youth pastor team as well.

The Sunnyside church has established several traditions, such as monthly potlucks after the service and a yearly “church in the mountains,” where anyone is welcome. This day’s activities in the Central Sierra has the largest attendance of any service of the year. It is an all-day affair, beginning with Sabbath School and worship service in a beautiful local chapel. This is followed by a picnic on a lakeshore with an afternoon baptism. Boating, hiking and similar activities follow, with a sundown vesper service around the campfire.

» These two churches illustrate possible outcomes of a church-planting effort. For one, it was an idea “whose time had not yet come;” for the other, it was a manifestation of what God can do when his people are ready. When a church refuses to adapt to changing conditions it sometimes loses great opportunities.

These two churches illustrate possible outcomes of a church-planting effort. For one, it was an idea “whose time had not yet come;” for the other, it was a manifestation of what God can do when his people are ready. When a church refuses to adapt to changing conditions it sometimes loses great opportunities.

God has established his church in the world to minister to people in need. In Fresno where there was one church there are now three. Like the growth of a new plant, the Holy Spirit cannot be guided by humans but develops where it is given freedom to fill the heart.

*Elaine Nelson lives in Fresno and writes from long observation of the Adventist church scene.*





Feature | John Thomas McLarty

# Intellectual Adventism

*Intellectual Adventists model the integration of vital faith with intellectual acumen. IA invites people to bring their minds along as they learn to believe.*

Intellectual Adventism (IA) has developed as a distinctive subculture within the larger church. Its value to the church is dramatically evident in our universities, health care institutions, publishing work, legal departments and communications and media specialists, all of which are heavily dependent on the skills and education of Adventist intellectuals. Not that all the individuals in these areas of church life are intellectuals, of course, but significant percentages are.

The greatest value of IA, however, is its ministry to children of the church and to educated inquirers with minimal church background. IA keeps intellectuals born in the church as members of the family instead of cutting them off because they no longer can think and live exclusively within the boundaries set by our most primitive traditions. Intellectual Adventists model the integration of vital faith with intellectual acumen. IA invites people to bring their minds along as they learn to believe.

## Definitions

Intellectual: Calling someone an “intellectual” is not a statement about their intelligence but a statement about the way they process information and the value they place on human culture. Intellectuals have confidence in the methods of history and science to generate reliable (though not infallible) information. They associate human creativity with the “image of God” and have a profound regard for the arts. In short, being an intellectual means treasuring human culture,

especially as embodied in libraries, the arts and the academy. This high regard for human art and learning includes a deep respect for the two millennia of Christian history. Intellectuals honor the ideas and practices of Irenaeus and Augustine, the Desert Fathers and Francis of Assisi, Hildegard and Clare, the Unitas Fratrum and the Benedictines. None of these people or movements is seen as infallible or authoritative, but they are instructive. Intellectuals have a lively awareness that Christianity was not started or resurrected in the 1800s. Rather, the Adventist genesis marked the creation of a new tribe with a distinctive mission within global, historic Christianity.

Adventist: An Adventist is a member of a spiritual community whose historical roots include nineteenth-century American Protestant apocalypticism, asceticism and restorationism. In addition, early Adventism embraced the Christian social activism and reform movements of the time. All this means being Adventist includes a certain iconoclastic tendency, a certain irreverence toward established authority, both in religion and in culture.

The most authoritative figure in our history is a woman. The central theological project of her later years was to demonstrate that the statement “God is love” is neither a tautology nor an oxymoron. (You cannot be an Adventist thinker without reckoning with Ellen White—both her dramatic contributions to Adventist life and thought as our leading prophet and her evident frailties and ethical lapses.) An

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Adventist regards the Bible as the supreme religious authority, but does not regard it as “inerrant”—a mediating position that provides for endless, fruitful tension. Our central religious practice is Sabbath keeping. Adventists believe human history finds its ultimate goal outside the normal course of history, but does so in a way that honors both human history and human concerns for justice. Above all, an Adventist is one who views reality through a lens shaped by Jesus. The “Advent” is about the return of Jesus. So being Adventist inescapably includes a certain otherworldliness.

## Origins

IA is the product of several generations of interaction between disparate elements within the Adventist heritage and of interaction between Adventism and “the world.” Any attempt to make that history simple and easy to read risks the charge of being simplistic. But in spite of that risk, I want to highlight three elements within the Adventist tradition that have contributed to the development and birth of Intellectual Adventism.

## George McCready Price

All contemporary Christian groups fighting against the hegemony of evolution and standard geochronology in education and public discourse can be traced back to the Adventist crusader for creationism, George McCready Price. Price was a militant opponent, not only of biological evolution but of the entire enterprise of standard geology. Price was a classic anti-intellectual, seeing the scientific fraternity as almost conspiratorially committed to anti-biblical views. He did not trust the methods or the people of the science. However, the way he fought evolution and geology laid one of the cornerstones of Adventist Intellectualism. Price did not say, It doesn’t matter what the rocks say. We trust the Bible. Instead, he offered a counterinterpretation of the rocks. He accused the geologists of misinterpreting the rocks.

His arguments unwittingly planted a time bomb. Inevitably at some point, an Adventist would actually look at the rocks. And when that happened, Price’s theories would fall apart. It so happened that one of Price’s students, Harold Clark, became a professor at Pacific Union College. One of his students arranged for Clark to spend a summer in the oil fields of Texas studying stratigraphy (the ordered layering of rocks). As a result of his field studies, Clark publicly acknowledged that the “geologic column” was not a merely heuristic tool of anti-theist geologists. It was, in fact, a fair description of how rocks are actually arranged in the earth. Price bitterly condemned Clark for this “apostasy.”

Since that time Adventist geologists, paleontologists, anthropologists, archaeologists, etc., have continued to pursue “the truth” found in rocks

and artifacts. They have come to have high regard for the value of scientific methods of study. They value the Bible record, but, following Price’s lead of working to intelligently interpret the actual stuff in the ground, they cannot conscientiously ignore the evident arrangement of the “stuff” in the earth just because it contradicts the “received interpretations” offered by church tradition.

If Price had just stopped at “the Bible and Bible only” as his source of information, we could have been spared all the complications raised by these intellectuals. (Of course, we could also have spared ourselves the expense of hospitals and medical schools and by limiting our healing ministries to the Bible-and-Bible-only guidance about the application of olive oil and prayer.)

## Historicist Evangelistic Preaching

Talk about unintended consequences! George McCready Price had no intention of fueling scientific education as a challenge to church tradition when he wrote books offering “Adventist” interpretations of geologic data. Adventist apocalyptic preaching may be an even stranger “father” of IA. Early Adventist evangelists traveled the country preaching months-long series of meetings about all the beasts and symbols of Daniel and Revelation. These evangelists were not Greek scholars or trained theologians. Sophisticates of today’s church often mock their sometimes simplistic methods of biblical interpretation.

» They associate human creativity with the “image of God” and have a profound regard for the arts. In short, being an intellectual means treasuring human culture, especially as embodied in libraries, the arts and the academy. This high regard for human art and learning includes a deep respect for the two millennia of Christian history.



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# Intellectual Adventism

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However, this early Adventist fascination with Daniel and Revelation led directly to the development of an intellectual culture within the Adventist church. How? Because the Adventist approach to understanding these books was “Historicist.” This school of interpretation matches specific events in history with statements by the prophets. To do this skillfully and persuasively, good Adventist preachers became keen students of history. A crucial piece of the Adventist “Sanctuary

Doctrine”—the date, October 22, 1844—was entirely dependent on extra-biblical Jewish chronologies and histories of the Persian empire. For Adventist preachers, a broad knowledge of ancient history was indispensable for their work of preaching “the everlasting gospel” and “the third angel’s message.”

Even before Adventist theologians began earning Ph.D.s, Adventist colleges had teachers who were deeply involved with ancient texts and ancient ideas. One fruit of this fascination with ancient history is that three of the top five leadership positions in archaeology in the United States today are held by Adventists.

When Adventists began getting doctorates in archaeology and ancient

Near Eastern languages and Reformation history and the history of Sabbath and Sunday, they could not help being changed by their education. A few remained fundamentalists and never changed their minds. They had regard only for information that was useful for buttressing what they already believed. But most scholars find their thinking altered in some significant ways by their intense interaction with their subject matter. Like the early evangelists, they believe truth matters. No matter where it comes from.

## **The College of Medical Evangelists and College Accreditation**

In this case, the roots of IA go straight back to the prophet herself. The most frequently cited historical source for IA is Ellen White’s call for the

church to create a fully accredited medical school. In order for The College of Medical Evangelists to become fully accredited, its feeder colleges needed to be accredited. This meant college faculty needed advanced degrees. For most people, exposure to the ideas and culture of higher education and the years of intense study required for a serious Ph.D. foster some measure of respect and appreciation for the traditions of Western culture. In the process of preparing to teach in Adventist schools, they become intellectuals.

## **Summary**

If my historical sketch is approximately correct, it is clear that Intellectual Adventism is not something that has “crept into” Adventism. Rather it has grown out of Adventism. It is worthy of respect within the community. It is not an alien or dangerous heterodoxy. The next logical question is: What practices and beliefs give shape to Intellectual Adventism? I’ll address that in the second and final installment of this article.

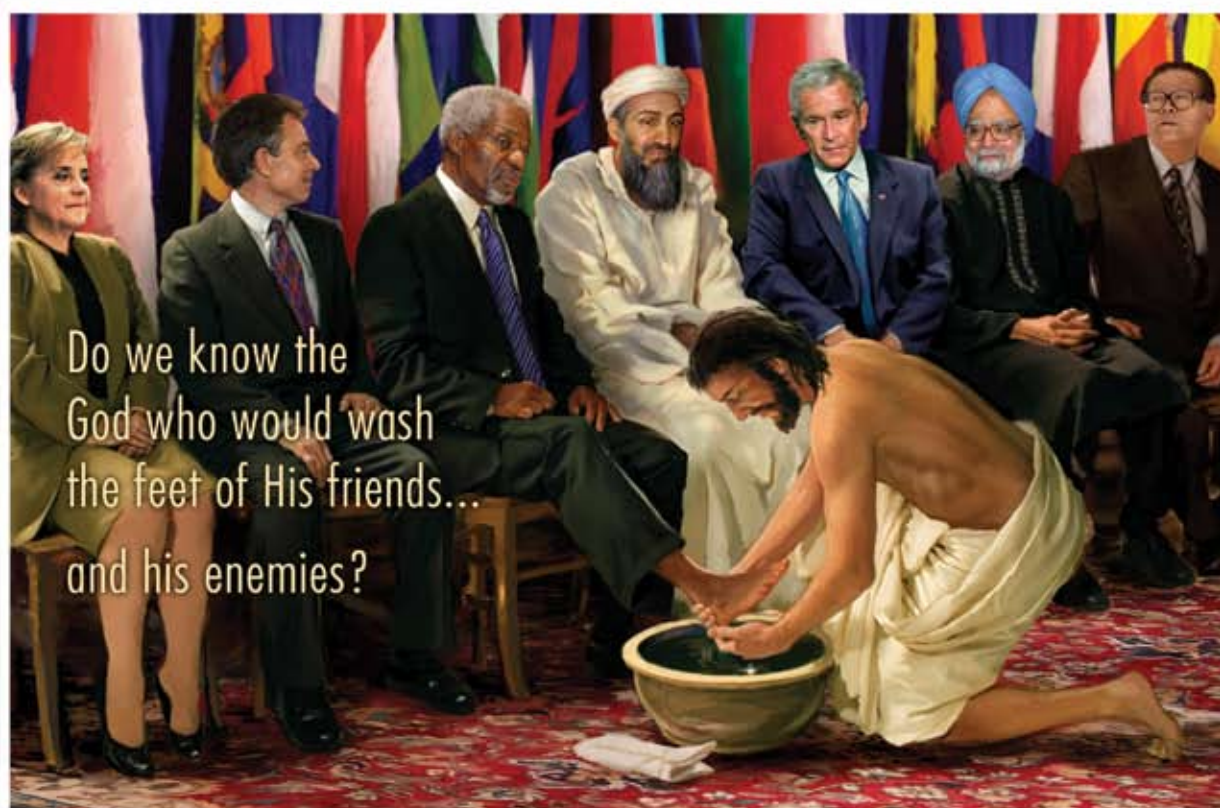
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»» Even before Adventist theologians began earning Ph.D.s, Adventist colleges had teachers who were deeply involved with ancient texts and ancient ideas. One fruit of this fascination with ancient history is that three of the top five leadership positions in archaeology in the United States today are held by Adventists.



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# How Far Can Honey Take Us?



“There is always an easy solution to every human problem—neat, plausible, and wrong.” That H. L. Mencken quote lurks on the fringes of this piece, an unsettling caution to all of us who want simple solutions to the complex troubles of the world.

The question I am addressing here haunts me virtually every waking moment—or more honestly said, “should” haunt me. It’s suggested by the proverb: “You catch more flies with honey than with vinegar.”

Good, you say, honey’s the word. But are there limits? Do people and problems sometimes call for the bitter instead of the sweet? Paul seemed to think so. “What would you prefer?” he asks the troubled church at Corinth, “Am I to come to you with a stick, or with love in a spirit of gentleness?” (1 Corinthians 4:21, NRSV).

Paul’s quote intrigues me, for if I turn to his famous treatise on love in chapter 13, the stick has disappeared; I hear only gentleness: “Love is patient and kind.... It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all thing.” That’s a lot of honey.

But in chapter 5 of the same book gentleness has vanished in favor of the stick: “Hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord” and “Drive out the wicked person from among you” (1 Corinthians 5:5, 13, NRSV).

Should we remind Paul of his words to the Philippians: “Let your gentleness be known to everyone” (4:5)? Or his counsel to Timothy: “The Lord’s servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Those who oppose him he must gently instruct.” (2 Tim. 2:24-25, NIV)?

I would like to propose that we are most “biblical” when we squeeze as much mileage as we can out of the honey, but are willing to use the stick as a last resort. Perhaps the greatest challenge for the church comes from the two extremes, those who are pure honey and those who are pure stick. I once heard a conference president say that a committee works best when its members include one “raging” liberal and one “staunch” conservative. They keep the committee honest. But more than one of each would already be too much.

Some might ask, however, if preferring honey over stick is actually “biblical.” In Scripture, God seems to prefer the heavy hand: Flood, Babel, Sodom and Gomorrah, ten plagues, Mt. Sinai, Uzzah, two she-bears, Babylonian exile. The list is long and sobering and edges into the New Testament. Ever heard of Ananias and Sapphira?

So I have to agree: in a contest of column inches, a violent God wins. And that “weight” of evidence has tempted some to go to the other extreme and jettison the tough stuff entirely. Marcion, for example, an early Christian heretic, was condemned by the church for trying to take the stick out of the Bible. Arguing for a Bible which included only ten of Paul’s letters and his own edited version of the Gospel of Luke, Marcion dumped the Old Testament entirely.

A modern version of the same impulse is represented by the Jefferson Bible. Never intending to publish his personal musings, Thomas Jefferson, the gentle deist among our nation’s founding fathers, compiled a dramatically slimmed down Bible consisting only of the “pure” words of Jesus, words that were as easily distinguished from the rest of the Gospels, said Jefferson, “as diamonds in a dung hill.” Thus, instead of a Bible of some 773,000 words, his was only 25,000, a modest 3.2 percent of the whole.

The problem with these gentle Bibles is that they don’t confront the world as it actually is. Gentleness



is a marvelous ideal but has to survive in a brutal world. A real Bible “knows” that. It’s down-to-earth and practical.

Yet at the heart of our Bible one discovers the source for our gentle ideal: Jesus. And not just a gentle Jesus, but a forceful, firm and confrontational Jesus. His woes against the Pharisees are quite short on honey. Yet Jesus’ stick was almost entirely verbal. Reynolds Price has noted, for example, that when Jesus cleansed the temple, he attacked the furniture, not the people. And what is so amazing is that the same anger that terrorized the wicked drew the children to him (cf. Matthew 21:15). I wish I could be angry like that. Typically, children are the first to flee at the first whiff of adult anger.

It’s also worth noting that in the Gospel accounts of Jesus’ ministry, only the figs and the pigs suffer from violent miracles. Instead of thunder and smoke, lethal punishments, and bloody sacrifices, the Gospels reveal a God who sweeps the little children up into his arms to bless them; who parries the call for deadly punishment – “Neither do I condemn you. Go and sin no more;” and who offers himself as a bloody sacrifice to bring all bloody sacrifices to an end.

That is the God of the Gospels, the God as revealed in Jesus. It is the God who tells us to love our enemies, go the second mile, turn the other cheek. It is the God who prays for those who nailed him to the cross, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

But let’s not be too hasty in our generalizations, for there is more to the New Testament than that; indeed, more to the Gospels than that. Jesus embodied the pacifist ideal, but his stories often included drastic punishments and final judgments, complete with weeping, wailing and gnashing of teeth. All three synoptic Gospels report Jesus’ vivid judgment against those who cause little ones to fall. As recorded in Matthew: “It would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depths of the sea” (Matthew 18:6, NRSV).

Beyond the Gospels, the New Testament still includes plenty of stick. Nowhere is that more vivid than in the very last book, Revelation.

The hard truth is that as long as this world suffers from the presence of sin and sinners, the stick has its place. I have my own reasons as to why God uses violence in order to conquer violence. But that is another story. What is important to note here is the practical issue involved. And Jesus’ millstone quote tells us all we need to know about that: those who cause someone else to stumble are guilty of great evil and must be confronted.

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The painful blend of emotions in such cases is reflected in the startling metaphor from Revelation 6:16: “wrath of the lamb.” An angry ram, yes. But an angry lamb? Ellen White’s powerful comment is worth noting: “How would a father and mother feel, did they know that their child, lost in the cold and the snow, had been passed by, and left to perish, by those who might have saved it? Would they not be terribly grieved, wildly indignant? Would they not denounce those murderers with wrath hot as their tears, intense as their love? The sufferings of every man are the sufferings of God’s child, and those who reach out no helping hand to their perishing fellow beings provoke His righteous anger. This is the wrath of the Lamb” (The Desire of Ages, p. 825).

To sum up, honey is the word – but don’t forget the stick. How that works in the church is another chapter in the same story. But here I want to emphasize the “honey” ideal. Some of Ellen White’s clearest statements of that ideal were written to one of Adventism’s “big stick” men, A. T. Jones (Testimonies to the Church, vol. 6, pp. 121, 22): “The Lord wants His people to follow other methods than that of condemning wrong, even though the condemnation be just. He wants us to do something more than to hurl at our adversaries charges that only drive them further from the truth. The work which Christ came to do in our world was not to erect barriers and constantly thrust upon the people the fact that they were wrong.... In the advocacy of the truth the bitterest opponents should be treated with respect and deference.”

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By Edwin A. Schwisow



# Adventist Today Development More Than a Pretty Cover

**T**o the few of you who suffer from genetic color-blindness or esthetically challenged addiction to black-and-white print, *look again!*

For the first time in its 76-issue life, *Adventist Today* is sporting a four-color cover—because one of you, our readers, felt strongly enough about the content of this issue to provide an extra \$350 to make four-color possible.

Definitive studies tell us that colorful magazines are more highly valued and read (per issue) by more people than monochromatic material. So adding four-color process to *Adventist Today* this issue represents good news on many fronts.

But there's more good news. From office manager Hanan Sadek comes a report that as of January 31 *Adventist Today's* first printing (2,000 copies) of Editor John McLarty's book, *Fifth Generation*, was nearly sold out—after only seven months on the shelf. These brisk sales have strengthened our bottom line to the tune of some \$10,000—not to mention the tremendous morale boost.

*Adventist Today* also stood tall this past December. It hosted at its own expense theologian Desmond Ford, after denominational leaders threatened the pastoral livelihood of the leader of the Adventist Renaissance Retreat, if Ford were allowed to speak under its auspices.

## Coverage Ahead

The incomprehensible brouhaha over Ford's visit to the United States, however, illustrates how serious the

stormy weather of anti-intellectualism has become in some prominent areas of the Church—and this environment neither calms the waters nor freshens the winds for *Adventist Today*, financially or culturally.

As I mentioned last issue, despite its habitual austerity, *Adventist Today's* subscription rate is market driven, not expense driven. Its subscription income still covers only about 40 percent of its overall yearly expenses—about \$45,000 of its \$120,000 budget.

So, despite its pretty cover, *Adventist Today* faces strong challenges this year. What this cover does represent is the progressive financial spirit that is alive and well among our readers. *Adventist Today's* mission in storm time is more vital now than ever before.

*Edwin A. Schwisow serves as development director of Adventist Today and is point person on matters related to donations and underwriting for Adventist Today Foundation. Ed retired from 27 years of denominational journalism in 2003, after forming his own publishing firm, LifeScape Publications. He writes, edits, publishes, and serves Adventist Today from his home near Portland, Ore. He can be reached by email at [easchwisow@hotmail.com](mailto:easchwisow@hotmail.com); by phone at (503) 668-7956.*

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