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Adventist *Today*

**AESTHETICS AND
INTELLIGENT DESIGN**

Beauty and the Personhood of God



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Adventist Today brings contemporary issues of importance to Adventist Church members and is a member of The Associated Church Press. Following basic principles of ethics and canons of journalism, this publication strives for fairness, candor and good taste. Unsolicited submissions are encouraged. Payment is competitive. Send an email to atoday@atoday.org. Voice: (503) 826-8600 Email: atoday@atoday.org Website: www.atoday.org or mail to: Adventist Today, PO Box 1135, Sandy, OR 97055-1135.

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Adventist Today (ISSN 1079-5499) is published quarterly by Adventist Today Foundation, 50800 SE Baty Rd, Sandy, OR 97055. Annual subscriptions \$29.50 (\$50/2 years) for individuals. \$40 for institutions. (Payment by check or credit card.) Add \$10 for address outside North America. Periodical postage paid at Sandy, Oregon and at additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Adventist Today, P.O. Box 1135, Sandy, OR 97055-1135. Copyright © 2012 by Adventist Today Foundation, a nonprofit organization dedicated to fostering open dialogue in the Adventist community.

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Why the Church Needs *Adventist Today* and Other News Services

By J. David Newman

The sad saga of Samuel Koranteng-Pipim was not reported in the official Adventist press until very recently. It was left to *Spectrum* and *Adventist Today* to report on his sexual philandering and to inform the Adventist public concerning the danger he brought to them.

In earlier years, investigative reporting by *Adventist Today* influenced Danny Shelton to resign as president of Three Angels Broadcasting Network (3ABN).

The resignation of Robert Folkenberg as president of the General Conference came about largely because of publicity by lay people.

Recent turmoil in ADRA would have gone unnoticed if it had not been for the unofficial Adventist press.

Issues regarding the ordination of women have been virtually neglected in the official press. It was left to the unofficial Adventist press to bring into the open the differing views on this subject.

Very little is said about social issues such as homosexuality, and when they are addressed, only one point of view is given. It is important for people to realize that we do not live in a monolithic society and that there is more than way to look at a subject. We should not be afraid to discuss opposing viewpoints.

A God-ordained Post

No one likes to be criticized. There is something in human nature that likes to be right, that wants to be seen as being right. This seems especially true of those in positions of power, and church leaders have given us no reason to believe they are exempt from this desire.

But God commanded: "Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from me" (Eze. 3:17, NIV). "Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins" (Isa. 58:1, KJV).

Because power tends to corrupt and absolute power tends to corrupt absolutely—even in religious realms—God has often called individuals, especially those who are not church employees, to speak out and share alternate viewpoints. This has not been a popular or easy task. Probably most who have served were as reluctant as Jonah (Jon. 1:3) and Jeremiah (Jer. 1:6).

However, the independent Adventist press *can* partially fulfill the role of the Old Testament prophets. In describing this modern manifestation of the prophetic role, Walter Brueggemann wrote: "The goal of the managers and benefactors is to stabilize the system so that it is not noticed that it is a system, but there is only one reality, the only possible, thinkable reality. And if no other social reality is thinkable or possible, then criticism of this one tends to be precluded." He then described the work of the prophet as challenging the status quo and showing that there are other perspectives, other possible realities. "Thus," writes Brueggemann, "the prophetic is an alternative to a positivism that is incapable of alternative, uneasy with critique, and so inclined to conformity."¹

Dissenting Voices

Here is a wonderful statement from Ellen White about the need for dissenting voices: "One man may be conversant with the Scriptures, and some particular portion of the Scripture may be especially appreciated by him; another sees another portion as very important, and thus one may present one point, and another, another point, and both may be of highest value. This is all in the order of God. But if a man makes a mistake in his interpretation of some portion of the Scripture, shall this cause diversity and disunion? God forbid.

"We cannot then take a position that the unity of the church consists of viewing every text of Scripture in the very same light. The church may pass resolution upon resolution to put down all disagreement of opinions, but we cannot force the mind and will, and thus root out disagreement. These resolutions may conceal the discord, but they cannot quench it and establish perfect agreement."²

The independent Adventist press is where you will discover that we do not view "every text of Scripture in the very same light" and where you will get to discuss alternative views—not just on Scripture, but on the life of the church.

¹ Walter Brueggemann, "The Prophet As a Destabilizing Presence," *The Pastor As Prophet* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1985), pp. 51-53.

² Manuscript Release #898 printed in *Ellen G. White Manuscript Releases*, Vol. 11, p. 266.

"We cannot then take a position that the unity of the church consists of viewing every text of Scripture in the very same light."

-Ellen G. White



The article “A Quantum Paradox of Time and Providence: Death *Before* Sin and Man’s Fall *Afterward* As Its Cause” by Darrel Lindensmith (September-October 2012) is an interesting attempt to reconcile an explanation for a good God and evil (theodicy) within the confines of the traditional scientific interpretation that life has existed on Earth for billions of years. In that model death would have occurred long before creation week as a foreshadow of our present sinful plight. While a number of biblical verses are used as evidence, it may be helpful to consider that other passages in the Bible and some associated scientific factors favor the more traditional biblical interpretation of a recent creation, and no earlier life on earth before then.

The traditional evolutionary interpretation of the fossil record is that life arose around 3,500 million years ago, predatory dinosaurs flourished 70 million years ago, and man did not appear until around 2 million years ago or later. Hence, in that scenario we do have lots of death illustrated by voracious predatory dinosaurs that existed long before man was there to sin. This view contrasts sharply with the biblical account that indicates that God created all in six days (Genesis chapter 1, Ex. 20:11 and 31:17), and according to the many chronological

numbers given in the Old Testament, one can estimate that this occurred only a few thousand years ago. The Bible makes no specific suggestion of millions of years for life on earth.

It seems unlikely that a God whose creation is “good” and even “very good” (Gen. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31) would create predatory animals such as the famous *Tyrannosaurus rex*. God is

described as caring, even noting the fall of the sparrow (Matt. 10:29, Luke 12:6). While we do not have specific details in the Bible as to the origin of predation, it could be associated with the curses pronounced after man’s fall (Gen. 3:14-19) or crossbreeding (“amalgamation”) including the work of Satan (see Ellen G. White’s statements in *Spiritual Gifts*, Vol. 3, p. 75; *Selected Messages*, Vol. 2, p. 288).

Romans 6:12-21 states that death resulted from man’s sin. It is difficult to conceive why a perceptive and loving God would unnecessarily subject nature to millions of years of suffering through rampant predation and death before the creation of humans whose sins engender the curse of death. One can conceive of some kind of God that would do this, but it would not seem to be the kind of loving God described in the Bible whose creation is described as “very good.”

The Genesis record of beginnings specifically denies the possibility of life on Earth prior to creation week. It speaks of an original Earth that was “void” (i.e., empty—see Genesis 1:2). Furthermore, before the creation of light on the first day, it appears that the earth was covered with “darkness” (Gen. 1:2). Light is necessary, through photosynthesis and the food chain, to maintain most of the

kinds of organisms we find in the fossil record. This suggests that the organisms that form the fossil record could not have existed on Earth before creation week. It appears more likely that the fossil record was formed after creation week by the astonishing Genesis Flood that followed man’s creation when he became “evil continually” (Gen. 6:5). Thus, the Flood would be responsible for a major part of our fossil record. In the biblical model, plants, animals, and man were all created during creation week; hence, they are of fairly recent origin just a few thousand years ago.

The fossil sequence we now find may reflect a more specialized distribution of a greater variety of organisms before that Flood than we now have. Dinosaurs and many of our coal-forming trees are examples. If these represent very ancient organisms created over billions of years, one can wonder how they fit with expectations from a reasonable creator. It would be a bizarre kind of creator God who would create many varieties of organisms, many times, over billions of years, only to let them die out later. What senseless operations! The biblical account of a destruction by the Flood to purify the Earth because man was “evil continually” seems more reasonable than to seemingly have no cause. Furthermore, the most direct words we have from God in the Bible are the Ten Commandments that were spoken and written by God himself (Ex. 20:1; 31:18). There we are told to keep the Sabbath holy because God created “all” (Ex. 20:11) in six days. It would be a strange kind of God who would create over millions of years and then ask us to keep the Sabbath holy because He did it all in six days! God could give us many reasons to keep the Sabbath holy and would not have to lie to us. Because there are different kinds

of fossils at various levels in the fossil record, there are serious implications for God's integrity when you put millions of years into the geologic record while God says he created all in six days.

The article states that "many seem to feel a load of increasing evidence in the fossil record of the death in nature before the creation of men and women." This approach might be expected if one is willing to accept the current secular scientific ethos that interprets nature without a God and that considers the biblical account of beginnings to be erroneous. However, there is significant scientific data that favors the biblical account of a recent creation in contrast to the evolutionary model of slow, gradual evolution over billions of years. We might note especially: (1) the virtual impossibility of life arising on Earth by

itself, (2) the gaps between the major fossil groups, (3) rapid rates of erosion of the continents, which would eliminate them many times over during the assumed long geologic ages, (4) extremely flat and widespread sedimentary units, as would be expected during the Genesis Flood, (5) a general lack of the erosion expected over assumed long geologic ages where major parts of the geologic column are missing (paraconformities). For more examples, see Discussions numbers 2, 9, and 12-16 in the webpage www.sciencesandscriptures.com. Ellen White perceptively points out that "Those who wish to doubt will have opportunity; while those who really desire to know the truth will find plenty of evidence on which to rest their faith" (*Steps to Christ*, p. 105). One does not have to give up scientific integrity in order to believe in

the biblical account of beginnings. There is significant data from nature that is hard to explain without the context of creation and the Flood.

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AESTHETICS AND INTELLIGENT DESIGN

Beauty and the Personhood of God

By Bernard Brandstater

The theory of intelligent design can seem incomplete. It leaves undefined the identity and nature of the designer. We usually see design as an initial step toward a good end product, whether it's a cell phone or a cathedral. But where did the design come from? It implies purposeful thought, so we must enquire about its origin. Does the quality of design tell us something about the character of its source? If the intelligence resides in a person, what kind of person might it be? And if the intelligence we are contemplating is vast, even godlike, what does design tell us about the personhood of that God?

In seeking answers, I will review what intelligent design theory tells us. But I will go further in search of its ultimate source—what lies behind the design we see. I propose that the undefined ingredient is huge: it is the artistry and the personhood of God.

Beginnings of a Revolution

The movement we know as intelligent design offers a paradigm shift in the world's view of science. It claims that intelligence and design are necessary to produce our Earth and its life. For many it has religious implications. The movement started in the early '90s, and the fireball who started it was Phillip Johnson, professor of law at University of California, Berkeley. About 1990, while on sabbatical leave in Oxford, Johnson read an intriguing book by New Zealand scientist Michael Denton, titled *Evolution: a Theory in Crisis*. Weighing the evidences, Johnson saw that Darwinian evolution, though embraced throughout the world of science, was supported by evidence that was surprisingly feeble. So he wrote a questioning book titled *Darwin on Trial*.

The book was provocative. It aroused a barrage of disagreement among scholars, intensified by the author's prestige as an honored law professor. Soon a cluster of young enthusiasts gathered around Johnson. Some of them were motivated by religious leanings, with a feeling that God should find a defensible place somewhere in the history of mankind. But the evidences they uncovered and their reasoning rested not on sacred writings, but on solid data and logic.

They held conferences. In 1994 I joined with some of them at Queens College at Cambridge University. They were gathered, with Johnson as their leader, at the C.S. Lewis Foundation's Summer Institute. Most of them were young scholars, names that have become well known in recent times: William Dembski, Paul Nelson, Stephen Meyer, Jonathan Wells, and others. I was sitting with them around a big table, a hungry listener. It was fun to be among such heady company. Their papers and their arguments were new and engaging, and to a Christian like me they were faith-affirming. It was good to feel intellectually respectable as a Bible-adhering Christian. In the air I felt palpable excitement. These men were on a roll, gathering momentum in a project they believed in. They were showing there has to be some kind of designer-God in the cosmos, after decades in which Darwin's evolution had largely excluded him.

Leading Voices in Intelligent Design

The early voices were joined by many others, including some lecturers I have heard: Michael Behe, Jay Richards, Guillermo



Gonzales, Richard Sternberg, David Klinghoffer, Casey Luskin, Douglas Axe, and others. With voice and pen, they forcefully combated the dogmatic atheism of today's mainstream science. Their books are a rich, thought-stretching read for enquiring minds. My list does not include some stalwart defenders of Bible-based creation. They support design, but they also quote sacred texts as authority, whereas intelligent design purists try to stay strictly with objective science. Among creationists there are differences of opinion about the processes, how an intelligent God actually brought the cosmos and its life into being. These differing opinions can sound speculative and do not sit easily alongside today's empiric science. So intelligent designers seek to maintain objective rigor and deal on equal terms with other academics.

After Some Years, Where Are We?

Where has intelligent design taken us in the past 20 years? The debates about origins of life in planet Earth have been transformed. Fine-tuning in the physical universe is a mind-numbing but unexplained reality. Probability theory has cast immense doubt on a chance beginning of life. Improbabilities in physics and chemistry rule out many chance mechanisms of species variation and the appearance of new life forms. The principle of irreducible complexity has been applied persuasively by Behe. Recent advances in analyzing DNA and epigenomic cell functioning have made a powerful molecular case for intelligent design. And information theory has joined the chorus. Most thought leaders among elites, like the National Science Foundation, still voice atheism

or agnosticism. Yet some hard thinkers, such as philosopher Sir Antony Flew, are admitting openness to some version of intelligent design. Unrelieved mechanistic naturalism is increasingly seen as problematic.

Among Christian believers these are great advances, and we must salute our intelligent design colleagues. Thanks to them, it is now easier to be an intellectually fulfilled Christian. We are enabled to see God's fingerprints in nature and to take heart in resisting the arrogant godlessness of a scientism that seeks to rule our culture.

Searching Beyond Design

Intelligent design *can* be searched further. In it I am convinced we can find something awesome: the personhood of God revealed in the beauty of his creation. As usually argued, design theory wins its case by default, speaking from the negative side. It follows Karl Popper: if we cannot prove a theory is correct, we may still prove that *its opposite is false*. If we have no demonstrable proof that God created, we can nevertheless show that the opposite is false: chance cannot produce our complex universe and its life. There must exist the opposite of chance, an intelligent designer. Darwin is falsified.

But intelligent design theory stops there. Design alone says little about a Creator who is a person with thoughts and feelings, with taste and purpose. It fails to complete the majestic story. It does not identify the source of all things, the Judeo-Christian Creator God who is revealed in the Bible, the personal God whom multitudes worship. Intelligent design theorists don't talk

much about creation. Yet it is this final chapter in mankind's story that is the animating, exciting part that has significance for us. For all its strengths, design theory fails to identify and embrace *the personal God* who overshadows my worldview and my daily life.

This limitation of intelligent design theory is intentional, a deliberate policy. In the early years of intelligent design, its founding father, Phillip Johnson, was my houseguest when he came to lecture at Loma Linda University. I asked him this question: You prove the necessity of intelligence and design in the cosmos, so why don't you finish the job and speak of a divine fabricator, a Creator?

Johnson's answer was direct, and it made sense. Science has not advanced far enough, he said, to allow us to characterize a Creator. What kind of person is he? We cannot tell. That big question can wait. First we must show that evolution by chance does not work, and we in intelligent design have done that. Due to our efforts, Darwin is in trouble today, and many scientists are quietly leaving him. There's a second reason why design theorists hold back from discussing Creation. We could get stuck in endless arguments about the interpretation of data, and what's right and what's wrong in the Bible story. It's a minefield. Creation advocates will not reach agreement, and we would waste energy in family quarrels between believers, whether they are Christians or Jews or Muslims. We prefer to be inclusive. There's room for all of us in the big tent. The real adversary, the issue in today's world, is not the *how* of Creation. Rather, it is the Enlightenment run amok: it's postmodernism, bored indifference, agnosticism, or outright disbelief. People either ignore God or else they reject him.

Compelling Evidence in Nature

Johnson was partly right, but in one important respect I think he was dead wrong. It's not true that we don't know enough about God to discern his character. Apostle Paul says it clearly in Romans 1:20-21 (NLV): "From the time the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky and all that God made. They can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse whatsoever for not knowing God. Yes, they knew God, but they wouldn't worship him."

Paul is adamant: any thinking person who observes the world and what's in it, yet does not believe, *has no excuse*. These are hard words. The evidence in nature, Paul insists, is compelling. For years I puzzled over that verse. What was in Paul's mind? What is it in the natural world that speaks irresistibly of a Creator God? If you can't see it, he says, you are *without excuse*.

But I say: If you can't see it, better look again. For many observers, complexity alone is sufficient evidence. We can see it in the awesome intricacy within a living cell. But beyond complexity,

we can add a further feature in nature that uniquely reveals the person of the Creator: its aesthetic quality, its beauty. The presence of manifest beauty in our world reveals not chaos, but purposeful design. There is more in nature than complexity. Beauty points to artistry in the designer and to the kind of person he is.

Beauty As Evidence

Without God, naturalist theories don't work. They require chance mechanisms that do not exist in nature. And since chance can't do it, by default there must be a designer. This is a victory for theists, but it's scarcely a resounding one. Many thoughtful persons seek something more—a god who is a real, approachable person, worthy of worship, a god who receives and responds to our devotion. That's exactly what beauty gives us: not merely a falsifying of chance mechanisms, but fingerprints of a real person. It reveals *the aesthetic purpose of an artist-Creator*. It points to a cosmos that is intentional, from a thinking person who has style and taste.

I find it helpful to think of beauty as *the signature of God*, his unique identifier.

When I sign my name on a document, my signature identifies me; it has meaning and authority. It is evidence that I am an intelligent, deliberative person. It says that I am placing my identity, my judgment, and my intentions there on paper for all to see. Further, the content of the document I sign, and even the flourish in my writing style, says something about my nature, my taste, and my purposes. I am a living person whom you can get to know.

Likewise beauty, in its diverse forms, is also evidence. It identifies a great First Cause, a Creator who is a thinking, deliberative person. Beauty is more than an impersonal force. It shows that in planet Earth the Creator has placed his identity for all to see. And through the content of his work and the manner of its display, he has revealed some of his nature, his taste, his purposes—in effect, his personhood. It is made available to our senses so we may feel the force of his *persona* and even have a relationship with him. It brings God near.

Can We Define Beauty?

Philosophers love beauty, but they don't easily define it. The ancient Greek philosophers and the Church Fathers upheld three ideals that we should pursue: goodness, truth, and ... beauty. The Bible speaks of "the beauty of holiness." Closer to our time, Sir Isaac Newton wrote of the solar system: "This most beautiful System of the Sun, Planets and Comets, could only proceed from the counsel and dominion of an intelligent and powerful Being."¹ In the 20th century, a Catholic theologian, Hans Urs von Balthasar, wrote volumes developing a theology of aesthetics, about God and beauty. For me, Balthasar is a rich read, but not an easy one. Alfred Lord Whitehead, mathematician, philosopher, and cosmologist,

declared that ultimate reality consists of the achievement of beauty, and he wrote of its two dimensions: harmony and intensity. We could add many recent writers on beauty. I have explored and profited from Thomas Dubay, Daniel Treier, and Harry Poe. And plenty of poets have added their unique music.

For our purpose we should set aside abstract musings and attempt a definition. Beauty is a quality of existence, of being, in patterns we perceive in nature and in ourselves. It has distinctive properties, which different observers can recognize confidently. At the same time, it leaves room for differences in our taste and preferences. Observers experience beauty through their senses and through their minds, within their physical and mental capacities. Beauty satisfies and gives pleasure. Its constituents seem right to us; they fit coherently together within their proper context. Beauty comes to our awareness usually from an outside source, but it may also come from within our own minds, our own creative inventiveness.

Different Kinds of Beauty

Beauty is commonly visual: colors, patterns, arrangements, and proportions that appear beautiful when they fit together agreeably. In part, beauty is certainly *subjective*—truly in the eye of the beholder. But it is not wholly imagined, existing only in our heads. There is an objective entity external to us, and it evokes similar responses in different observers. The wavelengths of light we observe are outside of us; they arise from physical entities and consist of measurable radiation. Colors of a rainbow evoke our pleasurable response, but the physical radiation exists independent of our minds. Beautiful patterns remain, even when we are not watching. Thomas Gray's magnificent *Elegy* says it well:

*Full many a gem of purest ray serene
The dark unfathomed caves of ocean bear.
Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,
And waste its sweetness on the desert air.*

We may say much the same about auditory beauty, the sounds that may please or excite us.

How amazing it is that vibrations in the air around us can be arranged into patterns that delight us! And it's equally amazing that we find ourselves equipped with astonishing mechanisms for hearing: eardrum, ossicles, cochlea, and nerve pathways that bring sound to our consciousness. There's great variety in music. Whether it's Bach or bluegrass, music well-performed gives us pleasure. And audible speech and comely language make human community possible, social life that we can enjoy. These vibrations in the air around us, including natural birdsong, exist in patterns that have order and meaning. They must come from intentional thought.

We must consider also the beauties of touch and taste and smell. My pleasurable response is in my senses and in my mind,

but the beauty's source lies in the thing itself, in the chemical properties of whatever I am tasting or smelling. Those molecules interact with my receptors to convey to my awareness subtle differences of flavor and aroma: distinctive varieties of apple or the unique bouquet of fine perfume. Their pleasing interactions could not have appeared by a natural selection that cared only for survival fitness, nor could they be invented within my mind.

There is yet another beauty of a different kind: patterns of thought and imagination derived from the creative minds of men and women. We can create our own beauty. Fine poetry is an arrangement of words that fit decorously together. It comes from mind and purpose, never from accident. I may write the lines myself, and then take pleasure in what I have myself created, its rhythm and its sonority. Beethoven could enjoy in his mind the beauty of his own compositions, even after he was deaf and could hear nothing. I enjoy in anticipation my own piano improvisations, even before I touch the keys. Logic and rhetoric were beautiful to the ancient Greeks and Romans. An elegant mathematical equation can be beautiful, experts say. In its own special context it provides beautifully coherent, satisfying answers. The same may be said for a ballet choreography or a software algorithm. These patterns are beautiful ideas. They may be expressed and communicated through material means: voice, or print, or a software program—whatever we choose as a vehicle. But their content and meaning, their order, exists independently, whether recorded or not, as patterns of ideas and thought that critic-author David Berlinski lyrically calls “the ineffable inimitable.” Our creations may be gloriously beautiful, though in dull technical prose they could be described simply as information.

The Big Question

This brings us to the next question: From where did these beautiful patterns appear? Is the purposeful intelligence outside of us, or is it from within? How can evolutionary theory, which excludes God and intelligent agency, account for their arrival? What “first cause,” other than a purposeful mind, could cause them to appear? And further, how does evolution, which relies only on chance mechanisms, account for our possessing an ability to perceive and enjoy them? Here are two entities with no physical connection: the beautiful objects or ideas, and our conscious capacity to appreciate them. How can chance explain their parallel but totally separate development throughout vast eons by increments of natural selection? We have a system of two distinct parts, and each part has no meaning without the other. Such a unified system had to be designed, and with a majestic purpose.

Strict naturalists have trouble here. If, as atheists declare, the cosmos came from random events in the emptiness of space, the widely postulated quantum fluctuation in a vacuum, plus an undirected Big Bang, the result should be chaos. So why is there

order? Why is that order exceedingly complex, and why is some of it beautiful?

A Problem for Naturalism

In my view, this is a decisive question for which naturalists give no satisfying answer. It is a debate stopper. If living things developed through an unguided evolutionary process, as Darwin insisted, the mechanism for development must have been his vaunted natural selection. That was the core of Darwin's theory: survival of the fit and extinction of the weak. But order that is beautiful cannot arise as an accident out of nowhere. And in Darwin's world, neither can it survive. Neo-Darwinian theory rests wholly on survival usefulness, on toughness, not on loveliness or any perception of aesthetics. Evolution has no explanation either for beauty's appearance or its survival.

We should pause to grasp the full weight of this. There are no mechanisms in raw matter to produce exquisite order by chance. Darwin had no way to explain either the origin or the survival of a delicate orchid in the jungle or the extravagant beauty of a peacock's feathers. In Darwin's world, we should be surrounded by life that is tough, ugly, functionally efficient but brutal and savagely competitive. Could we enjoy a world where Richard Dawkins' selfish gene was in control?

So accounting for beauty is a problem for naturalists. The question has worried some atheists, who must find natural, mechanistic explanations. Steven Pinker, outspoken professor and atheist at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, admitted this. He has referred to beautiful music as a puzzling gift and described it as "auditory cheesecake." It enriches our lives, he said in *Nature* (March 2002), but it makes no contribution to survival.

An Explanation That Satisfies

My answer is close to Pinker's. Beauty is indeed a gift, but for me it's not a puzzling one. It could come only from a Great Giver, whom I identify as the Judeo-Christian God. For me that is the only feasible answer. Some questions do have only one answer, and this is one of them. The faces on Mount Rushmore could possibly have been carved by wind and rain. But intuitively we know they must be man-made, the product of thought and purpose. The same is true of beauty. Undirected chance mechanisms cannot carve beauty out of chaos. Beauty must have come from a purposeful designer-fabricator.

If there is another conclusion, I do not find it. To account for beauty requires belief in a purposeful God, and for me that is easier than finding unlikely mechanisms in a godless universe that lacks purposeful thought. Beauty can be seen as a gift from a Creator who, at the beginning, provided us human creatures with more than the basic necessities: an enriched existence. He put us in a world that fits together in beautiful ways that we can

enjoy. Its qualities, many of them magnificent, are embedded in the natural world. But in addition, he gave us a towering enhancement: he equipped us with vision, with intricate hearing, and with unfathomed mental processes that can perceive these beauties and find delight in them. On one hand is the beauty out there, and on the other hand is our ability to perceive and enjoy it. Again we see two distinct entities, fashioned separately by a purposeful Creator, and each needs the other in order to have meaning. It's a two-part system whose unity must have been purposely designed.

The Purpose of Beauty

So may we ask what was God's purpose? The words that I heard once in Washington, while inspecting the new Mormon Temple, still echo in my ears: "He created us that we might have joy." Those words speak of a divine purpose that I can believe in: "that we might have joy." These are weighty words, and over the years they have helped shape my worldview. The joy that beauty gives us is our *intended inheritance*. Beauty is a gift offered uniquely to us human creatures to enjoy and also to create. We must revel in it and celebrate.

God's Unique Identity

God's vast wisdom can be seen in the design that gives efficient functioning to the world and its life. He is a supremely clever designer. Beyond his wisdom, it was God's *creative power* that brought his design into physical reality, giving it shape and life and movement. God's wisdom and his power, inseparable in nature, show us his identity as engineer-Creator. His handiwork hangs together efficiently; it works well. That tells us *who he is*: the Ultimate Source, the Maker and Master of all.

That's how God was identified in ancient times, amongst competing gods. That's how the runaway Jonah, in a fierce ocean storm, identified the Hebrew God to his pagan shipmates: "the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land" (Jon. 1:9, KJV). Jonah's God was supreme because he was the Creator. And that's also how the Apostle Paul on Mars Hill identified the Unknown God for the pagan scholars in Athens: "God that made the world and all things therein" (Acts 17:24, KJV). Paul's pre-eminent God was the Creator. No Greek god made such a claim. So among pagans, whether Phoenician seamen or Greek philosophers, the supreme deity was the Maker-God. Today it's the same: the God who made us is the one who commands and deserves our worship.

Here is the super-intelligence that is championed by intelligent design advocates. They are brilliant in analysis and argument, yet they are cautious theorists and do not go further to describe his person. They do not suggest who he is or what he is like. They usually decline a creationist label. For them, intelligent design

remains a big tent that can accommodate a wide variety of people who may have different ideas about God.

Revealing the Designer's Person

This is the point at which I part company with intelligent design advocates. Though I respect their rigorous science and their big-tent inclusiveness, I believe it is possible to form an opinion about the designer's *persona*. And the reason is that we have his signature. It is beauty. Beauty points beyond intelligence, beyond design, and even beyond power. What God brought into being tells us what *kind of person* he is, what is *his taste and his nature*.

So nature's content and the flourishes in his signature reveal God's style and his taste. He's a person, far beyond us in every respect, but nevertheless a person. And he has emotions. The Bible speaks of his mercy, his grief, his joy, and his anger. For his pleasure, he planted in the Garden not only fruit trees for food, but also fragrant flowers for sensory delight. And he made silver-toned songbirds with magnificent plumage, far beyond any process of mate attraction. For him efficient function was not enough. He gave us a rich enhancement: aesthetic pleasure. This is a divine experience, and we are privileged to share it. God takes pleasure in good, lovely things, and so can we. In the Bible we read that there will be "joy in heaven" (Luke 15:7, ASV). How can we humans understand sentient joy in persons of suprahuman intelligence? His thoughts are not our thoughts. Yet when we delight in beauty, we are thinking some of his thoughts. We can resonate with him, sense his closeness, and speak with him up close and personal. His divine personhood comes through and engages mine. We become friends.

The Ultimate Gift: Aesthetic Joy

This sharing attribute of God is a wonder, a mystery. The Bible says it's true: we are made "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Pet. 1:4, KJV). Can we grasp the weight of this? Just as we enjoy sharing good things, so does he. He seeks our company in his aesthetic pleasure! He wants us to enjoy what he enjoys. Paul urges us: "whatsoever things are lovely, ... think on these things" (Phil. 4:8, KJV). God invites us to cultivate a taste like his, and by study and habitual choice we may come close to him. My response is astonished awe. This generous, sharing God is the one I must fear and adore and worship. I like the Bible's picture of God walking with Adam and Eve in the Garden, pointing delightedly at the beauty all around. God the artist puts his signature there. And like Adam and Eve, we too can share in the joy of the divine Artist. It really is true: "He created us that we might have joy."


Made in His Image

The Bible tells us we are made in the image of God. But what is this *imago dei*? In what way can frail, limited humankind be like

God? Surely not in any physical resemblance, for God is not flesh and blood. It must be in the realm of mind. And if we dare to contemplate the mind of God, there can be no more wondrous *imago dei* than to possess some of God's capacity for conceiving and delighting in beauty, and even creating it ourselves. It is an ultimate gift.

My philosopher friend John Mark Reynolds once described beauty to me as an idea in the mind of God. But that God-idea has been implanted in our minds also. You and I, too, can walk in the Garden with God. We can open our senses wide to exult in all the magnificence he has made. Our tastes, though limited, can be cultivated to be close to his. The full range of aesthetic pleasure—made by both God and man—has been opened to us. It includes the splendors of the cosmos, all observable nature, and also our man-made music, our art, and our dance. King David loved exuberant dance, and surely so does God. He savors what we create: our sculpture, our poetry and rhetoric, all of our exalted flights of inventive fancy. The ability to create resides in him, but he implanted some of it in us. He knows what's featured at The Getty in Los Angeles as well as the Guggenheim in New York City, and he knows the music with which we worship him. He understands the good and also the not good. We too can discriminate. It's all ours to explore, to evaluate, to enjoy, and to create.

The intelligent design movement has given us much. It has effectively challenged the sterile godlessness of modern science. But it stops short of revealing the person of a Creator who is wise and powerful and who shows supreme artistry. Before him we stand in awe. We can lift our wonderment above the mechanics of Creation—the hard intricacies of particle physics, quantum gravity, string theory, and the mysteries of time. By all means we should wrestle with these entities to seek understanding. But let us also revel in the wonder, the beauty of it all.

God is a person, and we are invited to come close and know him. He is the ultimate engineer-Creator and also the supreme artist-Creator. As we delight in his aesthetic gifts, our artist-God will surely take pleasure in a flowering of joy amongst his creatures. Human joy itself will be seen as a thing of beauty, a part of his divine signature. And as he did at the end of those first Creation days, he will say, "It is very good." 

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¹ Isaac Newton, *Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica*, Third edition (1726) in Latin with variant readings, assembled and edited by Alexandre Koyré and I. Bernard Cohen with Anne Whitman (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972).



SCRIPTURE, POLICY, *and* UNITY

BY RANDY ROBERTS

EDITOR'S NOTE: *This is a presentation made on Aug. 19, 2012, the day the Pacific Union Conference constituency decided, by a vote of 79 percent to 21 percent, to ordain candidates to the pastoral ministry without regard to gender. The transcript retains some of the oral style.*

I stand before you as a lifelong and devoted member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, a church that I deeply love. I believe my church has been given a divinely inspired mission. It continues to be my hope and prayer that it will move forward in a Spirit-inspired way to engage the world in which we live and minister. It is my intention to do anything within my God-given power to support the accomplishment of that to which God has called us.

You have been convened here today to cast an historic vote: to approve the ordination of ministers “without regard to gender.”

As I have listened to and read about this debate, I hear three principal objections repeatedly stated. They are:

1. That it is contrary to Scripture;
2. That it is contrary to General Conference policy; and,
3. That to proceed in this direction will fracture the church.

I sincerely thank you for the opportunity to offer, on behalf of the union executive committee, a response to each of these objections.

Objection No. 1

The first objection offered is that *to ordain women would be to do something that is contrary to Scripture.*

To begin, let me be clear on one fact: there is *no* text in the Bible that forbids the ordination of women. Not one. Now, there *are* texts which—if read literalistically, giving no attention to context, principle, and interpretation—*do* forbid women to do a number of things and instruct them to do a number of others. For example, if such texts were followed with wooden literalism, women could say *nothing at all* in church. They would wear head coverings when they pray; they would be barred from having any authority over men, such as being presidents of Christian hospitals or universities; and they would need to bear children in order to experience salvation (see 1 Timothy chapter 2 and 1 Corinthians chapter 11). Not even the most hearty literalists among us would suggest that such a role is God's will for the women we love and value as full and equal partners in the kingdom of God.

What, then, *does* the Bible say about women and leadership? The Bible tells us of women who filled every conceivable role. Huldah was a prophetess. Deborah was a judge and leader. Ruth was an astute and loyal progenitor of David and of Jesus. Esther was a queen who was the salvation of her people. Mary was the mother of our Lord. Numerous women, largely unnamed in the Gospels, were the most faithful and courageous disciples of Jesus. Priscilla was in a ministry team with her husband. In fact, significantly, when Paul writes about this ministry team, he is quite consistent in listing Priscilla first, which may have placed her in the lead role. Phoebe was a deacon in the church in Cenchrea. And Junia was identified by Paul as a leading apostle. Women filled every leadership role you can imagine!

But aside from these examples, is there a biblical principle to which we can turn to guide us in such decisions? The answer is: Yes, there is! Doubtless, the most potent passage Paul penned to address this issue was Galatians 3:28: “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (TNIV).

Gerald Winslow, a dear and respected friend of mine, pointed out the following about this passage: it does away with three key distinctives. First, Paul says, “there is neither Jew nor Gentile.” That was *the key question* of the early church—could Gentiles become equal members without becoming Jews? After tremendous debate, dissension, fighting and, yes, even bloodshed, the church resolved that question by saying, “Yes, they can become equal members without becoming Jews.” Make no mistake about it; had they not resolved the question that way, you and I would not be here today. Christianity would have been doomed to be a backwater sect of Judaism.

Second, Paul says there is “neither slave nor free.” To our everlasting shame, it took the Western world more than 1,800 years to finally bring that theology to fruition. As recently as 20 years ago, one of the largest Christian denominations in the world finally apologized for its support of slavery. Not a very courageous stance by then.

And third, Paul says there is “neither male nor female.” It's the 21st century, and we are still trying to figure out if he really meant what he said.

There are some who say that this passage only describes how God views *us* and that it is not addressing the issue of how we are to view *each other*. They say that it is speaking only of

our inheritance in Christ and that it is not suggesting that the distinctions that often separate humans ought to be erased. To paraphrase such an approach, one would have to say: “God makes no distinction between his male and female children, but while *he* makes no distinction, he asks *us* to.” To that point I would reply, “To see distinctions where God sees none is an egregious affront to the gospel of Jesus Christ.”

the 28 Fundamental Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, voted by the church in official General Conference Session. It is titled “Unity in the Body of Christ.” I quote this fundamental belief in its entirety:

“The church is one body with many members, called from every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. In Christ we are a new creation; *distinctions of race, culture, learning, and nationality,*

PAUL SAYS THERE IS “NEITHER 21ST CENTURY, AND WE ARE OUT IF HE REALLY

After all, in what other facet of our walk with Jesus are we *not* to follow God’s example? Aren’t we to strive to treat others in the same way *God* treats them? Isn’t it, for example, true to the essence of the gospel to say that when God loves the unlovely, *we* are to do so as well? Doesn’t the New Testament say to forgive each other just as Christ has forgiven you (see Eph. 4:32)? Are we not told to be kind and compassionate to others, just as Christ has been to you (see Eph. 4:32)? And didn’t Jesus tell a story about a man who was forgiven a staggering debt, only to refuse to forgive a minor one owed to him by his fellow servant (see Matthew 18)? And didn’t the master judge the man for such actions?

In other words, the way in which God both *sees* and *treats* us is the model and standard by which we are to *see* and *treat* each other. That sentiment is underlined repeatedly in the New Testament. Galatians 3:28, then, not only states that God sees each one of us as equal in his eyes and that he draws no distinction as to whom he will call; it is also ethical *ground zero* for how we are to treat each other.

Would affirming God’s call to ministry in the lives of women by ordaining them be contrary to Scripture, then? *No!* Absolutely not.

Objection No. 2

The second objection is that *to vote “yes” on the motion before us would be to go against General Conference policy.* In offering a response to such an objection, let me begin not with policy, but with a much more important and foundational reality: doctrine. *Seventh-day Adventist* doctrine.

I quote to you directly from Fundamental Belief #14, part of

and differences between high and low, rich and poor, male and female, must not be divisive among us. We are all equal in Christ, who by one Spirit has bonded us into one fellowship with Him and with one another; we are to serve and be served without partiality or reservation. Through the revelation of Jesus Christ in the Scriptures we share the same faith and hope, and reach out in one witness to all. This unity has its source in the oneness of the triune God, who has adopted us [*all, I would add*] as His children (emphasis added).”¹

Forgive me for reminding you that those are not *my* words, but the words of a fundamental belief voted by the worldwide Adventist church in General Conference Session.

That’s doctrine, and in the best of cases, doctrine is the foundation of policy. So now let us turn to policy. I want to read to you from the *General Conference Working Policy*, policy numbered BA 60. I am going to read only certain sections to you, as it is a bit lengthy, but they are representative of the entire policy. Now, before reading, I must tell you that as I read through this policy, its emphasis on total equality is so clearly and forcefully stated—even in the area of pastoral ministry—that it quite honestly left me wondering why we even needed to be here today voting on this question, because to simply read this policy makes the issue of ordination without regard to gender the only and obvious choice! As you listen, you will see what I mean. Here it is:

“The Church rejects any system or philosophy which discriminates against anyone on the basis of race, color, or gender. The Church bases its position on principles clearly enunciated in the Bible, the writings of Ellen G. White, and the official pronouncements of the General Conference.”²

It then quotes Galatians 3:28 (KJV): “‘There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female; for ye all are one in Christ Jesus’ (Gal. 3:28).”³

The second paragraph further down quotes Ellen G. White: “No distinction on account of nationality, race, or caste, is recognized by God. He is the maker of all mankind. All men are of one family by creation, and all are one through redemption. Christ

word, no. Maybe a better way to ask the question is to ask, “Does unity allow for varied convictions and practices in different parts of the world without fracturing the church?” In a word, absolutely. It already has.

To take just one example, consider that different branches of the church have already voted at least five policies relative to women in leadership that are not followed in all parts of the

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came to demolish every wall of partition, to throw open every compartment of the temple, that every soul may have free access to God ... In Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free. All are brought nigh by His precious blood’ (COL 386).”⁴

It then goes through a list of nine policies and practices, which the church upholds, that are nondiscriminatory in nature. I will read the opening sentence to this section and the final paragraph of the section, as they are representative of the entire portion. Here’s the opening sentence: “The world Church supports nondiscrimination in employment practices and policies and upholds the principle that both men and women, without regard to race and color, shall be given full and equal opportunity within the Church to develop the knowledge and skills needed for the building up of the Church.”⁵ And here’s the final paragraph: “Administrators, departmental directors, pastors, educators, local church officers, and others in positions of leadership in the Church shall uphold this position and support these principles as a part of the gospel and God’s special message for the world.”⁶

Reading through this policy makes clear the answer to the objection. Would voting “yes” here today be contrary to General Conference policy? The answer is a resounding “no!” *Absolutely not.* It would actually be in *harmony* with studied and voted Seventh-day Adventist doctrine, as well as with the overall spirit of General Conference policy.

Objection No. 3

Finally, the third objection offered is that *to vote yes today on this change will fracture the church.* Will it fracture the church? In a

world. They are:

1. The policy that women deaconesses should be ordained;
2. The policy that women can serve as elders;
3. The policy that women elders should be ordained;
4. The policy that women can serve as pastors; and
5. The policy that women pastors should be commissioned and can perform virtually all of the functions that a male pastor can.

While these particular policies have *not* been followed around the world (in fact, not even everywhere in the Pacific Union Conference), they have neither shattered nor strengthened the unity of the church, because unity is based on something far deeper than making certain that all members, everywhere, follow the same practices.

The Christians in Ephesus were famously divided along several lines. Paul told them that at the cross, Jesus “destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility” (Eph. 2:14, TNIV) and, in so doing, he made them one.

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul also provides a list of realities that were to be the basis of their unity. The list is strikingly short. Listen to his words: “Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all” (Eph. 4:3-6, TNIV).

Paul lists seven foundations for unity: *one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all.* Surprisingly short, isn’t it? It’s also surprising what is missing

from the list. He says as much by what he leaves out as by what he includes.

He does not say that there must be unanimity of thought regarding circumcision. He did not say that there must be unanimity about how to approach the issue of food offered to idols. He did not even say that there must be unanimity over how to handle the Jewish festival days, though he has much to say

law, but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. *I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some.* I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings" (1 Cor. 9:19-23, TNIV, emphasis added).

The gospel is the ultimate priority, says Paul, and everything else bends to that. So I am willing to flex who I am to the

TELLING WOMEN WHO ARE CLEARLY CANNOT RECEIVE THE AFFIRMATION WILL DO GREAT HARM TO OUR CAUSE HERE

elsewhere about all three issues.

Rather, he provides us with a list that is Trinitarian: *one Father, one Lord, one Spirit*. His list includes how we receive salvation and live the Christian life: *one faith*. It includes how we come into the church: *one baptism*. It includes the *context* in which we live the Christian life and grow mature as believers: *one body*. And it includes the ultimate destiny toward which the church is heading: *one hope*. Simple. Succinct. Non-negotiable. But it allows for differences in conviction about many other facets of our life and practice.

We make a deadly mistake when we confuse two terms: *unity* and *uniformity*. Unity means that our hearts are bonded together even when our function, our gifts, or our thoughts and perspectives are different. *Uniformity* means that we must all walk in lockstep fashion, thinking, believing, behaving, and voting in precisely the same manner while seeking to participate in the same practices at the same time. As a family therapist, I can tell you that one of the quickest ways to fracture a family is to require that the members live in uniformity.

When it came to differences between people and how the gospel relates to that, Paul had some *very pointed* words. After having laid out his rights as an apostle, he then says this: "Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's

circumstances in which I work, *in order that* the gospel might have a hearing.

If Paul were writing this today, he might say: "If I am in Southern California, I work within the context of what's acceptable there. If I go to Africa, I will adapt my practices to that world. If I labor in China, I will be respectful of and in harmony with the practices of the Chinese. And if I preach the gospel in South America, I will do so in a way that will not needlessly trouble those who live there."

In other words, Paul calls for unity of heart around the core realities of the Christian faith while he allows for *and even encourages* divergent practices, if they will allow the gospel to be heard.

What does that mean? It means that *if* it is our priority for the gospel to have a hearing, we must be respectful of the context in which we labor, being thoughtful so as to not needlessly offend. Therefore, while we are respectful of the conscience of those who see the ordination of women differently than we do because of their context, and while we do not intend to coerce them to feel the same about it as we do, we also—being cognizant of our *very different* context—align ourselves with the Paul who said, "*I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some*" (verse 22). In so doing, we recognize that telling women who are clearly called by the Spirit that they *cannot* receive the affirmation of the church will do great harm to our cause here in this part of the world.

"But," the plea has been, "we must wait until we are all unified on the issue of women's ordination before we can move forward.

That,” it is said, “is what unity means.”

That is not the unity of which Scripture speaks. It is not even the unity of which Ellen White writes. I want you to listen to these words from her pen as she addressed the issues of unity and equality.

“All who are found worthy to be counted as the members of the family of God in heaven, will recognize one another as sons

with him concerning justification by faith?

What if William Wilberforce had waited to act until the entire British empire could be unified in its opposition to slavery?

What if Abraham Lincoln had waited to issue the Emancipation Proclamation until all the states agreed that slavery was wrong?

What if John F. Kennedy had waited to act until the Southern

LY CALLED BY THE SPIRIT THAT THEY N OF THE CHURCH WILL DO GREAT N THIS PART OF THE WORLD.

and daughters of God. They will realize that they all receive their strength and pardon from the same source, even from Jesus Christ who was crucified for their sins. They know that they are to wash their robes of character in His blood, to find acceptance with the Father in His name, if they would be in the bright assembly of the saints, clothed in the white robes of righteousness.

“Then as the children of God are one in Christ, how does Jesus look upon caste, upon society distinctions, upon the division of man from his fellow man, because of color, race, position, wealth, birth, or attainments? *The secret of unity is found in the equality of believers in Christ*” (emphasis added).⁷

Do you desire a unified church? I do! Then did you hear those words—words penned by a woman—a *woman*—called, empowered, and ordained by God for such a time as this? Here again is what she said: “The secret of unity is found in the equality of believers in Christ.” To summarize: *if you want unity, fight for equality*.

With that in mind, let me ask you: What if Moses had waited until every enslaved Israelite had agreed that God was calling them to freedom?

What if Gideon had waited to act until he had the support of an army he considered to be big enough?

What if David had waited until the entire Israelite nation was ready to crown him king?


What if Paul had waited until the entire church agreed that circumcision was no longer needed?

What if Martin Luther had waited until the bishops agreed

states all agreed to integrate their schools?

And what if, in 1888, Ellen White had waited until every Adventist leader agreed that *righteousness by faith* was the central doctrine of importance?

Time and again, churches and governments have faced such moments. And time and again, braved-hearted followers of Jesus have taken a stand for the right. The result of that—and *I implore you to hear this*—has *not* been the demise of the church or the state, but rather its salvation.

Today, here in the Pacific Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, might we go forward in faith in the God of every nation, kindred, tongue and people; the God who calls and empowers whom he will; the God who will pour out his Spirit on our sons and our daughters; the God who is no respecter of persons! 

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¹See <http://www.adventist.org/beliefs/fundamental/index.html>

²See <http://session.adventistfaith.org/human-relations>

³*ibid.*

⁴*ibid.*

⁵*ibid.*

⁶*ibid.*

⁷Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, Vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1958), p. 259.



IS PROTECTING THE DENOMINATION'S NAME IMPORTANT ENOUGH TO SEND PEOPLE TO JAIL?

BY ANDREW HANSON

SHOULD THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH SEEK TO PUT PEOPLE IN JAIL BECAUSE OF A NONVIOLENT RELIGIOUS BELIEF THAT INTERFERES WITH THE LEGAL RIGHTS OF THE DENOMINATION? THAT IS THE BOTTOM LINE TO THE LONG STORY OF A LITTLE, INDEPENDENT CONGREGATION AND THE GENERAL CONFERENCE ATTORNEYS.

The Creation Seventh Day Adventists broke away from the Adventist denomination in 1988, but its leaders believe that the group must continue to use the name “Seventh Day Adventist.” The General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists has registered the name “Seventh-day Adventist” with the United States federal trademark authorities to try to protect the name of the denomination.

The leaders of the Creation SDAs, Walter “Chick” McGill and Lucan Chartier, have been ordered by Federal Judge J. Daniel Breen to stop using the name, fined \$500 each, and required to pay attorney costs to the General Conference.¹

Adventist Today interviewed Chartier a number of times over the summer via the Internet. He stated that the two men expected to be jailed and would go to jail because of their religious beliefs. There was a federal bench warrant out for their arrest, and the San Bernardino County (California) Sheriff took McGill into custody July 13; he served 30 days in the county jail. Chartier turned himself in to the Redlands (California) police late in July and served 10 days before he was released on August 9.

Adventist Today was not able to discover the particulars of the releases of these men. There are several possibilities. Maybe the federal judge in Tennessee decided that they had been punished sufficiently. Maybe the General Conference lawyers communicated with the federal judge and indicated a wish for leniency. Maybe the Federal Department of Justice decided that it

was a waste of money to keep paying San Bernardino County for their incarceration in view of government budget woes and cases of greater priority to American citizens. Maybe the medical staff at the jail were concerned about the fact that McGill went on a liquid-only “fast” and dropped from 170 pounds to 153 pounds. Maybe it just slipped through the bureaucratic cracks. Reporters at the *San Bernardino Sun* and *Riverside Press-Enterprise* have given no explanation.

Defending the Seventh-day Adventist Name

The Adventist denomination does have the legal right to protect its name from misuse by groups that are not part of the organization. At times, independent ministries have done things that are embarrassing to the entire denomination. One only needs to mention “Waco” to illustrate that reality.

On the other hand, most Adventists think of their faith in terms of the larger movement, not legal definitions and bureaucratic lines. We have about 14 million members, but we have twice that many adherents who identify with the movement. Do we want a narrow definition of our identity that trims and throws away the margins? Or is it better to take a broad view and welcome all who are interested, despite the wide range of views and sometimes weird causes and personalities?

Do church members and pastors think that this is an appropriate way for the denomination to deal with splinter

groups? Do they believe that this is a good use of church resources? Is there a Bible basis for enforcement efforts that go so far as to put people in jail? Protecting the denomination's name is a good idea, but how far is too far in accomplishing this goal?

About the Creation SDA Group

The little congregation led by McGill is located in the small town of Guys, Tennessee. The group operates free clinics in two places in Uganda and has members scattered in various other countries. The name "Creation Seventh Day Adventist" is based on what they believe is divine revelation received by Danny Smith and McGill. It was organized as an independent religious association at a meeting held in Plant City, Florida.

THIS CASE RAISES IMPORTANT ISSUES ABOUT THE RESPONSIBLE USE OF LITIGATION ... [AND] THE ISSUE OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM WITHIN THE ADVENTIST BODY OF BELIEVERS. HOW MUCH VARIATION CAN OR SHOULD BE TOLERATED?

The Creation SDAs believe that the name "Seventh-day Adventist" was given by God to describe the Adventist faith in general and that, as a result, those who accept the key beliefs must use the name in identifying themselves and their organizations. They consider this to be a matter of conscience equivalent to denying or affirming the name "Christian." They base this on several quotes from Ellen G. White regarding the adoption and use of the name being divinely commissioned.

The group holds to a number of key Adventist doctrines, including the observance of the seventh-day Sabbath, the imminent Second Coming of Christ, the investigative judgment, and avoiding unclean meat. While differing from contemporary Adventist theology, their doctrines regarding religious accountability, the Trinity, and victory over all known sin were accepted by many early Adventists.

The Creation SDAs reject the doctrine of the Trinity as an extra-biblical error. They believe that the Father and Son are

two distinct and separate beings and that each may be referred to by the Hebrew term "El," usually translated as "God" in the Old Testament, or collectively by the plural term "Elohim," also translated as "God." They reject the idea of the Holy Spirit as a person in the same sense as the Father and Son, believing it to be the shared essence, power, characteristics, presence, and life of those two.

The group also believes in a complete separation of church and state, rejecting the idea that government agencies possess any authority to intrude on religious activities or groups. They hold strict views on church membership, claiming that once an individual has come into unity with Christ, unity with "His Church" (meaning their group) will be the natural result, with one not being valid while rejecting the other.

The Creation SDAs observe new moons monthly during the conjunction phase of the lunar cycle. Also referred to in their writings as the "New Moon Festival of Humility," it is the day on which they partake of the communion meal, foot washing, etc. They observe new moons in the way they observe weekly Sabbaths, in that secular work and trade are prohibited.

How Did This Conflict Get Started?

Believe it or not, the struggle over the Seventh-day Adventist name began in Hawaii with a different group, the Seventh-day Adventist Congregational Church of Kona. The *Los Angeles Times* described the first exhibit in this story as "only a 4-foot-by-8-foot sheet of plywood with hand-painted lettering on a rainbow background. The board hangs in Kona, Hawaii, outside a small rented hall where a few souls quietly worship God each Saturday morning. But the sign contains a forbidden name, and a legal battle over its use has stirred a tsunami of church reaction on the mainland. The case is now pending in the U.S. 9th Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco."²

The article quoted "a defendant in the unusual lawsuit" who described it as "a Goliath vs. David situation" and noted that it "pits the [then] 5.5-million-member Seventh-day Adventist Church against an 11-member splinter congregation." It also quoted Lily Anne Deniz, a member of the group: "The real issue is forcing us to change our name, not allowing *any* use of the words 'Seventh-day Adventist' because it is a registered trade name."³

The Kona group started in 1980 when John Marik, an intern pastor in the Hawaii Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, "began relating 'dreams and visions,' which he said came from God."⁴ The following July, Marik was fired by the conference.

“He and his mother, wife and daughter, along with a handful of followers, formed a separate congregation and rented a \$765-a-month suite on the second floor of a corrugated metal industrial building near Kailua Bay.”⁵

After Marik’s firing the denomination’s attorneys registered the words “Seventh-day Adventist” with the U. S. government as a trade name. Denominational officials issued repeated warnings to Marik to stop using the name and finally filed suit on April 9, 1987, to enforce the denomination’s legal rights. Marik, who had no legal training, filed a document in self-defense.⁶

Marik’s congregation did not secure legal counsel until after the Federal District Court of Hawaii handed down a judgment and injunction against it on Dec. 8, 1987, “prohibiting the defendants [the 11-member church and their pastor, John Marik] from using the name ‘Seventh-day Adventist’ and enjoining them to remove the sign and hand over to Federal agents all of their personal books, magazines, and other property that contained the name ‘Seventh-day Adventist.’”⁷

General Conference attorneys tried to reach a compromise with Marik, suggesting that his church could use either “Seventh-day” or “Adventist” as part of its name, but not both. A General Conference attorney wrote to Marik, “We would recommend and will favorably consider your using, for example, the name ‘Seventh-day Congregational Church.’” Marik refused.

In May 1988, the court entered an order for Marik’s arrest. Marik was arrested, and while out on bail he became a fugitive. Then the court issued a warrant for his arrest on contempt charges and levied a \$500-a-day fine against the congregation. Marik hid for more than a year.

With the passing of time, Marik apparently became careless. He would occasionally speak at some small Adventist gathering. It is rumored that a local pastor employed by the denomination turned him in. On Friday morning, Dec. 16, 1989, federal marshals entered the home where he was living at the time in Yucca Valley, California, and placed him under arrest. His bond was set at \$25,000.

Apparently frightened at the possibility of again going to prison, Marik contacted the Hawaii attorney representing the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists and said he would sign anything. He was given a settlement agreement, which he signed. Evidently it was not reviewed by an attorney representing him.

It is important not to miss a key fact in this complicated case: the General Conference did not win the case or establish a legal precedent. They settled for a signature on an out-of-court

agreement. On Dec. 5, 1991, the *Adventist Review* announced the end of the Hawaii case.

History of Related Litigation

A significant amount of litigation has piled up since the Marik case. A quick summary includes the following:

1988—The General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists is challenged by the Bashan Group in Missouri, the Salem Association in South Carolina, and the Mountaindale Association in New York. These groups filed an *amicus curiae* brief in the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit.

1989—Due to the challenges noted in the paragraph above, the judgment against the Kona group was reversed and the case was remanded to the district court for further proceedings.

1991—The General Conference attorneys brought a lawsuit against Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International, Inc., an organization of gay and lesbian Adventists. The General Conference lost the case. It was ruled that “kinship” refers to a social network, not a worship group.

1993—W.L. Perry and Max A. Corbett, Adventist attorneys (not representing the denomination), argued against the General Conference’s trademark. Perry filed a petition for a hearing to take place in Virginia, and leaders of some Davidian Adventist groups attended as well as representatives of the Seventh-day Adventist Reform Movement, a separate denomination formed in Europe in the aftermath of World War I when leaders of the Adventist Church there moved away from the historic peace-church position taken when the denomination was founded in the early 1860s.

1996—A decision on the Perry-Corbett appeal was rendered in February. Two of the three judges voted against cancellation of the trademark, while one sided with the Perry-Corbett appeal. On December 16, the General Conference won the case.

1999—The General Conference threatened legal action against the Eternal Gospel SDA Church in West Palm Beach, Fla., for using the abbreviation “SDA.”

Events in 2012

On Apr. 5, 2012, a decision was rendered in the case against the Creation SDAs that began in 2008 when McGill was sued by the General Conference. The court “held that defendant’s ‘Creation Seventh Day and Adventist Church’ infringed the ‘Seventh-day Adventist’ trademark owned by plaintiff,” stated the decision. “Although a trademark like that of [the General Conference] becomes incontestable five years after its registration, it could still

be challenged as generic, in which case the burden of proof lies on the challenger. ... Defendant failed to present sufficient evidence to overcome the presumption that such mark was not generic. The fact that two other small churches utilize the name does not establish that the relevant public does not associate it with the 'mother' church. In the absence of proof, the district court could not just assume that the relevant public would view the disputed term merely as a way to refer to a person who believes that the Sabbath should be celebrated on the seventh day and that the return of Jesus Christ is imminent, and not primarily as a means of reference to a member of the" denomination. McGill and Chartier were ordered by Federal Judge J. Daniel Breen to stop using the name, required to pay attorney costs to the General Conference, and fined \$500 each.⁸

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McGill and Chartier contacted *Adventist Today* and announced that they were traveling across the country, contacting independent Adventist groups as well as local churches affiliated with the denomination because "this issue has been largely kept from the Adventist constituency. The majority of members have no idea what is happening on their behalf, or that they have been included as plaintiffs. ... The issues need to be brought to the forefront and discussed, so that decided positions may be taken."

The two men expected to be jailed and said they would turn themselves in. "The victims of this policy are not simply names on a court document or words on a screen," Chartier said. "They are real people with real faces. We want people to know who we are and what we stand for, so that, when they make their final decision, it will be an informed one."

"We are in the closing hours of Earth's history," Chartier said, because the Adventist denomination "is using civil power to force 'all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond' to either forsake the buying and selling of the three angels' messages, or to 'receive a (trade) mark in their right hand, or in their forehead,'"

equating the General Conference trademark registration with the Bible language traditionally related by Adventists to the "mark of the beast" in Revelation.

"Our hope is that men and women will take a stand and become true Adventists; true Protestants. Adventism once stood against the arbitrary authority of the church, fighting against the civil magistrate's intrusion into matters of conscience. Adventism once stood for the separation of church and state, and freedom of religion for every believer and unbeliever alike. Adventism once stood for liberty of conscience, whether the one exercising it agreed with us or not. Adventism still stands for these things in the Creation Seventh Day Adventist Church, and what we hope to find ... are those few true Adventists that remain. We are in the midst of a modern reformation, with modern persecution. It is high time for modern Protestants to stand up and be counted. That is what we hope for in visiting the brethren."

Asked why people should care about his obscure case, Chartier quotes Martin Luther King, Jr., who wrote that "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."⁹ He believes that the General Conference attorneys have "deceived" the federal court and that, by seeking to enforce the trademark, they have made use of "papal weaponry." He quotes Ellen White: "Force is the last resort of every false religion."¹⁰

Response by the North American Division

A statement released by the North American Division (NAD) of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists said the denomination was not seeking to close down McGill's group or restrict his religious liberty. It said that unauthorized use of the Adventist name "confuses the public, media, and at times our own members." When people see a congregation that uses the name Seventh-day Adventist, they assume it is affiliated with the large denomination.

"The Seventh-day Adventist Church has no interest in seeing Mr. McGill or his associates in jail, nor is the church responsible for Mr. McGill's disposition toward the court. The Seventh-day Adventist Church has neither legislative nor judicial authority in that it neither makes nor enforces the law. It grieves the church to see any person or group act in opposition of the law and be forced to suffer the penalty of their own actions. Our prayers will be with Mr. McGill."

An attorney explained to *Adventist Today* that once the federal court issues orders that direct someone (McGill, in this case) to cease and desist or to pay costs or otherwise comply, then the other litigant (the General Conference, in this case) no longer has any control over the outcome. It is no longer a case of a

disagreement between two litigants. It becomes a matter of law enforcement. When McGill refuses to obey a court order, he is breaking the law.

What McGill and Chartier engaged in last summer is sometimes called “civil disobedience.” They broke the law because they believe the law to be wrong, a violation of their religious liberty. For some observers it is a classic case of “your freedom ends where my nose begins.” McGill and Chartier have the freedom to believe in any religious beliefs they wish so long as they do not take action stepping on the freedoms of others. In this case, the General Conference believes that it has the freedom to keep the name “Seventh-day Adventist” from being used by churches that are not actually part of the organization.

Reaction of Adventist Church Members

Many Adventists may be turned off by the ultra-fundamentalist positions of these splinter groups and the legal tactics of the General Conference attorneys. Does a worldwide denomination approaching 30 million adherents need to chase small groups that are largely unknown? Is it good stewardship to spend money going to court to stop these little groups from using variations on the denomination’s name?

These groups may do things that are embarrassing in local areas on occasion, such as the group that put up highway billboards in Orlando and Denver explicitly connecting the pope to “the mark of the beast.” But this litigation cannot actually stop people from doing that—nor even from including a line such as “This is the teaching of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.”

Clearly most Adventists today are not interested in that kind of publicity. It is counterproductive to the mission of the church. But how far should we go in countering this sort of thing? When do legal tactics become counterproductive to their purpose?

At a minimum, we must consider the issue of religious freedom in the contemporary context of our church. There is also reason to question the value of the money spent in 32 years of litigation and related legal work. *Adventist Today* has tried unsuccessfully to clarify how much money has been spent on this project.

Clearly the denomination has a legal right to protect its name from misuse and fraud. Perhaps it has a moral duty to seek to prevent situations in which the name may be used for dishonest purposes in fundraising or investment scams. Who makes the decisions about when moral duty prevails and when compassion and the forgiveness taught by Jesus is the priority? For example, is there a policy that requires a vote at an Annual Council before litigation of this kind is filed? It is unlikely that the General Conference attorneys act independently on these

matters. They, like all lawyers, represent a client and cannot be both client and attorney. Who is the client in these cases? Is it the denomination as a whole? The delegates at a General Conference Session? The members of the General Conference executive committee? How small is the group that makes these decisions?

The New Testament admonishes the followers of Jesus that it is inappropriate for believers to go to court against each other. But the world we live in today is far more complicated, and litigation is almost impossible to avoid even for the Amish. This case raises important issues about the responsible use of litigation.

This case also dramatically raises the issue of religious freedom *within* the Adventist body of believers. How much variation can or should be tolerated? What about believers who were baptized before the statement of 27 Fundamental Beliefs (now 28) was adopted in 1980? How is orthodoxy to be determined, and who should determine it? What are the *de facto* requirements for baptism and continued membership? Do they differ here in the United States from some other countries around the world? Is the process of dropping people from church membership carefully policed? If so, by whom? Is there an appeals process for those who feel that they may be unfairly excluded?

The Adventist Church takes a strong stand advocating religious liberty. That is one of its great strengths and defining features. Is it being equally zealous in protecting the religious liberty of those within its ranks or within the broader Adventist movement? Perhaps the most difficult of these situations is when the rights of the institution—the “organized work,” as it has been traditionally labeled among Adventists—is in conflict with the rights of individuals and small groups. Given the rapid rate of church growth and the cultural diversity and global reach of the Adventist family, issues of this kind are likely to occur more and more often. 📌

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¹General Conference Corporation of Seventh-day Adventists v. McGill, case 06-1207, U.S. District Court for the Western District of Tennessee.

²Russell Chandler, “Tiny Church in Hawaii Battles Adventists Over Trademark Use,” *Los Angeles Times*, Nov. 27, 1988.

³*ibid.*

⁴*ibid.*

⁵*ibid.*

⁶*ibid.*

⁷Case 06-1207, U. S. District Court for the Western District of Tennessee.

⁸*ibid.*

⁹Letter from Birmingham Jail, April 16, 1963.

¹⁰*Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, Vol. 7, p. 956.

HOW HISTORICAL DIVERSITY DIVIDES US

By Albert C. Koppel

In his inaugural sermon as president of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, Elder Ted Wilson said the church needs to return to an earlier day, when the Bible was taken more literally and the writings of Ellen White were given greater significance.¹

Adventism has indeed changed (and continues to change constantly)—though the denomination has seemed slow to admit it. These changes began to evolve immediately after the Great Disappointment, as Adventists moved away from time setting and a closed view of the door of probation. Such is our doctrinal complexity today that the book *Seventh-day Adventists Believe* declares on page 27: “It would be difficult for any one author to state the beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church comprehensively and accurately.”

Reinder Bruinsma, former president of the Netherlands Union Conference, was right on track when he declared that Adventism is, essentially, a search for truth that requires cultivation of the mind.²

Our history has been one of replacing old light with new—though we have not advertised this widely—yet old, tired, temporary positions never seem to die. Just last autumn (2011), we heard of yet another widespread disappointment of many former Adventists who believed Christ would come October 15.

Undefined Expectations

To demonstrate that even some of Adventism’s most cherished “essentials” are in flux, I recently prepared a list of six statements and began asking my informed lay and pastoral friends to tell me if they believed the statements were either true or false.

I first asked 10 Seventh-day Adventist church members to evaluate them; I then asked the same of 10 ordained Adventist

pastors. A friend gave the same questionnaire to 16 additional laymen and 10 additional ordained Adventist pastors.

In the end, a total of 25 laymen and 20 ordained pastors participated. Results are as follows:

1. Wearing (or not wearing) jewelry is a test of fellowship.

Laymen's Responses	Ordained Pastors' Responses
TRUE 4	TRUE 6
FALSE 21	FALSE 14

2. Eating (or not eating) swine's flesh is a test of fellowship.

Laymen's Responses	Ordained Pastors' Responses
TRUE 13	TRUE 6
FALSE 12	FALSE 14

3. Belief in the prophetic office of Ellen G. White and her writings is a test of fellowship.

Laymen's Responses	Ordained Pastors' Responses
TRUE 11	TRUE 4
FALSE 14	FALSE 16

4. Belief in the doctrine of the Investigative Judgment is a test of fellowship.

Laymen's Responses	Ordained Pastors' Responses
TRUE 5	TRUE 8
FALSE 20	FALSE 12

5. Belief in the 28 Fundamental Beliefs is a test of fellowship.

Laymen's Responses	Ordained Pastors' Responses
TRUE 10	TRUE 8
FALSE 15	FALSE 12

6. Paying tithe is a test of fellowship.

Laymen's Responses	Ordained Pastors' Responses
TRUE 15	TRUE 4
FALSE 10	FALSE 16

In their answers, ordained pastors seemed nearly as divided as the laity. In three cases, pastors declared all six to be "False." None of the laity did so. Conversely, one pastor stated that all six assertions are "True." The rest provided mixed answers. One layman refused to participate on grounds that "judging such assertions is wrong."

The answers show how wide the latitude remains in the thinking of Adventist church members and clergy. This is not surprising, given our history.

On the matter of Ellen White, for example, in *Questions on Doctrine* the church declares, "We accept the Bible and the Bible only as our rule of faith"³ and again, "We test the writings of Ellen G. White by the Bible, but in no sense do we test the Bible by her writings."⁴ Yet former General Conference President Robert

H. Pierson writes, "The Bible is God's unerring guidebook of Christian faith, but sometimes it *needs an authoritative source (Ellen G. White) to interpret portions and thus to avoid division among us*"⁵ (emphasis supplied).

Pierson then "proves" his point when he writes, on the same page, "Hundreds of churches and religious sects claim that they believe in the Bible and the Bible only. Has this ...brought unity of doctrine among the churches in Christendom? Not at all." An additional "authoritative" source (Ellen G. White) is required.

Clearly on the question of Ellen G. White there is tremendous latitude among Adventists. But I wanted to learn more, and when I read an article in the Dec. 18, 2008, *Adventist Review*, a reference to the Adventist Information Ministry (AIM) caught my eye.

The article explained that AIM was staffed by about 75 Andrews University students, with a backup staff of several "chaplains," to pray, listen, dialogue, answer questions, and build relationships with callers. Just what I needed!

My call was answered by a student who promptly referred me to Chaplain Joseph Williams. I asked about his qualifications and learned that he was a Master of Divinity student at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary.

I asked Williams to please answer my six true-or-false questions, and he promptly assured me that in his opinion, all six were false.

Now I seemed to be getting somewhere! Several highly informed Adventist leaders had told me that all were false, and Chaplain Joseph Williams, a Master of Divinity student at the seminary, now concurred. Maybe Adventism was more single-minded on these issues than I had thought!

But no such luck. A few days later, a young woman phoned and identified herself as another Master of Divinity student Andrews University. "Dr. Koppel," she warned, "you had better study this for yourself, because here at the seminary the students argue with each other about such things, and the professors argue about them among themselves." Apparently I had created quite a commotion!

So I followed her counsel and continued asking questions of others. Here's what I found about the various Adventist tests of fellowship.

1. Wearing (or not wearing) jewelry is a test of fellowship.

Between May 17, 1865, and Oct. 6, 1880, James White served three two-year terms as president of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination, and in 1874 the church formulated and voted its first set of baptismal vows.

Vow Number 10 read: "Are you willing to follow the Bible rule of modesty and simplicity of dress, refraining from the wearing of

necklaces, bracelets, beads, rings, etc., and from any lack of dress that is out of keeping with the Bible rule of modesty? (1 Timothy 2:9, 10; 1 Peter 3:3, 4; Exodus 33:5, 6; Genesis 35:2-4)” (emphasis added).

This reminded me of hearing my mother tell that when she was baptized, in 1916, she dropped her wedding ring into the offering plate.

I also recalled that, as a member of the nominating committee of the Sligo Church (in Takoma Park, Maryland), I once voted not to nominate an organist because she wore jewelry. During my military service in Germany, however, I had noticed that all German Adventist pastors wore wedding rings—clearly in direct opposition to the 1874 Baptismal Vow. Why, how, where, and when was this changed?

I am a product of Seventh-day Adventist parochial schools,

asked one of the hospital administrators why this was permitted, he was told that the patients requested it.

Where do we stand today on this question? Is it a test of fellowship? Clearly it once was.

3. *Belief in the prophetic office of Ellen G. White and her writings is a test of fellowship.*

In the 1874 Baptismal Vows, Number 14 read as follows: “Do you *recognize* that the remnant church has the Spirit of Prophecy, and that this has been manifested in this church through the *writings of Ellen G. White?* (Revelation 12:17; 19:10)” (emphasis added).

Yet just three years before, James White himself had written in the *Review and Herald*, “[Seventh-day Adventists] do not, however, make a belief in this work a test of Christian fellowship.”⁶

SO, IN EFFECT, FAILURE TO BELIEVE ANY OR ALL OF THE 28 FUNDAMENTAL BELIEFS CAN ARGUABLY BE SAID NOT TO BE A TEST OF ONE'S FELLOWSHIP.

high schools, and college, and I had heard throughout my childhood and youth that jewelry was not acceptable. There seems to be a tremendous breadth of opinion these days on what was once a very narrow position.

2. *Eating (or not eating) swine's flesh is a test of fellowship.*

Vow Number 9 in the 1874 Baptismal Vows reads as follows: “Is it your purpose to obey the command to eat and drink to the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31), by abstaining from all intoxicating liquors (Proverbs 23:29-32), tobacco in all its forms (1 Corinthians 3:16-17), *swine's flesh* (Isaiah 66:15, 17), narcotics, tea, coffee, and other harmful things?” (emphasis added).

During the 20 years my wife and I were members of the Sligo Seventh-day Adventist congregation, our senior pastor lost his position shortly before he retired, because his diet included swine's flesh.

Yet I recently learned from Daniel Duffis, an Adventist pastor in the New Jersey Conference, that the Seventh-day Adventist hospital in Orlando serves swine's flesh to patients. When he

Belief in the prophetic mission of Ellen G. White and of her writings is no longer an official test of fellowship in the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Some pastors, however, continue to *insert* the phrase into the vows on their own! One pastor, who correctly identified the statement in my survey as false, admitted doing so and declined further comment.

Such an insertion of the name of Ellen White is clearly out of harmony with Ellen White's own words, as quoted in *Questions on Doctrine*, page 97, “[Those who do not understand the gift] should not be deprived of the benefits and privileges of the church.”

Twenty or more years ago at the Potomac Conference Camp Meeting, I heard a Sabbath-morning sermon by Dr. V. Bailey Gillespie, in which he reported on the *Valuegenesis* study of Adventist academy students who voiced great uncertainty over the role of Ellen G. White. He reported that only 53 percent believed that she manifested the gift of prophecy; in other

words, 47 percent did *not* believe. Gillespie then told us that approximately the same percentage of adult Adventists also disbelieved in her prophetic calling.

Years later I personally phoned Dr. Gillespie, and he assured me that my memory was serving me well. He also suggested that if I wanted documentation, I should obtain a copy of *Valuegenesis—Faith in the Balance*, by Roger L. Dudley and himself.

Later, when I spoke with Robert Olson, former head of the White Estate, I alluded to the 47 percent of academy students and adult Adventists who do not believe in the prophetic role of Ellen G. White. I suggested that if we multiplied 47 percent by total Adventist membership of 17 million, we would arrive at a figure of a little less than 8 million Adventist members worldwide who do not recognize her as manifesting the Spirit of Prophecy. Olson seemed to disagree with my reasoning, though he did not fault my mathematics.

I am a German-speaking American Seventh-day Adventist, and while serving as a United States Army Dental Corps captain, I regularly attended German church services and was aware of the history of Ellen G. White's relative non-acceptance in Germany. I noted, as well, that she was rarely quoted in local sermons.

After my military tour of duty (1951-1953), my wife and I brought a 15-year-old German girl back to the United States with us, to attend Takoma Academy. She told us toward the end of her stay that Ellen G. White is followed more intently in the United States than in her homeland.

4. *Belief in the doctrine of the Investigative Judgment is a test of fellowship.*

The Investigative Judgment is one of the doctrines listed in the 28 Fundamental Beliefs. The discussion under the next question should further clarify this.

5. *Belief in the 28 Fundamental Beliefs is a test of fellowship.*

Page iv of *Seventh-day Adventists Believe...* says the book was written because “we have found it necessary to summarize our beliefs” and because church leaders abroad asked for “a statement [that] would help government officials and others to a better understanding of our work.” It affirms that the volume “is not an officially voted statement,” and on page vii the editors insist that it was not written “to serve as a creed.”

So, in effect, failure to believe any or all of the 28 fundamental beliefs can arguably be said *not* to be a test of one's fellowship. The answer to the question is apparently “False.”

6. *Paying tithe is a test of church fellowship.*

In the 1874 Baptismal Vows, Number 8 read as follows: “Will you practice the Bible plan for the support of God's work by rendering unto Him first the tithe, or one tenth of all your increase (Leviticus 27:30; Malachi 3:8-10); and then offerings as you may be able, according to His prospering hand (Deuteronomy 16:17; Luke 6:38)?”

Current estimates place the percentage of Adventists who pay tithe at only about 33 percent. Clearly it is not considered by most to be a condition for membership.


No doubt the biggest problem of those who do not pay tithe is selfishness. But I also believe that a good number withhold tithe out of concern for leaders' refusal to be transparent and accountable.

More than 125 years ago, Ellen G. White in speaking about denominational institutions wrote, “All their business transactions, whether with believers or unbelievers, should be as transparent as the sunlight.”⁷

Church members are never told specifically how their tithe funds are ultimately used, and many feel disheartened when they hear of the church allowing tithe moneys to be used in construction of conference buildings and in court litigation. Members can and do vote with their pocketbooks.

A Call for Greater Openness

The world has changed a great deal since Civil War times, and “present truth” will certainly call for some adaptations in the way we allocate funds and articulate the tests of fellowship. But if we mismanage this process, we could find ourselves trying to fence up to 50 percent of our current membership *out* of Adventism, even as we make the path *into* Adventism too narrow.

Martin Weber, in his article “Keeping Our Kids in the Church,” based on his recent doctoral dissertation, concludes, “There is no greater cause of attrition than to attempt to *shield children* from knowledge of, or resisting discussion about, church or denominational conflict” (emphasis mine).⁸ 

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¹ Lawrence G. Downing, “Where Is Ted Wilson Leading Us?” *Adventist Today*, Volume 19, No. 2, Spring 2011, p. 12.

² “With All Your Mind: Challenges for the Adventist Intellectual,” *Adventist World-South Pacific Division Edition*, Vol. 3, No. 8, August 2007, pp. 14-15.

³ *Questions on Doctrine*, p. 9.

⁴ *ibid.*, p. 90.

⁵ *We Still Believe* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1975), p. 165.

⁶ *Review and Herald*, June 13, 1871.

⁷ Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases*, Vol. 20 (Silver Spring, MD: E.G. White Estate, 1993), p. 384.

⁸ *Outlook*, Vol. 33, No. 9, September 2011, p. 5.

Have you ever wondered why, after Jesus left this earth, he waited 10 days before he sent the Holy Spirit? Was he just waiting for the day of Pentecost, so that a lot of people would be in Jerusalem to witness the event and hear the gospel? Perhaps, but why leave so early then? Why not stay a few more days with his disciples? They sure would have loved it!

sinned. But to accomplish this, the divine Trinity needed One among them who was *not* flesh and blood (and thus restricted by human nature); enter the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. But then it wouldn't be Jesus, would it? And that's important, because the Holy Spirit hasn't gone through what we have. Only Jesus has done that. He doesn't know what it means to be tempted;

sending of the Holy Spirit will make it so that Jesus can "remind you of everything I have said to you."

Let me emphasize it again. This is not a mere "Oh, Jesus is all tied up in his human flesh and blood thing and can't make it, but I'll send the "Other Guy." Please don't take what I'm saying as sacrilegious, but it is critical for us to understand that this is not a second-best, alternative plan. On the contrary, the outpouring and baptism of the Holy Spirit was devised by the divine Trinity, as a plan superior to Jesus himself staying on earth. The Father, in a most amazing way (see below), will actually put the resurrected life of Jesus inside us via the Holy Spirit! It's sort of a reincarnation, if you please. Notice Jesus' prayer to his Father: "I have given them the glory [God's character] that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: *I in them* and you in me. ... Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them *and that I myself may be in them*" (John 17:22, 25-26, NIV, emphasis added).

Just as the Holy Spirit was actually *in* Jesus when he was here on earth, accomplishing the Father's purposes, so Jesus, via the Spirit, wants to be *in* us as well, so he can make the Father known to us and put his love in us. Only Jesus *in* us can accomplish that! Paul was referring to this when he said, "To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is *Christ in you, the hope of glory*" (Col. 1:27, NIV, emphasis added). Our only hope of reflecting the character of God (his glory) is if Jesus is actually in us, speaking, caring, loving, doing.

So how does the baptism of the Holy Spirit put Jesus *in* us? Is this just "religious talk"—code words for "The Spirit is so much like Jesus that it is almost like Jesus himself being in us"? That would be sort of like the president of the United States promising to visit my house, but sending

Christ *in* Us

BY DON WATSON

I believe that everything in the life of Jesus took place at the precise time that he and the Father had determined beforehand. Consequently, I don't believe that the 10 days between Jesus' ascension and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost was a random time period, given merely for the disciples to fast and pray or for God to test their patience. Those things happened and were important, but I believe there was something amazing going on in heaven between these two events. Presented here is what I'd like to suggest, and I would love to hear what you think.

Jesus told his disciples, "It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you" (John 16:7, KJV). Jesus knew that the disciples would never be able to accomplish the task of taking the gospel to the entire world without supernatural help. He could not abandon them to do it alone.

"I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you" (John 14:18, KJV). But Jesus could be in only one place at a time, and even then he could be beside only a few of them. What about when the church grew to thousands or millions of members?

The plan of salvation devised by the divine Trinity provided for an outcome that would even exceed the communion enjoyed by Adam and Eve before they

only Jesus has experienced that. He's never felt loneliness or pain or betrayal; only Jesus has done that.

So if that's the case, why did Jesus tell the disciples, "And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth" (verses 16-17, KJV). Was Jesus not "getting it"? They didn't want some Holy-Spirit-Ghost-thing; they wanted Jesus! But Jesus goes on and tells them something amazing, "For he [the Spirit] dwelleth with you, and shall be *in you*" (verse 17, KJV, emphasis added). Well, now, that "in you" part is really good, right? But it still doesn't sound like Jesus yet, until Jesus finishes his sentence. The very next verse says, "I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you" (verse 18, KJV). He seems to be suggesting that when the Holy Spirit comes and dwells "in us" forever, that's the way Jesus himself will "come to [us]."

Eight verses later, Jesus goes on to make it even clearer: "But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send *in my name*, will teach you all things and will *remind you of everything I have said to you*" (verse 26, NIV, emphasis added). Jesus is telling the disciples that God, the Father, will not just send One of the Three, but the Holy Spirit will actually be sent in a special way by the Father so that it is a coming *in Jesus' name*, and this special

the vice president instead and yet claiming to fulfill his promise. It just won't work, will it?

Here is how I think God did it and continues to do it. I have *not* received a vision from God about this, and I am sure that what actually happened is so much better, but I share it with you in hopes that you can catch a bit of the excitement—as I did when these thoughts came to my mind.

“On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, ‘If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.’ By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, *since Jesus had not yet been glorified*” (John 7:37-39, NIV). In this speech given by Jesus to the crowds present at the Feast of Tabernacles, he reveals that if we will believe what Jesus says, “rivers of living water will flow” out from within us, and John’s commentary was that Jesus was talking about the infilling of the Holy Spirit, who hadn’t been given yet *because Jesus had not yet been glorified*. I believe *that* is what took place during the 10 days between the ascension and Pentecostal outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and it is by this glorification that God truly sends the Holy Spirit in Jesus’ name and enables Jesus to truly be *in us*.

Maybe it happened something like this: When Jesus left this earth and ascended to heaven, he was accompanied by a multitude of heavenly angels. Thousands upon thousands, and ten-thousand times ten-thousand of the heavenly hosts escorted him to the gates of the New Jerusalem. I can picture these angels shouting out as they approached: “Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in” (Psalm 24:7, KJV). Then the angels within the city responded, “Who is this King of glory?” (verse 8a, KJV), because they had been anxiously awaiting the arrival of their beloved Lord. So the

escorting angels exuberantly shouted out, “The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle” (verse 8b, KJV). Again the angels sang, “Lift up your heads, O ye gates; even lift them up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in” (verse 9, KJV). The awaiting angels, wanting to hear his name as he approached, asked once more, “Who is this King of glory?” (verse 10a, KJV). And again the heavenly escort exclaimed, “The LORD of hosts, he is the King of glory” (verse 10b, KJV).

Next, Jesus was ushered into the very presence of God the Father and the Holy Spirit, and I picture the three of them embracing—the divine Trinity together again! The Prodigal, who went into a country far away from the Father and took upon himself our waywardness, had returned, and all of heaven was about to celebrate his arrival. This is how that celebration—a 10-day glorification ceremony of Jesus the Lamb of God—might have taken place. Having collected all of the inhabitants of the universe together for this celebration, God seated Jesus on a throne, high and lifted up so that all could see and honor him. Next to Jesus on another throne was the Holy Spirit. He, too, was high and lifted up. Between them, the Father was suspended in a glorious, colorful, pulsating light, and in this light the Three are intimately connected. Lightning flashed and thunder rolled as if providing the fanfare of some grand event—and grand it was, indeed, such as no one had ever witnessed from eternity.

Then, like an immense panoramic video above the Father, began the glorification of Jesus, the Son of God. God tapped into the memory banks of the human Jesus and began downloading every scene of his life—as a baby in a lowly manger, as a child in wicked Nazareth, as a teen working in Joseph’s carpenter shop. Faithfully God captured every act and deed and thought that took place during Jesus’ three and a half years of ministry—every feeling of compassion, every word of kindness, every temptation

resisted. Above the head of God, in living color, the universe beheld what divine love looked like in the life of Jesus. And then, as all of this was taking place, they began to realize that this was an actual download of who Jesus is: his character, his words, his actions—love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, trust, trustworthiness, meekness, temperance (Gal. 5:22-23). It was a “copy” (as if from a computer) from the flesh and blood Jesus, who can be with us in only one place at a time, to the Holy Spirit, who is not limited by matter and can actually be inside us—every single one of us—if we will give him permission.

Jesus did not promise to give us himself and then send something somewhat similar. He actually comes himself via the Holy Spirit, and I believe he stays connected to us via the Father, feeling what we feel and conveying to the Father our pain, our temptations, our hurt. Through Jesus, the divine Trinity is connected to each of us in this giant-computer-connection-thing that’s beyond my understanding except to know that it is more real that we can imagine. God is truly with us and Jesus is truly *in us*, via the gift of his Holy Spirit.

BUT Jesus will never force his way into our lives. Like Revelation says, he stands at the door of our hearts and knocks. He wants to eat with us, play with us, work with us, hurt with us, and laugh with us. Closer to us now than if we had never sinned! Wow!

Jesus explained the simple one-step process to receive the Holy Spirit. “If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will *your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!*” (Luke 11:13, NIV, emphasis added). What a gift! And if you ask him right now, you will have it because he says so! 📖

Don Watson is a retired pastor, principal, and Bible teacher who lives in Nashville, Tennessee. He writes a monthly online column for Adventist Today at atoday.org.



The 1901 General Conference—the Rest of the Story

By Alden Thompson

Before the 2010 General Conference (GC) Session, I dedicated part of this column to a review of the 1901 General Conference Session, hoping and praying that it could be a model for us. I still think Ellen White's presentation at that GC Session is one of her most powerful. And it was effective, too. When the dust had settled, the editor of the *General Conference Bulletin* declared that it had been "one of the most peculiar, yet the very best, General Conference ever convened by Seventh-day Adventists."¹

But a question keeps gnawing at my soul: Why are key aspects of that conference almost universally ignored by Adventist authors? Known as the "reorganization" General Conference, it will always have high visibility in Adventist history for that reason. But the substance of Ellen White's comments gets very limited press, and here I want to explore a possible reason why.

In the early 1890s, the brethren had shipped Ellen White off to Australia to get her out of their hair—another fact rarely mentioned in discussions of that era.² When she returned nearly a decade later, the church was in such turmoil that she didn't want to attend the GC Session of 1901, later admitting to the delegates: "I did not want to come to Battle Creek. I was afraid the burdens I would have to bear would cost my life."³

Taking the podium the moment GC President George Irwin opened the floor for business, she made the kinds of pointed comments that only a credentialed prophet could get away with. "At the last Conference which I attended here," she said, "there was gossiping and controversy in every house. If the people had prayed instead of gossiping, if they had talked with God, the condition of things would have been very different. ...

"I would rather lay a child of mine in his grave," she exclaimed, "than to have him ... see these principles [of heaven] mangled and perverted. ...

"Men who have not learned to submit themselves to the control and discipline of God," she continued, "are not competent to train the youth, to deal with human minds. ... That these men should stand in a sacred place, to be as the voice of God to the people, as we once believed the General Conference to be,—that is past."⁴

But perhaps her most telling blow came right at the end, just before she sat down. These were her words—and it helps to remember that she was speaking to a group of about 90 delegates. Good eye contact!

"I want to have a home with the blessed, and I want you to have a home there. I want to work in harmony with you, and I want that every one who has an impetuous temper, that will flare up and lead him to act like a frantic man—I want him, as he begins to speak in this way, to remember Christ, and sit right down and hold his peace. Say not a word.

"God help us to restrain our tongues. The voice is a precious talent, and it is to be used to a purpose. It is not lent to you that you may swear; but every one, who gives way to an unholy temper might just as well swear. God help us to submit to Jesus Christ, and to have his power right here and now."⁵

Elder Irwin's comment as he took over the podium? "These are certainly very plain words."⁶

Discussion and a season of prayer followed. Then the business session continued. And that was what caught the attention of the *Bulletin* editor, who spoke of a "quiet, deep-seated calm." "From the first of the business meetings," he wrote, "not one unkind word was spoken on

the floor, not a single rebutting argument was used. But all seemed to vie with one another in maintaining the rules of courtesy and Christian deportment."⁷

And why is this amazing stuff not trumpeted from the housetops? Probably because most church leaders know that disgruntled but devout conservatives will absolutize her statements and refuse ever again to grant the General Conference any authority. I could take you to the Internet and cite illustrations. In seeking to understand why my book *Inspiration: Hard Questions, Honest Answers*⁸ has stirred up such anger, I now know that perhaps half of the human family believes that if God said something through his messengers, it should apply to all people at all times and in all places. And that's why the often technical task of "exegesis" can so easily erode faith, for exegesis requires that we interpret all inspired passages in time and place. The implications of that reality is something that we as a church need to grapple with more seriously.

And here Ellen White's relationship to the 1901 General Conference Session provides an illuminating illustration of the process of interpreting an inspired passage in time and place. It comes from correspondence with a brother who had, in fact, absolutized her statements about the General Conference. This was her response:

"Your course would have been the course to be pursued if no change had been made in the General Conference. *But a change has been made*, and many more changes will be made and great developments will be seen. No issues are to be forced. ... It hurts me to think that you are using words which I wrote prior to the Conference. Since the Conference, great changes have been made."⁹

Years later, at the 1909 General Conference Session, Ellen White addressed



Bewildered at the ABC

Editor's Note: Faithful readers of this column may wonder if the occasional colorful letters from correspondents have been fabricated. We will leave this to some scholar to pick over after his tenure is secure, but we definitely can state that the following heart cry from "Bewildered at the ABC" is an authentic email message, sent to the address in the box at the end of this column. That same scholar might want to ponder just how firmly in her cheek Bewildered's tongue was lodged. Dissertation topic?

Q: Dear Adventist Man: I have long enjoyed reading your insightful answers to many readers' questions. I too have a few pressing questions of my own, which I know that only you can answer. Help me, Adventist Man!!!!!! -Bewildered at the ABC

A: Pressing questions? Fear not, Bewildered. I personally iron my own cape. (By the way, exclamation marks will cost you a quarter apiece. We're scraping a few bucks together for David Newman's pastoral retirement gift.)

Q: I noticed in an Adventist Book Center that, besides the blessed Worthington and Loma Linda brands, there were other secular vegetarian products from Boca and Gardenburger. Should a special prayer be said over the secular meat substitutes?

this situation for the larger church:

"At times, when a small group of men entrusted with the general management of the work have, in the name of the General Conference, sought to carry out unwise plans and to restrict God's work, I have said that I could no longer regard the voice of the General Conference, represented by these few men, as the voice of God. But this is not saying that the decisions of a General Conference composed of an assembly of duly

Adventist Man

A SATIRICAL LOOK AT ADVENTIST LIFE

A: Ah, Bewildered, I thought you were asking about clothes ironing, when your subject is actually fake flesh food. My mistake. You're right, the following prayer should indeed be offered over all meat substitutes, sacred or secular:

Now I sit me down to eat
A substance that resembles meat.
If I should choke from all this tof-
u, wash it down with lentil loaf.

Q: Is it permissible to cook vegemeat in its own broth, or is the broth like to blood in Levitical Law?

A: The answer to this insightful question is found in the Indo-European language, called thus because it was the dialect the ancient Europeans spoke when "indo" (indoor—i.e., inside the hut). Because Indo-European featured less guttural screaming across tundra wastelands, it was more refined and reflective than Outdo'-European.

"Broth" is a corruption of the Indo-European "breath," a linguistic coincidence that has caused many a stunned etymologist to bathe his forehead in lab alcohol. The reason that "breath" became "broth" was that it was spoken through slabs of lentil loaf, to which Indo-Europeans were desperately addicted. "Breath," then, originally referred not to a brown savory sauce (which Indo-Europeans called guck) but to the very life, the very soul, of the food product.

Since that is the case, the "broth," or "breath" is indeed very like the blood, since life is in both blood and breath. This means, Bewildered, that your question collapses, because you technically can't cook anything in its own breath, unless you sneak up on this whole matter through the back alley of metaphysics.

appointed, representative men from all parts of the field should not be respected. God has ordained that the representatives of His church from all parts of the earth, when assembled in a General Conference, shall have authority."¹⁰

Our task today is to do all in our power to ensure that the General Conference Session is "representative." When it is, it deserves the confidence of the church.

¹ *General Conference Bulletin*, April 25, 1901, p. 457.

² Ellen G. White, letter to O.A. Olsen, Dec. 1, 1896,

Q: Is it acceptable to blend Roma or other coffee substitutes with coffee for a less caffeinated beverage, or is this a sacrilege?

A: Get a firm grip on your socks, Bewildered, because I am about to knock them off. Type "Roma" into Wikipedia. Notice the very first definition you see: "Rome, the capital of Italy, called Roma in Italian, Latin, and some other languages." Now do you see the terrible significance of your question? Listen to it again: "Is it acceptable to blend Roma (Rome), or other coffee substitutes with coffee ... ?" Bewildered, whatever your theological background, it ain't acceptable to blend Rome with anything.

Q: My in-laws are not vegetarians, and at times they bring meat of the beast rather than meat of the vegetation to cook at my home. Can I cook vegemeat and beast meat in the same pan, or should I provide separate cooking utensils and pans for my in-laws? Or should I even allow them to bring beast meat into my home? Should I give them instruction from Mrs. White on eating no meat of the beast?

A: Again, Bewildered, etymology flies to our rescue and makes everything simple. Fake meat, as you know is mock meat, and that makes vegemeat the "Mock of the Beast." Cook it in whatever pan you want to—just make sure you cook it hot enough.

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

EGW 1888 Materials, pp. 1621-1627.

³ *General Conference Bulletin*, April 12, 1901, p. 204.

⁴ White as cited in *General Conference Bulletin*, Vol. IV, Extra #1, April 3, 1901, pp. 24-26.

⁵ *ibid.*, p. 27.

⁶ *ibid.*

⁷ *General Conference Bulletin*, April 25, 1901, p. 457.

⁸ Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1991.

⁹ White, Letter 54, 1901, cited (with his emphasis added) by C.C. Crisler, *Organization: Its Character, Purpose, Place, and Development in the Seventh-day Adventist Church* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1938), p. 174.

¹⁰ White, *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 9 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1909), p. 260.

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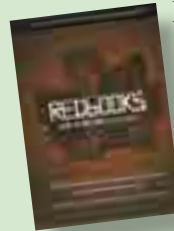


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