

A Charismatic in Search of a Message

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Apologetics and Apologies

By Loren Seibold

If you have followed the online versions of *Adventist Today* and its cousin publication, *Spectrum*, you have likely noticed comments such as these: “I can’t believe you people are really Seventh-day Adventists.” Or “What kind of Adventists would raise questions like this?” Or “How dare you criticize the church [doctrine, leader, policy, or decision]?”

There are many variations, but the essence is that *good* Seventh-day Adventists applaud only the traditional version of our shared faith, and every part of the organization that professes it; that even the most thoughtful critique, or the most undeniable but unwelcome fact, should never be voiced, much less written. That we should engage in nothing but the most banal and harmless apologetics characterizes modern Seventh-day Adventism across most of its range.

Beyond Apologetics

The use of this word root is different from its use when telling someone you’re sorry. *Apology* is admitting you were wrong, while *apologetics* is insisting you were right all along, even if on fairly thin evidence. Religious groups are more enthusiastic for the latter than the first, though both should be a part of our repertoire.

Of course, all of us rely upon apologetic arguments. When I preach to my congregations, I argue in every sermon that Jesus’ exemplary life, atoning death, and triumphant resurrection give us reason for hope.

What some don’t understand about publications such as these (by which I mean both *Adventist Today* and *Spectrum*—you may prefer one to the other, but we’re all friends and do similar work) is that our business isn’t confined to apologetics. Apologetics is ably attended to by the *Review*, *Signs of the Times*, and the Sabbath School Quarterly. By contrast, we’re addressing what those organs cannot, or will not. Here we’re opening windows and doors. We’re trying to hold both leaders and doctrines to account for the deeper truths of the gospel. We’re defending those whom the church has sometimes spurned. Guarding against cunningly devised fables. Trying to prevent the gospel from being sucked into and diluted by the

quite-different purposes of organized religion.

Because Seventh-day Adventists have officially had nothing but a century of apologetics, writing that questions old positions seems dangerous, destabilizing. It frightens people—and I understand that. One of the faults of the alternative Adventist press is that we haven’t always been as sensitive as we should be.

So here’s an honest and heartfelt apology. You might find something in our magazines and websites (I have surely been guilty) that takes on a bitter tone. I can make the excuse that this is because a generation of us felt deceived, ill-used. We grew up on certainties that turned out to be not at all certain, on threats and fears that made the blessed hope into a carnival freak show of beasts and popes and persecution, that made salvation in Christ into a discouraging perfectionism, that exalted Ellen White above Jesus and the church bureaucracy over congregations and communities.

Too often, in our disappointment with and anger at the church, we did our therapy in print. We might have tried harder to shape our faith in solid, defensible, meaningful ways, taking advantage of our shared culture and history to build a stronger faith community.

Questioners Needed

Yet it remains that if the early Adventists hadn’t asked any questions, we wouldn’t be Seventh-day Adventists today. William Miller wondered what the prophecies of Daniel 2, 8, and 9 meant. Ellen and James White asked why the churches around them didn’t take the second coming of Jesus seriously. Joseph Bates asked why so few were honoring the Saturday Sabbath. For a while we were at the leading edge of questioning and challenging.

Once we got an organization and a name, our focus seems to have shifted to apologetics. And we’re not unique in that. The fate of truth-seeking organizations is that, having invested in an identity, they lose the ability to seek truth. Where they were once on the offense for truth, they become strikingly defensive. Questions represent challenge and change,

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One of the faults of the alternative Adventist press is that we haven’t always been as sensitive as we should be.

FROM THE ARCHIVES

The first issue of Adventist Today was published in May of 1993. The editor, Raymond Cottrell, wrote an editorial recalling that our pioneers were open-minded and willing to ask questions, and that we should be, too—a philosophy Adventist Today still holds. Cottrell and his staff were planning the first magazine issue when agents from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives attempted a poorly planned raid on David Koresh's Branch Davidian compound. After a 51-day siege, the FBI launched an assault on April 19 that started the compound on fire, resulting in the deaths of many former Adventists. At a time when the Seventh-day Adventist Church was distancing itself from the Branch Davidians, Adventist Today editors bravely pointed to our common roots with Koresh and his followers and questioned the wisdom of the church's public relations campaign.



Welcome to Adventist Today

The pioneers of the Seventh-day Adventist Church were open-minded men and women, open to new vistas of the everlasting gospel appropriate for their time. Open-mindedness is a prime requisite for becoming a bona fide Seventh-day Adventist, and no less for continuing growth as a dedicated admirer of Jesus Christ. Surely we do not want people to close their minds once they become members of the church. Closed minds will never complete the gospel commission.

Adventist Today aspires to follow the open-minded tradition of the pioneers. Open-mindedness means openness toward one another and willingness to listen to one another attentively, perceptively, amenably. What a joy membership in the Seventh-day Adventist Church can be if there is full and complete openness in such matters as our corporate quest for an ever more perfect and complete understanding of God's Word, relationships between church leaders and the membership of the church, and the conduct of church affairs!

Adventist Today is a response to the widespread conviction that the church needs an open and straightforward

medium of communication such as this journal aspires to be—a place where all segments and age groups can find common ground and share their aspirations and concerns for the church in forthright, responsible dialogue.

Adventist Today is primarily a news journal that aspires to present the information thoughtful members of the church need in order to form a mature, accurate, and equitable understanding of matters of concern to the church in North America. There will also be a responsible expression of opinion about matters of current interest and concern.

Recent events in Waco, Texas, have altered our original plans for this, the first issue of *Adventist Today*. In order to make room for the cluster of articles on this topic—certainly one of major concern to the entire church—it has been necessary to reschedule some features originally intended for this issue. ...

Proponents of alternative points of view on these subjects have been invited to share their perspective of the facts. *Adventist Today* will be the convenor and moderator, and our readers will be the jury.

Welcome aboard!

RAYMOND COTTRELL

EX-ADVENTISTS AT MT. CARMEL

PR PROBLEM OR LEARNING OPPORTUNITY?

Enjoy this reprint of the first editorial from Adventist Today's premier issue, a thought-provoking piece that remains relevant 25 years after it first appeared in print.

THE ADVENTIST CHURCH CAN TAKE AT least two approaches to the Waco incident. First, it can handle the situation as a PR problem. This approach is understandable and in many ways appropriate—and well underway. The church hired a crisis management firm to devise a strategy. Officials from the church have spoken of damage control and the need to “play down the Adventist connection,” and the Southern California Conference has attempted to restrict church-member contact with the media by sending out a directive to all of its congregations.

Second, the church can seek to learn from the Waco incident. Such a response may be more involved than merely shoring up public relations, but it is no less important. The following cluster of essays offers perspectives that may help in this learning process.

Some will say that what happened in Texas has nothing to do with the Seventh-day Adventist church, since this Waco cult was merely a “branch” or an “offshoot” of a group that split from the church over 60 years ago. True, the Branch Davidians developed out of the Shepherd's Rod movement—a movement started in the 1930s by relatively few Seventh-day Adventists. However, in addition to this historical connection, the Branch Davidians have had ongoing connection to the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

David Koresh, the notorious Branch Davidian leader, was reared as a Seventh-day Adventist in Dallas and was a baptized member before joining the self-named Branch Davidian Seventh-day Adventists. Ninety percent of Koresh's followers are former Seventh-day Adventists, according to Marc Breault, a recent master's graduate in religion from Loma Linda University who for a time was a member of the Branch Davidians.

David Koresh actively recruited in Adventist centers, including Loma Linda; Honolulu; Sydney, Australia; and Bracknell, England. In England, one former Adventist pastor and four Newbold College theology students accepted Koresh's perspective, claims Breault.

Many Branch Davidians continue to adhere to traditional Adventist emphases, such as healthful living and Saturday Sabbath observance. Their notoriety has come from their interest in prophetic interpretation and belief in the imminent ending of the world—ideas hardly alien to Adventism.

Before Koresh developed the religious ideas for which he is now notorious, he attracted the interest of a number of traditional Adventists precisely because of his command of extensive passages from the Bible and Ellen White's writings. Unusual interpretations of obscure Bible texts have led Koresh to claim to be the modern David—even Jesus Christ—and to believe in a biblical warrant for active and violent cleansing of the world.

The Seventh-day Adventist denomination wisely disavowed the Shepherd's Rod movement long ago. The denomination abhors the tragedy at Mt. Carmel. Nevertheless, several questions deserve serious attention in the aftermath of Waco:

—Are there elements in the popular Adventist belief system that lend themselves to warped exploitation by charismatic leaders?

—Does the church's emphasis on the “imminence” of God's kingdom need to be re-evaluated?

—What type of Biblical interpretation (a “proof-text” approach or a historical-contextual perspective) is more or less likely to foster idiosyncratic beliefs?

—What concrete steps should the denomination take to help its members avoid the allure of any number of Adventist “fundamentalisms” that offer simple answers to complex issues?

—What is the relationship between personal psychology and religious belief?

—How could committed, sometimes highly educated church members opt for Koresh's line of belief?

These are at least some of the questions raised by the Mt. Carmel episode. Because of the considerable Adventist connection, we believe that the denomination would do well to appoint a high-level study commission to examine the Koresh phenomenon and make recommendations. **AT**

—THE EDITORS

The Birth of *Adventist Today*

BY JIM WALTERS

THE IDEA OF *ADVENTIST TODAY* WAS CONCEIVED IN EARLY 1992. Ervin Taylor, a professor of anthropology at the University of California in Riverside, had expressed interest in founding a journal that could compete with the theologically conservative *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, which had begun publication in 1990. His initial idea was for an annual scholarly publication, and he shared this dream with several of us who were fellow members of the Sabbath Seminar, a Sabbath School class at Loma Linda University Church.

At the time, I'd been a professor in the LLU School of Religion for 12 years. I immediately saw value in Erv's idea of a new, independent Adventist publication. *Spectrum* magazine had just published a profile on David B. Hinshaw, then the influential dean of Loma Linda University's School of Medicine. I recall observing to a colleague that Hinshaw was a more colorful figure than portrayed in *Spectrum*. This contributed to my agreement with Erv that a second independent journal could be helpful. Since I'd majored in communications as well as theology in college, I was interested in being part of such a project.

Although *Spectrum* may have fumbled a bit on the Hinshaw piece, it had long been doing well at publishing scholarly articles

Adventist Today Highlights

THE LAUNCH. We mailed the initial issue (May-June 1993) to some 40,000 church members in the North American Division. Editor Raymond Cottrell and his staff used his denominational reputation in our

publication for a year or two, some 25 percent discontinued.

EARLY FUNDING. To get initial funds to launch *Adventist Today*, we organized meetings—usually on Friday night or Sabbath afternoon—at the homes of several of our early supporters. Typically, a supporter in a geographic concentration of Adventist members in Southern California would invite 20 or 30 people whom we thought would be interested in knowing what *Adventist Today* was and had to offer. At these meetings Raymond Cottrell would usually describe

the magazine conceptually, while I'd speak of our financial need. Four such meetings were hosted

by Missy and Richard Rouhe, in Riverside; Jackie and Jim Henneberg, in Pasadena; Karen and Bob Torrey, in Loma

Linda; and Judy and Gordon Rick, in the San Diego area.

SUBSIDIZED SUBSCRIPTIONS. We knew from the beginning that this magazine would not be self-funding and that we needed contributions. In the first several years, subscriptions covered some 60 percent of the costs of publication—payment for publication, fundraising, and a full-time office manager. For a few years, a couple of the founder-families actually donated \$5,000 annually for the opportunity to work on *Adventist Today*!



1,900, where it stayed for several years. I surmise that many church members were initially attracted by the Cottrell name and didn't know exactly what *Adventist Today* would be like. After they had received



that met the need Erv was sensing—and continues to do superb work. At the time, I suggested that the most urgent need in the Adventist free press was for a more popular journal with articles no more than three pages long; after all, you don't have to be eternal to be profound. Another concern—a pastoral one in those pre-Internet days—was that perhaps thousands of educated, widely read church members were frustrated with the sanitized news from the official church organs. They had bigger questions about Adventist theology and practice, and they felt that they were alone.

Erv Taylor and I may have emerged as the most active proponents of starting a new independent magazine, but other Sabbath Seminar class members who joined in were John Jones, Keith Colburn, and Donna Evans. They and a few others met several times on Sabbath afternoons for brainstorming sessions at the Colburn family's mountain home in Oak Glen, near Loma Linda.

One of our first steps was to draft the legendary Raymond F. Cottrell as editor. (Read Richard Coffen's portrait of Cottrell in this issue.) After a distinguished career in Adventist higher education at Pacific Union College in the 1940s, followed by

service as a leading editor for the new *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* and as associate editor for the *Adventist Review*, Ray had retired in the Loma Linda area. He had continued to shake up the status quo by writing articles and speaking at Adventist Forum chapters. Ray readily accepted the editorship, with assurance that his role would be to help shape *Adventist Today's* vision and determine its content, while others would oversee marketing, fundraising, editing, printing, and distribution.

In the early years, Erv Taylor served as either board chair or board secretary/treasurer. I served at various times as associate editor, executive editor, publisher, and board chair. Others who supported Ray were Cherie Rouse and Colleen Moore Tinker as managing editors at different times, and Hanan Sadek as office manager. The division of responsibilities worked very well until Ray decided to devote himself to unfinished writing projects. Soon thereafter his health began to decline. Ray served as editor from May 1993 until August 1997 and then as editor emeritus until his death in January 2003.

We considered a variety of names for the new magazine. I polled 20 medical students in my ethics class on several potential magazine names. *Adventist Today* was the clear favorite. *Adventist*

WEBSITE. In 1998 board member John Vogt donated \$5,000 for the establishment of an *Adventist Today* website. Sensing



that the Internet was the communication wave of the future, we set up a site with help from Greg Billock, an Internet-savvy Adventist student at Cal Tech. At first we

posted news articles, and soon afterward we added past issues of the magazine.

DAVID KORESH. The initial issue of *Adventist Today*, May/June 1993, was supposed to focus on how different generations of church members—teens, twenty-somethings, Baby Boomers, and senior members—view their church. However, a few months before the inaugural issue was published, David Koresh clashed with federal and state agents in Waco, Texas. So the magazine's cover featured the drawing of a robust Koresh, with a 3-inch-wide bullet belt slung over his shoulder, holding a huge Bible simulating a machine gun. "Religion and the Waco Cult" headlined a section of five articles on the topic.

MAGAZINE'S MISSION. In the introductory issue, Raymond Cottrell

editorialized that *Adventist Today* "is primarily a news journal that aspires to present the information thoughtful members of the church need in order to form a mature, accurate, and equitable understanding of matters of concern to the church in North America." Accordingly, the magazine's masthead read, in part: "The purpose of *Adventist Today* is to report and discuss contemporary issues of importance to Adventist members. Following the basic principles of ethics and canons of journalism, this publication strives for fairness, candor, and good taste." That sentence about ethics and journalism continues to appear on the masthead of each issue of *Adventist Today*.

BOARD CHAIRS AND STAFF. I served as the first board chair (for 18 months), and then Erv Taylor assumed board leadership

Today was chosen to convey a contemporary Adventism; in contrast to the implications of the backward-pointing word “review” in *Adventist Review*, we would confront the challenges and interests of *today’s* Adventist members.

In early 1997 a pastor from the Pacific Northwest, John McLarty, knocked on my LLU office door. John admired

The name *Adventist Today* was chosen to convey a contemporary Adventism ... [and show that] we would confront the challenges and interests of today’s Adventist members.

Adventist Today and what it was doing in the denomination. Since Ray Cottrell was slowing down, the board appointed John as editor. With the Internet coming of age, it was possible for John to assume editorship while remaining at his parish in Tacoma, Washington. Ray and I dearly loved our church, but because of the often-controversial topics the publication

covered, and the way Ray’s and my writing styles sometimes didn’t adequately convey our immense appreciation for our church, I realized that the magazine’s image was suffering. John likewise loved the church, and he was able to convey his passion to every reader without sacrificing the power and directness of the content. John went on to become *Adventist Today’s* longest-serving editor (1997-2007).

Preparation for launching *Adventist Today* in May 1993 took about a year. Although initial setup took considerable effort, I recall thinking that there was a pretty good chance *Adventist Today* would fail—for any number of reasons. On the other hand, it could succeed, and we would have the challenge of the proverbial tiger-by-the-tail situation. Maintaining *Adventist Today* as a quality ministry has been and continues to be a challenge. We’re thankful for Monte Sahlin, who as a topflight entrepreneurial and journalistic churchman has led the organization in becoming so much more than a magazine.

Never before has Adventism needed a free press as it does today, in an era when differing views on church authority and women’s ordination are polarizing the denomination. Without an independent Adventist press, we would surely be an immensely different denomination—and a less-informed one. **AT**

for three years. Doug Schultz took the position in 1998, and then I again served as chair until early 2000, when I was facing burnout. At that time, *Adventist Today* was rescued when longtime board member Elwin Dunn stepped forward to assume leadership, a post he held with distinction for nearly nine years (2000-2008). Larry Downing (2008-2010) and Clive Holland (2010-2011) served as board chairs before Nathan Schilt (2012-present) took the helm. Two staff persons who gave particularly important service are office manager Hanan Sadek (1996-2009) and development director Edwin Schwisow (2005-2018).

EDITORIAL VISION. Editors of the magazine have included founding editor Raymond F. Cottrell (1993-1997); our longest-serving editor, John McLarty (1997-2007); former *Ministry* magazine editor J. David Newman (2009-2015);

and current editor Loren Seibold (2015-present). In addition to myself, others who have served as editor for short periods are Ervin Taylor, Andy Nash, and Monte Sahlin.



Raymond Cottrell
1993-1997



John McLarty
1997-2007



Ervin Taylor
2007



Andy Nash
2008-2009



J. David Newman
2009-2015



Monte Sahlin
2015



Loren Seibold
2016-Present



WHERE ARE WE AFTER A QUARTER-CENTURY?

BY MONTE SAHLIN

IN 1993 WHEN THE FIRST ISSUE OF THIS magazine came out, the global Adventist population was estimated at 25 million people and had just begun to catch the attention of scholars who study religions.¹

Adventists were shocked to find that a fundamentalist splinter group was willing to get into a shooting war with authorities outside of Waco, Texas, which ended tragically with at least 85 deaths following a siege that drew the focus of international media for 51 days.

By the early 1990s, much of the overt conflict from the 1980 Glacier View meeting and the reactions to the critique put forward by the widely respected Adventist Bible scholar Dr. Desmond Ford

had subsided. A number of pastors had left the denomination, and an unknown number of members had also dropped out, although the official membership totals continued to grow.

Many educated Adventists felt the need for a more grace-oriented and progressive faith—one less tied to traditional interpretations of apocalyptic passages in Scripture. There was a strong sense that it was still important to be Adventist and to embrace the hope of Christ's return, but that a dogmatic focus on "prophecy" led to extreme positions. The events in Waco proved how dangerous that could be, especially when mixed with an egocentric leader and blind dedication.

How far have we come in the quarter-century since? What has changed? What remains the same? Is God leading in this journey, or is something else going on?

Today there is definitely a greater focus on a more grace-oriented faith,

at least in North America, Europe, and Australia. The Adventist faith has become less sectarian and more international. A similar trend has developed in Africa, Asia, and Latin America as a larger and larger percentage of the Adventists in the Southern Hemisphere attain some higher education, move to the cities, and find employment in the new economy there.

Perhaps the largest development of the last 25 years is a shift of the center of gravity in Christendom from the global north to the global south.² The Adventist denomination is in the middle of this global shift; Africa, Asia, and Latin America have become home to the large majority of Adventists, while a decreasing, small percentage are found in Europe and

North America—less than 7 percent in 2018. The change has been so dramatic that many church administrators think that our current General Conference (GC) president will likely be the last American to hold that position.

The decline of Christian faith is most dramatic in Europe, yet recent polls in the United States show significant growth in the percentage of “Nones” (people who prefer no religion), especially among young adults. In 1990, 86 percent of Americans identified themselves

brings new challenges and opportunities. These include finding “employment for the millions of energetic young people ... new converts [who are] poor, uneducated, hungry, and orphaned.”⁴ The Adventist Church must include economic development along with health and education as essential parts of its mission. The denomination must also educate more pastors to provide spiritual care, maturing the vast numbers of new converts. And it must learn to co-exist with vigorous world religions beyond Christianity.

repeated waves of the Valuegenesis study results, which have shown the impact of Adventist schools, families, and congregations on children growing up in the faith. It has become clear that the majority of children born into Adventist homes will not be active church members by the time they reach their mid-20s, although many more will continue to carry some kind of Adventist identity.

The term “cultural Adventist” has become a new label. It relates to the reality that someone who is raised as an

AFRICA, ASIA, AND LATIN AMERICA HAVE BECOME HOME TO THE LARGE MAJORITY OF ADVENTISTS WHILE A DECREASING, SMALL PERCENTAGE ARE FOUND IN EUROPE AND NORTH AMERICA—LESS THAN 7 PERCENT IN 2018.

as Christians, but two decades later it was down to 75 percent. The Adventist Church has found it difficult to adapt to this new reality, as some pastors and congregations try new approaches while other Adventists hold to traditional methods, decrying any innovation.

A 2015 article in *Christianity Today* identified the Adventist Church as one of the fastest-growing denominations in the world,³ and the largest portion of this growth is in Africa. During the last 25 years, Africa has become the new center of the Adventist denomination, and this

For the first time in the history of the denomination, we saw a GC president forced to resign because of questions about his business ethics. Robert S. Folkenberg resigned on Feb. 8, 1999, after a committee at denominational headquarters examined a lawsuit filed by an entrepreneur in California. On March 1 a church administrator from Europe was elected GC president, which was another first. Dr. Jan Paulsen, a Norwegian, had been a missionary in Africa, seminary professor, college president, and chairman of the board for Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA).

We have learned much from the 10-year longitudinal study of Adventist young people directed by Dr. Roger Dudley at the Institute of Church Ministry at Andrews University, as well as the

Adventist has the imprint of a subculture regardless of his or her doctrinal beliefs or spiritual journey. Although used as a negative appellation by traditionalists, it is a more positive notion for a larger number—those with a lifelong moral vision and sense of hope, regardless of their current involvement with the Adventist organization or theology.

I will declare my bias right here. I am a fourth-generation Adventist who has given my entire life to serving the denomination. The last requirement that I completed toward my Master Guide pin was to turn 16. I spent my college years organizing the Adventist Collegiate Taskforce (ACT) summer urban ministries program. I have worked at every level of the denomination, from local pastor to GC staff. I have also seen the denomination from the outside, due to my involvement with many community

organizations over the years and then becoming executive secretary of the interfaith Cooperative Congregational Studies Partnership.

I am a fully devoted Adventist, pragmatic about our strengths and weaknesses as well as clear that God is not limited to one organization to achieve His purposes. I believe that over the past 25 years, we have matured as a faith community. We have become less sectarian and more cosmopolitan. The tragedy of Waco that filled the first issue of *Adventist Today* probably marked the low point of sectarian Adventism, and (thank God) we have come a long way since that sad day.

The denomination has recognized the most significant social trend of our era: urbanization. Over the past two decades, the missionary strategy of the denomination has refocused on the cities. This is where the majority of the world's population now lives. The developing nations are urbanizing at a rapid rate, and urbanization means profound change in the culture and religion of these countries, just as it has for those that became primarily urban in the first half of the 20th century. Although official denominational journals are careful how they report on these projects, significant innovations are underway by local Adventist ministries in metropolitan areas around the world. Some people still see the Adventist faith in terms of its original rural, 19th-century context, but others are beginning to envision it in a new 21st-century urban frame.

We have come to see Adventists play an increasingly important role in many developing countries. In 2009 Pastor Patrick Allen, the union conference president in Jamaica, was appointed Governor General by Queen Elizabeth, and in 2016 an Adventist named Andrew

Holness was elected prime minister in that Caribbean nation.

A political crisis in New Guinea in 2012 and another in Kenya in 2017 revealed the degree to which Adventist professionals play key roles in these nations. In both of these constitutional crises, Adventists held key government positions on the opposing sides. In a class I was teaching, a student from one of these countries told me that “they could settle this over fellowship dinner after church,” because key officials attended the same congregation.

The number of women serving as clergy has more than doubled in North America over the past 25 years, although they still make up a small percentage of the total. One woman has been elected a conference president, although the GC seeks to hide this fact by refusing to publish her name in the *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*. Throughout the world thousands of women are now serving as local elders, a role that for Adventists has always been a part of the ordained category.

One issue has become a primary marker for change in the Adventist denomination: the ordination of women. It has roots as far back as 1881, but it came back on the denomination's contemporary agenda in the 1970s, and by 1993 it was a full-fledged topic of debate. The 1990 GC Session had decided not to authorize the ordination of women clergy, with the specific understanding that it was an issue of “unity,” not Scripture or doctrine. At the same time, it specifically authorized the ordination of women as local elders, underlining the ambiguity of the stand.

Adventist Today has carefully reported the complex back-and-forth over this

issue since that time. The reality behind of all the nuance and noise is the question of whether tradition or Bible will be the basis for Adventist belief and practice. On three occasions over the decades, the GC has appointed a panel of Bible scholars who have each time reported that there is no Scripture mandate to prohibit the ordination of women. But a majority of delegates at GC Sessions have continued to vote for a traditional role limitation for women. As we approach 175 years since the Adventist movement began, such votes may not be surprising. This is how tradition becomes established in a religion and, eventually, more authoritative than the Bible.

We are at a turning point in the history of the Adventist movement. Will we continue to be faithful to a heritage that is inclusive, compassionate, progressive, hopeful and Christ-centered? Or will we allow tradition to supplant this free-church heritage, as have so many other Christian denominations? It is even more important today than it was 25 years ago to provide an independent source of journalism and commentary on current developments in the Adventist faith. **AT**

¹ This number is based on the work of scholars who study the demographics of religions, not the official membership statistics of the denomination. Official membership numbers do not include children too young to be baptized or the significant number of adults who tell the census and poll interviewers that they consider themselves Adventists.

² See Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom* (2011).

³ Sarah Eekhoff Zylstra, “The Season of Adventists,” *Christianity Today*, Vol. 59, No. 1 (January-February 2015) p. 18.

⁴ Christopher R. Mwashinga, “Global South Christianity and Adventism,” *Andrews University Seminary Student Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (Spring 2016), p. 49.

A PROFILE of ADVENTIST TODAY'S FIRST EDITOR, RAYMOND F. COTTRELL

By Richard W. Coffen



IN 1970 I ABANDONED THE SOCIETY OF Seventh-day Adventist pastors and entered the domain of denominational editors. I “saw giants there”—Kenneth Holland, Roland Hegstad, Julia Neuffer, Don Neufeld, Merwin Thurber, Kenneth Wood, and Raymond Cottrell—and next to them I felt like a grasshopper (see Num. 13:33, NLT).

All were outstanding professional role models. But I especially admired Ray Cottrell, with whom I became personally acquainted when he was a book editor for the Review and Herald Publishing Association. I felt awed by the breadth of his biblical knowledge. He left “footprints on the sands of time” of this denomination, as the American poet Longfellow said:

Footprints, that perhaps another,
Sailing o’er life’s solemn main, ...
Seeing, shall take heart again.¹

Ray was the founding editor of *Adventist Today*, and those who were part of creating this journal agree that his keen mind and editorial judgment set its course and made the magazine, as well as the organization that publishes it, what it is today.

Ray’s Heritage

Ray was born in Los Angeles, California, on Apr. 21, 1911. He was a fourth-generation Seventh-day Adventist, although further back his ancestry contained Albigensian and Seventh-day Baptist heritage. His great-grandfather, Roswell Fenner Cottrell (1814-1892), wrote for our denominational papers during the late 1800s and early 1900s. That R. F. Cottrell penned 20 published poems, including “It’s Jewish,” which defended the ongoing celebration of the seventh-day Sabbath among Christians. I remember that my dad, Pastor George A. Coffen, used this poem in his evangelistic meetings.

Ray’s first job for the church was as principal of an academy in San Bernardino. Later he went back to earn B.A. and M.A. degrees from Pacific Union College. An insatiable appetite for knowledge prompted Ray to learn six languages (among them Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek), master the principles of serious biblical research, and study geology, astronomy, and cosmology. Ray was never able to pursue his academic goal of earning a doctorate in biblical studies; however, in 1972 Andrews University awarded him an honorary doctorate degree.

While serving in Arizona as a ministerial intern, Ray was singing Christmas carols during Harvest Ingathering and having a hard time reading the music in the darkness. Elizabeth Landis solved the problem by shining her flashlight onto the music, and that initial acquaintance developed into a lifelong admiration. Ray and Elizabeth were married in 1932, and their union continued until her death, a few months short of their 70th anniversary.

A Man for His Time

Ray enjoyed an astonishingly varied career. He was a pastor in the Pacific Union (1930-1934), a missionary to Manchuria, China (1934-1941), a teacher at Adventist academies (1941-1945), an instructor of biblical exegesis at Pacific Union College (1945-1952), associate editor of the multivolume *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* series (1952-1957), associate editor of the *Adventist Review* (1957-1964), associate book editor at the Review and Herald Publishing Association (1964-1971), member of the Biblical Study Committee, adjunct faculty member of Loma Linda University, and special consultant for the Southeastern California Conference and the General Conference (1977-2003).

While at Pacific Union College, Ray cofounded the Bible Research Fellowship (BRF), though the organization was disbanded after General Conference President W. H. Branson grew suspicious of its intent. It remained dormant for years but was later reincarnated as today’s Biblical Research Institute (BRI). Ray suggested that it seek the guidance and monitoring of the General Conference, an idea that received official approval by the General Conference Committee in 1952. Later iterations of the organization include the Adventist Society for Religious Studies (ASRS), which continues to meet yearly in conjunction with annual meetings of the Society of Biblical Literature and American Academy of Religion. The Adventist Theological Society, which spun off from ASRS in 1988, attracts scholars who share a more conservative perspective.

Lasting Legacy

In the early 1950s, F. D. Nichol, editor of the *Adventist Review*, invited Ray to join him and Don Neufeld to produce the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (SDABC) series. This is arguably the most significant contribution Ray made to the church. He estimated that he invested more than 15,000 hours of study, personally writing 2,000 pages of the series. With his editorial

work, he probably contributed more than any other writer. He also wrote many entries for the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary* and the *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*.

Ray is especially remembered for a pivotal concept of Adventist theology: conditional prophecy. For Volume 4 of the commentary, he wrote a singular essay, “The Role of Israel in Old Testament Prophecy,” in which he developed the idea that Old Testament prophecies, including the messianic promises, were dependent upon the response of the Jewish people. The influence of this essay, which made sense of otherwise troubling prophecies, has been immeasurable for Seventh-day Adventists.²

As an editor for the SDABC, the *Adventist Review*, and other books, Ray’s lifelong aim was to encourage Adventists to lay aside careless methods of studying Scripture. He urged all who wish to take seriously God’s Word to adopt valid exegetical principles by utilizing the growing mass of scholarly knowledge of original biblical languages, immediate literary context, and the larger historical and social contexts.

Ray himself practiced intense discipline in Bible study. He once told me that he had memorized the entire Hebrew/Aramaic text of the book of Daniel. He’d repeat the text to himself as he took his daily walks, during which he’d mentally analyze the grammar and syntax. He later wrote a manuscript based on his study of Daniel.

In addition, he personally studied and wrote about the meaning of the Hebrew sanctuary, biblical eschatology, the biblical basis for church structure and governance, the importance of the role of women in all levels of the denomination, the interrelationship of theology and science, and the legitimate use of Ellen White’s writings.

Although I could never approach Ray’s level of scholarship, his solid exegetical approach appealed to me as something I would try to emulate in my own life.

Glacier View Committee

In August of 1980 at the infamous Glacier View “trial” of Desmond Ford, both Ray and I were among the official 129 invitees. We met unofficially and largely surreptitiously with a small group of like-minded friends during the noon breaks. We’d talk about what was said during the morning breakout sessions and what we might say—if anything—during the afternoon plenary sessions, then we would close with prayer for divine guidance.

Ray carried a pack of index cards at these crucial meetings. He’d learned shorthand at the urging of his father and was taking shorthand notes of everything said. (Somewhere those index cards are catalogued and waiting for a researcher!) The afternoon discussions were taped, but GC President Neal C. Wilson ordered that the tapes be locked up in the GC archives, unavailable to researchers.

Ray later wrote: “The meeting of the Glacier View Sanctuary

Review Committee ... Aug. 10-15, 1980, was the most important event of this nature in Adventist history since the 1888 General Conference in Minneapolis.”³ Adventist historians will have to decide whether or not he exaggerated.

Adventist Today and Other Accomplishments

Along with Walter Specht, New Testament scholar from Loma Linda University, Ray agreed in 1983 to a request from the General Conference to assess Ellen White’s use of sources in *The Desire of Ages*. The following year, Ray prepared for the Association of Adventist Forums an in-depth analysis of the structure and governance of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in comparison and contrast with 11 other American denominations.

During 1992, Ray joined with Keith Colburn, Richard Hammill, Ervin Taylor, and Jim Walters (all members of the same Sabbath school class in Loma Linda, California), to brainstorm the idea of creating a journal that would be thoroughly Adventist in spirit but would remain independent of official organizational control. For a while, Ray himself edited the newborn publication. Within five years, the paid circulation had escalated to nearly 2,500 subscribers who lived in more than 12 nations. Since its origin 25 years ago, *Adventist Today* has gained respect for its progressive stance and its willingness to report denominational news not addressed in the pages of the *Adventist Review*.⁴

In 1996, Ray served on the Gender Inclusiveness Commission established by the Southeastern California Conference. His insights from scriptural exegesis provided guidance for those who wrote the monographs read before that Commission.

During retirement in Southern California, Ray read 12 papers at the San Diego chapter of the Adventist Forum. His final paper on Feb. 9, 2002, was titled “The ‘Sanctuary Doctrine’: Asset or Liability?”

Even in retirement, Ray continued doing what he loved—teaching, writing, editing, and lecturing—until his final months. He died during his 90th year, on Jan. 12, 2003.

I found Ray’s biblical knowledge and willingness to pioneer untraditional and even unpopular ideas to be extremely encouraging. He could remain a committed SDA employee while pushing back the frontiers of his own mind and that of others. On one occasion Ray and I were riding alone in an elevator at the publishing house. I commented about the lack of progressive thought on the part of Seventh-day Adventist Church leaders. “We young Turks are getting impatient,” I said. Ray replied without hesitation: “So are we old Turks!”

Raymond Cottrell was to me a ray of hope. **AT**

¹ Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, “A Psalm of Life,” originally published in 1838.

² Richard W. Coffin, “Seventh-day Adventists, Conditional Prophecy, and Free Will,” *Adventist Today*, Vol. 25, No. 4 (Fall 2017), pp. 11-13.

³ Raymond F. Cottrell, “The Sanctuary Review Committee and Its New Consensus,” *Spectrum*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (November 1980), p. 2.

⁴ See atoday.org/history-of-adventist-today



An Interview with *Adventist Today* Columnist Alden Thompson

Alden Thompson began writing for Adventist Today when it was established in 1993, and his regular column in this magazine has been a much-anticipated feature since 2004. Loren Seibold, Adventist Today's Executive Editor and a former student of Dr. Thompson, queried him about his spiritual development, teaching career, and writing.

You've been my teacher and friend for many years, yet I've never asked about your family, spiritual, and educational heritage.

I am a fourth-generation Adventist, a product of Adventist education until my doctoral studies at the University of Edinburgh. Edinburgh was a significant first step outside the Adventist cocoon, a transformative event for me.

Three early memories have shaped my life, stories from when my father taught at our school in Medellin, Colombia, until we returned to the States when I was age 4.

My parents told me that I contracted trenchmouth, a deadly tropical disease. I was near death when the church held a special prayer session, and the Lord intervened.

I also remember my mother telling the story of an emergency landing in a DC-3 when we were returning from Bogota. The weather closed in on us, and a sandspit briefly opened up in the middle of the river. Miraculously, the pilot was able to ditch the plane just in the nick of time. My mother reported that I asked: "Where is the sidewalk to the airport?"

Our home at the school bordered on the property of a wealthy Catholic rancher who was contesting the school's use of a well adjacent to his land. While the courts were sorting things out, Señor Restrepo hid in the bushes outside our window with his loaded gun aimed at the place where Climaco Joya, a young ministerial student, would come to turn on the pump at midnight, as per the court-approved arrangements. I remember hearing Restrepo's angry shouts and feeling afraid. He later died after his wife accidentally gave him the poison he had purchased to put in our well.

Those stories left their mark on my soul.

What led you to study for ministry, and then enter teaching?

My father was a physician, but I couldn't stand the sight of blood so was prevented from studying medicine. J. Paul Grove, the teacher to whom I dedicated my book *Inspiration*, held a week of prayer at Upper Columbia Academy when I was a student there. That week pointed me in the direction of ministry.

While a student at Walla Walla College, I was Grove's reader for three years.

After graduation, I served as a pastor at Redlands and then Fontana in the Southeastern California Conference. Each year Grove would call to ask if I would be willing to become a faculty member at Walla Walla College (WWC). I told him that I didn't want to abandon the pulpit for the classroom. But in the third year, Robert Reynolds, WWC president, phoned me.

"I would prefer to continue with my work here for one more year," I told him.

"But we need you this fall," he responded. I joined the faculty in 1970 and have been here ever since.

Everyone has life events, whether joyous or tragic, that have been hinges or turning points.

Certainly Wanda's health situation looms largest on our horizon. In 1979 in Scotland, she contracted what was probably viral encephalitis. That was overlaid with Lyme disease, bequeathed to her by a tick in Germany in 1980, though not diagnosed until seven years later. The end result is that she has very limited energy, and I have way too much.

But out of this trauma, blessings emerged. A fairly average marriage has turned into a thing of beauty as we have learned to talk things through with a better perception of the other's needs and desires. Later a doctor suggested that Wanda find something meaningful to do that didn't require so much energy. Because she'd always enjoyed art, on "doctor's orders" she embarked on a B.A. degree in fine arts. The fruit of her art education has emerged in the seven art-and-reflections page dividers in the new edition of *Inspiration* and will also be displayed in full color in her own book, which will probably be off the press by the time this article appears. *Reflections on Scripture, Dandelions, and Sparrows* is published by Energion, the same publisher of the current editions of my books *Who's Afraid of the Old Testament God?* and *Inspiration*.

Other major turning points include my four years as academic dean at Walla Walla, a time of pain and impossible challenges. But I learned a great deal.

Central to my writing have been our experiences in Scotland and Germany. In Scotland, my eyes were opened to the effects of culture, and I began to realize why the Old Testament is the way it is. Typically Americans adapt much more quickly to change. The Scots were more likely to say, “We don’t do it that way here”—discussion ended!—so if we wanted to make changes at all, they had to come very slowly. I sensed the challenge God faced in dealing with the people of the Old Testament: if he wanted to win them instead of bullying them, he would have to be very patient.

If Scotland opened my eyes to culture, our experience at Seminar Marienhöhe in Darmstadt, Germany, where I was an exchange teacher for a year, opened my eyes to differences in temperament. Germans were and are intense. Americans keep looking for an easier way to do things. Germans simply rely on strength and energy.

Besides your family and Wanda, to whom do you owe the greatest debts for your theological and spiritual development?

Two Walla Walla teachers, J. Paul Grove and Richard Litke, loom large in my story. As for authors, Ellen White and C. S. Lewis have played key roles.

When I finished my doctoral studies, I knew that if I were to make my study of the Old Testament useful to the church, I would have to become more familiar with my own Adventist heritage. So I set myself the task of reading through all nine volumes of the *Testimonies for the Church*, which cover the years 1855 to 1909. I had tried to read the *Testimonies* a few times in my younger years—I was a very devout teenager—but had never gotten very far. I hadn’t discarded them, but neither had I found them meaningful. Once I had the model in mind that I had developed during my doctoral studies, however (i.e., a move from fear and external motivation to joy and internal motivation), I was ready to roll.

It didn’t take me long to discover why I hadn’t been able to read the *Testimonies*: the smoke almost comes curling up from the early volumes. “The dreadful frown” on the face of Christ,¹ which young Ellen had seen in vision, frightened her. There’s also this 1856 passage: “God will have a people separate and distinct from the world. And as soon as any have a desire to imitate the fashions of the world, that they do not immediately subdue, just so soon God ceases to acknowledge them as His children.”²

Ellen White herself grew in grace and understanding through the years. Some of my conservative Adventist colleagues are deeply troubled by the growth model, but I don’t know of any other way to account for the dramatic changes in Ellen White’s perspective (or, for that matter, the striking contrasts between the two Testaments of Scripture).

Take her description of John the Baptist’s experience. In 1858 she wrote: “John’s life was without pleasure. It was sorrowful and self-denying.”³ But in 1897 she said that “he enjoyed his life of

simplicity.”⁴ The first time I shared that contrast in class, one of my students quipped: “You mean the more Ellen White enjoyed her walk with the Lord the more John the Baptist enjoyed his!” Precisely. Our view of God shapes the stories we tell. And a better story is just one step ahead of each of us. In Ellen White’s view, such growth will continue throughout eternity: “Every faculty will be developed, every capacity increased.”⁵

What is the church’s biggest challenge right now?

Learning to talk with each other with trust and good faith. When I look in the mirror I don’t think I am that intimidating, but somehow those church leaders who consider my book dangerous have found it almost impossible to talk with me.

That is a great sadness. One

of my favorite Ellen White quotes is this one: “When men cease to depend upon men, when they make God their efficiency, then there will be more confidence manifested one in another. Our faith in God is altogether too feeble and our confidence in one another altogether too meager.”⁶

I would love to see the church become a community where trust is natural. It’s Jeremiah’s new covenant promise: “No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, ‘Know the

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LORD; for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more” (Jeremiah 31:34, NRSV).

The original covenant that Adventists used when they organized in 1861 would be a wonderful piece to place at the head of our Fundamental Beliefs, and it’s a covenant I would gladly sign: “We, the undersigned, hereby associate ourselves together, as a church, taking the name, Seventh-day Adventists, covenanting to keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus Christ [Rev. 14:12].”⁷

You’ve spoken and written about the role of temperament in the kind of theology we end up with.

In all of my classes, I use a pie diagram to illustrate the different ways we use the terms “liberal” and “conservative.” (The meaning and implications of the chart are explained in

There are plenty of reasons to be humble, and if the Lord had not bequeathed me such a passionate over-the-top enthusiasm, I could easily be discouraged.

Part IV of my book *Beyond Common Ground*, pp. 117-146.) I use the Myers-Briggs temperament profile, because it is merely descriptive and nonjudgmental: whatever you are is “normal.”

From playing racquetball I learned that our initial reactions are often nonvolitional. We can change, but only God knows how much and how quickly. One of Ellen White’s more astonishing statements is this one: “Every association of life calls for the exercise of self-control, forbearance, and sympathy. We differ so widely in disposition, habits, education, that our ways of looking at things vary. We judge differently. Our understanding of truth, our ideas in regard to the conduct of life, are not in all respects the same. There are no two whose experience is alike in every particular. The trials of

one are not the trials of another. The duties that one finds light are to another most difficult and perplexing.”⁸

Of my own temperament, I’m convinced that the structuring safety provided by my Adventist heritage has kept me out of all kinds of trouble. I wish I could live out this description from the Quaker mystic, Thomas Kelly: “In some we regret a well-intentioned but feverish overbusyness, not completely grounded in the depths of peace, and we wish they would not blur the beauty of their souls by fast motion.”⁹

What are you looking forward to? What are the challenges ahead for you?

I have a host of books and articles that I want to write. A book for the larger world could be titled *There Are No Problems in the Bible: A High View of Scripture Without Inerrancy*. One for Adventists might be *Small Bonnets, White Bread, and Strong Cravings: Ellen White and the Adventist Lifestyle*.

I want to work with my fellow brothers and sisters toward a “big tent” Adventism, and that goal is enormous. There are plenty of reasons to be humble, and if the Lord had not bequeathed me such a passionate over-the-top enthusiasm, I could easily be discouraged.

In general, I have a great burden for angry Adventists and angry ex-Adventists. The woods are full of them. But I would much rather deal with anger than apathy. Angry people can at least tell you where to start. **AT**

¹ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 1 (1868 edition), p. 74.

² *ibid.* (1856), p. 136.

³ White, *Spiritual Gifts*, Vol. 1 (1858), p. 29.

⁴ White, *Youth’s Instructor* (Jan. 7, 1897).

⁵ White, *The Great Controversy* (1911), p. 677.

⁶ White, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers* (1923), p. 214.

⁷ “Doings of the Battle Creek Conference, Oct. 5 & 6, 1861,” *Review and Herald*, Vol. 18 No. 19 (Oct. 8, 1861).

⁸ White, *The Ministry of Healing* (1905), p. 483.

⁹ Thomas R. Kelly, *A Testament of Devotion* (1941), p. 43.

BOOK REVIEW

Inspiration

by Alden Thompson,

Energy Publications (2016), 433 pages.

Reviewed by Ed Reifsnyder



My dad, an Adventist minister and educator, read the first edition of Alden Thompson's *Inspiration* and then burned it. When I asked him why he didn't just throw

it away, he said he didn't want to risk that someone might find it in the trash and rescue it.

He wasn't alone in his hostility to the book. In 1992, the year following the publication of *Inspiration*, the Adventist Theological Society published a rebuttal titled *Issues in Revelation and Inspiration*. It is a compilation by the brand-name-of-the-day theologians of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The table of contents shows point-by-point rebuttals of Thompson's premises. In the Preface the editors wrote, "At stake is the very authority of the Scriptures and the continued existence of the Seventh-day Adventist people as a Bible-centered, Bible-based movement and church."¹

In the second edition of *Inspiration*, Alden Thompson recognizes the controversy when he offers "a somewhat awkward but grateful thank-you to those who responded in genuine horror to the first edition."

I believe *Inspiration* to be one of the most important contributions to

Seventh-day Adventist theology in the last 25 years. A well-known senior pastor of an eminent institutional church told me recently that when he read *Inspiration*, it cemented his confidence in Scriptures. It's done the same for me.

Why *Inspiration* Was Written

One morning while reading the Bible, my wife noticed that Mark and John tell factually different stories about Jesus' calling Andrew and Peter. She said to me, "If God had *dictated* that incident, would he not have dictated the same story?" All of us have, in our Bible reading, run across versions of events with differing, sometimes contradictory, storylines or facts. The variances may not be fatal to faith, but they are there and must of necessity inform our view of inspiration.

Thompson says he wrote the book in response to difficulties he saw his students experience as they tried to make sense of the Bible. In particular, he saw the impact of theories like inerrancy and literal dictation by God of exact words to writers who were mere stenographers. To students, and to congregations across the Pacific Northwest, he had tried to provide a framework into which Bible readers could fit messages from God, along with the reality of the humanity of Bible writers, without a diminishment of the spiritual value of Scripture. "I got sick and tired of seeing students lose their faith when they found things in their Bible they didn't think were supposed to be there," Thompson writes. "So I decided to write a book that highlights those universal principles that never change ... as a secure foundation for grappling with those things that do change."²

Inspiration is a book with a distinct view of inspiration and, correspondingly, of the Bible. It is a view contrary to the theory of inerrancy and its other theoretical cousins. It recognizes inconsistencies and variances in the Bible, and it attributes

those instances to human writers. Notably, though, this is not a faith-threatening book. Thompson strives to create a new kind of confidence in the Bible, and for me, he succeeds.

Ellen White's Views of Inspiration

In large part, Thompson bases his views of inspiration on Ellen White's. He believes that her views on inspiration could give the Seventh-day Adventist Church an advantage within Christianity. (Though, of course, her views of inspiration are also interpreted with differing hermeneutics—something that becomes clear when reading the ATS rebuttal book.)

Variances about the meaning of inspiration go back to early Adventism. Thompson contrasts statements made by Ellen White with those in a 1911 book by Milton C. Wilcox, long-time editor of *Signs of the Times*:

Wilcox: "It was not the person who was inspired; it was the God-breathed Word."³

White: "It is not the words of the Bible that are inspired, but the men that were inspired. Inspiration acts not on the man's words or his expressions, but on the man himself...."⁴

Clearly there were, and still are, sharply conflicting views of inspiration within Adventism and, indeed, all of Christianity.

Here is a smattering of Ellen White quotes that demonstrate what Thompson found in her writings about inspiration. The progression of logic in these quotes lays a foundation for Thompson's subsequent building blocks.

- "The truths revealed are all 'given by inspiration of God' (2 Timothy 3:16); yet they are expressed in the words of men."⁵

- "[It is the inspired Bible writer] who, under the influence of the Holy Ghost, is imbued with thoughts. But the words and thoughts receive the impress of the individual mind. The divine mind is diffused. The divine mind and will is combined with the human mind and will;

thus the utterances of the man are the word of God.”⁶

- “But the Bible, with its God-given truths expressed in the language of men, presents a union of the divine and the human.”⁷

- “The Bible must be given in the language of men. Everything that is human is imperfect.”⁸

During a conversation with Thompson, I suggested that his interpretation of Ellen White’s views of inspiration would tend to support a more progressive school of

its development.

Perhaps the possibility of imperfection in Scripture is what causes the crises of faith that Thompson has observed in students and in churches. If you hold that Scripture is perfect, and then you find something that appears to be an imperfection, your faith could be shaken and you could be put crosswise with your fellow believers who think otherwise.

2. *God’s word as casebook and codebook.* The basic idea of casebook vs. codebook is that not everything in Scripture functions

for us.¹² Thompson asserts that we have to use our minds and reason to understand what is eternal.

Believers may be reluctant to adopt the casebook concept out of fear that it may seem too open-ended and possibly undermine the authority of scriptures, Thompson concedes. Perhaps this is why one of the major changes between the first and second editions of *Inspiration* was a change in a chapter title that in the first edition asked the question, “Casebook or Codebook?” but in the second edition simply asserts that the Bible is both.

3. *The One, the Two, and the Ten.* Though much of the Bible is casebook, it is also codebook. Thompson proposes that the essential codebook portions of the Bible consist of the One, the Two and the Ten. These describe a sort of law pyramid. The pinnacle of the pyramid is the enduring principle of “the *one* great law of love, which is the absolute foundation of God’s being and government.”¹³ The One overarching law of love can be divided into the Two great commands: love to God and love to people. The Two can be further divided into the Ten: the Ten Commandments. So there are three layers of the pyramid, with each successive layer adding detail. The pyramid constitutes eternal principles, values, and guidance. They never change and are always applicable.

It is difficult to synthesize Thompson’s views into a compact statement, but let’s use a quote from the book: “While the authoritative codebook elements in Scripture are found in the ONE, the TWO, and the TEN, every portion of Scripture is a concrete, albeit partial, revelation of God in time and place. ‘All Scripture is given by inspiration of God’ (2 Timothy 3:16). But because that revelation is adapted to the conditions of fallen humanity, it partakes of the imperfections of that humanity. In the words of Ellen White: ‘Everything that is human is imperfect’ (ISM, p. 20).

This is not a faith-threatening book. Thompson strives to create a new kind of confidence in the Bible, and for me, he succeeds.

thought about inspiration. He responded that in her later years, Ellen White was “a flaming liberal.”

Premises of Inspiration

Thompson relies on three key premises as building blocks to create a conceptual structure of inspiration.

1. *Scripture as incarnation.* Not unlike Ellen White’s description of inspiration above, Thompson describes the making of Scripture as an act of incarnation, where humanity and divinity are blended. “Incarnation” is usually used to describe a blending of divine and human in a person, but here Thompson combines the two in scripture itself. There are two sets of inputs, so Scripture is a product of both God and humanity, each affecting the final product.

In a chapter titled “Heavenly Message, Earthly Vessel,” Thompson quotes White: “The treasure was entrusted to earthen vessels, yet it is, nonetheless, from Heaven.”⁹ Combine the description of Bible writers as “earthen vessels” with her statement that “Everything that is human is imperfect,” and you’ll understand why this book is so controversial: the logical conclusion is that Scripture could be imperfect, because humans had a hand in

as code in the legal sense. Not everything is directive to the reader. Not everything establishes eternal precedent.

“[A] codebook is at home in legal circles.... A *casebook* describes a series of examples which reflect a variety of responses under varied circumstances. None of the cases may be fully definitive or prescriptive in other settings, but each ... could be helpful to someone facing similar circumstances.”¹⁰

To Thompson, just a few passages of Scripture are code, and the rest is casebook. “Except for the law pyramid [see below], scripture is more like a casebook than a codebook.”¹¹

Casebook may include stories, incidents, histories, genealogies, prayers, poetry, prophecies, and philosophy. Casebook is valuable as a means of observing and learning from God’s relationships with mankind through history.

But casebook does not constitute eternally applicable or permanent guidance. “If we clearly define scripture as a casebook, then we are admitting the Bible lays before us the many differing ways that God has guided his people in the past, but without making our decision

Thus ‘God and Heaven alone are infallible’ (CWE, p. 37).¹⁴

A full third of the book explores the human element in Scripture: challenges such as differences in parallel passages, inconsistencies, prayers of hatefulness, and other such manifestations.

Thompson understands that some people will see his ideas as the beginning of a slippery slope, fearing what may happen if they accept that the Bible is not the result of word-for-word dictation by God. After all, once a person recognizes that faulty human elements are potentially in the text, where does such thinking stop? Here are three relevant quotations:

“By affirming the enduring value of the Law Pyramid and the universal validity of the ONE, the TWO, and the TEN, protection is provided against the slippery slope. Other aspects of God’s revelation may be seen to be adapted to particular needs...without undermining the authority of Scripture as a whole.”¹⁵

“Recognizing the casebook element in Scripture allows apparent contradictions in Scripture to be seen as consistent adaptations of the law of love to the needs of individuals or groups in particular circumstances. Yet every adaptation can be seen as consistent with the ONE, the TWO, and the TEN.”¹⁶

“When the unity of Scripture is seen more in its MOTIVATIONAL focus than in its theoretical content, then every passage of Scripture has a practical and concrete purpose that takes precedence over its abstract and doctrinal value.”¹⁷

A Personal Assessment

The proponents of various theologies of inspiration are quite avid in promoting and protecting their views. In my opinion, these are little more than theoretical constructs, due to the paucity of direct information about inspiration. Precious few Bible verses actually address the subject directly (though there are more from which we

can make inferences about the process). The most well-known, 2 Timothy 3:16, is not rich in detail about the nature of—or, should I say, the mystery of—inspiration. It says Scripture was “God-breathed.” On those two words entire theologies have been created.

I don’t know exactly what God breathed. Did he breathe words? If so, did he breathe them very slowly so the writer could hold the thought in mind while he wrote? Did God breathe detailed pictures that the writer then drew from to create words? Did God breathe out a warm aura that created a compulsion to write? I don’t know. But it feels like I should allow for mystery in the transmission of whatever it was that God breathed.

It is all too tempting to develop theories that provide the comfort of certainty. That’s why large doses of humility are needed when considering the nature of inspiration. But instead of humility, there is too often a desire to construct a theory of inspiration that serves to protect an established set of beliefs and presuppositions.

In a conversation I had with Thompson while writing this review, he related to me an experience that is illustrative of this point. He was having difficulty understanding why some theologians had opposed *Inspiration* so vigorously, and finally he asked one of them. The man explained that Thompson had used the “wrong method.” He had used the inductive method, his critic said, when he should have used the deductive method, in which you always start with what you know to be true. How can you read the Bible objectively, listening intently to what it says, if you start with a presupposition about what it says? “But with such an approach,” Thompson grants, “one would never modify an opinion or conviction on the basis of Scripture.”

This incident helps pinpoint the root of many of the theological divisions we see in

the Seventh-day Adventist church today. I fear that many Adventists may read the Bible to confirm what they already believe rather than seeing with fresh eyes what it actually says. Those are two different experiences entirely.¹⁸

Inspiration boosts my confidence in the Bible. Besides a practical and comforting framework for relating to the Bible, it is an antidote to the theory of direct transcription of God’s inerrant words dictated to mere stenographers.

Why would God need the help of human writers at all? Couldn’t he just deliver the finished product himself? But God seems to always work with human partners, and the humanity of his partners shows up clearly, whether humans are working on behalf of God’s kingdom or writing about it. I cannot believe that the Holy Spirit installed a filter somewhere between each Bible writer’s brain and fingers that magically screened out any trace of the person’s humanity and culture. The writers were creatures of their time, place, character, and culture.

It is precisely this aspect that *Inspiration* wrestles with so engagingly, and that makes it such a necessary book for us. **AT**

¹ *Issues in Revelation and Inspiration*, p. 8.

² Alden Thompson, *Inspiration*, p. 3.

³ Thompson, *Inspiration*, p. 56.

⁴ Ellen G. White, Manuscript 24, 1886.

⁵ White, Letter 206 to Dr. Paulson, June 14, 1906.

⁶ White, Manuscript 24, 1886.

⁷ White, *The Great Controversy*, Introduction (1911), p. v.

⁸ White, Manuscript 24, 1886.

⁹ White, *The Great Controversy*, p. vi.

¹⁰ Thompson, *Inspiration*, p. 116.

¹¹ Thompson, *Inspiration*, p. 115.

¹² Thompson, *Inspiration*, p. 124.

¹³ Thompson, *Inspiration*, p. 134.

¹⁴ Thompson, *Inspiration*, pp. 326-327.

¹⁵ Thompson, *Inspiration*, p. 328.

¹⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁷ Thompson, *Inspiration*, pp. 328-329.

¹⁸ Coincidentally, James Londis posted this unrelated but relevant comment on the *Spectrum* website on Feb. 1, 2018: “More conservative scholars, especially those leaning toward inerrancy, come at the text with their own historical doctrinal baggage (as we do) and cannot admit the text says what it says.”

CAN WE TALK?

BY CHARLES SCRIVEN

AT AGE 30, SOME TWO GENERATIONS AGO, I published “The Case for Renewal in Adventist Theology.” The article said that light from our own tradition encourages us to refresh, or even to adjust, our convictions. Renewal, it said, depends on humility and eagerness to learn. The argument abounded with supporting quotations from the pioneers, including Ellen White.

Perhaps it should please me that no one refuted what I said—or even attempted to do so. But it does not.

About two decades later, I published “The Radical Vision and the Renewal of the Church.” By then I knew that Adventism’s roots lie in the Radical Reformation. So I stressed that our forebears, the Anabaptists in particular, thought Christians should engage their questions and disagreements through a method a later writer would dub “the *dialogue of those concerned*.” The method was based on Matthew 18, and the point was to reach, through conversation, the kind of shared understanding that would build up the *life of the church* and enable members to live out a deeper authenticity and faithfulness. I stressed, too, that

attention to the Anabaptist part of our heritage would help us focus on the one thing that matters most: our solidarity with Christ.

Perhaps it should please me that no one has refuted these remarks, either, or even attempted to do so. But it does not.

Maybe these essays said nothing that deserves careful scrutiny. But during these years, Adventists who read and want to understand the wider culture have agreed, I think, that honest dialogue and an eagerness to learn are too little honored in our community. They have felt, too, that preoccupations inimical to our solidarity with Christ continue to cause harm; that many Adventists still favor lockstep adherence to points of belief that actually *distract* from, or even *subvert*, genuine discipleship. Here I need only mention, for example, the age of the Earth or the station of men compared with women.

I thought about all of this a few Sabbaths back while I was witness to lively current effort to refresh and adjust religious conviction. I had accompanied my wife to Andrews University, and we attended a Sabbath School class led that day by Lucile Sabas, a Sorbonne-educated economist in the university’s business department. She explained neoliberalism—what we today might think of as conservative economic doctrine—by tracing its history and key ideas. She then asked the class to reflect on questions like these: How does your Christian perspective affect the way you feel about the various economic systems? If economic life requires trade-offs “between efficiency and equality,” how might a people steeped in Scripture deal with this challenge?

The economy is something that nearly everyone thinks about a little, and the most engaged members of any community or nation have strong opinions about it.

So I was not surprised when the well-educated class members sprang into action like ballplayers emerging from a dugout. One thought or question followed another in a shared struggle toward deeper comprehension of Scripture's relevance.

Afterward, my wife and I walked the short way to Buller Hall for worship at what is called "One Place." Here students and faculty, gathered in a tiered classroom, sang together and listened to Scripture before hearing a "teaching pastor"—Denis Fortin, a volunteer from the seminary faculty—speak on the first several chapters of Micah. He began by recounting how the day before, at a nearby pharmacy, he had observed a senior citizen presenting a prescription for much-needed medicine. Fortin related, using present tense, that the man hears the (very high) price and just "melts," his "whole body" signaling how overwhelmed he feels. He simply does not have enough money. The pharmacist explains to the customer, with evident dismay, that he cannot walk out with the medicine unless he pays the price, and the distraught man has to turn away, fearful and empty-handed.

"It shouldn't be like this," said Fortin.

With mounting intensity, he then explained how upset Micah would be by such a thing. The prophet declared that God is a "witness" against his own people when the sorrows of the poor go unaddressed. If in the face of oppressive inequity the "priests" and "prophets" hold their tongues, the piety they display is a sham, and one day God will set aright both the inequity and the sham. But where, Fortin asked, is the "prophetic voice" within our own church?

Messages like this from the Hebrew prophets seem always new and disturbing. At least since the early 1970s, a few Adventists, appealing both to these

prophets and to Jesus himself, have spoken out like Fortin, but the point seems not to sink in—not widely, at least. Adventism's Statement of 28 Fundamental Beliefs, first set forth in 1980 and revised somewhat in the years after, makes *no mention* of all this, whether in remarks on the "gift of prophecy" or "stewardship" or "Christian behavior" or the mission of "the remnant" or anything else.

In view of anticipated attention to biblical hermeneutics at the next General Conference Session, I have been trying to stimulate a *public* exchange between conservative scholars who work at and for the General Conference and other, less conservative, ones who teach in our colleges and universities.

The silence is dumbfounding. Who has refuted the Hebrew prophets? Who has refuted Jesus? Who has refuted those who say these scriptural giants have something to teach us today? No one has. People fixated on "what we've always believed" may offer hasty dismissals of "social" concern, but no one has attempted a serious refutation of this central biblical theme.

What we call "free inquiry" concerning Adventist belief does take place, as my wife and I saw during that fine Sabbath in Michigan. What is more, the "independent press," which has flowered through websites and magazines such as *Adventist Today*, has given opportunity for expression of opinion that can reach the entire church. But resistance remains, much of it concentrated within high-echelon administrative leadership. One evidence is that church employees who answer to administrators have a fear of speaking their minds, especially in public. Another is that top officials so often (if not quite always) deal with opinion and scholarship they don't appreciate by failing—or even refusing—to engage in the conversation.

Again and again, reputable Adventist pastors and scholars present arguments for doubting some convention or embracing some fresh idea. Again and again, the bureaucracy fails to give these arguments respectful notice, or even discourages open consideration of them. The experience I mentioned at the beginning illustrates the point, at least in part. Now, in view of anticipated

attention to biblical hermeneutics at the next General Conference Session, I have been trying to stimulate a *public* exchange between conservative scholars who work at and for the General Conference and other, less conservative, ones who teach in our colleges and universities. I envision something that could become available, perhaps by video, to all church members. But one General Conference insider told me that it would be very hard to make this happen, especially if the proposal involved people who have a connection with [one of the church's independent magazines].

I had the feeling (without being certain) that this insider would be open to such an exchange, but I also had the feeling that top-down pressure would rule it out. As for this latter, I would certainly welcome correction. How, after all, can refusal of conversation even be Christian? How can it withstand attention to the spirit of Matthew 18?

A step beyond free inquiry is engagement in generous dialogue—dialogue that includes church leaders and the scholars who identify with them. That's why I intend, again and again, to ask this simple question: Can we talk? **AT**



A CHARISMATIC IN SEARCH OF A MESSAGE

By Aage Rendalen

MUCH SPACE HAS BEEN WASTED IN trying to explain Ellen Harmon White in terms of pathology, instead of seeing her for what she was: a charismatic, embedded in a 40-year-old revival tradition. I remain unimpressed with the theories of physicians Delbert Hodder and Molleurus Couperus that Ellen White's visions might be attributed to "partial-complex seizures"¹ resulting from a traumatic brain injury caused by being hit in the face with a stone when 9 years old, and I am equally unmoved by neurologist Donald Peterson's 1988 response to them.² There is no reason, in my opinion, to give undue attention to the accident that may have caused an identity crisis but was not a

life-changing mental pathology.³

The Rev. George Baxter, a staid clergyman from Boston who was serving as principal of Washington College in Maryland,⁴ happened to be present at the famed Cane Ridge Revival in Kentucky in 1801. He gives this dramatic firsthand account of the startling display of phenomena that characterized 19th-century charismatic camp meetings: "Immediately before they become powerless, they are seized with a general tremor, and sometimes, though not often, they utter one or two piercing shrieks in the moment of falling.... Persons in this situation are affected in different degrees; sometimes, when unable to stand or sit, they have the use of their hands, and

can converse with perfect composure. In other cases they are unable to speak: the pulse becomes weak, and they draw a difficult breath about one in a minute; in some instances, their extremities become cold, and pulsation, breathing and all signs of life forsake them for nearly an hour."⁵

People who attended such country revivals did not all receive religious experiences because of traumatic brain injuries. This was simply the religious environment in which Ellen White came of age. Of some of the early Adventist meetings, she would write: "Sunday the power of God came upon us like a mighty rushing wind. All arose upon their feet and praised God with a loud voice; it was something

Ellen G. White walking with her son William “Willie” C. White and his wife at Washington Training College in May 1905.

Photo: Ronald D. Graybill via Jacqueline Leslie Trott-Bally

as it was when the foundation of the house of God was laid. The voice of weeping could not be told from the voice of shouting. It was a triumphant time; all were strengthened and refreshed. I never witnessed such a powerful time before.”⁶

Two weeks later she wrote: “Our last conference was one of deep interest. ... It was a powerful time as I ever witnessed; the slaying power of God was in our midst. Shouts of victory filled the dwelling. The saints here seem to be rising and growing in grace and knowledge of the truth.”⁷

Later in life, Ellen White would be embarrassed by her participation in these charismatic excesses and deny vehemently that she’d had any part in them. She claimed to have opposed any “fanaticism” that had tainted the post-1844 Millerite movement in Maine. The old charismatic wanted to be seen as a messenger of the Lord, not a shouting “holy roller.”

Experience, Not Content

One characteristic of charismatic worship is that it focuses on experience, not on message. God communicates in unknown tongues to the faithful, and those with the gift of interpretation might translate the sacred words to the congregants. But record isn’t necessarily kept of this divine speech. The message to the faithful is that God speaks; *what* he speaks is of relatively trivial importance.

Much of Ellen White’s charismatic speech in the early days was of this nature; it survives only because she, unlike many other charismatics, committed it to writing. Note the emotional tone and narrow scope in these examples from an 1850 manuscript release: “I saw that Brother Bates’s heart must be open, ready to yield up a dear point when the clear light shines. I saw that we must be more like Jesus. Everything in heaven is in perfect order, and the events of the judgment will come in perfect order. Then I saw James [White] and Brother Bates. Said the angel, ‘Press together, press together, press together, ye shepherds, lest the sheep be scattered.’”⁸

In pages upon pages of White’s writings, God leaves the rest of the world to its own fate in order to straighten out a small group of apocalyptic charismatics in New England. The content of her experience was confined to the people and beliefs she knew. She would write about future events, but even these revelations were for the community she knew personally and were in harmony with their beliefs. Here is another example: “We gathered about Jesus, and just as He closed the gates of the city, the curse was pronounced upon the wicked. The gates were shut. Then the saints used their wings and mounted to the top of the wall of the city.”⁹

Over time White’s parochial writings—essentially charismatic in nature—were gathered into *Testimonies for the Church*, nine volumes of Talmudic guidance and chastisement.

Finding Content

Adventism gradually became less a shared experience and more a growing,

evangelizing organization. Ellen’s writings needed a more universal appeal. The Great Controversy theme, already well-known to most Christians, became the unifying theological thesis of her writings. This is the story of how Jesus’ blood brother Lucifer (at this time in Adventist history, Jesus was thought a created being) accused the Father of favoritism. Jesus was the cosmic Abel, and Lucifer was Cain. Jealousy drove Lucifer to recruit a third of the angels and mount a coup d’état against his own immortal Creator.¹⁰

Here is where problems arose for Ellen White. She needed to flesh out the story beyond the scant details that were held in common by most Protestants, but where would she find the material? A partial explanation for Ellen White’s “borrowing” is that her charismatic experience did not provide as much background information as she needed, so she took it from others.

We see the emergence of a pattern. Ellen White would announce a vision but often wait a year or two to publish it. And when she did, she would explain that while yes, she had in fact had the source material in her house that her supporters recognized, she had not read it.

In 1847 Ellen White wrote to Joseph Bates, who had expressed concern about the similarity of her visions with the writings of Joseph Turner, leader of the post-1844 shut-door Millerites in Portland, Maine. She said: “Brother Bates, you write in a letter to James [White] something about the Bridegroom’s coming, as stated in the first published visions. By the letter you would like to know whether I had light on the Bridegroom’s coming before I saw it in vision. I can readily

answer, No. The Lord showed me the travel of the Advent band and midnight cry in December, but He did not show me the Bridegroom's coming until February following. Perhaps you would like to have me give a statement in relation to both visions. At the time I had the vision of the midnight cry I had given it up in the past and thought it future, as also most of the band had. I know not what time J. Turner got out his paper. I knew he had one out and one was in the house, but I knew

"After the vision was given me, my husband was aroused upon the health questions. He obtained books upon our eastern journey, but I would not read them. My view was clear, and I did not want to read anything until I had fully completed my books. My views were written independent of books or of the opinions of others."¹²

The Testimonies

Critics also charged that White's epistolary testimonies were not

Piracy

In the face of repeated charges of his wife's unoriginality, James White asserted that she was a master not only of inspiring, but also of inspired writing: "Mrs. White has written and spoken a hundred things, as truthful as they are beautiful and harmonious, which cannot be found in the writings of others, they are new to the most intelligent readers and hearers. And if they are not to be found in print, and are not brought out in

Whether intentionally or not, she did cross the line. Ellen White allowed herself to be seen as what she was not: an infallible interpreter of the Bible who did not depend on others for her authoritative statements.

not what was in it, for I did not read a word in it. I had been, and still was very sick. I took no interest in reading, for it injured my head and made me nervous."¹¹

Health Reform

When Ellen White's health reform vision from 1863 was published in 1865, the same questions arose. She answered: "That which I have written in regard to health was not taken from books or papers. As I related to others the things which I had been shown, the question was asked, 'Have you seen the paper *The Laws of Life* or the *Water Cure Journal*?' I told them no, I had not seen either of the papers. Said they, 'What you have seen agrees very much with much of their teachings.' I talked freely with Dr. Lay and many others upon the things which had been shown me in reference to health. I had never seen a paper treating upon health.

inspired so much as researched. If so, this is another example of a tendency to supplement charismatic impressions. The charge—repeated by John Harvey Kellogg in his 1907 exit interview from the Adventist church in Battle Creek¹³—was that the guidance in *Testimonies for the Church* was based on information provided to her from a network of informants. In the following "so what if I did?" statement, she nearly concedes the point: "Suppose—some would make it appear, incorrectly however—that I was influenced to write as I did by letters received from members of the church. How was it with the apostle Paul? The news he received through the household of Chloe concerning the condition of the church at Corinth was what caused him to write his first epistle to that church. Private letters had come to him stating the facts as they existed, and in his answers he laid down general principles which if heeded would correct the existing evils."¹⁴

sermons from the pulpit, where did Mrs. White find them? From what source has she received the new and rich thoughts which are to be found in her writings and oral addresses? She could not have learned them from books, from the fact that they do not contain such thought."¹⁵

Yet her writings, however inspired, weren't so inspiring when Ellen was left to depend on her own talents. In 1974 Adventist historian Donald McAdams completed his study of Ellen White's handwritten manuscript about John Huss, a chapter of *The Great Controversy* so badly written that the only thing retained for publication was what she had borrowed from historians such as Wylie. Here is a sample: "When ever there has existed and continue to exist a self righteousness and a persecuting spirit there is nothing like a missionary spirit how ever they may weare the missionary cload let

us look to see if the Spirit of men are changed who have not the restorative power of the Gospel of Christ Jesus up to the time of the Lord 2500 years after the time [“when this” crossed out] of the murder of Abel what is the decision of our Lord. He was the truth his judgment must *therefore* be true He was one who could read the hearts of all men and he would not darken the picture already dark enough He says out of the heart of men proceed evil thoughts adulterous fornications murders thefts covetousness wickedness and deceit lascivious and evil eye blasphemy pride foolishness. All these were [“working with a” crossed out] active agents until the character be benovent Jesus proved it before all heaven before the universe he the perfection of all [“exceel” crossed out] excellence the brightness of the Fathers glory come to earth and as a messenger from heaven to restore by his precept his example the moral image of God in man. But his own nation said he hast a Devil crucify him Who was it the chief priests the rulers of the people came down to the period after his death and resurrection and ascension to heaven...”¹⁶

It goes on like this until one is forced to ask: If this was the quality of Ellen White’s writing, how much that was published in her name was actually written by her? We now know that she sometimes received help from James, her first editor, and that later she employed several editors.

Self-doubt

This pattern of borrowing content to fill in the gaps of her charismatic experience may help to explain Ellen White’s frequent direct and implicit references to doubts about her own

prophetic gift, which she expressed periodically from the beginning of her career to the end. Although more than 20 such statements appear in her writings, Ellen persisted against the tide of self-doubt, driven perhaps by the enthusiastic support of followers who provided her with validation, not to mention recognition and some prosperity.

Was she a “fraud,” as some critics assert? I hesitate to use that word. There is no doubt that in the early days she had genuine spiritual experiences, which she interpreted as divine intervention in her life, and that she felt a call to duty. She was a charismatic, but not a classic fraud in the sense of being calculating.

It is indisputable, however, that whether intentionally or not, she did cross the line. Ellen White allowed herself to be seen as what she was not: an infallible interpreter of the Bible who did not depend on others for her authoritative statements. She used words and information provided by others and took credit for them. At the very least, she was guilty of compartmentalization. At times she grossly distorted her past history, to the point of lying.

But “fraud”? If so, she lived her fraud as if it were the truth. I’m more comfortable calling her a conflicted charismatic who was a few revelations short of the prophet she aspired to be. What remains is a charismatic who struggled to shoulder the burden of infusing message and content into mere experience. **AT**

¹ Delbert H. Hodder, “Visions or Partial-Complex Seizures?” *Evangelica*, Vol. 2, No. 5 (November 1981), p. 35; Molleurus Couperus, “The Significance of Ellen White’s Head Injury,” *Adventist Currents*, Vol. 1, No. 6 (June 1985), pp. 17-23.

² Donald I. Peterson, *Visions or Seizures: Was Ellen White the Victim of Epilepsy?* (1988).

³ When I compare the photos of Ellen and her fraternal twin sister Elizabeth, I see no indication of disfigurement, though ex-Adventist Robert K. Sanders has made a credible case for her photos being heavily retouched and her being preoccupied with photographs and the desire to appear prettier than nature had deigned to make the Harmon girls. Yet given her longevity, I’m disposed to see her accident as part of the prophetic legend rather than a persistent mental pathology.

⁴ Letter from George Baxter to Archibald Alexander, Jan. 1, 1802, *Evangelical Magazine*, Vol. 10 (1802), p. 375.

⁵ “Religious Intelligence,” *Christian Observer*, Vol. I (October 1802), pp. 670-672.

⁶ Ellen G. White, Letter 28, Nov. 27, 1850.

⁷ White, Letter 30, Dec. 13, 1850.

⁸ White, Manuscript 14, 1850.

⁹ White, *Early Writings* (1882), p. 53.

¹⁰ In *Age of Reason* (1794), Thomas Paine shows how well-known the Great Controversy theme was in this vehement attack of it: “Having thus made an insurrection and a battle in Heaven, in which none of the combatants could be either killed or wounded—put Satan into the pit—let him out again—giving him a triumph over the whole creation—damned all mankind by the eating of an apple, these Christian Mythologists bring the two ends of their fable together. They represent this virtuous and amiable man, Jesus Christ, to be at once both God and Man, and also the Son of God, celestially begotten, on purpose to be sacrificed, because they say that Eve in her longing had eaten an apple. Putting aside everything that might excite laughter by its absurdity, or detestation by its profaneness, and confining ourselves merely to an examination of the parts, it is impossible to conceive a story more derogatory to the Almighty, more inconsistent with his wisdom, more contradictory to his power, than this story is.”

¹¹ White, Letter 3, July 13, 1847.

¹² White, Manuscript 7, 1867.

¹³ See <https://m.egwwritings.org/en/book/697.2#6>

¹⁴ White, *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 5 (1889), p. 65.

¹⁵ James White, *Life Sketches* (1880), pp. 328-329.

¹⁶ Donald R. McAdams, “Ellen G. White and the Protestant Historians: The Evidence from an Unpublished Manuscript on John Huss” (1974).

ELLEN WHITE'S INGRATIATING AMALGAMATION STATEMENTS

By T. Joe Willey

More than 150 years have passed without consensus from Adventist biologists, historians, critics, and apologists on the interpretation of Ellen White's disconcerting amalgamation statements. To many modern readers of *Spiritual Gifts*, her 1864 references to "amalgamation of man and beast"¹ appear problematic. When Mrs. White mentions strange creatures produced by "unholy alliance between humans and beasts," is it possible that she is referring to fanciful fables of blighted races that are a genetic mixture of man and beast resulting from bestiality? This would, after all, be serious enough to qualify as the "base crime" for which she says God destroyed the world.

In an effort to establish a modern scientific explanation, some bio-theologians have claimed that White must be describing varieties of mankind that were the genetic combination of human and animal genomes inserted either by Satan (the great primal hybridizer) or notorious antediluvians sophisticated enough to create chimeras.²

But from a historical perspective, such speculation goes in the wrong direction.³ Interbreeding of humans with animals is not what Mrs. White was writing about. Instead, the amalgamation statements signal White's full understanding of the historical context in which

her nation was then immersed. To speak plainly, White was following up her renunciation of radical abolitionism with a rejection of racial intermarriage. Denis Fortin and Jerry Moon in *The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia* note that Mrs. White "appears to have supported her messages with information that was commonly accepted in her day, but that is now known to be incorrect in important particulars."⁴ This viewpoint is confirmed in the truculent amalgamation statements.

The intensity of America's debate in the press over emancipation of Southern slaves is most likely the provocative force that aggravated White to take a religious position against amalgamation. The lens through which she viewed this "base crime" grew out of a cultural hysteria associated with the re-election campaign of Abraham Lincoln. The direct and fearless advocacy of both emancipation and amalgamation, as promoted by abolitionists in 1864, was an "idea of which the American people [were] more afraid than any other."⁵

"Absurd and Contradictory"

A second important source of historical context, which was left out in previous interpretations, is a 27-page pamphlet published in 1866 by two apostate Adventist evangelists. They wrote *The*

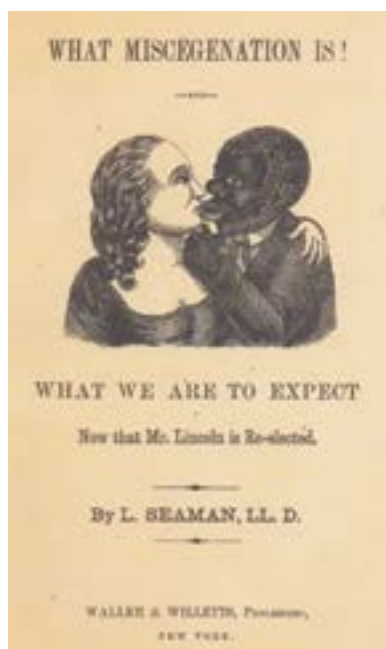
Visions of E. G. White Not of God after being in direct contact with White and her visions. Both B. F. Snook (a former Methodist preacher) and William H. Brinkerhoff (a lawyer and teacher) were ordained by James White and had served as president and secretary, respectively, of the newly formed Iowa Conference. But after attending a spring meeting of the General Conference in Battle Creek in 1865, these men withdrew their membership in the church.⁶ Among their 50 objections to Ellen White's visions, Snook and Brinkerhoff included amalgamation as antagonistic to the teachings of the Bible, calling it "absurd and contradictory."

This pamphlet serves as an excellent starting point for understanding White's assertions on race and her theological (and nonscientific) views of human origins. It states: "These visions teach that the Negro race is not human. This charge they deny, but we will let the reader decide for himself. ... But what are we to understand by *certain* races of men? She [Mrs. White] has not informed us in her writings but left us to fix the stigma of amalgamation where we may see fit. But the interpretation has come to light. She told it to her husband, and he made it known to Eld. [William] Ingraham,⁷ and he divulged the secret to the writer [Snook] that Sister White

had seen that God never made the Darkey. ... Oh, shame on such visions! Is not the poor Negro debased low enough with chains and shackles, without depriving him of the honor of being a creature of God, a human being.”

This heterodox pamphlet prompted a defense of White’s visions within the pages of the *Review*, written in 1866 by Uriah Smith, the journal’s editor.⁸ Smith also defended White’s spiritual gifts in 1878 by writing a pamphlet designed for wide circulation at Adventist camp meetings.⁹ In it, Smith pointed out that the effects of amalgamation were still visible in certain races of men, saying that no one can deny this, but “If they did, they could easily be silenced by a reference to such cases as the wild Bushmen of Africa, some tribes of the Hottentots, and perhaps the Digger Indians of our own country.” But, he remarked, “as long as these varieties had original Adamic blood in their veins,” they were human. Under this defense, Smith confused the issue without hesitation when he argued: “Naturalists affirm that the line of demarcation between the human and animal races is lost in confusion. It is impossible, as they affirm, to tell just where the human ends and the animal begins. Can we suppose that this was so ordained of God in the beginning?”¹⁰ Clearly, Smith understood the “beast” in White’s amalgamation statements to be a human, not an animal.

Smith’s defense apparently stifled further ecclesial analysis on the amalgamation statements until a self-proclaimed geologist, George McCready Price, entered his review of these ideas in 1931 and started a cascade of speculative bio-theological interpretations.¹¹ Price failed, however,



to explore the relevant historical perspectives within the 1864 context of these statements.

During the re-election campaign of Abraham Lincoln, no topic was more passionately discussed in America than amalgamation (also called *miscegenation*) and the emancipation of the slaves. Some Northerners felt hard-pressed to prove an absolute and immutable species difference in order to justify labeling interracial sex as a deviant, unnatural practice. This is apparent in White’s writings when she referred to amalgamation as “one sin above another which called for the destruction of the race by the flood.”¹²

Ellen White did not invent the word “amalgamation.”¹³ Nor, for that matter, did she come up with the popular view that a worldwide flood represented God’s reaction to the practice of racial intermarriage.¹⁴ In religious circles, amalgamation linked to Noah’s flood had a common and profane usage,¹⁵ and her Adventist readers would readily understand what she meant by these messages.

To speak plainly, White was following up her renunciation of immediate abolitionism with a radical rejection of racial intermarriage.

Mrs. White attached heaven’s authority to *Spiritual Gifts*, claiming “that the Lord has made me His humble instrument in shedding some rays of precious light upon the past.”¹⁶ But acceptance of her theory on the ambiguous origin of “certain races of men” due to “amalgamation of man and beast [animals]” would make God’s original Adamic creations subject to manipulation by Satan or some other unknown biological laws. (Biblical literalists, though they believe that all men are of one species, are still not able to account for the physical diversity of the races.)

Distanced from Abolitionists

White was definitely not an abolitionist or an amalgamationist.¹⁷ Without ever explaining her amalgamation statements (she let Smith defend her), she did reveal her lingering prejudicial views¹⁸ decades later: “No one is capable of clearly defining the proper position of the colored people. Men may advance theories, but I assure you that it will not do for us to follow

human theories. So far as possible the color line question should be allowed to rest.”¹⁹

Although Adventists may have sounded vaguely like abolitionists, they embraced neither the hands-on political activism nor the interracial ideology of those seeking emancipation by political means. In the years leading up to the Civil War, radical abolitionists had aggressively championed the right to interracial marriage. As a result, the charge of amalgamation was successful in spurring violent opposition to the abolitionists. So powerful was the rhetoric from 1838 to 1863 that as many as 165 anti-amalgamation riots broke out in the North, resulting in destruction of property and life.²⁰

During this period, Adventists taught that the great reform would come in God’s own time. Though they recognized slavery as profoundly evil, the change believers sought was religious, not political. American slavery revealed just how hopelessly sinful society had become, so their Advent hope prompted them to prepare spiritually for Christ’s soon coming.

A perusal of White’s major publications from this time reveals scant yet passionate statements regarding freedom and slavery. When she published her first version of *The Great Controversy in Spiritual Gifts*, Vol. 1, in 1858, she excoriated the nation for the fact that “human beings, the workmanship of God, [were] reduced to the *lowest depth of degradation* and placed on level with the *brute creation* by their fellow man” (p. 191, emphasis added). But her intense jeremiad on such oppression covered only one page of the 219-page volume. Seeing no hope of a political solution to the grave problem



of slavery, White said that in vision it looked to her “like an impossibility now for slavery to be done away. God alone can wrench the slave from the hand of his desperate, relentless oppressor.”²¹

In his essay “War, Slavery, and Race,” Adventist historian Eric Anderson notes that White did not pay the level of attention to the events and issues in this period that one might expect of a political activist or social reformer. Anderson writes: “Her commentary on the Civil War and slavery is, in fact, surprisingly spotty. She had nothing to say about the Fugitive Slave Law until nearly a decade after its enactment, when the law was already a dead letter in key areas of the North. Her private correspondence yields not a single reference to the name of Lincoln, a leader about whom the historian expects her to have definite and quotable opinions. After a flurry of comments about slavery and disunion between 1858 and 1863, she drops the subject, giving no evaluation of the Emancipation Proclamation, the employment of black troops, or

In broaching the matter of amalgamation to account for species diversity, White expressed herself on a subject that had been highly controversial as far back as the 1830s.

the decisive victories of Grant and Sherman. She does not return to the Civil War issues until the 1890s.”²²

As the Civil War intensified in 1863 and 1864, Adventist pioneers and White seemed less like the abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison and more like the domestic feminist Catherine Beecher. Following White’s health vision in June of 1863 and the loss of two sons, John Herbert (1860) and Henry Nichols (1863), she and her husband visited James Caleb Jackson’s health institute, Our Home on the Hillside, in Dansville, New York. Ellen’s newfound interest in health reform was a world removed from the harrowing events of the war and the ardent debate over Lincoln’s re-election and amalgamation.

By the autumn of 1864, Mrs. White released her major writings on health and faced criticism from outsiders for concentrating on hoops and hemlines (dress reform) rather than the critical political events of the times. Yet John Loughborough remembered: “While from the year 1863 to the spring of 1865 the terrible war in the United

States interfered with any great success in our public efforts to advance the message, it seemed to be the Lord's time for instruction in health reform—that which afterward should be 'as the right arm and hand to the body' in the rapid advancement of the work."²³

Staying Clear of National Politics

If early Adventist leaders were active in the anti-slavery and abolitionist movements, if they were crusading for the emancipation and freedom of the slave, it should have been most apparent in 1864. In that year, the Civil War had reached an intense and turbulent crescendo. Abraham Lincoln sought re-election in a field of condemning public orators and newspapers. Yet the Adventists, newly organized as a church in 1863, seem to have paid little attention to the social and political turmoil swirling around them.

Unlike other Protestant ministers, Adventist pastors did not recruit volunteers in the Union Army from the pulpit. White and other church leaders sporadically condemned the system of slavery in the pages of the *Review*, but they barely touched on the critical events of the time. The fears and concerns that seized the country at large earned no space and only a little editorial commentary in the *Review*.²⁴

By 1864, the draft became an important issue for Adventists, but the matter reflected the church's disengagement from the war, not its involvement. Adventists sought exemption from the military draft as conscientious objectors, but this required official recognition of the denomination as a peace church, a designation obtained only by the Quakers, Amish, and Mennonites. Another way to opt out of military service was for individuals to pay

\$300, a sum equivalent to the average annual income. They could also pay someone to substitute for them in the military, which turned the Civil War into a "rich man's war but a poor man's fight." Adventists availed themselves of these means of avoiding military service until, on July 4, 1864, Congress passed an amendment abolishing the opportunity of dodging the draft by financial means. In August, J. N. Andrews represented the General Conference in Washington, D.C., pleading the church's claim to noncombatant status. Andrews was successful, so Adventist draftees could thereafter enter the army and work in a hospital or assist the Freedmen's Bureau without bearing arms.²⁵

When Adventists referred to the Civil War, they did so in their own distinctive way. They saw themselves as ascending a path toward heaven, not traveling the road to free slaves. As White depicted their worldview, the rebellion of the South recreated the "rebellion of Satan and his angels" in heaven. Now residing on Earth, Satan and his hosts were "at war with commandment keepers, and will work to bring them into trying positions."²⁶ Unlike the abolitionists or amalgamationists, Adventists did not view the Civil War as a holy crusade to emancipate slaves. Like the abolitionists, however, they did criticize the war as an attempt merely to preserve the Union.

During this period, the *Review* published on the evils of smoking tobacco and on women's wearing of hoops and on Sabbath-keeping. In the obituary notices, one Adventist soldier was reported killed in the battle at Chickamauga, Tennessee, in September of 1863. "While a soldier," it said, "he did not join in the sinful

amusements of his comrades but tried to obey as far as he could the teaching of God's word." Another Adventist "brother," drafted into the army, served in Virginia and passed around the *Review* to his fellow soldiers; he requested extra copies. A young preacher from Wisconsin was drafted and, with "no means of his own," attempted to raise the \$300 to avoid service. Able to raise only half the amount, he was assured that church members would make up the rest.

In a small column on slavery, J. N. Andrews recommended reading *The Bible Against Slavery* by abolitionist Theodore D. Weld. Throughout 1864, however, the *Review* devoted no space to comments on the presidential campaign. As an indication of Adventist insularity from Civil War politics, the church paper did not report military successes or failures—only the difficulties the South was having in provisioning its army. No evidence in the *Review* indicates that Adventists believed the national crisis called for participation in nursing wounded soldiers, sewing and rolling bandages, providing charitable assistance to slaves escaping to the North, providing chaplains, handing out antislavery literature, or attending women's suffrage or antislavery meetings. No reports hint that Adventists ever joined with Sojourner Truth in providing clothing, food, and shelter to black volunteer troops near her Battle Creek home.

Opposition to Lincoln's Re-election

In 1864, no second-term president had been elected since Andrew Jackson in 1832. Opposition to Lincoln's re-election was so widespread that the press was calling for the president

to step aside.²⁷ The famous orator Wendell Phillips from Massachusetts vowed he would “cut off both hands before saying a good word for Lincoln.” In England, a stuffed gorilla went on display, standing upright, holding a walking stick, and wearing a placard around its neck that read, “Am I a Man and a Brother?” Southerners adopted the habit of calling Mr. Lincoln “the Gorilla.”²⁸ First described by American anatomist Jeffries Wyman in 1847, the gorilla instantly became a man-beast cultural analog, invoking comparisons to “inferior blacks.”²⁹

In this charged climate, racist demagogues were prolific and vociferous. Newspaper accounts reflected the pervasive national worry about the consequences of freeing the slaves. Northerners feared that after emancipation, hordes of Southern blacks would migrate northward, attract their women, compete for jobs, and eventually become dependent upon taxpayers. Due to rampant fears in both the North and the South, questions on the origin of the black “race” and the inferiority of Negroes came to the forefront. A small minority of scientists and ministers vigorously promoted polygenesis, a theory that accounts for the existence of dark-skinned humans by suggesting multiple creations of different human species, including the Negro, by God at different times and places. This theory, in addition to the biblical account of a curse on Noah’s son Ham,³⁰ was used to support the beliefs of those who opposed racial intermixing.

These scientifically and theologically unorthodox discussions in the weekly religious press probably incited White to express her cultural views on “amalgamation of man and beast”

as the base crime “which afterward finally provoked God to destroy the inhabitants of the earth by a flood.”³¹ She further stated, “Since the flood there has been amalgamation of man and beast, as may be seen in the almost endless varieties of species of animals, and in certain races of men.”³² By linking the diversity of human characteristics with a “base crime” against the Almighty, White made it very unlikely that her followers would become amalgamationists.

White was up against polygenists who claimed as many as a dozen separate creations for mankind. Such reasoning opposed a literal reading of the Bible, with Adam and Eve as the original parents of mankind. In broaching the matter of amalgamation to account for species diversity, White expressed herself on a subject that had been highly controversial as far back as the 1830s. Abolitionists asserted that amalgamation would produce a racial blend—neither white nor black—that improved the human race, not worsened it. But even literate African-Americans opposed amalgamation. “We are often both provoked and amused at hearing so much fuss about amalgamation. Our pale-faced brethren, certainly, must be a very “conceitly [sic] set of beings.”³³

Miscegenation Replaces Amalgamation

At the end of December 1863, two Democratic newsmen, David Goodman Croly and George Wakeman, coined the word “miscegenation” to function as a replacement for “amalgamation.” Both were anti-Lincoln writers to the *New York World*. Writing anonymously, they created a 72-page satirical pamphlet

titled *Miscegenation: The Theory of the Blending of the Races, Applied to the White Man and the Negro*. The authors surreptitiously mailed it to newspapers, abolition leaders, other reformers, and to Lincoln and his cabinet members. Among a sizeable public, they saw their pamphlet embraced as though it were legitimate. To form the new word “miscegenation,” the journalists had combined two Latin root words: *miscere*, “to mix,” and *genus*, “race.” Although the pamphlet was a hoax, it was cleverly written, full of faux scientific facts, mock arguments, and learned quotations that gave it an air of authenticity.³⁴ Quite likely White was aware of this pamphlet, because of its wide circulation and coverage in the newspapers, but she did not adopt the term miscegenation.

The authors proclaimed that the mingling of the two races, white and black, was not only desirable but also essential. It is a fact “that miscegenation or mixed races are much superior, mentally, physically, and morally to those pure or unmixed.” They went on to state that the present war was not a war for the Negro but, “if you please, a war of amalgamation looking at the final fruit of the blending of white and black.” The pamphlet was written to appear as if it were coming from abolitionists and was endorsed by Republicans. It cleverly attempted to tie miscegenation to Lincoln and hurt his chances of re-election. The copperhead wing of the Democratic Party, who sought peace with the Confederates, quickly leapt on the content of the pamphlet and used it as a campaign tool with which to bludgeon Lincoln and the Republicans, as, no doubt, the writers had intended. A follow-up pamphlet



During the re-election campaign of Abraham Lincoln, no topic was more passionately discussed in America (also called miscegenation) and the emancipation of the slaves.

predicted that in the future black men, the product of interracial coupling, would “occupy public positions, from policemen up to the president”³⁵—a prophecy that former U.S. President Barack Obama helped to fulfill.

Many years later, in connection with the General Conference Session at Battle Creek in 1891, White urged church leaders to fulfill their duty to the colored people in the South.³⁶ She pointed out that while other denominations had advancing work, Adventists had little. More than 50 years had lapsed since the amalgamation statements helped to fuel the isolationist disposition of the church and the “prevailing prejudice against the colored people.”³⁷ It was hard to throw off prejudice, she explained in a letter to her son James Edson White, “because of the white people who have the slave master’s spirit with the slave master’s cruelty in exercising the same, as if the blacks were not more than beasts; and to be treated worse than the dumb animals because they are in the form

of a man, having the marks of the black—Negro—race.”³⁸

No Color Line in Heaven

Finally, it can be said that Mrs. White’s amalgamation statements arose during a third wave of concern in the North over interracial marriages³⁹ in direct response to the urgent question raised by Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation that freed the Southern slaves. She took the prevailing cultural prohibition against marriage between members of different races and gave it greater significance by claiming inspiration for these prejudicial views. Fundamentally, the prophet taught Adventist whites that blacks were physically and socially inferior when she linked “degradation” to the terms “brute beasts” or “brute creation” in her writings.⁴⁰ Racial thinkers often express a distaste for marriage across racial lines and understand their own race to be the superior one. Six years before White wrote her amalgamation statements, she had been shown in a vision that “God cannot take the

slave to heaven, who has been kept in ignorance and degradation, knowing nothing of God, or the Bible.”⁴¹

In the minds of Adventists at the time, “The nation’s doom was foreordained. Only Christ’s Second Coming, as one of Ellen White’s visions depicted it, would free the slaves.”⁴² Consequently, their emancipation by 1864 was confusing and unexpected. When blacks later began to convert to Adventism, it became clear to church leaders that some way must be found for blacks and whites to share equally in the benefits of heaven, with nothing in the way of prejudices and injustices. Mrs. White came up with a simple solution. In a 1901 sermon to recent black converts in Vicksburg, Mississippi, she told her audience: “Remembering this, you will be able to bear the trials which you meet here. In heaven there will be no color line; for *all will be as white as Christ himself* (emphasis added). Let us thank God that we can be members of the royal family.”⁴³ **AT**

¹ Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts*, Vol. 3 (1864), pp. 64, 75.

² See Ronald L. Numbers, *The Creationists* (2006), pp. 101, 147.

³ *ibid.*

⁴ Denis Fortin and Jerry Moon, *The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia* (2014), p. 231.

⁵ Sidney Kaplan, quoting the *National Anti-Slavery Standard* in his *American Studies in Black and White: Selected Essays, 1949-1989* (1991), p. 58.

⁶ For a fuller discussion of the Iowa Rebellion, see Arthur L. White, *Ellen G. White: The Progressive Years*, Vol. 2 (1986), p. 146.

⁷ William Ingraham was a frequent traveler with the Whites and was sent by them to attempt to reconcile with Snook and Brinkerhoff.

⁸ Uriah Smith, “The Visions—Objections Answered,” *Advent Review & Sabbath Herald* (June 12-July 31, 1866).

⁹ Smith, *The Visions of Mrs. E. G. White: A Manifestation of Spiritual Gifts According to the Scriptures* (1868).

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p. 103.

¹¹ George McCready Price, “The Problem of

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CHURCH PEOPLE

BY JOHN McLARTY

ANIL WAS PART OF A CHURCH FAMILY—not by blood, not officially. But he lived at their house, sharing a room with one of the sons. He was a senior in high school. Part of his reason for moving to Washington from San Bernadino was Anil's ambition to graduate. He figured that if he stayed in the old neighborhood, he would end up in prison or dead, because that's what happened to the young men he knew back home. So when his best friend's family moved to Seattle, he joined them. And when the family went to church, he often went with them.

The adjustment was difficult. Seattle was a different world. He missed his old friends. He missed the sun. Seattle did not feel like home. Still, his host family provided sanctuary. The husband and wife treated him like one of their own. After we met at church, Anil and I visited occasionally over lunch. I offered him my standard deal for young people: I paid; he talked. Through our conversations, I sensed the allure of the old, wilder life. I felt the alien nature of academic focus and consistent study. I heard his ambition. He wanted a decent income and the respect of being a professional. I also felt the enormity of the hurdles in his path from here to there.

That was four years ago. Recently, we had lunch again. We went to our usual place, a burger joint with good hamburgers and good veggie burgers. He told me again of his profound gratitude for the family that had given him sanctuary, and especially for the husband who modeled a radically different vision of what it meant to be a father. (I recalled his story of tracking down his biological father during his junior year of high school. When Anil asked why his dad had never been in his life, he dismissed Anil's protest. Raising children was women's work, his dad had said.)

I asked about school. I remembered that the transition to college from high school had been difficult. The discipline of study was not part of his native culture. In addition, he had to juggle work and school. Anil floundered at times. I had worried he might give up

assignment completed. It was finals week at school, and the pressure of work and school and his tutoring assignment was too much. He apologized profusely to Garrett for wasting his time. Garrett responded: "You're not wasting my time. I just want to see you succeed."

Those words lit a fire in Anil's brain. "No one had ever told me that before," he said. "I couldn't believe it. He was going to get nothing out of it. He just wanted me to make it!" It was pure altruism, something utterly alien in Anil's world. That was three years ago. Anil has only one more math class, Calculus 3, and a physics class to complete before he will be able to apply to transfer to the University of Washington engineering program.

Sitting there, listening to Anil, I was proud to be part of the church people who have touched Anil's life. He was

Anil floundered at times. I had worried he might give up and settle for earning some money, buying a car, getting a girlfriend.

and settle for earning some money, buying a car, getting a girlfriend. We continued to have lunch occasionally. He continued to plug along in school, taking one or two classes at a time. He called me for help on math homework. I was flattered, but fairly quickly his questions went beyond my abilities, and I sent him to a young person in the church who was a math whiz. It worked. Anil got the help he needed, and the grades.

Our youth pastor connected him with Garrett, a church member who worked at Google. Garrett offered to tutor him in computer science. They worked on projects together. At one point in this process, Anil showed up for an appointment without having his

going to make it. He was going to escape the doom that haunted so many of his peers in his old neighborhood.

Then he said something else, something I had never heard from him before. I had always heard his ambition to make it—to earn a decent income, to become someone who would enjoy respect in society. But this time I heard something new. He wanted to finish his degree, he said, and then he wanted to go back to his old neighborhood and create an institute that would offer a chance to "his people." His ambition was to do good, to pay forward the goodness that his host family and Garrett had added to his life.

That's the effect of church people. **AT**



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Hybridization,” *Ministry*, Vol. 4, No. 4 (April 1931), pp. 13-14.

¹² White, *Spiritual Gifts*, Vol. 3, p. 75.

¹³ Americans appropriated the term from the field of metallurgy as a shorthand for “race mixing.” By 1830 “amalgamation” was in common usage and came to dominate the national debate.

¹⁴ See Stephen R. Haynes, *Noah’s Curse* (2002), p. 112.

¹⁵ By 1852 John Fletcher of Louisiana, in his *Studies on Slavery*, popularized that the Flood represented God’s anger to the sin of amalgamation between Adamites and the soul beasts (p. 250).

¹⁶ White, *Spiritual Gifts*, Vol. 3, p. vi.

¹⁷ This point was also made by Julia Neuffer in “How Activist Were Adventist Abolitionists?” *Review and Herald*, Vol. 147, No. 41 (Sept. 10, 1970), p. 11.

¹⁸ See Ronald D. Graybill, E. G. White and Church Race Relations (1970), p. 15, and Roy Branson, “Ellen G. White: Racist or Champion of Equality?” *Review and Herald*, Vol. 147, No. 15 (April 9, 1970), pp. 2-3.

¹⁹ White, *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 9 (1909), pp. 213-214.

²⁰ Elise Lemire, “Miscegenation”: Making Race in America (2002), pp. 55, 58, 95, 110.

²¹ White, *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 1. (1868), p. 266.

²² Eric Anderson, “War, Slavery, and Race,” *Ellen Harmon White: American Prophet*, ed. by Terrie Dopp Aamodt, Gary Land, and Ronald L. Numbers (2014), pp. 262-263.

²³ J. N. Loughborough, “Sketches of the Past—No. 129,” *Pacific Union Recorder* (Aug. 22, 1912), p. 1.

²⁴ I read every issue from January to December 1864 to make this analysis.

²⁵ Peter Brock, “The Problem of the Civil War,” *Adventist Heritage*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (January 1974), pp. 23-27.

²⁶ E. G. White, *Testimonies*, Vol. 1, p. 356.

²⁷ John C. Waugh, *Re-electing Lincoln: The Battle for the 1864 Presidency* (1997).

²⁸ Monte Reel, *Between Man and Beast*, (2013), p. 191. By the 1830s, Americans knew a lot about non-human primates. Edward W. Clay’s “Practical Amalgamation” series of images makes the point that abolitionism was pairing white women with dangerous animals. See Lemire, p. 100.

²⁹ When Paul Du Chaillu opened his exhibit of Gorilla (considered man’s closest relative and the wildest beast on the planet) on Broadway in New York City in January 1860, P. T. Barnum advertised that his nearby museum had an “extraordinary living creature, just arrived from the wilds of Africa. Is it a lower order of Man? Or is it a higher development of the Monkey? Or is it both in combination?” All of the New York newspapers raved about the strange exhibit. An ad in the Sunday *New York Times* declared, “The new curiosity just added to the Museum stock seems to supply the real link between man and monkey.” The truth, which the papers did not

report, was that the “nondescript” was a black man who suffered from microcephaly, a development disorder that results in an unusually small skull that tapers back from the forehead.” See Reel, p. 93.

³⁰ G. Blair Nelson, *Infidel Science! Polygenism in the Mid-Nineteenth-Century American Weekly Religious Press* (PhD dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2014).

³¹ E. G. White, “Adam’s Life,” *Spiritual Gifts*, Vol. 3. (1864), p. 51.

³² White, *Spiritual Gifts*, Vol. 3, p. 75.

³³ “Amalgamation,” editorial in *Colored American* (June 23, 1838).

³⁴ Sidney Kaplan, “The Miscegenation Issue in the Election of 1864,” in Werner Sollors, *Interracialism: Black-White Intermarriage in American History, Literature, and Law* (2000).

³⁵ L. Seaman, *What Miscegenation Is! What We Are to Expect Now that Mr. Lincoln Is Re-elected* (no date), p. 3.

³⁶ E. G. White, *The Southern Work* (2004), p. 9.

³⁷ *ibid.*

³⁸ E. G. White, Letter 223, June 22, 1899.

³⁹ The first anti-amalgamation movement was during Thomas Jefferson’s election, and the concern arose a second time in 1830 because one of the tenets of the abolition movement was freedom to marry across racial lines.

⁴⁰ Compare *Spiritual Gifts*, Vol. 1, p. 191 with p. 193.

⁴¹ E. G. White, *Spiritual Gifts*, Vol. 1, p. 193. See also T. Joe Willey, “Steal Away to Jesus: Will God Keep Slaves from Heaven?” *Adventist Today*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (Spring 2017), p. 18.

⁴² Douglas Morgan, *Adventism and the American Republic* (2001), p. 26.

⁴³ E. G. White, “Trust in God,” *The Gospel Herald* (March 1901), p. 22.

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and though we’d all say we want to follow the truth where it leads us, in the real world we’re more afraid of what we might lose.

What I wish our defensive sisters and brothers would realize is that even the leaders of our church at the headquarters in Silver Spring, Maryland, have many of the very questions we voice here and feel the same doubts. For example, nothing that scholars revealed to us in the late 20th century about Ellen White’s plagiarism surprised church leaders at all; they’d been aware of it for 150 years. But what would happen if the common people were to find out? The nature of big

organizations—organizations with a lot to lose by way of reputation, real estate, employees and salaries, offices and titles, constitutions and bylaws, and pension funds—is that they don’t want to upset the contributing saints. So the leaders inside these organizations who have doubts just swallow hard, shut up, and carry on.

I’m not accusing anyone of hypocrisy, though religion is by its very nature a hypocritical business: like hospital-acquired infections, hypocrisy isn’t something we want, but it’s inevitable. I’m only admitting that religious organizations, though they start with ideals, quickly get caught up in their own survival. They no longer self-examine. They want to reassure, not stir up. When conflicts appear, they prefer to silence them and hope that no one points out that the emperor is, if not naked, at least rather shabbily attired. Even those who applaud the Reformation are now reluctant to see anyone question their authority, as though this were a one-time process that need never be repeated. So who watches the watchmen? (A phrase, by the way, that comes not from a graphic novel, but from the poet Juvenal, nearly two millennia ago: “Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?”) When self-interest is involved, none of us wants to be watched too closely.

I realize that no one likes to be challenged. I have a member of a midweek Bible study group who seems to question everything I say. It’s quite annoying. But why shouldn’t he? And why shouldn’t I have to wrestle with those questions? And why shouldn’t congregations and pastors and church leaders and all of the rest of us be held to account?

This is, I hope, what the alternative Adventist press does well.

Uncertainty and Faith

As we celebrate 25 years of *Adventist Today*, I propose two ideas that can continue to guide us in our next 25 years.

First, you can be less than absolutely certain and still be a person of faith. I like this passage from Episcopal Bishop John Shelby Spong: "When you look at the history of the church, the times when we

were certain were also the times when we persecuted people, that's when we burned people at the stake, that's when we had religious wars. I think certainty is a vice in religion, one of the things we ought to rid ourselves of, so I would constantly want to hold this wrestling, this uncomfortable 'I don't have it together,' 'we're struggling in this together' as the proper image of the Christian faith. We walk into the mystery

of God; we never arrive, and if we think we arrive, we become idolaters."

The second, closely related, is that you can be a questioner and still love your church. I hope that someday more of the faithful, including our denominational leaders, realize that the church is better for having questioners, even if it doesn't always like them.

Contributors



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BIBLE CREDITS

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NEWS BRIEFS

Adventist Today Event Generates "Telling Data"

SILVER SPRING, Md. — In its latest newsletter, the Unity Oversight Committee reported that it gathered "telling data" on those who attended *Adventist Today's* 25th anniversary event in Loma Linda on April 21.

Committee members who were present reported that the food was "sinfully delicious" and that their fellow attendees were the most entertaining Adventists they had met in years. Although the committee mourned the lack of openness to GC censorship among *Adventist Today* editors, its members admitted privately that it was sometimes refreshing to read commentary and news about the church that didn't sound like it had been edited by the North Korean Central News Agency.

Angel-Friendly Theater Designed for Hollywood

LOS ANGELES, Calif. — In a bid to counter what it calls the "superficial filth machine that is Hollywood," the Southern California Conference (SCC) has opened the first "angel-friendly" movie theater in the denomination.

"We have repurposed the property where Hollywood Seventh-day Adventist Church used to sit in order to build a movie theater that we know in our hearts angels are 100 percent OK with," said an SCC statement. "We are confident this will be a better use of the land."

The theater has been specifically designed to avoid the aspects of theatergoing that have long been criticized by Adventists. Instead of dark corners, the theater will feature cafeteria lighting and widely spaced wooden chairs with aggressively stiff chair backs that encourage focus and alertness. Creative director Max Stoder says that the theater will feature uplifting standards such as *Sound of Music* and *Veggie Tales* as well as what he calls "a dynamic mix of stimulating and doctrinally appropriate PowerPoint presentations." He claimed that the space would be perfect for Adventist dates nights: "Who could say 'no' to dinner and a State of the Dead PowerPoint?"

Adventist Martial Law to Enforce GC Unity

SILVER SPRING, Md. — In a bid to ensure unity within the church worldwide, the General Conference has declared Adventist martial law. "As of this moment, all of Adventism will resemble the campus of Southern Adventist University," said Marcos Nuevo, Unity Enhancement spokesperson. "Until we have utter and complete unity around what gets decided in this building, every Adventist will need to abide by an 11 p.m. curfew." He promised to send GC-sponsored equivalents of dorm resident assistants to make sure members were in their homes on time.

Nuevo also said that under denominational martial law, Adventists will be required to abide by an ultra-strict dress code. Men must wear collared shirts or suits to all worship experiences, and women should dress as the ladies do who appear on Three Angels Broadcasting Network (3ABN).

Church meeting attendance will be tracked via a worship credit system. No credit will be given to members of churches led by ordained female pastors. Dissenting voices within Adventism will be written up and punished with "indefinite amounts of manual labor at some far-flung summer camp," said Nuevo.

Check Your Bulletins for Church Seating Chart

ADVENTIST WORLD — For the first time in Adventist history, churches will feature official seating charts. Each member will have an assigned seat, and visitors will be ushered to the very front of the sanctuary, where the entire congregation can keep an eye on them.

GC director of church rigidity, Mas Reglas, pushed back on complaints that seating charts were an unnecessary intrusion into church life. “Our churches have had *unofficial* seating charts for as long as I can remember,” said Reglas. “Members are super territorial about where they sit; we just decided to make things official.” Reglas explained that all congregations will be required to print their seating charts on the back page of their worship bulletins. He directed church leaders to select their biggest deacon to act as the “Sabbath Bouncer” in case anyone disregards the chart.

GC Finally Approves Pay for All Pastors’ Wives

SILVER SPRING, Md. — Adventist pastors’ wives around the world are celebrating a groundbreaking victory with the announcement that they will be added to the official church payroll. General Conference Treasury Director Tom Briggins confirmed that pastors’ wives will be paid a stipend equal to 60-70 percent of local pastoral compensation. Deborah McNoughton, president of Shepherdess International (an association for wives of Adventist ministers), said that she was “elated” at the decision. “For years now we have pushed for some form of hazard pay for our constituents,” she said. “Regular members have no idea how difficult it can be to assume the thankless tasks of piano playing, small-group hosting, and babysitting in Cradle Roll week after week simply because of whom we married.”

Pastors’ wives will be paid on a scale that takes into account the difficulty of the congregation(s) they must endure. Extra pay will go to those who must serve as Pathfinder director, coordinate aggressively vegan potlucks, supervise overly judgmental Dorcas crews, or attend two or more church services each week in small districts.

SWAT Team Frees 250 Trapped by Altar Call

ATRAPADO, Fla. — Last Saturday, 250 souls were freed from Atrapado Lane Adventist Church by a SWAT team. The rescue mission took place after news that a visiting preacher’s altar call had gone on for more than an hour. “The guy just kept asking for one more commitment,” said an exhausted deacon as medics swarmed around his stretcher. “And he wouldn’t stop, even after the stage was full of volunteers.”

Another freed captive told investigators that the congregation had sung “what felt like every song in the hymnbook” before the SWAT team arrived. The visiting preacher was unrepentant. Before being hauled off in a police van, he could be heard offering the arresting officer GLOW tracts and vegetarian cooking classes.

BarelyAdventist (barelyadventist.com) is a satire and humor blog on Adventist culture and issues. It is written by committed Adventists who have no interest in tearing down the church but don’t mind laughing at our idiosyncrasies.

25 Gifts



Who would have imagined 25 years ago that a dream to provide innovative ministry resources and a source for independent journalism would bring us so far? As we celebrate our 25th anniversary, we have the opportunity to reflect on all that has been accomplished through God's grace and an amazing number of people committed to this cause. It's a time of gratitude. We hope you have seen our 25th-anniversary report, sent recently to your mailbox. Since it's our silver anniversary, people have been asking what gifts they can give to celebrate this significant accomplishment. Maybe you've been wondering that, too! Well, we've been thinking about numbers with 25 in them. Would you consider giving to one of these areas?

\$250 helps sponsor new print/digital features, new books, and adds reporters.

We want to pay young writers to provide original work and curate content that helps us attract younger readers in North America, Europe, the South Pacific, as well as Africa, India, and Central America. If we could place and pay correspondents in those regions in the coming year, we would be delighted. Investigative journalism is never inexpensive, but increasing the quality and creativity of Adventist Today's content is one of our important values. Would you consider a \$250 gift today?

\$2,500 places Adventist Today representatives on Adventist campuses worldwide.

We want to assure the future viability of Adventist Today by increasing our visibility on many of the more than 100 Adventist college/university campuses worldwide. At each site we would provide a stipend to a student who would make sure copies of our magazine are available at strategic locations around the campus and in campus churches. If that person is able to make comments on campus at appropriate meetings or get announcements into campus apps or websites, that would be a bonus. Would you give a gift of \$2,500 today?

\$25,000 gives us the ability to work with innovative video/audio producers to develop new multimedia content in several languages.

We want video and audio producers who bring us new stories that are compelling, creative, and courageous. We want thought-provoking video and audio short segments, author interviews, and streamed ministry events. We want a video-streaming library of progressive, hopeful, compassionate sermons for congregations and house churches, to compete with the sermons that are currently more readily available from ultra-conservative ministries. Adventist Today readers have given \$25,000 and more—in one gift—before. We're confident that it can happen again!

TO MAKE YOUR 25 GIFT:

- Go to www.atoday.org, click the donate button on the menu bar at the top, and complete the form to make a credit card payment.
- Send a check to Adventist Today,
PO Box 683, Milton-Freewater OR 97862
- Give us a call at **800.236.3641**, and we'll be happy to help you.

You have been a longtime reader, and no doubt supporter, who has invested in what you believe in. Your faithfulness to Adventist Today has been nothing short of amazing. You've taken seriously the advice of 2 Corinthians 9:7: "Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver" (NIV). Thank you!