

What Is Truth?

A Fallacy Primer

J. N. Loughborough,
Historian?

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Adventist *Today*



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I LOVE THE WAY YOU LIE



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What Jesus Died For

Jesus died for sin, not just sins

By Loren Seibold

“All of creation groans with pain, like the pain of childbirth.”

—Romans 8:22, *Good News Translation*

“Was everything okay?” he asked.

Yes, we said. As good as usual. Curious why our Cracker Barrel waiter was a middle-aged man, soft-voiced and serious, when usually the servers are young people or occasionally older women, I asked, “How long have you worked here?”

“Eight years,” he said. “I worked at the Newtech plant,” he said (as if we would know it, though we were traveling through a town far from home), “but I got laid off, so I started working here.”

“So, you like it?” I asked.

“Well, last year my wife got very, very sick, and they tried to accommodate me so I could take care of her.” He gathered up the dishes, then turned back. “She just died. Just a few weeks ago.” His voice broke.

What to say? After all these years of comforting people, I still feel helpless when confronted with the rawness of new grief. We expressed our sympathy, as much as we could in a few moments with a stranger. Although others were waiting, he stayed by our table for a minute longer. He told us how empty the house was now. He had a 16-year-old daughter, and her mother’s death had devastated her, though he hoped the busyness of high school would keep her occupied. “If you believe in prayer,” he added as he turned to go, “say some for me. That’s all I have to depend on.”

Back in the car, we sat in silence for a long time. “I think there are many people like that,” Carmen finally said, and I agreed. Barely making it through each day, finding and losing jobs, struggling with sorrows they haven’t the resources to handle.

In Paul Zindel’s award-winning play *The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds*, a mother tells her daughter: “I spent today taking stock of my life, and I’ve come up with zero. I added up all the separate departments, and the result is zero...

zero zero zero zero zero zero zero zero
zero zero zero zero zero
zero zero zero

zero zero
zero

And do you know how you pronounce that? You pronounce it oooooooooOOOOOOO. Like a moan.”

Sometimes we see life as so enjoyable, so promising. Other times, it’s fears and tears and passing years. We take stock of life and it turns out to be a struggle, a trial, a cry of pain, a wailing moan for existence.

I like to do personal home visits with church members. Most people want to present their best face to the pastor. Yet I’ve also seen how close to the surface are many of the hurts. I don’t pry; I don’t have to. (I also don’t tell.) When we sit down to talk—with Jesus being there, as he promised—I’m astonished at how people who look like they have good lives have a sorrow, a fear, a painful memory, just below the surface. A child who’s lost his or her way. A divorce. A youthful indiscretion. A threatening cancer. A brutal childhood. A sibling who died in a car accident. Sometimes 40 or 50 years have passed, but it’s still there, close, like a stillborn baby still cradled in the heart, never buried. Always, in some small way, it poisons.

We often say that our sins killed Jesus on the cross. Lately I’ve begun to wonder if that’s accurate. Perhaps it was not just our sins, but sin. Not just the bad deeds we do, but all of the ways sin hurts.

We hear every week of thousands of lives lost in the most horrible ways: starvation, war, disease, tsunami, genocide. We click our tongues, then pass them off as statistics, because we must; we couldn’t take onto ourselves all the pain of even one death, much less a million of them. And perhaps what Jesus took upon himself at the cross, the weight that killed him, wasn’t just our misdeeds, but all of the pain suffered by all of the well-meaning people in the world. Perhaps he was wounded not just by our transgressions, but by our house fires, our positive biopsies, our disappointing marriages, our lost children, our migraines, our sleepless nights, our foreclosure notices, our mental illnesses.

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Have you noticed that the people who criticize others for their choices and demand they be accountable seem to assume that they themselves are making the best choices they could?



FACEBOOK, I LOVE THE WAY YOU LIE

By Lindsey Abston Painter

WE ARE IN A SOCIAL MEDIA AGE! AT LEAST, THAT'S WHAT ALL of the articles say that pop up on Facebook and Twitter (oh, the irony...). Class reunions are no longer a suspenseful surprise, because you already know what's happening to the people you went to school with.

But the biggest social media buzzword is “fake news.” Everyone seems to be throwing the term around—even the president of the United States.

In a social media world, what does it mean to tell the truth? Does sharing an article on Facebook make you a crusader? Does *not* sharing controversial articles mean that you are silent in the face of injustice?

And what exactly is truth? Are police unselfish public servants making our communities safer, or are they corrupt, racist tyrants killing black people without remorse? Is abortion killing a baby, or is it offering women a choice? Is comprehensive sex education promoting immorality among young people, or is it protecting them from making foolish mistakes? Is the church upholding Scripture by refusing to ordain women, or is it oppressing women?

Even things we thought were clearly and generally agreed upon are now up for debate. Are vaccines, in fact, harmful? Is the Earth actually flat?

Never before has truth seemed so elusive. Bias has always been a problem, of course, but social media exacerbates the difficulty. We all have that one uncle who shares every ridiculous political article and meme without bothering to check whether or not it's true. Not to mention the cousin who shares *Onion* pieces, not realizing that they're satire.

But even those of us who are better at critical thinking than Uncle Joe are sometimes fooled by fake news.

Liar, Liar

One thing that often seems missing in this discussion is that sharing something that isn't true is, in fact, lying. It's not *just* online

or *just* forgetting to check. It is lying. We've simply gotten so used to it that it doesn't always register.

This isn't innocent. If I look someone in the eye and give them information, shouldn't I be sure that my information is true? We can find lots of rules in the Bible, but the ninth of the 10 most-well-known set of rules is about this very thing: don't tell lies.

What is it about social media that makes us so fast and loose with the truth?

The Nature of the Medium

Facebook is a fickle friend. In 10 minutes of scrolling, you could laugh, cry, feel touched, feel disgusted, be furious, be overwhelmed, feel pity, feel your heart warm, and judge another person. I might be feeling anger about some political thing my friend posted, and then a moment later I'll be saying “awwwwwww!” to a picture of a kitten and a turtle who made friends. What does this kind of whiplash do to our brains? What does it do to our perception of truth?

One day I scrolled through my Facebook news feed and saw that an acquaintance needed an emergency liver transplant, a friend had shared a memorial post about her 8-year-old who died last year of a brain tumor, and another friend had a baby who is receiving urgent life-saving care in NICU. I felt sadness and sympathy.

But for how long? A minute later I was laughing at a joke my cousin made.

Facebook doesn't lend itself to nuance or reflection. We're addicted to reaction, to flashes of shallow emotion. This lack of depth isn't just about emotions, though; it also contributes to a cavalier attitude toward truth.

Dr. Henry A. Kissinger, in an article in *The Atlantic*, says that the digital tools themselves contribute to our dishonesty: “Users of the internet emphasize retrieving and manipulating information over contextualizing or conceptualizing its meaning. They rarely interrogate history or philosophy; as a rule, they demand information relevant to their immediate practical needs. In the process, search-engine algorithms acquire the capacity to predict the preferences of individual clients, enabling the algorithms to personalize results and make them available to other parties for political or commercial purposes. Truth becomes relative. Information threatens to overwhelm wisdom.”¹

Social media is, by its nature, epigrammatic: concise, short, to the point, but also with generalizations and a general lack of nuance. An amusing epigram says, “All generalizations are lies, including this one.” When we generalize—that is, simplify

complex issues—we have the immediate reward of emotional satisfaction, but at what cost? In one keystroke we have spread misinformation, demonized or dehumanized our opponents, and removed a bit of truth and goodness from the world. Says Dr. Kissinger, “Inundated via social media with the opinions of multitudes, users are diverted from introspection.”²

What if, instead of pressing a handy “share” button, we had to meticulously copy or type everything by hand in order to share it? Would the process of slowing down and reflecting make a difference in what we shared?

Hearing What We Want to Hear

Confirmation bias means that our brains are designed to believe things that confirm what we already believe. Conversely, our brains are designed to reject information that does not fit our current beliefs. So if Uncle Joe believes that there is a government conspiracy and then reads an article saying the attack on 9/11 was actually an inside job, he is more likely to believe it.

The surprising thing about confirmation bias is this: our brains are so averse to information that contradicts our current beliefs that when presented with evidence *against* a certain belief, we are actually more likely to continue believing what we believe rather than to change an established belief. This means that all of the evidence we painstakingly present to Uncle Joe probably will only make him believe in the conspiracy more firmly.

A pastor friend of mine once saw one of his very pious and deeply conservative church members post a totally false political quotation on her Facebook page. In an attempt to be helpful and prevent her from embarrassing herself, he commented with some reputable sources, including Snopes.com, proving beyond question the falseness of the quote. His reward? She was furious. She unfriended him, deleted all of his comments, and wrote him a nasty private message.

Before we judge her too harshly, please remember that none of us are immune to this impulse. When we see something that supports our previously held beliefs, we are less likely to fact-check it and more likely to believe it. All we can do is to be mindful of it and try to overrule the initial impulse to interact only with things that reinforce our preconceived notions.

A Post-truth Society

We now live in a world where the president of the United States tells us lies that are so obvious and easily disproved that we scramble to fact-check him. Was his inauguration crowd the biggest in history? It takes only minimal effort to see that isn't true. So why do so many believe him? Because his beliefs confirm their own.

I once had a friend who dismissed Trump's lies by countering that Obama also lied in office. I showed my friend an article from a fact-checking website about the lies Obama told compared to the lies Trump tells.³ Obama did lie in office—18 times, to be exact, during his eight years in office—according to *The New York Times* fact-checkers. In his first year, by their comparison, Trump lied 103 times.

My friend was not swayed. “I don't believe that's true,” he said. And that was the end of the conversation. Because how can you ever resolve anything if there's no source material both sides can trust?

This is the equivalent of saying (something I've often heard), “Well, that's my opinion,” as though that settles everything. The statesman Daniel Patrick Moynihan is credited with saying, “Everyone is entitled to his own opinion, but not his own facts.” Would you want a physician who said, “I have no facts to back up this diagnosis and treatment, but my opinion is just as good”? Your opinion may make you feel good, but it really isn't worth very much if it is simply untrue.

Is This News Fact or Fiction?

Here are some ways to distinguish fake news. This is from *The Liturgists Podcast* on March 7, 2017, where Science Mike (Mike McHargue) outlines five checks for sharing reliable social media.

- Is an author listed? You should know who is producing the media you're examining.
- Is the publisher credible, with an editorial review board? If it's *The New York Times* or *The Wall Street Journal*, you can be fairly sure they've attempted due diligence. If you haven't heard of the publisher before, be cautious.
- Does a date appear on this article? Much fake news isn't dated, which is why Uncle Joe can share it months and even years after it has been discredited.
- Are sources cited to back up any claims? If so, do the sources listed actually back up those claims? Some articles cite studies, but when you read the actual study, it doesn't support the author's conclusions.
- What is the writing quality? Real journalists have editors.

In the fifth Harry Potter book, *The Order of the Phoenix*, a government that is afraid to accept the rise of tyranny and terror decides to wage a media smear campaign against Harry Potter, the truth-teller. Harry refuses to stop telling the truth even when they make him out to be crazy, war-mongering, and attention-seeking. He undergoes torture in which he must repeatedly carve the words “I must not tell lies” into his skin, but his greatest hurt isn’t from the authority figures who are trying to make his life hell. It’s from his peers and friends who don’t know what to believe. Friends who once trusted him now give him wary glances and a wide berth in the hall.

Harry is living in a post-truth society, and so are we. The lies are so believable, so seductive, that they are easier to believe than the truth. The lies make us feel good. They make us feel rage, but the satisfying kind—the us vs. them kind of rage where our primitive brains roar with the satisfaction of having an enemy. They make us believe that an issue as complicated as poverty or race is simple, and not, in fact, nuanced, multifaceted, and very difficult to change. Poverty is too abstract an enemy to fight, whispers the lie: let’s blame the Democrats, or the Republicans. Or let’s blame poor people for being poor. That’s easier, whispers the lie.

We choose to be lied to. We like it.

Facebook, I love the way you lie to me.

The Ease of False Logic

The political comedian John Oliver called it “#whataboutism.” I call it the “Two wrongs make a right” tactic. Trump had an affair? Well, what about Bill Clinton? It has become a social media joke to follow any criticism of Donald Trump with, “But what about her emails?” (#ButHerEmails).

The “whatabout” tactic is a way to distract from a real problem by complicating the issue with something unrelated. Do Trump’s affairs not matter because Bill Clinton also had an affair? Are none of the criticisms of Trump’s campaign legitimate because Hillary Clinton used a private email server? Bill Clinton’s indiscretions and Hillary’s emails are genuine problems that should be debated—on their own. How does it help one argument to bring up something entirely different?

A game I like to play when I’m reading about the inconsistencies of one side or another is to flip the inconsistency around and see if it yields any truth.

Let’s try it now:

Inconsistency: Republicans were outraged when Bill Clinton had an affair. But now it’s none of our business what the president does in his private life?

Okay, let’s flip it around and see if it tells us anything.

The Democrats said it doesn’t matter what the president does in his private life when Bill Clinton was under fire. But now it’s suddenly a critical issue?

Hmmm...looks like both sides are guilty of inconsistencies.

My game doesn’t always yield results, though. Let’s try one I can’t seem to make work:

The Adventist denomination refuses to accept the authority of women called by God, but it was founded by a woman who was ordained and frequently spoke with authority to men.

What’s the reverse inconsistency? The Adventist church should accept women as ministers, but...I got nothing.

Yet, even that tells us something about truth and the strength of our argument.

Can We Trust Anything?

So what’s the answer? Should we all be cynical all of the time? Constantly mistrustful of every new bit of information that crosses our path? I sometimes wonder if the end goal for some propagandists is to undermine everything and make us believe there is no actual truth, only opinions. If there’s no truth, we are easier to control. It’s harder for us to organize.

But maybe now I’m the one going down the conspiracy theory rabbit hole.

I feel funny writing about this at all, because I love my social media. I check my Facebook many times a day and stay connected with a wide variety of people that way. And I’ve been known to scoff when I see dire warnings about how social media is ruining us all.

So, this is not about hating Facebook or going on a social-media-is-evil rant. But if we are going to interact with social media, let’s be smart about our interactions. Let’s be, as Jesus said, as wise as serpents and as harmless as doves. We can use social media to help fill the world with love and beauty. Or we can use it to destroy everything we hold sacred and precious.

Most importantly, I’m a Christian, which means I have to hold myself to a higher standard than run-of-the-mill Facebook posters. Micah 6:8 seems appropriate here: “He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God” (NIV). **AT**

¹ Henry A. Kissinger, “How the Enlightenment Ends,” *The Atlantic*, June 2018.

² *ibid.*

³ David Leonhardt, Ian Prasad Philbrick, and Stuart A. Thompson, “Trump’s Lies vs. Obama’s,” *The New York Times*, Dec. 14, 2017.

Faith, Evidence, and the Dynamics of Truth

BY FRITZ GUY

At first glance this unlimited potential scope of truth may seem daunting, but in fact, it is invigorating. ... The excitement and satisfaction of learning can continue as long as we want it to continue.

“GOD NEVER ASKS US TO BELIEVE, without giving sufficient evidence upon which to base our faith.”¹ This 16-word sentence is tucked unobtrusively into Ellen White’s 126-year-old devotional classic *Steps to Christ*, which has been read by almost every Adventist and by untold numbers of other Christians. What most of these millions of readers may not have realized, however, is that this sentence encapsulates an entire philosophy of religion and is thus a reminder that profound and sophisticated truth can sometimes be expressed in surprisingly modest language.

Many Christians seem to suppose that faith and evidence are inversely related, so that the more faith we have, the less evidence we need; and the more evidence we have, the less faith we need. But this is a spiritual, practical, and theological blunder. For faith to be worth anything, especially in its dynamic form as trust,² it must be based on truth; and truth is discovered and confirmed by its evidence. Evidence is thus just as important in determining religious truth as it is in determining scientific truth (although the two separate quests involve different kinds of evidence).

From its earliest days in the 19th century, Adventist Christianity has had an ongoing love affair with the word “truth.” The first Adventist periodical was named *The Present Truth*, of which 11 issues were produced in Middletown, Connecticut, between July 1849 and November 1850, before it was succeeded by *The Advent Review*.³ An online search of the Ellen G. White writings for the phrase “present truth” yields 3,338 hits.⁴ Older Adventists (like me) easily remember when it was a widespread denominational practice to refer to the set of Adventist doctrines (maybe too confidently) as “the

truth”—perhaps a shortened version of “present truth.” In those days people were often described as “coming into the truth” or as having “been in the truth for a long time” or (sadly) as “leaving the truth.”

In thinking about truth in general, it is useful to recognize various categories of truth with appropriate designations. These may be identified and defined as follows:

- Individual truth = What a particular person *actually* knows
- Accessible truth = What a particular person *could in principle* know
- Total human truth = What human minds altogether *actually do* know
- Ideal human truth = What human minds collectively *could in principle* know
- Infinite Truth = What God knows

It is important to note, moreover, that these categories are not points on a continuum; they do not blend smoothly into each other. On the contrary, they are separated by huge, insurmountable gaps that are as important as the categories themselves. Indeed, it is precisely the gaps that define the respective categories.

Beginning with the most elementary category (where all of us actually are and will remain until the eschaton), the first gap is between what a person actually knows (individual truth) and what this person could in principle know (accessible truth). I could, for example, learn—and thus know—a great deal that I do not in fact know (and almost certainly never will know) about literature, history, biology, neuroscience, politics, automobile mechanics, etc. I could learn how to read Japanese or ancient cuneiform, or how to talk intelligently about elementary-particle physics. But by deciding in early adulthood to make philosophical theology the center of my intellectual effort and activity, I have in effect cut myself off from a thorough understanding of many

other areas of knowledge.⁵ Perhaps Francis Bacon could say (more than 400 years ago), “I have taken all knowledge to be my province,”⁶ but we modern persons certainly cannot. Individual truth seems pretty paltry in comparison with accessible truth. This is one of the consequences of our finitude on the one hand and the ever-increasing fund of accessible human knowledge on the other.

Between what a particular person could in principle know (accessible truth) and the sum of what human minds in fact now collectively know (total human truth) is another huge gap. What any particular person, no matter how intellectually gifted, could in principle know is limited by an assortment of factors, such as one’s existence at a particular time and place, innate intelligence, and accidental life experiences. Consequently, some things are known by Tibetan monks and other things are known by rock musicians that are simply not accessible to me, even if I would seriously try to learn them. I am just not mentally equipped to grasp them. Total human truth is vastly larger than anyone’s accessible truth.

Next, between the totality of what persons now know (total human truth) and what human minds together could know under ideal conditions (including unlimited time) is a third immeasurable gap. The exponential rate of increase of information about human existence (in physiology, biochemistry, and psychology, for example) and about the natural world (from paleontology to astrophysics) during the past few centuries, not to mention the recent explosion of information technology, makes it impossible even to estimate how much more there is to know “out there” and “in here.” There is no good reason to suppose that total human truth will not continue to

increase indefinitely, ever approaching but never actually reaching ideal human truth.

Finally, between what human minds altogether could ever possibly know (ideal human truth) and what God knows (infinite or absolute Truth—Truth with a capital T), there will always be an epistemic gap corresponding to the “infinite qualitative difference”⁷ between the Creator and the created.

So theology—Hindu, Islamic, Christian, Adventist, or anyone’s own—never is, never was, and never will be Absolute Truth; “evangelical theology cannot claim for itself that authority which belongs to [God] alone.”⁸ It will never be complete and “finished”; there will always be more to learn, always room for new thinking toward ultimate Truth, new ways of understanding, experiencing, and expressing truth. This epistemological faith involves “not only belief but [also] trust.”⁹

At first glance this unlimited potential scope of truth may seem daunting, but in fact, it is invigorating. Indeed, it is the best possible news regarding truth—including (and maybe especially) religious truth. “Whenever the people of God are growing in grace, they will be constantly obtaining a clearer understanding of His word. They will discern new light and beauty in its sacred truths. This has been true in the history of the church in all ages, and thus it will continue to the end.”¹⁰ This is as much a promise as it is a challenge. The excitement and satisfaction of learning can continue as long as we want it to continue.

I fully expect that my grandchildren and great-grandchildren will someday say something like this: “You know, while Gramps was ahead of his time about some things (and since his particular ‘thing’ was theology, it sometimes got him into a bit of trouble), about some other things he

just didn’t seem to ‘get it.’ But we should give the old guy a break. After all, he was born way back there in 1930. He wrote his doctoral dissertation in the 1960s on an antiquated contraption called a ‘typewriter,’ and he didn’t even have a cell phone until he was 60 years old. We’re sure glad we don’t live in Dark Ages like he did.”

For many of us, the most interesting and exciting aspect of Adventist Christianity is precisely its recognition of, and commitment to, the idea of present truth—truth that is newly recognized, newly relevant, newly lived, and that keeps on getting bigger and more useful and more satisfying.

At the same time, we must remain modest about our own understanding of truth. Arrogance and truth are mutually exclusive. **AT**

¹ Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ* (1892), p. 105.

² White, “Justification by Faith,” *The Signs of the Times*, Mar. 6, 1893.

³ *Early S.D.A. Periodicals: Facsimile Reproductions of The Present Truth and The Advent Review*, “Part One” (1946).

⁴ Accessed May 29, 2018.

⁵ The word “decision” means literally (that is, etymologically, from the Latin *de + cidere*) “to cut away,” as Paul Tillich helpfully noted in his *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 1 (1951), p. 184.

⁶ Francis Bacon, “Letter to Lord Burghley,” 1592.

⁷ Søren Kierkegaard, *Training in Christianity, and the Edifying Discourse Which “Accompanied” It*, Trans. Walter Lowrie (1941).

⁸ Karl Barth, *Evangelical Theology: An Introduction* (1963), p. 6.

⁹ White, “Justification by Faith,” par. 1.

¹⁰ White, “The Mysteries of the Bible a Proof of Its Inspiration,” *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 5 (1889), p. 706. See also p. 707: “The fact that there is no controversy or agitation among God’s people should not be regarded as conclusive evidence that they are holding fast to sound doctrine. When no new questions are started by investigation of the Scriptures, when no difference of opinion arises which will set men to searching the Bible for themselves, to make sure that they have the truth, there will be many now, as in ancient times, who will hold to tradition, and worship they know not what.”

A FALLACY PRIMER

BY MAYLAN SCHURCH

A fallacy, in short, tries to distract from the merits of an argument by bringing in irrelevant side issues.

ONE OF THE MOST GALVANIZING SENTENCES I READ DURING MY college days was this one:

“It would be a very good thing if every trick could receive some short and obviously appropriate name, so that when a man used this or that particular trick, he could at once be reproved for it.”

Attributed to the German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer, this quote appears on the title page of *Fallacy: The Counterfeit of Argument*,¹ which I bought in a used-book store while studying college debate. Each “trick” he mentions is a logical fallacy, and my quick ruffle through *Fallacy*’s table of contents revealed scores of these crafty dodges, named and categorized and explained. I bought the book, and decades later, it’s beside me as I’m writing this. Since then, I’ve acquired several other fallacy manuals as well, including those listed in this footnote.²

A fallacy, in short, tries to distract from the merits of an argument by bringing in irrelevant side issues. Madsen Pirie’s 2006 book *How to Win Every Argument* lists, defines, and gives examples of nearly 80 fallacies, and I’ll be depending on Pirie for most of the following definitions. I’ve found that even a basic understanding of fallacies helps me spot dodgy reasoning, and though I might not be able to instantly pounce on an error and slice-and-dice it into *tu quoques* and *petitio principii*, at least I know to slow down and think carefully.

A Few Fallacies

Argumentum ad antiquitatem. “If it’s old, it’s good,” says the argument from antiquity, “or at least better than what we have now.” Antique shops profit from this, and Masons and medieval re-enactors revel in it. “This is the way we’ve always done it,” a church board insists. Or more ponderously, “We’ve already set a firm precedent regarding this issue.”

The Adventist pioneers rejected this fallacy with an almost knee-jerk ferocity. And no wonder. Their stance on the specific date of Jesus’ expected return meant they needed to turn from their previous denominations’ traditions (and friends and family) and stride stoutly toward a sturdy *sola scriptura* stance not seen even in Luther’s time.

Argumentum ad baculum is the appeal to force. A baculus was a cane, staff, or stick. As I’m writing this, the governments of the United States and North Korea are alternately planning a summit and shaking their baculi at each other.

When I was a college English teacher, a parent once called me up and threatened that if I didn’t raise his son’s grade, he would

stop recruiting students to my college. (I didn't cave.) I also served on a school board chaired by a business person whose manner and expression clearly signaled, "Defy me at your peril."

Half a century ago, as a Wesleyan Methodist kid attending an Adventist grade school, I got the clear impression from my classmates that Ellen White's writings were the dreaded baculi that well-meaning teachers and parents brandished above their charges' souls. In my teens I discovered that during thoughtful Sabbath School class discussions, a quote from Mrs. White about the Bible passage in question brought all further discussion to a screeching halt. The prophet had spoken, and that was that. No further exegetical probing needed! On to the next verse!

Yet from everything I've read about Adventist history, that's not how our founders thought. Certainly they understood that Sister White was an inspired prophet, and when individuals received letters of counsel containing unmistakable divine proof that Ellen had been shown their case in detail, they typically bore the rebukes gratefully and amended their ways. But I don't read that Uriah Smith (or any other church author) submitted book manuscripts for her imprimatur, and the same is true for material found in *Signs of the Times* or the *Review and Herald*.

On several occasions the Adventist preacher and "near pioneer" H. M. S. Richards, Sr., recounted how one Sabbath his pastor father stepped to the pulpit to preach, only to observe Ellen White and her traveling companions arriving in the sanctuary. He immediately offered her the pulpit, but she refused. "Has the Lord given you a message, brother?" she asked. "Then let us hear what you have to say."

Argumentum ad hominem (abusive). Madsen Pirie defines *ad hominem* crisply: "If you cannot attack the argument, attack the arguer."³ He divides this fallacy into two categories: abusive and circumstantial. An insult, though abusive, is not a fallacy itself, but it becomes one when it's used to undermine an opponent's argument. "How can you give advice about what women should do? You're a man." Or, "None of us should believe a word Professor Smith says. Remember, three decades ago he supported Calvinistic predestination."

Argumentum ad hominem (circumstantial). In this fallacy, "the appeal is to the special circumstances of the person with whom one is arguing."⁴ Speaking about his first impression of Jesus (who was often the target of both abusive and circumstantial *ad hominem* attacks), Nathanael asked, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" (John 1:46, ESV).

More than once, after a worship service, a stranger has entered the foyer of a church I've pastored and asked me for money. When I explained that we direct our charitable funds to our onsite free clothing bank, the stranger has frowned and said: "I thought you people were Christians! What would Jesus do?"

As a young pastor, I learned the hard way to be careful to whom I told the fact that in seminary I had taken a class in ecclesiastical Latin from a former Catholic priest who'd become an Adventist. The people in the conservative church I pastored who knew about this flicked uneasy glances at me, wondering if I were a closet Jesuit.

Back in the days when Hope International was a sharply divisive influence, their magazine *Our Firm Foundation's* ominous fulminations against "new theology" and "neurolinguistic programming"—in both of which young seminarians were said to have been indoctrinated—made pastoring a bit tricky for a while.

Blinding with science. This fallacy "specializes in the use of technical jargon to deceive the audience into supposing that utterances of a scientific nature are being made, and that objective experimental evidence supports them."⁵ By the time I entered college I was a baptized Adventist, thoroughly schooled in a seven-day Creation week during which God created everything, including humanity, and found it to be "very good." I was stunned when a guy my age who still attended the Wesleyan church explained to me what theistic evolution was and then told me that he firmly believed in it.

Blinded a bit myself by the people in white coats and pocket protectors, in my younger years I humbly kowtowed to the dictum that both Creationism and macroevolution were matters you had to take on faith. Now, having seen too many examples of jaw-dropping complexity in all levels of nature, I find myself growling, *Oh, come onnnnn!* when I hear a radio interviewee tell me why we evolved the way we did.

Concealed quantification. This is the "allness" or "broad brush" fallacy, "widely used to condemn whole groups on the basis of some of their members."⁶ A college General Semantics class I took insisted that rather than asserting "Congress is corrupt," the careful thinker should instead say something specific, such as, "As far as I can tell, on July 7, 2014, Senator John Doe accepted a bribe of \$10,000 from the XYZ Corporation." This rightly lets any of Doe's blameless Congressional colleagues off the hook.

I've heard more than one "millennial" say rather crossly that he or she most often doesn't fall into all of the sorting boxes that some church-growth researchers have assigned to that label.

Every schoolboy knows. "The audience is invited to assent [to an assertion] not from conviction but out of shame and fear of being thought less knowledgeable than a mere child."⁷ A variation of this fallacy is "Everyone can plainly see that [assertion] is true." Or more colloquially, "Come on! It's a no-brainer!" Maybe so—but also, maybe not. The burden of proof is still on the asserter. I once served on a board with a pastor whose smirk and eyeroll signaled "Every schoolboy knows" more powerfully than the spoken words could have.

The exception that proves the rule.⁸ I haven't heard this fallacy used for a couple of decades, so perhaps everybody else is as puzzled by it as I've been. But back when I did hear it employed, it tended to bring any discussion to a halt, because for some mysterious reason, an exception to an otherwise solid principle was considered able to declare it null and void. Which of course is silly.

But "the exception that proves the rule" is not a fallacy if you use the older, applicable meaning of "prove." "The word 'prove,' which is now taken to refer to establishing something beyond doubt, used to mean 'test.'"⁹ ["Prove all things; hold fast that which is good" (1 Thess. 5:21, KJV).] In other words, the supposed exception *tests* whether the rule is sound, and if it's found that the exception is true, then the rule must be revised. Otherwise the rule stands.

False precision.¹⁰ Scientists and mathematicians often quantify their results by using numbers. This is appropriate when accurate tests are actually performed, but if the numbers are more haphazard, or simply come from thin air, they can be very deceptive. Ever since taking a class in statistics toward an education degree—and skimming through books like *How to Lie With Statistics*¹¹—I've been cautious about attempts others make to lump me in with the "53 percent of Baby Boomers" who are supposed to believe this or that or behave in a certain way.

In the early 1990s, when demographics ruled church-growth thinking, the church I pastored invited an evangelist to do a series for us. Church-growth theory suggested that we commission a demographic study to find which segment of the Eastside in Seattle might respond most enthusiastically to getting an evangelistic brochure in the mail. The study was done by a reputable and experienced firm, and we targeted that ZIP code

with 10,000 brochures. Only one person responded, and the man remained only partway through the first night, then ambled out. As he passed me in the foyer, he said: "Thanks! I just stopped in to see what you Adventists were up to these days," and bade me a cheerful farewell.

The genetic fallacy. As Pirie says, this fallacy "has nothing to do with Darwin or Mendel, but a great deal to do with not liking where an argument comes from. People give less credence to views which emanate from those they detest, regardless of the actual merit of the views themselves."¹² A few years ago, Barak Obama could publicly utter the most bland and generally accepted truth, and once his detractors learned who had said it, they heartily scorned the statement.

In fact, as I was working on this article, I came across a news story about a high school valedictorian in Kentucky who quoted an inspirational remark and credited it to Donald Trump. The conservative crowd cheered enthusiastically, but then halfway through the applause, the student interrupted them and told them it had actually been spoken by Obama. The crowd's enthusiasm quickly subsided. Check the footnote for a link that features both the story and a video clip.¹³

I remember the wave of "celebration paranoia" that swept over the church I pastored back in the late 1980s. The very word "celebration" itself was suspect, and I had to be careful not to use it in my sermons or in the bulletin. People became very disturbed if modern choruses were sung in the worship service, and this antipathy increased if these choruses—or even standard hymns—were projected on the back wall of the church. The reason was that these practices were used by the dreaded "celebration churches." Ed, our kindly Sabbath School song leader, refused to be hassled. Every Sabbath morning he set up his overhead projector and focused his song transparencies on the wall, just as he'd been doing for decades before celebration paranoia set in.

Plurium interrogationum ("Complex question"—literally "of many questions.") This fallacy is committed "when several questions are combined into one ... [and] the person they are asked of has no chance to give separate replies to each."¹⁴ The most famous example of *plurium* is "Have you stopped beating your wife?"; which blissfully ignores the preliminary question, "Have you been beating your wife?"

Shortly after I began ministerial studies, I happened upon a training manual (*not* used in the seminary curriculum) written by an Adventist evangelist from another part of the world. His

recommended method of getting decisions for baptism was to go to the prospect's home, review the truths he'd been teaching, and then thoughtfully ask, "So this coming Friday evening, what color of baptismal robe would you like to wear?" It had only been a few years since I'd been a debate student, and when I read this, I remember emitting an outraged howl, startling my wife. The evangelist had deftly skipped over the foundational question: "Would you like to be baptized?"

As I think back on evangelistic series I've attended (and even preached), it occurs to me that even though the presenters don't wish to deliberately overwhelm the listeners, this happens more often than not. A guest who is new to the Bible, and maybe even to close sequential reasoning, can get brain fatigue early on. After that they might express visible assent mainly because night by night the evangelist becomes more familiar and, therefore, seems more trustworthy.

Post hoc ergo propter hoc ("After this, therefore because of this") is a result of the false assumption that when two events occur in succession, the first causes the second. Ellen White did battle with this fallacy when she stressed the importance of estate planning. "Death will not come one day sooner, brethren," she insisted, "because you have made your will."¹⁵

Surprisingly, some Christians might succumb to this fallacy in the area of prayer. If I pray earnestly for something, and receive it, does this automatically mean that my request was God's will? If I beg for an impression from the Spirit to indicate whether a person I'm attracted to should be my life partner, and then I feel a warm glow, does that mean I've been given the go-ahead? What part should plain old common sense have in our petitions to God?

Tu quoque ("you also"). This fallacy is committed "when a case is undermined by the claim that its proponent is himself guilty of what he talks of."¹⁶ High-powered Christian leader Jones' accusation that Politician Smith is a womanizer deflates rapidly when Jones' own marital infidelities are exposed. The Pharisees launched a variation of *tu quoque* when they accused Jesus of exorcising demons through the power of Beelzebub (Matt. 12:24).

Suggestions on Using the Fallacies

First of all, forget their names. Or at least keep them to yourself. The worst thing a reasoner can do (unless engaging in a close debate with fellow reasoners who are also fallacy nerds) is to drag in those Latin or even English labels. The lay listener will be so

irked at, or intimidated by, your parade of esoteric knowledge that further discussion is likely to be fairly useless.

Second, use thoughtful colloquial dialogue to ferret out the faulty reasoning, something like this:

Jones: I still get spooked when I see those choruses projected on the screen in church.

Smith: Why's that?

Jones: That's the way they do it in those celebration churches.

Smith: So, you say it gives you a funny feeling?

Jones: Yeah.

Smith: You feel...what? Scared? Annoyed?

Jones: Well, not so much scared as—well, why don't they just use the hymnals with all of those good old songs in it?

Smith: Sure, but there are some good new songs that aren't in the hymnal.

Jones: Like what? Name one.

Smith: "As the Deer." And also the Gettys' songs, including "In Christ Alone."

Jones: Yeah, those are good. Too bad they're not in the hymnal.

Third, drop the topic if it's not a crucial one. As you can see, Smith knows that this topic isn't a "hill to die on," so he doesn't press hard for victory. Fortunately, discussions like this aren't national debate topics, and you're not graded on how well you do. Instead, in a careful and humble way, you're mentoring someone in how to think, while staying friends.. **AT**

¹ W. Ward Fearnside and William B. Holther (1959).

² S. Morris Engel, *With Good Reason: An Introduction to Informal Fallacies*, 5th ed. (1994); Julian Baggini and Peter S. Fosl, *The Philosopher's Toolkit*, 2nd ed. (2010); Nathaniel Blueborn and Hans Blueborn, *The Fallacy Detective: Thirty-six Lessons on How to Recognize Bad Reasoning* (2003).

³ Madsen Pirie, *How to Win Every Argument* (2006), p. 88.

⁴ *ibid.*, p. 90.

⁵ *ibid.*, p. 22.

⁶ *ibid.*, p. 34.

⁷ *ibid.*, p. 61.

⁸ *ibid.*, p. 63.

⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p. 76.

¹¹ Darrell Huff (1954, reissued in paperback in 1993).

¹² Pirie, p. 82.

¹³ https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/trump-obama-high-school-quote_us_5b14af82e4b010565aad1c77?ncid=APPLENEWS00001

¹⁴ Pirie, p. 29.

¹⁵ *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 4 (1881), p. 482.

¹⁶ Pirie, p. 164.



THE ADVENTIST OM

BY ELLE BERRY

HE WAS MY FIRST CELEBRITY CRUSH. HE PLAYED THE MIDDLE child on the '90s sitcom *Home Improvement*, his birthday was on September 8, he was cute, he was dreamy—and he was a vegetarian. Jonathan Taylor Thomas adorned my calendar for an entire year of my elementary school life, and I was elated that my dad also happened to enjoy *Home Improvement*, since that meant I could almost always watch the show.

I grew up with parents who believed that Pop-Tarts® and donuts were desserts, not breakfast food, and the closest we ever got to eating kids' cereal was Rice Krispies® (Lucky Charms™ never appeared on the Berry breakfast table). Soda was a rare treat, and whole-grain flour was the standard. We drank soy milk before it was considered normal and shopped in the health food store long before Whole Foods and avocado toast were in vogue.

But we weren't vegetarians.

Then, as an Adventist teen who was motivated by the profound trio of animal rights, true love (for JTT), and religious endorsement, I made my first foray into vegetarianism. I would continue to be vegetarian, on and off, for the better part of my teenage years and early twenties. In fact, as a freshman in college, I even spent a season as a vegan as a result of my belief that avoidance of all things animal would result in better health.

It did not.

My vegetarian diet was generally better than what we would refer to as the SAD, or Standard American Diet. It wasn't perfect, but it wasn't awful and probably would have received the American Heart Association's endorsement, as well as the approval of most Adventists.

Nonetheless, between the ages of 11 and 21, I gained 10 pounds a year. You could figure out my weight by adding a zero to my age. I also struggled with depression and debilitating social anxiety. But worst of all, by the time I hit my mid-twenties, I was experiencing chronic pain.

I initially believed the pain, depression, and anxiety were all due to extra weight. If I were thin, I reasoned, I would be pain-free, confident, and happy. And so I shifted my self-control into high gear, cut my caloric intake to barely functional (though still within a *reasonable* diet range), and lost 70 pounds. The pain did not go away; in fact, it got worse.

Told by the doctor that my chest pain was called costochondritis, I was sent home to take ibuprofen. I was only 26. For the next three years, my problems escalated. Despite carefully eyeing my caloric intake, I regained 40 pounds of my original weight loss. My spiritual faith was about the only thing sustaining



NIVORE'S DILEMMA

me, so while I wasn't exactly suicidal, I was definitely stranded on the island of despair. Although I was never formally diagnosed, the patterns I exhibited looked a lot like fibromyalgia, the label that encompasses a complicated collection of symptoms with few solutions and limited acknowledgement from conventional medical practitioners.

Since I was still able to work and do most other things, whatever was wrong with me didn't qualify for a diagnosable disease. And yet I was miles away from vitality, always mentally and physically exhausted.

One night, in a dark hour, I called out to God. In truth, it was more of a whimper. *God, I've done everything I know to do. I've done everything I thought you wanted your people to do. I don't know what else to do. If something doesn't change, I don't want to be here anymore.*

Desperation is a strange state, and for me it meant I was more than willing to become my own personal experimental subject, exploring multiple dietary patterns and advice. While mine wasn't a story of instant healing, I experienced a definitive turnaround. And a strange thing happened in the process of the self-experimentation: I fell in love with the field of nutrition.

Along the way I discovered Terry Wahls, M.D., a medical

doctor and clinical professor of medicine at the University of Iowa, who used ancestral dietary principles to mitigate her multiple sclerosis symptoms.¹ Dr. Wahls, like myself, was a former vegetarian. She changed her diet to include meat, although the *key* component to her practice involved eating approximately nine cups of vegetables a day. Her protocol, and several similar nutritional approaches, became—and remain—the foundation of many of my own health choices. These days my weight is healthier and chronic pain is the exception, not the norm. I still have a tender heart, but despair is not a place I have visited for years.

Furthermore, I have spent the last few years working on a Master of Science degree in human nutrition, because I know from experience that nutrition is a potent force for helping to create wellness. I see food less through the lens of dogma and more as an artist's palette, or perhaps a computer code, with which we help to create and program our physical being.

That said, I am no longer a vegetarian. I am an Adventist omnivore.

Conversations about food can motivate some passionate emotions from people. As food writer Michael Pollan notes: "The food movement is a big and lumpy tent, covering a wide range

of concerns, including everything from childhood obesity and hunger to animal welfare, sustainable farming ... food safety regulation, eliminating antibiotics from livestock production, farmland preservation ... It's a long, daunting list of issues.² It is both frustrating and fascinating to watch food documentaries and media reports, often filled with inaccurate conclusions, propel seemingly endless firestorms of debates and rebuttals. And despite my best intentions, I have more than once blundered in attempting to communicate kindly and clearly about these topics.

For the Adventist, there are some specific interesting additions to the food dilemma. The health message is well-established in Adventist culture; however, much of our nutrition advice delivers a monotone message of vegetarianism. While the Adventist church has no official ban on meat eating,³ a plant-based diet

The health message is well-established in Adventist culture; however, much of our nutrition advice delivers a monotone message of vegetarianism.

is a widely encouraged church standard due to the writings of founder Ellen G. White, and it's estimated that as many as half of North American Adventists are vegetarians. I suspect that more than a small fraction of the other 50 percent of church members have at times felt disapproval for their lack of conformity (likely depending on the climate of the local congregation). It is something that many of us just won't talk about, which can insinuate that we're all vegetarians and thereby foster a culture of inauthenticity.

This makes life interesting for the nutritionist who is an Adventist omnivore.

I take these conversations seriously, and so it is with the intention of facilitating a more authentic dialogue, and of promoting grace between one other when we differ in practice,

that I share these thoughts about the dilemma. I will limit my thoughts to the church culture rather than running the gauntlet of aforementioned meat-ethic topics.

1. There is no such thing as an average human. While human beings have an average height, few of us are *that* height; we are variations on a theme. This is also true for nutrition. While lumping and generalizing is important for scientific investigation, humans continue to be individuals. As a nutritionist, I cannot endorse the idea of one diet for everyone. One very interesting study⁴ looked at blood sugar variations between individuals in response to the same foods. For instance, researchers might give everyone a piece of bread, or maybe a bowl of lentils, and find that one person's blood sugar skyrockets in response, while another person's remains stable. While many people may respond

There are many pieces of this conversation, and while vegetarianism may benefit some, I think there is room for variation and nuance in practice.

very positively to shifting to a more whole-grain or legume-based eating pattern, it is also likely that many people (like myself) will end up gaining 10 pounds a year and riding a rollercoaster of blood sugar highs and lows as a result.

E. G. White took these variations into account in her writing, which does truly make her a visionary. In one article she wrote: "I would not take the position that meat should be discarded by everyone. Those who have feeble digestive organs can often use meat, while they cannot eat vegetables, fruits, or porridge."⁵ If you follow the increasing body of research that has recently connected gut-health to other factors in chronic diseases, this is a particularly interesting statement for people making health decisions in the present era.

2. One of the key points that E. G. White makes in regard

to discarding flesh foods is that she was intent on replacing them with “simple food.”⁶ Unfortunately, the church seems to have homed in only on the elimination of meat. Adventists are known for being vegetarians, not for eating simple food. Again, it seems that we may be missing the most valuable piece of her nutritional advice. As food writer Robb Wolf notes in his book *Wired to Eat*: “More than ten thousand new ‘food’ products are created every year in the United States ... Given these complex food combinations and our nearly limitless food options, it’s no wonder we’ve broken the neuroregulation of our appetites.”⁷ “Simple, healthy meals are so lacking in stimulation *relative* to our nearly limitless options that people will describe these normal meals as being just north of cardboard with regard to flavor.”⁸

For the average American (Adventist and otherwise), it is probable that refocusing on simple food would do more to promote health than giving up meat.

3. It is crucial that we do not weaponize our ideas about health. While I openly share my choice to be an omnivore, it is intended only as that—sharing. Unfortunately, I have witnessed both overt and subtle abuses of the wellness message in the church. Personally, I find the subtle more nefarious.

I was particularly saddened when I recently read a note from a church leader who said that while being vegetarian doesn’t make us closer to the kingdom of God, his doing so means that he is trying to follow God’s health laws so that “the frontal lobes and the delicate nerve endings can receive the impressions of the Holy Spirit in a wonderful way.”⁹ The indirect implication is that nonvegetarians are *not* trying to follow God’s health laws and are not keeping their brains sensitive to the Holy Spirit. (Given that Jesus was not a vegetarian, I find this a particularly interesting insinuation.) This subtle shaming doesn’t allow deviation in practice.

It is crucial that we are gentle with one another. Casting shame can take a potentially beautiful tool for facilitating wellness (nutrition) and transform it into a cruel or cutting weapon.

There are many pieces of this conversation, and while vegetarianism may benefit some, I think there is room for variation and nuance in practice. As a nutritionist, I firmly believe that individualization in diet is necessary. Furthermore, given the saturation of hyperpalatable food available in our society, simply whittling the health message down to “abstaining from meat and strong drink” is not a particularly vibrant health

message for this generation. I see a tremendous need and opportunity for a health message; yet, if we’re not careful, we can easily swap health with dogma.

If you find you are thriving as a vegetarian, then it is certainly wise to continue. However, if you find that being an omnivore is more beneficial, my message would be: grace also to you.

Most of all, whatever we do, may we be kind to one another, remembering that “the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 14:17, NIV). **AT**

¹ Wahls Paleo Diet and Progressive Multiple Sclerosis, available online at clinicaltrials.gov/ct2/show/study/NCT01915433

² Michael Pollan, “A Decade After ‘The Omnivore’s Dilemma,’ Michael Pollan Sees Signs of Hope,” *The Washington Post*, June 6, 2016.

³ Roger W. Coon, “Ellen G. White and Vegetarianism,” *Ministry Magazine*, Vol. 59, No. 4 (April 1986), pp. 4-7, 29.

⁴ “Personalized Nutrition by Prediction of Glycemic Responses,” *Cell*, Vol. 163, No. 5 (November 2015), pp. 1079-1094.

⁵ Ellen G. White, *Youth’s Instructor*, May 31, 1894.

⁶ White, “The Camp-Meetings,” *Review and Herald*, July 19, 1870. See also *Review and Herald*, June 13, 1899, Article B.

⁷ Robb Wolf, *Wired to Eat* (2017), p. 33.

⁸ *ibid*, p. 37.

⁹ Andrew McChesney, “Adventist Church President Makes Case for Vegetarianism,” Adventist News Network, July 14, 2014.

J. N. LOUGHBOROUGH, HISTORIAN?

By Ronald Graybill

DURING THE 19TH CENTURY, J. N. Loughborough was one of Adventism's premier evangelists. A former Sunday-keeping preacher, he had accepted the seventh-day Sabbath in 1852 under the ministry of J. N. Andrews. After evangelizing New York, Pennsylvania, and the Midwest, he and D. T. Bourdeau pioneered Adventist work in California. One of Loughborough's biographers called him a "Lighter of Gospel Fires" because an early California convert once dreamed of two men lighting fires that local clergy were powerless to extinguish.¹

Loughborough's abilities as an evangelist, his long experience in the cause, and his close association with James and Ellen White helped make him the church's premier storyteller, as well. In response to D. M. Canright's *Seventh-day Adventism Renounced* (1888), it was natural that the General Conference should turn to Loughborough to record a more favorable account of the

denomination's development. The result was *Rise and Progress of the Seventh-day Adventists* (1892), the first history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

In the face of Canright's assault and in the divisive aftermath of the 1888 Minneapolis General Conference Session, Loughborough's book doubtless helped to steady the denomination and ground its many new believers in the faith. He expanded and revised his work in the 1905 volume *The Great Second Advent Movement*. Over the years, his work filtered into the very folklore of the people; no longer just history-in-a-book, Loughborough's stories were learned at a mother's knee.

In the 20th century, Adventist historians have sought to build a solid documentary base for their church's history. In the process, they have had to come to terms with Loughborough.

On the one hand, Loughborough frequently needs correcting. On the

other, his strong assertion of God's providential guidance and positive support of Ellen White make it difficult to criticize him without appearing to undermine the faith of Adventists. To reject Loughborough's version of events has been seen as denigration of a "faithful pioneer."

Still, a Christian historian has a duty to establish the truth, believing that in the long run, it will be by far the best way to nurture the faith of the community. Those duties compel the conclusion that faithful though Loughborough may have been as an evangelist, he was far from faithful as a historian.

Many Adventist historians recognize Loughborough's shortcomings. Longtime *Review and Herald* editor F. D. Nichol, though he did not name this pioneer, doubtless would have included Loughborough among those "loyal members of the church" who sought to square all unfavorable evidence with the favorable. "A vividly



held premise can blind the eye and invalidate the reasoning even of the most conscientious,” Nichol said.²

Rolf Pöhler, while a young student at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, was more frank. For him, to classify Loughborough as “extremely careless” was “almost a euphemism.” Pöhler, who is now a theology professor and director of the Institute Adventist Studies at Friedensau Adventist University in Germany, placed Loughborough’s

work “among the worst examples of SDA apologetics” for its “misleading approach” and “irresponsible use of the documents.”³

In a recent 500-page biography of the Adventist pioneer, Andrews University professor emeritus Brian Strayer documents Loughborough’s extensive and significant contributions to his church, but he doesn’t ignore his shortcomings as a historian.⁴ Strayer faults Loughborough for “subtle spins and deliberate omissions,” notes a few

obvious errors, and reports a number of impossible exaggerations.⁵

Loughborough’s narratives combine Adventist history and theology, especially in his 1905 volume, where the first 75 pages deal exclusively with biblical materials. Even in *Rise and Progress*, Loughborough quoted nearly 200 Bible texts.

Loughborough’s basic argument was that the providence of God is seen in two particular aspects of Adventist

It is difficult to know whether Loughborough failed to do adequate research, was poorly informed, or both.

history: the remarkable growth and success of a movement that started in poverty and difficulty, and the miraculous guidance provided by the prophetic gift of Ellen G. White.

For sources, Loughborough relied on his memory, his diary, interviews with and letters from other Adventists, and the files of Adventist periodicals such as *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*. Although diaries often can be valuable sources, Loughborough recorded only the briefest jottings and appears to have used them in his history only to pinpoint the date of a few interviews. *The Advent Review* was a more valuable source, and he cites it numerous times, mainly for statistics on the growth of Adventist endeavors

such as the publishing work.

Every historian makes errors—sometimes through carelessness, sometimes as a result of being misled by an otherwise trustworthy source. If such errors are infrequent and minor, the overall value of the historian's work is not seriously undermined, but if they are too numerous, even inadvertent errors jeopardize his or her credibility. When errors reflect a consistent pattern of bias, however, the reader has good reason to question the historian's reliability.

When Did William Foy Die?

Loughborough made some inadvertent errors. When he discussed William Foy as one of two men who

records found to show that Foy actually lived until 1893.⁸ Nevertheless, Loughborough's reporting on Foy is typical of his tendency either to accept other people's recollections uncritically or to make unwarranted assumptions of his own.

How Bold Was Josiah Litch?

Some of Loughborough's problems stem from inadequate original research. For instance, he asserts that the Methodist-Millerite preacher Josiah Litch made so bold as to publish, in 1838, his "unqualified position" that the sixth trumpet would cease to sound on the 11th day of August in 1840, when Turkey would fall.

As Adventist historian Eric

about making the fulfillment of his Aug. 11 prediction a test of the year/day principle. In fact, by 1867 Litch himself had rejected that interpretive device.⁹

How Did Adventists Choose Their World Headquarters?

In other cases it is difficult to know whether Loughborough failed to do adequate research, was poorly informed, or both. In his account of how Washington, D.C., was chosen as a site for the General Conference offices, he attributes more initiative to Ellen White than she actually exercised.

Loughborough reports on the search committee's explorations in the New York City area, followed by White's warning that the headquarters should not be too near New York and her suggestion that the advantages of Washington, D.C., should be closely investigated.¹⁰ Then, he says, just as the committee began to look at the possibility of locating in the nation's capital, another letter arrived saying that "light has come to us in a very decided way"¹¹ and directing the denomination to settle in Washington, D.C. This letter, according to Loughborough, predicted that a favorable location would be found for a low price.

While it is very true that Mrs. White played an important role in the selection of a site in Washington, D.C., she was not the instigator of the idea. Nor did she predict the discovery of the site in advance.

For months before the search committee began its work, J. S. Washburn, who was pastor of the Memorial Church in Washington, had been besieging Ellen White and other church leaders with letters

This pioneer's work must be seen today not as an accurate record of Adventist history, but as a testimony to Loughborough's faith in God's providential leading.

received visions prior to Ellen White, he said that Foy was a mulatto and that he died shortly after the Great Disappointment.

Since Loughborough never met Foy, he can be forgiven for accepting the assumptions of others that this light-skinned Black man was a mulatto.⁶ In Portland, Maine, with its substantial population of West Indians, Foy may have appeared light-skinned. Later in life he lived in northern Maine, where Blacks were rarely seen, and there he was considered dark-skinned.⁷

Likewise, Loughborough cannot be too seriously faulted for reporting that Foy died in the 1840s. Only in the 1980s were census and property

Anderson has shown, Litch actually saved his greatest precision for after the event. In 1838 he was convinced only that Turkey would fall "sometime in the month of August." Litch settled on Aug. 11 only a few days before the expected "fall" of Turkey. More significantly, Litch was very tentative about his prediction, admitting a lack of "positive evidence" to pinpoint the crucial date of the end of the previous trumpet. Consequently, he allowed for some "variation in the conclusion."

Loughborough also claimed that Litch had said his prediction would "demonstrate to the world that a day in symbolic prophecy represents a year of literal time." Yet Litch says nothing

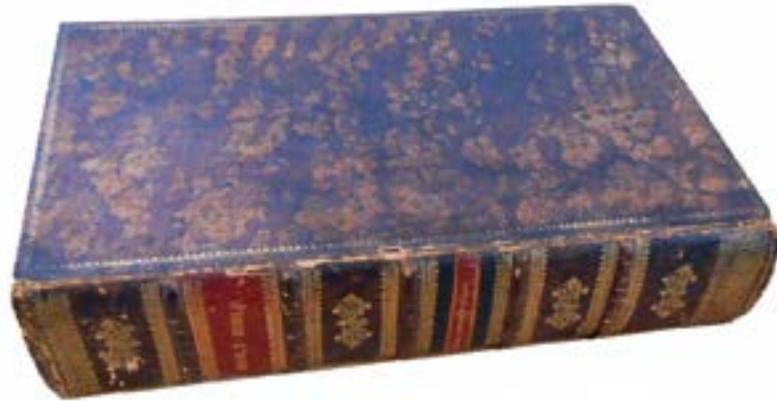
arguing every possible advantage of Washington, D.C., as a location.¹² He got his church behind him and submitted a printed “memorial” to the 1903 General Conference Session in Oakland, California, inviting the denomination to locate in Washington.

It was at that Oakland General Conference Session that the denomination voted to move east and formed a search committee.¹³ From the beginning of their work, the committee members had every intention of investigating Washington D.C. It was only after they had visited the capital and after Washburn and A. G. Daniells, who was then president of the General Conference, had both reported to Ellen White on the advantages of Takoma Park that she received the decided light confirming that Washington, D.C., was the proper location for the church headquarters.¹⁴

Loughborough may have based his account on an incomplete selection of letters from Ellen White’s files. Whatever the reason for this distorted account, it detracts from his laudable effort to show White’s providential role in church leadership. He shows a constant tendency to depict her role as more dramatically miraculous than it really was.

The Big Bible Bigger Still

The same problem besets Loughborough’s account of how the youthful Ellen Harmon, in vision, held a large, heavy Bible on her outstretched hand for over half an hour. The story, as handed down by the White family, was told to Loughborough, he claims, by Ellen’s parents and sister. Loughborough was apparently the first to place it in print—after he told it in a



sermon at the 1891 General Conference Session.¹⁵

The Bible was an 18-pound volume published by Joseph Teal in Boston in 1822. The alleged incident took place in the Harmon home in 1845. In Loughborough’s version of the story, young Ellen not only held the impossibly heavy volume, but also held it open, turned the pages, pointed to texts, and quoted them correctly while looking in another direction.

Willie White recalled his parents telling him the story of the “Big Bible,” too. However, his version is more restrained—the Bible was held closed. Since the tendency in oral transmission is to embellish such stories, Willie White’s account is probably closer to the original, although we shall never know to what extent Willie himself was influenced by Loughborough’s storytelling.

Mrs. White herself records an eyewitness account of her having held open another Bible in Randolph, Massachusetts, that same year, 1845. This copy of the Scriptures was a smaller quarto Bible, whereas the Harmon family Bible—Joseph Teal’s 1822 Bible—was a much larger folio volume. At any rate, in Mrs. White’s account the only miracle mentioned

involves her quoting texts correctly while not looking at them. It is very possible that Loughborough has conflated the different Bible-holding incidents into one story. The story was first printed more than 20 years after his witnesses died, ample time for his creative memory to accomplish such a feat.¹⁶

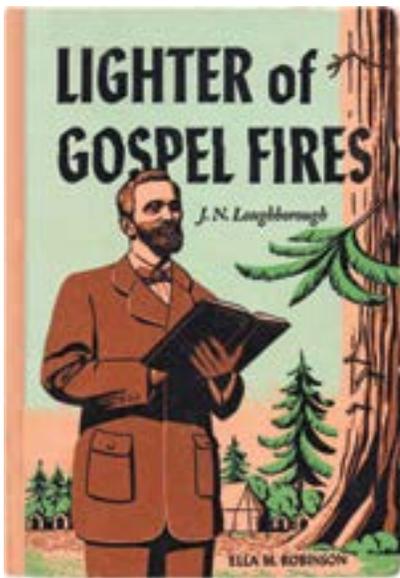
Neither James nor Ellen White made any written mention of Ellen having held the Harmon family Bible (the Big Bible). In fact, when the Bible came into their possession after the deaths of Ellen’s parents, James only mentions it had “fallen into our hands as an invaluable legacy.”¹⁷

Who Killed Jonathan Orton?

Loughborough’s penchant for taking good stories about Ellen White and making them better is similarly seen in his recounting of the 1866 murder of Jonathan Orton, a believer in Rochester, N.Y., who was mysteriously bludgeoned to death in his barn. In 1892 Loughborough explained that Orton had been among those who had prayed faithfully for James White’s recovery while he was convalescing in Rochester late in 1865. After her vision on Christmas day of that year, Mrs. White reported that she had been

shown that Satan was very angry with those who had prayed for her husband and that they should live very close to the Lord, for the devil would seek to harm them.¹⁸

In his book, Loughborough said that shortly before Orton's murder the following March, the man had expressed fears for his safety but "did not seem to have any idea who it was that wanted to take his life." Yet, 26 years earlier, Loughborough himself had reported Orton's murder and said: "Brother Orton told me last Friday ... that he feared P[addock] would try to take his life." Paddock was an ex-convict who had threatened Orton repeatedly after the two men



were involved in a legal dispute over ownership of a chest of drawers.

By omitting the unsavory history of Orton's dispute with Paddock, Loughborough was able to make Ellen White's prediction about Satan's anger seem all the more dramatic. It is possible that in the years after Orton's death, Loughborough himself had

suppressed the memory of Paddock in an attempt to console Orton's grief-stricken widow, a family friend. However, Loughborough had access to his own earlier account in the *Advent Review*.

Loughborough also notes that Orton's death was a heavy blow for the man's wife, Carolyn, and that "she did not long survive her husband." But Jonathan Orton died in 1866, and Carolyn Orton didn't die till 1873—seven years later.¹⁹ Loughborough further makes it appear that she must have died very soon afterward by adding that within a "few months," six out of the nine who prayed for James were dead. We cannot be sure exactly whom he was numbering in that prayer group, but among them could be the Ortons, the Lamsons, the Andrews, the Loughboroughs,

the first of the group to die after Orton, did not die until 15 months later.²⁰

How Long Under Guardianship?

Also in his writings, Loughborough describes the case of Stockbridge Howland, a civil engineer and Millerite Adventist in Topsham, Maine. Local officials placed him under guardianship, afraid that his zeal for the Advent message was causing him to neglect his temporal affairs, which could put him at risk to become a financial burden on the community. But "after a while," when the officials wanted him to build a bridge for the town, his guardianship "suddenly" ended. Loughborough doesn't specify how long that "while" was, but the reader naturally assumes it was not very long. In fact, probate records

Loughborough consistently embellishes, omits, and distorts history so as to defend or enhance the reputation of Ellen White.

the Lindsays, the Aldrichs, and Ellen White. If both husband and wife were present, and if he were counting all of those couples, that would actually be 13 people. However, checking the death dates of all those who were likely among the prayer group reveals that Mary Loughborough died first, in 1867, and J. M. Aldrich and J. B. Lamson died in 1870. All of the rest died a good deal later, so it's highly unlikely that six of those who prayed for James were dead within "a few months." Even Mary Loughborough,

discovered in recent years show the guardianship continued for 13 years.²¹

The Unquotable Quote

Loughborough's work is also marred by an occasional deliberate distortion of his sources. Between his 1892 and 1905 books, he changes the wording of a letter he "quotes." In 1892 he used Mrs. M. C. Truesdail's letter to bolster his argument that Ellen White always opposed the shut door doctrine. Truesdail spoke of Mrs. White's rebuke of a woman who advocated the shut

door: “Sister Harmon was shown that there was no truth in her message, as there were many in the churches who would yet embrace the truth; that the good angels would leave her [this sister] at the door of the church, if she went there upon such an errand.”²²

In 1905 he quoted the same passage, but words were added saying “that the good angels would yet go to work for souls in those churches, and when they did thus, they [the angels] would leave this sister, with her message [meaning her “no-mercy” message], outside the door.”²³

In reference to a separate passage, D. M. Canright accused Loughborough of “a deliberate deception” when he spotted ellipses where Loughborough omitted three crucial words from a quote of James White’s *A Word to the “Little Flock.”*²⁴ But Rolf Pöhler noticed what Canright had missed—that on the next page Loughborough did the same thing again, this time without ellipses! James White had said: “she and all the band in Portland, Maine (where her parents then resided), had given up the ‘midnight cry’ and shut door as being in the past.”²⁵ But Loughborough left out the words “and shut door” without any indication to the reader that he had done so.

Again, the specific error is not as significant as the pattern it establishes: Loughborough consistently embellishes, omits, and distorts history so as to defend or enhance the reputation of Ellen White.

Having seen this pattern, a prudent, conscientious scholar must take it into account whenever a decision must be made whether to credit Loughborough’s version of an event. The general rule of thumb must be

that in dealing with facts or incidents that favor Loughborough’s thesis, he cannot be used to establish with certainty anything for which he is the only witness or source, especially where other evidence tends in a contrary direction.

For instance, Loughborough is the only eyewitness to Ellen White’s visions to make the explicit claim that during vision she spoke while not breathing.²⁶ Similarly, Loughborough is the only witness to claim that Ellen White had a public vision as late as 1884.²⁷ Other sources date her last open vision in 1878,²⁸ and by that time public visions were extremely rare.²⁹ A public vision as late as 1884 would certainly have been a spectacular event, yet no one else who was present at the Oregon camp meeting where it is supposed to have taken place made any mention of a vision, and the published accounts of the meetings are similarly silent.

This does not mean that these events did not take place, but rather that Loughborough’s testimony is not sufficient to establish their historical veracity. This pioneer’s work must be seen today not as an accurate record of Adventist history, but as a testimony to Loughborough’s faith in God’s providential leading, a faith that today must be buttressed by better historical writing than Loughborough provided. **AT**

¹ Brian Eugene Strayer, *J. N. Loughborough: The Last of the Adventist Pioneers* (2014); Ella M. Robinson, *Lighter of Gospel Fires: The Story of John N. Loughborough* (1954).

² Francis D. Nichol, *Ellen G. White and Her Critics* (1951), p. 193.

³ Rolf Pöhler, “And the Door Was Shut—Seventh-day Adventists and the Shut-Door Doctrine in the Decade After the Great Disappointment” (typewritten, Andrews University, 1978), pp. 48-49.

⁴ Strayer, *op. cit.*

⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 329-330.

⁶ Delbert W. Baker, *The Unknown Prophet* (1987), p. 31.

⁷ Lelia A. Clark Johnson, *Sullivan and Sorrento Since 1760* (1953), pp. 65-66.

⁸ Baker, p. 159.

⁹ Eric Anderson, “The Millerite Use of Prophecy,” in Ronald L. Numbers and Jonathan M. Butler, *The Disappointed: Millerism and Millenarianism in the Nineteenth Century* (1993), pp. 78-91.

¹⁰ J. N. Loughborough, *The Great Second Advent Movement* (1905), pp. 458-461.

¹¹ *ibid.*, p. 460.

¹² Judson Sylvanus Washburn to Ellen G. White, March 2, 1903.

¹³ “General Conference Proceedings, April 6, 1903, Further Report on Plans,” *General Conference Bulletin*, Vol. 5 (April 7, 1903), p. 100.

¹⁴ Ellen G. White to General Conference Committee, Letter 106 (May 20, 1903); A. G. Daniells, “The Removal to Washington,” *Review and Herald*, Vol. 80 (August 20, 1903), pp. 4-5.

¹⁵ Loughborough, *Rise and Progress of the Seventh-day Adventists*, pp. 103-104; Loughborough, “Early Experiences,” *General Conference Bulletin*, Vol. 4 (March 18, 1891), p. 145.

¹⁶ Ronald Graybill, “The Big Bible, Bigger Still,” *Spectrum*, Vol. 43, No. 3 (Summer 2015), pp. 5-16.

¹⁷ Ellen G. White, *Life Sketches of James White and Ellen G. White* (1880), p. 324.

¹⁸ Loughborough, *Rise and Progress of the Seventh-day Adventists*, pp. 270-271.

¹⁹ “Obituary Notices” [Caroline Orton], *Review and Herald*, Vol. 41 (May 13, 1873), p. 175.

²⁰ “Death of Sister Loughborough,” *Review and Herald*, Vol. 30 (July 2, 1867), p. 40.

²¹ Merlin D. Burt, *Adventist Pioneer Places: New York and New England* (2011), p. 48.

²² Loughborough, *Rise and Progress of the Seventh-day Adventists*, p. 119.

²³ Loughborough, *The Great Second Advent Movement*, p. 223.

²⁴ D. M. Canright, *Life of Mrs. E. G. White, Seventh-day Adventist Prophet: Her False Claims Refuted* (1919), p. 88.

²⁵ James White, *A Word to the “Little Flock”* (1847), p. 22; Loughborough, *The Great Second Advent Movement*, p. 264.

²⁶ Loughborough, *ibid.*, p. 319.

²⁷ Loughborough, “The Study of the Testimonies—No. 2,” *General Conference Daily Bulletin*, Vol. 5 (Jan. 29-30, 1893), p. 20.

²⁸ Nichol, p. 76.

²⁹ Ronald D. Graybill, “The Dream Life of Ellen G. White,” *Adventist Today*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (Winter 2017), p. 30.

JOHN 18:37-38

What Is Truth?

BY STEVEN SICILIANO

THERE CAN HARDLY BE A MORE tantalizing question in the Bible than Pilate's "What is truth?"—after which he immediately walks away, leaving readers to wonder what he meant. He was responding to Jesus' saying that his purpose for coming into the world was to bear witness to the truth, and yet nothing in the immediate context explains which truth either man was referring to.

As the encounter between Jesus and Pilate unfolds, however, one issue seems surprisingly clear: Pilate's problem was not a matter of knowing, but doing. He knew the truth about Jesus, and he understood what he should do in response. He just didn't have the courage to do it.

What Pilate Knew

Pilate started out on the right foot. When the Jewish leaders who were expecting a favor brought Jesus before him, Pilate resisted, demanding to know what the charges were (John 18:29). He then interrogated Jesus—a

necessary step in any inquiry—after which he declared, "I find no guilt in Him" (verse 38, NASB). He went on to repeat that exonerating phrase twice more.

When Pilate was told that Jesus had "made Himself out to be the Son of God" (John 19:7, NASB), the text notes that Pilate became "even more afraid," suggesting that he discerned something in the character of Jesus that made the claim seem plausible. Even Pilate's order to inscribe "King of the Jews" atop Jesus' cross may have been more than just a way to antagonize the priests who had forced his hand. Wittingly or not, the title captured a truth that Pilate seemingly felt compelled to declare, perhaps to atone for his wrong.

The point of these verses is not about Pilate's interest in truth, however; it's about his weaknesses, which are on display in every line of the passage. He didn't lack discernment. He lacked will. Though he couldn't fool himself into believing Jesus was guilty, he couldn't bring himself to vindicate the accused either. Pilate's deficit of soul gradually led

him to betray his own conscience and condemn an innocent man.

Obstacles to Truth

Pilate seemed apathetic in general, and indifferent toward righteousness in particular. No sooner had he rebuffed the priests for not leveling a charge than he said, "Take Him yourselves, and judge Him according to your law" (John 18:31, NASB). That was an understandable reaction, since there was no real case against Jesus, and Pilate had become impatient with their vague complaints.

At that point Pilate could have intervened to set things right, either by dismissing the case or by ruling in behalf of Jesus. A person of integrity would have done that. The Roman prefect knew that Christ's opponents wanted him dead, and he could have prevented it (verses 29-32).

But Pilate couldn't be bothered by intellectual challenges either, as he demonstrated by asking his momentous question (verses 37-38). "Truth?" he might have thought,

“Who can know it? And what is truth compared to power and expedience?”

The tendency to shirk responsibility manifests in the next scene, too, where Pilate relies on the crowd to decide Jesus’ fate for him. Given the stark contrast between Jesus and Barabbas, Pilate likely expected the crowd to release Jesus, which would have helped him: since the Jewish leaders wouldn’t allow Pilate to exonerate Jesus, perhaps the crowd would do it for him.

That plan backfired, of course, but it was a dubious strategy from the beginning, because the “custom” to which he appealed was not a culturally embedded practice that met essential needs of society. It was more of a gimmick and a ploy to please the masses. In asking the crowd to choose between Jesus and Barabbas, Pilate appealed not to truth (*aletheia* in Greek), but to a convention (*synetheia*). Homiletically the rhymed words evoke the contrast between Pilate’s choices: it was as if the paired words were whispering, “What will it be, Pilate? Aletheia or synetheia? Truth or trifle? Doing the right thing or taking the easy way out?”

Next Pilate tried appeasement. “I’ll have the prisoner slapped around a bit. Maybe that will settle them down.” If he could inflict enough pain to satisfy the accusers, then he could avoid having to release Jesus outright. What other reason was there to torture an innocent person? But that only intensified the crowd’s thirst for blood. Pilate could have declared Jesus’ innocence, but his action had the opposite effect: it weakened his

If living up to truth depends on strength of soul, then discerning the truth probably does also.

position as judge (John 19:1-7).

After speaking to Jesus a final time, Pilate “made efforts to release him,” and at that point the Jewish leaders employed their most powerful weapon: saying that it would be disloyal to Caesar to free a rival to the throne. In this way, they coerced Pilate to give in and sentence Jesus to death (verses 8-12).

Here at last is the central issue, and probably the reason Pilate had dawdled as long he had over this case. If he mishandled an affair such as this, reports would get back to his superiors, and his position could be in jeopardy. Pilate’s ability to act on truth was compromised by his desire to protect his situation.

Knowing and Doing

The account of Pilate’s interaction with Jesus as told in the Gospel of John includes two striking references to the word *truth*, but the passage never indicates what truth is or how to find it. Instead, it depicts people in the act of mishandling a truth they either know or sense, and it demonstrates that right action is as much a function of the soul as of the intellect.

Pilate couldn’t bring himself to do the right thing; too much was at stake, and his moral core couldn’t bear the pressure. The story reveals a lot about how people behave in response to truth, but it doesn’t say much about how they can know truth.

Or does it? If human actions are warped by preconditions such as laziness, apathy, and fear, it could be that perception is skewed by nonrational factors as well. If living up to truth depends on strength of soul, then discerning the truth probably does also. Even something as benign as optimism can distort a person’s view of reality. Is it unreasonable to suppose that anger, bias, greed, and cowardice can prevent people from understanding truth?

What is clear is from Pilate’s story is that truth is not just knowledge; without moral courage, truth is useless. **AT**



Samuel Cried All Night

By Alden Thompson

Once upon a time, I wrote a column for *Signs of the Times* called “Windows on God’s Word.” It provided a much-needed corrective to my natural tendency to be issues-oriented. Writing that column was a good monthly tonic for me.

But even though I was focusing on Scripture, I should not have been surprised to discover that the stories and exhortations in the Bible were often remarkably relevant for my personal life and for life in the church. As Ellen White put it, “The Bible was given for practical purposes.”¹

So here is a story from about 1,000 years before Christ.² It’s a story about leadership in Israel, featuring the prophet Samuel and also Saul, the man who would become Israel’s first king.

Tumultuous Times

Israel already knew something about leadership. After they had spent centuries in slavery and another 40 years wandering in the desert, God had brought them into the land of Canaan. And during those tumultuous days, he had raised up leaders for them: Scripture calls them “judges,” though they were more like warriors than anything else. But the people weren’t satisfied. They clamored for a king. Reluctantly God agreed to grant them their request.

At first, Samuel had boiled over when the people demanded a king. “Ungrateful fools,” he cried, his pained and angry words echoing through the camp.

But Samuel’s initial reluctance soon gave way to more positive feelings. Once he saw the new king, he knew God had found a good man. Saul was tall, muscular, and God-fearing. With disarming ease, he transformed Samuel into a devoted friend and admirer. Despite an inner conviction that the passion for a king was a not-so-subtle form of apostasy, Samuel couldn’t resist Saul’s charm. And why should he? Saul was the man of God’s choosing.

At the public ceremony marking the beginning of Saul’s reign, a sudden impulse of national pride welled up even in Samuel’s well-disciplined heart. The Lord had given them a man of stature, the best in the land.

Not everyone was as easily convinced as Samuel, however, and Saul faced the specter of revolt on the first day of his reign. Whispered sneers filtered through the camp. “What can this fellow do to save us?” muttered the malcontents. They sat tight while everyone else brought gifts.

The doubts about the new king’s ability were not unfounded. On the day of his coronation, Saul couldn’t face the people, but ran away and hid among the baggage. What kind of spineless fish had the Lord given them for a king? Never mind that Saul was a head taller than anyone else. What good was a giant if he had no backbone?

But now, the revolt itself was a chance for the king to show his stuff—that he was tough enough to face the world of politics and war. A touch of royal muscle would make believers of everyone.

No such luck. Without a whimper, Saul simply headed home to the family farm. Maybe the rebels were right after all.

Passion Plus Grace

But Samuel saw something better in Saul: modesty, not cowardice; a man of nobility, worthy of prophetic support. Soon Saul would prove him right.

Nahash, a belligerent neighbor, began picking on Jabesh-gilead, an isolated Israelite city on the eastern frontier. “We’ll make a treaty and serve you faithfully,” offered the men of Jabesh.

“Fine,” responded Nahash. “But I’ll gouge out your right eyes. That’s the price of peace.”

Panic-stricken, Jabesh asked for seven days of respite to send for help. Nahash smugly agreed; he

must have heard about the spineless new king. He could afford to wait a week for his city and his gouged eyes. In the meantime he would relish the scenery—the mounting terror as the deadline approached.

When the messengers from Jabesh rushed into Gibeah, Saul's city, everyone wept. They knew they had no warrior worthy of the cause. But then Saul

What do you say to the Lord when your king has fallen from grace?

came in from the field, where he had been plowing with his oxen.

“What's all the noise?” he queried. They told him.

Scripture says that the Spirit of God overwhelmed Saul. He got angry. Very angry. This was no minnow among barracuda. Saul could hold his own with the toughest.

He whacked his yoke of oxen into pieces, shipping the chunks of flesh throughout Israel with a startling one-liner: “This will be the fate of your oxen if you don't come.”

The people came.

Saul sent word to Jabesh: “We'll be there tomorrow. Hang on.” And they did.

Saul swooped down on Nahash and company, polishing them off. This king had backbone.

He also had grace. After the victory, the people were so charged up that they clamored for the blood of the rebels who had jeered at Saul's authority. “Where are those scoundrels?” they cried to Samuel. “Let's put them to death.”

But it was Saul who intervened. “We'll not put anyone to death today,” proclaimed the king. “For the Lord has delivered his people.”

That's why Samuel loved Saul with a deep passion. God had found a king who was powerful—yet humble and generous, a man who honored God and loved people.

But somewhere in Saul's heart lay a tragic flaw. Thread by thread, his noble soul began to unravel. The climax came when God commanded him to obliterate the Amalekites—yes, the violence of it all is troublesome for us today, but that's not the point here. The point is that Saul did it his way, not God's. To put it bluntly, he disobeyed.

God spoke the bitter words to Samuel: “I'm sorry I ever made Saul king. He has turned his back on me and has disobeyed my commands.”

Scripture says that Samuel got angry and cried to the Lord all night. From twilight. To midnight. To dawn. How long is a night like that? And what do you say to the Lord when your king has fallen from grace?

Or a friend? Or a loved one? What can you do?

Samuel got angry and cried to the Lord all night. **AT**

¹ Ellen G. White, Manuscript 24, 1886, *Selected Messages*, Book 1 (1958), p. 20.

² Based on 1 Samuel 9 to 15.

Editorial *continued from page 3*

This is, it seems to me, a more comprehensive way to understand sin, and a more gracious way. Yes, people do horrible things. But people can be forgiven—about that, at least, the Bible is clear. An earthquake, a plague, a cancer, cannot. Were the Christian perfectionists to be suddenly fantastically successful, and everyone on Earth managed to be very, very good, low-pressure cells would still form over warm oceans, spin into typhoons, hit land, and kill thousands. Microorganisms against which we have no immunity would still sweep through populations. Tectonic plates along the Pacific Rim would still shift.

Because not just people, but all of creation groans waiting for salvation. Christ died for that, too. Perhaps mostly for that. We are all of a piece, we and the universe we live in.

Here some people, people who need someone to blame, begin to get a bit annoyed. “You’re letting us off the hook, aren’t you?” they say. “You’re talking about no responsibility, no accountability. You’re saying we’re all just victims.”

Well, yes, in a way we are. I didn’t eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. Yet I’ve suffered plenty of pain and unhappiness. Yes, I’ve made choices to do things I knew were wrong, and so have you. But according to the Judeo-Christian story, I never would have experienced any of that had it not been for a choice that someone else made a long time ago. Paul admitted that “in Adam all die,” and while that doesn’t take me off the hook for my own choices, it does explain why both of my parents got cancer and died young in spite of living healthy lives, why my friend’s child was born with permanent disabilities even though he and his wife had prayed for a happy and healthy family, and why another friend has clinical depression even after accepting Jesus as his Savior.

So often I hear Christians scolding about other people’s sins. We scold about drugs and homosexuals and abortion and pornography. Have you noticed that the people who criticize others for their choices and demand they be accountable seem to assume that they themselves are making the best choices they could? No Christian would deny that “all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.” It’s just hard for us to identify our own greed, gluttony, anger, and pride when things such as homosexuality, abortion, drugs, and pornography are happening “out there.”

Every time a major election is coming up, as it is this year, I hear a lot from politically minded Christians about what other people shouldn’t do. They should quit being homosexual, quit being so lazy and taking my taxes, quit having abortions, quit taking drugs, quit sneaking across our borders. It is astonishing to how many Christians that’s the gospel. The gospel of cut it out. The gospel of get out of here. The gospel of straighten up.

That is a pathetic gospel, a syphilitic gospel, an utterly useless gospel. Even on those occasions when it’s good advice, it’s never good news. You don’t need a loving God for a gospel like that. You just need opinions. For the gospel is not, and never has been, about the improvements we need to make, though we undoubtedly require many. It is about what God has already done. It is his power, not ours (for ours, we have demonstrated repeatedly, is inadequate), that is good news.

The human psyche is far too complex for us to know why people make the choices they do, but I’ve chosen to rely upon the operating theory that most people are doing about the best they can. Almost without exception. Even some supremely dysfunctional people might be (as far as we know) maxing out their potential. Consider the boy born with crack cocaine already in his veins. The

girl who learns all she knows about sexual morality from an abusive stepfather. The child raised with no convenient example of anyone in his world holding a job. The millions born with a losing combination of genes, raised in a setting that doesn’t help them one little bit to overcome whatever combination of bad tendencies they came into the world with.

That’s the kind of universe we live in. One where sin is not just chosen, but is thrust upon us. That’s what sin is, and that’s what sin does. We are sinners, but we’re also sinned against. Sinned against by existence itself. *Jesus died for that, too.* And so our first task, even before helping others identify their sins (a task at which we Christians are known to be experts) is to help them fight back against an existence that by its very nature has it in for us, by marshaling to our side all of the love and power that God has for us.

We Christians make the propensity to sin our headline, until it leaves everyone feeling hopeless. Let’s admit that we don’t just do sin. Sin does things to us. It has created the setting in which all of those things that we hate happen. So while not subtracting a bit from the bad choices you and I make, we can (if we are thoughtful) begin to see God’s mercy penetrating and trying to heal every continent and ocean and nebula, every atom, every cell, every quantum process of this diseased universe—not just the actions human beings do that are easiest to identify and blame them for.

Jesus died for our guilt, but also for our grief. Jesus died for our carelessness, but also for our cancer. Jesus died to atone for our envy, but also for the earthquakes that shake the very ground we stand on.

In the end he’s going to heal it all, the personal *and* the universal. If the parable in Matthew 25:31-46 is to be taken seriously, all he asks in the meantime is that rather than exclude and blame, we pitch in and help the victims of sin, just as he did while on this Earth. **AT**

Contributors



ELLE BERRY is a writer and nutritionist. She is passionate about creating wellness, maintaining a

bottomless cup of tea, and exploring every beautiful vista in the Pacific Northwest. She blogs at ChasingWhippoorwills.com.



RONALD GRAYBILL'S early scholarship earned him an invitation to the Ellen G. White Estate to assist

Arthur L. White in writing a six-volume biography of his grandmother. During his 13 years at the White Estate, Ron completed his doctorate in American Religious History at Johns Hopkins University, then taught for a decade at La Sierra University. He spent another decade preparing annual community health reports for Loma Linda University Medical Center and leading grassroots community health projects.



FRITZ GUY is a retired dean, editor, college president, and professor of theology and philosophy. He is the author of *Thinking*

Theologically.



LINDSEY ABSTON PAINTER is a writer, teacher, and mother of two. She enjoys reading, writing about feminism, her two children, her cat,

and strawberry pie.



MAYLAN SCHURCH is pastor of the Adventist church in Bellevue, Washington, and has authored or co-authored more than

a dozen books.



LOREN SEIBOLD is a pastor and the executive editor of *Adventist Today*.



STEVEN SICILIANO is pastor of the Jackson Heights, Hartsdale, and New York Filipino churches in the Greater New York Conference of Seventh-

day Adventists. He holds an M.Div. from Andrews University and an M.A. in Community Health Education from Adelphi University.



ALDEN THOMPSON is professor emeritus of biblical studies at Walla Walla University. A revised 25th-anniversary

edition of his book *Inspiration* has been released.

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EDITORIAL PHILOSOPHY

The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the editor or the editorial board. One of the purposes of this magazine is to encourage dialogue between those of differing viewpoints within the Adventist Church. Thus, we will publish articles ranging throughout the conservative-liberal continuum.

Adventist Today



NEWS BRIEFS

Fitbit Tells Facebook What We Do on Sabbath

ADVENTIST WORLD — A new Fitbit, designed specifically for Adventists, has been engineered to post automatic notices to your Facebook wall if it detects that you are swimming on Sabbath. The Adventbit is the first Fitbit model designed for a specific denomination and was commissioned by the General Conference to encourage “Social media-powered Sabbath-keeping accountability.” The Adventbit will be distributed to Adventists with their church bulletins next Sabbath. All members will be required to wear the devices during Sabbath hours. In addition to letting your online social networks know if you engage in strenuous exercise on Sabbath, the Adventbit will tell Facebook exactly how much of Sabbath you spent napping and will geotag your snoozing if it happens to be taking place in the middle of a sermon.

Which Shoes Are Best for the Time of Trouble?

SILVER SPRING, Md. — The entire *Adventist Review* staff spent last weekend trying on running shoes for a new monthly rating system that ranks shoes for end-times-escape effectiveness. The ranking has already proven controversial, as staff members have vigorously disagreed on which brand and model provides the best chance for saints on the run.

“We all agreed that style points mean absolutely nothing once you are knee-deep in wilderness mud,” said *Review* spokesperson Ko Riendo, “but beyond that we were hopelessly divided into Adidas, New Balance, Nike, and Mizuno camps.” He said that late Sunday night, after several senior editors pulled rank, the group finally reached a consensus that the Adidas UltraBoost provided church members—regardless of fitness level—with the most hope for an effective Jesuit escape.

In order to meet a severely tight publishing deadline, the team delegated the remainder of the ranking work to a summer intern who, incidentally, was the only consistent runner on staff.

Hot Guy Is Instant Hit on AdventistMatch

LOMA LINDA, Calif. — Adventist dating site AdventistMatch has crashed seven times since Lars Stilig created a profile this morning. Minutes after Stilig uploaded his profile picture, the site was flooded with a torrent of traffic from existing users, followed shortly thereafter by the biggest increase in membership signups in the site’s history.

Stilig, a family practice resident at Loma Linda University, populated his profile with details about his love for carefree Sabbath-afternoon bird watching and inner-city mission projects. His ideal date involved a romantic walk around an Adventist Book Center. Stilig added that he couldn’t wait to marry the Adventist who would bear him his three beautiful Pathfinders. “Word of the first hot guy to sign up for AdventistMatch has spread around the Adventist world like a flash flood,” said Mahd Skhramble, a Walla Walla University communications professor. “Imagine the energy generated by seeing a good-looking single guy walk through your church door for the first time, and then multiply that by 144,000 and you’ll get a feel for the impact this guy had on the world church this morning.”

Church Administrator Demoted to Soul-Winner

BORING, N.D. — After losing a close re-election bid for his position as conference executive secretary, Zac Cloth has spent the last several months mourning his new role as a local church pastor. For the life of him, Cloth still is unable to understand how a man of his obvious talents and experience could lose such a perfect fit of a role and end up once again in the trenches, winning souls. Cloth, who hasn't had to deal with petty local church affairs for a good two decades, has complained to close friends that having to roll up his sleeves and do some actual work is a waste of perfectly good cufflinks. Plus, he is convinced that he was landed with the B-Team as far as his church elders are concerned. About the only thing that consoles Cloth is micromanaging the church board agenda.

Potluck Expert Trying to Retain Visitor Status

BERRIEN SPRINGS, Mich. — A lifelong Adventist who moved to town years ago has refused to transfer his membership to a local church. Instead, Jack Jumpur has opted to church hop every week in order to retain visitor status for potluck purposes. “Any self-respecting Adventist church knows that you have to let visitors get first dibs on potluck,” said Jumpur while scanning his list of potluck ratings for the 30-plus area churches near Andrews University.

“If you visit a different church every week,” insists Jumpur, “nobody catches on and they put you first in line for the Special K® casseroles.” He admitted, however, that a few highlighted churches on his list were now risky options, since they had “particularly good potlucks that I hit up a little too much.” He said that if he turned up at the Korean church for the third time this month, he might have to wait like everyone else until his table is announced.

Family Picks Ideal Island for Next “Mission Trip”

ATLANTA — All five members of the Kostoso family have spent the last several days in prayer and sincere online research as they have attempted to find a gorgeous island with perfect white sand beaches and highly rated resorts to visit for their “mission trip” this summer. They reached unanimous agreement that the Lord was leading them to make a sacrificial medical supply drop-off at any worthy Adventist school/clinic/Dorcas closet on said island during their projected two-week stay, as long as they could do so without having to cancel scuba diving lessons.

The Kostosos have not been able to decide if they will attend Sabbath worship services while on their mission trip, as there might not be an air-conditioned local church within a five-mile radius of their resort. Besides, even if such a church did exist, they had no way to be sure that its members speak English or have perfected potluck-worthy vegan lasagna.

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.

Trust & Verify

From an early age, your personality has been to explore new ideas and question the status quo.

When a teacher presents new topics as if they are indisputable facts, you trust them as far as you can verify the veracity of their claims. Your inquiring mind compels you to speak up in class, asking searching questions, and prompts you to write papers that challenge commonly held assumptions.

When your employer gives you data to do your work, you appreciate your paycheck and do everything you can to keep getting paid, but you also double-check what you're given to make sure it is accurate, fair, ethical, and truthful.

And when you go to church, you think your pastor is a good person who has compassionately supported you and your family through some difficult life events, but you're not going to take his or her theological pronouncements as gospel. You're going to study them for yourself and draw your own conclusions on any topic of faith.

Adventist Today Is Independent

We think our print and online resources are uniquely tailored to you. Our mission includes a respect for the Adventist community, but we are willing to investigate anything and bring it to light whenever necessary:

- Even if a fundamental belief has been held for centuries, we will seek for present truth and share it with you so that you can come to your own conclusions.
- When a leader at any level bullies, abuses, or assaults children or women or men, we will call it out and bring pressure to bear to resolve those situations.
- When leaders insist on uniformity and demand compliance with loyalty oaths, we will suggest how to resist these power plays.
- When financial spending by the denomination is presented as good for its members, we'll verify their claims and let you know if your trust is well-placed.

We're Worth Supporting

It's easy to think someone else will financially support independent journalism and that your money is not needed. It's easy to think there must be an institution or family foundation that is underwriting Adventist Today. It's easy to think that everything on the Internet is free, and there are no associated costs. But as a reader-supported nonprofit organization, we need your continuous support to sustain us.

Independent journalism is needed now more than ever. The issues we need to verify in the Adventist community are increasing every day. And you're counting on Adventist Today staff to be at their best and get the story right. That's why we are asking you to become a member.



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Thanks for sustaining Adventist Today. We value you as a reader and supporter.

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PO Box, 683 Milton-Freewater, OR 97862

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