

Will God Save Hindus  
and Buddhists?

Why Adventists  
Fear Easter Sunday

Is the Resurrection  
Story Believable?

SPRING 2022 • VOL. 30 NO. 2

# Adventist *Today*

## RESURRECTION



## features

**5 Stories, and Why They Matter***By James J. Londis***8 Christ Is Risen! Risen Indeed!***By William G. Johnsson***11 Should Adventists Celebrate Easter Sunday?***By Reinder Bruinsma***14 A Crown of Red***By Katrina Blue***16 Not Seeing, But Believing***By Smuts van Rooyen***DEPARTMENTS****3 Editorial**

The Resurrection Is the Treatment for Adventists' Fears

*By Loren Seibold***18 The Exegete**

1 Corinthians 15:12-14: The Significance of the Resurrection

*By Olive J. Hemmings***20 World Church**

Jesus, Salvation, and the World's Religions

*By Raj Attiken***24 Faith & Culture**

What Makes Someone a Christian?

*By Loren Seibold***28 Health**

Is It Good Because It's "All Natural"?

*By Jack Hoehn***30 Barely Adventist**

News Briefs

**31 Contributors****Executive Editor**

Loren Seibold

**Copy Editor**

Debra J. Hicks

**Contributing Editors**James Walters, John McLarty,  
Stephen Chavez, J. David Newman**Art Director**

Chris Komisar

**Interim Director of Operations**

Annet Johnston

**Digital Media**News Editor: Jammie Salagubang Karlman;  
Editorial Associates: Mark Gutman, Carmen  
Seibold; Weekly Email Edition Editor: Lindsey  
Painter**Business Development and Fundraising**

Björn Karlman

**Accountant**

Mark Gutman

**Governing Board****Bill Garber** (chair), **Elmar Sakala**, (vice chair),  
Marit Case, Andrew Clark, Jaci Cress-Solis,  
**Chris Daley**, Jack Hoehn, Björn Karlman,  
Mailen Kootsey, Alvin Masarira, Keisha  
McKenzie, Chuck Mitchell, J. David Newman,  
Lindsey Painter, Gary Raines, Monte Sahlin,  
Carmen Seibold, **Loren Seibold**,  
David Van Putten, John Vogt, **Jim Walters***Bolded names are Executive Committee members.*

*Adventist Today* brings contemporary issues of importance to interested readers. *Adventist Today* is a member of The Associated Church Press. Following basic principles of ethics and canons of journalism, this publication strives for fairness, candor, and good taste. Unsolicited submissions are encouraged. Payment is competitive. Send an email to [atoday@atoday.org](mailto:atoday@atoday.org) or mail to Adventist Today, PO Box 683, Milton Freewater, OR 97862. Call 800.236.3641 or 503.826.8600 (outside USA).

Website: [www.atoday.org](http://www.atoday.org)

As an independent press, *Adventist Today* relies on memberships and donations to meet its operating expenses. To support *Adventist Today* and continue receiving this magazine, go to [www.atoday.org](http://www.atoday.org) and click on Membership or Donate at the top. Mail payments to the address above. All donations are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law.

*Adventist Today* (ISSN: 1079-5499) is published quarterly by Adventist Today Foundation, 105 N. Main Street, Milton Freewater, OR 97862. Periodical postage is paid at Milton Freewater, OR, and at additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Adventist Today, PO Box 683, Milton Freewater, OR 97862. Copyright (c) 2022 by Adventist Today Foundation, a nonprofit organization dedicated to fostering open dialogue in the Adventist community and beyond.



## The Resurrection Is the Treatment for Adventists' Fears

by Loren Seibold

WHEN I WAS GROWING UP, MY FAMILY DIDN'T celebrate Christ's resurrection.

We did have family Easter events, mostly having to do with dyed eggs and searching for baskets of candy. Sometimes Grandpa and Grandma came over and we had supper together, because it was, after all, a holiday.

But I don't remember any mention of Christ coming forth from death. Even on the Sabbath before Easter, the resurrection could go entirely unmentioned in the church service.

That is not to say that we didn't believe in the resurrection. It just wasn't mentioned all that much. That particular belief (though we may not have said it this forthrightly) was sullied, soiled by its association with Roman Catholics and "apostate" Protestants.

Often we talked about how Sabbath was the true day of rest and Sunday the counterfeit. We remembered all of the times our neighbors had told us that they went to church on Sunday because that was the day of the week Jesus came forth from the tomb. We knew they were deceived and would be lost for it. We knew some people went to church *only* on Easter Sunday, which we laughed at as evidence of the feebleness of their commitment—that they would be so foolish as to think God would be satisfied with such a pusillanimous expression of faith.

I find it sad that we missed out on celebrating Jesus' resurrection. We weren't put off by eggs and bunnies, which have a questionable provenance. But we were afraid of the resurrection. When it came to this holiday, Catholics exercised more influence among us than Christ, and our potential enemies were more attended to than our stories of hope.

Sunday—even the Sunday of Jesus' resurrection—frightened us.

### Fear Over Hope

I am grateful that in the Sabbath schools of my childhood we learned, too, all of the good lessons about Jesus: that he was kind and generous, that he loved children, that he heard our prayers.

But even in those earliest years, the darkness could creep in like a black mist. Even when we sang about Jesus and talked about God's love, the scary parts of our faith always crowded in on us a little more than the hopeful parts.

As for the resurrection, it was merely one more story about Jesus in the Bible. But what dominated the adults' religious discussions (and therefore influenced us children, too) had more to do with what we were right about and others were wrong about—what threatened us more than what gave us hope.

In the early Advent movement, the believers spoke of Jesus' return as "the blessed hope." It wasn't that to me. Yes, I thought it would be nice to be in that perfect place that Harry Anderson pictured, to stroke the heads of lions, to never be sick, and to eat that amazing fruit from the Tree of Life.

But there were so many contingencies to that ever being realized that it was almost impossible to expect.

First, you had to be perfect, and I wasn't.

Then, there were the intervening events. Not only your pastor could turn against you, but perhaps even your parents, they said. Roman Catholics had torture chambers in their church basements. When we drove by our Catholic neighbors' houses, my mother would occasionally feel the need to mention that these very people would turn against us during the time of the end.

There was no security of salvation; we were warned that it was arrogant to say, "I am saved." You could

It seems to me now that nothing in all of Christian theology is more important than the resurrection.

Are we not wise enough by now to distinguish between celebrating the resurrection of Christ (which was undoubtedly on a Sunday) and making Sunday our day of worship?

hope that you might *possibly* be saved, but only after the Catholics had persecuted us for merely being Seventh-day Adventist.

All of which added up to a very good chance of suffering and a rather slim chance of being saved.

We Adventists have been far better at celebrating fear than hope.

### An Antidote?

I don't know for sure that acknowledging Christ's resurrection on Easter Sunday could, at this late date, overbalance all of that. But it surely would be a step in the right direction. It seems to me now that nothing in all of Christian theology is more important than the resurrection. Note how frequently in the book of Acts the resurrection is the anchor for the hope of those first believers. Jesus' return is there, too, and bits of atonement theology. But it's the resurrection that dominates it all.

I don't find much meaning (I confess honestly) in some of the atonement theologies; I'm confused by the human sacrifice notions embedded there. I really haven't found a fully satisfying explanation of why God the Father allowed Jesus to be killed. Nor do I know any longer what "soon" means in regard to Jesus' return.

But upon this I depend: that people who were wholly dead—no heartbeat, brain dead, putrescent flesh, maybe nothing but the dry bones that Ezekiel saw—will come alive again in the full freshness of health. This is a miracle that I want to see until I am surrounded on all sides by the people I love who have passed on.

Some years ago, in a big church where I was the pastor, I initiated an Easter Sunday service and invited the community. Some people came from the community, but most of our own church members stayed away. It didn't survive my moving from that church, and I never tried it again.

But I have never given up my desire that we Seventh-day Adventists would make Easter Sunday part of our worship repertoire. We celebrate Christmas with few questions—and with Ellen White's approval—even though we don't know at what time of year Jesus was born. The date of Easter we know quite accurately, because of its association with Passover. Are we not wise enough by now to distinguish between celebrating the resurrection of Christ (which was undoubtedly on a Sunday) and making Sunday our day of worship?

Years ago a precious Armenian woman in my congregation said to me one Easter, "Pastor, something I miss is that when I was a girl, we greeted one another on Easter weekend with the phrase 'Christ is risen,' and the response was 'Christ is risen indeed!'" I asked the congregation to do it for her sake, and we loved it.

By the time this magazine arrives in your mailbox, the Passover and Easter holidays will have passed. But I say to you today, dear *Adventist Today* reader, that this truth of the resurrection lasts all year: Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Let us set aside our fear and live in hope! **AT**



# STORIES, AND WHY THEY MATTER

By James J. Londis

IN 1948, FULTON OURSLER PENNED *THE GREATEST STORY Ever Told*. An instant bestseller, the ensuing Hollywood film was so disappointing that I never bothered with the book. Having been seized in 1952 by the Gospels themselves, my imagination, aflame through their stories and parables, carried me, as it had believers in earlier generations, to an inspiring faith. Thousands of sermons, articles, books, cathedrals, art, and music across two millennia created what we call the Christian “tradition.” Those original writings also demanded philosophical and theological wrestling to assess whether the story, with its umbilical cord to history, made rational sense, given the impact of the Enlightenment. Does a rational method for understanding material reality leave room for the transcendence affirmed in the Bible? What meaning can “theism” or a “personal” God have?

## God Must Exist

Earlier efforts to buttress the implicit transcendence of the Bible through philosophical rigor reached a zenith in the 11th century with St. Anselm’s celebrated “ontological argument,” a clever if not brilliant *a priori* effort to demonstrate the Creator’s reality. The fact that it is studied and debated by philosophers to this day is testimony to its

creativity. Loosely rendered, it affirms: “God is a being than which no greater can be conceived. Therefore, God must exist; because if not, God could not be that which no greater could be conceived; ergo, God must exist or ‘be.’”

Such analytical efforts still leap from biblical stories. Jewish and Christian intellectuals struggle to systematize whatever seems to be “implicit” in the stories (or narratives, as they are often characterized).<sup>1</sup> That struggle will never end, for by its nature “story” is a “first-order” discourse and reflections on it are, at best, “second-order.” That does not make second-order discourse less significant, just of different utility.

Think about a brutally honest memoir versus the therapeutic analysis it might generate. The latter can illuminate the former but may never exhaust its nuances. Stories, metaphors, and poetry, pregnant with possible meanings, are too suggestive for the precision of abstract formulations. Even poets occasionally admit that readers may discern meanings never consciously intended, which exist nonetheless. Abstractions may justifiably occupy curious readers, but they cannot absorb them, any more than studying tree botany can compare with walking through the woods at sunrise. One writer suggested that serious strolling

through a poem must be so intense that interpretation should be sidelined: “A poem should not mean, but be.”<sup>2</sup> Very occasionally, scholars reverse the story-abstraction order of discourse to prodigious effect. For example, the traditional Christian doctrine of immortality of the soul, developed by the second-order discourse of Platonic philosophy, received a withering blow from New Testament scholar Oscar Cullmann.<sup>3</sup> Instead of mounting a better “argument” through theoretical investigation, Cullmann compared and contrasted the accounts of Socrates’ death in Plato’s dialogues with the Gospels’ description of the death of Jesus. Socrates welcomed the end that hemlock guaranteed, the freeing of the soul from the body that held it in servitude; Jesus

### Universal Truth

We who hear and deliver sermons know that the stories of the Bible are unforgettable and eloquent, that abstractions easily become distractions. Gospel stories about Jesus are interspersed with stories by Jesus that, in the eyes of the populous, gave him an authority the “lawyers” (experts in the Torah) could not duplicate. In Luke 10:25-37, for instance, one asks Jesus to define what he must “do” to inherit eternal life. Jesus throws the question back at him, a common Jewish tactic in discussions: “What do you read in the Law?”

“Love God, and love your neighbor,” the lawyer rightly answers, as Jesus expected.

## We believe [that Jesus rose from the dead] because a magnificent sacrificial community became convinced that it happened and testified to it, at the risk of their lives.

prayed to be released from death in Gethsemane, the last “enemy” God will destroy. He was summoned to endure it whatever the cost. The implications of each account were utterly inconsistent with each other.

In more recent years, Ronald E. Osborn of La Sierra University did something similar. His impressive book, *Humanism and the Death of God: Searching for the Good After Darwin, Nietzsche, and Marx*, painstakingly analyzes the difficulties of justifying human rights on the theoretical grounds his three subjects supported. They do not—in fact, cannot—succeed. He argues that nothing less than a “transcendent” basis for human rights will suffice. He makes his case not in the theoretical approach of the thinkers he has just skewered, but by exposing the pearls within the Gospels’ narratives. The “story” offers the validation of transcendence, much like Cullmann’s remarkable effort decades ago. As such, its power to persuade, subtle as it may be, surpasses argumentation. How that story undergirds people’s being “endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights” struck me as a unique contribution to the human rights debate in our culture.<sup>4</sup>

Not done, Jesus shifts from analysis to a moral and religious challenge: “Do this and you will live.”

Disconcerted, the lawyer tacks back to another analytical question. “Who is my neighbor?”

Jesus is ready. The Gospel of Luke records him telling a story that still births sermons, such as “The Parable of the Good Muslim” by Barbara Brown Taylor, and sculptures, such as Alan Collins’ *The Good Samaritan*, which depicts a black man helping a wounded white man being ignored by other passersby. What greater impact of that story in our modern situation can be imagined? Surely not one laying out moral imperatives by themselves. Taylor’s sermon speaks to believers who, for a variety of reasons, may loathe Muslims. Collins’ sculpture on the campus of the Loma Linda University speaks to a sordid history of white supremacy. Can anything more universally true about loving one’s “neighbor” be imagined?

More than 50 years ago, Presbyterian theologian Robert McAfee Brown delivered an address to several thousand scholars attending an annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion. Deeply distressed by the morality of the Vietnam War and hoping to find some way through his frustration, Brown had initiated a conversation with Abraham Heschel, a respected rabbi. Heschel listened carefully and then thoughtfully responded: “My son, let me tell you a story...” How Jewish, how wise, how universal.

## The Ideal and the Real

The story on which Christianity rests, found in all four Gospels, is also the most implausible: the bodily resurrection of Jesus from the dead. While the crucifixion of Jesus is accepted, resurrection “myths” and the Enlightenment make this story, as necessary as it is to the New Testament’s integrity, the least believable for many. On the other hand, where are such myths now? Besides scholars, who even knows about them?

At the end of an analytical ethics course in graduate school, the professor hinted that the coming Easter holiday would celebrate a unique event in history. As I left the room, I walked by him and quietly suggested: “You sound as if you believe the resurrection story is true.”

With a wry smile, he answered: “I cannot explain the existence of the early church without it.”

In a seminar with New Testament scholar Hans Frei some decades ago, an Adventist studying at Yale Divinity School heard him make a similar admission. Throughout the study of the Gospels, miracle accounts were summarily dismissed as impossible for 20th-century believers. But when it came to accounts of the resurrection, he admitted that he had to have this one. “The Christian church and faith could not exist without it.”

The student asked: “Why not the others, then?”

“Because I am a 20th-century man and cannot accept it,” he confessed.

The resurrection theme will not die; it is retold in creative ways even to children. C. S. Lewis is an example of a Christian who, to make the story of a sacrificial death and resurrection accessible to children (and to the rest of us), wrote *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* as part of his Chronicles of Narnia series. Aslan, the Lion of goodness, is slain by the forces of evil, which assume their victory is final. All seems lost until his life is restored to marshal the forces of righteousness for a final victory.

J. K. Rowling, on the other hand, denies that she intended the Harry Potter series to be a subtle retelling of the Christian story. It never entered her thinking, she says. Nevertheless, young Harry, at 12 years old not knowing his true identity as a wizard or “the Chosen One,” gradually understands who he is and what role he must play in the wizard world (as the boy Jesus did in an awakening discussion with adult rabbis). The supremely evil wizard Voldemort had attacked the Potter family when Harry was just an infant. For challenging Voldemort, Harry’s wizard parents paid with their lives. At Hogwarts, the “academy” for wizard youth, Headmaster Dumbledore explains why Harry alone lived: “You survived because as a baby you were pure love, Harry. Evil had no power over you.”

At the end of this remarkable series of volumes (500 million sold), the adult Harry—to protect Hogwarts—dies in the process of destroying Voldemort once and for all. To the dismay of his supporters and believers, Harry Potter is gone. But then his life is restored. For me, such details echo the Easter story. Authorial intent, it seems, has been overridden by its compelling power. Self-emptying (kenotic) love that leads to death and resurrection is a story that demands retelling. As philosopher Nels Ferré once noted, “Faith is belief that the ideal is the real.” It is too wonderful to forget.

There is no incontrovertible historical “proof” that Jesus rose from the dead. We do not believe because it can be verified historically. We believe because a magnificent sacrificial community became convinced that it happened and testified to it, at the risk of their lives. Their faith gives us the experience of the risen Christ who now lives in us. Even those who do not believe, but used to, still hope the story is true.


The Jesus story is the greatest story ever told—most convincingly, by our own servant lives as we embrace the words of Paul’s hymn to Christ’s servanthood:

“In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

Who, being in very nature God,  
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;

rather, he made himself nothing  
by taking the very nature of a servant,  
being made in human likeness.

And being found in appearance as a man,  
he humbled himself  
by becoming obedient to death—  
even death on a cross!

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place  
and gave him the name that is above every name,  
that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,  
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,  
and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
to the glory of God the Father” (Phil. 2:5-11, NIV). 

<sup>1</sup> See David Bentley Hart, *The Experience of God: Being, Consciousness, Bliss* (2013); and Sally McFague, *Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language* (1982). Both, in different ways, insist that philosophical and theological effort must grow out of and pay tribute to the arts and that spirituality through such reflection is the gateway to both experiencing and understanding God.

<sup>2</sup> “Ars Poetica,” by Archibald MacLeish.

<sup>3</sup> Oscar Cullman, *Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead?: The Witness of the New Testament* (Nov. 29, 2000).

<sup>4</sup> Declaration of Independence (July 4, 1776).

# CHRIST IS RISEN! Risen Indeed!

*By William G. Johnsson*

What perverse compulsion, I wonder, drives some Adventists to insist that everything in their belief or practice be different from other Christians? Yes, even in such basics of the faith as the resurrection of Jesus.

Some years ago, I was invited to conduct Week of Prayer for the faculty and students of Andrews University. Realizing that the dates coincided with Holy Week, I built each day's address around the final days of the Savior's life. Starting with the Triumphal Entry, we followed day by day Jesus' journey, which climaxed on Friday at Calvary. Just one event remained: the resurrection. That topic would bring a wonderful week to a glorious conclusion.

At that time, Pioneer Memorial had two services on Sabbath morning. I spoke to a nice-sized audience that got up for the 8:30 worship. The Lord blessed, as he always does when the focus is Jesus.

But the associate pastor didn't appreciate the sermon. During the break between services, he sought me out. I could tell that he was trying to keep his emotions in check.

"You must make a statement to the people in the second service," he demanded. "You need to correct the wrong impression you left at the first service."

I was dumbfounded, but he continued.

"Here it is, the weekend when other churches are celebrating Easter, and you preach on the resurrection just like them! You must make crystal clear when you speak again that Adventists don't observe Easter."

I gave him no such assurance, but I did add a few remarks at the second service: "My friends," I told the people, "we don't know the date of Jesus' birth, but we do know when he died and rose again. Jesus died on a Friday, when the Passover moon was full. His body lay in the tomb during the Sabbath hours, then he rose from the dead early on the first day of the week.

"These dates are certain. Yesterday—Friday—was the day on which he died nearly 2,000 years ago. Today, Sabbath, was the day his body gradually grew cold as it lay in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea. Tomorrow will be the day—the actual day—he came out of the tomb long ago. So we can celebrate this grand event



today. *We should* celebrate it. It has nothing to do with pagan festivals or Easter eggs or bunnies. It's all about Jesus!"

After the service, many of the worshipers came by to shake my hand and exchange a few words. The associate pastor wasn't one of them.

I wonder how the apostle Paul would have reacted if he'd arrived at a church and the elder told him, "You'd better not speak about Jesus' death today," or "Please avoid the topic of the resurrection; some folks could get the wrong idea."

I have a hunch that Paul would have said something like: "What! Not speak of Jesus' death and resurrection? What else is there to speak about?"

Look at Paul's speeches in the Book of Acts or glance through his letters. They are saturated with references to Calvary and the risen Lord. He couldn't keep quiet. Wherever he went and whatever the day, it was always the same: *Jesus of Nazareth, who died on the cross, is alive. He is risen, risen indeed!*

This is the irreducible minimum, the heart of the Christian message. Whatever we Adventists want to add to it—and we have some distinctive elements, such as the Sabbath and healthful living—these doctrines cannot, must not, supplant the core good news.

When Paul heard that some of the saints in Corinth had latched onto ideas that led them to deny the resurrection, he let fly with a broadside in defense of the good news he proclaimed.

"I passed on to you what was most important and what had also been passed on to me," he wrote. "Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said. He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day, just as the Scriptures said" (1 Cor. 15:3-4, NLT).

Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection was what was most important for Paul. He was absolutely sure of that.

Are we as sure as Paul was? We speak about the "Advent message" or the "three angels' messages," often seemingly unsure as to how they relate to Paul's "most important" elements.

In Steven Covey's book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, he reveals a key principle: the main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing.

Do we?

In Paul's letter to the Corinthian believers, he doesn't stop with the bald restatement of the good news. When he comes to the resurrection, he gets on a roll, exploring different facets of the subject, seemingly thinking out loud as he writes. It's a fascinating, brilliant treatise, not just on Jesus' resurrection but on resurrection per se, arguing that Jesus' rising from the dead guarantees that we too will rise, and discussing what our resurrected bodies will be like.

The Corinthians needed to hear this message from their spiritual father, Paul, who planted the church. The ideas were vastly different from those of philosophers such as Plato and Socrates, who held that not only do humans possess an immortal soul, but the body is evil, something to be discarded at death. In such an intellectual climate, talk of resurrection was arrant nonsense. Thus, when Paul spoke about the resurrection, some of his hearers on the Areopagus in Athens "laughed in contempt" (Acts 17:32, NLT).

Paul's discourse in 1 Corinthians 15 is by far the most extensive and most penetrating account of resurrection (both Jesus' and ours) that we have. It stands as the second bookend of the letter, the first bookend being his message of the cross in chapter 1. That message was foolishness to the philosophers, scholars, and brilliant debaters, but it was the wisdom of God.

*Lazarus came out of the tomb in a mortal body, one doomed to die in due course. Jesus came out of the tomb in a resurrected body, one that could disappear and appear, that could pass through locked doors.*

What a letter, framed by the cross at one end and the resurrection at the other! And what a message: Christ died for our sins but rose again, victor over death!

A message for any day, for every day—no exceptions.

### **The Burial of Jesus**

In our telling of the story of Jesus' Passion, we frequently condense it to: "Jesus died for our sins and rose again the third day." By doing so, we pass over a point underlined by Paul: "He was buried." Why is this important?

Because Jesus really died. He wasn't resuscitated. His body didn't revive in the coolness of the tomb. He died. All body functions ceased.

Jesus was a poor man, but in death he was treated like the wealthy. As the prophet Isaiah had predicted: "He was buried like a criminal; [but] he was put in a rich man's grave" (Isa. 53:9, TLB). His body was wrapped in cloths, with myrrh and aloes, and put in a cave cut from the rock.

According to Jewish custom, the body would have been revisited several months later, once the flesh had rotted away. The bones would then have been collected and placed in a stone box, known as an ossuary.

Hundreds of ossuaries from the time of Jesus have come to light, as a result of excavations around Jerusalem. But no ossuary has been found with the bones of Jesus of Nazareth, nor will one ever be found.

Jesus' body vanished from Joseph's tomb early on the first day of the week, when he rose from the dead! He departed Joseph's new tomb, leaving behind the cloths in which he'd been wrapped. He didn't appear covered head-to-toe before Mary Magdalene.

When Jesus called back to life Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha, the man came out totally covered, and Jesus told the startled onlookers, "Unwrap him and let him go!" (John 11:44, NLT).

Lazarus came out of the tomb in a mortal body, one doomed to die in due course. Jesus came out of the tomb in a resurrected body, one that could disappear and appear, that could pass through locked doors. It was, says Paul, a "spiritual" body (1 Cor. 15:44).

### The Resurrection of Christ

Paul lists in 1 Corinthians 15 six witnesses to the risen Lord. It is the earliest such listing we have (the Gospel accounts arising only later), and it supplies some startling new evidence.

1. "He was seen by Peter" (verse 5). Paul is clearly attempting to draw up a chronological list of witnesses ("then" in verse 5, "After that" in verse 6, and "Last of all" in verse 8), but his list begins with a glaring omission. He begins with Christ "was seen by Peter," yet all of the Gospel writers make clear that the list should go like this:

- first to Mary Magdalene
- then to the "other women" (the other Mary, Salome, et al.)
- then to Peter.

How could Paul get it so wrong? Did he have a blind spot toward women? Maybe, but I think it is more likely that Paul wasn't aware of their part in the story. The Gospels weren't written yet. Furthermore, after his conversion he spent very little time in Jerusalem. He was the apostle to the Gentiles.

2. "Then by the Twelve" (verse 5). Strictly speaking, the Twelve had become eleven, because of Judas' betrayal of Jesus. But the name for those in Jesus' inner circle had stuck; they remained the Twelve.

3. "He was seen by more than 500 of his followers at one time, *most of whom are still alive*" (verse 6, emphasis mine). This is a powerful statement—a strong counterpoint to critics of the resurrection, in Paul's time or ours. The risen Lord was seen by more than 500 people—and most of them were still alive when Paul wrote, more than 25 years later! Not fable, not hallucination, but fact: Jesus rose from the dead!

4. "Then he was seen by James" (verse 7). Presumably this was James the brother of Jesus, who became leader of the church in Jerusalem. It is the only mention of this appearance in the New Testament.

5. "Later by all the apostles" (verse 7). Luke elaborates on this appearance: "During the forty days after he suffered and died, [Jesus] appeared to the apostles from time to time, and he proved to them in many ways that he was actually alive" (Acts 1:3, NLT). The risen Lord ate and drank with them, gave instructions concerning the mission, and after 40 days ascended into heaven as they watched (Acts 1:4-9).

6. "Last of all, as though I had been born at the wrong time, I also saw him" (1 Cor. 15:8). The Damascus road: what did Saul of Tarsus see? I "saw him," he simply says. What did the risen Lord look like? I'd love to know.

Paul was absolutely certain of it; he had seen Jesus and heard his voice on the Damascus road. He could never doubt it, never go back to the life of a self-righteous Pharisee who was hell-bent on wiping out followers of the Way. Jesus the crucified had risen from the dead, and ever after he would be Paul's Lord.

Of the various witnesses to Jesus' resurrection, this one—"I also saw him"—was decisive for him, irrefragable.

For the Corinthians, the very idea of resurrection—any resurrection—was impossible. For Paul, the thought that Jesus had *not* risen was impossible.

### Insiders

Plato and Aristotle have long since vanished from the scene, but today a new set of skeptics cast scorn on the resurrection. Christopher Hitchens, Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, and Daniel Dennett totally deny the supernatural. They restrict reality to what can be observed scientifically.

But that is an impoverished view of life. It fails to take account of reality that only comes from the inside. The risen Christ was seen by a lot of people, but not by everyone. "God allowed him to appear," said Peter, "not to the general public, but to us whom God had chosen in advance to be his witnesses" (Acts 10:41, NLT).

We who believe, who have met Jesus on the road of our lives, know that he is alive and that the ancient good news is still true:

Christ is risen! *Risen indeed!* **AT**



## SHOULD ADVENTISTS CELEBRATE EASTER SUNDAY?

*By Reinder Bruinsma*

WHEN I DID MY MINISTERIAL INTERNSHIP in Amsterdam in the 1960s, the central meeting place for Seventh-day Adventists in the Dutch capital was a historic church building at the Keizersgracht, one of the canals that attracts hordes of tourists. On Sundays the building was rented to an independent Baptist congregation. One year, when Christmas fell on a Thursday, our Baptist friends decorated the church for their service on that day and left a beautifully decorated Christmas tree for us to enjoy during our Sabbath service two days later.

When our members started to arrive on Sabbath morning, they were appalled to find this pagan symbol in their sanctuary. A few young people decided to do something about it. They carried the tree outside, complete with ornaments, and dumped it unceremoniously into the canal. Seventh-day Adventists do not celebrate pagan feasts!

Most European Adventists at that time had an uneasy relationship with Christmas. Christmas trees were slowly making an appearance in some Adventist homes, but Christmas services in Adventist churches were still unthinkable. Adventists were reminded again and again that Christ was not born on December 25. The world was celebrating a feast that had pagan origins, as did the day they set aside for worship: Sunday, which had usurped the place of the biblical day of rest. Most Adventists were totally unaware (and would not have believed it, had they been told) that Ellen White was okay with Christmas celebrations, under certain conditions.

Today, anti-Christmas sentiment mostly lingers at the right-wing fringes of the church. Christmas is, by and large, no longer taboo among Adventists, and the Sabbath closest to December 25 has become a kind of Christmas-Sabbath. Some local churches hold a service on

Christmas Eve, but very few have dared to plan a service for December 25, unless it happens to be Sabbath. And certainly not when December 25 falls on a Sunday. Having a special service on a Sunday, as “Sunday churches” do, is simply a bridge too far.

### **Why a Lesser Emphasis on Easter?**

Whereas Christmas is tied to a specific date and may “wander” through the week from year to year, Easter is a so-called “movable feast.” It is celebrated on the Sunday after the first full moon of the spring equinox (March 21). This rather complicated way of calculating Easter has its roots in the desire to position the Christian observance of Jesus’ resurrection as close as possible to the date of the Jewish Passover, the day on which Jesus was crucified. Dating Easter gave rise to one of the unfortunate controversies between the Church of the

West and the Church of the East. Roman Catholic and Protestant churches continue to celebrate Easter on a different date than Orthodox churches.

Adventist churches, in general, place less emphasis on Easter than on Christmas. One may wonder: Is Christ's resurrection less important than his birth? In his famous chapter on the resurrection (1 Corinthians 15), the apostle Paul argues that our faith would lose all meaning if Christ had not been raised from death. Giving special attention to Christ's resurrection seems as important as having a season to remember his birth.

I have attached a special meaning to Easter ever since I had to study the *Catechetical Lectures* of Cyril of Jerusalem (A.D. 313-386) as part of my theology study at the University of London. This course in early Christian liturgy required students to read and analyze the 23 lectures of this early church leader, in the original Greek language. Cyril gave his lectures during the Easter period as he prepared baptismal candidates, who would join the church by triple immersion on Easter. Spending countless hours deciphering the original Greek text, and learning about the rich symbolism that gave this Christian feast so much meaning, made me deeply appreciate Easter. It also firmly planted this question in my mind: Why do we, Seventh-day Adventists, not follow a liturgical calendar that highlights Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost?

### Not Like Other Churches

The Adventist Church did not originate in a vacuum. It began as a small group that had to come to terms with its Millerite past. Sabbatarian Adventists, as part of the movement that developed from this unpopular start, were under constant attack as a result of some of their peculiar views.

Denominations around them were enemies rather than friends. An eschatology developed in which the Roman Catholic Church, as well as "fallen" Protestant denominations, represented "Babylon," from which true believers had to separate. Not only did "apostate" Protestant churches follow Rome in breaking God's law by exchanging the Sabbath for a counterfeit day of rest, but they also introduced unbiblical doctrines and customs, often from pagan backgrounds.

All of this convinced Adventists to

## People wonder: Why do Adventists not celebrate the birth and the resurrection of the Lord, as almost all other Christians do?

resolutely reject the elements with which they disagreed or that had no clear biblical basis. They had to be "unique" and stay clear of all customs that could not claim a "thus saith the Lord." Adopting the liturgical year of traditional churches, with everything this entailed, would make Adventists just like other churches. This was, therefore, unacceptable.

But in 2022, we realize that we live in a different world. Now, the problem with regard to Christian feasts is not that we might become too much like other Christians, but rather that we face questions about our true Christian identity. People wonder: Why do

Adventists not celebrate the birth and the resurrection of the Lord, as almost all other Christians do? Do they not consider these events important? To ask it another way: Is it not crucial for our Adventist interpretation of the faith that we join in celebrating Christian feasts? For, let's face it, in the often overly rational and legalistic way that many Adventists "live" their faith, a stronger focus on our Lord Jesus Christ would be more than welcome.

Having said this, we must not forget that our 19th-century spiritual forebears were far from consistent in their rejection of the beliefs and practices of other denominations. When our Advent pioneers were organizing their movement, they adopted many of the administrative structures they saw in the churches around them. The Adventist tradition of a quarterly communion service had nothing to do with a biblical mandate; it simply reflected the familiar practice of the Methodists. In the early 1800s, Sabbath school for adults, with its class structure and mission emphasis, had become a vital part of church life in many denominations in the United States. When James White wrote the first Sabbath school lessons in 1852, he took a first step in the eventual wholesale adoption of this non-Adventist institution.

### Adventist Special Days

The Adventist denomination does not have a liturgical year that guides its members through an annual cycle of seasons and days, with a focus on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We do have something similar—though, in my view, far less meaningful.

Each year, during its Annual Council, the Adventist Church votes a calendar of a few dozen special days, events, and offerings prescribed for the entire worldwide church. Some local adaptations

are allowed for divisions and union conferences. The Week of Prayer, now held in early November, has been part of the Adventist Church calendar since 1885. The Ten Days of Prayer in January have been added in recent times, as well as the Global Youth Day in March, World Pathfinder Day in September, the day in October to emphasize Ellen White's ministry, and a number of other "special" days. One may well ask how special these days can be, if almost every Sabbath has an assigned emphasis.

Since 2009, the fourth Sabbath of October has been designated as Creation Sabbath, for (I quote from its website with resources) "a celebration of God's creative power and continued involvement in and care for human life." Apart from the fact that this special Creation Sabbath has a not-so-hidden agenda of indoctrinating church members with the view that Creation happened 10,000 years ago (at most), in six literal 24-hour days, it makes me wonder: Why have this special day to emphasize Creation and not have special days devoted to the birth and resurrection of Jesus and the coming of the Holy Spirit?

I recently took a look at the days of special emphasis and events for 2022 listed on the General Conference website.<sup>1</sup> As the Christian world celebrated Christ's resurrection on Sunday, April 17, Adventist congregations around the world were asked to concentrate on Literature Evangelism Rally Week (April 16-22). A day before Christians around the globe celebrate Pentecost on June 5, the Adventist calendar puts special emphasis on support of Sabbath schools and Bible correspondence courses. I was somewhat relieved to see that December 10 is the last day of the year with a special emphasis, so that Christmas, insofar as it is celebrated, does not have to compete with a General Conference designation. I would at any

time be willing to exchange this kind of church calendar for the liturgical calendar observed by most Protestant denominations.

### Do We Dare?

Christmas may not be mentioned in the list of days of special emphasis in the Adventist Church, but it has gradually made its way into Adventist church praxis. So, what can we do to give Easter a more prominent place in Adventist worship? Can the Sabbath after Passover become an

## Giving special attention to Christ's resurrection seems as important as having a season to remember his birth.

exuberant celebration of the resurrection of Christ? Do we dare to take it one step further and also worship—together with our fellow Christians—on Easter Sunday, as a witness that we Adventists likewise base our eternal hope on the risen Lord?

If celebrating Easter with other Christians on a Sunday is cause for anxiety, we may be able to take away most of that concern by turning our observance of Christ's resurrection into a weekend event. Could we perhaps begin the weekend with a communion service on Friday evening, in response to Jesus' invitation to continue to eat the bread and drink from the cup in remembrance

of him, who shared his last meal with his disciples in the upper room in Jerusalem?

John mentions in his Gospel that the day Jesus rested in the tomb was a special Sabbath. It was a "great" Sabbath, because it was the Sabbath of the Jewish Pascha. Could we find creative ways to make the Sabbath of the Easter weekend "great" (John 19:31)? Could we in our Sabbath services remind ourselves and others that Christ is the model for our Sabbath keeping, and that he remained the Lord of the Sabbath (Matt. 12:8), even while in the tomb?

Then on Sunday morning, could we plan a service in which we truly meet our risen Lord? And could we possibly find inspiration in a practice of the early church and make baptism part of this service? For doesn't the baptismal rite find its ultimate meaning by sharing in the death of Christ and his rising to new life?

This may sound good, but do we really want to have an Easter service on *Sunday*?

Why not? After all, Christ came forth from his tomb on the first day of the week. If Adventists had been in charge, they probably would not have picked that day of the week, but Jesus did. That seems (at least to me) a conclusive answer to the question. **AT**

<sup>1</sup> See [gc.adventist.org/events/special-days/](http://gc.adventist.org/events/special-days/).



# A Crown of Red

By Katrina Blue

AS I DROVE ON A WINDING COUNTRY ROAD, A FLASH OF PURE white caught my eye. It dived low toward the ground, then I saw the little body bouncing upward in front of my fast-moving vehicle. A wing touched the hood of my car, tossing it into a swirl.

Expectations—what we think should happen, or even what we hope for—don't always match real life. I had expected this bird to fly up and away, not in front of my car. But it all happened so fast.

In the rearview mirror, I saw the little body fall. I gasped, “No!”—but I still hoped that somehow it would be OK. Didn't Jesus say: “Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside of your Father's care” (Matt. 10:29, NIV)?

I felt compelled to go back. As I pulled off the road and waited to turn around, several cars sped by and I shuddered, fearing they'd run it over. Finally I was able to park near the little body, which appeared at first to have some movement.

I scooped into my hands one of the most beautiful birds I have ever laid my eyes on. It was an acorn woodpecker, his tummy pure white, wings and back jet black, with a fluffy red crown.

Thinking that he might be in shock as well as injured, I gently placed him in my lap. In those moments, any life left in him was fleeing. I realized a couple of minutes later that he had passed away. I had prayed to God to save him, but it was too late.

That night, when my husband came home from work, I sobbed over the death of that little bird. “I told him I am sorry that I killed him,” I cried, choking the words out. “Please go and dig a grave in the backyard.” After a prayer and many tears, I placed his lifeless body in the ground.

Many people cry over the loss of loved ones, whether family members, friends, or even animals. To be honest, though, I don't think I have ever cried about Jesus' death. I know and understand as a follower of Jesus that he died for all, so that the offer of salvation might be made to every human being. I also know that all of creation waits with eager expectation for the revealing of the sons of God, to be set free from bondage (Rom. 8:19).

I have cried over sorrow for sin and been touched by evil in this world. But the reality of Jesus' death has never made me sob the way I did over that little acorn woodpecker. The evil unleashed upon the world by Adam and Eve's sin has brought devastating consequences, the likes of which no one could imagine. Sometimes it takes a small, simple loss to realize it.

## Atonement

Christianity has tended to view Jesus' death—the atonement for sin—as the result of an angry Father concerned more with his own honor and vengeance than his Son's well-being. But today, many

Christians are revolted at the idea of a heavenly Father penalizing, or punishing, the Son to avenge his wrath on the sins of humanity. The penal substitution theory has come under increasing attack in the modern world, prompting a negative reaction among young people. How could God take any pleasure in punishing his own Son for the sins of the world? The image of an abusive father comes to mind. Consequently, this idea has been replaced by the picture of a God who sets an example of love to humans but pays no penalty.

Easter in the Christian calendar is a reminder to us that Jesus has paid the penalty of sin, which is death. This fact is a

*If Jesus cares about a sparrow that falls to the ground and the acorn woodpecker we buried in our backyard, what does God feel about the mounting numbers of dead in an assault on the innocent in the country of Ukraine?*

foundation for the hope of eternal life. As awful as it sounds, Jesus' death is reason to rejoice. For the resurrection to mean anything, we cannot skip Jesus' death. Remembering it is a cause for the celebration of Jesus' life and what it means for this planet, as well as for us individually. In Romans 5, Paul explains how Christ's death not only meets the tragedy of sin and death entering the world, but also unleashes the power of God's grace and gift of righteousness in a far greater offensive against sin. This one act results in justification, life, and righteousness.

"For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ! Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous" (Rom. 5:17-19, NIV).

Does this sound like the act of an abusive, angry father? Through Jesus' death, God unleashes power into the world that brings blessing and hope.

The traditional view of God as the delighted Father, off in a distant heaven watching while Jesus' mother stands before him at the cross weeping, is blown away by Colossians 2:9 (NIV), where Paul says: "For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form." God, who is transcendent, above and beyond all, in Christ was immanent on the cross. So let us never look with contempt upon the willing death of God to pay the penalty for the sins of the world.

### **Death Now**

Death sparks emotions for us quite unlike anything else can: distress, fear, outrage, and a sense of helplessness and despair. The experience of the beautiful little acorn woodpecker flying into my car as I drove home prompted a depth of sorrow and sadness that stuck with me for days.

At the time of this writing, war—a manifestation of pure evil and destruction—is being waged in Europe. As I wept over the senseless death of a little bird, I thought of the loss of life that had just begun with the invasion of Ukraine. It is anti-human, anti-life, and anti-freedom. Who hasn't shouted inwardly, "In God's name, stop!!"?

As the world looks on in horror, is God weeping, too? If Jesus cares about a sparrow that falls to the ground and the acorn woodpecker we buried in our backyard, what does God feel about the mounting numbers of dead in an assault on the innocent in the country of Ukraine?

As we grieve the disaster of this war in addition to other conflicts, disease, and personal sadness, one death continues to bring hope. Good Friday was good because it was a necessary step that Jesus willingly took to pay the penalty for sin in our place. There is no hope without death.

So, let's not skip over Jesus' death, but instead use it as an opportunity to find meaning in a world of senseless destruction. Jesus' word about the sparrow that falls to the ground as not escaping the Father's care reveals a loving, tender God over all of creation. Jesus continues with an encouragement: "And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows" (Matt. 10:30-31, NIV).

Beyond the senseless loss of the innocent, my reaction to that beautiful little bird's death was also wrapped up in sadness and shock over what I saw transpiring in Ukraine, the absolute horror over what they were experiencing. I cannot find meaning in death, except when I cry out to God to bring suffering to an end. Then I remember the cross. **AT**

# NOT SEEING, BUT BELIEVING

By Smuts van Rooyen

*“Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand in his side, I will not believe.”*

—John 20:25, NIV

SO, WHAT SHALL WE SAY TO THOMAS? HE PUTS HIS FOOT DOWN and declares the mantra of the critical thinker: “I will not believe unless....” He gives his ultimatum, draws his line in the sand—the line over which he will not step. Sensory perception, he insists, is to be the basis for all belief. It alone is normative.

I confess that I like the man, and I like his approach. But can my life—and his—actually function that way?

## Caravaggio's Painting

Directly above my office desk hangs a striking copy of *The Incredulity of Thomas* painted by Caravaggio. The Italian artist was a brawler, a philanderer, and a killer. Caravaggio was the “bad boy” of the art world; he died of fever in a swamp while scrambling to Rome to ask the pope for absolution. However, Caravaggio was also a yearner who sought to believe, who longed for forgiveness but had difficulty finding it.

This magnificent painting freezes on canvas the moment when the risen Christ meets the demands of his skeptical disciple. It evokes both revulsion and adoration within the viewer. Revulsion because it depicts a crude, shabbily dressed Thomas plunging an index finger deep into the side of Jesus. His hands are unwashed, his fingernails filthy as he stretches the sacred wound to its limit and pries it wide open to peer inside.

Yet, the depiction also arouses deep adoration, due to the gentle collaboration of Jesus in the unseemly process. The Savior holds his robe back with his right hand to give Thomas easy visual access to the spear puncture in his side, while with his left hand he gently grasps the disciple's wrist and carefully guides his exploration. “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe,” says Jesus.

And Thomas replies, “My Lord and my God!”

## One Way of Believing

The risen Christ does not reject Thomas' attempt to know what is real by observation, hearing, and touch, but encourages his sensory search. And if we were to play the music again but transpose the key, I suspect we could say that Jesus would also approve of enlightenment science, because it seems to hold so much in common with Thomas' approach to belief. The risen

Christ helps critical thinkers to investigate life within their own parameters of thought.

But *not* seeing may also lead to belief and, hence, to truth. Jesus says, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen yet have believed.”

Maurice Boyd, a Presbyterian minister in New York, wrote that there are serious consequences to a “seeing-is-believing” tunnel-visioned approach to life. Science, says Boyd, isn't a matter of believing only what you see. Science is a matter of seeing to believe and, vice versa, believing so as to see.<sup>1</sup>

Einstein said that scientific investigation begins in an attitude of wonder, which is not far from faith. He said: “Astronomy began, not when somebody looked at a star through a telescope, but when somebody said, ‘Twinkle, twinkle, little star. How I wonder what you are.’” You may say that *only* seeing is believing, but if you do, how will you ever be prompted to start a scientific exploration?

## Science and Intuition

The truth is that science does not work by mere sight. It must also hypothesize, reason, and subjectively play around. Scientists who are worth their salt do not lack an active imagination. They do not simply walk through the orchard of life, picking facts off trees as farmers pick peaches.

Science involves the subjectivity of intuition. The artist Maria Friedman created a life-sized bronze sculpture that gives expression to this notion with her work titled *The Red Palm Nut*. It depicts the moment a chimpanzee named David Greybeard brushed a palm nut from the extended hand of the scientist Jane Goodall, thus rejecting the food she offered him, and held her hand instead. She said she knew intuitively that he wanted to communicate with her. Before going to Gombe in Tanzania, Goodall had been instructed to be wholly objective in her study of these apes. They were to be given numbers, not names, and observed impartially with complete detachment. But through this encounter, she found an intuitive, empathetic dimension to science. Her discovery was epoch-making.

## Science Works With Unseen Models

Models are mental constructs we make to help us break new ground. For instance, physiologists speak of the synapse in the nervous system, where two nerves meet as a system of locks and keys. How these locks are opened or snapped shut by chemical keys determines our emotional state. No one has ever seen actual



little locks and keys in there, but it's a model that works amazingly well and has enormous explanatory power.

Science depends on models that say, "I think this thing is like that thing." It doesn't see the model. You cannot be a scientist if you want to work simply on the basis of sight. Your science will not function. If you have the idea that all scientists do is go around looking at things, and by merely looking gather facts, you mistake how science works. It works with mathematics, which is a symbolic language. It works with models, with imagination, with trial and error. It works because the scientist brings her biases to the problem, because she is willing to be moral and not fudge her findings.

Science is a magnificent interactive enterprise between seeing and *not* seeing.

None of this is said to negate the explanatory power and the benefits of the scientific method (observation and experiment). I cannot begin to enumerate the blessings technology has given me. Thank goodness for gases to put one to sleep before surgery; for a 4x4 pickup truck to roam the Mojave Desert; for Bose speakers that shatter one's equilibrium when booming the finale of Mahler's "Resurrection" Symphony; for COVID-19 vaccinations that drastically reduce one's chances of serious illness and death; for scientifically trained hospital staff.

I fully believe in science. What I dismiss as inadequate is a simplistic science that regards faith as phony.

## Beyond Science

You can never be an artist if your formula for life limits you to "seeing is believing." The very thing that makes an artist is creativity. Something is here today that wasn't here yesterday. Something new and previously unseen came out of the imagination. When Ernest Hemingway wrote *The Old Man and the Sea*, and the great fish was swimming around the old man's boat, Hemingway said he did not know whether or not the fish would take the bait. It was as if the story itself was shaping and leading him. To paraphrase the poet Robert Frost, If you want to surprise your reader, you first have to surprise the writer. You will never be an artist if you live only by "seeing is believing."

Nor can you have a deep relationship with another person based on the simple formula that "seeing is believing." Mutual trust is an essential ingredient in any deep relationship, because people show themselves to those they trust, or believe, and seldom to those they distrust. When I got married, I felt safe enough to tell my wife that I was afraid of the dark. Imagine a

grown adult terrified of the dark! But I trusted her and explained my shame to her. She could not have known me deeply without our mutual trust. Thanks to her help, I no longer suffer from that unreasonable fear.

You will never know how to endure a crisis if you live by the simple pronouncement that "seeing is believing." When you're confronted by the negative facts at hand, when the reality is bad, when the evidence is against your health or your financial survival or your marriage, how will you reach beyond your grasp by merely observing the facts before you?


We need to embrace all of our faculties in order to experience life and to pursue or apply science. We cannot amputate our powers from our souls and expect to succeed. Within our very beings, we are a symphony of abilities that play music together. Such is science. Such is art, relationships, and faith in crises.

## What I'm Really Trying to Say

It is not possible for us to scientifically prove Jesus and to embrace the resurrection by putting an index finger into his side. Thomas and the apostles could do so, but we cannot. Instead, we rely on their testimony. The apostle John said: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we have proclaimed concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life" (1 John 1:1-4, NIV).

We depend on the testimony of these witnesses. We cannot prove the resurrection in an absolute way. We choose to believe these witnesses, as jurors might do now in a court case.

Jesus understood this problem and said, "Blessed are those who have not seen, yet have believed." He proclaimed that such an approach would work. When we choose to believe the apostles, he comes through the door and pushes through our defenses, and we experience resurrection for ourselves.

"I serve a risen Savior,  
He's in the world today.  
I know that He is living,  
Whatever men may say; ....  
You ask me how I know he lives?  
He lives within my heart!"<sup>2</sup> 

<sup>1</sup> R. Maurice Boyd, "Believing Is Seeing," *Consensus*, vol. 16, no. 1, article 6 (May 1990). Online at <http://scholars.wlu.ca/consensus/vol16/iss1/6>.

<sup>2</sup> Alfred H. Ackley, "He Lives" (1933).

# 1 CORINTHIANS 15:12-14

## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESURRECTION

*By Olive J. Hemmings*

“BUT IF IT IS PREACHED THAT CHRIST has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith” (1 Cor. 15:12-14, NIV).

The resurrection of Jesus was the *kerygma* (from the ancient Greek *kērugma*, meaning “preaching” or “proclamation”) of the early church. The word appears in verse 14: “If Christ has not been raised, then our [*kērugma*] has been in vain and your faith has been in vain” (NRSV). The resurrection defines the message of the restoration of God’s kingdom and God’s justice (the literal meaning of the word “righteousness” is “justice”); this was disruptive not only to the

Jewish religious tradition, but also to the Roman social order.

Please note that when Paul talks about resurrection, he transcends Adventist concepts of “the state of the dead?” and focuses on the restoration of all things, including our bodies, not our state in the time in between. The Greek word for resurrection is *anastasis*, combining the terms *ana* (again) and *histēmi* (stand) to mean: standing up again after having fallen down. This speaks to the return to life that is lived not in fear and oppression, but as it truly is and ought to be.

### **Apocalyptic Judaism**

Resurrection as we see it in the Bible emerged from Apocalyptic Judaism. The central message was that the end of history was near and that God would shortly intervene to bring an end to “the present evil age” and to establish his rule on earth through the righteous (just) Messiah.

Paul himself was an Apocalyptic Jew, yet the religious tradition included

the Sadducees and other Jews who did not believe in resurrection, which is why he could ask, “How can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?” (verse 12). Some Pharisees believed in an intermediary existence of the soul akin to the Greeks, who believed in the immortality of the soul. The Hebrew Bible itself indicates diverse concepts regarding the afterlife (see Eccl. 9:4-6; 12:6-7; Psa. 88:10; and Isa. 38:18). The idea of afterlife offered no clear sense of restoration, because the afterlife is not a resurrection per se, but rather a going down to a shadowy existence.

The *kerygma* of the early church, however, offers us no clear opinion on the afterlife or the immortality of the soul.<sup>1</sup> It boldly proclaims resurrection, which is a related but

different concept having to do with the *restoration* of a good and godly world. It is not resurrection as a stopgap for the crippling fear that drives religious systems, but one that offers assurance to the faithful who suffer while (and/or because) their *modus vivendi* is disruptive to the unjust and corrupt system of this world.

For these, and for the entire groaning creation, God makes all things new through Messiah Jesus (Rom. 8:21-23).

This view of resurrection appears most consistently in the apocalyptic literature of the Hellenistic and Roman periods. Jews experienced brutal oppression under the Seleucid Empire, which placed strict censure upon Judaic religious practice.<sup>2</sup>

Apocalyptic Jews saw the world as irredeemably evil. The expectation of the end of evil and the resurrection of the righteous reached its climax in the first century under Roman rule. The preaching of John the Baptist, the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth, and the work of early apostles are clear indications of this, with Jesus calling his followers to “seek first” God’s kingdom and justice (Matt. 6:33) and preaching a message of comfort in what the early church compiled as the Beatitudes.

As an Apocalyptic Jew, Paul remained entrenched in the hope of a new age of righteousness/justice

by God’s radical intervention to make it new again. When Paul met the glorified Christ, his views were reaffirmed; Jesus was the firstfruits of the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:20; Acts 26:23) and the assurance that God will put an end to the evil age.

## Resurrection is the kērugma of the apostolic church because it assures us that unjust systems will not have the last say.

### Hope in a Bad World

Paul says in our key text that if Christ has not been raised, “your faith has been in vain.” The Greek term *pistis*, translated “faith,” is not about *believing* something to be true. It literally means “faithfulness”—the faithfulness that defines the life of the just person (Hab. 2:4; Gal. 3:11; and Rom. 1:17). So as the early church suffers stigma and persecution from both the Romans and the synagogue because of its radical inclusiveness (Acts 21:27-23:35), Paul employs the assurance of the resurrection to encourage the church to remain faithful.

Resurrection is the *kērugma* of the apostolic church because it assures us that unjust systems will not have the last say. Those who, like Jesus, have fallen under its brutality will rise again by the Spirit of God, just as Jesus has (Rom. 8:11). Not only the faithful of the church, but the entire groaning creation shares in this hope.

In the teaching of the early church, resurrection is an assurance of newness of life—of standing up again, like the fallen foliage after a great hurricane and the blushing blooms that emerge from the bare trees of wintertime. It offers hope in a world where injustice and brutality persist, and it assures us that the Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead will prevail, as long as the faithful do not lose heart. **AT**

<sup>1</sup> Some may argue otherwise, based on 2 Cor. 5:8; Phil. 1:20-24, and 2 Cor. 12:2-4.

<sup>2</sup> John J. Collins, “The Afterlife in Apocalyptic Literature,” in *Judaism in Late Antiquity: Death, Life-after-Death, Resurrection, and the World-to-Come in the Judaisms of Antiquity*, Eds. A. J. Avery-Peck and J. Neusner (1999), pp. 119-139.

# Jesus, Salvation, and the World's Religions

BY RAJ ATTIKEN

CHRISTIANS LIVE FOR THE PROSPECT OF an eternity with God and with others. That hope is linked, for Adventists, with the anticipation of Jesus' return.

Visions of our eternal destiny, however, raise troubling questions about whether that destiny would be denied to our Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, and other friends who do not convert to Christianity.

When your life is linked closely with those of other faith traditions, this is more than an abstract or theoretical question. To me, the question conjures the faces of men, women, children, families, and communities with whom I lived my early years. More than 70 percent of the population in the land of my birth were Buddhist. The largest minority were Hindu. Christians accounted for a mere 7 percent of the population. My world included Anglican, Methodist, Dutch Reformed, and Roman Catholic churches, Buddhist and Hindu temples, a mosque, and a few shrines of the Buddha placed under sacred Bodhi trees within a mile or two of my childhood home.

I grew up in contrasting worlds until my late teens. In one world, most of my childhood friends and acquaintances belonged to a religious tradition different from mine. Their families invited me to join in their religious festivities, and through

these relationships, I formed impressions about their devotion and disciplines.

The other world I grew up in was the Adventist one: my family and my church. I was a Busy Bee, Sunbeam, Pathfinder, Master Guide, Missionary Volunteer,

**Rather than being monotheists who were led astray, could the Israelites have been polytheists (just like their Canaanite neighbors), who then later adopted monotheism?**

and eventually a pastor and conference president.

## The Coming of Christianity

According to a comprehensive Sri Lanka country study,<sup>1</sup> the Portuguese, who arrived on my island in the late 15th century, wanted to convert the population

to Catholicism. Small pockets of Nestorian Christianity had existed in Sri Lanka, but the Portuguese were the first to propagate Christianity on a large scale. They discriminated against other religions with a vengeance, destroying Buddhist and Hindu temples.

The Dutch, who arrived in Sri Lanka in the mid-17th century, tried with little success to supplant Roman Catholicism with Protestantism. They rewarded native conversion to the Dutch Reformed Church with promises of upward mobility, but Catholicism was too deeply rooted.

In 1801, Sri Lanka became Britain's first crown colony. In spite of the efforts of colonizing powers to Christianize the population, only 7 percent of today's population is Christian (still largely Roman Catholic). After more than a century of missionary activity, the current Adventist membership on the island is approximately 3,300.

Research suggests that for all of the effort expended by Christian missionaries, relatively few people convert to Christianity from other faith traditions. In India just 0.4% of converts to Christianity who responded to a 2021 Pew Research study identified themselves as having switched from the religion in which they were raised. The statistics may be similar in other parts of the world.

How, then, should I think about the 20 million people in Sri Lanka who have not embraced Christianity? Or the 1.29 billion (97% of the population) in India who are not Christian? How should I think about the eternal destiny of the many friends I now frequently interact with who are not Christians?

The Pew Research Center reported that the percentage of the world's Christian population was 31.4% in 2010, and according to its projections, that percentage would not change at least until 2050. By then, the anticipated Christian growth rate per five-year period is expected to decline to 0.4% from 1.1% in 2010. According to the Center for the Study of Global Christianity at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, only 14% of Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists today personally know a Christian.

### **Culture and Conversions**

When I hear or read reports about the evangelistic successes that the Adventist Church and other Christian organizations are achieving, I cannot help but think of my friends and the two-thirds of the population of our world who haven't been effectively touched by these efforts. Should I conclude that they face eternal damnation if they do not confess faith in the Jesus of the Christian tradition?

Religious conversion is not merely an individual matter. It is a multifaceted process of change with personal, cultural, social, and religious implications. Conversion means disavowing long-held cultural identities, beliefs, values, worldviews, and practices, and opening oneself to a new identity, new roles, rituals, and rhetoric.

Frequently, native values and practices are carried over into one's newfound Christian faith. Pew Research showed, for example, that most Christians

born in India say they believe in karma (54%), which is not rooted in Christianity. Many Indian Christians also believe in reincarnation (29%) and that the Ganges River has the power to purify (32%)—core teachings of Hinduism. Christians native to India are not averse to participating in the customs of other religions, such as celebrating Diwali (31%) or wearing the forehead mark worn by Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain women. In Sri Lanka, many Christians celebrate Vesak, the annual commemoration of the birth, enlightenment, and death of the Buddha.

In my early years of pastoral ministry, I held weekly Bible studies with a novice Buddhist monk. He seemed eager to learn about Christianity and was intrigued by several Christian beliefs. From his deeply embedded worldview, however, he could not find meaning in the concepts of sin and salvation and in the exclusive claims of Jesus as Savior of the world. Words and theories were not sufficient to break through the hold that millennia of Buddhist culture had on him. Who he was, his very personal identity, was tightly wrapped in Buddhism.

The conviction grew in me that he and others like him are not simply dealing with a personal choice of one theory over another, but on shedding the many elements that have long given meaning to their identity and personhood.

Encounters such as these have left me with a gnawing question about ultimate destiny. In our understanding of Jesus Christ as the sole mediator of salvation, is there space for those who remain outside the circle of believers?

### **The Evolution of Monotheism**

Like most other Christians, I read the Bible for many decades with an interpretive lens that I received in childhood, which colored

my conclusions. My reading taught me that a monotheistic view of God was the first and original conception of the divine held by humans.

Christians have traditionally held that the first humans and early Israelites were monotheists, followers of Yahweh who were later led astray by false gods. A more critical reading of the biblical texts pointed me to polytheism within the earliest worship practices of the Israelite people. The picture that emerges is that exclusive worship of YHWH as the sole God did not become the belief system in Israel and Judah until about the 8th or 7th century BCE, or even later.

Rather than being monotheists who were led astray, could the Israelites have been polytheists (just like their Canaanite neighbors), who then later adopted monotheism? This puts into context such texts as Exodus 20:3, Deuteronomy 6:14; 28:14-15, and Jeremiah 11:13, all of which say or imply that YHWH recognized that he had competition.

One postulate about the evolution of religions says that the trajectory went from animism to polytheism and then to monotheism. Polytheistic manifestations were largely confined to geographical regions and tied to the need for gods to protect local plants and animals. Even among polytheists, in time one patron god might have emerged as the most vital and useful. We may see hints of this in the song of deliverance in the exodus account, "Who is like you among the gods, O LORD...?" (Ex. 15:11, NLT).

The origin of monotheism is sometimes associated with the Zoroastrians of Persia. It could well be that when the Persians conquered Babylon during the Jews' exile there in the 6th century BCE, the Persians introduced monotheism to the Jews. (I have seen the claim made that Cyrus the Great was himself a Zoroastrian.)

Judaism, as we know it today, began taking shape during this period, between the destruction of the First Temple by the Babylonians and the Second Temple by the Romans in 70 CE.

## History of Religions

Historians of religion point to the Axial Age, from about 800 BCE to about 200 BCE, as the period when the world's dominant intellectual, philosophical, and religious systems became formalized. These ranged from the ancient Greek philosophers, to Indian metaphysicians and logicians who articulated the traditions of Hinduism that had its roots in the Indus Valley Civilization over 2,000 years before, to Buddhism, Jainism, Zarathustra in Persia, the Hebrew prophets in Judea, and Confucius and Lao-tzu (Daoism) in ancient China.

A self-reflective attitude toward human existence emerged at this time, and with it an awakening to the concept of transcendence. Christianity, coming out of Judaism, was a late entrant, and Islam arrived even later between the 6th and 7th centuries CE. Since nothing in the origins or histories of these religions sets one apart as superior to the others, adherents don't find in history any compelling reasons to shop around for something better or truer.

The history of religions also raises questions about how much cross-cultural fusion has taken place between religions. While we Christians suppose that all of the influence has gone from us to them as a result of our missional activity, in fact, this isn't true. Cross-pollination of religions—not just among the Abrahamic religions, but even between the relatively removed worlds of the Eastern and the Western religions—has been occurring for centuries. Along with the Indian textiles, spices, opium, silk, and precious

stones that were loaded onto Dutch ships, stories from the Mahabharata and other Indian epics also traveled far and wide.

Some of the stories from the East traveled through Greek and even Arab cultures on their way to the West. Names were anglicized, specifics lost. One story was about the son of a king who renounced his wealth and became a wandering teacher. He was born Siddhartha Gautama, but his title was Bodhisattva—in Arabic *Budhasaf*, in

## No religion can control or limit the flow of God's broad, deep, all-inclusive, universal love.

Greek *Ioasaph*, in Latin *Josaphat*. We know him today as the Buddha. In his article in a recent issue of *Harper's Magazine*, British journalist Hari Kunzru traces how the Buddha under the name of Josaphat came to be venerated as a saint in Roman and Orthodox churches in the late Middle Ages.<sup>2</sup> (Read the Wikipedia entry "Barlaam and Josaphat" for the rest of the story.)

The world's religions differ sharply in doctrine, ritual, and experience. They do not all plumb the same depths or ask the same questions, but they do converge in some important ways. They all begin with the recognition that something is wrong with the world. Though they differ on what is wrong and how to fix it, they invariably seek ways for their adherents to make the present life better for themselves and others.

Another basic aspiration that is common to all is the human yearning to know what is after this life. Buddhists who aspire for Nirvana, Hindus who desire Moksha, and Christians who want to go to heaven and enjoy eternal life all yearn for an existence beyond the grave, and they try to map a pathway to attain it. Although our definitions of eternal existence differ, we all desire something beyond death.

## Exclusive or Inclusive?

The Christian view of human existence and of the world is largely shaped by the biblical story of a loving God, who takes the initiative to put the world back into the good order for which it was designed. According to that story, the love of God that is incarnate in men and women is revealed in the clearest and most decisive way in the person and life of Jesus of Nazareth. The God who loves all people becomes what he loves in the person of Jesus Christ, through whom God's saving initiative is realized: "There is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12, NKJV).

Speaking of himself, Jesus said, "Everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16, NLT). Salvation, which has a distinctively Christian content, is made possible only in and through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The declaration that salvation is attained only through faith in Jesus is repeatedly affirmed in the New Testament. This Christian vision of salvation points to a time when creation will be renewed, the dead will be raised, God's new world would be in place, and God will forever be personally present with his creation.

Somewhat in contrast with this view are hints in the Christian scriptures that

the salvific significance of Jesus extends to all human beings, even to those who do not know him or confess faith in him. When Simeon first saw the baby Jesus in the temple, he referred to Jesus as the “light to reveal God to the nations” (Luke 2:32, NLT). John begins his Gospel by announcing that the Word “brought light to everyone” (John 1:4, NLT).

In Romans 5, Paul draws a parallel between Adam and Christ. The first Adam has a universal relevance as the first man and the first sinner. Christ, as the second Adam, similarly has salvific significance for all humanity. The will of God to save all people is unlimited and universal. Humans are children of God and always will be, even when they don’t realize it or believe it. Religions, ultimately, are about people.

God, as conceived in the Christian faith, loves people—all people. The divine plan of salvation for mankind knows no frontiers of people or races. The Holy Spirit is the universal agent who acts in all people, regardless of their religious affiliations. This inclusive view is reflected in what Ellen G. White wrote in *The Desire of Ages*, page 638: “Among the heathen are those who worship God ignorantly, those to whom the light is never brought by human instrumentality, yet they will not perish.”

If the “heathen” are eligible for salvation, as Ellen White asserts, they receive eternal life not because their salvation is mediated by the Buddha or by the pantheon of Hindu gods and goddesses or by Confucius, but because of Jesus. “There is one God and one Mediator who can reconcile God and humanity—the man Christ Jesus. He gave his life to purchase freedom for everyone” (1 Tim. 2:5-6, NLT).

## Salvation Is for People, Not Religions

The Christian belief in a universally transcendent and omnipresent God implies that God’s presence could be experienced in culturally conditioned images and notions in the nations of the world. This could also imply that the moral and ethical teachings in the religions of the world emerged under the influence of the God of the Bible. Professor N. T. Wright wrote in his 2010 book *Simply Christian*

**According to the Center for the Study of Global Christianity at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, only 14% of Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists today personally know a Christian.**

that the longing for justice, the quest for spirituality, the hunger for relationships, and the delight in beauty are “echoes of a voice,” expressed in different ways, but the voice of God nevertheless.

Perhaps the purpose of Christian missionary activity is not to prevent the damnation of those who have not been converted to Christianity, nor to swell the membership numbers of the Adventist church, but to make known a good God who loves his creation and who will set all things right in his time. In the words of Isaiah: “Learn to do good. Seek justice.

Help the oppressed. Defend the cause of orphans. Fight for the rights of widows” (Isa. 1:17, NLT).

The Adventist churches I attended in my youth frequently used a hymn from *The Church Hymnal* (1941) titled “From Greenland’s Icy Mountains.” Composed in 1819 by Reginald Heber, a British pastor who went to India as a missionary, it portrayed Christians as those “whose souls are lighted with wisdom from on high.” In contrast, Heber described the people in my home country of Sri Lanka in the hymn’s second verse:

“What though the spicy breezes  
Blow soft o’er Ceylon’s isle;  
Though every prospect pleases,  
And only man is vile?  
In vain with lavish kindness  
The gifts of God are strown;  
The heathen in his blindness  
Bows down to wood and stone.”

I am convinced that God is present in nations and places long before Christianity gets there—even in places where people bow down to wood and stone. The gifts that God lavishes are not in vain. People in such places do experience and express love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, and faithfulness (Gal. 5:22).

The God of the universe does not belong to Adventists or to Christians. We do not have a monopoly on God. No religion, not even Christianity, can ever encompass the depth of God’s love and goodness. No religion can control or limit the flow of God’s broad, deep, all-inclusive, universal love.

God’s eternal future will be available also to my Buddhist, Hindu, and Muslim friends. It cannot be otherwise. **AT**

<sup>1</sup> Russell R. Ross and Andrea Matles Savada, editors, *Sri Lanka: A Country Study* (1988).

<sup>2</sup> Hari Kunzru, “Dangling Man,” *Harper’s Magazine* (January 2022).

# What Makes Someone a Christian?

By Loren Seibold

*“[Trump] is highly biblical, and I would say to your listeners, we will in all likelihood never see a more godly, biblical president again in our lifetime.”*

—Michele Bachmann, ex-congressperson, April 2019

*“Nobody has done more for Christianity or for evangelicals or for religion itself than I have.”*

—Donald Trump, October 2021

One should always receive politicians’ assessments of anything or anyone with some skepticism. Left or right or in between, their interest in power scrambles—and not infrequently overpowers—their principles.

But a lot of ordinary Christians felt as Michelle Bachman and Donald Trump did—and they still do. One of the things that has surprised the nonreligious or mildly religious among us is how readily conservative Christians embraced the notion that politicians should publicly claim Christianity, whether or not they act like Christians.

Whatever you may have thought of the phenomenon that is Donald Trump, it seems to me he is a catalyst for an interesting and possibly necessary discussion: What does it mean to be a biblical and godly Christian?

An important question, don’t you think? Because in order to evaluate someone as godly and biblical (or not godly or biblical), a good Christian or not a good Christian, we must define what “Christian” means.

Here are some ways we can think about this question.

## Personal Christians

Christians of this mold base their Christianity on their own decisions, judgments, and feelings. To them, all it takes to be a Christian is your own declaration, feelings, and subjective experience. It includes:

- Declaring yourself a Christian. “I say I am, and you can’t judge me. It is between God and me.”
- Believing in Jesus. In the evangelical vernacular, this means “accepting Jesus as your personal savior.”
- Feeling Jesus within yourself in some way.
- Having a personal spiritual experience, such as hearing God speak to you, receiving an answer to prayer, or *glossolalia*.

I think the above Christians are what we get at the conjunction of a solipsistic culture and simplistic Bible reading: the “I’ve gotta be me” notion interpreted through selected Bible texts. North American Christianity has been building up to this for a long time by, for example, pulling John 3:16 out of its context, which makes our faith sound like a rather undefined form of personal belief, without much context or follow-through. But Jesus’ admonition to Nicodemus to “believe” must be understood in the context Nicodemus’ courageous words and actions on Jesus’ behalf, as recorded in John 7:50–51 and 19:39–42.

The claims of such Christians are correct to the extent that I should hesitate to judge them: at least some parts of Christianity are very personal. Adventist evangelism notwithstanding, not everyone needs to see Jesus through the lens of doctrinal points.

Furthermore, people come into the world with lots of strikes against them, and this kind of faith makes room, it seems to me, for those who just can’t do very well at life, those who struggle to behave decently and morally. That’s precisely the space for grace, isn’t it?

But abstracting the concept of belief, or a vague personal feeling about Jesus, from the rest of Christianity seems to me to be a primitive, unfinished faith. Yes, it accommodates the person who doesn’t have many resources to live his faith. But it contains no expectation that you advance toward the spiritual fruits that were so important to Paul and the early Christians.

If nothing is expected of a Christian other than claiming to be one, then anything goes. A charismatic person who can talk the Christian talk can easily take advantage of gullible but sincere followers, as some greedy, immoral, and corrupt clergymen have demonstrated.

This form of Christianity can’t be condemned wholesale, but it seems to me a novice’s faith, and it turns dangerous when unscrupulous actors extrapolate it into a full-blown Christian identity.

## Organizational Christians

Some Christians find their identity in the group they belong to, or something the group demands of them or offers them. This goes back to the Old Testament concept of God’s chosen people, and Adventists have refreshed it in the Christian era using the “remnant” reference of Revelation 12:17.



This can be described as:

- Loyalty to a certain church organization
- Affirming a set of doctrines of a church
- Participating in and giving to the church
- Believing a certain set of church teachings, such as its eschatology

Again, there's an important principle here: human beings are social creatures, and we find support and meaning for our lives in community.

This, however, is but a partial picture. Jesus had followers, but he didn't establish a General Conference. Nor did Paul or the Jerusalem brethren. No matter what some on the top floor of 12501 Old Columbia Pike have said, Acts 15 was not a General Conference Administrative Committee meeting.

Ours is not the only Christian religion to claim that you must be a member of our denomination to be saved. But we, even more than modern Roman Catholics, have been unusually insistent about it—at times evangelizing by making people fearful of not being one of us. “Remnant,” as we have used it, essentially means that Seventh-day Adventists are the only authentic Christians. This “we are the only ones with the truth” arrogance has survived the church's failures to actually behave in courageous Christian ways.

Churchmen (of all denominations) can be just as dangerous as shallow “Christian” politicians. Yes, their motives differ. Churchmen seem motivated by a wish to save the organization at all costs, and they sometimes bend principles of ethics and kindness to do that. They sincerely believe they are God's representatives in God's organization, and because they board themselves up behind walls of policy, doctrine, and officialdom, they turn stubborn and opinionated. Swept along by the demands of the organized church, they may be blind to the organization's moral lapses.

Some argue that Roman Catholicism has thrived on authoritarianism and self-interest for 2,000 years. But organized religion has never encountered a world like this one. Never has religious hypocrisy shone as brightly as it does now.

I believe we may be witnessing the senescence of denominational Christianity. While personal Christianity appears strong, organizational Christianity seems to be waning. Here in the Western world, many denominations and congregations are suffering declines in donations and participation. Because the institutionalized churches have been triumphalistic and selfish, all studies show that new generations are rejecting them.

Yet church leaders of all denominations seem unable to see this or to make adjustments. Christian activist Shane Claiborne

said in his book *The Irresistible Revolution*: “The church is like Noah's ark. It stinks, but if you get out of it, you'll drown.” I once thought that true, but now it sounds to me like an excuse for not doing the mucking out. Many today would rather risk drowning outside of a stinking church than existing miserably within it.

As the church declines, a few Adventist leaders have fallen back on the excuse that we are experiencing “the shaking”—getting rid of the people we don't want around anyway. I've been saddened by how ready our church leaders are to say “so long” to people with doubts and questions in order to maintain what they consider a pure organization.<sup>1</sup>

## Performative Christians

I'm not talking here about people who do good for others—though that can surely be part of their repertoire—but about those who believe that the mere doing of certain things to please God can make them Christians. The guiding texts here have to do with sin being the transgression of the law (1 John 3:4) and the admonition to “Be ye therefore perfect” (Matt. 5:48, KJV). Whereas the personal Christian declares himself a Christian because he feels it internally, whether or not it is affirmed outwardly, here the grounds for being a Christian are external and active—things you choose to accomplish by actions, ritual, or discipline and that should cause guilt if not achieved. For example:

- Attending church, giving your resources to the church, or receiving the sacraments and participating in church rituals
- Behaving according to a certain set of principles or doctrines, whether or not they are central to the gospel message
- Engaging in Bible study and prayer or other devotional activities
- Attempting to be perfect according to a set of principles
- Being able to feel or display ecstatic experiences

Some of these actions, such as going weekly to mass to take the sacraments—“the visible means of invisible grace”—are quite easy. Charismatic experiences seem to happen in the right setting, too, to the type of person receptive to them. As a pastor, I have also encountered some who consider themselves Christians because in times of need they turn to certain expected rituals, such as marriages and funerals.

Still, the person who sets out to behave perfectly has a stiff uphill climb. How one chooses to behave is, of course, part of being a Christian. But making behavior a way to earn salvation will end in disappointment, says Paul.

What seems to have worked for many Adventists is redefining perfection to a simplistic understanding of what God requires.

They feel in God's good graces because they eat the right things, eschew the disapproved foods and beverages, pay their tithe, and avoid improper Sabbath activities.

That Jesus resoundingly condemned the Pharisees for this shallow sort of religion has never seemed to bother Adventists very much. Many of us believe the doctrines and eat Adventist food and so regard ourselves (and are regarded by others) as successful Christians, even if thoughtless or unkind.

However, great suffering is in store for sincere individuals

## I can't imagine a faith that doesn't put Christlike treatment of others on the list of Christian aspirations.

who demand absolute perfection of themselves, since no one can live perfectly. These troubled, unhappy people—from whose lives the shadows are never lifted—are frequently also demanding spouses and hurtful parents.

### The Cultural Christian

In *Habits of the Heart* (1985), American sociologist Robert N. Bellah coined the term “civil religion” to describe what basically consists of being a decent neighbor and citizen. It may include church, but its rituals encompass all matters of life in society, from entertainment (a bowling league) to business (the Rotary Club) to community celebrations (the Independence Day parade) to politics (city council meetings) and patriotism (the war memorial in the city square). Such individuals call themselves Christians “because I'm overall a decent person.” They may nominally be part of a church since, well, you're supposed to be. But it really doesn't matter much, because “we all believe in the same God.” For these folks, religion is merely part of an active life in one's community or world.

This life doesn't require a great deal of spiritual commitment, and some argue that for much of the 20th century, it was adopted by a great many Americans. To be a cultural Christian, little is required.

- Be part of a community that is generally Christian.
- Live according to the generally accepted principles of your culture (or appear to).
- Support community activities or political initiatives that are identified as Christian.

The last of these, which seems ascendant right now, is the most troubling. A great many evangelicals point to a set of politicians as great Christians only because they appear to advance initiatives supported by Christian leaders. Such politicians favor a strong military or conservative judges, want to deregulate firearms, oppose abortion, and in general want to make America a country that favors Christianity. Surprisingly, this earns politicians accolades for being biblical and godly, even if little about their lives or their platforms qualifies them as role models in the pattern of Jesus.

Some commentators have predicted that this marks not just a crisis for Christianity, but possibly a sign that evangelical Christianity is being replaced by an artificially Christian-flavored political movement that is becoming less and less about the real Jesus and increasingly a capitalistic, political caricature of him. American Christianity, in particular, seems to be turning nationalistic, not taking into account the larger world community of which we're a part.

I appreciate cultural Christianity to this extent: it would seem to say that what most matters in one's faith is decent and kind interaction with others in one's community. Yet, too often cultural Christianity's understanding of biblical ethics is shallow: it has a poorly thought-out sense of justice, it is tribal rather than inclusive, and it takes marching orders not from the Bible or even the better parts of a moral society, but from populist political movements.

### Humanist Christians

The above models of Christianity always operate in combination. None of us is just one of them. Each of these definitions has its own set of controlling Bible texts. All of them are part of a larger spiritual truth, but each also has dangers. To my way of thinking, the above are components of a biblical Christianity, but if they don't add up to a thoughtfully conceived, sacrificial, and unselfish treatment of others, they shouldn't be called “Christian.”

For me, real Christianity is gathered together around these priorities:

- Behaving according to Jesus' definition of goodness, and modeling one's life on Jesus' self-sacrificing justice and kindness
- Making decisions based on how they affect the world we live in, not just ourselves or our country or our race or our family
- Being appreciative of, while remaining suspicious of, all human constructs and authorities, whether organized religion, charismatic leaders, or economic or political structures

Right or wrong, I define my Christianity by the first and last teachings of Jesus. The first, Jesus' first public pronouncement

about his ministry, is a quotation from Isaiah about godliness being characterized by justice to the lowest and neediest in the world.

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me,  
because he has anointed me  
to proclaim good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners  
and recovery of sight for the blind,  
to set the oppressed free...” (Luke 4:18-19, NIV).

The last is a parable of two groups, styled sheep and goats, whose salvation (or lack of it) is decided in the judgment not by their beliefs or doctrines or church affiliations, but by how they treated people (Matt. 25:31-46). The conclusion: “Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me” (verse 40, NIV).

Christians should reject legalism of the sort that says God loves only those who have achieved personal perfection. But I can’t imagine a faith that doesn’t put Christlike treatment of others on the list of Christian aspirations. I call this kind of faith “aspirationalism.” As a Christian, I want to model the life of Jesus, reflect the Isaiah quote in Luke 4:18-19, be among faithful sheep in Matthew 25, live the priorities of Jesus’ Beatitudes, and practice Paul’s fruit of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5:22-23.

My personal spiritual experience, the church I belong to, my behavioral disciplines, and the kind of citizen I am should all support this. But none of them are alone decisive marks of Christianity. That requires, it seems to me, a moral compass that leads a Christian to crave being like Jesus.

I am convinced that in order to make a genuine claim of Christianity, a person must aspire to these qualities and, at some point, actually display them. Politicians who demean women, the handicapped, or minorities; who advocate violence toward those who disagree with them; who signal prejudice to those unlike them; who encourage violent insurrection; and who lie while hardly realizing they are doing it probably haven’t understood much about Christianity. Even if they choose to promote a law supported by Christians, their bad example may well overcome the good they can be convinced to do.

## A Postscript on Politics

Is politics off-limits to the preacher? I was sometimes told so whenever I mentioned, even in passing, a political figure or an idea that politicians had adopted as their own.

The problem, of course, is that religion isn’t off-limits to politicians. People nowadays want to hear not just personal religious affirmations from their politicians, but religious reasons for the things that politicians promote. And the moment a

politician expands into the territory formerly covered by faith, the perception that politics is off-limits in religious discussion pushes the preacher, ethicist, or religious scholar into a smaller corner.

An acquaintance recently wrote that I dare not write about vaccinations anymore, because they are political now. (Unless, he added, I agree with his theology of vaccinations.) All sorts of topics now straddle over into the political column: abortion and other life-edge issues, racism, feminism, poverty, education, public services and the role of government, crime and punishment, and dozens of others. If a politician has addressed it, he or she now forces me to be on the defensive to some portion of my audience.


Soon there will be nothing left I can safely address except Jesus, and even he’s standing in a minefield now that Donald Trump has been declared by a set of churchmen and churchwomen to be not just a useful figure, but a modern-day Messiah in the mold of Cyrus. (The figure of Cyrus in Isaiah 44 and 45—an evil and destructive pagan ruler whom God appears to call his “shepherd” and “anointed”—has been revived as a type of a pagan monarch who is God’s servant because he does God’s bidding, even if he is unaware of it.)

But if political figures or commentators or well-known church leaders claim to be Christians, shouldn’t they need to answer to biblical ethics? It seems to me they don’t get to say, “Judgments about politics are off-limits to anyone but an entitled class of powerful politicians and religionists,” much less that “It matters not how I behave or how I govern, because I have authority in matters both civil and religious.”

The saddest result is that as Christianity is claimed by people with considerable wealth and political power, it loses relevance to masses of others: the very common people, for whom the prophets and Jesus all spoke up as they demanded accountability from the rich and entitled.

This is why I fear that religion in America could go the same direction as religion in Europe. It will become so divisive that right-thinking people will abandon it as a historical artifact, replaced by an agnostic humanism that is more moral than Christianity has managed to be.

On the way to that, I see endless conflicts in store for us. And in the end, history will show the downfall of Christianity to be the fault of those religious leaders who, disliking the broad justice of Jesus, have put their faith in self-proclaimed “Christian” politicians who are not qualified to claim that adjective.

But we shall see. 

<sup>1</sup> Loren Seibold, “The Church: Love It or Leave It?” *Adventist Today* online (Aug. 21, 2020).

# Is It Good Because It's "All Natural"?

By Jack Hoehn

ACCORDING TO THE CENTER FOR Science in the Public Interest (CSPI), which is a trustworthy source for accurate information on matters of food and health, the words “natural” or “all natural” mean very little in the world of advertising.

The uncola beverage 7-UP® was once touted as “having only five natural ingredients.” But besides unnaturally carbonated water, the other four ingredients were potassium citrate, citric acid, unspecified natural flavors, and high-fructose corn syrup. Who knows about the mystery flavors, but the other three don’t sound very natural to me. Making high fructose corn syrup, according to the CSPI, requires “a complex, multistep industrial process.” It isn’t something you could cook up from a bushel of corn in your kitchen, unless you happen to be equipped with centrifuges, hydroclones, ion-exchange columns, and buckets of enzymes.

Advertisers understand our bias toward nature and the natural. If something was created by God or developed over time by Mother Nature, we feel more comfortable with it. Although we all benefit from the Industrial Revolution with our well-manufactured vehicles, mobile phones, and computers, we intuitively feel safer with—and tend to suspend judgment of—a product we are assured is “all natural.”

How could it be harmful if it is a product of nature?

## Natural Remedies

The National Institutes of Health reminds us: “Nature has been good to us. Nature gave us aspirin and morphine, and other



medicines derived from plants. The use of plants as medicines has a long history in the treatment of disease, and plants have played an important role in improving our health.”<sup>1</sup>

Seventh-day Adventists who lived in the pre-scientific age were urged as early as 1864 to be cautious about diseases caused largely by natural substances such as animal flesh, wine, tobacco, tea, and coffee. We were advised to avoid some combinations of natural foods, such as “highly seasoned meats,” “rich gravies,” “rich cakes,” “pies,” and “puddings.” Ellen White warned, “The trees and all vegetation also have felt the effects of the curse.”<sup>2</sup>

As for the dangerous drugs then used by physicians, or the alcohol-based

herbal snake-oil medicines sold without prescriptions, Ellen White advised against them. She recognized the dangers of the poisonous substances in these drugs—substances we now know to be environmental toxins or addictives, such as mercury, strychnine, cannabis, or opium. She recommended in their place the abundant use of water, “a day or two of fasting,” and “strict habits of cleanliness.”

The 1864 presentation of what came to be called the “Adventist health message” defines *nature* as the disease-fighting capability of the body. Ellen White wrote: “The sick themselves, if they would be patient, diet and suffer a little, and give nature time to rally, would recover much sooner without the use of any medicine. Nature alone possesses curative powers.”<sup>3</sup>

*Nature* in this context did not mean roots, herbs, or tonics. It meant the body’s intelligently designed immune and healing systems.

## Herbs?

It was not until 26 years later that Ellen White mentioned, in a letter to an overseas missionary, that she had found simple mild herbal remedies such as hops and catnip tea to be of some use.<sup>4</sup> Seven years after that, she wrote in another personal letter, “There are herbs that are harmless, the use of which will tide over many apparently serious difficulties.”<sup>5</sup>

The pro-herbal movement in Adventism arose mostly after Ellen White’s death, at the same time prescription medicines were becoming more scientific. In *The Place of Herbs*

in *Rational Therapy*, a compilation published in 1931, followers gathered a few scattered and scant private remarks gleaned from White's personal letters to friends about simple, nontoxic home remedies (charcoal, snakeweed, hops, catnip), alongside her well-known public and accurate denunciation of earlier 19th-century poisonous chemicals used as drugs. These statements are selectively quoted and pasted together to support a "drugs bad, herbs good" mantra.

The compilation ignores the reforms happening in scientific medicine at that very time. What Ellen White did in treating pneumonia in her son in 1864 surely has little relevance to what one would do to treat pneumonia or any other serious ailment in 1931, much less with modern pharmaceuticals today. While she was undoubtedly correct that mercury and opium as then used were of great harm, most of this 19th-century anti-drug/pro-herb advice should be only of historical interest.

Many natural herbs are *not* harmless, and even if not harmful, may be entirely ineffective.

The National Institutes of Health warns that so-called "natural" medicines are not without side effects. Some can even pose serious safety concerns. "For example, kava, a plant native to the islands of the South Pacific, and often used as a dietary supplement for anxiety, may be associated with severe liver damage. Ephedra, an evergreen shrub-like plant native to central Asia and Mongolia that has been used for centuries for colds, fever, and other conditions, is associated with heart problems and risk of death. In 2004, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration banned the sale of dietary supplements containing ephedrine alkaloids for safety reasons."<sup>6</sup>

Due to obvious environmental degradation from factories and their chemicals, we might think the words "chemical" or "synthetic" refer to things that must always be harmful—or that only substances described with the word "natural" should be trusted.

In fact, everything we know as real is chemical. The apple on a tree, the water in your well, and the body you live in are entirely chemical. Some chemicals are harmful, of course, while other chemicals are absolutely vital and lifesaving.

### Pure, Safe, Effective

For purified or designed synthetic medications, as well as for ancient roots and herbs, three words define the decision about what remedies to use and what to avoid. These words are *pure*, *safe*, and *effective*.

Unlike the unregulated use of chemicals and the over-the-counter alcohol-based herbal potions in Ellen White's day, all pharmaceutical-grade medicines of today must be presented in a pure form. All must have been proven by complex and often lengthy laboratory and clinical studies to be safe for humans to use. All must be shown to be effective by properly designed double-blind, placebo-controlled studies of sufficient size to tell the truth.

Please note that the advertising words "clinically tested" or "clinically proven" (often used on cosmetics or supplements) are unregulated and have no legal definition. They could mean that 10 people, all employed by or related to the product's manufacturer, tried the magic vitamin or jellyfish extract and that five of them said they felt better afterward. Calling a product "all natural," "clinically tested," or "clinically proven" is not assurance that it is safe, nor is it assurance of curative powers.

For most simple illnesses, the use of water, short-term fasting, rest, and safe over-the-counter medicine such as acetaminophen, ibuprofen, or aspirin may be all the body needs in order to perform its magical job of healing. But for serious illness, no rational alternative to modern medicines has been proven to be the blessed trinity of *pure*, *safe*, and *effective*.

In the last book Ellen White wrote and published, she left this excellent advice to her church: "Those who seek healing by prayer should not neglect to make use of the remedial agencies within their reach. It is not a denial of faith to seek to use such remedies as God has provided.... This knowledge has been placed within our reach for use. We should employ every facility for the restoration of health, taking every advantage possible, working in harmony with natural laws."<sup>7</sup> **AT**

*Illustration from the Boston Public Library Print Collection of 19th-century American trade cards. Ayer's Sarsaparilla is reported to have had sarsaparilla root, mandrake, yellow dock herb, and 26% alcohol. It claimed to cure over 25 illnesses, including syphilis. Ayer's popular over-the-counter Cherry Pectoral for colds and coughs also contained morphine.*

<sup>1</sup> National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health, "Natural Doesn't Necessary Mean Safer, or Better," online at [www.nccih.nih.gov/health/know-science/natural-doesnt-mean-better](http://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/know-science/natural-doesnt-mean-better).

<sup>2</sup> Seventh-day Adventists were introduced to their "health message" in an article by Ellen G. White first published in 1864 in the chapter titled "Health" of her book *Spiritual Gifts*, Vol. 4A.

<sup>3</sup> Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts*, Vol. 4A (1864), p. 136.

<sup>4</sup> White, Letter 35 (Feb. 6, 1890).

<sup>5</sup> White, Manuscript 86 (Aug. 25, 1897).

<sup>6</sup> National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health, op. cit.

<sup>7</sup> White, *The Ministry of Healing* (1905), p. 231.



## NEWS BRIEFS

BarelyAdventist (barelyadventist.com) is a satire and humor blog on Adventist culture and issues. It is written by committed Adventists who don't mind laughing at our idiosyncrasies.

### Graying of Adventism No Longer a Problem

SILVER SPRING, Md. — Church administrators have completed a massive purchase of hair dye that will be delivered by ADRA trucks to Adventist congregations around the world.

All gray-haired members are encouraged to go to their local church for “emergency” hair coloring on the day the supplies arrive. Outside of Sabbath hours, hairy dyeing will take place in church fellowship halls around the clock, until there isn't a gray hair to be seen across the denomination.

“The graying of our churches is alarming,” said the blue-haired 73-year-old GC Director of Experimental Expenditure, Gammal Gubbe, who added that it was high

time the denomination “got creative” about a solution.

“If we aren't attracting young people, the least we can do is make boomers look less old,” said Gubbe.

### Interest in Pathfinders Soars in Time of Chaos

LOMA LINDA, Calif. — Adventists in North America are reconnecting with their Pathfinder roots as gas prices rise to unprecedented levels. Pathfinder clubs report that young and old alike have been qualifying for the Hiking Honor in record times, covering long distances on foot while leaving their cars at home.

“If all of this World War III talk keeps growing, I'm getting the Candlemaking Honor next,” said 45-year-old Loma Linda resident Mia Edo, looking worriedly at a

prophetic chart. “Who knows how much more it will cost to keep the lights on, if this continues?”

In other news, Pathfinder leaders around the globe are developing new honors in basic and advanced nuclear bunker construction. Doug Batchelor of Amazing Facts has withheld his support, saying that a good cave is all the shelter you really need in troubled times.

### GC Bans Filters That “Bear False Witness”

SILVER SPRING, Md. — The General Conference (GC) is cracking down on members who have been using forgiving filters to enhance their selfies.

“Filters are basically Instagram makeup,” said GC Director of General Interference, Iris Terrande, calling on Adventists around the world to resist the temptation to “bear false witness with flattering filters.”

Terrande said the world church is committed to forming a digital adornment committee by recruiting bored members who have superb filter-spotting abilities to comb through the social media accounts of fellow Adventists.

“Many of these individuals are already on the job full-time, entirely on their own initiative,” said the director.

“We will keep a running list of the worst selfie filter

offenders and notify their local churches,” said Terrande. “There's always someone judgmental enough in the congregation to take it from there.”

### Inflation Doubles University Fines

COLLEGEDALE, Tenn. — Student appearance and behavior at Southern Adventist University changed drastically this week after the administration announced that it would double school fines in order to keep up with inflation.

Eyewitnesses report that attire across the Southern campus has gotten downright churchy, as students do their utmost to keep from getting fined for dress code violations. In addition, “Everyone has become super punctual about curfews, and student driving is absolutely perfect,” said Assistant Dean of Men, Rezzi Dencia. “Nobody can afford to get caught.”

“I wish they'd up the pay I make at my grounds job by as much as they've raised the fines,” said junior biology major Cari Simo. “I've been walking around on eggshells since the announcement of the fine increase.”

Student government officers at Southern have started raising money for a new Worthy Offender Fund, in order to assist students who simply cannot pay the steep fines.

# Contributors



**RAJ ATTIKEN** is an adjunct professor of religious studies at Kettering College and former president of the Ohio Conference.



**KATRINA BLUE, PH.D.**, is an associate professor of Theology and Christian Spirituality at Pacific Union College.



**REINDER BRUINSMA** lives in the Netherlands with his wife, Aafje. He has served the Adventist Church in publishing, education, and church administration on three continents, his last post as president of the Netherlands Union. His latest books are *In All Humility: Saying “No” to Last Generation Theology* and *I Have a Future: Christ’s Resurrection and Mine*.



**OLIVE J. HEMMINGS** is a professor of religion and ethics at Washington Adventist University in Takoma Park, Maryland.



**JACK HOEHN, M.D.**, was a family physician and tropical medicine specialist for 46 years. He is the author of the 2021 book *Adventist Tomorrow*, which is now available on Amazon.com.



**WILLIAM G. JOHNSON** is a retired Adventist professor, editor, and writer living in Southern California.



**JAMES J. LONDIS** is a graduate of Atlantic Union College and earned a Ph.D. from Boston University. He retired in Tennessee after serving the Adventist Church as a pastor, college professor, and college president.



**LOREN SEIBOLD** is the executive editor of *Adventist Today*.



## 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.

## BIBLE CREDITS

King James Version is in the public domain.

The Living Bible (TLB) copyright © 1971 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

Scripture taken from the New King James Version®, copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan (www.zondervan.com). All rights reserved worldwide. The “NIV” and “New International Version” are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.™

Scripture quotations marked (NLT) are taken from The Holy Bible, New Living Translation, copyright ©1996, 2004, 2007 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

# You Are Not Alone



Recently a millennial *Adventist Today* reader shared her experience of moving with her husband to an entirely new community at the start of the pandemic. It was a lonely time. With everyone wearing masks and socially distancing, it was hard to connect and make friends.

What really helped combat their feeling of isolation was the weekly *Adventist Today* Sabbath Seminar, where this young couple had a chance to connect with like-minded Adventists. They experienced a place of fellowship and meaningful community via these warm weekly gatherings. The *Adventist Today* Sabbath Seminar was both spiritually and socially nourishing, and our

friends felt connected to a larger family of believers.

Community is one of the most important things *Adventist Today* offers its readers. Whether you connect with *Adventist Today* through the stimulating print magazine, the wealth of content on our website, social media accounts, or through the weekly *Adventist Today* Sabbath Seminar, the message to all of us is clear: we are not alone. *Adventist Today* is a global family of readers who value stimulating discourse, welcoming relationships, and accessible, independent journalism.

When you give generously to *Adventist Today*, your donations help us grow this friendly community, which aims to encourage the Adventist Church to be the best it can be. With your generous gifts, you are backing *Adventist Today's* efforts to provide a place where careful, critical thinking, transparency, and dialogue (even on difficult issues) is encouraged. With every dollar you give, you are helping us spread the word that no matter where in the world we find ourselves, we are not on our own. We have friends, and we are connected to a growing community.

I know I'm speaking for the entire *Adventist Today* team in telling you how profoundly grateful we are for your support. Thank you for standing with us during our spring, summer, and year-end fundraisers, as well as through your monthly generosity.

The Adventist community is a better place because of your support. Thank you so very much.

Your grateful *Adventist Today* executive director,  
BJÖRN KARLMAN

All it takes is a monthly gift that fits your budget to keep this magazine and our other 7 communication channels coming to you:

- \$5/month is a wonderful place to start your support
- \$25/month assures us that you believe in our mission and ministry
- \$100/month lets us know you want us here for years to come

Of course, we also accept one-time gifts of any size. Here's where to donate:

[atoday.org/donate/](https://atoday.org/donate/)

## Other Ways to Give




If you'd prefer to donate stock, or give distributions from your IRA, or include us in your estate plans, we'd be more than happy to schedule a confidential conversation with you. Please call us at the phone number below. These types of gifts will sustain *Adventist Today* in a meaningful way.

*Adventist Today* accepts all credit cards, checks, or PayPal donations. It's quick and easy, safe and secure to donate today. If signing up on your smartphone or computer seems daunting, give us a call. We'll be happy to take your donation over the phone.

Thanks for supporting *Adventist Today*. We value our readers/viewers.

# Adventist Today

[Adventist Today.org](https://www.adventisttoday.org)  
Phone: 800.236.3641

-  [www.facebook.com/AToday.org/](https://www.facebook.com/AToday.org/)
-  [@AdventistToday](https://twitter.com/AdventistToday)
-  [Instagram.com/adventisttoday](https://www.instagram.com/adventisttoday)