

A satellite image of North America, showing the continent's topography and surrounding oceans. The image is the background of the entire cover.

\$5.00

adventist today

september | october 2007

volume 15 issue 5

The Future of Adventism in North America

THE ADVENTIST CHURCH IN NA TODAY : 06 | WARNING FROM ANCIENT ISRAEL : 12

Foundation Board

Elwin Dunn — Board Chair
Ervin Taylor — Board Vice-Chair
Eugene Platt — Treasurer
Keith Colburn
Diana Fisher
Edmund Jones
John McLarty
Chuck Mitchell
Jim Nelson
Randy Roberts
Nate Schilt
Dan Smith
James Stirling
Eldon Stratton
John Vogt
James Walters
Kit Watts

Raymond F. Cottrell Endowment Board

James Walters — Board Chair
Douglass Ewing
James Nelson
Nate Schilt
Ervin Taylor

Advisory Council

SENIOR LIFETIME ADVISORS*

Beth and Elwin Dunn
Kathi and Richard Guth
Betty and Al Koppel
Joan Ogden
Lori and Thaine Price
J. Gordon Short
Marilynn and Ervin Taylor
Priscilla and James Walters

LIFETIME ADVISORS**

Judy and Gordon Rick

UNDERWRITING ADVISORS**

Kelli and Robert Black
Marielyn and Edwin Hill
Tracy and R. Craig Reynolds
William Sandborn

GENERAL ADVISORS#

Diana and Ken Bauer
Kelli and Robert Black
Jeanne and Gary Bogle
Lilia and Antonius Brandon
Ginny and Todd Burley
Charlotte and John Cassell
Ruth L. Christensen
Judy and Keith Colburn
Patricia and Ronald Cople
Kathryn and James Dexter
Rosemary and Merlyn Duerksen
James Dunn
H.O. Engen
Patricia and Douglass Ewing
Elsie and Jack Facundus
Sharon and Gary Fraser
Annette and Gary Frykman
Karen and Brent Gardner
Patricia Hare
Linda and Lyndon Harder
Jackie and Jim Henneberg
Jolene and Dennis Hilliard
Sally and Russell Hoenes
Susan Jacobsen
Wayne Jacobsen
Judy and John Jacobson
Virginia and Donald Jeffries
Erika and Brian Johnson
Marga and Elton Kerr
Dolores and Dean Kinsey
Helen and Frank Knittel
Doreen and Irvin Kuhn
Yung Lau
Berryl and Ralph Longway
Felix Lorenz
Florence and Ken Lorenz
Adele and James Nelson
Elaine and T. Clint Nelson
David T. Person II
Eugene Platt
Ruthe-Marina and Gary Raines
Judith Rausch
Joyce and Phil Reiswig
Maryann and James Stirling
Nancy and John Vogt
Betty and James Webster
Stephanie and Tim Welebir
Anne and Ralph Wiseman

*Senior Lifetime Advisors: \$25,000 +

**Lifetime Advisors: \$10,000+

+Sustaining Advisors: \$5,000+

++Underwriting Advisors: \$2,500+
during last two years

#General Advisors: \$500+/year plan

Editorial | J. David Newman

Adventism in Decline

» The fact is, Adventism has failed — yes, you read this right! Adventism has failed. How? We came into existence to herald the second coming of Jesus in a single generation.

With the Inter-America Division just baptizing its three-millionth member. With glowing reports of evangelistic success regularly appearing in the *Adventist*

Review. With constant affirmation in books and newsletters that the Adventist ship is making great progress — how could anyone suggest that all might not be as well as the statistics and reports show?

This issue of *Adventist Today* focuses on North America. Monte Sahlin's article is a must-read. While it is brimming with hope and optimism, it also contains a stark reality: If it were not for immigrant churches, Adventism would be losing members in North America. In other words, we are falling further and further behind in reaching the European-American population.

But we find no mention of this in Union papers, in Don Schneider's weekly fax, or in any other official church publication. The fact is, Adventism has failed — yes, you read this right! Adventism has failed. How? It came into existence to herald the Second Coming of Jesus in a single generation, to play the same role John the Baptist did in heralding the first coming of Jesus. He lived to see fulfilled what he predicted.

Those who began the great Advent Movement were supposed to see the fulfillment of what they too predicted. In the Ellen G. White online database this citation is found: "Ellen White Expected Christ's Return in Her Day, 'I was shown the company present at the Conference. Said the angel: "Some food for worms, some subjects of the seven last

plagues, some will be alive and remain upon the earth to be translated at the coming of Jesus'" (*Testimonies*, Vol. 1, pp. 131, 132, 1856).

How can anyone some 151 years later say that the Adventist Church is doing well? We are like the emperor in Hans Christian Andersen's famous story of the king who believed he was clothed in a magnificent new garment, yet was completely

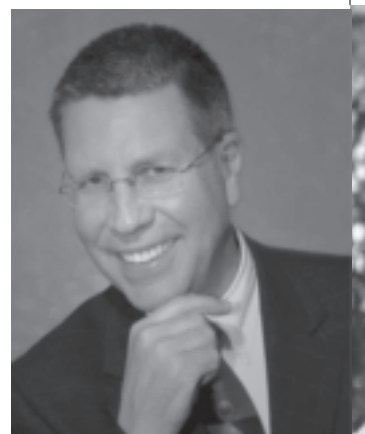
naked. Doesn't this sound like the Laodicean message of Revelation, about the last church that thinks it is rich and doing great, when really it is pitiful and naked?

In this issue we are trying to wake up the sleeping giant that is Adventism. The articles are deliberately provocative. We want to start a conversation, a discussion. We do not profess to have all the answers. We all love our church very much, but feel we cannot just stand back and cheer the naked emperor on while pretending he is clothed.

We welcome feedback, letters, even other articles suggesting other solutions. Let's be honest. Until Jesus comes, Adventism is a failure. And while his coming is obviously closer than it was 150 years ago, it may take another 150 years if we do not change what we are doing. And just maybe God will use someone else other than the Adventist Church to finish things up.

The worst thing we can do is be like the Jews who boasted, "We are the seed of Abraham," as they prepared to crucify the Messiah. We boast that we are the remnant church, and yet we crucify Jesus again by not being the people who God wants us to be.

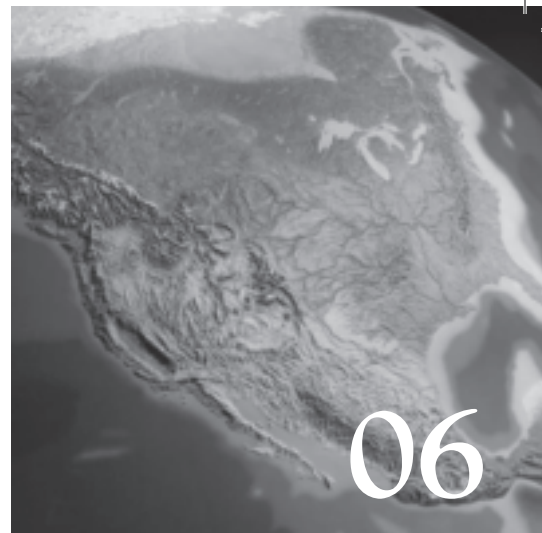
May the conversation begin.



James and Ellen White



09



06



12

Contents

04 | Letters | *AT Readers - A Comment & Response*

Features

06 | The Adventist Church in North America Today | *Monte Sahlin*

09 | Adventism in Present Communal Progressive | *Julius Nam*

12 | Warning From Ancient Israel | *Graeme Bradford*

14 | Adventist Church Found Wanting | *J. David Newman*

18 | The Adventist Advantage | *Alden Thompson*

22 | Visions and the World: *The Authority of Ellen White in Relation to the Authority of Scripture in the Seventh-day Adventist Movement: Part 1* | *George W. Knight*

Vol. 15, issue 5

EDITORIAL STAFF

Publisher
Elwin Dunn

Editorial Board
Chris Blake, Andy Nash,
David Newman

Executive Editor
Ervin Taylor

Managing Editor
Diana Fisher

Senior Editor
John McLarty

Associate Executive Editor
Lee F. Greer

Director of Development and Production
Edwin A. Schwisow

Senior Associate Editor
James H. Stirling

Editorial Advisor
Steve Daily

Office Manager
Hanan Sadek

Co-Founding Editor
Raymond Cottrell, 1911-2003

Co-Founding Editor/Publisher
James Walters

Adventist Today reports on contemporary issues of importance to Adventist Church members. 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 e-mail to editor@atoday.com for writer's guidelines. Annual subscriptions \$29.50 (\$50/2 years) for individuals, \$18 for students, \$40 for institutions. (Payment by check or credit card. Add \$10 for address outside North America.) Voice: (800) 236-3641 or (951) 785-1295 Fax: (951) 785-1595 E-mail: atoday@atoday.com Web site: www.atoday.com.

Adventist Today (ISSN 1079-5499) is published bimonthly by Adventist Today Foundation, P.O. Box 8026 Riverside, CA 92515-8026. Periodical postage paid at Riverside, California, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *Adventist Today*, P.O. Box 8026, Riverside, CA 92515-8026. Copyright©2007 by Adventist Today Foundation, a nonprofit organization dedicated to fostering open dialogue in the Adventist community.

letters *“Special Addition”*

The Specter of Plagiarism Haunting Adventism: A Comment and Response

In a recent article in *Adventist Today* (May-June 2007) it was claimed that Canright, Kellogg, Rea, McAdams, Numbers, Cottrell, Specht and Veltman made “plagiarism observations” and that thus Ellen White is guilty of “serial plagiarism.”¹

Unfortunately for this claim, Dr. Veltman explicitly noted in his study that he was not dealing with the plagiarism claim. For instance, in the very introduction of his study he says: “After studying the nature of the problem for three months and feeling the pressure of three months of times already taken up by the selection of the research director, I decided that the project had to be cut down in size. We would have to limit the investigation to a strict source study, omitting questions of content and the issue of plagiarism.”²

This quote alone shows us two things: one, those who claimed that Dr. Veltman made “plagiarism observations,” whether they use those exact words or not, have not in fact read and understood his study. Second, it shows that they have not understood what the others have done — this will be explained further below.

Furthermore, Dr. Veltman noted the kind of study that needed to be done in order to answer the claim of plagiarism.³ We should also be aware that none of those who were listed as having made “plagiarism observations” have conducted such a study, as recommended by Dr. Veltman.

In addition, the claim not only exceeds the evidence at hand, it also runs counter to what some of those who were listed actually said. For instance, Cottrell in his study said: “...the demonstrated minor, yet appropriate, use she made of Hanna and other classical authors such as Edersheim, Harris, Geike, and Farrar — going far beyond all of them — relegates attention to her use of these authors to a simple matter of purely academic interest. It is appropriate to give attention to these literary relationships, but in the setting of the author’s purpose in writing, the possible 2.6 percent⁴ of correlation between DA and LC is certainly insignificant. It would be inaccurate to describe this literary relationship as “literary borrowing” or “literary dependence.” Such terms can appropriately be applied only to a literary relationship that goes

far beyond that reflected in DA. There is not one instance in DA where either ethical considerations or copyright laws, even the new U.S. copyright law of 1977, would require her to give credit. From a strictly scholarly point of view, Ellen White’s use of these and other sources measures up to the very highest ethical standards of her own time — the only accurate and fair way to judge her as a writer.”⁵

Note that he concludes that we aren’t even up to the level of “literary borrowing” or “literary dependence.” So he could hardly be said to have gone one step further and made “plagiarism observations,” as we were so confidently told.

When we look at Ellen White’s literary works, we should remember that they are partially a product of her time. We would do well to look at what scholars of the literature of the time have found. Weinauer, for instance, argues that American writers of the ante-bellum period were attempting to work out the limitations and the possibilities of proprietary authorship.⁶ Note what Dr. Veltman stated about the plagiarism question and the historical context with respect to Ellen White: “Has Ellen White’s source copied from an earlier writer? The concern over charges of plagiarism against Ellen White must push the question further back in source tradition study. Literary conventions are established by practice and not by external legal or ethical norms. The historical, literary, and cultural context of these 19th century lives of Christ needs to be explored before we can settle the issue of plagiarism for a given 19th century religious writer.”⁷

It was precisely because Dr. Veltman and his team did not know what the standards were at the time that led him to ask: “What were the literary conventions followed by Seventh-day Adventists and other religious literary sources...?”⁸

And then he suggested “a comparison of... works...might be useful in establishing a nineteenth century model for what is permitted by common consent and what would be unacceptable and understood as plagiarism.”⁹

Again, in his study Dr. Veltman astutely observes: “...Time and again the parallels between sources tempt us to initiate a study of literary borrowing among Ellen White’s contemporaries. Such an investigation should be undertaken to

Continued on page 5

letters

Continued from page 4

inform us on the literary practices of writers on religion in the 19th century. Only when we have a realistic and fairly comprehensive understanding of the literary conventions followed by her contemporaries can we with justification evaluate Ellen White's position relative to the question of plagiarism."¹⁰

The secular field, studying the works of Edgar Allen Poe, Dameron noted that a number of scholars have examined "Poe's role as an author and journalist within the context of the culture and mass market of his day."¹¹ Why hasn't anyone done this for Ellen White? Since we know what needs to be done (since 1988, no less), shouldn't we be doing it? Since we also know that it hasn't been done, then isn't calling Ellen White a plagiarist an attempt to "poison the well," as it were?

What may in fact be happening with these claims of Ellen White's alleged plagiarism is that some people are persisting in seeing parallels where none actually exist. As Dr. Veltman observed: "The very nature of a study of source parallels [is that it] leads one to emphasize similarities over dissimilarities. Often obvious agreements are noted and the more subtle disagreements between two writers are overlooked."¹²

Dr. Veltman's report also noted: "A close scrutiny of such similarities between the various accounts being compared will clearly reveal the complexity of literary comparison, especially if one wants to avoid "parallelomania" (seeing parallels where none really exist)." ¹³

These phenomena of "parallelomania"¹⁴ may be especially acute in people who see things in terms of black-and-white when the real world is one of far subtler shades.¹⁵ Dr. Veltman spoke of this very early in the introduction of his study: The excitement of finding certain parallels appears to cloud the eyesight and narrow the vision. The differences are somehow underplayed or overlooked and connections are established upon the flimsiest of bases. Once the initial shock of the discovery fades and calmer attitudes prevail, the scene changes in color and the picture becomes much more complex.¹⁶

An examination of the facts at hand leads one to a number of conclusions: First, it is decidedly premature to label or condemn Ellen G. White as being guilty of "serial plagiary." Second, our current understanding is at the level of finding and examining examples of literary similarity in the works of Ellen G. White, as compared to writers of her era. What no one has established, with rules that can be applied in a repeatable fashion, is whether or

» Since we also know that it hasn't been done, then isn't calling Ellen White a plagiarist an attempt to "poison the well" as it were?

not these examples then rise to the level of proving literary dependency. Then and only then, can we analyze the examples that are left, to see if they rise to the level of plagiarism.

Third, since no one has done the work that we have just described, it reveals that those who accuse Ellen G. White instead meet the observation of Pollock: that the reason many claims of plagiarism fail is because those making them are "tyros" who are "ignorant of law and literature."¹ The article we have referred to at the beginning of this article is indicative of the level of thought, research, and analysis that has been put into making the claim of Ellen G. White being a "serial plagiarist."

Fourth, in an ethical context that, to call Ellen G. White a plagiarist when this fact has not been established, is to bear false witness against one's neighbor. Fifth, God is not obligated to exceed the standards of one era solely to meet the caviling of a few in a later era.

Reference:

¹Willey, T. Joe "Reporting on a Presentation Frederick Hoyt, "The Specter of Plagiarism Haunting Adventism," *Adventist Today* 15/3 (May-June 2007): 16-8, endnotes on page 13.

²Veltman, Fred "Full Report of the Life of Christ Research Project," 4 vols. (Nov. 1988). Found online at the GC web site <http://ast.gc.adventist.org>; the above quote is on page 48.

³On page 244 of his study Dr. Veltman "points to the need for latitudinal as well as longitudinal studies" of Ellen G. White's writings. To date, this has not been done by any of those who are listed as having made "plagiary observations." So, no one say with absolute surety that Ellen G. White plagiarized other people's writings. What we can say so far, is that the evidence does not support a claim that Ellen G. White copied 80-90% of her writings from other

Continued on page 17

Letters policy

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU

Adventist Today welcomes letters to the editor.

Short, timely letters that relate to articles appearing in the journal have the best chance at being published. We reserve the right to edit for length and clarity. In publishing letters, *AT* does not necessarily endorse the views represented, but believes in giving voice to differing viewpoints. We prefer messages sent by e-mail, addressed to atoday@atoday.com. Please include your complete address and telephone number — even with e-mail messages. Send postal correspondence to Letters to the Editor, *Adventist Today*, P.O. Box 8026, Riverside, CA 92515-8026.



Feature | Monte Sahlin

The Adventist Church in North America Today

» Adventists are way ahead of the curve on diversity. The demographics of Adventism are the demographics of America's future. About one in five congregations have no ethnic majority and are truly multicultural in makeup.

The majority of baptisms in North America come from immigrants, despite the fact that these are *not* the focus of most of the evangelism initiatives. About one in three of the converts coming from public evangelism are former members rejoining the Church and another one in five are the children of church members.

The Adventist Ship of State is leaking badly. There is a large dropout factor. For every two new members joining the Adventist Church in North America,

someone is dropped from membership. Despite conventional wisdom to the contrary, these are largely *not* new converts, but younger adults who have grown up in the church. Roger Dudley, director of the Institute of Church Ministry at Andrews University, tracked a sample of 14- and 15-year-olds from Adventist families through their mid-20s. Depending on how you interpret the data from his study, about half of these young people had dropped out of the church by the end of the 10-year period.

The Adventist Church membership in North America is aging far faster than the general population. This is more true for the ethnic majority membership than for minorities, and more true among the native-born (of all races) than among immigrant members. But, the immigrant churches have a very large dropout rate among the "second generation" children raised as Adventists. The result is that there is a decline in the number of teens and young adults among Adventists. Youth ministry is in decline. Most congregations no longer have a weekly youth meeting, as they did when I was a teen. More and more have no Sabbath School class for youth.

The Adventist Church never really engaged the Baby Boom generation; and now that Boomers are in middle age, they have become deeply polarized,

more involved in internal disagreements than in advancing the mission of Christ. The majority of most local church boards and many conference executive committees is now made up of Baby Boomers, but they seem to have forgotten what it was like when they were young people, locked out of the decision-making process. The church is making little serious effort to engage and empower new generations, despite the fact that Gen X is in that family-formation stage of life when many unchurched young parents come back to church and the Millennial generation shows signs of greater denominational loyalty than any other generation since World War II.

Conventional evangelism is largely stalled, despite the widespread use of satellite technology, Web sites, etc., and increased funding. The majority of baptisms in North America come from immigrants, despite the fact that these are *not* the focus of most of the evangelism initiatives. About one in three converts through public evangelism are former members rejoining the church, and another 20 percent are the children of church members. There are very few real converts among the cultural mainstream of America — less than one per congregation per year. That is an accession rate so low that it would likely occur if the organization did nothing about evangelism and spent not one dime on outreach.

The stories you hear about rapidly growing congregations come primarily from areas of the country that benefit from migration. There are growing congregations in the Sunbelt, because Americans are leaving the Midwest — a long-time stronghold of Adventist faith — and moving to the South and Southwest. The same is true in the Northwest, fueled by migration from Southern California, another historically strong center of Adventist population. Almost all of the Adventist growth in the Northeast is driven by immigration from the Caribbean and Latin America, and growth has turned up in the Midwest with increased numbers of Hispanics going there.

Very little investment is being made in research and development. Innovative approaches are discouraged more often than they are encouraged.

Continued on page 7

Continued from page 6

Experimental ministries are usually expected to yield traditional results in short order. The attention span of leadership for the kind of R&D effort that is required is short. The percentage of budget being set aside for such efforts would quickly lead to failure of almost any business in America today, because it is way too little. Business people know that they must constantly put new products on the shelf to hold onto the eyes and ears of potential consumers, but the Adventist denomination is loath to trickle out new ministries.

Most of the proposals for restructuring an organizational system that was designed in 1901 have come to naught. The largest single reorganization plan — the merger of a number of ministries into a Church Ministries Department in 1985 — lasted less than 10 years. It never fully trickled down to the local conference level before the proverbial rubber-band snapped back to its former shape. It was really not a very ambitious or far-reaching change, as organizational change goes, and it largely seems to prove that the system cannot reform itself.

Ministry at the “front lines” of mission — the local congregations and communities — is in steep decline. Fewer and fewer young people are being hired as ministers, to the point that the chairs of theology departments in Adventist colleges are deeply concerned that the flow of incoming candidates will be discouraged. In the last five years there has been an overall decline in 10 out of 15 key local church ministries, as measured by the Faith Communities Today (FACT) 2000 and 2005 surveys of Adventist Churches in the U.S. (See graphs.) Three of the five ministries that have grown have benefited from significant increases in resources provided by the denomination, such as public evangelism delivered by satellite downlink.

Most Adventist congregations have little, if any, real impact on the community where they are located. I have helped hundreds of congregations conduct community assessments, and the findings are almost always the same: (1) Civic leaders are not aware that the Adventist Church is doing anything to meet needs in the community, unless there is an Adventist health institution nearby; (2) Two-thirds of the residents have never heard of the Adventist Church and less than 10 percent can remember even one true fact about the church or its message; and, (3) Very few of the church members live in the community where the church building is located. The Adventist mission and message is largely invisible and irrelevant, not because of its content or intrinsic value, but because there is no serious effort to position it for real ministry.

Our missionary forces are located largely where people do *not* live. “Two-thirds of the local churches in the U.S. are located where only 20 percent of

» Ministry at the “front lines” of mission — the local congregations and communities — is in steep decline. Fewer and fewer young people are being hired as ministers, to the point that the chairs of theology departments in Adventist colleges are deeply concerned that the flow of incoming candidates will be discouraged.

the population lives, in small towns and rural areas. The congregations located in metropolitan areas — where 80 percent of Americans live — include “just one quarter of all local churches. In fact, this represents the largest mission challenge for the Adventist Church in the U.S. Despite decades of energetic counsel from Ellen G. White to ‘reach the large cities,’ urging ‘laymen’ to ‘move into...cities’ and ‘families’ to ‘settle in these cities,’ Adventists have focused their efforts on the periphery of American culture, outside the mainstream of the population.

“As a result, the church is seriously marginalized and poorly positioned for outreach and evangelism in most metropolitan areas. In some cities, there are only one or two local churches that can minister to millions of inhabitants in the cultural mainstream, because almost all of the local churches are immigrant congregations. Adventist Churches are also less likely to be situated in the most visible locations. The majority of metropolitan-area churches are located in residential neighborhoods, with only 2 percent in the much more visible commercial areas.... Adventists are two and a half times as likely to be 30 minutes away from church as are other religions” (*Adventist Congregations Today*, 41-42).

How many people are we really reaching? The 2000 FACT survey showed that “Adventist Churches minister to fewer people than do most religious groups across the U.S. They are twice as likely to have fewer than 100 total individuals associated with [their ministry] than is true for all faith groups. Only 2 percent of Adventist congregations are ministering to 1,000 people or more; about one sixth the national average for all faiths. A key issue for church growth is how to break out of this focus on small, marginal target audiences and increase our reach into the larger mainstream of America” (*Adventist Congregations Today*, 45).

By now, some readers will conclude that this assessment is unfairly negative, for there are definite

Continued on page 11

Adventism in Present Communal Progressive

» “The doctrinal litmus test for Adventism is an incredibly simple, yet frustratingly ambiguous one — commitment to Scripture.”

“To be human for me is to be Adventist,” I tell a friend during a surprise visit. I see his eyes widen with surprise as I continue, “I cannot think of life apart

from this community and culture.” He confesses that it’s hard for him to conceive of Adventism as being so ingrained and essential to existence. He dearly and deeply loves the Adventist Church, but it is, after all, a volunteer society one can choose to join and to leave. Doctrines — truth as expressed in propositional statements — lie at the heart of that choice. Thus, change in convictions on beliefs — or shift in the community’s belief proclamations — could mean change of community for him.

“I know, I know,” I shoot back. “Doctrines are, of course, important, even central, for Adventism. That’s how we’ve defined it. That’s what people think of first when they try to describe Adventism. No question about that. Yet for someone like me, it’s practically in my genes.” I pause momentarily for dramatic effect, taking my glasses off.

“Adventism is all I know and everything I’ve got. I was born into an Adventist family, grew up in Adventist schools, and now work for the church. For people like us, being Adventist is just to be. It’s deeper than beliefs. In fact, in the way I feel, beliefs come secondary to my belongingness to this community, this culture. So, who I am in relation to the community precedes what I believe. I mean,

that’s how it happened for me to begin with, right?” He concedes with a nod. “Well,” I proclaim, “that’s how it is.”

But he brings up beliefs again. If relationship within the community is indeed more central than beliefs, he wonders what the place of correct theology will be. He can sense that I might be pulling the rug from under him.

“As you know, Adventism began as a movement centered on Scripture.” I turn the conversation toward Adventist history. “Early Adventists were anti-creedal and resisted forming a binding doctrinal statement. That spirit is retained in the preamble to the current statement of fundamental beliefs, which says, ‘Seventh-day Adventists accept the Bible as their only creed.’ The 28 doctrinal statements are what Adventists consider to be the ‘teaching’ of Scripture, but these statements may be revised when the church arrives at a better understanding or expression.” I’m anxious that I might be getting pedantic, but I sit up with a continuing resolve.

“I’d submit to you that the defining characteristic of Adventism is not any one doctrine or collection of doctrines, but its commitment to Scripture. This is a certain *attitude* and *approach* toward being a community. That attitude and approach, as captured in the preamble, says that no statement of beliefs can act as a controlling, community-defining creed except Scripture, a millennia-old document that is widely open to interpretation. Included in this approach is the provision for dissenters to believe differently

Continued on page 9

Continued from page 8

than the majority, as long as they accept and use Scripture as their only creed. The community has the responsibility to listen to them respectfully, because it is always open to new understandings and expressions. No belief has a sacred halo around it that prevents future revisions — even the most hallowed doctrinal pillars. The doctrinal litmus test for Adventism is an incredibly simple, yet frustratingly ambiguous one — commitment to Scripture.”

He thinks I’m wishing and willing the preamble to make it much more than what it was intended to be. To him, all this sounds like contortion of the present-truth concept to justify a personal pipe dream. His playful sarcasm arrests my thought progression.

“What I’m saying is that, whether we celebrate it or lament it, theological diversity is a reality. And frankly, I don’t see the community falling apart because of it. We’re still somehow able to find connectedness with one other that is deeper than theological agreement.”

He wonders if I’m advocating complete, all-out individualism in theology without a clear core. He thinks my view will result in the believe-anything-you-want brand of Adventism. He asks how I see the Adventist community moving toward the future, then. An invitation to dream is one I can’t resist.

“I dream of an Adventism that is committed to God’s continuing and unfolding revelation, regardless of how it comes. I see it as a community that is confident enough to allow itself to be a free market of ideas, beliefs, and stories, rather than a matrix of foregone conclusions and unchangeable dogmas. This community is not only *open* to different ways of being Adventist and understanding God, but actively *seeks* them. It resists the urge to be protectionist about what we have held and allows different stories to be told in our midst, trusting that God’s truth will continue to shine.”

He questions how this would work, in practice, as mutually exclusive viewpoints vie for the heart of Adventism. The rosy view of everyone getting along sounds naive and unrealistic to him. He begs me to consider the human nature.

“I agree that there are clear, incontrovertible claims that Scripture makes that must not be denied, one of which would be the existence of God. But there are other areas of belief in which there are significant differences among Adventists. Let’s consider some specific examples. I dream of our church as a place where those who lean toward theistic evolutionism do not belittle those who read Genesis 1 as a literal, historical account. I would rather see us all celebrate God’s creation and work together to promote stewardship of God’s creation from personal to global levels. I envision

» “These are difficult questions that I wrestle with. When does expansion of meaning and acceptance of diversity become a betrayal of identity? How normative are those elements that gave rise to your community? I think this is part of the messiness that accompanies the dynamic nature of the present truth.”

a community where those who believe that Christ entered the Most Holy Place on October 22, 1844, do not marginalize those who disagree with them; instead, they partner as brothers and sisters in spreading the good news of the Lord, who is with us and who is coming. I am hopeful that our community can embrace those who take Ellen White as a prophet and those who do not, and that they all will thank God for the blessing she has been to the global Adventist community and exhort one another to live by the wisdom she imparted.”

He agrees that in individual cases such a fellowship is possible. However, he would consider these to be exceptional cases, rather than normal. He sees my dream as an essential redefinition and re-envisioning of Adventism that would sabotage our historic mission and identity. While he concedes that the community has the right to redefine itself, it is hard for him to see himself being a part of this “new” Adventism where, for example, different schools of prophetic interpretation are equally valued.

“These are difficult questions that I wrestle with. When does expansion of meaning and acceptance of diversity become a betrayal of identity? How normative are those elements that gave rise to your community? I think this is part of the messiness that accompanies the dynamic nature of the present truth. And I can’t tell you exactly where the limits of diversity ought to be. That’s for the community to decide, as it is led by the Holy Spirit. But I’m convinced that the ‘old time religion’ that was good enough for our pioneers cannot be good enough for us. We must re-vision and re-embrace the landmarks of our faith in new ways. Take the Sabbath, for example. I think we can mine Scripture further to capture the meaning of Sabbath as a day of healing, liberation, and justice. Just as the Sabbath was meant to be a day of rest and liberation for laborers and former slaves (even nonbelievers), today’s Sabbath-keepers ought to be at the forefront of working for

Continued on page 10

Continued from page 9

Adventism in Present Communal Progressive



the liberation and healing of the oppressed. I learned recently that there are 27 million victims of human trafficking and enslavement around the world. Shouldn't our commitment to the Sabbath stir us to be leaders in bringing freedom to these children of God? Proving the right day or seeing it as a test of loyalty to God just isn't enough."

This is something he has no problems with. But he asks how I would react if someone in the community stops valuing the "seventh-day-ness" altogether and says that each day is equally holy or that Sunday is the true Lord's day. *What would I do with such a person?*

"I certainly would not remove the person from the community. I think it is more of a practical question of whether this person would continue to worship with the rest of the community in Sabbath worship. Once you physically remove yourself from the community (following your specific interpretations), then fellowship becomes impossible and separation occurs naturally. As long as the person participates in the life of the community, I would definitely look for ways to celebrate God's gift of Sabbath rest and redemption with everyone. My fervent hope is that different ways of embracing Adventism and different approaches toward experiencing Adventism would be accepted as real, authentic, legitimate ways of being Adventist. We should worry far less about how Adventism might be perverted by some, but rejoice over how Adventism can be adapted into new and exciting possibilities."

This is not easy for him. He can't imagine a religious community not standing for something clear. Diversity, tolerance, and even paradox are all fine, but there's got to be some foundational ideas that sustain the community. He thinks I'm embracing one feature of postmodernism — tolerance of opposites — while rejecting another —

respect for particularities. More than ever, people are accepting of Adventism *because* we're different and unique. He doesn't see why we would now want to water down our particularism. It's time, he believes, to be proud of our distinctives and stand firmly for the special truths we have been commissioned to preach.

"Actually, I agree with you for the large part. Let me interface with what you said by rewording one of my favorite Ellen White quotes: the best argument for our faith is a loving and lovable Adventist. We may disagree on the relative weight of the doctrines and emphasis, but I think we can agree that Adventism's emphasis on the Sabbath, whole person, Christ's work of atonement, the Second Coming, and three angels' messages must somehow lead us toward becoming more loving toward each other and becoming a community of doers and activists that build bridges and loving relationships with the world — not just believers and followers who swear by correct teachings. My experience is that even when we hold diametrically opposite views on some key, fundamental teachings, we can still work together in a loving and lovable manner. Can true community happen with the stark doctrinal differences that we've been talking about? It has to be! I hope that we would realize such a loving and lovable community that our friends outside the community would see and praise us for it. Such a judgment by others, for me, is as important in real, experiential ways as the ongoing approval by God."

He winces at this last comment, but he chooses not to pursue it. Speaking more broadly, he does not wish for Adventism to move away from clear doctrinal positions that demand both intellectual decision and life commitment. But he says he understands and respects what I'm trying to get at. After all, we "prophesy" only in part — dimly at that. And that's probably where we need to leave things for now.

I watch intently as the image of my friend trails off the edges of my mind's mirror. I wonder if I have been too dogmatic (ironically) in my push for openness. I worry that I might have brushed aside his concerns too quickly. I worry that he might not visit again.

I know that I can't be who I am and who I wish to be without him. I know that we can't be who we are and who we wish to be without each other.

Julius Nam, Ph.D., is assistant professor of religion at Loma Linda University. He can be reached at jjnam@llu.edu.

Continued from page 7

The Adventist Church in North America Today

positives that must be included in a balanced picture.

Adventists are way ahead of the curve on diversity. The demographics of Adventism are the demographics of America's future. About one in five congregations has no ethnic majority and is truly multicultural in makeup. A 2002 survey of members in the Columbia Union Conference reveals that 32 percent belong to such congregations. Even more encouraging, 55 percent indicated that they would prefer to belong to a multicultural congregation, where no ethnic group dominated.

Our health message is being widely adopted by public health professionals. Burger King sells a veggie-burger. The National Institutes of Health have given repeated major grants to Loma Linda University to track the health benefits of the Adventist diet and lifestyle. Noted Evangelical writers have produced books advocating essentially what Adventists have taught for more than a century.

More and more Adventist ministers are working in the secular arena as chaplains in the military, prisons, hospitals, and other public institutions. Perhaps the single most visible Adventist minister in America today is retired Rear Admiral Barry C. Black, chaplain of the Senate.

The Disaster Response program of Adventist Community Services is becoming as well known as the Five-day Plan to Stop Smoking was in the 1970s. In 1997 it was recognized by an Outstanding Public Service Award from the White House. It has opened the door to remarkable community-based ministries in a number of places — for example, the current metro ministries project in Pittsburgh, directed by Pastor Andrew Clark.

There is a growing (though small) number of women in pastoral ministry. The 2000 FACT survey found that 1 percent of Adventist pastors were women, but the 2005 FACT survey found that it had risen to 2 percent. Currently a third of the students enrolled in the M. Div. program at the Adventist seminary at Andrews University are women.

Small, local innovative projects are blossoming, and two or three funding organizations are now focusing their efforts on seeding and supporting these ministries. The emphasis on church planting, supported by the NAD Evangelism Institute, has helped significantly. There is now a National Innovation Conference that meets each year in Columbus, Ohio, and attracts pastors, lay leaders, and conference staff from across North America and overseas.

We are becoming a much more grace-oriented fellowship. Repeated surveys of Adventists over the

past quarter century have used a key question to measure this spiritual attitude: "Circle the number that shows the assurance that you have of eternal life," with a five-point scale from "Not Sure" to "Very Certain." When this question was first asked in 1980, two-thirds of the respondents indicated they were "certain" or "very certain" in their assurance of salvation. This percent has risen over the years and in surveys conducted in the last year or two, more than 90 percent of respondents gave the same answers.

I have presented serious issues preventing the church from fulfilling its mission. The other articles in this special edition of *Adventist Today* seek to provide answers to these issues.

Monte Sahlin is director of research and special projects for the Ohio Conference. He has served as assistant to the president for research and development at the North American Division and vice president for creative ministries in the Columbia Union Conference.

Sources include unpublished surveys that have been identified as well as the following published materials: *Adventist Congregations Today* (2003, Center for Creative Ministry, Lincoln); *Trends, Attitudes and Opinions: The Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America* (1998, Center for Creative Ministry, Lincoln); *Why Our Teenagers Leave the Church* by Roger L. Dudley (2000, Review & Herald, Hagerstown); Faith Communities Today reports at www.creativeministry.org and other reports available at the same Web site.

References:

See *Review and Herald* September 29, 1891; September 19, 1899; August 12, 1902; August 19, 1902; and August 26, 1902. For the larger context on this topic, see *The Ministry of Healing* by Ellen White, pages 139-216; *Testimonies for the Church*, Volume 9, pages 89-152; *The Later Elmshaven Years: 1905-1915* (Volume 6 in the official Ellen G. White Biography) by Arthur L. White, chapter 18; and "Metropolitan Medical Missionary Work," a comprehensive collection of Ellen G. White materials on this topic published by the School of Public Health, Loma Linda University.

Feature | Graeme Bradford

Warning From Ancient Israel

The Jews missed the gospel. To them, being right with God was a matter of following correct teaching and practice, as taught in the Torah by their fathers. They had a righteousness, they thought, but it was their own and not that of Christ.

The priests in the temple at Jerusalem are going about their daily routine of sacrificing animals, just as their ancestors had done for centuries. They are oblivious to the momentous events taking place nearby. A cry rings out from Calvary: "It is finished!" The earth quakes, rocks split open, and the temple curtain is torn from top to bottom by an unseen hand. The priest who is about to offer the lamb drops his knife, and the lamb flees. All present are puzzled. They have no idea that what their fathers had looked forward to for centuries is taking place.

Why was Israel ignorant of the fulfillment of prophecy regarding the coming of Jesus? They were meticulous in carrying out the requirements of the law. They were keen students of prophecy. They had a longing and an expectation that soon the Messiah would appear. But still they didn't know.

Israel was a chosen nation, called of God with a message to take to other nations. God made his covenant with them; however, this special calling caused them to think of themselves as the *only* people of God. The Gentiles were "dogs" and "outsiders." At the same time, however, there were non-Jews, "heathen," like the wise men that came to visit the baby Jesus, who were used by God and inspired by the Spirit (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 44). It is sobering to think that such people knew more about the coming of Jesus than did the great religious leaders of Israel.

People in Israel listened to the voices of false prophets and stoned the true ones God sent to them. The false prophets were usually crying "Peace, Peace," affirming that God would never break his covenant. In contrast, the prophets sent by God warned that God would be with them only as long as they were faithful to that covenant; that if they were not faithful, that God would not bless them and that terrible consequences would follow. They stoned these true prophets and refused to listen to their warnings.

The Jews locked themselves into a Messianic end-time scenario and felt they had everything

worked out in detail. They commonly believed that Elijah would come first, and then the Messiah would appear, overcome their enemies, and bring an era of peace. When the prophecies were fulfilled, it turned out that Israel had many things to learn and unlearn. While they had concentrated on the majestic "Day of the Lord" prophecies, they had neglected to see the "Suffering Servant" passages revealed through Isaiah. God is full of surprises when it comes to fulfilling prophecy. While the prophecies are fulfilled in essence, he can vary the fulfillment details as circumstances change. Israel failed to comprehend that God had been doing this all through history.

Israel's religious leaders betrayed the nation. The people trusted them, but Jesus delivered some of his strongest condemnations against these leaders, for though they could read the signs of the weather, they could not understand his mission.

Divisions of thought were confusing the people. The Pharisees claimed to represent conservative orthodoxy and projected great self-assurance as they worked with successful missionary zeal. The Sadducees, a more liberal element, questioned the Pharisees' belief in angels and a resurrection. The Essenes, on the other hand, insisted on living on the margins of society, in the desert, and a group called Zealots sought above all else to cast off the Roman yoke.

Amid this turmoil, the Jews missed the gospel. To them, being right with God was a matter of following correct teaching and practice, as taught in the Torah by their fathers. They had a righteousness, they thought, but it was their own and not that of Christ.

So what warnings should Adventists derive from the experiences of Israel? Adventism, like Israel, has received a special calling from God. We can fail if we do not live as God wants us to. Some will answer that Ellen White guaranteed that the church will triumph, but Israel was given many similar messages by its prophets. Still, in the end, God removed them from their privileged position because of their repeated failures to live up to the covenant. God never accepts any one person or group unconditionally.

Continued on page 13

Continued from page 12

Has Adventism, like Israel, stoned messengers sent from God and listened to false prophets? In Adventism we often find that those who give warning messages or are ahead in their thinking are treated poorly, while those who tell the people what they want to hear are applauded. Every thought leader in Adventism must ask, “Is it I?” Our present attitudes would suggest that if God ever sent another special messenger, we would certainly make life difficult for them, and anyone claiming to have the gift of prophecy would almost certainly be rejected. The Bible teaches, however, that spiritual gifts continue on in the church.

The Bible teaches that God can vary the details of how prophecy is fulfilled, and we could find ourselves facing the indictment that Christ gave to the leaders of Israel. They were ignorant of how prophecy was being fulfilled, because it did not meet their preconceived ideas. While the Book of Revelation focuses on the issues of worship at the end time and we can see response to the gospel through obedience to the law of God [especially the Sabbath] as end-time tests, yet we need to see them in the setting of the world of the 21st Century, and not 19th Century North America alone.

A great responsibility rests upon Adventist leaders. Church people look to their leaders for guidance and trust them to be open and honest with them. Yet the laypeople are often kept out of discussions because their leaders think they could not handle information. This breeds resentment and distrust, when the facts become known. Many leaders do not read and grow, and yet they are making important theological decisions that affect much of Adventist thought. Many who know the most are afraid to say what they really think, for fear of sacrificing their careers. This is not a sign of a healthy organization.

Adventists should be willing to learn and grow in spiritual understanding. Our pioneers were persuaded by the concept of “present truth” and refused to write up a creed. We need to return to open Bible Conferences, such as those held in 1848, when our message was born. Today our “so-called” Bible Conferences tend to have specially selected speakers who will not depart from accepted ideas. Some leaders have expressed concern that if things were discussed openly “it might get out of hand.” This stifles discussion and leads to a dead orthodoxy.

We need not be afraid of truth, for it will survive open discussion. The attitude of Ellen White was, “If the pillars of our faith will not stand the test of investigation, it is time that we knew it” (*Counsels to Writers and Editors*, 44). It was she, more than anyone else, who called for openness and growth in understanding. Her classic statement remains, “In every age there is a new development of truth,



a message of God to the people of that generation, the old truths are essential; the new truth is not independent of the old, but an unfolding of it.... He who rejects or neglects the new does not really comprehend the old. For him it loses its vital power and becomes but a lifeless form” (*Christ’s Object Lessons*, 127, 128). As with Israel of old, much of what we now do and believe has become a lifeless form.

The divisions of thought in Adventism today are causing confusion. As on Israel of old, most Adventists today have no idea of the theological wrestlings going on in various meetings and publications. We have our own form of Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, and Zealots who often pay their closest attention to things unrelated to salvation.

Each individual in Adventism must be sure not to miss the gospel. God has placed a special calling upon this movement, with its message to share with the world. But with this consciousness comes a danger of thinking that in giving assent to and guarding an understanding of this message, we will achieve a right standing before God. This was a pit into which Israel fell. Various forms of legalism have plagued Adventism throughout its history. We need to remind ourselves constantly of Ephesians 2: 8: It is by God’s grace alone that we are saved.

If we get this right we may be amazed at how everything else seems to come up right. It is the very heart of Christianity. When we respond to the gospel in loving Christ with all our hearts, we have a motivating purpose in obeying him. When we have assurance that God loves and accepts us in Christ, it takes a lot of the pressure off, and we perform better in our Christian behavior. It makes us kinder, more loving and accepting of others. We do not feel as threatened by the ideas of others. It is up to us as individuals to receive and understand the gospel; no one else can do it for us.

Graeme Bradford, Ph.D., is a retired professor of religion at Avondale College. He can be reached at graeme.bradford@edu.au

Has Adventism, like Israel, stoned messengers sent from God and listened to false prophets?



Feature | J. David Newman

Adventist Church Found Wanting

I also find it ironic that Ellen White penned a very specific message to Adventists about being in a Laodicean condition, yet we act as if that is history and does not apply to us today.

Is it possible that God will cast away the Seventh-day Adventist Church and use other means to bring about the end times? An obscure statement by Ellen White suggests that possibility: "In the

balances of the sanctuary the Seventh-day Adventist Church is to be weighed. She will be judged by the privileges and advantages that she has had. If her spiritual experience does not correspond to the advantages that Christ, at infinite cost, has bestowed on her, if the blessings conferred have not qualified her to do the work entrusted to her, on her will be pronounced the sentence: "Found wanting." By the light bestowed, the opportunities given, will she be judged. (*Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 8, p.247)

I have been a Seventh-day Adventist for almost sixty-four years, and I have never seen this statement quoted in any Adventist magazine or book. What does it mean, "Found wanting?" It sounds like the judgment pronounced upon Belshazzar and Babylon.

This special issue of *Adventist Today* focuses on the future of Adventism in the United States. We have seen from Monte Sahlin's article that our church is in decline in North America. In addition, we are now in the 21st Century, though God apparently intended to wrap world events up in the 19th Century.

I also find it ironic that Ellen White penned a very specific message to Adventists about being in a Laodicean condition, yet we act as if that is history and does not apply to us today:

"The Laodicean message must be proclaimed with power; for now it is especially applicable.... Not to see our own deformity is not to see the beauty of Christ's character. When we are fully awake to our own sinfulness, we shall appreciate Christ.... Not to see the marked contrast between Christ and ourselves is not to know ourselves. He who does not abhor himself cannot understand the meaning of redemption.... There are many who do not see themselves in the light of the law of God. They do not loathe selfishness; therefore they are selfish" (*Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, September 25, 1900).

What did Ellen White mean when she said at the beginning of that century that "the Laodicean message must be proclaimed with power"? How can we fulfill this mandate when Laodicea's predicament concerns our inability to recognize any fundamental problems within the church? Church leaders believe, on balance, that the work is making rapid progress. While church growth is not as great as we would like, it is still satisfactory. Our great successes in Euro-Asia, Africa, Inter-America, and other portions of the world can easily lull us into a false sense of security. In other parts of the world maintenance of the status quo seems to be the main priority. Every year for more than 150 years, leaders have been saying: "The Lord's coming is just around the corner. Our evangelistic endeavors are bringing more and more fruit." Yet Jesus still has not returned.

Still, I hear no talk about us being in a Laodicean condition, even though we are in decline in North America in regard to the indigenous population.

Continued on page 15

Continued from page 14

The answer to our decline is found in the text in Revelation where it says that the remedy is to “buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see” (Revelation 3:18).

“Faith and love are the true riches, the pure gold that the True Witness counsels the lukewarm to buy. However rich we may be in earthly treasure, all our wealth will not enable us to buy the precious remedies that cure the disease of the soul called lukewarmness. Intellect and earthly riches were powerless to remove the defects of the Laodicean church, or to remedy their deplorable condition. They were blind, yet they felt that they were well off. The Spirit of God did not illumine their minds, and they did not perceive their sinfulness; therefore they did not feel the necessity of help.” (*Testimonies*, Vol. 4, p. 88.).

And where do faith and love come from? They come from making the cross our focus, our passion, our story, that which we talk about more than anything else. But Adventism does not lift up the cross in all its fullness.

» If we are not be “found wanting” in the scales of the sanctuary, if we are to escape our Laodicean condition (which is reinforced by every article and book we publish extolling how well we are doing), then we must become really serious about the true remedy.

Our denomination originated to reveal long-neglected truths as illustrated in this picture that James White commissioned to illustrate the mission of the Adventist Church.

It is a picture of the Plan of Salvation, from Eden to Eden. You see Adam and Eve exiting the Garden of Eden. There are Cain and Abel, the sacrificial service. Over on the right of the picture are the baptism of Jesus, the Lord's Supper, the New Jerusalem. But in the middle is a huge tree with ten branches, one for each of the Ten Commandments. Hanging under the tree are the two sections of the commandments. Also under the tree is Jesus on the cross. It is the law tree that grabs your attention — that is the dominant motif in this picture. In the process the church forgot about making Christ central.

Continued on page 16



Continued from page 15

Adventist Church Found Wanting

The picture above illustrates that so well. Finally Ellen White recognized the danger, and after her husband died brought out a revision of the picture in 1881. She longed to see Jesus lifted up as the main mission of our church.

Notice that the same elements are still there: Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, the sacrificial service, baptism of Jesus, the Lord's Supper, New Jerusalem. But notice the big change. The law tree has disappeared. The Ten Commandments are gone. Now Jesus on the cross dominates the picture. The law has been reduced to a mountain — Sinai — in the far background.

In 1888 the most significant General Conference session on the gospel convened in Minneapolis. Two young men, Jones and Waggoner, argued for the preeminence of the gospel, while Butler, the General Conference president, and Uriah Smith, editor of the church paper, the *Review and Herald*, argued for the distinctives — the landmarks, as they called them.

Ellen White tried to change the direction of the church from the first picture preferred by her husband, to the second picture with Jesus as the center. She joined Jones and Waggoner in uplifting Jesus. "My burden during the meeting," she wrote a few weeks later, "was to present Jesus and His love before my brethren, for I saw marked evidence that many had not the spirit of Christ."

"We want the truth as it is in Jesus," she told the denomination's leaders during the Minneapolis session. "...I have seen that precious souls who would have embraced the truth [of Adventism] have been turned away from it because of the manner in which the truth has been handled, because Jesus was not in it. And this is what I have been pleading with you for all the time — we want Jesus." (George Knight, *Anticipating the Advent*, pp. 73-74).

There are hundreds of statements by Ellen White about the vital importance of making Jesus Christ front and center of everything that we do.

"There is one great central truth to be kept ever before the mind in the searching of Scripture — Christ and Him crucified. Every other truth is invested with influence and power, corresponding to its relation to this theme. It is only in the light of the cross that we can discern the exalted character of the law of God. The soul palsied by sin can be endowed with life only through the work wrought out upon the cross by the Author of our salvation" (*Manuscript 31*, 1890).

"Of all professing Christians, Seventh-day Adventists should be foremost in uplifting Christ before the world. The proclamation of the third angel's message calls for the presentation of the Sabbath truth. This truth, with others included in the message, is to be proclaimed; but the great center of attraction, Christ Jesus must not be left out" (*Gospel Workers*, p. 156).

If we are not to be "found wanting" in the scales of the sanctuary, if we are to escape our Laodicean condition (which is reinforced by every article and book we publish, extolling how well we are doing), then we must become really serious about the true remedy.

The challenge is to decide what will be our focus — the distinctives or Jesus. When the world knows us first as Christian because we are "of all professing Christians. . .uplifting Christ before the world," then it can be said that we are applying the Laodicean remedy.

Ellen White says, "One interest will prevail, one subject will swallow up every other — Christ our Righteousness" (*Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, Dec. 23, 1890).

Today we publicize handing out books and pamphlets on the Ten Commandments, and that is exactly how the world sees us, as Sabbath keepers rather than Christ-followers. "The message of the gospel of His grace was to be given to the church in clear and distinct lines, that the world should no longer say that Seventh-day Adventists talk the law, the law, but do not teach or believe Christ" (*Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 93).

So I appeal to my brothers and sisters, which picture are you in, the James White picture or the Ellen White picture? What is the burden of your witness — the law, the Sabbath, end-time events, or Jesus?

If we do not make Jesus our burden, if he does not become everything to us, then God will indeed pronounce on his church "found wanting" and will move to his next plan in completing his work on this earth.

J. David Newman, D.Min, is the senior pastor of New Hope Seventh-day Adventist Church in Burtonsville, Md., and a former editor of Ministry Magazine.

Letters - Continued from page 5

people and it is highly doubtful that the amount of literary similarity that has been found so far rises to the level of plagiarism. Again, on page 400 of his study Dr. Veltman notes that there “is the need for a careful and thorough comparison of [Ellen G. White’s] content with that of her sources.”

⁴ Note that he said “possible 2.6 percent.” He also states (page 9): “An exhaustive collation of bona fide instances of literary relationship between DA and LC would probably yield a figure *considerably less than* 2.6 percent, in view of the fact that numerous words and phrases have been included for which an actual relationship is tenuous at best.” (Emphasis added)

⁵ Cottrell, Raymond F. “The Literary Relationship between Desire of Ages, by Ellen G. White and the Life of Christ, by William Hanna,” (Nov. 1, 1979), 39 pages; the quote can be found on pages 30-1.

⁶ Weinauer, Ellen “Plagiarism and the Proprietary Self: Policing the Boundaries of Authorship in Herman Melville’s “Hawthorne and His Mosses,”” *American Literature* 69/4 (1997): 697-717.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pages 300.

⁸ *Ibid.*, page 522.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pages 522-3.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, page 353.

¹¹ Dameron, J. Lasley “Poe, Plagiarism, and American Periodicals,” *Poe Studies* 30/1-2 (1997): 39-47; the quote is on page 39.

¹² *Ibid.*, page 354.

¹³ *Ibid.*, page 427.

¹⁴ The term was penned by Sandmel, Samuel “Parallelomania,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 81 (1962): 1-13.

¹⁵ Perhaps, it would be helpful to the field of literature if someone were to develop the literary equivalent of Kohlberg’s Moral Development theory?

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, page 40; I would suggest that, at least, for some of us, we are at the stage described in the last sentence.

¹⁷ Pollock, Channing “The Plagiarism Racket,” *American Mercury* 60 (1945): 613-9; the quoted material can be found on page 615.

*David Conklin can be contacted at
djconklin@aemail4u.com*

A RESPONSE BY T. JOE WILLEY

People who study human nature are convinced that certain moral standards are universal. A disposition against stealing, lying, murder, and rape (four quick examples) are not matters of taste or fashion. Our normative moral intelligence lets us know right from wrong. As the reprobate Hemingway put it; “What is moral is what you feel

» If these writings are alleged to come from the supernatural (light from heaven which the Lord has presented) and it is conspicuously detected from another person’s works, the reader will be faced with unavoidable ethical imperatives.

good after, and what is immoral is what you feel bad after.” Therefore, it is a given that when a religious person with the pretense of originality produces unacknowledged “truth-filled literature” that is literary dependent, ethical emotions will be aroused. This is called “detrimental reliance” viz; relying on a falsehood.

If these writings are alleged to come from the supernatural (light from heaven which the Lord has presented) and it is conspicuously detected from another person’s works, the reader will be faced with unavoidable ethical imperatives. In a sense I am arguing that the boundaries of plagiarism are especially not vague for a prophet, unless of course you depend on the mystery of religious relativism — that God owns all the words and does not disapprove copying or covering it up, as long the reader feels more spiritual and there are no untoward economic and personal gains for originality the prophet can trade on (it belongs to God).

It sounds like Conklin is fascinated by subtleties that surround deliberate and fuzzy plagiarism, infringement detection, copyright law, and proofs. That was not the ambition of this article. Professor Hoyt and other revisionists are not so much bothered by the now-acknowledged literary dependency, but rather the moral issues for the church created by Mrs. White’s denial, while borrowing without attribution (hence the plagiary effect). Her steadfast response had always been along the line of the following: “I have not been in the habit of reading any doctrinal articles in the paper, that my mind should not have any understanding of anyone’s ideas and views, and that not a mold of any man’s theories should have any connection with that which I write.”¹

The earlier charismatic Joanna Southcott in England (1750-1814) and also a prolific writer, returned books sent to her with the explanation; “I should not like to read any books to mix my senses with any works but those of the Spirit by whom I write.”² Contrast this against Willie White’s admission about his mother’s writing habits: “...She always felt most keenly the results of her lack of

Continued on page 21



Feature | Alden Thompson

The Adventist Advantage

» I believe part of the reason is that we too easily fall to quarreling. Instead of provoking one another to love and good deeds (Hebrews 10:24), we simply provoke one another.

This issue of *Adventist Today* is dedicated to the unhappy thesis that Adventist membership in North America is in decline (if you subtract first-generation immigrants). I believe part of the reason is that we too easily fall to quarreling. Instead of provoking one another to love and good deeds (Hebrews 10:24), we simply provoke one another.

The fact that we are called to be a “remnant” doesn’t mean that the “little flock” should be getting smaller and smaller! Indeed, I think our situation is serious enough that we should adopt Ellen White’s forceful outcry, spoken originally when she sensed the danger posed by exuberant but potentially deadly health reformers wanting to try their unproven methods on Adventists: “God forbid that we should be the subjects for them to experiment upon! We are too few. It is altogether too inglorious a warfare for us to die in.... We cannot afford to let such persons kill off this one and that one. No; we cannot afford it!” (2 *Testimonies* 375 [1870])

This piece has crept into print with fear and trembling. It appears in a special issue of *Adventist Today* that is intended to reach out to the whole church. But if the hopes, dreams, and prayers of the *Adventist Today* sponsors are to be realized, it must somehow bridge a gulf that often seems wide and deep.

If I could generalize, several words come to mind as characterizing the perspective of *Adventist Today*: progressive, exploratory, critical, liberal, careless, negative. Regardless of your personal perspective, you’ll like some of those words better than others. A revealing quote from the “other side”: “Who reads it anyway?”

My generalizations about mainstream church publications are also a mixed bag: affirming,

practical, conservative, cautious, uncritical, positive. Again, regardless of your personal perspective, you’ll like some of those words better than others. A revealing quote from the “other side”: “I haven’t seen a significant article in months.”

I must admit that when I write for either side, I often feel uncomfortable. In my view, one side is often too cautious, the other not cautious enough. And the editors know my convictions. Much as I hate to admit it, we need diversity for the right things to happen, and diversity implies a certain healthy tension.

Our problem, however, is that when the church is being pummeled from all sides (and it is), those of us who love the church are powerfully tempted to turn away from all criticism, even that which is intended to be helpful. We just want the critics to go away. But then we are in danger of missing out on something we really need to hear, for even the most negative critic may be working with a small kernel of truth. It would be like looking for a new doctor when the “old” one confronts us with a sobering diagnosis. A second opinion is often highly desirable. But to decide in advance that the second opinion has to be good news is to flirt with disaster.

The tensions within Adventism today are by no means unique to us. They haunt every human community. The individualism of our modern secular age simply heightens the tensions. Knowing that the tensions are normal can temper our fears. But we still need to explore ways of addressing them positively. It takes no talent at all to split the church; but to nurture a genuine unity out of our astonishing diversity requires our very best efforts and an abundant measure of God’s grace.

At the risk of reinforcing an unhappy Adventist arrogance that sometimes lurks in the call to be a “remnant,” I would like to lay out as succinctly as possible what I believe is an amazing and exciting “Adventist Advantage” in our attempts to be faithful to Christ’s call. I’ll start with two simple propositions. They are linked, but we can look at them separately. I hope both sides in Adventism can hear me out.

1. Loving God by loving people is the cure for the liberal-conservative divide.

I want my strengths to be a blessing to the church. But those very strengths are likely to also be my weaknesses. And that’s probably true for most of us. Some of us are better doers, others are better listeners; some of us are detail people, others are big-picture people; some of us are better defenders,

Continued on page 19

Continued from page 18

some are better explorers. Happy families and successful businesses learn to take advantage of those differences. Why shouldn't the church do the same? Indeed, if we are following Jesus, the church will be the best place of all to see different kinds of people working together. High-structure conservatives who want to defend the past and high-exploratory liberals who want to move into the future will both recognize that each is needed to make the community strong. And when we affirm each other's strengths, it's easier for us to admit our weaknesses.

That idea of mutual love and appreciation lies at the very heart of the teachings of Jesus: "In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets" (Matthew 7:12, NRSV). That's an amazing one-sentence summary of the entire Old Testament. In another passage, Jesus makes the same point by adding a key tag line to the two great commands: Love God, love people. "On these two commands," declared Jesus, "hang all the law and the prophets" (Matthew 22:40). Paul spoke a hearty amen to all that when he declared that loving your neighbor "sums up" the whole law and that "love is the fulfilling of the law." (Romans 13:8-10).

Finally, Jesus' famous judgment story of the sheep and the goats makes the point that the best way to love God is to care for God's needy children. In Ellen White's words, Jesus pictured the judgment scene as "turning" on that "one point" (*The Desire of Ages*, 637).

That means that all our quarrels over doctrines, proofs, facts, and church structure must be brought to the test of whether or not we are treating others the way we would want to be treated. In other words, hard-line conservatives and mushy liberals have to find a way, not just to tolerate each other, but actually to love each other.

And the reason why this one point can cure the liberal-conservative divide is that treating each other right is a language both sides can understand. If we simply draw lines over doctrines, facts, arguments, and proofs, concrete-thinking conservatives and abstract-thinking liberals will always be at each other's throats. But if our first priority is to treat each other with love and respect, then we can turn to doctrines, facts, arguments, and proofs and find ways of blending our differing perspectives into a powerful unity that can transform the world.

Marvelous idea. So where's the catch?

It comes down to one word: Relativism, a word that is tempting to liberals but horrifying to conservatives. My second point speaks to the issue. I believe it lies at the heart of our Adventist Advantage.

» That means that all our quarrels over doctrines, proofs, facts, and church structure must be brought to the test of whether or not we are treating others the way we would want to be treated. In other words, hard-line conservatives and mushy liberals have to find a way, not just to tolerate each other, but actually to love each other.

2. Jesus' two great commands and the Ten Commandments are a sure protection against the dangers of relativism.

Based on my now considerable experience in the church (I am on the verge of retirement), I know that my first point above gets more "amens" from liberals. This second point brings the conservatives on board.

Is there any way in heaven and on earth to bring together in a constructive way that conservative fear of relativism and the liberal attraction to it? That is the question that haunts our fractured culture today. And Adventists, precisely because of our tenacious commitment to the Sabbath, can answer that question with a resounding "Yes!" The Decalogue, engraved in stone by the very finger of God, is a stable anchor that protects us against the dangers of an anything-goes relativism — the very real and legitimate fear of the conservatives — while making it safe for us to explore every nook and cranny in Scripture, seeking to match its rich diversity to the multiple needs of our complex modern world, the very real and legitimate interest of the liberals.

What I find so intriguing about the American religious scene right now is the widespread commitment to the Decalogue among thoughtful Christians, a commitment that often includes an increasing interest in the Sabbath. Indeed, some of the best writing about Sabbath today comes from people who wish they had a Sabbath! Some are actually resting on Sabbath while continuing to worship on Sunday; others select another day of the week as their Sabbath. Marva Dawn, for example, author of *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly*, keeps Tuesday as her sacred day. But simply to talk about the "principle" of giving a portion of our time to God weakens the anchor; it doesn't have nearly the staying power of actually cherishing the day God has blessed. And that is the Adventist Advantage. We don't just talk about the Sabbath in principle. We

Continued on page 20

Continued from page 19

The Adventist Advantage

» In short, I believe Adventists could draw great strength from the anchor that the law provides us. God gave it to us to keep us out of mischief, to protect us from harm.

are committed to keeping holy the very day that God has blessed.

Tragically, because of a failure to understand the nature of law in Scripture, former Adventists who have moved into conservative evangelical churches have effectively chiseled the Sabbath out of the Decalogue. For them, Sabbath no longer has anything to do with time. Virtually the only anchor they have left, then, is the doctrine of the inerrancy of the Bible, a strictly psychological anchor that simply does not match the evidence in Scripture.

It is worth noting that even though many Adventists no doubt hold to the conviction that the Bible is “inerrant” or “infallible,” our Fundamental Beliefs do not use the word “inerrancy” at all and speak of the Bible as “the infallible revelation of God’s will,” a far cry from simply affirming that the Bible is “infallible.” That more nuanced use of “infallible” is based on Ellen White’s usage in the “Introduction” to *The Great Controversy* (p. vii).

We must be perfectly clear, of course, on what the law can and cannot do. It is not a means of earning eternal life. Salvation is the gift of God through Jesus Christ. To be sure, law is a great gift of God, but for quite a different purpose. It simply is an anchor that keeps us safe and out of mischief here on earth. That too, is very good news.

But I must say something more about “relativism,” for we must take seriously both the conservative fear of relativism and the liberal attraction to it. What I find so exciting about our Adventist Advantage is that it provides an anchor that meets the needs of both. The stable structure marked out by Jesus’ two great commands and the Ten Commandments gives us freedom to explore all of Scripture and all of life without fear that our faith will collapse. Its secret of success lies in the fact that it is anchored in concrete moral and ethical principles on which we all agree, not in contentious “facts” and “proofs” on which we frequently disagree and that are subject to change because of historical and scientific research.

Behavior is part of the story, to be sure, but it is linked with relationships and broad moral principles, not with a narrow list of do’s and don’ts.

Let me be right up-front, however, and wave a

friendly but startling warning flag here, a warning flag in favor of two forms of “relativism” that are indeed firmly rooted in Scripture. In other words, I am talking about a legitimate “biblical relativism.” If our anchor is secure, we can be absolutely honest with both of them, for both are thoroughly biblical and thoroughly practical. That’s why I have found that most conservatives are willing to accept them in spite of their unhappiness with the word “relativism.”

Divine-human relativism

Before God, a human being is small indeed. In the words of Isaiah: “My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:8-9, NRSV). As C. S. Lewis put it, “My idea of God is not a divine idea. It has to be shattered time after time” (*A Grief Observed*, 4:15). When we admit that God’s ways are higher than our ways, we dramatically “relativize” everything human — precisely what creatures should do in the presence of their Maker. Thus the Bible illustrates God’s way of reaching us at our level, not his. Scripture simply gives us a host of “examples” of an all-powerful God reaching sinful human beings. “These things happened to them to serve as an example,” wrote Paul, “and they were written down to instruct us, on whom the ends of the ages have come” (1 Corinthians 10:11, NRSV). Everything in Scripture points to God, but it is never on the same level with God in his absolute purity and holiness. The words of Scripture are never absolute truth in the same sense that God himself is absolute truth.

Ellen White made this point by saying that God inspired the writers of the Bible rather than their words: “Men will often say such an expression is not like God. But God has not put Himself in words, in logic, in rhetoric, on trial in the Bible.... It is not the words of the Bible that are inspired, but the men that were inspired” (1 *Selected Messages* 21 [1886]). The same rationale lies behind her statement that “God and heaven alone are infallible” (*Ibid.* 37 [1892]).

Behavioral or motivational relativism

En route to an obedience that is entirely spontaneous, the Lord, just like human parents and

Continued on page 21

Continued from page 20

teachers, will use threats and bribes. As Paul put it to the believers in Corinth: “What would you prefer? Am I to come to you with a stick, or with love in a spirit of gentleness?” (1 Corinthians 4:21, NRSV). Not all of us respond in the same way to the same methods. The goal is the same, but the methods of motivating us differ widely. That’s why Paul could also say to the Corinthian believers, “I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some” (1 Corinthians 9:22, NRSV).

In the Old Testament, the radical impact of sin meant that fear was frequently the motivator of choice. Indeed, in the additional legislation given to Moses, every one of the Ten Commandments except the last one carried the death penalty. God was and is willing to do what needs to be done. Yet the Ten Commandments themselves carry no penalty clauses, part of the reason why they are still widely revered and seen as applicable today. And that brings us back to the remarkable nature of the Adventist Advantage.

Jesus, of course, coming to earth as God in the flesh, points us toward the nonviolent ideal, with the story of the woman taken in adultery being the most famous example: “Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again” (John 8:11, NRSV). Thus, in striking instances, Jesus could omit the penalty while still affirming the

command as enduring. And that’s an important clue as to how one can bring the Testaments together as a consistent revelation of the God who revealed himself in Jesus Christ.

In short, I believe Adventists could draw great strength from the anchor that the law provides us. God gave it to us to keep us out of mischief, to protect us from harm. It was never intended to be a means of salvation and never could be. But within the safe framework established by Jesus’ two great commands and the ten commands, we can be a dynamic community working together to make a difference in God’s great world while we await his return.

We are far too few to quibble over lesser matters. Let us hold fast to the ten commands and the two commands. They give us an anchor that never moves, our great “Adventist Advantage.” Then every passage in Scripture can speak its piece, illustrating how God works with people in different times and different places to move them toward his kingdom.

Alden Thompson, Ph.D., teaches religion at Walla Walla University, College Place, Washington.

Letters - Continued from page 17

school education. She admired the language in which other writers had presented to their readers the scenes, which God had presented to her in vision. And she found it both a pleasure, and a convenience and an economy of time to use their language fully or in part in presenting those things which she knew through revelation, and which she wished to pass on to her readers.”³

Contrary to what Conklin says, Fred Veltman advanced within a step of acknowledging plagiarism (but couldn’t for obvious reasons) in White’s writings: “I must admit at the start that in my judgment this is the most serious problem to be faced in connection with Ellen White’s literary dependency. It strikes at the heart of her honesty, her integrity, and therefore her trustworthiness. As of now I do not have — nor, to my knowledge, does anyone else have — a satisfactory answer to this important question.”⁴

This was a remarkable crowning conclusion by a college professor working within the Adventist

Church. It shows the emotional arousal of pervasive moral intelligence when faced with the evidence. The ethics of belief advances this further for the rest of us. We have an obligation to believe only that which is supported by the evidence — even though it brings discomfort.

Reference

¹ Ellen G. White. Letter 37 — 1887.

² James K. Hopkins. *A Woman to Deliver Her People*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press. 1982. p. 10.

³ W. C. White Letter to L. E. Froom. January 8, 1928. *Selected Messages*. Book 3 Appendix C.

⁴ Fred Veltman. “The Desire of Ages Project.” *Ministry*. October, 1990. See also Warren H. Johns. “Ellen White: Prophet or Plagiarist?” *Ministry*. June, 1982. p. 6. “What we do know is that Ellen White made use of contemporary sources in her published and unpublished writings, and that sometimes she used material nearly word for word without giving credit.”

Visions and the Word:

The Authority of Ellen White in Relation to the Authority of Scripture in the Seventh-day Adventist Movement-Part 1

» ...it is important to recognize that even though the early Adventist leaders believed that Ellen White's gift of prophecy was subordinate to the authority of the Bible, that did not mean they held her inspiration to be of a lesser quality than that of the Bible writers.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church from its earliest days has told the world, and its own members, that in the true Protestant tradition, it holds the Bible as the supreme guide to all its doctrine and practice.

The church also maintains that Ellen G. White (1827-1915), one of its founders, had an "authoritative" prophetic gift.¹ She had "visions" and revelations that helped shape the structure and practices of the church. She and most of the people surrounding her averred that her authority was second to that of the Bible; while she could provide clarification of the Scriptures, she could not and would not try to supersede them.

In more recent times, however, some devoted followers have attempted to elevate her writings to a position equal to, or more authoritative than, the Bible's. In fact, it is not too much to say that the Seventh-day Adventist movement was formed in the matrix of tension on the subject of visions versus the Word.

Christian Connexion Antecedents

Millerite Adventism² (one of the church's major historical antecedents) had gone on record in June 1843, and reaffirmed in May 1845 after the 1844 Great Disappointment, that "we have no confidence whatever in any visions, dreams, or private revelations."³ This was some five months after the first vision of the young Ellen G. Harmon (White after August 1846).⁴ Millerite Adventism was a movement based on one authoritative book — the Bible.

Another of Seventh-day Adventism's theological roots, the Christian Connexion, a restorationist group, held to the Bible as the only rule of faith. William Kinkade (b. 1783), one of its founders and their principal theologian,⁵ wrote in 1829 that he had in his early years refused to call himself by "any name but that of *Christian*" and that he would take no book for his "standard but the *Bible*."⁶

However, Kinkade recognized that at the center of New Testament order were the spiritual gifts, including the gift of prophecy, described in 1 Corinthians 12:8-31 and Ephesians 4:11-16. The presence of these gifts in the church, he wrote, "is the *ancient order of things*; every one opposed to this, is opposed to primitive Christianity."⁷ Kinkade did not seem to be concerned with possible conflict between the two realms of authority.

Kinkade's theology is important for understanding early Seventh-day Adventism because two of the movement's three founders had been active in the Christian Connexion — Joseph Bates as a leading layperson, and James White as a Connexionist pastor.

Early Adventists on Authority

The earliest Sabbatarian Adventists were quite clear on the issue of authority. James White, Ellen's husband, stated the developing denomination's position quite accurately in 1847 when he wrote that "the Bible is a perfect, and complete revelation. It is our only rule of faith and practice." But, he added, in harmony with Kinkade's line of thought, "this is no reason, why God may not show the past, present, and future fulfillment of his word, in these

Continued on page 23

Continued from page 22

last days, by dreams and visions; according to Peter's testimony [see Acts 2:17-20; Joel 2:28-31]. True visions are given to lead us to God, and his written word; but those that are given for a new rule of faith and practice, separate from the Bible, cannot be from God, and should be rejected."⁸ Whenever they were not subordinated they were being used wrongly.

Thus James could write in 1851 that "the gifts of the Spirit should all have their proper places. The Bible is an everlasting rock. It is our rule of faith and practice.... Every Christian is therefore in duty bound to take the Bible as a perfect rule of faith and duty.... He is not at liberty to turn from them to learn his duty through any of the gifts. We say that the very moment he does, he places the gifts in a wrong place, and takes an extremely dangerous position."⁹

At this juncture it is important to recognize that even though the early Adventist leaders believed that Ellen White's gift of prophecy was subordinate to the authority of the Bible, that did not mean they held her inspiration to be of a lesser quality than that of the Bible writers. To the contrary, they believed that the same Voice of authority that spoke through the Bible prophets also communicated through her. Ellen White and her fellow Adventists held that her authority was *derived* from the Bible and thus could not be equal to it. We find a careful balance here.

As a result, her authority was not to transcend or contradict the boundaries of truth set forth in the Bible. As Ellen White so aptly put it in 1871, "The written testimonies are not to give new light, but to impress vividly upon the heart the truths of inspiration already revealed" in the Bible.¹⁰

It is important to realize that Ellen White believed that her visions were for the guidance of the Adventist community, rather than the Christian church at large. Writing to Adventist believers in 1871, she noted that "if you had made God's word your study, with a desire to reach the Bible standard, ...you would not have needed the *Testimonies* [i.e. her counsel]. It is because you have neglected to acquaint yourselves with God's inspired Book that He has sought to reach you by simple, direct testimonies, calling your attention to the words of inspiration which you had neglected to obey."¹¹

Did the early Adventists practice what they preached on the topic? More specifically, did Ellen White's visions have a significant role in doctrinal formation, and how did her writings relate to the interpretation of the Bible?

In the first decades of Adventism, Ellen White's writings were not thought of as interpreting the meaning of scriptural passages. As to doctrinal formation, James White wrote in 1855 that "it should be understood that all these views as held by the body of Sabbath-keepers, were brought out from

» ...did Ellen White's visions have a significant role in doctrinal formation, and how did her writings relate to the interpretation of the Bible?

the Scriptures before Mrs. W. had any view in regard to them. These sentiments are founded upon the Scriptures as their only basis."¹²

That statement is found in the context of a discussion of Seventh-day Adventist doctrine being a "vision view" rather than a "Bible view." That accusation was a popular one among the denomination's detractors. Miles Grant, for example, argued in 1874 in the *World's Crisis* (a leading Advent Christian periodical) that the Sabbatarians' understanding of the heavenly sanctuary doctrine had come through Ellen White's visions.¹³

Uriah Smith vigorously responded to that accusation. "Hundreds of articles," he stated, "have been written upon the subject [of the sanctuary]. But in no one of these are the visions once referred to as any authority on this subject, or the source from whence any view we hold has been derived. Nor does any preacher ever refer to them on this question. The appeal is invariably to the Bible, where there is abundant evidence for the views we hold on this subject."¹⁴

The interesting thing about Smith's assertion is that any person willing to go back into early Seventh-day Adventist literature can either verify or disprove it. On the subject of the heavenly sanctuary, Paul Gordon has done that and has verified Smith's claims in his *The Sanctuary, 1844, and the Pioneers*.¹⁵ On a broader scale, extensive research by Merlin Burt, Rolf J. Pöhler, and George R. Knight has demonstrated that Adventism's various doctrines were originated and fleshed out by several individuals, none of whom became Seventh-day Adventists.¹⁶ The Adventist contribution was in integrating the various doctrines they had accepted through Bible study into an apocalyptic theology. But even that was a contribution by Joseph Bates rather than Ellen White.¹⁷ Her early visions tended to be visions of confirmation of Bible study or related to building unity in matters of detail.¹⁸

Early Seventh-day Adventists appear to have been a people of the "Book," consistent in theory and practice in their view of the Bible as the only source of doctrinal authority and their acceptance of a modern prophet. But that would change.

The 1888 Era and Authority

The transformation in Adventism's usage of Ellen White's writings in relation to the Bible may have

Continued on page 24





Visions and the Word *Continued from page 23*

» No one pounded home the primacy-of-Scripture principle more vigorously and more often during the 1888 era of Adventist history than Ellen White. “We want Bible evidence for every point we advance,” she wrote to Butler in April 1887.

begun in the late 1870s, but it is openly evident in the 1880s, particularly as the denomination approached its 1888 General Conference session. That session would be one of the most significant in Adventist history. At stake was the understanding of gospel and law and how they should be related. Side topics were the definition of the law in Galatians and the 10 horns of Daniel 7.¹⁹

In the struggle over the various topics, the question of religious authority came to the forefront. Swerving from the earlier Adventist position on the absolute primacy of Scripture, the denomination’s second-generation leadership sought to solve its theological and biblical issues through the use of human authority related to expert opinion, authoritative position, Adventist tradition, and majority votes.²⁰ But these were opposed by a reforming element that was pushing for a more Christ-centered theology, and the reformers rejected all appeals to human authority in solving theological and biblical issues. Ellen White, the only remaining founder of the denomination, stood firmly with the reformers in their primacy-of-Scripture position.

But the official leadership of the denomination sought to use human authority to shore up what they saw as threats to not only traditional Adventist theology, but also the authority of Ellen White. In the eyes of General Conference president George I. Butler, an authoritative word from the pen of Ellen White would solve both the biblical and the theological issues facing the church.

Butler and his colleagues took two approaches to having Ellen White solve these issues. The first was to have her provide a written statement on the controverted topics related to the interpretation of Galatians and Daniel. Between June 1886 and October 1888 the embattled president wrote Ellen White a series of more than a dozen letters requesting, and at times demanding, that she use her authority to settle the controversial issues.²¹

Significantly, Ellen White refused to let Butler and his colleagues use her writings as an inspired commentary on the Bible.

The second strategy of the Butler coalition in the 1888 era was to use Ellen White’s published writings to establish the “correct” interpretation of the controverted issues. In regard to the

interpretation of the law in Galatians, for example, they quoted from her *Sketches from the Life of Paul* (1883) to arrive at the correct understanding. Once again, she rejected their maneuver, asserting: “I cannot take my position on either side until I have studied the question.”²² She was not willing to let her writings be used to settle the interpretive issue. For her, Scripture was supreme.

No one pounded home the primacy-of-Scripture principle more vigorously and more often during the 1888 era of Adventist history than Ellen White. “We want Bible evidence for every point we advance,” she wrote to Butler in April 1887. In July 1888 she published in the leading Adventist periodical that “the Bible is the only rule of faith and doctrine.” And in August she wrote to all the delegates of the forthcoming General Conference session that “the Word of God is the great detector of error; to it we believe everything must be brought. The Bible must be our standard for every doctrine and practice.... We are to receive no one’s opinion without comparing it with the Scriptures. Here is divine authority, which is supreme in matters of faith. It is the word of the living God that is to decide all controversies.”²³

The lessons on religious authority related to the 1888 General Conference session are crucial for evaluating the authority of the Bible in relation to prophetic authority in Seventh-day Adventism. Ellen White herself had held to the position of early Adventism. But many of the second-generation leaders and ministers had moved from that well-defined position and had sought to use Ellen White’s prophetic authority to settle theological and exegetical issues.

TO BE CONTINUED IN NEXT ISSUE

George Knight, Ed.D., is an SDA historian and educator. He is emeritus professor of church history at Andrews University. He is the author of many books on Ellen White and Adventist history.

Continued on page 25

Continued from page 24

Notes and References

¹⁴“Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists,” in *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, 16th ed. (Hagerstown, MD: *Review and Herald*, 2000), pp. 9, 15.

²For major discussions of Millerite Adventism, see Ronald L. Numbers and Jonathan M. Butler, eds., *The Disappointed: Millerism and Millenarianism in the Nineteenth Century* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987); George R. Knight, *Millennial Fever and the End of the World: A Study of Millerite Adventism* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1993).

³⁴“Declaration of Principles,” *Signs of the Times*, June 7, 1843, p. 107; “Conference of Adventists at New York,” *Morning Watch*, May 15, 1845, p. 158.

⁴For more on Ellen White’s life and ministry, see Arthur L. White, *Ellen White*, 6 vols. (Washington, DC: *Review and Herald*, 1981-1986). For a briefer treatment, see George R. Knight, *Meeting Ellen White: A Fresh Look at Her Life, Writings, and Major Themes* (Hagerstown, MD: *Review and Herald*, 1996).

⁵Milo True Morrill, *A History of the Christian Denomination in America: 1794-1911 A. D.* (Dayton, OH: Christian Publishing Assn., 1912), pp. 58-65; Leroy Garrett, *The Stone-Campbell Movement: An Anecdotal History of Three Churches* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1981), p. 290.

⁶William Kinkade, *The Bible Doctrine of God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, Atonement, Faith, and Election; to Which Is Prefixed Some Thoughts on Natural Theology and the Truth of Revelation* (New York: H. R. Piercy, 1829), p. iv.

⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 331-333.

⁸James White, in *A Word to the “Little Flock”* (n. p.: James White, 1847), p. 13.

⁹James White, “The Gifts of the Gospel Church,” *Review and Herald*, April 21, 1851, p. 70.

¹⁰Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 9 vols. (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1948), II: 605.

¹¹E. G. White, *Testimonies*, II: 605.

¹²James White, “A Test,” *Review and Herald*, Oct. 16, 1855, p. 61.

¹³Miles Grant, *World’s Crisis*, Nov. 25, 1874, in *Review and Herald*, Dec. 22, 1874, p. 204.

¹⁴Uriah Smith, “The Sanctuary,” *Review and Herald*, Dec. 22, 1874, p. 204.

¹⁵Paul A. Gordon, *The Sanctuary, 1844, and the Pioneers* (Washington, DC: *Review and Herald*, 1983).

¹⁶Merlin D. Burt, “The Historical Background, Interconnected Development, and Integration of the Doctrines of the Sanctuary, the Sabbath, and Ellen G. White’s Role in Sabbatarian Adventism from 1844 to 1849.” (Ph.D. dissertation, Andrews University, 2002); Rolf J. Pöhler, *Continuity*

and Change in Adventist Teaching: A Case Study in Doctrinal Development (Frankfurt Am Main: Peter Lang, 2000); George R. Knight, *A Search for Identity: The Development of Seventh-day Adventist Beliefs* (Hagerstown, MD: *Review and Herald*, 2000).

¹⁷For Bates’ development of “great controversy theology,” see George R. Knight, Joseph Bates: *The Real Founder of Seventh-day Adventism* (Hagerstown, MD: *Review and Herald*, 2004), pp. 107-151.

¹⁸See, e. g., J. White, “Time to Commence the Sabbath,” p. 168; Knight, Joseph Bates, pp. 102-103, 116, 153.

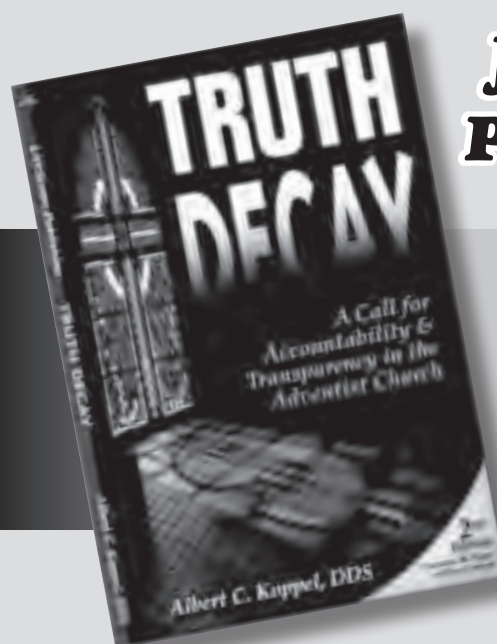
¹⁹For discussion of the events surrounding the 1888 General Conference session, see A. V. Olson *Thirteen Crisis Years: 1888-1901* (Washington, DC: *Review and Herald*, 1981); George R. Knight *A User-Friendly Guide to the 1888 Message* (Hagerstown, MD: *Review and Herald*, 1998).

²⁰George R. Knight, *Angry Saints: Tensions and Possibilities in the Adventist Struggle over Righteousness by Faith* (Washington, DC: *Review and Herald*, 1989), pp. 100-104.

²¹*Ibid.*, pp. 104-107.

²²*Ibid.*; Knight, *Angry Saints*, pp. 107-108.

²³E. G. White to G. I. Butler and U. Smith, Apr. 5, 1887; Ellen G. White, “The Value of Bible Study,” *Review and Herald*, July 17, 1888, p. 449; E. G. White to Brethren who shall assemble in General Conference, Aug. 5, 1888.



Just Published!

New and Expanded edition of “**Truth Decay**” by Albert Koppel, DDS.

Order from:
Adventist Today,
P.O. Box 8026, Riverside,
CA 92515-8026

800-236-3641



Opinion | Ervin Taylor

A “Nonnegotiable Fundamental Truth?”

— COMMENTS ON THE ADVENTIST REVIEW INTERVIEW
WITH GENERAL CONFERENCE VICE PRESIDENT LOWELL
C. COOPER

» There was some initial hope that church authorities would... move toward some reasonable and responsible centrist position, but the organizing committee opted to... [accept] the ATS position on this divisive topic.

One of the current Adventist “Fundamental Beliefs” (currently Number 6) is listed under the heading of “Creation.” All historic

Christians confess that God is ultimately responsible for the Creation of all that is good. It would be expected that all Adventist Christians would also concur with that understanding. In 1980, Adventists adopted a formal statement that utilized the biblical affirmation that God made the “heaven and the earth and all living things upon the earth...in six days.” The framers of this statement wisely did not go beyond the words of the biblical affirmation to define what exactly “six days” signified.

The church in recent years spent what is conservatively estimated to be more than a million dollars to conduct a series of Faith and Science conferences. These sessions, held during a three-year period of time, brought together from around the world many of the church’s leading theologians, scientists, and administrators to focus attention on a better understanding of this Adventist teaching that has caused so much contentious debate in recent years.

Among Adventists, much of the recent controversy has been fueled by the desire of some to see a retrogressive understanding of how the biblical narratives should be understood declared the “official” Adventist position. For example, the Adventist Theological Society (ATS), which requires its members to affirm that “the world was created in six literal, consecutive, contiguous 24-hour days [and] that the earth was subsequently devastated by a literal global flood,” has actively advocated that the entire Adventist Church adopt and agree with its views on this matter.

There was some initial hope that church authorities would use the Faith and Science conferences to move toward some reasonable and responsible centrist position, but the organizing committee opted to write a report that essentially accepts the ATS position on this divisive topic. For example, the report states, “We affirm the historic Seventh-day Adventist understanding of Genesis 1 that life on earth was created in six literal days and is of recent origin [and that] the biblical account of a catastrophic Flood...[is] an important key to understanding earth history.” This outcome came about, even though Lowell Cooper, a General Conference vice president with a reputation as a reasonable and moderate administrator, served as the organizing committee’s chairman. This language was used even though it has been documented that more than half of the scientists teaching at Adventist colleges and universities take issue with that understanding of the Genesis account.

Continued on page 27

Continued from page 26

In a recent interview, Bill Knott, the newly appointed *Adventist Review* editor, asked Cooper to “talk about lessons learned in the International Faith and Science Conferences and the implications for future discussions.” Knott’s interview was recently published under the intriguing title of “Disagreeing Faithfully: How to understand and appreciate the difference between unity and uniformity” (*Adventist Review*, June 28, 2007).

Some of Cooper’s responses are very enlightening, since they may provide some insight as to why an opportunity afforded by the Faith and Science conferences to heal a serious rift in Adventism’s intellectual fabric failed so miserably and produced such a retrogressive document. In fact, in the view of many, the report of the organizing committee served only to further exacerbate divisions and mistrust. It is becoming increasingly difficult to resist the conclusion that moderates and progressives were allowed to attend the International and North American Faith and Science conferences primarily as a way to lend legitimacy to what was essentially a preordained outcome. How and why did this happen?

In response to the question “Are you saying that our belief in creationism...is a nonnegotiable fundamental truth?” Cooper answered, “Yes...our understanding of the Creation story is tied so directly into everything else we believe.... Our view of origins carries with it implications about other realities, such as sin and salvation. Our beliefs are interconnected.... We don’t separate things from the whole body of truth.”

In 2001, in the pages of the *Adventist Review*, Clifford Goldstein wrote an article describing a practice he attributed to a relatively small, ancient Greek philosophical school of thought, the Pythagoreans. This group had what Goldstein viewed as a “wacky” (his word) belief that required that any member who divulged to outsiders “the nature of irrational numbers” be permanently excluded from the group. Mr. Goldstein’s point in describing this alleged Pythagorean practice was to argue that Adventism has “the right...to identify the parameters of its faith, whatever the parameters are and whatever the rationale — ‘good’ or ‘bad’ — [that stands] behind them.” In other words, Adventist leaders have every right to insist that all Adventists members — and especially pastoral clergy and scholars teaching in denominational institutions — accept and advocate a given set of beliefs, even if some of these beliefs might be supported by one or more “wacky” arguments.

Some church members seem to view Adventism primarily in terms of an interconnected set of propositional beliefs. To them, Adventism is a

package deal — remove one element and the whole Adventist theological package falls apart. Perhaps a better metaphor would be a “house of cards” built from a deck of 28, with each card representing a fundamental Adventist belief. These beliefs are deemed nonnegotiable, not necessarily because they are clearly supported on the basis of some clear and unambiguous biblical statement, but because they are part of the traditional Adventist master saga, the “Great Controversy” system of prophetic interpretation advanced by Ellen White.

To the list of current variant Adventisms — cultural, historic, evangelical, liberal/progressive, conservative/fundamentalist — might we now wish to add a “Pythagorean Adventism”? This would be an Adventism where an undifferentiated “Truth” takes on a reality apart from the validity of any part or segment making up the whole. This kind of “Truth” seems to be conceived by some as largely an interlinked system of nonnegotiable propositional statements. If this view is held by those in positions of authority in the church, it becomes extremely difficult to make meaningful adjustments in problematical single elements, without members assuming that this would put the whole “system of Adventist Truth” in jeopardy. On this basis we perhaps can thus explain the desperate, heroic, and sometime expensive measures that are used in the institutional church to prop up the seriously problematical elements or parts of the theological system.

Fortunately, there are those who conceive of Adventism not as a theological system composed of propositional statements, but a community of individuals committed first of all to Christian standards and perspectives and to one or more Adventist historical and cultural values. That type of Adventism does not require that conventional, historic Adventist elements be regarded as sacrosanct or normative, but rather seeks to enter into a continuing dialogue with others of like mind, with the aim to create a community where authentic human needs can be fulfilled. This mature Adventism has no need to talk about “nonnegotiable” elements, other than those that all Christians confess are central to the message of Jesus.

Ervin Taylor, Ph.D., is professor emeritus of anthropology at the University of California, Riverside, and Executive Editor of Adventist Today. He can be reached at erv.taylor@atoday.com.

ADVENTISM *in the Present Tense*

Pondering Our Pasts • Plotting Our Futures

September 28-30, 2007

Adventist Forum Conference
Santa Rosa, California

FEATURING:

Malcolm Bull and Keith Lockhart

Authors of

Seeing a Sanctuary: Seventh-day
Adventism and the American Dream

The Red Books:

Our Search for Ellen White
an original play

Information: 916-774-1080
www.spectrummagazine.org

Co-sponsored by Pacific Union College and Hollywood SDA Church



"REDBOOKS"

*is without a doubt a seminal moment in
the history of Seventh-day Adventism."*

Deepthi Welaratna, KQED Arts & Culture

Coming to Southern California • September and October 2007
Pacific Union College Dramatic Arts Society Southern California Tour

Co-Hosted By

- ~ Adventist Today ~ Loma Linda University Church of Seventh-day Adventists
- ~ Vallejo Drive Church of Seventh-day Adventists
- ~ and other Adventist churches and organizations

For information about the play go to www.redbooksEGW.org

For a schedule of performances and ticket information please call or email
1-800-236-3641 • atoday@atoday.com