

**AIDS CHALLENGE IN AFRICA**

NEWS • ANALYSIS • OPINION

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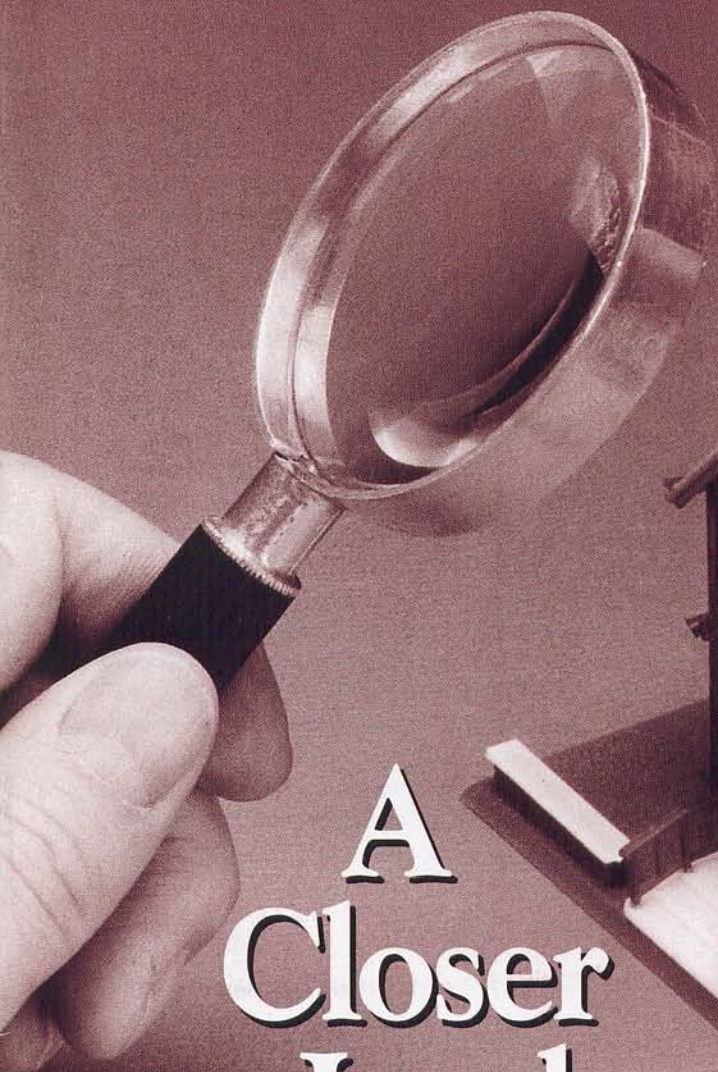
# ADVENTIST TODAY

VOL. 3, NO. 2

MARCH • APRIL 1995

**Negative Mail on  
Women's Ordination**

**Branch Davidians  
Two Years Later**



**A  
Closer  
Look:**

**Members Staying and Leaving**

# Inside Adventist Today

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**W**e Adventists are goal-oriented. We're driven. We're achievers. We rationally calculate our ends, and find means. But in our penchant for working toward a better future, we need not neglect the importance of Christian holy days that provide meaning for present life.

For many years we have expected the "imminent" coming of Christ, and our actions have followed suit—we have worked hard to that end. We have calculated how best to "finish the work." We used sanitariums to promote health as an entering wedge for gaining converts.

Eventually, rural sanitariums yielded to giant suburban medical centers. If Dorcas Societies in church basements were good, the worldwide help done through ADRA is better. Even if we are now not exactly sure when the Advent will occur, a diligent, rational work ethic has been established that pervades the contemporary Adventist mindset.

*Adventist Today* is thoroughly Adventist, a goal-oriented, rationally-based publication that wants to make things better by fostering thoughtful discussion of an increasingly complex church. Accordingly, for this issue we invited members and former members to tell their stories about why they stay, leave or return to the church. Also, here we remember Waco of two years ago—those former Adventists who were so tragically misled and ended in a fiery apocalypse.

By so doing, we give rational, truthful attention to important topics in our lives. But as a Christian publication, *AT* also must take time apart from cool, dispassionate engagement with "the issues" to allow affective, even passionate, reflection on our inner religious lives. So, even before reading the focus section on Leaving and Staying, why not turn to page 23 and spend 15 minutes—or a thoughtful hour—and allow Eileen Greenwalt to lead you in contemplating the Passover. Consider its ancient past, its transformation 2,000 years ago by the cross, a Sabbath rest and a glorious resurrection, and its meaning for 1995.

We Adventists are often so busy in pursuit of noble ends that we don't take time to remember—to say nothing of celebrate—the great Christian holy days. In Christendom Easter and the preceding Lenten Season have long been the most significant time in the Christian year. (Christmas is a distant second.) Yet, as much as I'd like to spend this Easter in worship (as I sometimes do when I am not too busy), I may be preoccupied this year. My colleagues and I at Loma Linda University have planned a business trip I am expected to make. My daughters' Adventist academy has planned a school outing for the weekend. My wife's academy has invited her class of 1965 to a 30th anniversary held on Easter weekend.

When I was a kid in the 50s, growing up in a sleepy little Adventist college town, I got the sense that we believers had it all together, and when a sufficient percentage of the world joined our near-perfect community, the New Earth would appear. When I pastored in the early 70s, I prepared each sermon with a sense of urgency that had little time for the cyclic holidays or the routine seasons of the Christian calendar.

But now we Adventists are coming to acknowledge our own humanness—for example, divorce near the national average. Perhaps it is time we paused in our activity and reflected along with the Christian world during this present season of Lent—a time for collective penitence. And then on the climactic Passion of our Lord on April 14-16, we can reflect on the meaning of Good Friday and the importance of Sabbath rest, and we can celebrate the joy of Easter Sunday.

*Jim Walters*



**Jim Walters** teaches and writes on ethics at Loma Linda University. He also helps teach a Sabbath School class.

Cover photo: Richard Cross and Richard Tinker

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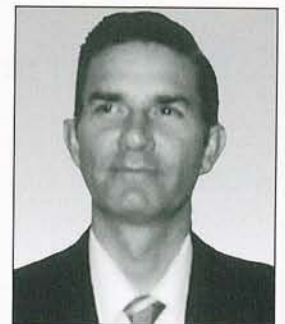
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**ADVENTIST TODAY**

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# Why I Left the Seventh-day Adventist Church

by Clela Fuller



**M**other took me to Sabbath School and church at North Park church in San Diego. I was baptized and married in that same church. My mother followed Ellen White's recommendation and taught me at home until I was eight, and then I attended San Diego Academy and went on to take pre-nursing at La Sierra College and nursing at Loma Linda University and the White Memorial Hospital.

I married a medical student who felt called to be a missionary. So, after graduation we went to Africa and the Caribbean for the General Conference for eight years. Later we lived in Mogadiscio, Somalia, where my husband worked for the U. S. Department

**Clela Fuller**, a medical/legal consultant in Southern California, also pursues interests in history, geology, archeology, and poetry writing.

of State for two years. Later I worked for Paradise Valley Hospital in nursing administration for about 20 years and retired in 1990.

My four children received all their education in Adventist schools. Two are still in the Adventist church. I move comfortably among all my children

and we freely discuss our religious beliefs. I was always content with the Adventist way of life and the schools and the happy, positive people. It was a good life, and I don't live much differently now.

The transition from Sabbath School teacher to nonmember took 12 years. About 1979 I became acquainted with someone who had no religious background and did not believe in the Bible. Yet this person believed in God and was a good individual. He enjoyed attending church with me and listened carefully through Sabbath School and church, and was soon asking questions: "Why do you take one part of the Bible literally, but not another part? Why do you keep this Old Testament law and not that one? Why do you do this on Sabbath, but not that?" He never argued with me, but I had the feeling that my answers did not make sense to him. Worse yet, many of the answers didn't make sense to me.

As if that was not problem enough in my religious life, there were some developments within the church which caused me great distress. The first was the Davenport situation. I studied everything in the Bible related to tithe and church finances. I stopped paying tithe through the regular channels, but gave to the local church budget and to special projects that appealed to me.

Next came Glacier View and I studied everything the Bible says about the Investigative Judgment, which didn't take long, and then I abandoned that traditional Adventist doctrine. As new information concerning Ellen White and her writings came to my attention, my concept of her as a prophet and her position in the church had to be greatly altered.

Now this was getting serious. I felt I was being shaken off my foundation and decided I needed to look closely at all my beliefs. I allowed some questions concerning the Bible to enter my consciousness that I had previously put aside. Why are there hundreds of Christian churches and sects all based on the Bible, but who cannot worship together, for each one considers itself to be the one and only true church? If God is a gracious God who wants everyone to be saved, why is the Bible, the basis for salva-

tion, so difficult to understand? Why do Christians of all faiths believe the portions of the Bible that they judge to make sense or fit in with their understanding of God and ignore or explain away the rest? If the Biblical Christ is the only source of salvation, why has the Bible never been available to more than a small portion of the world's population?

I also had a problem with prayer. I believe that whenever and by whatever means the human race came to be, the creator made us very special and different from all other creatures by giving us the freedom of choice. If God manipulates us as individuals or nations, or would interfere in anyone else's life because of our prayers, that would violate our precious freedom of choice.

At the beginning of 1988, instead of making my usual resolution to study the Bible and pray more during the coming year, I made a written declaration that I would look for truth elsewhere. I read extensively, but most importantly, I examined all my beliefs to see if they made sense to me. Here's an example: Christianity characterizes all of us as sinners, our righteousness as filthy rags. I am nothing. Apparently a feeling of worthlessness is necessary so as to recognize the need for a Savior. Yet it is evident that in all other successful pursuits, self-esteem is necessary to function successfully. We wouldn't think much of an earthly parent who enjoyed belittling his children, or made them feel worthless; so why would the heavenly Father use such tactics?

During those unsettling years of trying to find a way that was right for me, I read the *Review*, *Spectrum*, *Ministry* and other church publications, watching closely what was going on in the Adventist church. I became more and more disillusioned with the Adventist religion specifically and with all organized religions in general.

I suffered severely from "anti-institutionalism." Institutionalism, the established, unnecessary hierarchy and bureaucracy, is the reason many are leaving the Adventist church. Finally I had to face the fact that I was no longer an Adventist, and I doubted that I was a Christian, yet I loved my local church and the people and didn't know how to be anything but an Adventist. But I could not pretend to be something that I was not; and with that decision made, I suddenly stopped going to church.

My absence was noticed and several church members called to say they missed me and hoped I would return soon, and I knew they were sincere. But no one ever asked why I was no longer attending. I talked with my former Sabbath School teacher, but no one else asked or knew the reason. It was still more than a year before I could bring myself to ask that my name be dropped from membership, for it was so painful. After such a momentous decision I

could not just fade away into the sunset. I asked the pastor for an appointment, and he and the head elder did come visit me. I appreciated their kindness and understanding. The way they handled the situation produced as little trauma as possible to me and the church.

The fact that I question much about the Bible and prayer doesn't mean that I don't know right from wrong. Here are a few of the concepts that make sense to me, not because they are original, but because they meet my needs where I live every day.

1. I have come to rely more on my inner guidance system—the conscience, the Holy Spirit, the Inner Self, whatever you choose to call it—to guide me in right decisions and in moral behavior. I am becoming more aware of the way the Spirit works in me, promoting peace and harmony when all is well and causing discomfort when I violate my value system.

2. There are resources available to us humans, to contribute to our happiness and health beyond anything that we could imagine to ask for, if we endeavor to live within the harmony intended for this world.


3. Love your neighbor and "do unto others" are basic to most of the great religions of the world. I know that is the way of life that gives me and others the greatest peace and happiness. Incidentally, since leaving the church I recognize my neighborhood as encompassing a larger scope than ever before.

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***But I could not pretend to be something that I was not; and with that decision made, I suddenly stopped going to church.***

4. There is such diversity in the human race, such a wide range of culture, values, ways of eating and living, that I doubt that one belief system could fit all. I relish my uniqueness and have become much more tolerant of people who think differently than I—much more tolerant than when I was part of "The Remnant" and had "The Truth."

Yes, I have a definition of sin or moral wrong: Anything that prevents me from reaching my highest potential, or prevents someone else from reaching theirs. That is a high standard, but not difficult to apply in most situations.

Please accept these as some truths for me, for now. I expect I will adjust them as I further endeavor to integrate my spiritual self with the reality of everyday living. I will not attempt to convert others to my way of thinking, for I believe that our valued beliefs must be very personal and individually customized. 

# A Letter to the Board

June 27, 1983

Dear Church Board:

The purpose of this "epistle" is to resign from the membership in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This resignation is effective today and is not negotiable.

I will attempt to be mercifully brief with my reasons, at the risk of being misunderstood. For too many years, I "went along to get along." But with the present furor within the Church I am obligated by conscience to take a stand. I have reviewed with great personal agony my religious beliefs and philosophy. To my great dismay, I find significant, glaring errors, misinterpretations ("unique" Adventist exegesis), and obsessions. Further, there are distortions of Bible metaphors, prophecies, doctrines and teachings. I realize that I have made sweeping generalizations, but I am always willing to discuss these with anyone interested in details.

To be intellectually honest with myself and to be fair to my brethren, I am compelled to leave "this" fold. The institutional Seventh-day Adventist Church does not have room for a dubious believer such as myself. Kenneth Wood, former editor of the *Adventist Review*, clearly stated: "Anyone who professes to be a Seventh-day Adventist should be able to affirm, without mental reservation or qualifications, 'I believe these doctrines'" *Adventist Review*, July 1, 1982 (italics supplied).

Please allow me to give two incomplete lists of beliefs or doctrines.

I do not believe:

the Adventist Church is the final authority of what is "Truth", the Adventist Church is *the* remnant church, the gift of prophecy is the identifying mark of the "remnant" church, that Ellen G. White is the Spirit of Prophecy, given her documented dishonesty in production of her works, the sanctuary doctrine, the investigative judgment doctrine, the Adventist "signs" of the end of the earth (e.g., the 19th century falling of the stars, the moon turning to blood, the dark day, etc.), the Adventist obsession with ritual prohibitions regarding dress, diet and diversions, the idea that a monastic lifestyle makes one "more" Christian than other believers, the notion that "colorless and simple" is evidence of greater moral excellence than being "colorful and complex," the doctrine that the "shaking time" of the Bible refers to leaving the Adventist Church.

I do certainly believe:

that we are saved by Jesus Christ and by His grace alone, that the Bible, when read by a believer who is led by the Holy Spirit, contains the truth about salvation, that my position is *not* set in "concrete" (except for the two previous statements, all other conclusions must be tentative), that the understanding and interpretations of Truth is progressive, that the Adventist Church contains some of the most beautiful born again Christians in the world.

Please do not label me with the familiar Adventist cliché, a "backslidden" Adventist. This label is repugnant, and more importantly, inaccurate. Today, I am an unchurched Christian.

I pray for you, and I ask that you do the same for me. Thus we might have "eye salve," and "white raiment." I trust that our witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ is to expose truth, not to impose it.

Sincerely, Walt Fahlsing

## Reflections Ten Years Later

Today would not substantively change what I said ten years ago. I have even stronger convictions now as to the insidious damage caused by some traditional Adventist beliefs. I will elaborate on three of them.

First, the only unique doctrine contributed by Adventists to Christendom is the seriously flawed Sanctuary doctrine. This is a glaring example of text selection/rejection and text manipulation. Is it not strange that a date such as 1517, when Martin Luther first reemphasized the Gospel, was not foretold in Scripture? The fact of the matter is that Scripture fails to foretell any date after AD 70. John the Revelator, writing to seven churches in Asia Minor, clearly believed, and stated so in seven places, that he was living in the "end time."

Second, there is no scriptural identification of the Seventh-day Adventist Church as to time, place or message. Two passages, Revelation 12:17

and 19:10, have been egregiously warped to validate the existence of the Adventist denomination.

Third, I wish to address Ellen White as a special prophetess. I realize that these words will sound harsh, but in order to get believers' attention and awaken them from the sedation of "we have the Truth," I will risk being misunderstood.

Ellen White was a pious fraud and a liar. Her frequent insistence that her messages were free of contemporary influences and unique and direct from God ("the Lord showed me"), and is to place the reader in the camp of the gullible. Her plagiarism is well documented.

Ellen White was a false prophetess. For over seven years she defended (later "reinterpreted") her "shut door" doctrine. Imagine the agony and sorrow she inflicted on her believers during those seven years.

The "Health Message" that she claimed was unique, is permeated with the contemporary health beliefs and facts of the 1800's (vegetarianism, hydrotherapy, "secret sins", phrenology, drugless therapeutics, etc.).

She exhibited strange neuro-psychiatric

behavior consistent with medically established diagnosis of temporal epilepsy and complex partial seizures. Finally, it is pathetic that the "good" in her writings was not original and the "original" was not good.

These three areas that I have defined, but have not elaborated, are enough to question the Adventist denomination's reason for existence. The foregoing has accented the negative (false religion exposed) and no one is saved by this process.

One is saved by accepting God's gracious gift embodied alone in the Gospel. Apostasy is the renunciation of Jesus Christ—not leaving a particular denominational church. A specific label is not required of Christians. The new light is the same as the old light—the Gospel. The Gospel only is unique for salvation.

The Gospel: Nothing more, nothing less, nothing else. The Gospel: Believe it, live it, share it.

Walter Fahlsing, MD, raised and educated an Adventist, was an active member until 1983. Now a confident "generic Christian," he advises Adventists not to smother the gospel, but to realize Daniel 8:14 (1844 doctrine) is no match for John 3:16 (the gospel).



ONE WOMAN'S STORY OF THE JOURNEY BACK TO HER CHURCH FAMILY

# Coming Back to Family

by Rosalie Anderson Lynn

“**S**o when is Jesus coming?” The words drifted threateningly. My eight-year-old mind searched for the right answer. I didn’t know, and I didn’t think the questioner knew.

“Within 10 years,” I replied, thinking that the answer was safe.

“How can you say that? Jesus is going to be here soon, 5 years at the most!” The words no longer drifted, they accused and humiliated me.

“Guilty as charged. Your sentence, Miss Anderson, is prison and death.” I knew from the beginning that would be the verdict and sentence, but the words still shocked and shamed me. The junior Sabbath school room had been turned into a mock courtroom, presumably to motivate us into learning our Bible so that when we’d stand trial for our faith we’d give all the right answers. I should not have been surprised that I was the one chosen to be tried. I was the one usually asking the questions.

Replaying the event in my mind, I can still see delight in the eyes of the junior room leader and can still feel the hot blush of my face and the trembling of my hands.

Over the years I learned to fear humiliation from church people. I also learned that to belong to the Seventh-day Adventist denomination, I had to believe a particular set of doctrines and behave in certain ways. By the time I entered Walla Walla College I knew that I didn’t belong to the Adventist “in crowd.”

More troubling than not belonging were the questions that I had about life. Weren’t the Bible, church, and religion intended to help with living? But my struggles seemed to be outside their purview. Instead I found an echo to my

questions in Dostoevsky, “How can a loving God allow innocent children to suffer?” and in Sartre and Nietzsche, “What can be more courageous than to come face to face with nothingness?” I kept asking, “If religion isn’t working for me, of what value is it? Why keep doing it? If love is the essence of God, and the church is a loveless wasteland, why bother to look for God in the church?”

The day I requested that my name be removed from church membership, I acted with integrity. I didn’t believe as I had been instructed to believe and I didn’t behave as I had been instructed to behave. I did not belong. I have never regretted that request. It was confirming externally what was already happening in my mind. I was throwing out broken models of God and the church.

In the next few years my marriage would fail, my business would fail, and thoughts of suicide would become my constant companion. Jestingly I would say, “If there is a God, you can’t prove it by me.” The heroic stance of courageously facing meaninglessness felt hollow, devoid of anything heroic. Furthermore, the magic potions that I was buying in the bazaar of our contemporary culture had short shelf lives.

**I**nstead of the healing that I was hoping to find in some of the Americanized eastern religions and in psychology as religious substitute, I was finding only deeper spiritual dissatisfaction. Time passed.

One day a thought broke into my consciousness, “I never knew the God of the Bible, personally. I knew only the images of God fashioned by others and given to me.” Immediately I bought a NIV Bible translation. I read it not to figure out doctrine, but to discover the God behind the Bible.

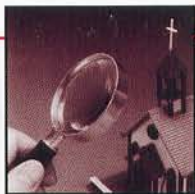
I came to realize that while God, through Christ, had already forgiven my resentment of others and my outrage toward God for not fixing the world, this forgiveness was merely the vehicle for something greater, a space of loving. Yet I could not enter this space of loving without consciously and deliberately accepting God’s forgiveness. At the same time I was aware that loving God would be taking the greatest risk of my life. It would be the most demanding endeavor I could ever undertake. It would mean being in fellowship with Christians who seemed to have more hang-ups than people of the world. It might even mean being affiliated with a dysfunctional denomination. Perish the thought!

**A** friend invited me to sing in the choir of a local evangelical church. During the two years that I was involved in their Bible study groups and worship services, I learned that other denominations are also dysfunctional. I learned that most Christians struggle with intellectual dissonance. I learned, however, that belonging to the family of God—the body of Christians—is foundational and that out of this belonging grows belief and behavior. In the same way that I belong to my family of origin without

CONTINUED ON PAGE 22



Rosalie Anderson Lynn, born in Ethiopia to missionary parents, has an M.A. in education from Claremont Graduate School and owns a real estate company in Southern California. She teaches a Sabbath School class at her local Adventist church.



A Closer Look: Members Staying and Leaving

# TREASURE

(and a few other things)

# HID IN A FIELD

**T**he San Diego chapter of Adventist Forums had two meetings about the reasons why many people leave the church. They have some pretty good reasons, there's no doubt about that. And those reasons involve aberrations that we all are aware of. But we don't all walk away. Quite a lot of us remain committed Seventh-day Adventists, and it seems useful to talk about why.

In the year since those meetings I've been a little bit like a brown bear, stumbling through the woods, turning over rocks and looking under them. It's called "soul searching." You wander around in your mind, turning over your presuppositions to see if there's anything reasonable under there.

One of the biggest rocks I've had to roll over is my "list." I have this unwritten list of wise and gentle people, people I trust. As long as they remain, they are my church. They define it for me, and I'm comfortable. Turn that rock over, and there's an awful question under it: "Suppose they left? What if they all gave up on the church and left? Then what would hold me?"

I think something would.

In a year's pondering, I've found four metaphors that help me to make sense of my continuing identification with the church.

## THE FIELD

I found a treasure hidden in a field a long, long time ago. I was a high school kid, and when I got a glimpse of that treasure, I wanted it. I needed that treasure, the kingdom of heaven. I needed the gospel and I needed Jesus. And to get the treasure, I bought the field—oh, did I buy that field! I did one double flip from being a high school kid to being a Pacific Union College student—in a matter of months! And then I married a fourth-generation Adventist and produced fifth-generation Adventists. I sold all I had and bought that field.

## Maryan Stirling



Maryan Stirling is a journalist in Southern California and long-time active member of the Adventist church. Besides writing, she is turned on by symbolism in theology.

Now, when you buy a field, the deal is that you don't just get the treasure—you get the field. And I've learned that when you get a field you get an enormous amount of dirt! And you get a pretty little creek that's flowing through the field, and you get wildflowers and ferns in shady places. You get lovely things. Vesper bells, magic moments around the log fire, choirs and camp meeting.

Along with all that, you get stickers and poison oak, and I might as well admit—not to name any names—but my field has some snakes in it. I've been cheated and I've been lied to. I've been manipulated and exploited and used. But in that same field I've been dealt with honestly and graciously, and my love of truth has been nurtured. I've been affirmed and appreciated.

A field is a place to grow things. Well, I've been planted in that field for 52 years, and I'm growing. And to tell you the truth, my roots have gone so deeply into that field that most of what's standing here today is from that field. I've learned my ways of thinking and speaking from the minds that I've interacted with in this church. I doubt that transplanting me to any other field would be successful. Staying in the church may be, for me, a reasonable response.

## CANDLESTICKS

My second metaphor appears as a symbol in the book of Revelation. All of the seven churches (Chapter 1) are represented as candlesticks. Now, a candlestick is a very good thing to have, especially back there when they didn't have halogen lights and car lights and all the rest. The only way to illuminate any place was to light a candle.

So the church is a light, and if it's burning, it's doing a wonderful thing for the world. But sometimes the lamp is "burning dim before the sacred ark," as you know. And sometimes the light seems



to go out completely. What I want to say is that even if the flame flickers and falters, every one of those seven churches is a candlestick of gold. Not gold-plated, but gold all the way through.

It's not just the illumination that the church can give to the world. In itself, a church is a very valuable thing. Nearly any kind of a church does wonderful things for families that worship in it. It's a social system that stabilizes homes. It's a cultural stronghold, an educational institution. It's the salt and the yeast and the warm hand reaching out. The earth would be worse off without all the churches, however weird their teachings may seem to us. Exclude, maybe, a few that stockpile assault weapons.

The seven churches don't have perfect theology. It's not required. Whether ultimately all our 27 doctrines wash or not, I think I'll stay.

## COCOON

We got a catalog of Native American art, and the page that caught my interest was a picture of a living thing. You can't see the living thing. It's all wound around with something that hides it. But you can see that something inside is straining, pulsing, living. It's immobilized. Whatever's happening is not being done by the thing. Something is acting on it. There's biology going on. There's biochemistry turning a worm into a butterfly. What crawled in will fly out. It has happened to every butterfly you've ever seen. Metamorphosis. Transformation.

**N**ow, when you  
buy a field, the  
deal is that you  
don't just get the  
treasure—you get  
the field. And I've  
learned that when  
you get a field you  
get an enormous  
amount of dirt!

Radical, fundamental change is a standard part of its life cycle. Can it be a part of our church's natural history? Why not? I think I'll stick around and see.

## DRY BONES

In my fourth metaphor, Ezekiel (Chapter 37) has a vision about a valley piled high with human bones. Very many; very dry.

God asks him if these bones can live. Ezekiel doesn't know. God tells him to make them live by hearing the word of the Lord. So Ezekiel speaks the living word of God to the bones, and there's a great rattling all around the prophet. Those bones sort themselves into skeletons. The whole process of death reverses itself. Muscles and skin, hearts, lungs all come into place. They're ready to live, but they aren't breathing yet.

Ezekiel calls the breath of life from the four winds, and all the vital signs surge into action. They're alive! They spring to their feet—an exceeding great army! And they're us! Well, they're God's people at some time when there's a daunting job to be done. They're God's people who have lain down and died. Lost their vision. (They get it back.) Lost their energy. (They get it back.) Lost their spiritual life. (They get it back.) They get it all back and strike up the band. They unroll the flags. They remember who the enemy is and what the fight's about. The exceeding great army takes the field.

I don't want to miss that. I'm staying. 

### What I Mean by Stating:

## I Am an Adventist

by David J. Entz

**W**hile I am working wholeheartedly to make a better world here and now, my hope is not in human progress but rather in divine intervention—the second coming of Jesus. I identify and work with all who, like Abraham, seek a better country, even a heavenly, but also seek justice and peace on earth as it is heaven.

I do not identify with those who speculate as to the time of Jesus' return, either now or in the past. Had I lived

in the days of William Miller, I would not have been a Millerite, distracted from the work of reform.

I cannot identify with any who invent a complicated scenario of final events that supposedly must ensue before Jesus can come. Groups which arose out of the Millerite excitement do so, but I do not find such a scenario in my Bible. What I do find there is that Jesus may come unexpectedly at any moment; I must look for him momentarily.

Finally, as an Adventist, I must keep constantly in view the judgment scene described by Jesus (Matt 25) to take place at his coming. This defines not only the issues of eternal destiny but also of present duty and final crisis. I do not know of any crisis which has not revolved about the issue of how we treat one another, especially the weakest and most vulnerable among us. As an Adventist trying to emulate the apostles James, John and Peter, I cannot identify with any who shift the focus to sectarian distinctives.

**David J. Entz** is an attorney practicing law in Madison, Tennessee. He has been active in various ministries independent of the Adventist denomination.



# Why I Am Still in *Love*

S

ome of my Adventist brothers and sisters know that I don't subscribe to all the traditional doctrines, but I have energetically and enthusiastically participated in church life and have worked to support the church. Therefore, on several occasions, they have asked me to explain this—why I believe differently but remain an involved member.

by Richard L. Bates

As I explain my experience, I find two themes. One thread is the development of my love of knowledge and my enlarging understanding of the nature of knowledge. The other strand is my growing appreciation that diversity is a blessing for humankind and for the church.

## LOVE AFFAIR WITH KNOWLEDGE

When I was 12, with no family religious background at all, my parents enrolled me in a nearby Seventh-day Adventist church school. I was an avid reader, so very soon I was reading *Messages to Young People* and other church books. The Investigative Judgment and standing before Jesus at his second coming was impressed on my mind. I had visions of standing before the judgment bar with all my family and friends gathered around while God ran a movie projector (the latest technology) which showed all of my secret sins. It was a sobering experience, but I soon adapted. Youth is so rich that it can endure an incredible amount of guilt. I enjoyed the church, especially Sabbath School, and learning. I volunteered to help teach a class in the primary division, and had such a good experience that eventually I have been involved in every Sabbath school department from cradle roll to the senior division. I finished church school, academy, and La Sierra College where I received a degree in physics.

1962 was the start of a renewal of theological emphasis in my life. I was a teacher in the La Sierra

Church Sabbath school and also the coordinator for the 13 class instructors, many of them faculty members of the college. Early Sabbath morning each week the teachers met for a pre-class session. It was a good experience, and all the teachers attended. One can only imagine how exciting it was with most college departments represented for an in-depth look at God.

I was disappointed when I realized that not all church members were as supportive of the writings of the church prophet, Ellen White, as I was. About 15 years ago a good friend of mine, an SDA psychiatrist, came up to me after class and told me how impressed he was with my imitation of her style and thinking.

This revelation caused me to reassess myself, and I decided that I would bring more balance into my study of God and his creation. I began by reading history by non-church authors and historians. I was introduced to William Durant's *The Story of Civilization* and numerous other works. An understanding of "infidel writers" developed, and I began to read a cross section of their works. It is interesting what a close and passionate experience these people had with God. In spite of the powerful religious suppression of their thinking, they still had the energy and courage to share their feelings with the world.

I was delighted to refine my understanding of knowledge. As I read, I noted that a look at church history shows that the scientist, along with the historian, is guilty of heresy. Neither allows for non-sensory evidence when examining nature and the past.

My experience illustrates an irony in the emphasis on the Adventist church being especially chosen by God, and our emphasis on education. We take the mind and the simple faith of a child and educate



Richard L. Bates has been active in the Adventist church since his baptism 49 years ago, serving on numerous school, church and conference committees and boards. He works as a physicist for the Navy, specializing in infrared detectors.

it upwardly in this world to heresy, and then are bewildered by the number of our children who do not continue in the church. It is at this point that I am tempted to ask: What should we expect to happen when we partake of the fruit of the tree of knowledge?

### LOVE AFFAIR WITH DIVERSITY

Those who feel they have been guided by God have naturally desired to control and guide the world to an ideal destiny. And of course, there have always been persons who see God differently. This has been true in Christianity and certainly is the history of Seventh-day Adventism. Paul pled with the early church to stop stabbing each other in the back over the nature of meat and the nature of vegetables. About 400 years later, Constantine, who integrated Christianity into the Roman Empire to help promote unity, had this to say about the churches' constant warring over the nature of the Trinity:

"Let the divine providence dissipate the horrid deeds of your quarrelsomeness, we [Christians] do nothing but what tends to strife and hatred, and, to speak plainly, the destruction of the human race."

Issues such as the nature of Christ and the nature of man were contested within Adventism from our beginning. The Adventist writers of the 19th century church reveal a plurality of viewpoints. Today the nature of woman is fiercely debated in our church. This is emblematic of our continuing the enduring Christian conflict.

The church has always felt the controversy between members with tender scruples and those with robust consciences, between members who excel in faith and those who insist on reason, between those who eschew the senses and those who can only be sensible. I'm not convinced the differences will ever be resolved unless God repents of the way he designed us. Until then we should be very careful! One must be wise when relating to such diversity.

I have never been quite sure which it is, the tender or the robust, who with God in perfect focus, are able to bring about "spiritual," faculty "cleansings" in such institutions as Andrews University, Southern College, or Pacific Union College.

A popular hope within Christianity is that God will recall our brains at the second coming, and that the chip responsible for differences of opinion will be neutralized.

I personally suspect "the kingdom of heaven" might imply that those with tender scruples will appreciate that God also created the robust conscience, and that the Creator enjoys and loves us

both because he loves creaturely freedom and plurality. Meanwhile, here in the church, hell is periodically meted out because we can't tolerate these differences of opinion about God. It is a remarkable commentary on the human spirit that in the midst of this tension anyone can stay within the fold.

Historically the 150 years of Adventism is a microcosm of the Christian world. We are not unique. Why should we be? God doesn't choose a special people in the world. A look at the Gospels shows God choosing the whole world.

### LOVE AFFAIR WITH ALL OF GOD'S CHILDREN

I now see clearly that we are in this world and of this world. We may even be as "catholic" as our dreaded apostate brothers and sisters, or as superstitious as our pagan, pumpkin-, pine tree-, bunny-worshipping neighbors. I am more excited about this than the mystical ideal of being the special chosen people.

The reason is that I have fallen in love with the people of this world. They are real, warm, and fellow creatures of God. If this is what Jesus meant when he ate with publicans and sinners, then I know what he meant when he kept repeating, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand." I am more interested in the next pagan I will meet than in seeing the cloud the size of a man's hand in the sky. I even go so far as to think that the experience I have with this pagan is the same as inviting God in to dine with me.

I am still a member because there are people within the church who are filled with the Spirit of God. They are friends. I can share the thoughts and feelings of my soul with them. When we compare our different understandings of God and the world, it is a heavenly experience.

It has been 49 years since I joined the church. There is no doctrine, no Bible verse, no Spirit of Prophecy quote, no tradition that is more important to me than the social community God gave us. The kingdom of heaven is among us.

There are angels in this community. They help protect me from a tyranny of others' ideals. They are not judgmental. They hold creaturely freedom sacred. They recognize that people are the apple of God's eye, and that God took a big bite from that enlightening fruit right along with Eve and me on that momentous day, long ago, at the dawning of Bible times. They understand that knowledge is a shared attribute that makes the creator and his creature complete, and allows for communion together in heaven. They are the reason I am still a member of the Seventh-day Adventist church.

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**I** am still a member because there are people within the church who are filled with the Spirit of God. They are friends.



# The Stages of

# FAITH

BY JOHN K. TESTERMAN

**L**ife can be viewed as a quest in which we seek to understand the world we find ourselves in, discover its meaning, and locate ourselves within the grand scheme of things. As we go about the lifelong business of constructing our intelligible worlds, we pass through different eras or stages in our life, in each of which we approach our meaning-making task quite differently. James Fowler called these life stages the “stages of faith”—your faith being the way you make sense of the world. After listening to the life stories of hundreds of people, Fowler believed he had found a consistent pattern of six major faith stages which occur in an invariant order. However, most people complete only three or four during their lifetime.

These stages have to do with the type of faith but not with the amount of faith. Profound faith in God or unbelief may occur at any stage. Faith stage determines what one considers to be the important questions, what counts as evidence, and how and with what cognitive tools one looks for answers. The stages can be thought of as the different lenses through which we view the world as we journey through life.

Faith stage transitions occur when, in response to new experiences or life crises, our old way of seeing the world collapses and a new faith structure is built. As seen in the stories in this issue of *Adventist Today*, these faith stage transitions are sometimes trau-

matic, accompanied by much painful soul-searching, and they can bring people into conflict with their faith communities.

## I. Magical World

The Stage 1 child of ages 2-6 perceives the world through the lens of imagination and intuition unrestrained by logic. The preschooler thus lives in a numinous, magical world in which anything is possible.

## II. Concrete Family

Stage 2 children of ages 6-12 see the world through the lens of story—a concrete, literal, narrative world of family and tribe, ritual and myth. They begin to identify with a faith community, which may be religiously, politically or culturally defined, and to locate themselves within its “Master Story”—the story that tells you who you are. The Adventist “Master Story” not only includes the Christian story of creation, fall and redemption, but continues with the story of the Millerite movement, the great disappointment of 1844, the heavenly sanctuary, Ellen White, and so on.

Stage 2 collapses when teenagers use their newfound power of abstract thought to deconstruct their previous concrete understanding of the world. If they are not provided with a Christian peer group and adult level religious teaching, they will now be at high risk for rejecting their religion as childish, and identifying instead with the surrounding secular culture.

## III. Faith Community

The teenager in Stage 3 sees the world through the lens of the peer community. We are socialized into our faith community, “catching” our values and ways of thinking unconsciously from our peer group and subculture. We are immersed in the thought system of our faith community like a fish that does not perceive the water in which it swims.



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Stage 3 usually continues as the adult faith stage of most people in our church and society. Once the culturally accepted ways of thinking become part of us, we tend not to question them, nor the authoritative sources from which they derive. At Stage 3 my identity is based on being part of a group with shared history, traditions and values. Without Stage 3 persons, denominations or cultures would have little cohesiveness or continuity. People may change denominations, however, if they can be convinced that the new group is more faithful to accepted authoritative sources, such as the Bible.

Group-based identity is also a cause of conflict. It is hard to deal calmly and rationally with issues which touch on one's identity. In the early 1980s, Desmond Ford, a prominent Adventist theologian, publicly questioned features of the Sanctuary doctrine. Although to many it was an obscure doctrine, it was an identity issue, part of our Master Story. The ensuing intense reaction, which nearly split the denomination, was a predictable response to a perceived attack on the Master Story. You can reinterpret the Master Story, even radically, but directly attacking it will provoke outrage. This is a homeostatic mechanism that protects the continuity of faith communities. Unfortunately, a lot of innocent people get hurt in the process of trying to maintain the continuity.

Adult Stage 3 Adventists, then, tend to be loyal and support the church and its beliefs and subcultural lifestyle practices. They may react strongly if they perceive any of these things as under attack, since their identity is tied to them. They form the majority and financially supportive backbone of our denomination, and without them it is doubtful that we could maintain such institutions as Andrews University.



## IV. Rational Constructs

If the traditional answers stop making sense, Stage 3 collapses. In some respects Stage 4 is a continuation of the rational examination of belief that begins during Stage 3. Now, however, not only individual beliefs, but the whole previously unquestioned traditional and authoritative bases of belief are called into radical account. One develops the capacity to step back from one's own faith heritage and examine it through the lens of reason, compare it to other faith traditions, throw out the parts that don't make sense, or even abandon it altogether. One's universe is now reconstructed along self-chosen rational lines, and one's religion (if retained) must, above all, make sense.

Usually people at Stage 4 have little interest in the marks of Adventist subcultural identity, because there is a moving away from group-based identity, as well as from dependence on external sources of authority. Thus Stage 4 Adventists are extremely irritated by the traditional Adventist habit of using quotations from Ellen White as "discussion stoppers."

As illustrated in many of the stories in this issue of *Adventist Today*, adult Adventists in transition to Stage 4 may experience deep disappointment and anger on finding that some of the beliefs they had based their lives on do not stand up to their investigation. They may nevertheless remain in the church if they can reinterpret their Adventist faith along reasonable lines

and find a supportive local church community with Stage 4 Adventist role models and tolerance of diversity. Leaders who insist on having 100 percent of the church agreeing with all 27 of the Adventist "fundamental beliefs" as a condition of retaining membership are essentially demanding that all Stage 4 Adventists leave the church. Members who happen to be passing through the Stage 4 transition but who hold highly visible positions in the denomination often become casualties, whereas less vulnerable individuals who are members of supportive local church communities may remain and thrive.



## V. Numinous Universe

Stage 4 collapses when we run up against the limits of rational thought and the search for certainty ends in failure and even despair. Stage 5, which may begin at mid-life or later, in some respects is similar to Stage 1. Seeing once more through the lens of the imagination and intuition, we again come to live in a numinous universe of mystery, wonder and paradox. The answer is not an explanation, so reason is no longer the primary tool with which we attempt to apprehend ultimate reality. Having taken authority into ourselves at Stage 4, we now give back to sacred symbol, story, tradition, liturgy and faith community the numinous power they enjoyed in our consciousness decades earlier. God, previously the target of much theological discussion, is experienced in a way that is not so neatly captured in a theological box. Without giving up or devaluing one's own religious heritage, there may be a new openness to learn from other faith traditions.



## VI. Selfless Service

Stage 6 faith is rare. Such individuals identify deeply with all of humanity, and therefore tend to spend themselves in service of worldwide issues of love, justice and brotherhood. Some possible examples are Mahatma Gandhi, Albert Schweitzer, and Mother Theresa.



## Coexistence

How are people at all these faith stages supposed to coexist in the same church? To those at any given stage, the next stage looks like loss of faith and the previous stage is repulsive. To people in Stage 3, Stage 4 sounds like giving away the store. To those in Stage 4, Stage 3 looks like unthinking traditionalism and Stage 5 like mystical mush. The problem is worsened by some Stage 3's who engage in witch hunting at the first scent of heresy, and Stage 4's who gleefully bait or ridicule their Stage 3 colleagues.

How do we provide for diversity without losing community? This is not an easy problem, and historically we Adventists have not done especially well at solving it. Many of the stories in this issue are testimony to our failings. There is, of course, no easy answer. But knowing about stages of faith can help us understand how tradition and continuity, as well as new ideas and diversity in the church, are inevitable and necessary. All of the stages are important and valid expressions of faith, and people in all stages have a right to serve and be served by the church.



# THE REAL REASON PEOPLE QUIT THE CHURCH

**L**ately the *Adventist Review* and *Ministry* magazines have addressed our church's "swinging back door." A growing chorus of voices say that people leave the church because it is "cold and uncaring." As a pastor for the last 25 years, who has visited hundreds of former and inactive members, I perceive a dangerous misconception: the majority of people who leave the church do not leave because the church is cold and uncaring. Rather, they do not want to make the self-discipline commitment to Christ that active membership demands.

I recognize that there are some former members who have been genuinely hurt by church members. But my personal experience is that genuine cases of coldness and unconcern are relatively few. In an informal survey I found that only 26 percent of former Adventists thought of the church as "critical" and only 9.9 percent thought of the church as "ignoring them." Although 36 percent is a significant number, I have found that when you learn the full story, often the "cold and critical" line of former and inactive members is only an excuse for self-justification.

Typically former members say, "The same old people always run the church. I wanted to be a deacon but they wouldn't let anyone new into their little clique." However, as I get to know the people and their story, I find that they had a problem with tobacco, alcohol, Sabbath work etc.

Or people say, "When you are down and out the church won't help you; they just kick you out." However, I often find that such people have chronic trouble (financial, emotional, or other) and that the church helped them several times, but when they refused to help themselves the church stopped carrying them.

Repeatedly, I have seen incredible outpourings of love and support from our churches for new members, youth and those in crisis. However, the members of our churches are themselves very busy,

by John R. Martin



**John Martin** has served as an Adventist pastor since 1970 in the Illinois and Rocky Mountain Conferences. His primary interest is evangelism, and over the years he has observed with concern that the hardest individuals to reach are former Adventists.

stressed people. They are struggling to make ends meet financially and to cope with their own problems. They love to help in ways that enable people to stand in Jesus' strength. However, it seems unreasonable to expect that they should become long-term care givers for years and years carrying a case load of people who have no personal commitment to the doctrines of the church, to personal, self-disciplined growth, or to the support of the local congregation.

My survey further revealed that 29 percent report that they have fond memories, only 16 percent report bad memories, 50 percent still consider themselves Adventists, and 71 percent describe their former church as supportive and friendly. This tells me that the "uncaring attitude" that I hear about in the *Adventist Review* and at the workers' meetings is not an accurate picture.

Those who say that the revolving back door is mostly the fault of the church claim that if the church took more interest in people they would stay. There is a grain of truth in here. As I have affirmed and nurtured former members, I have seen a good number return to relatively regular church attendance. However, in most cases they do not grow to the point where they become active in the church as a matter of principle. They become a perpetual "case load," and as soon as the level of nurture falls off—

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# BRANCH DAVIDIANS TODAY

by the editors

**T**he Branch Davidians of Waco, Texas, are down to a group of some 20 adherents who have taken de facto possession of the Mt. Carmel property, says Philipp Arnn, director of the Watchman Fellowship, an Arlington, Texas, organization that studies nontraditional faith groups. The Davidians, however, say they have between 50 and 100 adherents worldwide, according to Clive Doyle, a survivor of the fire that burned the Mt. Carmel compound to the ground two years ago. The local group calls itself the General Association of Branch Davidian Seventh-day Adventists, with an address in Axtell, Texas.

The Davidians' basic theology remains intact, including a belief that they are living in the 5th seal of the book of Revelation, according to Arnn. Doyle emphasizes that while the Davidians take prophetic symbols very seriously, they do not set times for events to happen. They look for the reappearance of their former leader David Koresh, who died in the conflagration, at the time of the "special resurrection" outlined by Ellen White, just prior to the return of Jesus. At the same time they expect all the other martyrs since Jesus' time to be likewise raised from the dead. In the meantime they have no prophet for a leader, but are waiting for someone else who may bear the credentials of a prophet, one through whom the Holy Spirit speaks.

Nine of their members are now in jail, some with long sentences, for accusations which Doyle says were cleared during their jury trial. One is a former Seventh-day Adventist pastor. Communication among those inside and outside the jail helps keep up the morale and theological rationale for the group, says Larry Guinn, pastor of the Waco Seventh-day Adventist church.

Marc Breault, a former Davidian now living in Australia, states that the propensity for reinterpreting prophetic time periods follows a precedent set by William Miller, whose prophecy that the Second Advent would occur in 1844 resulted in the Great Disappointment.

Beyond their penchant for interpreting prophetic passages, the Branch Davidians' primary legacy from Seventh-day Adventism was the Sabbath, dietary laws, and the language of "present truth." David Koresh would talk of "present truth" in recruiting members from Adventist institutions by claiming that God would give new truth through contemporary prophets in the last days of earth's history.

Koresh was perhaps honest in his own way, but he was a master manipulator and sociopath, according to Arnn, who is a leading authority on the Davidians. Arnn sees Koresh as a "basket case" who needed professional therapy when he was a member of the Tyler Adventist church in the late 1970s. Arnn says that Koresh caused a "massive upheaval" in the Tyler church, including Koresh's announcement to the local Adventist pastor that God had told him he should take the pastor's 14-year-old daughter to be his wife.

The strongest non-Waco faction of Branch Davidians is in Alabama, and it never accepted David Koresh as the legitimate leader.

The Branch Davidians split from the Shepherd's Rod group some 30 years ago, claiming that believers should reject the dead rod and join the living branch. Today the Shepherd's Rod, or Davidian Seventh-day Adventist Association, is headquartered in Exeter, Missouri. It is a parachurch organization with some 30 employees who are primarily involved in its publishing work, according to Jerial Bingham, vice president of the group. The Association claims to have 5,000 followers: 1,000 "full time supporters," perhaps 2-3,000 "periodic supporters," and a number of sympathizers. The great majority of followers—over 90 percent, says Bingham—are "closet" believers with membership in local Seventh-day Adventist organizations.

Many sympathizers with the Davidian Seventh-day Adventist Association view that group's founder, Victor Houteff, as a prophet because of the "prophet phenomenon" they inherited from Seventh-day Adventism, says Jerial Bingham. David Koresh, with his fanciful Biblical interpretations and his personal messianic claims, represents a tragic outcome of that perspective.

**T**hey look for the reappearance of their former leader David Koresh, who died in the conflagration, at the time of the "special resurrection" outlined by Ellen White, just prior to the return of Jesus.



# Understanding *David Koresh*

**A** year after David Koresh's holocaust in Waco, Texas, we still have more questions than answers. Perhaps we should look at Koresh from the perspective of phenomenology of religions. This may clarify the personal journeys of Koresh and his followers. In his spiritual journey, David Koresh moved, from a devoted, deeply religious boy who could pray all night, to a visionary charismatic, a militant, self-proclaimed messiah, willing to take on the U.S. government and die in defiance of its power.

Obtaining unbiased data on Koresh and his followers is difficult; the popular information disseminated by the popular media was emphatically contradicted by religious scholars and others who closely monitored the activities of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms and the FBI at the Waco site. These observers presented their viewpoints, along with testimony from a few survivors of the holocaust, on November 22, 1993, at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion held in Washington, D.C. One thing became certain: for some of the remnant of his followers, David Koresh was messianic, while to others he was demonic. How did a charismatic Christian leader like David Koresh provoke such widely divergent views of himself? Let's look at the data from the perspective of phenomenology of religions.

Rudolph Otto argues that a religious person experiences God through a unique state of mind. One's experience of God is underived. Religious consciousness results from a nonrational apprehension of God as a mystery, the ineffable, the absolute other, the "numinous." The encounter with the mystery produces extraordinary but ambivalent feelings: love and humility, but also fear or terror (see Isaiah 6:5). The ambivalence of religious feeling represents a kind of a divine-demonic polarity in the experience. Movement

by Joseph Greig



Joseph Greig holds a Ph.D. in Old Testament theology from the University of Edinburgh. He teaches religion, philosophy, and Hebrew at Andrews University. Born and raised in Wyoming, he keeps in touch with his western roots by raising a small flock of sheep.

toward the divine pole occurs when the encounter with the numinous, while causing fear, gives an appreciation of moral obligation and leads to an ethically and rationally structured religion. This encounter also brings the creature to an experience of God's love. Thus, love is assuaged fear, quenched wrath.

In the experience of the numinous there is something of the highest value which commands devotion and praise; but if the experience remains mere feeling, if it is not given a moral direction or rational structure, it tends to lead to fanaticism, to the demonic. The attraction of the fanatical in all forms of fundamentalism, with its control by fear and the negation of moral rationality, is evidence that within fundamentalism lurks the shadow of the demonic.

David Koresh appears to have been controlled by his nonrational experience of the numinous. He was unpredictable and irrational. He claimed that he took orders directly from God. His erratic and impetuous behavior fits well that of the religious fanatic.

Koresh claimed to be a messiah, but technically speaking, he was an antichrist. There are many similarities between Christ and antichrist. They both develop out of the same religious matrix; only somewhere along the way, one gets on the wrong path and reverses the journey. This would seem to be the case with David Koresh. Christ was declared sinless; Koresh proclaimed himself the chief of sinners and put his belief into practice. Christ was a pacifistic messiah, Koresh was the warrior messiah. This is not only a reversal of the earlier Shepherd's Rod's pacifist belief, but a reversion to the royal-messiah figure of Psalm 2. The military messiah was the archetype of Koresh's messianic understanding.

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# Adventists and the Waco Syndrome

**T**wo years later, we recall the weird, irrational apocalypticism of the Branch Davidians, the fanatical messiahship of David Koresh, and the bizarre events that began to unfold on February 28, 1993, at Mount Carmel Center near Waco, Texas. It is appropriate now for us to identify the underlying factors and the measures that might prevent a recurrence of this tragedy.

I believe the “Waco syndrome” is rooted in an irrational interpretation of the Bible that appeals to naive, uneducated, eccentric minds that resonate with sensational ideas and esoteric knowledge. One and all, Shepherd’s Rod and Davidian leaders have suffered under the additional delusion that they have a divine commission to directly fulfill the Bible format for last-day events.

Key Bible passages on which the Waco syndrome relied are the seven seals of Revelation 5:1 to 8:1 and the executioners with destroying weapons of Ezekiel 9. David Koresh claimed to be Christ incarnate, the “Lamb” of Revelation 5:6-9, who alone is “worthy....to open the seals,” that is, to direct their fulfillment in anticipation of “the great day” of divine “wrath” (6:17).

## A Matter of Interpretation

The prophet Ezekiel was “among the [Jewish] captives by the river of Chebar” (1:1) in Babylonia. He dates the message of Ezekiel 9 to the sixth year of his exile, about 591 B.C. “The elders of Judah were sitting before [him]” (8:1, NIV), and he was taken off in vision “to Jerusalem” and shown the “abominations that the house of Israel committeth here” (8:6). “The iniquity of the house of Israel and Judah,” he was told, was “exceeding great” (9:9). A “man clothed with linen” was commissioned to “go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that are be done in the midst thereof” (9:4). Six men with destroying weapons were instructed to follow him and to “smite” everyone who did not have the mark.

Ezekiel himself and the historical context explicitly apply this prophetic message to the people of Jerusalem in a particular historical situation, in 591 B.C. Neither here nor elsewhere in Scripture is there any indication that Ezekiel 9 anticipates any application of this passage beyond that time and place.



by Raymond Cottrell

Raymond Cottrell is a veteran Adventist leader and scholar. In addition to many extensive scholarly and administrative contributions, he has given more than 30 different presentations to local chapters of the Association of Adventist Forums.

The Waco Davidians, however, identify the Seventh-day Adventist Church as “Jerusalem.” Assuming that he was “the Lord,” David Koresh encouraged his followers to “sigh and groan over all the abominations” committed in the Seventh-day Adventist Church and to slay all who opposed them, hence the arsenal of “destroying weapons” assembled in the Mount Carmel Center, which led to the Federal raid on the compound.

On what basis did the Waco Davidians apply to the church today the vision of Ezekiel 9 and other passages of Scripture that referred explicitly and exclusively to ancient Israel in the long ago? They ignored what the Bible itself actually says, and read into its words a modern interpretation of their own devising.

## Reasons for This Interpretation

Davidian interpretation of the Bible is based on the proof text method, which pays little or no heed to the meaning a Bible writer intended his words to convey, as determined by its literary and historical context, and reads into them whatever meaning suits the fancy of the reader. The ultimate cause of the Waco syndrome is this defective, fatally flawed hermeneutic. It makes the Bible appear to say whatever a modern reader may happen to think it says or wants it to say. The historical method, which looks for the meaning the ancient inspired writer intended, has built-in safeguards against ever, even inadvertently, making this error.

Adventist exposition of the Bible has not been altogether free from this error, particularly in the exposition of apocalyptic prophecy. Most Davidians were formerly Adventists; Adventist tolerance of the proof text method over the years may, at least in part, be responsible for their use of the method. Some minds are predisposed to resonate with anything sensational, and Adventist apocalyptic exposition has sometimes seemed intended to appeal to such minds.

## Where Should We Go From Here?

Let us have the Christian grace and maturity to examine our biblical-theological infrastructure and our proclamation of the gospel objectively. The disaster in Waco summons us first to eliminate every vestige of proof text principles and procedures from our formulation of doctrine and our witness to the gospel, with special attention to our exposition of Bible prophecy. Following proof text principles has unwittingly involved the church in traumatic intramural doctrinal controversy, and has been responsible for much of the criticism fellow Christians of other faiths often aim at us.

Second, we should eliminate the sensational language and garish art we sometimes still use in our witness to Bible prophecy in relation to current events, which tend to attract minds that resonate with anything sensational and esoteric. Instead, let us emphasize gospel principles that alleviate the ills of society and

## Folkenberg Explains Remarks on Nurture

Recently, Robert Folkenberg, Adventist church president, posted comments on the CompuServe Adventist bulletin board to explain his remarks on church nurture. He had criticized nurture in a speech at the Walla Walla College Church, as reported by *Adventist Today* (January/February, 1995). After church members carried on a lively discussion of the *Adventist Today* report, posting their comments via Compuserve, Folkenberg came online to explain himself as follows:

Please, rest assured, I fully believe in and am committed to "nurture!" One cannot be a disciple or invite others to the joy of discipleship without it. However, "nurture," like so many other words, has a wax nose that can be pointed conveniently in any direction. It is so frustrating to see that in much of the "first world" the concept of "nurture" has become a substitution for witnessing. We've defined it to mean taking care of each other. It should be inevitable that, as a natural consequence of the conversion experience and our joy in Christ, our service and care for those in the family would know no bounds.

Nurturing would simply be a manifestation of love for one another. Further, the same motivation would drive us to share both the joy of salvation and the prophetic urgency of the second coming with those who do not "know that you have eternal life" (1 John 5:13). Sadly, it isn't always true.

It was this frustration that boiled over on that fateful Sabbath when I did say, "Nurture is a four letter word." Clearly, I was not denigrating true Christian nurture, but the superficial platitudes that justify inaction. Furthermore, I was in no way singling out the members of the Walla Walla Church. I was in no position to even have an opinion of the life and vision of that congregation.

In retrospect, I wish I'd been more careful. Being offensive is seldom necessary and rarely constructive. Obviously, the effect of my comment is evidence that I should have been wiser in making the point. A few days after the meeting in

question, when I heard the feedback, I called the pastor to try to clarify what I was attempting to say. I appreciate the opportunity to drop the explanation into the dialogue and hope it helps. I appreciate more than I can express those who withheld judgement and were compassionate in their comments. Remember, I'm just a man, doing the best I know how a task I didn't ask for. Only the Lord and His presence, forgiveness, and power will ever get us through, for it won't be because of infallible leaders.

## Nielsen Rates Lifestyle Magazine

by Albert Dittes

In a recent fund-raising letter, Dan Matthews, speaker-director of Faith for Today, exclaimed, "I get a warm feeling every time I think of the millions of dollars NBC spends trying to attract viewers away from *Lifestyle Magazine* so they can gain and hold the #1 rating in New York. (They often tie us now in the ratings.)"

That sounds impressive! What do these figures mean?

Donna Webb, of the *Lifestyle Magazine* staff, said the program runs 7 a.m. Sunday on WABC-TV in New York City and has ranked number one in the monthly Nielsen ratings.

"These monthly surveys measure the most households watching at that time," Webb says, drawing a distinction between the monthly surveys and the three-time-a-year "sweeps." "We are usually not considered number one in the sweeps."

Two other programs *Lifestyle Magazine* competes against are NBC's *Sunday Today* and *The Hour of Power* with Robert Schuler.

A check with WABC-TV in New York verified that *Lifestyle Magazine* airs 7 a.m. Sundays and enjoys a number one rating. "Most of the time it has been either number one or tied," said Art Moore, director of programming for WABC. "It wasn't number one in January. The NBC *Sunday Today* show beat them then."

WABC-TV does not promote *Lifestyle*

but invests its advertising dollars in shows like *Oprah*, *NBC Nightly News* and *Primetime*.

The Greater New York metropolitan area has 6,716,000 households, according to Pat Ligouri, research director at WABC-TV.

Moore said that 70,000 households watch *Lifestyle Magazine*, with 2.5 persons per household. That adds up to a viewing audience of 175,000 people. Of this early Sunday morning audience, 75 percent consists of women 50 years old or older, 97 percent of whom do not work outside the home. Of the total audience that time of day, 77 percent is older than 35 years of age.

## Church Finds Aids Challenge in Africa

In America, there is a growing concern about AIDS, and rightly so: 1 in 200 people in the U.S. are HIV positive. But it is hard for Americans to appreciate the magnitude of the AIDS epidemic elsewhere when we compare our .5 percent infection rate to figures of 35-70 percent in sub-Saharan Africa.

Nine million individuals are HIV-infected in sub-Saharan Africa; 300,000 are known to have died of AIDS, and estimates place this figure closer to 500,000. In central Africa, the HIV infection rate runs 30-35 percent, with the percentage for young adults, college graduates, soldiers, and policemen running between 50 and 70 percent. In East Africa, the rates are also high. In Malawi, for example, 20-25 percent of women attending prenatal screening are HIV positive.

The AIDS epidemic has claimed the parents of more than two million African children, and estimates are that ten million children will be orphaned by AIDS by the year 2000. Currently, about 500,000 children are HIV-infected; it is expected that this figure will quadruple in the next five years.

AIDS is affecting Adventist Africans as well. Many African SDAs are converts, coming from high-risk lifestyles. According to Harvey Elder, MD, PhD, a Loma Linda specialist in infectious dis-

eases, "A fair number of ministerial students, as many as 20-25 percent, are HIV-infected due to pre-conversion exposure. But they will not become symptomatic until they have graduated and taken on a church of their own." Fortunately, says Dr. Elder, "There is increasing interest and determination on the part of the church to move forward in meeting the unique challenges presented by AIDS." Elder has served as on-site consultant to several African AIDS programs.

## Truth and Financial Consequences

**T**he Worldwide Church of God, with roots in Seventh-day Adventism, recently recanted three of its fundamental beliefs. This was due to further Bible study and theological reflection by its current leadership. The seventh-day Sabbath, tithing and a unique view of the Holy Spirit have been given up. The 90,000-member church is in upheaval because its Pastor General Joseph Tkach Sr. announced last December that Sabbath no longer must be observed on Saturday, and tithing is not mandatory. Revenues since the first of the year have plunged over 30 percent, and the denomination is facing possible bankruptcy. Due largely to doctrinal changes, some 10,000 members have dropped out over the last five years. Although church officials put membership at 92,000, outside sources believe membership is closer to 60,000 worldwide.

Leaders of this denomination, which is based in Pasadena, California, are reviewing total operations of the church. Already the church is halting its \$2.5 million subsidy to its prestigious concert series, adored by thousands of Southern California music lovers. It has laid off 15 percent of its headquarters staff. Circulation of the church's *Plain Truth* magazine, mailed to some 1.3 million persons, will be cut to one million or less. Tkach's private jet and limousine will be sold, and ministers' salaries will likely be cut. The *Los Angeles Times*, the source for much of the information reported here, states that the denomination's prime 56-acre headquarters in Pasadena is likely to be sold.


The Worldwide Church of God, founded by the late Herbert W. Armstrong in 1934, possesses a connection to the Seventh-day Adventist church. It goes back to the president and secretary of the Iowa conference, Elders B.F. Snook and W.H. Brinkhoff, who in the 1860's left the church primarily because of disbelief in Ellen White's prophetic gift and disagreement over church organization. The Church of God (Adventist) Sabbatarian that they began never achieved a membership larger than about 3,000. This small denomination was the immediate precursor to the Worldwide Church of God.

The reason for the shocking doctrinal changes announced by Worldwide Church of God leadership was continued study of religion by key young leaders. The denomination has long been secretive about its operations and insular in its theological development. However, several administrative aides attended Azusa Pacific University, a conservative Wesleyan institution a few miles from Pasadena. In the course of their studies they became convinced that their denomination's position on the Sabbath and mandatory tithing were not doctrinally sound. They convinced the elder churchman Joseph Tkach Sr. of their newfound perspective, claims Phillip Arnn of the Watchman Fellowship that tracks nontraditional religious groups, and Tkach proceeded to announce the doctrinal shifts to the church.

The changes were introduced in a precipitous and unpastoral fashion, say some outside sources. But Tom Lapacka, director of church relations at the Pasadena headquarters, is quoted by the *Los Angeles Times* as saying, "I'm very proud to be a part of a church that will look at the Bible and say,

'This is how we read it and we're going to make these changes, regardless of the cost to us as an institution.'" Such doctrinal turnarounds are in the Adventist tradition, given the sudden shifts early Adventists made on issues such as the timing of Sabbath observance.

Today the 8-million-member Seventh-day Adventist denomination approaches its distinctive doctrines and the question of finances quite differently. One church official says that if Seventh-day Adventism is to make financial headway, it must loyally proclaim its time-honored beliefs. James Cress, head of the Seventh-day Adventist ministerial association, writes in the February 1995 issue of *Ministry* that Adventist pastors' salaries have fallen 40.3 percent in purchasing power since 1960. And if the pastors desire a raise, they must "proclaim unmistakable doctrinal loyalty. This will build confidence in your own ministry among your members and will deny the charge of dissidents that our pulpits have lost the distinctive Adventist message."

Perhaps, in making the change, the Worldwide Church of God leadership should have slowly educated their small membership in broader views, rather than issuing a sudden doctrinal fiat. In the Adventist church, with 8 million members, leaders must run the denomination in a financially responsible manner. Also, they have a pastoral responsibility to the vast majority of members who lack doctrinal sophistication, so our leaders cannot, of course, take a 90-degree turn as did the WWCG leaders. But we also must maintain our rich tradition of espousing progressive revelation and present truth. 

## Negative Mail on Women's Ordination

**R**obert Folkenberg, president of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, and Al McClure, president of the North American Division, have recently received letters on the issue of women's ordination—nearly 100 percent of them negative, according to a GC staff person. If you desire to register your view, write to these leaders at the church headquarters, 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904.—editors

## WOMEN IN THE CHURCH

As to Holmes' Tip of the Iceberg: There lies a tremendous need for a second look by those who denigrate women's place in the church. In Galatians 3:28 is...the fact...that there is no room for male and female...distinction. Why? We are one in Jesus. ...This is the Christian position—clear, and positive and sweeping.... The Apostle Peter's speech at Pentecost included... "Your sons and daughters shall prophesy" (Acts 3:28). You will note that "daughters" are included....

But there is a turnabout in Paul. He now enjoins something else. "Women must be quiet at the gatherings of the church. They are not allowed to speak ... as the Law enjoins."

It is here that Paul appeals to the law (Torah) for authority... He falls into the very thing he told the Galatians they were doing... Every time Paul tried to put woman into a subordinate position, he appealed to the Old Testament (Torah) as his authority—not Jesus! Paul says of the woman, "Man was not made from woman, but woman from man, and man was not created for woman but woman for man" (1 Cor 11:8,9, Weymouth). Here Paul turns right back to the creation...not the new creation in Jesus...but to the old covenant. Paul slipped a cog and thus...caused much confusion. But we know that he says that sometimes he was not inspired—he was speaking on his own...

**William (Bill) Ritz**  
**Walla Walla, Washington**

Having watched the development of this ordination issue since the early 80s, I am convinced of a strong bias in its favor, not only with your publication, but generally in California and some eastern areas. Dr. Holmes' book is good. I have read it carefully. While I am not "dyed in the wool" against ordination of women, I am forced to admit that this divisive issue has not been dealt with fairly, especially in church publications....

The ordination issue is not opposed because of sexual exclusion or inclusion, but because, after a full decade, no acceptable scriptural reasons for such a move have been presented....

Admittedly, this issue threatens to divide us as a church. We have labored in lands where it will never be accepted, which means that if some areas ordain women, the world church will be weakened by separation....

The recent Fall Council voted to bring the issue back to the next GC, requesting just such a move; let those divisions which want to ordain women do so. The assumption is that the NAD has dealt with the issue, and that the membership here is in favor of such an action. How tragic! When have our brethren of NAD ever voted in favor of ordaining women? We have the technology to carry out such a grass roots vote, but church politics will doubtless forestall any such move!

I am a retired missionary. I have always endeavored to loyally support the Church, and I will support the actions taken now, but I feel saddened to see the direction the leaders are taking us lately.

**Earl G. Meyer**  
**Oakhurst, California**

Only one governing principle should guide all discussions on church matters: What does the Bible say on this? Any other consideration—economic, social, or political—should be ignored. The Bible is clearly against the ordination of women. Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, made it very plain, no women should speak in church.... That we are even considering the ordination of women reveals how far from biblical truth our church has strayed as the result of a long series of compromises.

The first great compromise with truth was when we went against the plain word of Scripture and condemned slavery. The Bible does not condemn slavery (Lev 25:44-46). In fact, it specifically endorses the role of the slave. The whole book of Philemon in the New Testament supports slavery. The cause of those advocating the ordination of

women in our church began many years ago when the plain word of Scripture was ignored. "For they have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind" (Hosea 8:7).

**James Hilton**  
**Loma Linda, California**

Dr. Ray Holmes says that ordaining women to the ministry would mean "a departure from full biblical authority" ...He seriously misunderstands and misstates the issues in the church's discussion of women's ordination. Dr. Holmes apparently believes that unless we follow the letter of every scriptural command, we abandon "full biblical authority." If so, SDAs gave up that authority long ago. We don't, for example, exclude new mothers from worship (and double the exclusion time for those who had girls), despite the counsel of Leviticus 12... We don't... stone Sabbath breakers to death (Num 15:35)... Our congregations don't stone disobedient sons, as Deuteronomy 21:18-21 commands.

Or, turning to Paul..., should we prohibit women from praying with uncovered heads, on the basis of 1 Corinthians 11:5, 13? Should we stop having female Sabbath School superintendents, and forbid women to ask questions in Sabbath School classes, rather than violate the "revelation of God" in 1 Corinthians 14:34, 35? Shall we stand on the "full authority" of 1 Timothy 2:9 by casting out any woman who braids her hair, in defiance of divine counsel?...

I favor ordaining women because of Scripture, not in spite of it. ...Paul said many different things about women's role in the church. To oppose ordaining women, Dr. Holmes must develop some explanation of Galatians 3:28, of 1 Corinthians 11:5's provision for women to prophesy, of Paul's willingness to have Priscilla as well as Aquila teach him (which contradicts his statements to Timothy), of Paul's naming of Phoebe as a deacon and of the feminine Junias as "prominent among the apostles" in Romans 16 (NRSV). He must explain why New Testament acceptance of slavery is not binding on the modern church

(or accuse Ellen White of disdaining "full biblical authority").... Opponents of women's ordination have to do at least as much "explaining" of Biblical material as we proponents.

That's why this is not a debate about Biblical authority. I, like Dr. Holmes, accept the Bible as "a revelation from God in all its parts." I seek to interpret all of those parts by recognizing openly the differences in time, place, personality and circumstance,...and I seek the ...unity created by the eternal ...principles behind the texts'... surface dissimilarities....

"Theological pluralism," Dr. Holmes asserts, "is essential if the interpretation of the Bible allowing ordination to women is to be accepted by the church." He knows, however, that many Adventists with great skills in Biblical interpretation already favor ordaining women. "Theological pluralism" is here—Dr. Holmes is as much a part of it as I am! In fact, such pluralism is also "essential"...because many SDAs find current church practice unscriptural and morally wrong.... Pluralism has been here since Adventism (or, for that matter, Christianity) began, and the Church... has advanced wonderfully. God seems better able to deal with pluralism than some of his faithful children are....

**Darrell Holtz**  
Overland Park, Kansas

## CREATION ARTICLES

In his search for "interpretation of evidence, scientific or scriptural, Dr. Webster (November/December 1994) seems to have accepted several assumptions that are probably invalid. He assumes, for instance, that Genesis 1 is a more accurate description of Earth's origin than Genesis 2, which gives a completely different story. Genesis 2 states that God planted things and that the man and the woman were created at different times with enough time between for Adam to name all the animals, realize other animals had companions which

he did not, and become lonesome. That could take weeks, months, or even years.

Especially interesting is Genesis 2:5, which seems to say that the record applies only to the garden, not to the world as a whole. God made it clear in his speech on Mount Sinai and his subsequent writing on the tablets that he did something special in six days, and it is reasonable to assume that He did it about 6,000 years ago; but considering Genesis 2, it is not at all clear what it was that he did....

[Webster] also makes the unwarranted assumption that "death, of human and all other life forms, [is due] to the sin of Adam." ....Apparently he believes the "evil" introduced by Adam somehow altered the natural life cycle of animals (and perhaps some plants).... Most animals and even some plants are designed to survive on other animals. Anteaters, woodpeckers, sharks (all fish, for that matter), vultures, and hyenas, for instance, were obviously designed to eat nothing else. They were not "evil" when God created them; why should we think of their activity as "evil" today? ...Only humans were given the tree of life. Its very existence is proof that man did not possess inherent immortality....

Theologians who have little scientific knowledge have made many strange assumptions....

When seeking answers to scientific questions, it is as foolish to rely on the religious speculations of sages from past millenniums as it is to rely on Aristotle or Archimedes or even da Vinci for engineering data.

I appreciate Dr. Webster's reading of Proverbs 3:5-7, which speaks against trusting our own understanding, but there are other texts which specifically challenge us to learn and become wise (2 Tim 2:15, Isa 1:18, Matt 10:16).

...Texts indicate we humans are expected to be smart enough and wise enough to rule and judge the world (Gen 1:26,28; 1 Cor 6:2; Heb 2:6-8; Rev 20:6).

There needs to be balance in our thinking. It is all right to make assumptions (or hypotheses or postulates or theories), but when a theory is not sup-

ported by some source of information, it is time to abandon the concept....

**Robert Lee**  
Altamonte Springs, Florida

I found greater agreement with Clyde Webster than with Ervin Taylor (November/December, 1994).... The essence of the biblical record and the Christian religion is that God has involved himself with every phase of existence both celestial and terrestrial. I cannot agree with Taylor that "It was only with the emergence of Homo sapiens that God was finally able to discuss the issues of 'freedom,' 'truth' and 'love' with creatures that could now 'think God's thoughts after him.'" My God did not "botch" his job of creation. The only "mistake" he may have made in creating man was to give him "free will" with the power to think and choose, which led to the wrong choice, followed by degeneration rather than evolution!

Taylor suggests that "Some church administrators, with training in areas other than theology and science, tend to ignore the views of our best-trained scholars and scientists." Probably the majority of our "church administrators" have at least been dealing with theological issues (though perhaps many are not academic theologians). Since the concept of origins has important religious overtones, would not those who deal with the theological issues of the church be as well qualified to voice opinions on this subject as, say, an "anthropologist," since either way more faith is involved than evidence?

...I resent the insinuation that "thoughtful people" must move outside of what has been called a "traditional understanding" of origins, to paraphrase Taylor's parting statement! An elitist attitude is inappropriate for the proponents of either side.

**Neil W. Rowland, Ph.D.,**  
Professor Emeritus, Biology  
Union College, Nebraska

## Letters to the Editor

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## Understanding David Koresh

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 16

The Old Testament has two major messianic paradigms: One is the military messiah founded on kingship. In Psalm 2, this figure is proclaimed the begotten son of God and promised victory over his enemies. He would dash them to pieces and subdue them with a rod of iron. The other messianic figure is the suffering servant of Isaiah 42. Isaiah speaks of the messiah in whom God takes delight, or with whom God is well pleased.

The military messiah was the one expected by the leaders of the Jews during the time of Christ; but it was the suffering messiah paradigm by which Jesus understood his role. The suffering servant character of the messiah is clearly evident in Mark 1:11. At his baptism (anointing) Jesus was called God's beloved son, an expression taken from Psalm 2. But the military traits are rejected, and the response of God to the suffering servant of Isaiah 42 is added:

"In whom I am well pleased."

These two messianic expectations grow out of different religious perceptions developed during Israel's history. The observation "love is quenched wrath" expresses a change of attitude, from the terror of the numinous projected as vengeance on enemies, to the experience of God as compassionate and loving. The divine attributes of wrath and love stand in tension in the Bible, as do the characteristics of good and evil, the divine and the demonic, God and Satan. Shifting the responsibility for King David's census-taking of Israel from the Lord to Satan (2 Sam 24:1 and 1 Chron 21:1) is not only an example of this tension, but shows how the tension is handled theologically for the needs of the hour. The chronicler is theologically critical of Israel's experience with God through the exercise of what I have called moral rationality.

As a religious leader David Koresh failed to apply moral rationality to his religious experiences and beliefs. This is not to say that he was not a spiritual

man, but that his experience of the divine remained essentially nonrational and controlled mainly by feeling, and thus gravitated to the demonic. The problem is not that he understood himself to be the son of God; a central feature of deep mysticism is a merging with the divine until personal identity is lost. The problem comes when one experiences the fear, wrath and glory of God and then appropriates their demonic backwash, imposing one's demonic will on others.

This seems to have happened to David Koresh and earlier to charismatic leader Jim Jones. They were drawn to the demonic side of their religious experience. It was not so much love that fascinated them, but wrath. Those who tested Koresh's teachings and actions by some type of moral rationality eventually left the group; those who were entranced by the charismatic power and authority of the prophet remained faithful to his demonic manifestation. The result was a fiery death.

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## Real Reason People Quit the Church

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8

the nurturing pastor moves, their spiritual guardian leaves, etc.—they are right back where they started.

Thirty-five percent report that they gradually abandoned the lifestyle, and 52 percent report that they just got out of the habit of attending church. Evidently, 87 percent of former and inactive members had such a low level of commitment to Christ that other things easily took precedence over church involvement. Most folk I have met do not think of themselves as

"former" or "inactive" members (50 percent said that they still consider themselves Adventists). Only 35 percent say religion plays no part in their life now and only 3 percent indicate that they are connected to another denomination.

In my experience, most former and inactive members consider an active commitment to the church an important option that they plan to choose someday but at the present it doesn't fit their priorities. The real reason why most people backslide is that they are unwilling to make the requirements of God their top priority in life—they lack a real conversion.

My appeal to the church is to focus on saving others outside the church and to inspire dedicated self-disciplining commitment among those inside. Let's not take so seriously those who piously claim that the reason the back door swings is totally our fault. Let us remember that even in Jesus' day when the cause of God required commitment and dedication so many people went out through the back door that Jesus said to the few that were left, "Will ye also go away?"

Let's let the dead (those who can see only the faults in the church) bury the dead (those who look only for nurture).

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## Coming Back to Family

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7

thinking and acting like my siblings, I can belong to the family of God without believing and behaving exactly like my spiritual sisters and brothers.

Because of my commitment to God, I can be committed, now, to the family of

God—the family of all Christians, and again to my "home" denomination, the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Although I still find pressure to conform, freedom in Christ liberates me from both the fear of non-conforming and the need to rebel.

I see myself as one of many seeking truth. All of us are becoming more our

individual selves within community as we grow more fully into our relationship with God. My church family has been a source of deep hurt and deep love. Because I am a daughter of God, I can be content within the family of God and offer my siblings forgiveness, encouragement, and love.

# Across a Century of Centuries

*The sanctuary darkens as I await the beginning of a special vespers. This is Easter weekend and in these moments I reflect upon the God who suffers and dies and lives again. But tonight is different. Tonight I have come to observe a dramatization of the Seder, the ancient Hebrew celebration of the Passover. As it begins, I turn my attention to the players in the front. These are familiar faces. Playing the father is one of my husband's colleagues. Playing the mother is a deep-heart friend of mine, and those playing the children, casting knowing looks in my direction, are my own little children. I am reminded that this is our moment of time, but the traditional words they speak are borrowed from the moments of millions of celebrants across a century of centuries. The boundaries between stories are eroded. I am awash with the pain, the hopefulness, the glory of this story we call Life.*

**I** am a slave in a far country. I am weary of the effort of slavery—my arms heavy and numb, my feet dragging disconsolately in the sand. Joseph is forgotten. My community has broken apart; conventional religious language is empty for me. I am lost from the promises of deliverance. Life stretches on endlessly, timelessly forward. I am not on my way anywhere. There is no destination.

And then... A Moses appears. A stammering, outrageous Moses. A loud, crude, hairy, uncompromising midwife of deliverance. What kind of God sends such as Moses?

"I have met the I AM. I AM has sent for you."

I have been called back into life. I exist. I do not know where I am going. But my existence is enough. I can come forth. I do not have to remain tightly bound in slavery. Through calamity and darkness I step out, in the Presence of a Fire that burns into the darkness.

The delivery is full of pain, the newborn coming forth gasping and screaming for breath..."I am too old for these birthings. Why are these creations so uncontrolled and messy?"

The newborn's face is pressed into tight, tense folds, eyes tightly shut against this suddenness of new life, its uncompromising confrontations, its challenges. But the delivery is completed. Suddenly there is color and shape and depth in the world—freedom born out of slavery.

Had God taken us from Egypt,  
Borne from slavery  
Into freedom,

by Eileen Greenwalt

**T**he delivery is full of pain, the newborn coming forth gasping and screaming for breath... "I am too old for these birthings."

Eileen Greenwalt is a speech therapist in Washington State. She works in the public school district teaching communicatively challenged children.

Had she done this, only this,  
For this alone  
We would be grateful.

The newly-born awakes in a wilderness—to 40 years in the wilderness. What does it mean—40 years? Half a lifetime. Were we not called to live? But are we living a life in the midst of this wandering faith? Or are we to faithfully wait for something else? Is this still the journey or this...the destination? Or is this wild, freed life both journey and destination?

And then, the body of God appears. It is the body of suffering.

Sit in the Presence of the Fire and share in the suffering. This is the price of living free in the wilderness. Hear the voice of suffering say, "Abba, Abba, if it be thy will, let this part be omitted. Spare me, spare me this. I have lived a life with miracles. Why are there no miracles for me this night? This is my cup in remembrance of the Passover? And I am to be left in this wilderness?"

"Abba, Abba, why is the dying so much a part of living? Why hast thou forsaken me?"

I AM, lost in the wilderness, crying a dark epiphany, living out the dark truth of human existence.

And now, even God needs to rest from the agony of being human. The Flaming Fire of the wilderness goes out. Even the voice of God is silenced in grief. A Sabbath of rest. A stillness of night into day and night again.

And in the fullness of time, life returns as the morning light, slowly ebbing into the Body Broken. Ebbing this brokenness into Being again. Life. Forever the same and forever changed.

Had God offered us the Sabbath,  
Offered rest  
Through nights of sadness,  
Had He done this, only this,  
For this alone  
We would be grateful.

*As I look toward the front of the sanctuary, I see their eyes shining with their part in the story, these children. It is their story, and my story. On the wings of tradition we awake as newly borne and find ourselves connected to all the centuries of generations in memories of a shared human existence, where suffering and death coexist with rebirth and renewal.*

## Financial Irregularities and Sexual Misconduct Charged

**O**n February 22 David D. Dennis, former General Conference auditor, filed papers in a Maryland circuit court charging Adventist church leaders Robert Folkenberg, Alfred McClure and others with misuse of church funds. For 19 years Dennis served as director of the General Conference Auditing Service but was terminated December 29, 1994, on what he claims were trumped-up allegations of sexual misconduct designed to prevent him and his staff from disclosing financial irregularities.

Maryland state law requires those named in the suit to file a reply within 30 days, but provides for an extension of time under extenuating circumstances. Church leaders have claimed such circumstances, asked for the extension, and have a number of attorneys working on the case. When the church files its reply, the news media, including *Adventist Today*, will be able to report both Dennis' charge and the church's legal response.

## Creationism: A Hot Issue in Leadership Circles

**C**reationism, an issue that looms as potentially divisive in Adventism, was the focus of discussion at two recent meetings of church leaders. The board of the Geological Research Institute took a big step from apologetics toward dialogue, and the Board of Higher Education voted to respond to the fact that a majority of the church's science professors do not accept the denomination's traditional belief on creation. This was shown by a recent *Adventist Today* poll. The meetings were part of the annual set of sessions held at

Loma Linda in February. The GRI board asked the Institute staff to make plans for genuine dialogue on interpretation of the Genesis account of creation.

The board, chaired by Calvin Rock, a General Conference vice president, voted that study be given by the director in consultation with the chairman, to a modification of the GRI mission statement. This would expand GRI's role so that it can initiate dialogue through formal and informal meetings with Adventist science teachers who are struggling to understand the church's interpretation of Genesis 1-11. Further, the Board recommends that this modification be completed as soon as possible, circulated to the board, and voted by telephone conferencing rather than waiting until the next scheduled GRI board meeting. Thomas Mostert, president of the Pacific Union, formulated the voted motion.

The issue of creationism arose as part of the annual report presented by James Gibson, who recently replaced the retired Ariel Roth as director. Gibson stated that questions are increasingly raised in Adventist academic circles about the Genesis account of creation. A board member related that during the 90 minutes of discussion by board members, some dwelt on the need to maintain church belief and for discipline of the erring; this view was primarily advocated by men from the church headquarters. Others questioned the appropriateness of GRI staff members being expected to serve merely as apologists. This concern was voiced by science professors and other church leaders on the board.

"This action of the GRI board is more in line with the original intent of those who started GRI, envisioning the institute as engaged in genuine study and dialogue with science teachers," stated Richard Hammill, who led in the formation of GRI in 1957 and subsequently served as president of Andrews University and a vice president of the world church.

In another meeting, held only a few days later, the denomination's college and university presidents in the U.S. were ques-

tioned about the beliefs of their science faculty. It has been common knowledge for some time that a diversity of views on divine creation exists, but evidently the explicit views revealed in an *Adventist Today* poll (November/December, 1994) caused a number of members to complain to church leaders.

The issue of creationism arose in a Board of Higher Education meeting, but was postponed for full discussion at a special session of the presidents held several hours later in the day. Robert Folkenberg, president of the General Conference, and Humberto Rasi, director of the GC's Education Department, attended the meeting, expressing dismay that many science professors deviate from the traditional thinking of the church. Discussion pursued two different issues. The first was public relations—how would knowledge of diverse views of science teachers affect some conservative parents' decision to send their children to Adventist colleges? The second issue was the truth-value of various positions held. One college president who approached the discussion in a theological manner was admonished by another president to be more "pragmatic."

After considerable discussion, the group agreed that the college presidents should take the lead in dealing with their science faculties. Various ideas were broached: for example, a representative science faculty member could be interviewed for the general church paper, or a group of science faculty members could recommend steps the church might take for membership education on the interface of science and religion. The idea that science teachers could be required to sign a statement affirming their allegiance to a particular belief was discussed but not favored by most presidents. One of three college presidents contacted for this report stated that in line with academic freedom he would like to see the science teachers confer among themselves and come up with a report that would clarify the issues and give reasons for positions held.

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