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# NOTES from the editor

## True Adventism

■ JOHN MCLARTY

adventists have specialized in what made us different. The value of this separatism is the freedom it has given us to explore distinctive themes and practices outside the Christian mainstream. It allowed us to bluntly challenge the dualism of classical theology and advocate alternative views on death, hell and the soul. It emboldened us to reject 1700 years of Christian argument and habit in regard to Sabbath. It allowed us to bring a concern for health back into the religious realm and to correct some of the extremes of Reformation reaction against Catholic dogma. But our separatism also fostered a hypercritical spirit. We separated not only from Catholics and Protestants (The Beast and Babylon), we separated from each other. We have been a fractious bunch.

Every organism has boundaries—a skin, an exoskeleton, cell membrane. And the Church is an organism. It has boundaries. But those who specialize in the boundaries are often the ecclesiastical equivalent of bird watchers who can match up living birds with pictures in a book, but who know almost nothing about avian physiology, genetics, reproduction or habitat. They really don't know birds. You gain far more insight when you probe beneath the skin and examine organ systems, cell structure and DNA, and look outward to learn what environments promote the birds' well-being.

Red feathers are not the essence of being a cardinal. And some of the most distinctive elements of Adventism have little to do with the essence of Adventism. Belief in the significance of 1844 is an ineradicable part of our history, but it is silly to continue to insist that the essence of Adventism is absolute confidence in a secular historian's claim that Artaxerxes issued a particular decree in 457 B.C. Almost as silly is the insistence that the distinction between jewelry that touches the skin and jewelry that touches only fabric stands at the core of our faith.

What is the DNA of Adventism? What is in our nucleus? You'll

probably hear different answers at University Church in Loma Linda than in Muskogee SDA Church. You'll receive widely divergent answers from "Historic Adventists," friends of Graham Maxwell, Evangelical Adventists, disciples of Doug Bachelor or fans of Morris Venden. But every one of these groups is genuinely Adventist. Each is the development of some fragment of the Adventist DNA.

I dissent in part from each of them, and the differences matter. But I believe there is a vital center that connects us. No one theological camp is coterminous with that center, but nearly all overlap it considerably. It is this center that is "True Adventism."

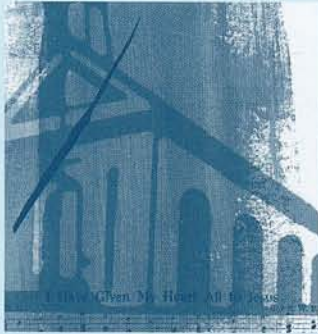
True Adventism is not the Sanctuary doctrine or Ellen White, a distinctive diet or costume, a particular interpretation of Revelation or Genesis or a specific form of organization. These are connected with True Adventism in various ways but do not define it.

True Adventism refers to: 1. An understanding of God and the universe. 2. An approach to reading the Bible. 3. A way of living and cultivating spiritual life. 4. A particular community. In all of these areas, Adventists share much with other Christians, (and with many non-Christians as well). Our uniqueness comes from the fact that we are not merely a collocation of weird persons and unique ideas, but we are a community, an organism, a network of friendships and institutions with a particular history.

Adventists emphasize God's love and his rationality. The model of Ellen White helps me make sense of the interaction of the human and the divine in the creation of sacred writings. Experience with the Adventist lifestyle (Sabbath, diet, dress and all) demonstrates its value. And beyond words is the wealth that

comes through friends, both my contemporaries and the company of saints across the millennia who through writing have shared themselves and their vision of God. This is the essence of True Adventism.





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# adventist today

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**adventist today** reports on contemporary issues of importance to Adventist church members. Following basic principles of ethics and canons of journalism, this publication strives for fairness, candor and good taste. Unsolicited submissions are encouraged. Payment is competitive. Send a self-addressed, stamped envelope for writer's guidelines. Annual subscriptions \$29.50 (\$50/2years) for individuals \$18 for students \$40 for institutions (Payment by check or credit card. Add \$10 for address outside North America.) Voice | (800) 236-3641 or (909) 785-1295 Fax | (909) 785-1595 E-mail | atoday@atoday.com Web site | www.atoday.com

**adventist today** (ISSN 1079-5499) is published bimonthly for \$29.50 per year (\$18 for students, \$40 for institutions) by Adventist Today Foundation, Calkins Hall 225 La Sierra University, Riverside, CA 92515. Periodical postage paid at Riverside, California and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Adventist Today, Box 8026 Riverside, CA 92515-8026. Copyright © 2001 by **adventist today** Foundation, a nonprofit organization dedicated to fostering open dialogue in the Adventist community.

## Government and Compassion

I was troubled by the article "Compassion Practiced vs. Compassion Preached" by John A. Ramirez, Jr. (AT Nov./Dec. 2000). It seems to equate moral government with a proliferation of social programs and spending. Government and compassion should not necessarily inhabit the same sentence. Compassion is to be expressed by individuals to individuals. . . . Government imposed generosity or morality is always inadequate, misplaced, and inefficient. A specific example would be the author's belief in government-supported guaranteed health care for children. Adventists espouse preventative care, which could be read educated care. We should be educating parents and children on God's remedies, good nutrition, fresh air, exercise etc. Government programs will tie people to doctors and drugs instead of faith in God and natural healing. . . . Let's teach people that they are Sons and Daughters of God, not victims that need constant rescuing by the big brother government.

**Garlyn Jameson | Kingman, Arizona**

## Good and Evil in Context

As I read John Ramirez' brief essay "Compassion Practiced v. Compassion Preached" (AT Nov./Dec. 2000), I am struck by the difficulty he has reconciling public statements of personal principle and public acts of governance. . . . There is a solution to the dilemma. Good and evil are meaningful only in . . . context. That is, even in manifest evil such as the Holocaust of the Third Reich or the genocide of Pol Pot, the ultimate moral culpability rests not with an organization, but with the individuals who established and carried out the evil acts. Conversely, good only inures to the credit of an individual, not an organization. This is in keeping

with the Biblical call for benevolence which is exclusively directed at people, not governments. . . . Governments are agents of force. They create nothing. But they do take from some and give to others. In the process they destroy in one place. In other words, governments are negative agents. There is a possible positive benefit in that force directed against force may prevent injury. This is the model of police work and national defense. But otherwise government is purely destructive. And being organizations they cannot be good or evil. . . . Let us consider

what is then meant by proposing that the government do more philanthropic acts. This first means that we are asking that there be more people forcibly dispossessed of their property. We are directly culpable for the act of theft, and therefore we are advocating evil! All this in the name of good. What is the alternative? Private philanthropy is clearly morally good. But beyond that, God blesses those who help others. When we are generous with our own means, we fulfill a part of our mission as Christians. But when we require others to do our task by way of the ballot box, we have acted evilly. It is morally wrong to advocate that the government provide physical goods for anyone, because that first requires theft of property from someone else. . . . The government is not and cannot be compassionate. The best that it can do is to eliminate its own roadblocks and punish the evil of others.

**Ted Noel | Maitland, Florida**

## Moral Values

The rhetoric by Mr. Ramirez seems confused and bizarre. George W. Bush

did not try to "satisfy all voters' needs." He wasn't giving "clever answers" to liberal assaults. Thank heaven he has a moral compass and embraces moral values. There have been 40 million babies killed in the name of "choice" since 1973. The Lord gave us the commandment "Thou shalt not kill." . . . I

**"It is morally wrong to advocate that the government provide physical goods for anyone, because that first requires theft of property from someone else. . . . The government is not and cannot be compassionate."**

stood along side of a Catholic priest on the steps of our state capitol building 15 years ago who prayed, "Lord, help us not to solve our social problems by killing the unborn, and help us to act Christlike with those who disagree with us." . . . That Adventist Today accepted and published Mr. Ramirez article is disappointing to say the least.

**Joseph D. Riederer | Via the Internet**

## Limits on Government

It's ironic that John Ramirez would end his missive on Compassion in your Nov./Dec issue with a reference to William Miller's courage. Courage is one thing, accuracy is another. . . . Theology students should take a year or two off and study free market economics and the limits of the constitution on the role of government. . . . Ramirez demonstrates his fuzzy logic in the comparison of the free market choices that the Priest, the Levite and the Samaritan made of their own free will and compassion and the government coerced, involuntary taking of property in the form of money to redistribute to whom the government decides . . . A

bit of Socialism popping up everywhere in the name of Social Justice? Take from those who work hard for it and give to whomever the government decides is its favorite group just now; the politically "in-group" that's worth some votes in most cases.

**Harry Fitzsimmons | Rogue River, OR**

## Principles for Sale

Ramirez applies biblical teaching of individual responsibility to those in need to governmental function. The blessing assured to those individuals who reach out to help their neighbors does in no way transfer to government. Money coercively taken in taxes is not a substitute for a personal ministry of compassion nor are politicians who seek to maintain themselves in power thereby the appropriate conduit. I would hope that Adventist Today is not endorsing such policies as part of our religious philosophy. Historically the denomination strongly adhered to church/state separation. Unfortunately this position was greatly weakened by acceptance of social security and subsequently a willingness to accept/solicit ever more government support for its operation of schools, hospitals, relief agencies and Loma Linda University. Obviously Adventist principles are for sale! Is this now being taught in our colleges to theology students?

**Norman W. Specht | Via the Internet**

## Bretsch at Sunnyside

John McLarty's "Sunnyside SDA Church Disfellowships Bob Bretsch" report was keen to identify what seems to be a not uncommon set of problems in some places within our church. . . . It is sad to see talented, energetic SDA pastors driven, as it were, from arenas of service to the church and into non Adventist "community" churches and/or centers, as in the case of Bretsch. However it is also of concern to me to see any movement

toward "congregationalism," as it is coming to be known. I regard [this] a danger to church unity that could be quite harmful to the church . . . and to the individuals who follow these former leaders out of the church. Finally I think we need to be more open to "power" sharing in our congregations so that all member groups can have their voices heard and counted. However should power be relinquished to groups or individuals who seek to establish a more autonomous congregation within which they then strive to pursue their private agendas? And shouldn't the elements in these agendas be exposed to light of day so that all can make a more informed opinion about them? And what about the typical attitudes advocates of these agendas have about the church's mission and character? Shouldn't these be part of any fair analysis or debate? It is as if advocates and their cheer leaders are afraid of exposure. Any idea worth promoting should be made broadly public. Facts should not reside among insiders and the supposed avant-garde only.

**Dean Riley | Via the Internet**

## The Saga of Bob Bretsch

We are grateful for *Adventist Today* and the spirit with which it is written. . . My husband and I are in our early 80's having been members of the Adventist church since our . . . teens. We have seen some comforting changes in our thinking on many items. We have watched with interest the saga of Bob Bretsch. It saddens us to learn what has been happening to him since he left the pastorate at College View. We loved him while he was here and fail to understand what was so grievous at Sunnyside. . . . When all this was going on we read that one near saint had expressed relief that it was nice to be rid of the young people. What does she think of the condition of her church

when all the older ones are laid to rest?

**Lillian Reiner | Lincoln, Nebraska**

## Creationism

When I read Ervin Taylor's review of "Creation, Catastrophe, and Calvary" (AT Nov./Dec.2000) I was struck with this key question: "What Bible does he read?" . . . I was saddened to see Mr. Taylor blithely make the false statement that the "massive weight of . . . scientific evidence. . . does not square with traditional SDA understandings of the opening chapters of Genesis." Perhaps he would do well to acquaint himself with Paul Giem's "Scientific Theology," . . . Michael Behe's "Darwin's Black Box," . . . the Carbon-14 and amino acid racemization data published by Robert Brown . . . and . . . the work of Robert Gentry on Polonium radiohalos. . . . The liberal wing of the church of God is in need of reform. These are those who are unwilling to recognize that the Bible is exactly what it claims to be: the word of God.

**Ted Noel | Maitland, Florida**

"If the creation story is not true, we may as well resign ourselves to who-knows-what. There must be a Creator."

## Origins Conference

I came across [Stirling's] article about the origins conference (AT Sept./Oct. 1998). In it you wrote of things that are often discussed by one of my church members. He is a professor of metallurgy. Very knowledgeable and I enjoy talking with him. He seems to be holding back some of his cosmology and other prehistory ideas as we talk. Shar-

ing these things with a pastor these days may not be all that safe I suppose. But I want to learn more about some of them. I am interested in learning more about carbon dating and why it is so disputed. I would like to understand both sides of the issue(s) surrounding it. Any layman's material on that subject you can recommend?

**Marty Thurber | Via the Internet**

*Editor's reply: While most Adventists look on prehistory and earth science as very incidental to the concerns of everyday life, there are some whose work and research make them confront the questions. Your willingness to listen is commendable. There are certainly many books and journals in the field, expressing a variety of viewpoints. On the apologetic side you might turn to the little journal put out by the Geoscience Research Institute, Origins, published at Loma Linda. Another prolific exponent of "scientific creationism" is the Institute for Creation Research, which puts out a free monthly newsletter, Impact. Their address is P.O. Box 2667, El Cajon, CA 92021. A readable book is Darwin's Black Box: The Biochemical Challenge to Evolution, by Michael J. Behe, 1996, Free Press. On the subject of geochronology, a definitive book is G. Brent Dalrymple's The Age of the Earth, published by Stanford University Press in 1991. General articles have been published in Spectrum; the Association of Adventist Forums has also produced Creation Reconsidered: Scientific, Biblical, and Theological Perspectives, AAF, P.O. Box 619047, Roseville, CA 95661.*

## Dilemma About Science and Faith

As an Adventist I am continually on the horns of a dilemma—whether to continue to believe in the Bible's creation story or not. I am haunted by doubt at times. Many Adventist scien-

tists (not employed by the denomination, of course) believe in micro-evolution and some, I understand, believe in macro-evolution. If the creation story is not true, we may as well "fold up our tents" and resign ourselves to who-knows-what. There must be a Creator, but if he hasn't revealed himself to us, for all we know we could be a giant terrarium created for his amusement and there could be no life after death. Do you have any answers to cheer me up? I want to believe, but it seems to be increasingly difficult. I'm sure there are other Adventists who feel much the same as I do.

**Warren Adams | Via the Internet**

*Editor's response. Many Adventist scientists employed in and out of the denomination have had to learn to live with the same ambiguity that you express. However, whether evolutionist or creationist, everyone has to exercise faith in the things that cannot be seen or measured today. Everything had to have a beginning, whether energy or matter, and something had to set the design process going. For Christians, that beginning and that design are best represented by God. Evolutionists have no answer at all. Although the Genesis story may not have been intended to serve as a chronological or technical account of God's work, it certainly gives us the most insightful and meaningful description of his purposes for mankind. It presents us with a Creator who cares about human beings as well as the rest of the world. Perhaps the main purpose of the Bible is to demonstrate how God has interacted with people, trying to show them his plan and responding to their efforts to find and know him.*

*Many scientists who believe in God have simply come to accept as interesting theories what researchers have proposed to explain change in the geophysical and biotic world. These theories themselves may change, but God does not. So hang in there, brother!*

## Readability in AT

Several of us have found it difficult to read through the pale green coloring on the latest issue (Nov./Dec 2000). . . . If you can make the print dark enough to read through whatever color you use, that would suit us oldies just fine. . . . Your writers waxed eloquent in many of the articles this time. Stories in our Postmodern world are very welcome and befit our own experience, and knowing some of the people personally was an extra bonus for me.

**Alice E. Gregg | Loma Linda, California**

*After 23 years in the ministry... I was dismissed because some members of my congregation collapsed under the power of the Spirit, and I refused to guarantee that it wouldn't happen again.*

## More Ink in AT

We just received the latest issue of Adventist Today and, of course, it is being read cover-to-cover. Please, however, may I suggest that more ink be used! The greyed out picture on front cover, the white print on lime green boxes, and the grey type for articles makes difficult reading in all but the brightest illumination. The previous issue was also difficult to read. . . . I still read everything in it, but wonder if a previous reader might

have tried to "clean it up," literally, and removed a little ink!

**Elaine Nelson | Via the Internet**

## Ready for Jesus

Uncertainty, uncertainty must this continue to be one of our hallmarks? The article by James Stirling, "Are You Ready For Jesus To Come?" exemplified this. "...the need to look at the fuller implications of getting ready." A biblical input was lacking. "How much adjusting will it take for us to become members of the 'redemptive community?'" How much effort will we have to put into learning to listen to others who have suffered...?" Certainly, God's Word must be sufficient for a reply to such vital questions.

**Paul W. Jackson**

## Touched by the Supernatural

The article about your ministry [Nosakhere Thomas] in the Sept/Oct edition of Adventist Today brought hope to my heart that at least a segment of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is at last opening itself up to the ministry of the Holy Spirit. After 32 years of ministry within the denomination I was dismissed because some members in my congregation collapsed under the power of the Spirit, and I refused to guarantee that it wouldn't happen again. I thank God, however, for my church. It has grown both in quality and quantity. We now have a second church in the city. Like you, I believe that the next move of God will be a post-denomination and Sabbath-restoration revival.

**Pastor Ritchie Way | Auckland, New Zealand**

## Openness to the Spirit

I want to thank you [Nosakhere Thomas] for your openness and forthright-

ness in the interview that was published in the last issue of Adventist Today (Oct/Nov 2000). I want you to know that there are many in the S.D.A. community, right here in California, who agree with what you have said, and believe that our church must cultivate a new openness to the reality and the existential power of the Spirit. At the recent General Conference session in Toronto a great deal of attention was given to praise reports from all over the world, and to the vast machinery of the church, but very little to the innermost engine of power and growth, Adventist spirituality, getting personally in touch with God.

**Bernard Brandstater | Loma Linda, California**

## Gladson and the Sabbath

Your recent posting of the article by Jerry Gladson [atoday.com forum] was somewhat troubling. Instead of over-analyzing the Sabbath to the point where it is no longer important, perhaps we should focus on the Sabbath as one of the central convictions of Seventh-Day Adventists. We have enough "shaky" Adventists to spare without confusing even more of us with this type of on-line, off-brand Adventist literature.

**April Cummings | Via the Internet**

## A Safe Place to Think

Thank you for posting your articles and the forum with Dr. Ford on the Internet. My daughter is studying the SDA doctrines and one of the studies she's using as reference material cites the parable in Matthew 22 as "proof" of 1844 and the "investigative judgment." She (age 15) did not see how this made sense. Thanks to your editorial policy I was able to tell her that there were lots of SDA's also asking what sense that made and question-

ing "proof texts" that have been handed down to us. Thanks again for thinking and creating a safe place for us to think along with you.

**Wendy Foster | Via the Internet**

## Atoday.com Forum

The excerpt from Atoday.com (Nov/Dec 2000) shows how dialogue brings out concerns and helps us understand each other. Unfortunately it seems that many of our congregations experience little or no dialogue, much less the use of modern tools like e-mail to facilitate it. Just as a marriage should be an ongoing conversation with occasional interruptions, church life should involve continuing, open dialogue. A business meeting once a year won't do. It takes much interaction to zero in on a church's mission, goals, and ways to attain them. And these are choices that cannot be imposed from above without alienating most members. However, just having business meetings is not enough. Vigilance is a must, for some of our church leaders have honed the skill of using parliamentary procedures to stifle rather than encourage communication. One last point: Some of our congregations have been dominated for years by a few people who reject innovation and allow no dissent. No wonder such churches lack a strong team spirit. Power is like fertilizer: For a good crop, it has to be spread around, not piled on a few spots.

**Hector Hammerly | Vancouver, Canada**

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# Adventist religion professors meet in Nashville

■ JIM WALTERS

The Adventist Society for Religious Studies focused on "Seventh-day Adventist Identity" at its annual meeting, November 16-18, in Nashville, Tennessee. In light of the last two tumultuous decades in the church—Rae, Ford, Davenport and Folkenberg—many Adventists are grappling with their Adventist identity and how it all fits together. In the 25 papers, ranging from 10-50 minutes in length, the Adventist religion professors and pastors variously included humor, scholarship, devotion, tradition, confession and insight.

One of the most illuminating sessions was Sabbath morning, when five professors and a graduate student addressed the question: Why am I still Adventist?

Lael Ceasar, Andrews University, presented Adventist theology as personal testimony. Drawing heavily on his strong Adventist Christian upbringing, Ceasar also remains an Adventist for additional reasons: for "the Bible's sake," "for Jesus' sake," and for "my neighbor's sake."

Richard Choi, also of Andrews University, grew up in a conservative Adventist home in a third-world country. His model for life was dualistic: If it's Adventist it's good; if it's not Adventist it's evil. Then he saw worldliness (e.g. divorce) entering Adventism, and his perfectionist dualism would have forced him to leave the church, but he adopted a new model—pluralism. Seeing good and bad in a plurality of groups and persons led Choi to accept his good but faulty church. "Asking why I remain an Adventist is like asking why I remain married to my wife....I don't remain married to my wife because she is absolutely the best looking woman in the world. I remain married to my wife because, for all her faults, I like her more than any other woman in the world."

Richard Rice, Loma Linda University, cited his personal commitment to the Adventist community as the most powerful reason for his continuing Adventist identity. When but five years of age his parents divorced, and the local church

community warmly embraced him with Christian love. Rice cited a rabbi who once told his youth the importance of a) believing, b) behaving, and c) belonging. Rice says that Adventists emphasize the first two criteria, but are weak on the third. "Nobody is a Christian in the abstract; I'm a Seventh-day Adventist because I'm Christian," says Rice. "I found Christ in the Adventist community, and I've never found a reason to leave."

The presidential address, the first and major paper, was presented by Ken Bursey, dean of the School of Theology, Walla Walla College. Bursey, a New Testament scholar, dealt with Peter's denials of Christ. He candidly admitted the variations in the different Gospel writers' accounts, a supposed problem that led one literalist to conclude that Jesus warned Peter two separate times that he would deny him three times, resulting in Peter's denying Jesus six times, with the rooster crowing at the end of each set of three denials.

Rather than seeing a problem in the trivial differences in the accounts, Bursey welcomes the different Gospel writers' emphases. Bursey drew an analogy between his selective memory of his wedding day 37 years ago, and the Gospel writers' memories and intentions in writing of that tragic night. The differing details fit well with the differing intent

of the authors. For example, Matthew's account shows how one's prayer life is preparation for sharing the gospel. On the other hand, Mark's account shows how to cope with the anticipated persecution Jesus promised would come before the end time.

Two other discussions are noteworthy. Anglican priest Kenneth G.C. Newport, Liverpool, U.K., who studied at Newbold College, gave a paper on the Branch Davidians and Seventh-day Adventism. He sees the Davidians as "inextricably intertwined" with Adventism historically, doctrinally and in its core membership. Second, two scholars, Glenn Greenwalt

of Walla Walla, and Rick Rice, critiqued the major theological book, *Thinking Theologically: Adventist Christianity and the Interpretation of Faith* (1999), by Fritz Guy, La Sierra University. The author was praised for his contributions to the intellectual life of the church and the importance of this book. The critics called for more attention to the role of church community, human experience, and post-Enlightenment interpretation of religion.

Kendra Haloviak, Columbia Union College, president-elect of ASRS, will head up planning for the 2001 session in Denver. The theme is: "Adventism: What's Core? What's Peripheral?"

The Nashville ASRS meetings, as usual, preceded the American Academy of Religion/Society of Biblical Literature 4-day annual conference (8,000 professors attended), that was held this year at the huge Opryland Hotel. The ASRS officers for the coming year are Keith Burton,

"In light of the last two tumultuous decades in the church—Rae, Ford, Davenport and Folkenberg—many Adventists are grappling with their Adventist identity and how it all fits together."

Oakwood College, president; Kendra Haloviak; and Ivan Blazen, Loma Linda University, vice-president; and Ernest Furness, Southeastern California Conference, secretary/treasurer.

"I heard many folk at our Nashville meetings say that the quality and variety was very good this year," said Furness, who is the major coordinator each year. "Keith Burton put together a very good program." The attendance at the ASRS sessions varied from 80-120 throughout the day and half of meetings.



# Sligo: A center of vibrant Christian ministry

■ LARA BEAVEN

**P**eter Bath, the new senior pastor of the Sligo Seventh-day Adventist Church, acknowledges that there are many challenges in leading a congregation as large and diverse as Sligo. But he says there is also a great opportunity for Sligo to be a center of vibrant Christian ministry, especially urban Christian ministry.

Bath came to the Takoma Park, Maryland, church with his wife Catherine and three daughters in September, after spending the past 20 years in Kettering, Ohio, first as pastor of the Kettering Church and then as president of Kettering College of Medical Arts. The decision to accept the Sligo position was made after much prayer and the growing sense that this is where God wanted him and his family to be, Bath says. "It wasn't the sense that we needed to leave" Kettering, but more the sense that "we kept seeing ourselves at Sligo," he explains.

Bath calls Sligo a "great congregation" and sees its ethnic, cultural and socioeconomic diversity as a blessing. "Sligo is much more conservative than people think," he says. The congregation is filled with a mix of "deep thinkers" who are long-time Adventists and want to explore the complexities of Christianity, and with individuals who have just begun their spiritual journey, he says. But he believes that Sligo provides the opportunity for everybody to participate in that journey together, "There is truly a sense that this is the Lord's church."

Part of Bath's vision for the nearly 3,000-member Sligo is for it to be fully a part of the community, both closely connected with Columbia Union College and Washington Adventist Hospital, and also with the wider community of Takoma Park and its position as part of the metropolitan Washington, D.C., area. He sees Sligo becoming a "metro ministry center," with a focus on worship and discipleship training.

Bath wants "to reinvigorate the mis-

sions of the church" and "look how we can grow," especially reaching out to young adults. He says he has heard "so many stories" about young professionals who are "church hunting" but have yet to find a church that feels like home. To that end, Sligo is developing a late afternoon Saturday worship service aimed at these young adults.

The challenges at Sligo are many. In

**Bath calls Sligo a "great congregation" and sees its ethnic, cultural and socioeconomic diversity as a blessing.**

early 1999, the Potomac Conference relieved then-senior pastor Oxentenko of his duties, due to concerns over growing divisions in the congregation, according to a March 23, 1999, letter sent from the conference president to all Sligo members. Some members left or stopped attending Sligo because of Oxentenko's dismissal. The congregation had two interim pastors until Bath accepted the call. William Johnson, editor of the *Adventist Review* and Sligo member, served briefly as an emergency interim senior pastor, and then Walter Scragg, a retired Adventist minister from Australia, served as senior pastor for about a year.

Bath is well aware that there has been much pain in the congregation

over the past couple years, but rather than focusing on the hurts of the past, he says he wants to help the congregation move ahead and "find balance and a vision for the future."

One of the major challenges right now for Sligo is a lack of staffing. In addition to Bath, there are two other full-time pastors on staff, but there are four vacant full-time positions that

need to be filled: the chaplaincy at Columbia Union College; pastor for worship; pastor for children's ministry and pastor for

young adult ministry. The approach for the four search committees, Bath says, is "to look for people God has called." Because anyone who is chosen without God's call will not be able to succeed, given the challenges of the job, Bath says.

Bath is also working with Sligo's 50 elders to help nurture the congregation. The elders meet monthly for lessons on how to pray with members, conduct visitation and just generally nurture people. They have taken the names of 55 to 60 and will visit each member at least once a year. Bath says. The elders are very focused on helping Sligo be a community again, he says.

## [CALL FOR WRITERS]

*Adventist Today* is looking for thoughtful and proficient writers for feature articles. If you are interested or concerned about some particular issue in Adventism and will write about it, we want to hear from you. Please send a query or sample to: [editor@atoday.com](mailto:editor@atoday.com) or [atoday@atoday.com](mailto:atoday@atoday.com). You can mail to: **Adventist Today, PO Box 8026, Riverside, CA 92515.**

# Phillip Johnson and the Argument From Design

Report of meetings held at Loma Linda, CA, Feb. 3 and 4, 2001 Sponsored by the AAF and AT

■ JAMES STIRLING

Phillip Johnson, retired faculty member of the School of Law at the University of California, Berkeley, has a new mission in life—to turn the debate on science versus religion into a new direction. He spoke on February 3 and 4 at a weekend seminar on this subject held at the University Church in Loma Linda, California, cosponsored by the Association of Adventist Forums and the Adventist Today Foundation. He is convinced that the debate should focus on origins of life, not on the process of evolution. This is an issue that people on both sides can discuss freely, he feels, with more productive results than talking about the age of the earth or the geological column. A new, constructive approach would tackle the question of evidence for intelligent design.

Johnson was troubled by the stereotypes that have emerged from the conflict between scientists and Bible-believers. As a lawyer he had taken on many contentious cases where the "truth" could be ferreted out only by carefully examining the reasoning and the facts presented by the litigants. He had colleagues who were scientists and friends who were Christians. The famous Scopes trial in Arkansas, originally intended as a promotional event for the state, became a media event in which the creationists looked like the "bad guys" of a Western film and the scientists became the "good guys." The stereotypes have lingered ever since, with the notion that "tenets of creationists are not testable," and that science is based on fact. Major points of argument were thought to be the age of the earth and Noah's flood. These issues were so ramified, however, that they could never be settled. As a result, some Bible believers thought they had only the alternatives of ei-

ther isolating themselves from mainstream science or taking the Genesis account as allegory.

Thus Johnson called for a new and better arena for discussion—the concept of Intelligent Design. He would start the discussion not with Genesis 1 but with John 1:1-3, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." The original Greek for "word" here is *logos*, which connotes intelligence and reason. The Bible equates this with God. The alternative to this in evolution would be "In the beginning were particles and impersonal laws of nature." In this scenario the particles somehow became more complex. Eventually they became humans, who imagined God, then discovered evolution, bringing about the "death of God." This process was presumably unintelligent, mindless, and purposeless.

George G. Simpson once said, "All could be explained by naturalistic processes, random selection, and differential survival."

How did the evolutionists come to their conclusion about the success of materialism? They started out with the premise that they would avoid supernaturalistic solutions, and would accept only materialism. They would start with nothing, then allow for only the simplest particles which had come about by chance or the "laws of nature."

From here on they looked to natural selection to guide the process. They felt this must be universal throughout the cosmos, even on

other planets wherever there might be life. Johnson thinks that science has made this rule a limitation on its ability to examine possibilities.

So the starting point for Johnson's proposed discussion would be the question: Do you need a God at the beginning, or can particles do it? Richard Dawkins once said, "Biology is the science of complicated things that look as if they were designed." In even the most simple of cells, a description of the structure is not enough; you must somehow tell about the information that makes it work, the DNA that allows it to function and replicate. This is something like computers, which are useless

Johnson called for a new and better arena for discussion: the concept of Intelligent Design. He would start the discussion not with Genesis 1 but with John 1:1-3, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

without software programs. This sets the stage for meaningful discourse: where did the rules, the "software," come from? From materialism, laws of nature, or from God?

Johnson thinks that posing the problem this way will help bring about more unity among Christians who accept the Bible and the Creator but differ on some points of interpretation. The insistence of evolutionists to exclude God from their picture of life holds a threat to religious believers. Johnson says that two definitions of scientific method need to be kept distinct: unbiased scientific observation, as opposed to applied

materialist philosophy. Some scientists take the stance that "if evidence points to intelligent design, then avoid and reject it." In his opinion, unbiased scientific investigation will prove that intelligent design is valid.

Johnson's contention that the Intelligent Design argument will silence the critics does not necessarily close the case. Charles Darwin was at first a religious man who sought to reconcile his scientific findings with his concepts of the Bible. He was bothered with the evidence for conflict in nature. For instance, many species of ichneumon flies spend almost their entire life cycle as parasites of the larvae of other insects. How could a benevolent creator design creatures to do this to one another? "The law of tooth and fang," the whole notion of the food chain, he saw as unbefitting a divine creator. Theologians have an answer to the problem of evil, invoking the freedom of choice and the influence of Satan on people and the physical world. Explaining the origin of Satan again calls for more theological discourse.

Nevertheless, Johnson's approach, putting the wedge of inquiry at the weakest place in evolution's armor, sounds like a good starting place for scholars in many different fields.

His call for scholars to look honestly at evidence applies to all who would talk about the problem. Just as science writers and teachers have been known to repeat outdated and disproved "evidences" for evolution, such as the peppered moths in England (see Jonathan Wells, *The Icons of Evolution: Science or Myth?*), so also Christian apologists have distorted the work and statements of people they didn't approve of. What Johnson asks for is that people come to the discussion without rancor and be open to the facts as far as reason can discern them. Creationists have no need to fear exposure of their children to the proposals of evolutionists if they have looked at the whole picture and provided a view of the reasoning which ultimately backs up the place of the intelligent God who stands beyond nature but much involved in human life.

## International action needed to end crisis in Turkmenistan

■ BETTINA KRAUSE

The Turkmen government is engaged in a widespread campaign of repression against religious minorities, despite its pledge to protect the basic human rights of its citizens, says John Graz, public affairs and religious liberty director for the Seventh-day Adventist Church worldwide.

Graz's comments come in response to reports of a fresh wave of police raids on Christian gatherings in private homes. According to Keston News Service, police in the capital Ashgabat broke up a meeting of the Greater Grace church on January 10, warning the group of some 25 people that their gathering was illegal. The latest incident follows months of harassment of faith groups, including the arrest and three-day detention of an Adventist pastor in October 2000 for meeting in a private home with a group of Adventist church members in the northeastern city of Turkmenabat.

"It is high time that the international community reacts seriously to the constant violation of human rights in Turkmenistan," says Graz. "Churches, temples and houses of worship have been destroyed or closed.

"Believers have been expelled from their apartments by the secret police. Such a repressive policy is in total opposition to the international treaties Turkmenistan has signed."

Graz says that the administration of the Adventist Church worldwide will continue its efforts to ease religious persecution in Turkmenistan. "To express our concern we are organizing a world letter campaign and will report this violation in our next intervention before the United Nations Commission on Human Rights," he says.

While Turkmenistan's constitution purports to protect religious freedom, under current law only "registered religious groups" can hold public or private meetings. The Russian Orthodox Church and Sunni Muslims are the only organizations that have been granted registration. During the past four years, the Turkmen government has cracked down on unregistered religious groups, breaking up meetings, arresting leaders, and confiscating or destroying property. Among the many groups targeted are Protestant Christian denominations, Jews and Hare Krishnas.

## The Changing of the Guard:

### North American Adventist College Administrators on the Move

Last year, Columbia Union College and Kettering College saw new administrators as Dr. Charles Scriven resigned from CUC (see AT Vol. 8 No. 2) and took Peter Bath's position at Kettering College as president. Dr. Scriven was replaced at CUC by Randy Wisbey, former president of Canadian Union College. Now two more presidents are stepping down on the west coast.

According to a press release from Pacific Union College (PUC) Dr. Richard C. Osborn, vice president for education of the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists, will be the next president of PUC, replacing Dr. Malcolm Maxwell. After 18 years as PUC's president, Dr. Maxwell plans to take a sabbatical for graduate study and for "catching up with neglected tasks"; then he will return to the classroom.

Michelle Velazquez Mesnard, PUC's public relations director, reports that Dr. Osborn announced his intent to accept the post on December 26, and he will begin to serve in his new position on July 1, 2001. Dr. Osborn is a multidimensional educator with experience as a teacher, administrator, writer, researcher, and historian. In addition, Dr. Osborn's wife, Norma Osborn, will join the pastoral staff of the Pacific Union College Church, where she will serve as an associate pastor. Currently, she is an associate pastor at the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Alexandria, Va.

In a similar move as Dr. Maxwell's, Walla Walla College President W.G. Nelson has announced he will step down from his position on June 30, 2001.

# Turf Wars and Turmoil at Walla Walla College

**W**alla Walla College is today a deeply wounded and divided camp. The Academic Standards Committee has been temporarily stripped of its authority to hear appeals of student grades. The history department is still bitter from having its decision to terminate Richard Jensen overturned by the Board of Trustees last year, following a storm of criticism. The board of trustees lays down specific instructions which the departments openly defy, and which the president is unable to enforce. Ugly written accusations have been made by the history department, and refuted. Lawsuits have been threatened, and administration is walking on eggshells. The history department, through the humanities program, built up the tension by again recommending that Jensen be terminated after this school year. Unless the board of trustees again overturns the department's decision at a March 4 meeting, Jensen will not be back next year. All sides tensely await the unfolding of the end game.

At the epicenter of this maelstrom is Richard Jensen, an analytic philosopher who expects to finish his doctorate in philosophy from UC Santa Barbara early this spring with a dissertation entitled, "Authority and a Solution to the Problem of a Divine Command Theory: An Answer to Subjectivism in Ethics." According to Jensen the goal of his dissertation is "to establish a metaphysical objectivism in ethics based upon modifications and synthesis of the various divine command theories that have sprung up in the last thirty years." He is halfway through the third of three one-year contracts at Walla Walla college on a tenure track. The next step in that track would be a three-year contract, followed by candidacy for tenure. Barring another surprise, the three-year contract leading to tenure will be denied.

WWC is the only SDA college with a full-time philosopher and has had a philosopher in residence going back at least to the 1980's, according to Presi-

dent Nelson. When Jensen was recruited by Roland Blaich, recently retired chairman of the history department, it was with the express understanding that WWC had committed itself to raising philosophy to full department status. Without such a commitment, says Jensen, he would not have agreed to come. Jensen was initially assigned to Roland Blaich's history department.

By all accounts, Richard Jensen is a brilliant and enthusiastic lecturer with high academic standards, is theologically conservative, has impeccable student evaluations and student loyalty, and loves teaching at Walla Walla. Even his detractors do not seem to question his abilities as a teacher and lecturer in philosophy. But beyond that, to say that the differences in opinion regarding his influence are astonishing is to understate the case.

Depending on whose version you hear, opinions about Richard Jensen range from calling him an irreplaceable intellectual and spiritual asset whose loss would be tragic, to a devastatingly divisive David Koresh-like cult leader at war with the church who needs to be terminated as soon as possible. Did he subtly orchestrate the student protests that led to his forced rehiring last spring, as some of his critics suspect, or was it a spontaneous outpouring of appreciation and loyalty from his students?

## The Battle Over Plagiarism

Jensen traces his fall from grace with administration to his well-advertised, uncompromising, aggressive policy against plagiarism. He spends at least a whole lecture on the evils of plagiarism alone. Plagiarism, even in a measly ten-point homework assignment, is sufficient to fail a student, and has. Unlike many teachers, he will actively search the Internet or library for the source of text which he suspects has been plagiarized. In his two and half years at the school, he estimates that he has failed 6-7 students for plagiarism. Plagiarism, he says, was a bigger problem at WWC

■ DENNIS HOKAMA

when he arrived than at any other college where he had taught previously.

From the beginning, it had been his policy to get the plagiarizing student to sign a document summarizing the points of mutual agreement sufficient to establish plagiarism beyond a reasonable doubt. Despite this seemingly airtight documentation establishing plagiarism in every case, his battle with administration began in May of 1999, when a student decided to appeal the failing grade with the Academic Standards Committee (ASC) chaired by Mel Lang.

The student's initial appeal was turned down. Then the stakes were raised as a voting member of the ASC helped the student draft a second petition in which the student retracted the confession of guilt on the basis of intimidation, and the student's father, a big school donor, threatened a lawsuit unless Jensen's decision was overturned. Jensen says he was subsequently called in by administration and berated for having such a strict plagiarism policy and informed of the possible lawsuit that might ensue as a result. When Jensen refused to back down, ASC upheld the student's second petition on the basis of intimidation and expunged the course and grade from the student's transcript.

W.G. Nelson, college president, John Brunt, vice president for Academic Affairs, Mel Lang, ASC chairman, and Terry Gottschall, ASC board member at the time, all declined to discuss ASC issues with AT. However, Gottschall's 7/21/99 letter of resignation from ASC over the handling of this case corroborates virtually all of Jensen's account (See AT's website, atoday.com).

Jensen appealed ASC's decision and filed a formal grievance with the grievance committee against Dr. Brunt, Dr. Lang, and the ASC, against the advice of Dr. Brunt. The grievance committee found unanimously that Jensen's right to due process had been violated, and it stripped the ASC of their power to hear any further grade appeals until their Handbook could be rewritten with the

proper protections for due process.

The grievance committee's report of March 3, 2000, admits the student was allowed to submit two "second petitions," but Jensen was allowed to see and respond to only one of them, whereas ASC's vote to uphold the student's petition was based on the content of both petitions. Additionally, the questions themselves commingled three separate issues: the extent of plagiarism, the reasonableness of Jensen's standards, and Jensen's alleged mistreatment of the student.

## The Battle Over Analytical Philosophy

While Jensen was battling administration over plagiarism, tension was mounting along another front. From AT's first contact with Jensen, he had emphasized that he was not just a philosopher, but an analytical philosopher, as opposed to the Continental variety, which Jensen had little patience for, and considers largely discredited.

Jensen explains that analytical philosophy is a mainstream approach to philosophy which holds that propositional truth claims can be evaluated for correctness using rules based upon indubitable axioms. A central axiom is that truth is never contradictory. He emphasized that analytical philosophy was not a specialty, or a particular set of doctrines, but a logical approach to philosophy that could be applied to any given aspect of philosophy, including the history of philosophy even Continental philosophy itself. Although it has historically been rough on conservative Christianity, Jensen asserts that this reputation is undeserved. If used properly, hard-nosed analytical philosophy can consistently save the faith of intelligent, informed, and thoughtful Christians who would otherwise be intimidated into believing that intellectual integrity demanded that they give up their faith.

By contrast, he says, "Continental" philosophy is a deconstructionist approach which has been largely discredited by the philosophical community and is today practiced by only a small minority of philosophers centered mainly in France and Germany (thus Continental). Exemplified by existentialism and Kierkegaard, truth is seen as

something that might well at times be contradictory.

Thus, in general, a fundamental absolutism arises out of analytical philosophy, while a fundamental relativism arises out of Continental philosophy. While on the surface both approaches may seem equally plausible and attractive, says Jensen, he found the underlying relativism of continental philosophy to be ultimately contrary and corrosive to the absolutist premise of conservative Christianity and Seventh-day Adventism and more suitable to Eastern religions.

What would emerge as a bone of contention, was whether analytical philosophy constituted a narrow "specialty" or doctrinal focus within philosophy, analogous to Marxism, as Robert Henderson, WWC history professor, still assumed during AT's phone conversation with him on January 29, or whether it is an approach to philosophy that is equally applicable to any subject in the field, including Continental philosophy, as Jensen maintains.

Jensen referred AT to Brian Leiter's "the Philosophers Gourmet Report" on the internet for corroboration. Brian Leiter is the Charles I. Francis Professor in the School of Law, a professor in the department of philosophy, and director of the Law & Philosophy Program at the University of Texas at Austin, where he has taught legal philosophy, ethics, Continental philosophy, and evidence since 1995. In his "A Note on 'Analytical' and 'Continental' Philosophy", Leiter corroborates Jensen's contention that analytical philosophy is overwhelmingly dominant in America and the world, that analytical philosophy is an approach encompassing all subjects within philosophy including the study of Continental philosophy, and that even those wishing to pursue a scholarly career in philosophy "cannot do better than to pursue training in analytic philosophy—even if one plans to work, in the end, on (Continental like) Hegel or Marx or Nietzsche."

## The Final Meltdown

The events leading to Jensen's termination and dramatic forced rehiring began innocently enough with the history department's recommendation to Brunt for Jensen's rehiring, contingent on the

hiring of a second philosopher of the Continental variety. When Brunt replied that no second philosopher would be hired, the history department chose to terminate Jensen for "curricular" reasons. The board of trustees overturned this decision after student and faculty protests, mandating that Jensen be given an opportunity to demonstrate his breadth (the history department had argued that he was too narrow) and a new evaluation in February. The history department struck back with a letter stating "extracurricular" reasons why Jensen needed to be terminated, and got the humanities program to endorse their previous decision only three weeks into the new school year in open defiance of the Board's mandate. Nelson has been powerless or unwilling to do anything about it.

## Another Perspective

Dan Lamberton, chairman of the humanities program, took a more balanced position than most when speaking with AT. The core issue, he maintains, is not "analytic" versus "Continental" philosophy, Jensen's teaching skills (which he admits are excellent), nor his stand against plagiarism (though he says others do not seek it out as aggressively, nor generate as much student hostility from those failed for that reason). Jensen, he says, while excellent in what he does, and performing a function of philosophy essential to any department, simply cannot also teach a wide spectrum of philosophers, which a department must be able to do. Hiring a second philosopher would have been the sufficient solution originally, and one which the humanities program continues to pursue. But since the traumatic upheaval of last spring, he admits, there has been so much collateral emotional damage that the current climate has become very difficult for everyone.

Finally, he reminded AT, hiring and firing of teachers within the first three years without explanation, is a department's right.

*The story was difficult to balance, as WWC administration was unwilling or unable to speak freely. Jensen was cooperative when contacted, but did not initiate the story. The writer attended WWC for two years in the mid-sixties. AT's editorial staff, including the Managing Editor, Diana Fisher, was not involved for reasons of conflict of interest.*

The Holy Scriptures, Old and New Testaments, were written by men of God who spoke and acted as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. In this way, the Holy Scriptures are the infallible and inspired Word of God, committed to man the knowledge necessary for his salvation. The articles in this journal are written in honor of that Word.

# an american ONE STUDENT'S ADVENTURIST ADVENTURE at newbold

■ TED SWINYAR

After almost two years at Walla Walla College, I was ready for a break so I headed for Newbold College in England. Walking into Heathrow International Airport in London, I was excited and nervous at the same time. I had heard all sorts of stories and didn't know what to expect. People who had been at Newbold told me of traveling in distant lands, experiencing new cultures, and coming back completely changed. Others told stories comparing Newbold to a modern day Sodom and Gomorrah full of drinking and debauchery. But then I remembered all the exaggerated rumors about Walla Walla College I had heard.

As a Computer Science major, there were not a lot of classes that fit my particular needs, but I can say without a doubt that my time at Newbold helped me to grow both as a student and as a Christian.

One of the distinctive features of Newbold is the chance to experience cultures from around the world. While a large majority of the students were Americans studying abroad—it was rather strange to come halfway around the world and end up at a school that was over half American—there were 52 countries represented on campus. Just walking into the cafeteria was a truly international experience. During one memorable lunch I sat with new friends from India, Norway, Tennessee, Sweden and Croatia. In addition to experiencing new cultures on campus, I found unrivaled the opportuni-

ties for traveling off to many new places.

Practically every weekend groups of students took advantage of cheap flights to explore Europe. Frequent bank holidays—long weekend—sweetened the travel opportunities even more.

At Newbold, my eyes were opened to the many blessings that we Americans take for granted. My roommate, Shandur, was an older student from the former Yugoslavia who had come to Newbold to learn English. For him, coming to Newbold was the greatest opportunity of his life. In his hometown in the former Yugoslavia he had what was considered a "good" job which paid the equivalent of \$45 per month. In England he was able to earn more money in one week than he could make in a month in his hometown. We talked quite a bit, and as his English improved, he shared many of the experiences of his life. I had read about the war in the Balkans seen TV news coverage, but nothing compared to hearing stories from someone who had lived through it.

The downside of being in a completely different country is culture shock. At first I hated it. To be fair, my first exposure to British culture was not positive: the first British person I met was an Immigration and Naturalization Services officer who yelled at me for 15 minutes. Granted, I had shown a bit too much cheek when he told me my papers weren't correctly filled out, but I still found his tirade something of a shock. Other little things hit me as well: jet-lag, different currencies, driving on

the "wrong" side of the road, and the time difference. And then there was the weather: from March until mid-May, it rained pretty much every day. I could have stayed at home in Seattle and seen less rain.

The college itself had its problems. The campus is tiny—smaller than some academy campuses I have been on. A small campus has its benefits, but coming from Walla Walla's larger campus, I felt Newbold to be cramped. The computer labs and technology on campus were horribly maintained and pathetically slow. Then there was the grading system. At Newbold it seemed that even if I worked my tail off, the highest grade I could ever get was a B+. I had grown up in the American system where the assumption is that if you do all your work you get an A. In discussions with my instructors it became clear that this is not the case at Newbold. I now think that as our businesses recognize that national currencies differ and have currency conversion methods, the academic world should recognize that not all grading systems are the same and have GPA conversions for students returning from the British system.

**Contrary to the rumors, Christianity (and Adventism specifically) was alive and well on Newbold's campus. What most don't realize is that Newbold is the seminary for most of the European SDA Church. Along with the slackers and partyers, there are genuine Christians engaging in heartfelt study of God's word.**

Gripes aside, Newbold was an exciting school. The dorm life was fresh and alive. People were friendly and fun to hang out with. The cafeteria food was absolutely amazing—thanks to Bruce, Newbold's awesome chef. The administration and faculty genuinely cared about Newbold and its students. There were excellent teachers who brought a broad range of experience and knowledge to their particular fields. While at Newbold I was privileged to take a Fine Arts class that included field trips to London for concerts and visits to galleries. Newbold did not offer a large quantity of classes, but the ones they did offer were of a high quality.

While preparing for my quarter abroad, I heard

all sorts of juicy stories about Newbold. For instance, one rumor had it that Newbold's theology did not include Ellen White. This, in spite of the large Ellen G. White wing in its library and several classes that focused on White's writings.

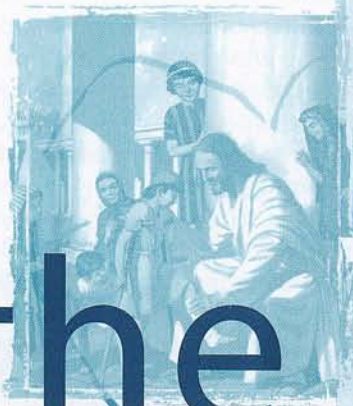
I heard claims that Newbold was a dangerously "liberal" school: that students openly engaged in risky behaviors on campus. The reality is far more complex. Newbold gives students a higher level of personal responsibility and freedom than do most North American colleges. Regular visitation hours allow students to visit the dorm rooms of the opposite sex. Try walking into the girl's dorm at Walla Walla, and you're in for a big shock. Some students abused Newbold's visitation privilege; most others didn't.

There was a certain element of the student body who drink, party, have sex, do illicit substances, and, most likely, even drink coffee. However, this same fringe element can be found at Walla Walla College, Southern Adventist University, or Pacific Union College.

Contrary to the rumors, Christianity (and Adventism specifically) was alive and well on Newbold's campus. What most don't realize is that Newbold is the seminary for most of the European SDA Church. Along with the slackers and partyers, there are genuine Christians engaging in heartfelt study of God's word. Some of the most searching and theologically engaging discussions I have ever had occurred at Newbold. Throughout the Newbold community are young Christians dedicated to growing spiritually, emotionally and intellectually. In addition to the traditionally styled church service, the Moor Close service provides students with a contemporary service featuring student speakers and upbeat music. Worship groups and prayer teams meet every day. There are even plans underway for the construction of a new church, because among other reasons, the current facility cannot hold all of the members.

Newbold is a good school. It has challenges that need our prayers, but it also has a strong core of committed Christians who are dedicated to fulfilling the work of our Lord. I have many great memories from my time at Newbold: early morning "raids" on the girls' dorm, class field trips to London, free laundry service, hilarious Newbold Student Association meetings and long bank holiday weekends of travel. I recommend that any student interested in stepping out of their comfortable American niche and exploring the world check it out.

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### Seventh-day Adventists Believe

*The Holy Scriptures, Old and New Testaments, are the written Word of God, given by divine inspiration through holy men of God who spoke and were moved by the Holy Spirit. In this Word we are committed to man the knowledge necessary for our salvation. The Holy Scriptures are the infallible standard of our faith and life. They are the standard of character and conduct.*

# the heart of ADVENTISTS ARE PEOPLE OF HOPE. THE STORY IS MOVING FORWARD. true adventism

■ JOHN MCLARTY

At the very heart of True Adventism is the conviction that God loves people and that this love is both passionate and principled. If you listen to talk about this particular view of God what you will hear is not primarily theological or philosophical discourse but narrative. We see God as the leading actor in a story; not as an impersonal force or idea. Adventism is a distinctive way of telling God's story. Because of humanity's connection with God, the way we tell his story shapes the way we live, and our pattern of life affects our understanding of him. So Adventism is not only a way of telling God's story, it is also a way of life, a culture.

The supreme revelation of what God is like came through the life, ministry and death of Jesus Christ. But that's getting ahead of our story.

In the beginning there was chaos. Was this chaos universal or merely the condition of the earth? Was this chaos nothingness or non-ordered something? We argue among ourselves. But the Story begins with God's transformation of chaos. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now [when God began this creating] the earth was formless and empty." Genesis 1:1-2.

Out of this divine creation came an Edenic habitat and two glorious humans.

What was the purpose of God's intrusion into the primeval chaos? Friendship. The Creator wanted friends. As his ultimate act of Creation, God set aside a park in time, the Sabbath, a temporal space designed to foster the special relationship between Creator and Created. "And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy." Genesis 2:1-3.

This central intention of God to create a community of friends has never changed. Even in the face of human rebellion and disbelief, God seeks our friendship. God does not want abject resignation to his irresistible power or mere intellectual acknowledgment of his existence; he wants to win our hearts. God respects questions and questioners. He aims to win our respect and trust, not cow us into silence. God is hungry for our affection. He wants us to be his friends.

As the household of God, Adventists aim to persuade people of his goodness and of the beneficence of his directives. Influenced by our Father, we don't imperiously insist, "Believe us! We're telling the truth." Instead we work to show that God is indeed trustworthy and that the very best life is realized through trust and obedience. We believe that the truth about God is congruent with the very best of human values and thinking.

The truth about God may well go beyond reason; that's to be expected. But it can hardly be contrary to reason since we are "made in his image." For instance, would a loving God keep people alive for billions of years just so they could experience the torment of hell? We think not. But our respect for reason is tempered by our awareness of the seductiveness of convention. What appears to be reason may be merely a philosophical fad. Intellectual mores can be the most winsome of all idols. We easily fall in love with our own conclusions and pay undue obeisance to the assertions of popular academics.

As we read the Bible, we give attention to the questions and answers that come from academia, but we know how to laugh when the assured results



of scholarship are offered as the new canon. We remember too many instances when the assured results in biblical studies were subsequently discarded. And remembering, we turn from the cavils of over-confident scholarship to the Bible itself, confident that for all its humanness, it is a trustworthy light. For all our love of logic and empiricism, we are shamelessly believers. We know the statements of faith cannot be proven. We have friends with keen intellects who look at the same evidence we do and conclude there is no God or that at best he is a mere possibility. Still we stake our lives on "the fact" of a living, active God.

We read the Bible as the very word of God and structure our lives on the basis of its instruction. We are aware of problematic passages, of contradictions and the fingerprints of the Bible's human authors, but we accept at face value the Bible's words: "God has called us his children, and that in fact is what we are" (1 John 3:1). And the declaration of David, "Your word is a lamp for my feet and a light for my path" (Psalm 119:105). In a way, we regard the Bible as a work of great art, confident that it will reward repeated attention, open-hearted admiration and careful analysis.

In the Bible story, Creation ends with Adam and Eve settled in a perfect garden habitat. But that bucolic picture is followed in short order by their decision to reject God's authority and wisdom. Their choice plunged humanity into a condition fatal beyond any human remedy.

Instead of abandoning humanity to its fate, God took on himself the task of finding a solution that would mend the torn moral fabric of the universe and at the same time save the lives and restore the friendship of his children. He gave Adam and Eve a cryptic promise of a future deliverer who would annihilate their enemy.

The next great episode in the story is Noah's flood, which ends with God pointing to the rainbow as a sign of his promise never again to destroy the earth by a flood. Notice here, the way the Bible links a thoroughly natural phenomenon—the rainbow—with a personal promise from God. This linkage suggests a major Adventist theme: the intimate connection between the moral/spiritual realm and the world of nature. Moral law and natural law are both believed to be universal across time and space. The dire results of immoral behavior are no more arbitrary than are the results of breaking physical law. When you fall, gravity and guilt both pull you "down" toward destruction.

The Bible makes it clear God had no intention of leaving humanity to the inevitable results of sin. About 2000 B.C. he entered into a special relationship with a couple named Abraham and Sarah. Their descendants formed Israel, a community of hope. Israel's entire existence centered on God's promise to intervene in human history. God would send a

person who would subdue wickedness and bring in everlasting righteousness.

Israel's history, heroes, poetry, prophecy, priesthood and royal family all adumbrated [prefigured] in different ways the coming deliverer, the Messiah. The Torah was the definitive statement of God's promise of deliverance. The Hebrew community with their traditions of hope and their extensive body of commentary provided the sacred glasses through which believers were (and are) enabled to read the encrypted messages about the Messiah.

Then Jesus was born. His birth was a gigantic leap forward in the Story. An old priest who met Jesus'

**But we are not simply listly waiting for the next big event. We are not in a plotless void between the departure and return of Jesus. After Jesus rose from the grave, he left the earth and went to the control center of the universe, a place called heaven.**

parents in the temple about six weeks after he was born, took the infant in his arms and prayed, "Now, Lord, you have kept your promise, and you may let your servant go in peace. With my own eyes I have seen your salvation" (Luke 2:29-30 TEV).

Jesus was the supreme revelation of what God is really like. Jesus is the only and the completely sufficient antidote to the fatal condition which has infected humanity since the first decision by Adam and Eve to do their own thing. Jesus' ministry showed us God's regard for broken people. His teachings outlined God's ideal for our way of life. His death somehow reversed the irreversible effects of evil. His resurrection was the ultimate demonstration of God's intention and capability to eradicate death.

The life and death of Jesus of Nazareth is the great centerpiece of biblical history, the definitive heart of God's story as we know it.

But Jesus' earthly story ends with a declaration of incompleteness. He rises from the dead and appears a number of times to his followers. The last interaction of the disciples with Jesus finds them staring heavenward as Jesus ascends into the sky. Their upward gaze is interrupted by two angels who announce, "This same Jesus who has been taken up from you will come again, just as you have seen him go" (Acts 1:11).

All of creation waits in expectant longing for the completion of the story, known among Christians as

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# the heart of true adventism

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the Second Advent. It was attention to this belief that gave us the name, "Adventists."

At present death appears to be forever. Life, love and friendship seem transitory. Every time someone we love dies our belief in the eternity of love is challenged. But when Jesus returns there will be a resurrection. Those who have died will live again. We will discover for ourselves that it is death which is transient. Friendship will prove eternal.

The Second Advent is absolutely essential to Christianity. Without the return of Jesus, Christianity is a fairy tale without a happy ending, an equation with no solution, a philosophy rooted firmly in fantasy.

But we are not simply listly waiting for the next big event. We are not in a plotless void between the departure and return of Jesus. After Jesus rose from the grave, he left the earth and went to the control center of the universe, a place called heaven. From there he is actively working to accomplish his purposes. He sent a divine personage, the Holy Spirit, to work in and through his followers to advance the kingdom of God here on earth. We engage in service to humanity and preach the good news about Jesus with the full assurance that we are cooperating with the Holy Spirit. Our lives have meaning not only because we are looking forward to a joyous eternity, but also because here and now we are working together with God, the architect of that future.

One conviction that helps us cope with the pervasive injustice of human society is that God is judge. While he delights in mercy, he does not ignore injustice. He will not allow people to use religious protestations as covers for unfaithfulness, cruelty and wickedness. Unrepentant oppressors will find God to be very severe. As we see it, the famous "millennium" of Christian tradition will be a thousand-year question-and-answer free-for-all during which humans will be invited to investigate for themselves the decisions that were made during the judgment. We will be free to pursue every question we've ever had about God's involvement with earth. God is so committed to winning our hearts and to open and joyous friendship, that he is unwilling to get on with eternity until he has responded to every challenge.

God will rule, that's not negotiable. But he will not call his administration a success until he has persuaded everyone that he is the best for the job and the job he has done is the best that could be done by anyone. Not all will find it in themselves to yield to God's governance, but all will agree that his government is just.

Where do people fit in this story? First of all we are the friends God aims to win; we are the skeptics God seeks to persuade; we are the captives he strives to rescue, the infected ones he works to cure, the evil ones he delights to transform. The Story is about what God is doing for us.

When we allow God to have his way with us, we become his agents in the world, his representatives, cooperating with God in the work of winning, persuading, rescuing, healing. Through our words and lives we introduce others to the God we have come to know and trust.

**One conviction that helps us cope with the pervasive injustice of human society is that God is judge. While he delights in mercy, he does not ignore injustice. He will not allow people to use religious protestations as covers for unfaithfulness, cruelty and wickedness.**

As beings created in the image of God, we discover our true identity through knowing and interacting with God. As we love and study, create art and build machines, as we cultivate relationships with people, as we savor the Sabbath rest, we come to know God and fulfill the ultimate purpose of our lives.

God's ultimate purpose for human beings is to restore to them the "dominion," the leadership and authority given Adam and Eve at creation. God has no intention of merely rescuing people from the threat of damnation, rather he intends to make human beings the reigning nobility of the universe (Revelation 22:5).

Adventists are people of hope. The story is moving forward. Since God is the principal actor in the story, we have absolute confidence in the outcome. Human frailty, stupidity or corruption will not ultimately frustrate the plot. God will accomplish his purposes.

Like all people, we bleed when we are poked. We hurt when we are wounded. We are outraged when we see the innocent wronged. And sometimes we are tempted to despair. But we are stubbornly confident that beyond the bleeding, hurting, outrage and despair, justice will triumph. Peace with honor finally will be established. Airy dreams will lithify. Our most profound fantasies will become rock-solid reality. Love will triumph. God guarantees it.

This is the heart of True Adventism.

# academy bible class

IS IT WORTH IT? ONE STUDENT'S VIEW

■ ERIN WOLFE\*

**b**ible class is one of the most time-consuming jokes I've ever seen. For all four years of high school, five days a week, we, the privileged students of an Adventist academy, attend the class. Do we learn anything? Not much, if anything. Do we waste time? Yes, Yes, YES!

Forty-five minutes, one hundred and eighty days a year for four years—that's 32,400 minutes, or 540 hours spent in Bible class—just in high school! The vast majority of Adventist academy students spend more time in Bible class than in history class, more time in Bible class than in math class, more time in Bible class than in science class. One sixth of the required classes—that's one large chunk of education!

The noun "class" is defined as "a group of students studying the same subject or following the same course". Fortunately for the brilliant people who designed the class, the definition does not include any stipulation about learning. Learn we certainly do not. We are examined on meaningless bits of gibberish that chance to fall from our "teacher's" mouth, and required to participate in irrelevant discussions involving "current" or "biblical" topics—more correctly, topics of interest to the teacher, often with no plausible connection to the course at all.

More frustrating is the confusion of theology and spirituality. There is nothing wrong with grading someone on the acquisition of facts. In fact, we students could benefit from a greater knowledge of Biblical and church history. However, it is impossible and morally wrong to grade someone on their spirituality. Even the Bible teachers realize this, but their classes are structured around opinions about spiritual life. And they give grades.

I would expect Bible class to teach the content of the Bible. I would expect to learn about the ancient world and its language and culture. But no. Lectures on "correct" spirituality are often presented. Instead of delving into the Scriptures to find deeper mean-

ing and spiritual identity, students are required to discuss shallow ethical questions. It often seems we barely scratch the surface (of anything). This is especially irksome when the teacher has spent time expounding some scientific or social theory ... and he's gotten his facts wrong.

I believe a Bible teacher should possess both solid convictions and an open mind. Even more than other teachers, they should know what they are talking about and be able to understand what we believe, what our church believes, and why it matters. When we are done with Bible class, we should be able to clearly take a stand for the truth.

Personally, the greatest problem I have witnessed in my Bible classes is the teachers' attitude towards the students. One teacher in particular, Pastor Bob, demonstrates lack of respect for and trust in the students. He constantly advocates trust, yet he will not even let students keep their tests because he fears they will be used by next year's students to cheat. Of course, he loudly announces this. He also tries to draw out students' opinions and feelings on different subjective issues. Once he has gotten someone to speak, Pastor Bob will proceed to explain forcefully and at great length why the student is wrong. Pastor Bob will twist their words if they speak, their silence if they do not. It often creates a tense, oppressive atmosphere in the room.

The Bible teachers I have encountered during my high school experience have often set poor examples for their students. Because they are not secure in their authority, they are unable to nurture students. They bully instead. Class becomes a war, and students leave feeling angry and frustrated.

I believe that there is much value to be found in an Adventist education, but it certainly does not reside in Bible class. Maybe someday the direction and content of the class will change. I do not know. I can only hope.

\*Erin Wolfe is a pseudonym for a senior in an Adventist academy.

Several Holy Scriptures are often presented. Instead of delving into the Scriptures to find deeper meaning, the teacher often presents lectures on "correct" spirituality. The Holy Scriptures are the infallible written Word of God, given by divine inspiration through holy men of God who spoke and were moved by the Holy Spirit. In this Word, we are committed to man the knowledge necessary for our salvation. The Holy Scriptures are the infallible

# homosexual change programs: what really happens?

■ CALVIN THOMSEN

A few years ago, a clinical psychologist and teacher at Fuller Theological Seminary asked me to work with him on a research/writing assignment designed to answer the question: how effective are programs designed to help gay men and lesbians change their sexual orientation? Our assignment was to describe the various treatment modalities used by psychotherapists and Christian ministries. We were asked to review existent empirical research studies, not to conduct new research. Nor was it our task to address the various ethical, moral or theological issues connected with the issue of either homosexuality or therapy designed to change it.

The results were to be included in an interdisciplinary, multi-author volume which the general editor envisioned as a comprehensive evangelical treatment on the subject of homosexuality. The book never materialized. Until *Adventist Today* asked for a summary article, the results of our study had become nothing more than a brief footnote in pastoral counseling classes we both teach.

The topic of sexual orientation change and the methods attempted to create it generate intense emotions. Some feel that they have experienced a miracle of transformation through therapy and/or spiritual resources of various types. They commonly assert that "If I can do it anybody can." They may suggest that to settle for anything less is to deny the power of God. Others are convinced that they really have tried everything, with no discernable change in the direction of their desires. They are often pained by the implication that if they just tried harder or prayed more they would become heterosexual. Still others feel deeply dissatisfied with their homosexual inclinations and look to such ministries as a way to find an alternative. Still others feel content with their lives and same sex relationships and wouldn't want to try such methods even if they were effective. And, even those who are not impacted firsthand generally have strong feelings on the subject.

What follows is a brief overview of what "change ministries" and "reparative therapists" do and what we know of their effectiveness. The most common behavioral approaches attempt to reinforce traditional gender-role-based behaviors. By increasing role-typi-

cal behaviors (which may include dating and courtship behaviors) it is believed that a stronger gender identity will develop which will, in turn, impact the direction of one's sexual desires. In the past, such treatments as electroshock or noxious chemicals were used in attempts to extinguish homosexual feelings, but these are rarely used today.

A number of therapists use a masturbation/fantasy substitution approach as well. Clients might be told that they are free to use same-sex fantasies to become aroused but to substitute the image of a member of the opposite sex as they approach orgasm. Sex therapy may be used when clients are already in a heterosexual relationship in order to increase attraction and response to their partners. Some therapists work with male homosexuals with a program designed to encourage emotional toughness by rigorously challenging expressions of complaint or self-pity.

Psychodynamic therapies currently tend to focus on the concept of "defensive detachment." Proponents of this theory believe that homosexually inclined individuals, whether male or female, have experienced a significant emotional deficit with the same sex parent. Thus the individuals detach emotionally in order to prevent further emotional wounding, but they also ultimately eroticize members of the same-sex in attempts to repair the rupture.

Treatment sometimes called "reparative therapy," involves a twofold goal: the defensive detachment towards the same-sex must be undone, and the unmet needs must be met through close, non-sexual relationships with the same-sex.

This is believed to significantly reduce homosexual desires and may help some people experience attraction to members of the opposite sex.

More explicitly spiritual strategies rely heavily on various forms of spiritual healing such as anointing, healing prayer, and healing of memories. Such approaches frequently attempt, through prayer, to bring Jesus back into scenes of early trauma and abuse. Recovered memory and the healing of those memories frequently figure in this approach.

A number of Christian ministries that operate under the umbrella of Exodus International, a confederation of gay-change ministries, utilize weekly sessions of worship, lectures, prayer (especially for inner healing), ac-

countability for behavior, and group support.

A few therapists are now attempting to encourage sexual orientation change using antianxiety and/or antidepressant medications. They suggest that homosexual behavior may sometimes represent a form of "self-medication" for treatable emotional distress and that such mood disorders may also block heterosexual responses. They were alerted to this when some clients receiving medication for depression and anxiety reported spontaneous (and sometimes unwanted!) changes in the direction of their sexual attraction.

Some counselors don't claim to change feelings at all—they simply candidly advocate the pathway of suffering and self-denial.

Do these therapies work? Do participants find them helpful? Before attempting a summary I want to mention several facts:

The majority of the studies have methodological limitations. For example, most did not use a control group. There is also little longitudinal data. Participants in the various treatments and studies were self-selected, and thus the studies didn't follow common scientific selection procedures.

This means that any results should be taken with some caution.

■ It should also be noted that there is some variance among the studies and that the summary results reported here are an admittedly imperfect attempt to lump a variety of studies together. However, there was a reasonable degree of consistency among most of the studies.

■ Also, correlation between participation in a therapy or program and reported changes in sexual orientation does not necessarily indicate that the participation was, in fact, the cause of the reported change. For example, one study that did use a nonparticipant control group of people who expressed interest in the program, found that both groups showed a similar pattern of increased heterosexual interest in the posttest.

Let me now attempt to summarize what we found in the research studies we surveyed:

■ Most of the participants (over 80%) in such programs indicate that they are less inclined to view themselves as "exclusively homosexual" afterwards.

■ About a third of the participants feel that they have experienced a "significant shift" in sexual orientation as a result of their participation. This does not necessarily mean that they experience significant heterosexual feelings. It generally means that they have come to experience homosexual feelings as not particularly life-defining and compelling. The majority of participants in most studies continue to experience predominately homosexual attractions, although many choose not to act on them.

■ A number (less than half) of those who experience a significant shift also report significant heterosexual feelings and some of them go on to marry. The marriages are reported as comfortable and, in many cases, sexually fulfilling, although respondents generally re-

port that they don't feel the same "lustly attraction" in a heterosexual relationship they experienced in their previous homosexual relationships.

■ While a few respondents report negative experiences as a result of participation in such therapies or programs, the vast majority (in the surveys that asked) said the therapy or ministry had been a positive experience. Whether or not they felt their sexual orientation had changed, the majority reported improved self-esteem, less depression, and greater emotional well-being as a result of their participation.

■ Making the picture even more complex is research showing that some people may engage in exclusively homosexual behavior for an extended period of time followed by a spontaneous change to exclusive heterosexuality. This little-discussed phenomenon seems to happen quite independently of religious conviction or therapy. This may, according to some research, be more common than exclusive homosexuality. What does this mean? There are two quite different interpretations. Some interpret the data to indicate that sexual orientation in general is less fixed than many have supposed. Others believe it indicates that reports of sexual orientation change come from the minority whose orientation is relatively fluid to begin with.

In conclusion, the research may raise more questions than it answers. It doesn't buttress dogmatic conclusions on either side. It does suggest that sexual orientation is not always as fixed as some assert. Some people indeed do report significant reduction of same-sex attractions and new heterosexual feelings. We also know that they are probably in the minority of those who make the attempt. And we don't know what variables might distinguish between those who experience significant change and those who don't.

It should also be clearly noted that this type of research cannot adequately address reports of divine miracles. We cannot discount the joy of those who are convinced that God's touch has brought them a kind of freedom they have deeply desired. But we must also remember that there are many others who are struggling to figure out how to relate to desires that haven't gone away.

What it does do is remind us of our need for humility and compassion. The church will continue to grapple with theological, ethical and psychological issues related to homosexuality. All these issues are important. But the people who struggle are not just statistics in a report or subjects for a theological debate. It is important that we not lose sight of the faces or fail to hear the voices of those whose lives are touched by this issue.

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*This article was written over a year ago at the request of Adventist Today. Space considerations excluded it from publication at that time. We believe the information it contains is still relevant. Editors*

# That kind can never change! can they...?

## One man's struggle with his homosexuality

■ CAROL SWINYAR

**m**y husband brought this book home and said I should read it. He was given the book by an old friend who also happens to be the author (Victor J. Adamson is a pseudonym). It sat on the end table for several weeks because frankly, thinking about the "gay" lifestyle can make my stomach turn.

In my workplace I have a pleasant and productive relationship with a gay colleague whose father was the pastor of a church in another denomination. But I have wondered what it must be like for the homosexual in the Adventist church, especially since two of my son's classmates "came out" recently.

So I thought, I really should read Adamson's story and see what I can learn from him about the "homosexuality issue". I picked up the book and began reading it Sabbath morning as I ate breakfast. That was a big mistake! Not because of its effect on my stomach, but because it is a book that demands to be read in one sitting and—well, let's just say it was lucky I had no formal responsibilities at church that day!

The author states in the preface that he wrote the book for: 1) the homosexual, 2) family and friends of homosexuals, 3) pastors and counselors, and 4) any sin-sick soul, the "whosoever"—and it was clear that included me.

My unease about the content of the book is addressed in the Introduction where the author states that "the details of my life of sin are not the subject of this book." (pg. 13) The object of the book is not to encourage the tendencies toward homosexual behavior nor to offend or repulse those with no bent toward homosexuality. His desire is to help and bring hope to others through the sharing of his story. His goal is to "expose the lie of Satan who charges that it is impossible to overcome the sin of homosexuality or any other besetting sin." (pg. x)

Adamson begins with a glimpse into his life at the end of his second long-term homosexual relationship. At that time, he promised God that he would go straight if God would help him get out of the relationship. Then he takes us back to his childhood, teen years, college, his term in Korea as an Army medic and then as a missionary, and finally his return to college, his short-lived marriage and the birth of his two children. He traces the experiences and influences that from his early years were leading him to his eventual choice of a life different from the biblical ideal.

He then tells about his "fall from grace" and gives a

"censored and condensed" account of his gay life. This is done in a matter-of-fact way that allows the reader to glimpse the realities of the time without glorifying the gay lifestyle. The reader now learns about how Adamson broke his promise to God (mentioned at the beginning of the book) and instead began his third long-term monogamous homosexual relationship. It was during this time that self-examination and study brought him to realize the awfulness of his "life of sin."

The final section of the book details how the Holy Spirit led him step by step into a victorious relationship with his Savior Jesus Christ. There are gentle references to negative experiences in Christian worship services and with various Christian individuals, but he does not dwell on these. Rather he focuses on the theology expressed by an unnamed prominent theologian: "We will be sinning right up until the time that Jesus comes to take us home." (pg. 163) He shows how this theology that tells a person it's impossible to live a life free from sin is terribly disappointing to one who desperately needs to be saved from sin.

"I desperately wanted to be saved from sin—from homosexuality. Waiting for Jesus to come was not soon enough for me," he explains. (pg. 163)

Anyone who has ever struggled with temptation of any kind (that pretty well takes in all of us!) will be given great hope by his final chapters. He shows how the Lord led him out of the homosexual life and into the ministry and a second marriage and two more children. Then he carefully presents a scriptural path that anyone who wants to be "made whole" may follow.

I wish to commend the author for writing his story, painful though it was. There will be those who will argue with its premise that homosexuality is a temptation and a sin. Others will argue that it is impossible for a homosexual to be changed. But one cannot argue with his convincing and compelling message of hope and victory through Christ Jesus.

That is a message that is greatly needed by our church and the world around each of us. I predict that if people read it in the Spirit, it will make a difference in many lives. It has already changed mine in subtle but important ways. This book deserves a wide audience.

*That Kind Can Never Change! Can They? One Man's Struggle with His Homosexuality.* By Victor J. Adamson. Huntington House Publishers PO Box 53788 Lafayette, Louisiana 70505 Paperback, June 2000

*Carol Swinyar is an elementary music specialist in the Sumner School District in Sumner, WA.*

# Reflections on Knight's 'A Brief History' of Adventism

■ STEVE DAILY PH.D.

Having spent most of the last twenty years teaching and working with Adventist academics, I have come to truly appreciate those who have a passion for honesty, the courage of their convictions, and the gift of practical wisdom. George Knight's books get an "A" on all three counts, and this one is no exception. Though introductory in nature, and not intended to be an addition to the historical literature itself, Knight writes, "This book does not claim to be a 'contribution to knowledge.' Rather, it is largely a summary of the high points of Adventist history." Yet, the author still manages to present a concise picture of Adventism's development that is incisive in what it includes and thought provoking in its relevance for today. This volume is the first in what is planned to be a series of five focusing on Adventist Heritage, with the remaining four dealing with the development of Adventist theology, Adventist lifestyle, doctrines SDAs share with other Christians, and distinctive truths that make Adventism unique.

In this volume Knight first traces the primary historical factors that most contributed to the emergence of our "pillar doctrines." The majority of Adventists today, when asked to identify what our "pillar doctrines" are, can't name more than two or three. But, there were actually eight doctrines that were considered to be pillars of our faith by the pioneers, and seven of them remain in contemporary Adventism. An easy mnemonic device that can be used to remember them is that they all begin with the letter "S."

- 1842 Soon Second Coming.
- 1844 Sanctuary Doctrine.
- 1844 Spirit of Prophecy.
- 1845 Seventh-day Sabbath.
- 1845 State of the Dead.
- 1845 Shut Door Doctrine.
- 1856 Systematic Benevolence.
- 1863 Standards.

Among these doctrines, it was the Seventh-day Sabbath and the Shut Door that most identified our early pioneers. They came to be derogatorily

labeled by their Millerite contemporaries as "Sabbath and shut-door Adventists." And although we need to be more candid about admitting that there were errors and cover-ups connected to this shut-door doctrine, Knight is right in his assessment that "the shut-door 'mistake' provided the small band of Sabbatarian Adventists with ample time to build their own theological foundation. They spent little of their scarce resources on evangelism until they had a message."

Once that message took shape and form, Adventism expanded across the globe with a missionary zeal that was impressive. But even the evangelistic growth that preceded our move into foreign missions stimulated a debate over the need for organization that raged from 1853 to 1860. The Whites ultimately won out against the strong opposition of R. F. Cottrell and J. N. Loughborough, who equated church organization with embracing "Babylon." We can only speculate about what might have happened to Adventism had the Whites not won this battle. But we need not assume that such a failure would have resulted in the demise of the movement. Shortly after Adventism chose the path of denominational structure, a number of Spirit-led congregational churches emerged that have experienced the greatest growth in Christian circles over the last century and make up the modern-day charismatic movement.

Knight also provides an insightful summary of the debates over righteousness by faith and reorganization, which pitted Ellen White against the General Conference leadership, in both cases. Had the prophet not been successful in the gospel struggle, it may have doomed Adventism to wallow in a perpetual mire of legalism. And had she not been victorious in her fight for reorganization, the church could have never risen to the expansive challenges of growth in the twentieth century. But Knight is also quick to point out that the need for an administrative "face-lift" in the twenty-first century is every bit as

great as it was at the turn of the last century. "Adventism at the start of the twenty-first century faces the problem of an organizational structure that needs to be revised to meet needs, possibilities, and challenges never imagined at the time of the 1901/1903 reorganization. Not only do we see signs that the denomination's massive organizational structure needs to be trimmed, but some (especially in North America) question Adventism's hierarchical structure and urge a congregational polity."

Unfortunately, the twentieth century gets only 46 pages of coverage in the book, but it is interesting to note that Knight identifies the 1950s as the decade where Adventism grew into maturity. Prior to this decade, SDAs were generally identified as a cult, "classed with Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons and Christian Science." But dialogue between the General Conference and leading Evangelicals Walter Martin and Donald Barnhouse led to the publication of *Questions on Doctrine* and the acceptance of Adventism into the Evangelical fold. However, the dominant role of Evangelical leadership in Adventism was short-lived, and in some ways received a fatal blow at Glacier View. Today, many Evangelical Adventists feel marginalized by church leadership, which has been traditionally dominated by the right. But has increasingly being infiltrated by left-wing Adventists who have often proven to be as intolerant of Evangelical Adventists as their right-wing brothers.

In conclusion, Knight's book is an excellent introductory resource for individuals who know little about Adventism and desire to learn more about our roots and history. But even the great majority of Adventists could benefit from this very readable and interesting volume.

*A Brief History of Seventh-day Adventists*, by George R. Knight. Hagerstown, MD, Review and Herald, 2000

## God the Puzzle Maker

■ G I L B A H N S E N

When I was little, I would go into my older brother's room and play with whatever I could get my hands on that looked interesting. I remember a wooden three-dimensional puzzle, made of interlocking pieces in complicated shapes that made a sphere when you finally got it completed. The trick was holding the pieces you had together while adding the remaining ones. All of them had to be in place or the puzzle would just fall apart.

Now I find life more challenging to solve than those puzzles. But I realized the other day that God is a Puzzle Maker—Jesus didn't spend thirty years in a wood shop for nothing—and a Puzzle Solver. And there is a Gill Bahnsen-shaped hole in this puzzle called life.

"They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor." Isaiah 61:3, NIV.

Planted by God. Like the rhododendron bushes in my grandma's yard, or the potatoes my mother-in-law put in her garden. Both ladies would dig holes in just the right places according to their designs. God situated me in a certain place to provide beauty for his glory; he chose me to produce specific fruit for his service.

"We have different gifts, according to the grace given us." Romans 12:6

As I take my place in the puzzle, I don't necessarily see the solution. I don't have the picture from the jigsaw puzzle box. That's not my concern. But the Puzzle Maker does. After all, who is the block of wood, to tell the Puzzle Maker what to make of it?

Being in the puzzle is where the action is. Being handled by the Puzzle Solver is where the excitement is. When I refuse to be myself (in him), when my only goal is self-protection, I

don't fit. I am a useless piece of wood. God still keeps me in his hand, using the means he has to heal me, but I'm not in the game. I want to be in the game.

"But each one should be careful how he builds. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames." I Corinthians 3:10-15

When I allow Jesus to make me the best me possible, I'm in the game. Made in his image, I too am creative. I too can make things. I want to be building with silver, gold, platinum, rubies, sapphires, emeralds, and diamonds. When I hoard my self, building only with flammable, consumable materials, I may be saved but I will smell of fire and smoke. Notice there is burning either way? I can't avoid the pain, regardless of whom I put first in my life. But it sure makes a difference how long my life continues, and what gets created.

"For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." Ephesians 2:10

I'm still a blockhead at times, pretty wooden. But the Carpenter keeps working. I must keep relying on him to make and keep me complete. That place in the puzzle is dynamic, much more complicated than pieces of wood. But God is creative and re-creative. Some of his best work comes from failures. Let's play.

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